A Modern Day Fairy Tale

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A Modern Day Fairy Tale

by tufano79

Summary

Crown Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen is the heir to the throne in the small independent country, Gevalia. His life is all about duty, honor and pride for his country. However, he's lonely, focused on his career. When his younger brother makes some poor choices, Edward is forced to fly to the United States to smooth out diplomatic relations and spend six months looking for a bride, with some pretty stiff stipulations by his mother, the Queen of Gevalia.

Isabella Swan is the oldest daughter and now owner of the Swan Family Bakery, Inc. 1897. She went to college to be a teacher but was forced to forego her dreams when her father was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. On a chance evening, a handsome stranger slips during a summer rain storm into her bakery and awakens something inside.

Who is he?

Where did he come from?

Why is she drawn to him?

All that is known is that Prince Charming is a real person and Bella is about to live A Modern-Day Fairy Tale. But will it end in a happily ever after?
Chapter 1

*Story summary:* Crown Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen is the heir to the throne in the small independent country, Gevalia. His life is all about duty, honor and pride for his country. However, he’s lonely, focused on his career. When his younger brother makes some poor choices, Edward is forced to fly to the United States to smooth out diplomatic relations and spend six months looking for a bride, with some pretty stiff stipulations by his mother, the Queen of Gevalia.

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Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyers for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

*A Modern-Day Fairy Tale*

Chapter One

**Masen**

“The motion is so tabled for further discussion after the holiday and this meeting is adjourned for today,” said Duke Edward Carlisle Anthony Cullen, the leader of the House of Lords and presider of the combined houses. He banged the gavel and the members of parliament got up, leaving the lavish chamber where the combined houses met to discuss motions to bring forward to the queen.

The Queen – who also happens to be my mother – Queen Esme Elizabeth Masen Cullen, the ruler of our small country, Gevalia.

I packed up my laptop, putting it into my worn leather satchel and slinging it over my body. The Duke walked over to me, a kind smile on his face. “Excellent proposal and compromise, son,” he said proudly. “I think it’s something your mother will approve of, Masen. You know how difficult she can be.”

“I do know that, Father,” I snorted, rolling my eyes. “You really think we can get this motion to pass? With the compromise? I hate to tax our people, but in order to increase revenue … It’s a small sum.”

“This tax increase has been on the docket for years, but we’ve never gotten it this far in either
houses. I’m so proud of you. I knew that American schooling would come in handy,” he quipped, leading me down the rear staircase of the parliament building to the waiting car. We settled into the backseat. “Home, please?”

“Understood, your highness,” said our driver and bodyguard, Felix.

“Are you eating with us, Masen or are you going to spend time at Masen Manor?” Father asked.

“I’ll eat with you,” I said. “Mother sent me a text …”

“She used her cell phone? Perish the thought,” he laughed.

“I know, right?” I snickered. “She wanted to discuss Emmett and my marriage …”

“She’s still trying to push an arranged marriage, Masen. I’m so sorry. I know you want a love match. I got one with your mother. You deserve the same,” he said.

“I’d rather cut off my own balls than be in an arranged marriage,” I grumbled.

“Edward Anthony Masen Cullen! Language,” Father growled.

“My apologies,” I said, sarcasm lacing my tone as I sat back. I looked out the window with a heavy sigh. I should be happy. I’m one of the world’s elite. I’m a royal. I’m the heir to the throne of Gevalia … and yes, I know my country has the name of a coffee in the United States. We were the main exporters of said coffee. We also were known for our chocolate and fine, intricate lace.

My name is Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, but I prefer to be called Masen. I’m the leader of the House of Commons. The former leader, who was elected into his position, had a sudden heart attack. I’d just returned home from completing my studies at Harvard. I got my MBA and law degree. I never slept, suffice it to say. Though, I had more freedom in Cambridge, Mass. than I do in my own home. However, when my father suggested I take over the leader of the House of Commons, my mother opposed it. The people loved it, so I was elected in unanimously. I’d finish out his term, which was for another six months.

Would I run again? That would remain to be seen … If my mother, the Queen, had her way, I wouldn’t. I’d be following her like an obedient puppy. Normally, I would do that, but this whole marriage business is fucking shit.

Please, excuse my language …

No, don’t excuse my language. Seeing as I’m a royal, I should choose who I want to marry. I don’t want to be forced into something I don’t want. I’ve seen what arranged marriages are like. Our second cousins, twice removed, Duke and Duchess Denali, have an arranged marriage. Eleazar fucks around on his wife and she does nothing about it. Divorce is frowned upon, especially among the blue bloods. I also know that my mother is trying to get me to marry their only daughter, Lady Kathryn.

Seriously, I’d rather chop off my manhood than go near that cunt.

God, I’m going to hell with my language today.

Anyway, Lady Kathryn is a bitch, plain and simple. Gorgeous and groomed, of course, but conniving and manipulative, too. She would stop at nothing to get onto the throne. She’d told me as such. When I told my mother, she said that Gevalia needed a ruler with that type of ambition.
Not going to happen … Never. Not in my lifetime.

I wouldn’t touch Lady Kathryn with my brother Emmett’s dick … and he’s a lot less discerning than me when it comes to having sex. Just saying.

“Your Highness, we’re here,” said Felix, breaking my reverie.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Felix,” I said, shaking my head. My father had already gotten out of the car. I picked up my satchel, walking into the Gevalian Palace. Now, most of the palace was on display for the people. During the week, members of our staff would give tours. My mother and father lived in a large apartment that was off-limits to the public. It was about the size of a massive home, completely renovated and elegant, per my mother’s tastes. Occasionally, they’d go down to the throne room and formal living spaces for diplomatic purposes and photo opportunities, but we didn’t live there.

My brother, when he was home, lived with them or sometimes, he’d spend time with me in my home just off the main palace’s grounds. I lived in Masen Manor, which was designated for the Crown Prince or Princess when they reached of age. I loved my family, but I couldn’t go back to living in the royal apartment after being out on my own for almost six years, four years of undergrad at Dartmouth and then two and half years of grad school at Harvard. So, upon my return, I moved into Masen Manor. I had my own staff, but I preferred to take care of myself.

I liked cooking, and baking. I enjoyed cleaning and relishing in the feeling of a hard-day’s work. I could do my own laundry, make my own meals and wipe my own ass. When I was in school, I refused to be treated any differently than any of the other students. My mother, however, had a snit fit. I lived in the dorms my freshman year, but was moved into a secured apartment for the rest of my time.

Supposedly, there was a threat made on my life.

I didn’t really believe it, but to assuage her fears, I moved into the swanky apartment, but I was against having a staff taking care of me. I agreed to a bodyguard, but said it had to be a fellow student who was studying criminal justice. He was a massive guy from the Pacific Northwest, attending Dartmouth on a scholarship. I ran a thorough background check and when it came back clean, Jacob Black became my bodyguard, roommate and best friend. I also paid him a hefty salary. Suffice it to say, he didn’t need the scholarship. He still lives in New England, but he works in the New York office of the FBI. We’re still close friends, despite me moving back to Gevalia. I was standing up at his wedding, acting as best man, in a year.

“Your Highness, the Queen requests that you join her in the study,” said one of the many servants we had.

I nodded graciously, heading into the study. My mother was sitting regally, reading the minutes from the parliamentary session. “Mother,” I smiled, bowing deeply.

“Edward,” she replied, putting the paper to the side and holding up her hand. She was the only person who called me by my given name. But, it got confusing. My father was also named Edward. It was my father who suggested calling me Masen. I loved it. Mother hated it. So, I kept doing it. Just to spite her. Walking over to her, I kissed her knuckles and sat down across from her. “Interesting proposal, Edward, about the taxes. Both sides are on board?”

“We’re discussing it in chambers after the holiday,” I said. “But, the fact that both sides are even considering it … it seems promising.”
“Good,” she smiled. “This will be your last act as the head of the House of Commons, Edward. Get this tax increase passed.”

“I don’t understand,” I frowned.

She sighed heavily and her posture deflated slightly. She reached behind a pillow and produced a newspaper. It was turned to the entertainment section. “I was reading the paper and I saw … this … while I was drinking my tea. I damned near spit it out.”

Royal Bad Boy on the Loose in the City

Prince Emmett McCarty Cullen was brought in for questioning the other night. Police were told that he was carrying and distributing illegal substances in a club on the upper east side, Sapphire. After enduring hours of questioning, Cullen, who is the second in line to the throne of Gevalia, was released with no charges pressed against him.

He’s also been partying it up in Chelsea, Manhattan and Brooklyn. He’s been recently linked with several supermodels, actresses and even a famous drag queen, Alexis Michelle. He’s been staying in the states while he completes his college education, attending New York University, getting his degree in business and international studies. However, after researching further, it would appear that Prince Emmett has flunked out of college and is living it up in the Big Apple, enjoying the freedom, away from his overbearing mother, Queen Esme Elizabeth Masen Cullen.

Who knows what’s going to happen to Prince Emmett, but he’s outstaying his royal welcome. Stay tuned as we find out more about this developing story.

“He was brought for questioning about drugs and he flunked out of college,” I grumbled, fisting my hands around the newspaper. “How come we were not notified about this? Unlike me, Emmett has an entourage. He loves having his minions.”

“Entourage, yes. Meaningful and trusting staff? No,” Mother growled. “He took the dregs with him. People I would have let go if it weren’t for Emmett taking them with him. They’re probably the ones supplying the drugs to him. He’s twenty-six, Edward. You have this sense of duty, honor. Emmett? He’s just a brat.”

“He is that, but he’s still my brother, your son,” I argued. “He needs to make mistakes.”

“The thing is that he’s making mistakes and not learning from them,” Mother snapped, tossing the paper to the side and her green eyes flashing angrily. “I’m done, Edward. I need you to bring him home.” She smoothed her skirt and crossed her ankles daintily. “I was supposed to fly to the States with your father for some diplomatic events in a month. I’ve spoken to the state department and you’ll be going in my stead. I’m not getting any younger. Long plane rides make my bones ache.”

“But my post to parliament?” I asked, my brow furrowing.

“I know, Edward. You’re proud of your work, but Emmett is out of control. You’re the only one who can talk some sense to him,” Mother said, her voice weary, pinching her nose. “He’ll just continue acting like a fool if I say something and I love your father, but he cannot control Emmett, even if he had a shock collar.”

“Mother!” I snorted.

“It’s true,” she smirked. I arched a brow, shaking my head sadly. “My trip was supposed to last until the Gevalian Independence Day Celebration in February. You’ll be staying for the same amount time.” She also stared at me, her green eyes narrowing.
“What?” I asked.

“It’s also an opportunity for you to have your last bit of fun before your engagement is announced,” she said, her lips pursed.

“I’m not having an arranged marriage, Mother,” I snarled, shooting up and stomping to the window.

“Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, I’m your mother and your Queen. You do not walk away,” she snapped.

“Is it so hard for you to understand that I want a love match?” I asked, leaning against the wall. “I don’t want to be in a marriage with someone I hate. I know you want me to mate with Lady Kathryn, the bitch. I’m not a prized stallion, Mother, and I refuse to bend on this!”

“Edward,” she hissed.

“She’s awful, Mother. No … just no,” I said, turning my back to her. I stared out, looking at the mountains that surrounded our palace. As I stared outside, another compromise swirled in my head. “You were amenable to the compromise with the parliament, yes?”

“Of course. It’s logical,” she scoffed, rolling her eyes exasperatedly.

“Then, a compromise for my marriage,” I said, walking back to her and leaning on the antique chair I was sitting in before I had my temper tantrum. Okay, not a temper tantrum, but still … “Let me use this six months find a suitable fiancée. You know me, Mother. I’m not Emmett. I don’t have empty relationships and I know that you were just suggesting that I sow my royal oats.”

“Well, yes,” she blushed.

“I don’t want that. I want love. I want forever. Yes, it’s unrealistic, but it’s what I want. I can use my time in the states to find someone who compliments me, completes me. You found love with Father. You had a love match. Why can’t I?” I pleaded. “And if I can’t find someone who does that, then you can announce my engagement to Lady Bitch.”

“Edward,” Mother growled.

“Sorry, Lady Kathryn,” I sighed. “It’s the best of both worlds, Mother.”

“There has to be stipulations,” she argued. “I don’t want some country bumpkin who wants to be with you because you’re a prince, Edward. I’d prefer you stick among the royals …” I gave her a dry look. “But, since I’m being so open-minded, I’ll agree to compromise. But, you need to concede to my stipulations.”

“Within reason, Mother,” I replied.

“Your future bride must be Gevalian. That’s in our laws. Every ruler has been a native Gevalian,” she said, arching a brow. “Also, never married. Divorce is … it doesn’t happen, Edward. So, you can’t have a divorced fiancée. And one more …”

“What’s that?”

“A virgin,” she said, giving me a triumphant look.

“Mother, that is never going to happen. A virgin? Were you a virgin on your wedding night?” I
asked. Her face flamed and she turned away, giving me the answer I already knew. I was already conceived when my mother walked down the aisle. “That’s what I thought. You and Father played hide the sausage before your wedding day. It would hypocritical for you to expect the same from me. I’m not a virgin. I lost my virginity to Jane, the chamber maid, when I was fourteen.”

“Jane was easily twice your age!” Mother yelled, glowering at me.

“And I was a horny teenager,” I bit back. “And don’t even think about having her arrested. I pushed for it. She was hot and I saw an opportunity. However, after losing my virginity, I knew I didn’t want an empty relationship. My wife, or my girlfriend, or my fiancée, would not just be a receptacle for my sperm or a warm body to fuck.”

“Edward,” she sighed.

“It’s true, Mother. I want someone whom I love, cherish and respect, someone who’s intelligent, funny, kind and fair. With that, comes the desires and wishes of forever. That’s what I want … and I’m not going to turn someone away because their hymen isn’t intact,” I grumbled.

“I knew I shouldn’t have sent you to law school,” she muttered.

“Because I can argue my way out of a paper bag,” I snickered. “I would still say the same thing, even without going to law school.”

“Okay, the virginity clause is moot,” she sighed. “But, I’d prefer it if she was a virgin.”

“Duly noted, Mother,” I deadpanned. “When do I leave?”

“Ideally, as soon as possible. But, knowing you, you want to get that tax increase through parliament and signed, yes?” she asked. I nodded. “Then, once that’s done, you’ll be heading to New York City, Edward. Only you can help your brother. I never wanted to bring shame to our country, but Emmett …”

“Mother, don’t say that,” I interrupted.

“I don’t want to. I love both of my sons, but Emmett, I’m ashamed of him,” Mother frowned. “Bring him back, Edward.” She got up and walked away, her shoulders, which normally stood tall and proud, were hunched and defeated.

Pulling out my phone, I sent a text to my brother. You are in trouble, Mac. Heaps of trouble …
Mase

Whatever, your MAJESTY. I’m having my fun. Fuck. You … Mac

It’s going to be a tough road to get him back. Damn it.

A/N: We heard from Masen … and from his slightly uptight mother. What do you think about Princeward? Yummy, hmmmmm? Pictures of the Royal Family, along with the Gevalian parliament, palace and Masen Manor are on my blog. Link for that is on my profile. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79.

Leave me some!
Chapter 2

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Chapter Two

Bella

Looking down at the mounting bills, I tried to keep tears from falling from my eyes. We owed money to the bank for our mortgage, Sal for repairing our ovens, my father’s medical bills for his weekly physical therapy, our electric bill, phone bill and our rent, which, thankfully, was rent-controlled. I didn’t get paid so we could cover the costs and living expenses for our family. But, my biggest fear, losing the bakery that had been in our family for four generations, was sadly coming to fruition. With the growing pile of debt, I feared we’d never get out of this without declaring bankruptcy.

And let’s not forget my student loans … but that was a whole other can of worms. Thankfully, I’d been able to defer some payment due to my financial situation, but that was another bill waiting to be paid and be paid soon.

Scrubbing my eyes, I sat back and took a few calming breaths. It was close to midnight. I’d have to be back down at The Swan Family Bakery, Inc. in 1897 by four tomorrow morning to prepare for the morning rush. We were one of the few remaining family bakeries in our tiny neighborhood in Brooklyn. There were two Jewish bakeries and then ours, which specialized in Italian delicacies and some Gevalian treats, calling on my great-grandfather’s heritage. It was a blend of Italian sweets, French baked goods and Gevalian chocolate. I also had an espresso maker, cappuccino maker and a fridge with sodas, but we were barely scraping by.

“Isabella, sweet girl, you need to go to sleep,” said my father, Charlie. “Staring at the bills will not make them magically go away.”

“We need a million bucks, Pop,” I said, standing up and walking out of the tiny office. “Or more. We have enough to cover the mortgage, electric bill, our standing order with the grocer and Sal, but we may have to ask the doctor for an extension on your therapy bills and I’ll cancel my cell phone. I’m here most of the time, anyway. You can reach me here.”

Charlie, with a trembling hand, frowned deeply and patted my cheek. “You should not be shouldering this burden, sweet girl,” he said, his voice tired, weary. “All of this would be so much easier if it weren’t for my medical expenses and Alice’s inability to understand that we’re struggling.”

“I’ve talked to her, but she keeps bitching that I’m not her fucking mother,” I growled, turning off the lights in the office and following my father up the steep stairs to our two-bedroom apartment. Alice, the selfish cow she is, took the bedroom that we once shared after I moved out for college and I was relegated to the couch when I moved back home after my dad was first diagnosed, just after I’d accepted a position teaching in Connecticut. It was a nice apartment, just under a thousand square feet with hardwood floors and antique charm. Our furniture was old, but well-maintained and it was homey, warm and comfortable.

“She is an entitled little snot,” Charlie grumbled. “I love my baby girl because she’s so much like
“Mom wasn’t spoiled like this, Daddy,” I argued. “She worked right beside you until she went into labor with Alice. She worked hard.”

“This is true, but Alice’s ambition is just like your mother,” Charlie snorted. He kissed my cheek. “Why don’t you take my room?”

“If I do, you won’t be able to walk for days, Dad,” I said. “The doctor said you need the support. I’ll be fine.” I hugged him and watched as he shuffled to his room. I went to the bathroom, stripping out of my dusty clothes and pulling on some pajamas. Brushing my teeth, I went back to the living room and tugged out the bedding from the chest we used as a cocktail table. I made my ‘bed’ and set my alarm on the phone that I was canceling tomorrow because we needed the money. I’d rather cancel Alice’s phone. It had unlimited text, data and minutes, but she’d bitch if she didn’t have her phone.

She’d bitch about every damn thing if it were up to her.

Suffice it to say, our lives changed drastically the summer after I graduated from college. Things were cruising along. I’d accepted a position in a high school district, teaching junior/senior English in Greenwich, Connecticut. I had an apartment, a nice place about two miles from my school. I was going to be paid well and I would finally get away from my hateful sister. But, that all came to a screeching halt after my father was brought to the hospital after he’d cut the hell out of his hand while working at the bakery. His hands were shaking so badly that he nearly chopped off his middle finger. At the hospital, he was given test after test before he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease.

He said he was fine, but the doctors said it would progress rapidly. They put him medications and we were faced with the possibility of selling the bakery. Alice was too young to take over and I was beginning my life in Greenwich. So, without batting an eye, I told the school district that I had to not take the position. I got out of my lease and I moved back home. I couldn’t let the bakery be sold to some asshole who would turn it into a Starbucks or demolish it to make the building into some cool hipster condo locale.

The first six months, they were tough. Very tough. Charlie was getting used to his medications and I was learning all of his recipes. He would help me in the kitchen, but would rage when he couldn’t do any of the baking. One night, we’d gotten into it and he backhanded me in frustration. I understood his anger, his frustration, but it was never a reason to hit me.

I left him, walking out of the bakery and wandering the city. I stayed in a hotel room, sleeping on a bed for the first time in almost six months. I sobbed hysterically and stayed there until check out. When I left, I walked back to our neighborhood and I saw that the bakery was dark, closed. I went inside, finding my dad on the floor. He was crying, for his shame, his anger and his apologies for lashing out. We decided to hire someone to help me. Quil started later that week and he worked at the bakery for about a year. We had an increase in revenue with the new recipes and extra help, but paying Quil drained it as quickly as we’d got it. Quil quit, saying that he was moving to San Francisco to start his own bakery with his long-time boyfriend Embry. It was after that, things started to fall apart.

Physically in the bakery and with my father’s health.

Charlie could still help, occasionally. When he had good days, he would work in the kitchen. On bad days, he’d hide his tremors by having his hands in his pockets and he schmoozed the customers. On horrible days, he could barely get out of bed because his walking was so unsteady.
with his tremors. After a month of him staying in bed and having to hire a nurse, we had him admitted to the hospital. He stayed there for two weeks … with no insurance … it had lapsed because of all of his medical bills.

I’m still paying off those bills, almost three years later.

As I drifted off to sleep, I wished and prayed for some sort of miracle. But, miracles didn’t happen to people like me, like us. The sad truth was that we’d be kicked out of our apartment, lose our livelihood and I’d lose my dad. I couldn’t let that happen.

*Please, someone help?*

The next day, it was a good day. Charlie manned the till and we’d made some good money. I wouldn’t have to cancel my phone. Not yet. However, that good day dissipated when my younger sister, Mary Alice, came stomping in. Her pinched face was filled with contempt. She slammed her book bag onto the counter.

“**Alice, take your shit off there. We put food on the counter,**” I snapped.

“I don’t fucking care,” Alice said, crossing her arms. She was pretty, if she smiled and actually had a heart. “This place is a dump. We should burn it to the ground and use the insurance money to start new. Oh, wait, they’d probably take all of it because we’re broke.”

“What do you want, Alice?” I sneered. “I’ve got shit to do and listening to you complain how poor we are is not one of them.”

“I need $500,” she said simply.

“**Not gonna happen,**” I replied. “**Not if you want to eat and have that expensive phone you wave around.**”

“It’s not like I need it for drugs or something like that,” she snorted derisively. “It’s for Homecoming. I’m a senior and on the court. I have to go! Jasper is taking me!”

“We don’t have the money, Ali-cat,” Charlie said, trying to hug his youngest daughter. She started rage, but Charlie gave her a stern glare. “**Remember your place. We work here. You work here. We don’t want to show that you’re a brat, Mary Alice. Go upstairs. I’ll talk to you soon.**”

“I want my money,” she snapped.

“Again, not gonna happen,” I spat. Alice glared at me, tugging her bag off the counter and causing a display of freshly baked donuts to fall onto the ground. She went upstairs and my dad picked up the ruined display. “**You better not buckle, Dad. We can’t afford it. Even with today, we still are drowning in debt.**”

“I have no intention of buckling,” Charlie sighed, leaning heavily against the railing. “She’s getting worse and she has no idea how much work it takes to run this place, sweet girl.” An evil grin spread over his face. “**Maybe she can work here?**”

“You saw the destruction she causes,” I said, gesturing to the garbage can filled with destroyed, nasty donuts. “And she’d never listen to me. I’m just her nothing sister. She doesn’t care. And you know she’d want to get paid. We can’t afford that, Dad. I don’t pay myself. Why should I pay my bratty little sister?”
“You don’t pay yourself?” Charlie asked. “What the fuck not? You work so hard in here, Bells!”

“We can’t afford it. My payment comes with us being able to keep the bakery, Dad,” I said. “Now, you look tired. Go upstairs and relax. It was a long day for you.” He looked conflicted, but he nodded. Clumsily, he left the shop and kissed my forehead. I stayed downstairs, finishing out the day and storing the sweet treats that could be sold the following day. The bread was brought upstairs for whatever we were having for dinner.

Charlie was in the kitchen, reheating some potato soup and sipping water. “Where’s Alice?” I asked.

“Sulking in her room,” Charlie replied, rolling his eyes. “She’s not going to win.”

I blew out a breath, sitting down on the couch and tried to maintain my calm. Charlie squeezed my shoulder before calling Alice for dinner. She came out, giving me a sneer. I rolled my eyes and made myself a bowl of soup, taking a hefty chunk of the bread. I sat down at the kitchen table, grabbing a soda and dipping the bread into the soup.

“Dad, seriously, I need this money,” Alice argued, sitting down across from me. “I can’t wear something second-hand or off the rack. It needs to be one of a kind!”

“You can find one of a kind at the consignment shop down the street,” I argued. “Vintage is in, Alice.”

“Vintage, yes. Second-hand schlock? Fuck no,” Alice sneered. “It might work for you, Bella, but not for me. I don’t wear flour as an accessory.”

“This flour pays for your cell phone, your clothes, your life, Alice,” I hissed. “Do you know what I had to give up ensuring the survival of the bakery?”

“No, I don’t care to,” she said, shrugging nonchalantly.

“Alice, I’m so ashamed of how you’re acting. Your generation is all about you, never caring about anybody else,” Charlie sighed. “Your sister gave up her career, her life, to help us. Help me.”

“Hmmm, why don’t you go to work, Dad?” Alice exploded. “You sit here, shaking, and watching Bella do all the work. Why don’t you help?”

“I can’t!” he yelled back. “I can’t, Alice. Do you think I like this? Do you think that I can control my tremors? I can’t.”

“You’re such a fucking brat, Alice,” I growled, getting up from the kitchen table. My appetite gone thanks to my spoiled, evil sister. “And Dad does help, you ungrateful bitch. I do all of the baking, but he runs the front of the shop. He brings in customers with his smile and his constant word of mouth. What do you do? You waste money. You leech off your family without contributing. You’re a parasite.” Alice screamed, slapping me and clawing at my face. I was pushed onto the floor and my father pulled her off me.

“I hate you! I hate you!” Alice shrieked as she pushed away from our father. He stumbled, falling against the counter. I hopped up, catching him before he landed on his ass. I guided him back to the chair, handing him some medication. Alice stomped to her room, slamming the door and causing the family photo on the wall to fall onto the ground, shattering.

“Are you okay?” I asked. “Dad?”
“I’m fine. Are you alright? She got you good,” Charlie frowned, his hand cupping my cheek and I could feel the heat from Alice’s smack.

“I’m going … I need to walk away or I will be arrested for murder, Dad,” I growled. “I love Alice because she’s my sister, but I don’t like her. At all.”

“I’ll talk to her,” Charlie said, getting up and reaching into the freezer. He handed me an icepack. “I’m so proud of you, sweet girl. I’m sorry that I can’t give you the life you deserve and that you had to give up your dreams to …”

“Don’t, Dad,” I said, hugging him. His tremors were quaking his body. “Don’t. I love you and I couldn’t imagine not doing it. You needed me. Yes, we’ve had our rough moments.” He frowned deeply, remembering when his temper got the best of him. “I couldn’t imagine not helping, Daddy. I love you. But, I need to get out of here.” I kissed his cheek and swiped my keys, going down the stairs. I turned on the lights in the kitchen and pulled out the ingredients for apple pies. I was making the crust when the rain began to fall. It deafened the screaming that was happening upstairs. Alice was being completely unreasonable and I saw her run out of the apartment, flipping off the bakery and the apartment.

Hours passed and the rain pounded our neighborhood. I was rolling the crust on my fifth pie when I heard the front door of the bakery opened. We were closed. Everyone in the neighborhood knew our hours, six to six. It was nearly ten and once the final pies were out of the oven, I would go upstairs. Taking the rolling pin, I walked out to the front of the shop. I’m surprised that we hadn’t had any break-ins. The lock on the front door was broken. It had been broken when I lost my keys as a senior, using an ice pick to force my way inside. It should be repaired, but that required money.

Money, we didn’t have. Money, we’d probably never have.

Gripping the marble rolling pin, I made my way to the counter. “Who’s there?” I asked.

“My apologies,” came a slurred, but heavily accented male voice. It was honeyed, deep and resonant, a warm baritone. “It started to rain and I needed to get inside and away from fucking life.”

“We’re closed,” I said, trying to keep my voice even and the fear at bay.

He turned around, wearing a beautiful tuxedo underneath a long overcoat but was soaked almost to the skin. His hair was a deep color and I couldn’t tell what color his eyes were, but he wasn’t from New York. His posh accent clearly indicated that. “It’s a torrential downpour,” he said, looking at me and his eyes narrowing. He stepped into the light and he was so handsome with a sharp jaw, lean body and sexy voice. It did things to my girly bits. He pressed a hand to his chest. “You have my solemn vow not to hurt you …” he trailed off, his hand, with long graceful fingers, gesturing to me.

“Oh, Bella. My name is Bella,” I whispered, tightening my grip on my rolling pin.

He stepped forward, more of his features coming into the light. “I’m Masen,” he smiled, with a beautiful crooked grin. I felt like a mess. I was wearing old, disgusting yoga pants, an oversized t-shirt I had from an ex-boyfriend and my face was covered in flour. My long brunette hair was pulled up into a messy bun. I put down my weapon, wiping my hand on my leggings and shaking his warm, smooth hand. When our palms touched, I felt a jolt shimmer down my arm. He used his other hand, cradling my hand in his. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Bella.”
“You, too, Masen,” I said. “Um, what’s with … the … um …” I stammered as I gestured to his sodden coat and tuxedo.

“The monkey suit? I was at some charity event. Boring as hell,” he laughed, waving his hand. “Luckily I ducked into this wonderful bakery. It smells divine, Bella. Can I stay here? At least until it stops raining?”

With a tentative grin, I nodded. “Um, yeah. Would you like some coffee?”

A/N: Ooooh, what I wouldn’t give to meet with a sexy royal with a velvety, baritone voice. Anyway, pictures of Bella, Alice, Charlie and the bakery are on my blog. You can find a link for that on my profile. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: Tufano79. Leave me some!
Chapter 3

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Chapter Three

Masen

I arrived in the states, landing at a private airfield in New York State. My passport was scanned and stamped before I was shuffled into a waiting limousine. Inside, I was greeted by a familiar face. “Cullen, you fucker,” barked my best friend, a slow grin spreading over his tanned skin, making his teeth appear blindingly white.

“Hello, Jake,” I smiled, hugging him. He was dressed in a black suit, his face covered in stubble and a friendly grin. “Long time, no see.”

“I know. The last time I saw you, it was my engagement party to Leah a few months ago,” Jake nodded. “And if I recall, you were quite drunk, my friend. How’s the hangover?”

I rolled my eyes, remembering fondly about his engagement party and how Leah’s roommate, Claire had flirted with me. I got drunk to forget her constant pawing. Blinking back to my friend, I smiled, “How is she?” I asked, settling back into the leather seats.


“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” I smiled crookedly. “Now, what are you doing here?”

“I’ve been temporarily reassigned by Diplomatic Security,” he chuckled, sitting back and crossing his legs. “When your mother said that you were coming to the states instead, they wanted me to be your personal valet and body guard. The fearsome twosome is back in business!”

“What about your position with the FBI?” I asked.

“It’s still there, but I’m on special assignment to work with you,” he answered. “I think it was your mother’s impassioned plea that got me reassigned.”

“I’m sorry, Jake,” I frowned. “I can only imagine … I know your position with the FBI is one that you’re proud of and you shouldn’t have to be my personal body guard forever.”

“Masen, don’t even sweat it,” Jake said, waving his hand. “I’d just closed up a case and was twiddling my thumbs before I got my next assignment, filing reports and that sort of bullshit. So, when diplomatic security assigned me to you, I jumped at the chance.”

“I’m glad,” I smiled. “Really glad. I think with your help, we can find my brother.”

“Your highness, you’re needed at the Gevalian Consulate,” said the driver.

“Understood,” I said. “Let’s go, please.” The limo pulled away and we made our way to the consulate. I checked in with the diplomat assigned to the United States. She gave me an itinerary of my stay. I wrinkled my nose at the sheer amount of lunches, banquets, charity events and diplomatic dinners I needed to attend, but there were a number of opportunities to look for Emmett
in New York. When I was done, I got back into the limo and drove to the secured condo in Central Park West. Getting the keys and speaking with the building manager, we rode up to the penthouse. “Are you staying with me, Jake? Shouldn’t you be ravishing your fiancée?”

“I am staying with you and Leah is staying with her parents, trying to save some money for our wedding,” Jake shrugged. “I’ll be leaving once you’re inside so I can pick up my shit from executive apartment.”

I arched a brow. “I don’t understand, Jacob. What are you talking about?”

“Leah’s folks, Harry and Sue? They’re freaky conservative. When they found out that Leah was living with me, they threw a shit fit. So, Leah moved back in with them to mend fences and save money. Her dad was not going to pay for the wedding if we were living in sin,” Jacob shrugged. “I couldn’t afford the apartment we had without Leah’s help. So, when the lease was up, I moved out, putting my furniture into storage. I’d been staying in an executive apartment, using my federal discount.”

“Jake …” I frowned.

“I stayed there only for a week, Edward,” he laughed, slapping my arm as he opened the penthouse door. He did a quick look, gesturing for me to come inside. “My reassignment to work with you is advantageous. Almost no living expenses, save for food and my contribution to the cable bill, like before? Because I know you won’t let me chip in for paying for this place. It’s a little above my pay grade.” He made a face, shrugging nonchalantly.

“This is true, Jake,” I snorted. “And do not worry about the food or the cable bill. It’s on the tab of the Gevalian government. Consider it an early wedding present.” Jacob barked out a laugh and went to explore the condo. I walked into the living room, looking out the window and seeing the early fall beauty of Central Park. I tossed my coat onto the couch, sighing deeply. I had a few days to acclimate to my new surroundings before I had to go to some charity event, a black-tie affair. Shaking my head, I went to the bedroom and saw my trunk of clothing opened, thanks to the handful of Gevalian staff who’d joined me on my trip to New York City. I quickly put my clothes away and then sent a quick message to my parents, notifying them of my safe arrival. When I was done, I changed into a pair of jeans and t-shirt, padding to the kitchen. I pulled out some ingredients and began making a late lunch, early dinner.

“I’d missed this.

Jake danced into the kitchen, dressed casually, as well, sitting down and smiled brightly. “A crown prince who can cook … I should marry you,” he snickered.

“Leah can’t cook?” I teased, a smirk gracing my features as moved easily in the kitchen.

“Fuck no,” Jake guffawed. “And neither can I. You know this, your princeliship. Whatcha making?”

“Beef stroganoff?” Jake beamed, snickering quietly. “Fuck, seriously, can I marry you?”

“I’m straight, Jacob. And while you’re a good-looking guy, I prefer the company of women. Beautiful women,” I laughed. “Now, make yourself useful. Make the salad. You do know how to cut vegetables, right?”
I was dressed in a Dior tuxedo, listening to some socialite drone on about her latest Botox injection. She was draped over me, flirting relentlessly. I think? Her face was practically frozen due to the plastic surgery. “Oh, you must join me up in the Hamptons, your highness! I think we’d have a good time,” she cooed. She linked her arm with mine. I just smiled tightly, reaching for another glass of champagne and downing it one gulp. My cell phone chirped from my pocket.

*Dude, you’re going to be blitzed ~ JB*

*Dude, I’m already there ~ Mase*

I slid my phone back and I wriggled my arm loose. “If you’ll excuse me, my dear, I do need to step away.”

“Can I join you?” she asked, her lips jutted out comically.

I smiled gallantly, laughing. “You can’t go where I’m going. I’m off to the loo,” I whispered conspiratorially. She blushed and I ducked away, making my way to the bathroom. I strode past Jacob, who was laughing. I punched him in the stomach, giving him a glower. I went to the bathroom and I was done with this black-tie charity event. After I took care of business, I saw that Jacob was speaking to another security guard. I took the opportunity to dart out. I hated to duck my protection, but if this was I was to look forward to, this six months was going to be way too long. I swiped my overcoat from the coat check and left the art gallery, the location of the charity event and which was in Brooklyn. As I was walking, the skies opened up and I grumbled, “Fucking fabulous.”

It was late and not many places were open. I shrugged deeper into my coat and I saw some lights coming from a building, just a half a block away. I moved quickly, pushing the door open. I was shocked the door was open since the hours indicated the shop was clearly closed. I looked up and read the sign, *Swan Family Bakery, Est. 1897.* I heard something in the back and I turned around.

A petite woman came out, holding a marble rolling pin and wearing thread-bare clothing, but beautiful nonetheless. Her skin was the purest alabaster, but with a nasty handprint on her cheek, which angered me, and mahogany curls atop her head in a messy bun. But, what drew me in was her swirling chocolate eyes, which were wary from my intrusion and clearly exhausted. However, after a few cursory introductions, she relaxed, not seeing me as a threat. This woman, Bella, was the owner of the establishment. Her sweet voice gave me an offer I didn’t dare refuse.

“Would you like some coffee?” she asked, her voice quiet, but raspy and a delicious blush covering her pale skin.

“I’d love nothing more, Miss Bella,” I answered, bowing gallantly and feeling the champagne. I shrugged off my overcoat and followed her to the kitchen. “What are you making?”

“Apple pies and maybe attacking some sourdough,” she shrugged, expertly making some coffee from some space-age contraption that was apparently a coffee maker. “I … I just needed to get some work done. I couldn’t sleep.” She poured some coffee into a mug, handing it to me. “If you want cream and sugar, there’s some in the cooler just behind you.”

“Thank you, Miss Bella,” I said, nodding in gratitude. “Can I help you? I’m pretty handy in the kitchen.”

“I don’t want you to ruin your tuxedo, Masen,” she gasped, gesturing to my ensemble. I put the coffee down and removed my coat, took off my tie and rolled up my sleeves. However, hearing her say my name made my heart patter. I liked hearing my name come from her lips. “Really, I don’t want you to …”
“I don’t mind, Miss Bella,” I said.

“Just Bella, please,” she blushed, pouring herself a cup of coffee. “Your accent … it’s beautiful. Where is it from? Obviously, you’re not from Jersey or even Brooklyn.”

“Ah, no,” I laughed. “I’m visiting from Gevalia. I went to school here, Dartmouth for undergrad and Harvard for my graduate degree. I’m here serving as a diplomat for an extended time, under orders of the royal family.”

“My great-grandfather is from Gevalia,” Bella said, her gaze wistful. “This was his bakery, his dream. It’s been in the family for three generations, well four if you include me.”

“Four generations,” I beamed, clinking my coffee mug with hers. She smiled, but there was a sadness there. I didn’t want her sad. “Now, why don’t you tell me what to do with the sourdough? I want to get my hands dirty.”

“You’ll still get your tuxedo dirty,” Bella chided. I waved my hand and she handed me a recipe card. She pointed out where the ingredients were located. We worked seamlessly together. She put the apple pies into the oven and we had so much fun making the sourdough. Her sadness dissipated and she was laughing. While we worked, she told me about the bakery, the history of the building, her family’s recipes and a little bit about her father, who was the baker prior to her taking over. She didn’t mention anything about her mother and from her comments about her father, he was still around, but very ill. Though, she didn’t say that. Her actions showed me that she was fighting for this very bakery.

However, she was very smart, extremely capable in the kitchen and I was captivated by her beauty. As we worked, we laughed, we talked and we built a tentative friendship. As we were putting the sourdough into the cooler so it could rise, my cell phone rang from my coat. “Ugh, it would appear that I’ve been discovered,” I grumbled. Bella handed me a towel and I wiped my hands, reaching into my pocket. I swiped my finger across the screen. “Yes?”

“Cullen, tell me one reason why I shouldn’t kick your ass?” Jake growled. “It’s your first charity event and you ducked me?”

“I couldn’t handle it, Jake,” I sighed. “You saw what I was dealing with!”

“I know, man. That woman was vapid,” Jake muttered. “I don’t blame you, but I’m still pissed at you. Where are you? Back at the condo?”

“I’m in Brooklyn,” I replied. “Not far from the gallery, really.”

“Never mind,” he said. “I’ve got your GPS signal. I’ll be there with a car in a little bit.” He huffed out a breath. “This conversation is not over, your highness. Your mother would have my head on a platter if something happened to you, Mase. Don’t make me a headless corpse before I can say I do?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I grumbled. “See you soon, Jake.” I ended the call and turned back to Bella. She’d finished putting the sourdough into the coolers and removed her apron. She’d taken down her hair, which was a mess of curls and only enhanced her effortless beauty. “Sorry about that.”

“Jake? Your boyfriend?” Bella asked, a smile toying on her features.

“More like my head of security and very good friend,” I chuckled, slipping on my tuxedo jacket and draping my overcoat over my arm. As I did that, another girl stormed into the bakery. She was clearly younger than Bella, pretty but had a pinched expression that made her look quite
unattractive. Bella stood up a little taller, but the wariness that had been in her eyes had reappeared
and her hands clenched into tight fists.

“I didn’t want to come down here, but Dad said that if I wanted to come home tonight, I had to
apologize,” said the girl. She glared at Bella, her nose wrinkled. “I hate you, Bella.”

“The feeling is quite mutual, Alice,” Bella retorted. “You’re ungrateful for everything I’ve been
doing for you, for our family. Not once did you say thank you. I gave up my dreams to come back
home.”

The girl, Alice, rolled her eyes. “You’re a self-righteous bitch, Bella. You think you’ve sacrificed
so much. What about me? I’ve had to give up everything,” Alice snapped. She crossed her arms, a
self-serving smirk crossing over her features. “Well, I don’t care. I bought a homecoming dress. It’s
beautiful, a soft pink color with sequins and gorgeous embroidery.” Her eyes were glazed over as
she described the dress, but they hardened, glaring at Bella. “Deal with it.” She turned on her heel
and stomped off, up a hidden set of stairs.

Almost, like a puppet had its strings cut, Bella fell. Her body just collapsed and a shattered
whimper came from her. I tossed my coat onto the counter and wrapped her into my arms. She was
stiff, trying not to cry. “Bella,” I whispered, sliding down to the ground.

“I won’t cry,” she choked out. “I can’t cry. Crying won’t help anything.”

I leaned my cheek against the crown of her head. “Sometimes crying does help,” I breathed. She
whimpered again, her eyes fluttering shut. Tears began to fall onto her cheeks and she shuddered in
my arms. “Let go, Bella.” With my quiet request, her fingers grasped my shirt and she sobbed. I
could feel the tension in her body and she clung to me. I cradled her in my arms, humming against
her hair and allowing her some sort of comfort. I could feel my phone vibrate against my hip,
indicating that Jake was here. I couldn’t pull myself away from Bella. With another set of
vibrations, I knew I had to go. “Cherie, I have to go,” I whispered against her temple as I kissed her
soft skin.

“I’m sorry for falling apart,” she said, releasing my shirt and hastily wiping her cheeks. “It’s just …
” Bella trailed off and shook her head. “Never mind. It’s not your problem.”

“It may not be my problem, but I’m concerned, Bella,” I said, tightening my arms around her tiny
body. She snuggled closer and I felt her muscles relax for a moment before she felt my cell phone
against my leg. Damn it, Black! She got up and walked a sink, washing her hands and wiping her
cheeks with a towel. “Can I see you again? I’d really like to, Bella.”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I’ve got a lot of stuff going on and I can’t get much time off.”

I knew why. If I had to guess, it had a lot to do with that ungrateful girl who made Bella cry.
“Regardless, I’d like to get to know you better, Bella.” I reached into my pocket and pulled out a
small card. Picking up a pen, I jotted down my personal cell phone number. “Please, call me,
cherie.” She took the card, staring down at the card and sniffled quietly. I hugged her again,
kissing her forehead. “I’d like to be your friend, someone you can talk to.” She hugged me back,
but didn’t respond. My phone rang again and I sighed. “Use that number, please?” I tipped her chin
up and stared into her swirling chocolate depths. I kissed her cheek and stepped away, even though
it pained me to do so. “Promise me you’ll call, Bella?”

“I will,” she nodded. “Thank you for … well, for everything.” She clung to the card like it was a
talisman. I grinned crookedly and turned to leave. She followed me into the front of the bakery.
“And lock your door, cherie,” I said. She blushed and nodded, biting her plump lip. I turned and left the bakery, getting into the waiting limo. I looked up and saw her standing, in silhouette, in the center of the bakery.

“I won’t kick your ass, Mase. She seems hot,” Jake teased.

“Just go,” I growled, my heart breaking as he pulled away when all I wanted to do was go back and make those tears go away.

A/N: So, Alice is a raging bitch. She’s completely unlikeable, entitled and selfish. We also met Jake, Edward’s bestie. A picture of Jake is on my blog. You can find a link for that on my profile. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. I’m on twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me some …

And we’re going to stay with Masen next chapter. Thanks for reading!
Chapter Four

Masen

Jake drove us back to the condo, parking in the secured garage and we went upstairs. My mind was troubled, worried for Bella. Her watery eyes, her dejected demeanor and broken smile were ingrained in my memory. “Mase, you okay?”

“No, I’m not,” I said, sitting down and thrusting my hands into my hair. “That bakery, it’s owner is … Can you do me a favor?”

“Sure, Mase,” Jacob replied. “What’s going on?”

“I just met someone who was is carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders, Jake,” I sighed. “I need you to find out information about that bakery, its history, its owners and anything else you can find. I want to help.”

“Not every woman needs a knight in shining armor, Masen,” Jacob said, his face somber and concerned. “What happened?”

“She fell apart, Jake,” I frowned. “This girl, her sister, I believe, told Bella that she spent $400 for a homecoming dress, presumably stealing from her family.”

“That’s pretty steep,” Jake said, making a face. “But, in New York, that’s par for the course.”

“I think that money was needed for that bakery, Jake,” I sighed. I felt grimy from the work I’d done in the kitchen. “I’m going to shower and then I’m going to do my own research. She may not want a knight in shining armor, but I would like to be her friend.”

Okay, Masen,” Jacob nodded. “You’ve got some flour in your hair and on your face.” I shrugged, leaving Jacob in the kitchen. He’d taken out his computer and was beginning his research. I slipped into the bathroom and looked up. My hair was covered in flour, mainly where my hands were thrust into my hair. I also had flour splashed on my cheek and some on my lips. I hated to wash evidence of my evening away. It was a reminder of her, of Bella. As weird as it sounded, I took out my phone and snapped a selfie. It seemed vain, but I saw something in my eyes that I hadn’t seen before.

Contentment.

Shaking my head, I stripped off my clothes and took a quick shower, rubbing one out in the shower, and changing into some sweatpants and a t-shirt. When I came out of my bedroom, Jake had a beer on the kitchen counter, his brow furrowed. “What is it, Jake?”

“You’re going to need this,” he said, handing me a bottle of beer. I took it from him, arching a brow. “Okay, so, Swan Family Bakery, Est. 1897 is on the verge of foreclosure. It would appear that they’re looking for investors to expand the bakery and make it competitive with other bakeries
nearby, but so far, there are no takers.”


“It would appear to be that Charlie Swan, Bella’s father? He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease. He had numerous doctor’s appointments, physical therapy appointments and obviously, a never-ending pile of bills,” Jake explained. “Bella went to college, graduating with honors as a teacher. She had a position lined up in Greenwich, teaching at some private school, earning an amazing salary, but she backed out of her contract to return home to care for father. She gave up her dream to be a teacher to save her family’s bakery.”

I took a pull of my beer, my heart stammering and anger simmering underneath my skin. I clenched my hand into a fist. “Go on, Jake. How much is she in debt? Or the bakery?”

“Another month or so? The bakery will be owned by the bank and the family will be evicted from their rent controlled apartment above the bakery,” Jake said. “And that $400 that the girl spent? That was probably going to be used for the mortgage or for the grocery bill.” He looked up at me, hope shining in his dark eyes. “There’s one more thing…”

“From the sparkle you’ve got going, it’s good news?” I asked.

“Isabella Swan is Gevalian,” Jake smirked. “Not a hundred percent, but a good deal.”

“I knew that. She said that her great-grandfather opened the bakery after he’d immigrated from Gevalia,” I said.

“Well, her father is one-hundred percent and her mother is half,” Jake answered. “The neighborhood where Bella lives was home to a lot of the Gevalian immigrants from the late 1800s, early 1900s.”

“What about Bella’s mom?” I asked, looking up at my friend.

“Died from childbirth,” he replied. “She started hemorrhaging and they couldn’t stop it, even with a complete hysterectomy, almost eighteen years ago.” Jacob looked at me, his lips pursed. “What are you thinking, Mase?”

“Nothing,” I answered, taking another pull of my beer.

“Bullshit. I’m thinking I should put you in a tutu, wings and a wand, calling you Tinkerbelle,” Jacob deadpanned.

“What?” I laughed. “Dude, that’s a visual I did not need to see, Jacob.”

“But, I’m thinking that you want to help this girl, Bella,” Jacob said. “Make all her wishes come true?”

“That’s not Tinkerbelle, moron. That’s a Fairy Godmother,” I scoffed.

“Wouldn’t it be Fairy Godfather, Mase?” Jacob chuckled. I rolled my eyes. “Seriously, though. Why would you want to help her? You just met her! Think this through, Masen.” I got up and walked away. Jacob followed me, stopping me. “You like this girl.”

“I do, Jake,” I sighed. “You weren’t there when this other girl told her that she spent $400. She cried and it seemed like no one cared to make Bella feel better. She’s been shouldering all of this, by herself. I assume her father tries, but it’s all on her. She clung to me and I’m certain that I was
the first one to offer any sort of comfort, Jake, since this whole situation happened.”

“Before you make any sort of hasty decisions, thinking with your dick, sleep on it?” Jacob suggested.

“I’m not thinking with my dick,” I argued.

“I know you, Masen. You probably did a little chug and tug in the shower,” he snickered. I blushed and he nodded. “Sleep on it before you turn into a white knight, okay?”

“Okay,” I nodded. Jacob gave me a sharp look. “Okay! I’m going to bed. Call your fiancée. Have some phone sex. It may calm you down, Black.”

“Good night, your princeliship,” Jacob teased, picking up his computer and sauntering to his bedroom. I walked to the balcony and I sat down, looking out over Central Park. I sipped my beer, thinking about how I could help Bella. Would she even want my help? But then I remembered how she clung to me, her sobs shaking her tiny body. I didn’t want her to experience that level of sadness. Granted, I didn’t know why she was so upset after that girl told Bella she spent money on a dress. Regardless of the reason, it shattered her heart and seeing her so upset made me want to help her more than just holding her and wiping her tears.

The rain had picked up again and I could feel a chill in the air, the change from a balmy summer to crisp fall. I stayed outside, finishing my beer and closing my eyes, imagining Bella in my arms again. I liked it. I wanted. Granted, I wanted for nothing, being a crowned prince. What I desired, I got with a wave of a hand. I never knew what it was like to be hungry, to worry about where my next paycheck was going to come from, or if I would have a roof over my head. For Bella and her family, this was a very real issue. I had the power to alleviate her problems. I had enough money in my personal account to fund the renovations, pay off the mortgage and give Bella’s family what they needed.

As the rain tapered off to a mere drizzle, I got up and tossed my beer in the recycling bin. Using my own computer, I sent an email to my personal assistant, asking to transfer funds from my account in Gevalia to the bank I was using in the states. I told her to be discreet and then I closed my computer, padding to my bedroom.

As I drifted off to sleep, I imagined holding Bella in my arms. Instead of comforting her and drying her tears, I was kissing her, making love to her. I liked that infinitely more than I cared to admit.

xx AMDFT xx

I woke up the next morning, my head clear and my mind made up. I checked my email and saw that my assistant had made arrangements for the transfer of funds. I showered again since I had a major bedhead. After I showered and dressed in a pair of jeans and a button-down, I went to the kitchen and made some coffee. Jacob came out, yawning and scratching his belly. I poured him some coffee and he grunted in appreciation. He sipped it, looking up at me. “Still planning on being a white knight?”

“I may as well live up to my expectations as a prince,” I quipped.

“Does she even know that you’re a prince?” Jacob asked.

“That’s the thing. She didn’t. We talked to each other like a man and a woman. She got to know me. Not Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, crowned prince of Gevalia. She got to know Masen,” I said. “She knows I’m a diplomat, but that’s it.”
"You’ve got to tell her, Mase," Jacob sighed, scrubbing his face.

"I will. When the time is right," I answered.

"Which is the next time you see her, right?" Jacob asked. I gave him a look, my nose wrinkled. "You’re going to fuck this up, Masen. I love you like a brother, but you can’t deceive that girl."

"I’m not deceiving her, Jacob. I’m helping her," I argued. I picked up my coffee and scoffed. "This tastes like piss. I’m going to get some coffee."

"Let me guess. The coffee shop is in Brooklyn?" Jacob snorted.

"Yep," I answered.

"I’m coming with you, Mase," Jacob said. I groaned. "Dude, I’m your protection. You’re still a royal and a target, Masen. I’ll be discreet. You know that." I nodded, picking up my keys, my cell phone and a leather jacket from the closet. Jacob went down the garage and pulled the car around. I slid into the backseat and Jacob made his way back to the bakery. An hour later, we pulled up to the bakery and I walked up to the entrance. I opened the door and was shocked at how empty it was. It was a beautiful, crisp early fall day. Perfect for a tasty treat and warm cup of coffee.

"We’re closed," said an angry voice. I looked up and saw the girl from the evening before. She was wearing a t-shirt and a pair of jeans. Her hair was pulled back away from her face and she was holding a towel. "Get out."

"I’m here to speak to Bella," I said, trying to keep my voice even.

Her eyes narrowed and she appraised me scornfully. She crossed her arms over her chest and she sucked her teeth. "She’s taking our father to the doctor. He fell this morning," she sneered, rolling her eyes. "They forced me to work in this dump, scouring the kitchen. Ungrateful bitch."

I wanted to wring this girl’s neck. She was the ungrateful one. That ‘dump’ was her livelihood, and paid for her life. But, my father said to never raise a hand to a woman, as much as some may need it. I took a deep breath, centering my thoughts and picturing Bella’s beautiful face. "Well, if you see her, can you tell her that Masen stopped by? I’d really like to talk to her. I enjoyed our time together yesterday evening," I said, plastering on my smile. The polite smile used for visiting dignitaries and Lady Kathryn.

"Why? She’s the loser who lives here," she scoffed. I growled lowly and crossed my arms over my chest. She rolled her eyes. "If I remember …" She waved her hand dismissively. She obviously didn’t care.

"Where’s the doctor’s office?" I asked, barely keeping my temper in check. The girl shrugged, seemingly uncaring about her father or Bella. With a sarcastic smile, I bowed. "Thank you so much for your help, little girl." Her eyes snapped up at me and she hissed angrily. I turned on my heel and I made my way back out to the street. I felt my cell phone vibrate in my jacket pocket. I stopped at the entrance, my hand on the door handle. "I’ll be back tomorrow. Heaven knows you won’t give Bella that message." I pushed my way out and slipped my phone out of my pocket.

I've found Emmett. Or rather, my future brother-in-law did. Seth has Emmett locked up in the two-seven precinct in Manhattan. I'm pulling around now ~ Jake

Ugh, now? With a sigh, I tapped out my response. I'm waiting, Jake. Thank you ~ Mase

A/N: Alice is such a little bitch. Completely bratty and ungrateful. She’s the complete
opposite of Bella. Now, we’re going back to Bella and have some Charlie/Bella bonding time.
Charlie is a good man, but he’s battling a debilitating disease with Parkinson’s. He also felt
guilty about the loss of his wife and enabled Alice, making up for her not having a mother.
I’m not explaining Alice’s behavior away, but it is a big reason behind it.

Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 5

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyers for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Chapter Five

Bella

I was sitting in the doctor’s office, flipping through a magazine angrily. I was exhausted. Beyond exhausted, really. Sleep didn’t come at all after Masen had left the bakery.

I tossed and turned on my couch, waking up when I heard a thump from my father’s bedroom. I ran to his room and found him on the ground, his hands shaking uncontrollably and he looked up at me with a pained expression. I gave him his medications and eventually got him off the floor. He was covered in bruises and his wrist was swollen. When my alarm went off, I woke up Alice.

“What do you want?” she sneered.

“Dad’s fallen,” I said.

“Big fucking deal,” she shrugged, turning over and covering herself with her quilt.

“Alice,” I snapped. “I’m taking Dad to the hospital. I think he may have broken his wrist. I need you to mind the shop.”

“Why? That’s your responsibility,” Alice said, covering her head with a pillow.

“ALICE!” Dad bellowed. “Get your ass in here!”

She shot up, pushing her way past me and I took a deep breath. I changed into a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt, grabbing Dad’s insurance card, wallet and my purse. I called for a cab and they said one would be at our house in ten minutes. I heard my dad hissing at my sister and she stomped past me. She slammed the door to the bathroom. I shook my head, checking on Dad. He was in a pair of sweatpants and sneakers, fumbling with the ties. “I’ve got it, Dad,” I said, crouching to tie his shoes. “Did Alice help with the pants?”

“I did it myself. I’m not completely incapable,” he said, his brow furrowed. I nodded, helping him to his feet and we made our way to the living room. “Alice is going to mind the shop. However, she’s not going to open it. She’s going to scour the kitchen.”

“We need the money, Dad,” I said.

“We’ll make it up. Extend the hours?” Dad grimaced, his hands shaking. I helped him to his feet and we made our way downstairs. A cab was pulling up and we got inside. I told the driver where to go. Fifteen minutes later, we made it to the emergency department. Inside, we were brought back and my dad was taken back for an x-ray. I paced the small cubicle, hoping that my dad’s wrist wasn’t broken. I also put in a phone call into my dad’s neurologist, asking to bring him in.

By mid-morning, my dad’s tests were finished and he had a sprain in his wrist along with a bruise on his hip. He’d have to wear a brace for a couple of weeks. I also heard from my dad’s neurologist did want him to come in. Thankfully, the office was in a medical building near the hospital. We
used the medical shuttle to make it to the office. My dad was tired and very sore. The mild pain killer he’d received in the hospital did little to help with his pain.

“Dad, we’re here,” I said, nudging him.

“Hmmmm?” he mumbled, his eyes blinking open.

“Come on, Dad,” I murmured, helping him to his feet and we made our way out of the shuttle. He was clumsier than usual. I got a wheelchair. I wheeled him to the office and checked him in. The nurse asked for our copay and I forked over the money, trying to hide my fear of the money we were losing from not having the shop open and the money for this visit.

“Bells, baby girl, I’m sorry,” he said after we got settled in the examination room.

“Don’t apologize, Dad. It’s not your fault,” I said, looking at him.

“My illness isn’t my fault, but Alice’s behavior is,” Dad frowned, looking down at his braced hand. “I’m sorry she’s treating you so horrifically. You’re such a good girl. You don’t deserve her ire. You don’t deserve what she does to you. I’m so sorry that she’s acting this way.” I didn’t say anything, just staring at the magazine that I wanted to chuck at his head. “It’s my fault. It’s all my fault.” He closed his eyes, tears streaking down his cheeks. “I should have done something … If I’d done something, Alice wouldn’t be the self-absorbed, entitled brat she is. I just felt so guilty that she didn’t have a mother. You had nine years with Renee, whereas, she never knew her.”

“I also lost her and I don’t act that way,” I said. “You loved us, Dad. You are a good man, but you indulged Alice.”

“I admit to that,” he frowned. “And now? You’re paying for that indulgence. I wish I could give a reprieve. With this injury, it doesn’t appear that will be happening, Bells. I’m so sorry.” He cried and he took my hand, squeezing it weakly.

I got up, kissing his cheek and telling him that I needed to go to the restroom. I left him in the examination room and I took the key from the nurse for the public restroom on the floor. When I got inside, I went to the handicapped stall and I fell to the floor. I curled up, crying quietly and wishing I could have someone who could support me, someone who could make all of this easier.

Masen …

I wrapped my arms around my knees, imagining Masen’s arms around me. It was when he held me that I felt comforted. I wanted that. I wanted him, but he was obviously rich and what would he want to do with me. I shook my head, feeling more upset than before. However, I didn’t have time to fall apart. I had to keep it together. I wiped my cheeks and got up. I quickly washed my hands, making my way back to the office. When I walked inside, my dad’s neurologist was speaking to him. “Ah, Bella,” he smiled.

“Hello, Dr. Volturi,” I said. “Have I missed much?”

“No, I was just checking your father’s reflexes,” Dr. Volturi replied. “Despite his tumble, they are still pretty strong. I think you just had a moment of instability.”

“Will it continue to get worse?” I asked.

“Over time, yes,” Dr. Volturi frowned. “But, don’t you worry about it. He’s got time. Now, I want to adjust your medications.”
“New medications?” I squeaked.

“No, not new medications. Just an increase in what he has,” Dr. Volturi smiled. “I’ll give you some free samples. I know that money is a concern.” He shook my father’s hand. “I also want to give you a stronger pain killer. Again, I’ll give you some free samples. Darvocet is a bit stronger than what you received from the emergency room. It will make you sleepy, but you won’t be in pain.”


“Take it easy, Charlie. I’ll see you in a month. If your symptoms continue to increase, please don’t hesitate to call,” Dr. Volturi said. He turned to me. “A word, Bella?” I nodded, following Dr. Volturi into his office. He looked at me, his eyes soft, but concerned. “I’m saying this out of worry, but you look like shit.”

“Thanks, Dr. V.,” I snorted, giving him a glower.

“When was the last time you slept, sweetheart?”

“I sleep, but there’s so much to do,” I answered, my brow furrowing. “And my sister, she’s not very helpful.”

“Have you considered getting some help, Bella?” Dr. Volturi asked.

“We can’t afford it. That’s why I don’t sleep. I need to be there for my dad, run the bakery and manage pretty much everything,” I said. “I’ll be okay.”

“Bella, the next thing you know is that you’re in the hospital for exhaustion or worse,” Dr. Volturi said, his hand taking mine. I sniffled and tried to not cry. “Damn it.” He pulled me into his arms and I was hugged by dad’s neurologist. “How bad is it, Bella?”

“We’ll manage,” I croaked out, stiffly returning his embrace.

“How much is your copay?” he asked, reaching into his pocket. He tugged out an old wallet, pushing whatever cash he had in it into my hands.

“Please, don’t. It’s okay, Dr. V.,” I said, wiping my cheeks and stuffing his money into his pocket. “I’ll open the shop when we get home and I’ll make Alice watch Dad. It’s okay.”

“Bella, you shouldn’t have to shoulder this alone, sweetie. You and your dad are more than just patients to me.” He took the money and handed it back to me. “No charge for this visit. And take the day off, Bella. You need to rest.” He hugged me again. “I’m going to get those samples.”

“Thank you, Dr. V.,” I smiled. He patted my cheek and led me back into my dad’s examination room. I helped my dad into the wheelchair and Dr. Volturi came back with a bag, handing it to my father. “So, a month?”

“Yes,” Dr. Volturi nodded. “Feel better, Charlie. You, too, Bella.” I smiled, rolling my father out of the room and we made an appointment for a month from today. The receptionist also made arrangements for a car to drive us back to the bakery.

“Bella, I know you’re dragging. I’m going to check on Alice,” Dad said.

“No, Dad. You need to sleep and take some of these pain pills that Dr. Volturi gave you,” I said, helping him up the stairs and into our apartment. I set him on his recliner and flipped his legs up. “Let me make something for you to eat. Do you want leftovers from last night?”
“Bells, please, slow down,” Dad growled. I stopped cold, looking back at him. “I overheard what Dr. Volturi said to you. I’m worried about you, just like him.”

“I’m fine, Dad. Someone has to make sure that things get done. Alice won’t. You can’t,” I argued, turning to reheat the soup. “I’m fine.”

“So, stubborn,” he sighed as I put the tray over his legs. “Bells, please, just lay down for a little bit. You look like you’re about to fall over.”

“I have to check on Alice,” I sighed, feeling my exhaustion. “Plus, I need to bake for this week. We need to make up for being closed today, Dad. We need that money to pay for the doctor’s appointments, your insurance and this apartment.” I kissed his cheek, getting up and making my way downstairs. “I’ll send Alice up.” Turning on my heel, I went downstairs and saw Alice in the kitchen, her feet up and munching on one of my apple pies I’d made yesterday. “That’s not for you!”

“I got hungry,” she said, giving me an evil smile.

I took the pie from her and forced her to stand. “You’ve done enough damage, Alice. Go upstairs and mind Dad.”

“That’s your job, Bella,” she sang.

“No, my job is make sure we don’t lose any more money, Mary Alice,” I snapped. “With the money you stole for your fucking dress and now not being open today? We’ve got a lot of ground to make up. GO!” She blinked at me and scurried up the stairs. I turned around and saw she didn’t even do a damn thing dad had asked her. I threw up my hair, picking up the half-eaten piece of pie. I threw it away and decided to take my aggressions out on the kitchen, scouring every inch for the rest of the day and well into the night.

_I hate my life …_

_A/N: Bella’s life is tough. Her father feels guilty of not being able to help. Dr. Volturi is a good guy, seeing how much distress this situation is causing Bella. And Alice … leave me your thoughts about her. We’re going to go back to Edward and find out about Emmett. Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading! :-)_
Chapter 6

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Bella’s life is tough. Her father feels guilty of not being able to help. Dr. Volturi is a good guy, seeing how much distress this situation is causing Bella. And Alice ... leave me your thoughts about her. We’re going to go back to Edward and find out about Emmett.

Chapter Six

Masen

I was sitting in the captain’s office of the two-seven precinct in downtown Manhattan. I was anxious to get out of there. I wanted to check on Bella and I knew that girl, her sister, I believe, was not going to pass along the message. I also didn’t want to deal with the press. They were circling around the precinct like vultures. Word of Emmett’s arrest had reached the gossip rags and they wanted to see a fallen royal.

Jacob was covering that issue. My car was waiting in the rear of the building.

“Your highness,” said the captain, an older man with a hawk-like nose and a receding hairline. “My name is Captain Aro Volturi,” he said. He awkwardly bowed before shaking my hand. “Thank you for coming.”

I nodded. “Does my brother need representation, Captain Volturi?” I asked, crossing my legs. His hesitation gave me the answer I needed. I took out my phone, calling Jacob. “I need a lawyer, Jake. Someone discreet.” I listened to Jake ramble off some information and I wrinkled my nose. “My brother’s lawyer will meet him at arraignment, Captain. What are the charges against my brother?”

“Drunk, disorderly, had drugs on his person, with possibly the intent to sell, solicitation, and resisting arrest,” the captain replied. “He was arrested in a nightclub in Chelsea.”

“I know that my brother is a fucking moron,” I said, leaning forward. “He’s not known for his smarts. His looks, yes, but not brains. I hope that this has not irreparably damaged our relationship with the United States.”

“His student visa has expired since he’s not a student anymore,” Captain Volturi muttered. “With the charges against him, he can be deported, never allowed to return to the states, your highness.”

“I don’t see that as a problem, Captain,” I said formerly. “If I had my way, my brother would return to Gevalia and his issues will be handled, appropriately. He’s got a problem. I would be a horrible brother if I didn’t see that his self-destruction isn’t a call for help. Can I see him?”

“Not until after arraignment, your highness.”

“Which will be when?” I asked.

“This afternoon, sir,” Captain Volturi squeaked out.

“Look, to be honest, is there any way that we can forego the arraignment? I’ll pay whatever bail
he’s issued and I’ll get him out of the states. Him being here is the issue, Captain Volturi,“ I
answered. “If I’m not mistaken, as a royal, Emmett has diplomatic immunity. He can’t be charged,
legally.” Captain Volturi’s face reddened. “Do I need to contact the police commissioner?”

“No, your highness,” Captain Volturi sneered.

“My brother is a fuck up. I get that. Your problem is that he shouldn’t be here. I can solve that
problem. I’ll pay whatever reparations needed and I’ll get him out of New York City,” I said,
leaning forward, glaring at the captain. “And if you think he’s going to get off easy, he won’t. My
brother will be dealing with his problems and he’ll have to pay me back.”

The captain huffed out a breath, picking up his phone. “Clearwater!” he barked. “Bring up Cullen.
I’m releasing him into the custody of his brother.” He slammed his phone down, glaring at me.
“The District Attorney will contact you regarding his ‘bail’.”

I handed him my card. “This is the phone number of the condo where I’m staying. Is he still
intoxicated?” The captain nodded. “I want to get him sober, so I can have a conversation with him.
He’ll be out of the country by no later than the end of the week. He will not return unless it’s
absolutely necessary, Captain.” He held me in a steely gaze, which he broke when there was
someone clearing their throat behind us. I stood up and saw my brother.

He was easily six inches taller than me, with curly brown hair and ice-blue eyes. However, his face
was bloated, and he looked paler than normal. His once athletic physique was soft around the
middle and he was leaning heavily against Seth Clearwater, Leah’s brother and Jake’s soon-to-be
brother-in-law. “Can you assist me in bringing him to the car?” I asked. Seth nodded, and I turned,
appraising the captain. “I will be retaining counsel for my brother, if something else should arise. I
could represent him myself, as I have passed the Bar Exam, but it could be a conflict of interest,
Captain. Good day, sir.” I left the office and Seth dragged my bedraggled brother behind me. We
rode down to the lowest level and made our way to my waiting car. “I know this may sound odd, Seth, but can I keep the handcuffs?”

“Why, sir?” Seth asked.

“To make sure he doesn’t get away,” I said, smacking my brother’s head. He just groaned, moving
unsteadily on his feet. He gagged, and I quickly thrust a garbage can under his mouth as he threw
up all into it. “Idiot.”

“Here you go, your highness,” Seth said, handing me a key. “Good luck.”

“No luck needed. This one is going to get his ass kicked,” I smirked, taking him by the arm. “Can I
keep the garbage can, too? I really don’t want my brother to projectile vomit all over my car.”

“We’ll add it to your tab,” Seth replied dryly. He escorted us out and helped Emmett into the
backseat. I could hear the din of the paparazzi, but Jacob was excellent in concealing the car, so we
wouldn’t be seen. Once Emmett was buckled in, we pulled away and listened to the roar of angry
reporters as Jacob ducked away, driving like he was at the Daytona 500 and not in downtown
Manhattan.

“Shit, Jake, I don’t want to have to use my brother’s puke bucket,” I snorted.

“Sorry, trying to get in front of the vultures. I forgot how much I hated those fuckers,” Jake
grumbled, ducking in and out of traffic, cutting off a fairly large truck, much to his chagrin and
vociferous swearing. “You drive like my grandmother, asshole!” Jake yelled, shaking his fist out
the window, making me chuckle and then grab the ‘oh-shit’ handle.
Emmett groaned, his head buried in the garbage can. I blanched, trying not to gag. As undignified as it was, I was a sympathy puker and being in such close proximity of my brother and the stench emanating from that can, I was going to need my own garbage can. “Are we nearly there?” I whimpered, leaning away from Emmett.

“Pulling in now, Pukeward,” Jake teased, parking the car. The vehicle had barely stopped, and I tumbled out of the car, thinking of something other than my retching brother. Jake stood next to me, holding out two things: a bottle of water and some gum. Thank goodness! “Drink that and then chew on the gum. It’ll settle your stomach.”

“Thanks,” I said, downing the water and popping a piece of gum into my mouth. Emmett was dragged out of the car and Jake held him roughly by his bicep. My brother was slightly taller than Jake, but since his downfall in the city, he was no longer as athletic, and the alcohol had made him unsteady, wobbly on his feet. “You bring him upstairs and handcuff him to the bed in the guest room.”

“As an officer of the law, I have to say that’s pretty illegal,” Jake said, arching a brow and a grin toying on his face.

“Well, in that penthouse and at the Gevalian Consulate, you’re not in the United States and my word is law,” I quipped, grinning wolfishly. Jake rolled his eyes. “I’m going to dispose of this and speak to the building management about my brother’s visit.” We rode up the elevator and I got off on the main floor. After a brief discussion with the management, I went to my condo and saw that Jake had handcuffed my brother to the bed. Seeing him in the light of day, made me sick. He smelled, and his skin was no longer healthy looking. I left another garbage can next to Emmett’s bed, along with a piss bottle and stripped off his shoes. “You think you feel like shit now? Wait, until I’m done with you.” Emmett’s response was a pitiful groan/gagging sound, rolling onto his side in agony.

While I waited for my brother to detoxify, I made arrangements and created a business plan for the bakery. I even did some research on who would be a contracting company who would best fit its needs and looked for new, state-of-the-art ovens, coolers and everything in between. I wouldn’t do any of this without Bella’s approval, but I wanted to be prepared.

It’s how I graduated from college and graduate school. With honors.

At nightfall, I heard my brother throwing up and cursing a blue streak in the bedroom. His mumbles were a combination of English and French. He was cursing my name, calling me everything under the sun. He bellowed for more drugs, but I sat calmly, reading my book and ignoring him. He fell back asleep shortly after that. Jake, bless his heart, went in and cleaned out his mess and brought in a new bucket and piss bottle. When he was done, he glared at me. “You don’t pay me enough for this shit, Masen.”

“I would have done it,” I replied, smirking at Jake. “I’m planning on letting my brother wallow in his own filth for a while. He’s just wretched.” I blinked to the door. “Do you think he’ll be coherent by tomorrow morning?”

“That’s a relative term,” Jake said. “Coherent to carry on a conversation is debatable. To understand that he’s fucked up and that you are going to kick his ass from here to the Gevalian capital? Definitely doable.”

“I’m going to make arrangements for Emmett at a rehab facility and then call my father, to prepare for his arrival.” I grimaced, looking at Jake. “You brought your passport?”
“Do I need to babysit the drunkard?” he groaned.

“I can’t leave, Jake. I don’t have anything planned tomorrow, but I do have a meeting at the consulate on Monday to discuss some more events that have been added to my itinerary,” I said.

“I’ll call Seth. He’s off for a couple of days. He can act as your muscle. I know he likes you,” Jake shrugged. “Now, as payment for cleaning up Emmett’s shit, both literally and figuratively, I want your stuffed pizza. With green peppers, sausage and olives. Get baking, your princeliship.”

“It’s the least I can do, my friend,” I said.

xx AMDFT xx

I got very little sleep, with Emmett’s moaning and my swirling concern for Bella. Was her father alright? Was she alright? So, after a jog in Central Park, I decided to turn to the problem I was there to solve. As much as I hated it, I couldn’t focus on her, but on my brother, who was drooling in the bed, naked as the day he was born, save for a torn arm off a t-shirt. I crossed my arms, glaring at my brother and I took a bottle of water, pouring it on his face. “What the fuck?!” he bellowed, sitting up. “What do you want, Edward? Being a good little royal for mommy?”

“You’re a grade-A moron, Emmett,” I snapped. “You’re making a mockery of yourself, of our family. What’s going on with you?”

“I want to forget my life,” he said, his ice-blue eyes nearly frozen solid. “Not everyone is as perfect as you, Prince Edward. You have your world handed to you on a platter, where I, I got shit.”


“You got the best tutors, best nannies and hottest maids. I got the second-rate piss-ants who barely knew their fucking name. You were groomed to rule, where I was groomed to be a fuck-up. Might as well live up to the hype,” he hissed, trying to remove the handcuff from his hand. “God damn it, Edward. Let me go.”

“Not until you come clean. There’s more to your self-destruction besides your skewed version of our childhood,” I said, crossing my arms. “You have a choice. You can tell me what the hell is going on and stay here, enjoying our time in New York, or you go to rehab. I don’t want the next phone call I get from the police to be me claiming your body, Emmett. I love you. You’re my brother and I can’t do this without you.”

“Yes, you can,” Emmett snarled. “You do everything without me!” He glared at me. “You’re giving me a choice, I’m going to take it. Rehab.”

“Very well,” I said. “You’re going to be going to rehab in Gevalia at Four Circles Rehabilitation Center.” I stood up, smoothing my shirt and adopting the blank ‘royal’ glower. “Jacob is going to your apartment, picking up your passport and you will be leaving within the hour.”

“Four Circles?” he gulped. “Not there, Masen. Please!”

“Now, I’m Masen. When you’re pissed you call me Edward, but when pleading for leniency, you call me Masen,” I scoffed. “It’s already been decided, Emmett. Mother and Father agree. Jacob will be flying with you to Gevalia and going with Father to deposit you at Four Circles. This is your final opportunity. Fall off the wagon, and Mother is taking that as a clear signal that you’re abdicating your right to the throne and you will no longer be welcome in Gevalia.” Emmett’s eyes widened, his skin blanched and he realized that he was fucked. “I don’t want to do this, Emmett. Mother doesn’t want to do this. Please, let us help you.”
He glared down at the comforter and his jaw ticked angrily. With disgusted huff, he nodded his head. “Fine.” He blinked up at me. “Can I at least shower? I can smell my own funk.”

“I think the entire building can smell your funk,” I said, unlocking his handcuffs. He got up, padding to the bathroom and he turned, looking at me. He opened his mouth, about to say something, but he shook his head, not saying anything. I knew that with time, Emmett will open up. Something was deeply troubling him. We used to be close, but when my life turned more into ‘king training’, he turned away from me, going to girls, booze and drugs. He just needed to realize that I may be training to be the leader of our country, but I was still his brother and that I’d always love him.

Even if it was tough love.

I stayed in the room, only ducking out to grab a pair of workout pants and t-shirt. Jacob came back, and we made arrangements for the private jet to bring Emmett home and to fly Jacob back to New York. After Emmett was cleaned and dressed, I stood in front of him. “You can still tell me, brother,” I whispered. “What’s bothering you?”

“I can’t, Mase,” he whispered back. “I need to do this. Though, Four Circles should be renamed the Seventh Circle of Hell, but I need to do this.” He hugged me and left with Jacob, heading back to Gevalia and hopefully, with the help of the rehab facility, he’ll be able to pull his head out of his ass.

A/N: So, we met Emmett, the bad boy royal. He’s not bad, per se, just lost. He doesn’t know where he fits in the world. Masen had been groomed to be the king since he came out of the womb. Emmett is just … he needs guidance. Oh, and Captain Volturi and Dr. Volturi are brothers.

We’re going to stay with Masen and have some more Bella/Masen time. Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 7

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So, we met Emmett, the bad boy royal. He’s not bad, per se, just lost. He doesn’t know where he fits in the world. Masen had been groomed to be the king since he came out of the womb. Emmett is just … he needs guidance. Oh, and Captain Volturi and Dr. Volturi are brothers. We’re going to stay with Masen and have some more Bella/Masen time.

Chapter Seven

Masen

I called my father and the head of security for the royal family, informing them about Emmett’s return home. I also made a dreaded phone call to my mother, who was undoubtedly pleased by my quick ‘capture’ of my brother but not thrilled at the options I’d given him.

She was over his bullshit and was ready to strip him of his title.

However, since I knew my brother better than her, I knew I had to give him another chance. His stint at Four Circles Rehabilitation Center would hopefully put him in line.

After dropping my brother off at the private airfield, Seth drove me back to my condo where I changed into another pair of jeans and button-down. It was warmer today, not as chilly as yesterday. I swiped a pair of sunglasses and told Seth that I needed to go to Brooklyn.

“Why, sir?” he asked, his brow furrowed.

“I need some coffee,” I answered.

“There’s a Starbucks around the corner, your highness,” he said.

“True, but I don’t want Starbucks,” I smirked. “Have you heard of The Swan Bakery?”

“Oh, yeah. They’ve got the best chocolate croissants,” Seth smiled. “And their sourdough rolls are to die for! My girlfriend and I use them for our hamburgers. Oh, and their pretzels?”


“They’re usually closed on Sundays, though,” Seth frowned.

“Can we, at least, go and check?” I pleaded. “If not, we’ll go somewhere local.”

“Sounds good,” he nodded. “There’s this really good dim sum restaurant that would really good, if the bakery is closed.” He grabbed the keys for the limo and bounded out of the condo, like an overgrown puppy.

Sliding into the backseat of the car, I checked my itinerary for the following day, biting back a groan when I saw the sheer number of meetings. However, one meeting caught my attention. There was a charity event at the Guggenheim Museum, some fundraiser for the arts, which I supported whole-heartedly. I was a piano player, almost a concert-level pianist, but I also dabbled with guitar
and violin. Apparently, my mother was on the board of directors, needing to finalize the event details, which was happening in two weeks, coinciding with the beginning of October.

I wonder if Bella would be interested in going?

_Gah, you’re turning into a girl, Masen. She didn’t call you yesterday. Why would she …?_

_Maybe she didn’t know that I stopped by. Hell, who was I kidding? She definitely didn’t know. That girl was more likely to … ugh, she truly was hateful._

“Your highness? We’re here,” Seth said. “And it looks like it’s open.” He furrowed his brows. “I’m surprised. Like I said, they’re usually closed on Sundays.”

“I know that there was a family emergency that caused the bakery to close yesterday. They might be open today because of that,” I said. “Um, Seth, I know that Jake said you needed to shadow me, but I’m perfectly capable of going into a bakery. Alone.”

He pouted, but nodded. “I’ll stay in the car. You’ve got my phone number, your highness?” he asked.

“I do. Thanks, Seth,” I said, sliding out of the car and into the bustling bakery.

It was packed with people, laughter filling the air and conversations happening all around. There was an older man, with chocolate-colored hair, sprinkled with gray and a mustache. He looked like a male version of Bella, with twinkling eyes and a warm smile. Bella was behind the counter, ringing up customers. She was still beautiful, but she looked like she was about to keel over in exhaustion. When she handed a customer a bag, along with a receipt, her eyes widened when she saw me. “Masen! W-w-w-what are you doing here?” she asked, her voice squeaking.

I smiled, walking toward the counter. “I said I’d come back. I told the other girl yesterday, the one who was … she bought the dress?”

A glare crossed over her face, but she shook her head, as if she wasn’t surprised. “My sister, Alice.” She sighed, wiping her hands on her apron. “She didn’t say anything. Shocker.”

The man walked over and he was moving slowly. On one of his hands, I saw a brace. He gave Bella a warm smile. “Who’s this, Bells?”

“Dad, you should be sitting. Dr. V. didn’t want you to push it,” Bella chided, guiding her father to a chair. He waved his hand, obviously upset at having to slow down. But, he gestured to me and Bella chuckled. “This was the guy I told you about. The one who helped with the sourdough?”

“The tux,” he chuckled. He held up a trembling hand. I shook it and smiled. “I’m Charlie Swan.”

“I’m Masen,” I replied.

“Just ‘Masen’?” Charlie quipped. “Like Madonna or Prince?”

“Something like that,” I snorted. Charlie looked at me, narrowing his eyes. I felt him appraising me. One thing I recognized in Charlie Swan was that he was a proud man – proud of his daughter, proud of his bakery and proud of his legacy. I couldn’t just walk in and offer to be an investor for the bakery. He had to be sashayed. I also wanted to spend time with Bella, who had flown into the back and muttering under her breath, angry and flustered.

“Bells, stop fussing and come back out here,” Charlie barked.
“The muffins were going off, Dad,” she said. “I had to take them out and put in the scones.” She came back out, her eyes bleary with exhaustion and her face worn, but no less gorgeous. She looked around, seeing the bakery nearly empty, save for a few people sipping coffee and enjoying their treats. “We need to hire more people, Dad. I can’t do this by myself. Alice … she …”

Charlie reached up and brushed a curl off Bella’s cheek. “I know, sweetheart.” He reached for her hand and squeezed in gently.

Bella closed her eyes, blowing out a breath. She blinked to me, her eyes were a little bit more expressive. “Would you like a freshly-baked muffin, Masen? It’s a new recipe I tried,” Bella asked, her eyes expectant. I nodded with a crooked grin and she ducked back into the kitchen. She came back with a huge muffin on a plate, along with a mug of coffee. I sat down next to Charlie and I tucked into the most delicious muffin I’d ever tasted. I hummed in pleasure. “Do you like it?” she questioned, her hands wringing her apron.

“Now, I understand the Americans and their infatuation with pumpkin spice everything,” I snickered. “This is delicious, Bella. I love the cheesecake added in the center.” She blushed, smiling shyly. “Anyway, I came here yesterday to talk to you. I enjoyed our bonding over sourdough.”

“For me, it was therapy,” Bella quipped sadly. She rubbed her hand on her now bruised cheek, reminding me of what Bella’s sister, Alice, did to her. It angered me to no end that her own flesh and blood treated her so abhorrently. She called Bella ungrateful, when in reality, Alice was ungrateful. Bella shook her head and sat down for a moment, her face relaxing as she got off her feet.

“Anyway, I came by here and I was wondering if you’d like to go out to dinner?” I asked.

“I’m flattered, Masen, but I’m not looking,” Charlie teased.

Bella rolled her eyes. “I think he was asking me, Old Man,” she snickered, but her face fell. She looked at the bakery and she shook her head. “I can’t, Masen. I have to work. If I don’t bake the food for the next day, we struggle.”

“Nonsense,” Charlie growled. “You’re going out with this handsome man. Your sister can mind the bakery. I’ll stay with her and make sure she does what she needs to do. You work too hard. You need to have some fun, Bells.” He arched a brow. “Take a break for a few moments, baby girl. Talk to Masen.”

“But the scones,” she argued.

“I think I can handle taking out a tray of scones, Isabella Marie,” he growled. “Actually, I’ll get Alice to come down. She can handle the bakery until you come back.”

“Dad,” she frowned.

“No tears, cherie,” I whispered. “Please?”

“Okay,” she said, taking off her apron. As she stood up, Alice came down, with a sneer on her
“Oh, she’s leaving? What the fuck?!” Alice snapped.

“Mary Alice,” Charlie growled. “Your sister needs to take a break, away from me, away from you and away from the bakery. You’re staying here until she gets back, maybe even longer. Your sister needs a reprieve.” He tossed the apron to Alice. “Your sister works her ass off. Pull your weight, Alice. Earn back some of that money you spent on that unnecessary homecoming dress.” Alice huffed and stomped into the back. I tugged on Bella’s hand, guiding her out of the bakery and walking along the sidewalk to a nearby park, McGolrick Park.

“Is this okay?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she smiled, but it was pained. “I’m sorry, Masen. I’m just overwhelmed with everything.”

I guided us to a bench and sat her down, pulling her legs across my lap. She arched a brow. “Your father said to relax. Have fun?” She blushed and I pulled her closer, draping my arm behind her back. “Now, what’s wrong, cherie? How’s your dad?”

“My dad is okay. He sprained his wrist and he’s got some horrific bruises on his hips,” Bella answered. “However, with his illness, I wanted to get him checked out by his neurologist. Dr. Volturi checked him out and gave him some pain killers and adjusted his medications.”

“Volturi?” I asked. “I met a Captain Volturi from New York’s finest.”

“That’s his younger brother,” Bella said. “Dr. Marcus Volturi is the oldest. Captain Aro Volturi is the middle brother and Chaz Volturi is the unexpected baby of the family. Chaz was born Caius and he hated his name, so he goes by Chaz. He works with my friend, Angela, at a bookstore in the neighborhood. I used to hang out at Turn the Page a lot when I was younger but that was before everything went to hell.”

“Okay, I apologize if I’m overstepping my bounds, but why doesn’t your sister help out more?” I asked. “I mean, she was at the bakery yesterday, but didn’t seem to be doing much.”

“Alice is an entitled, lazy bitch. She’s also in high school, and my dad is adamant that we put school first. He was the same way when I was in high school. It was that diligence that got me a great scholarship. I still had to take out loans, but it wasn’t as bad …” she trailed off. “Not that I’m using my degree.”

“What’s your degree?” I asked.

“Teaching, high school English,” she answered. She leaned her cheek against my shoulder and she smelled like vanilla, cinnamon, coffee and pumpkin. “I’m sorry about dumping all of this on you. I barely know you. You shouldn’t have to deal with my shitty life.”

“It sounds like you don’t have many people to talk to, Bella,” I said, threading my fingers with hers. I could feel the strength in her hands from working with dough, but relished in their delicacy as they slid between mine. A perfect fit. “Do you?”

“No,” she said. “Alice is all about herself. My dad, he’s got enough on his plate with his illness. I just shoulder all of this by myself and …” She idly played with the cuff on my shirt. “I’ll understand if you don’t want anything to do with me.” She tried to pry her hand from mine. I just held firm, holding her closer to my body.

“There’s something about you that pulls me to you, Bella,” I said. “You need someone on your face.
side. I’d like to be that someone, but don’t negate your friend, Angela. I’m certain she’d want to help you, cherie. I also know I want to get to know you. I want to explore what we have, if there’s something there.” I waited for a few moments. She didn’t reply. I blinked down, seeing she was sleeping. I just held her closer and gave her a few moments of solace, of quiet before going back to the bakery. I saw Seth hovering close by. I know he was uneasy with me being in the park, but being able to share this time with Bella, even if she was sleeping, was special. She obviously felt comfortable enough to sleep next to me. I leaned my cheek against her soft hair, idly scratching her back. She sighed, cuddling closer. “I want to be here for you, cherie. Let me in, please?”

My cell phone vibrated in my pocket. I scowled as I wriggled my fingers from hers. Seth had sent a text. *Paparazzi are starting to mill around, your highness. Sleeping beauty needs to wake up from her nap ~ Seth*

Pocketing my phone, I caressed her cheek. “Bella, I need you to wake up.” She wrinkled her nose and shook her head. I chuckled, kissing her forehead. “Come on, cherie. I want to see your beautiful eyes.”

Her eyes fluttered and she groaned. “I fell asleep?”

“You look worn out, Bella,” I said. “I think you should take your dad up on his suggestion on taking some time for you. Relax for the rest of today.” I turned on the charm. “And go out on a date with me?” I grinned crookedly. “I gave you my cell phone number.”

“I had to cancel my cell phone,” she whispered. “With the closing the bakery yesterday and my dad’s trip to the emergency room? The bakery doesn’t have long distance and your number is classified as long distance.” She looked so ashamed. I hugged her and she was stiff in my arms. “Like I said, I’ll understand if you don’t want to deal with my shitty life.”

“Bella, will you go out with me on Wednesday?” I asked. “Dinner and a movie?” Little did she know that dinner would be at my condo and the movie would be shown in the media room in the condo. “Completely relaxed, fun.”

“Okay,” she blushed. “Dinner and movie sounds freaking perfect.” I hugged her and got up, twining my fingers with hers.

*A/N: They’re having a date. I originally planned something else, but they need to get to know each other as people. But, all of the burdens of Bella’s family are weighing her down. With her father’s illness, the bakery and Alice’s constant bitchiness? The girl is about to fucking break.*

*A picture of McGolrick Park is on my blog. Link for that is on my profile. You can also find me on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79.*
Chapter 8

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They’re having a date. I originally planned something else, but they need to get to know each other as people. But, all of the burdens of Bella’s family are weighing her down. With her father’s illness, the bakery and Alice’s constant bitchiness? The girl is about to fucking break.

Chapter Eight

Bella

Masen walked me back to the bakery and he hugged me tightly. “I’ll pick you up here on Wednesday, cherie,” he said. I blushed at his nickname for me. With his accent, it did tingly things to my insides. “Seven?”

“Oh,” I nodded. “I’m pretty certain that my dad is reading my sister the riot act. She’ll work after school, working on making the goods for the next morning. But, I can’t stay super late. Eleven, at the latest.”

“That’s doable,” he smiled. He caressed my cheek and pressed a kiss to my forehead. “And I’ll call you. At the bakery. Does it have a speaker phone option? You can talk while you work?”

“Yeah,” I nodded.

“But, get some rest today,” he chided. He opened the door and helped me into the bakery. Alice was at the till, ringing up customers. She was being somewhat pleasant, but her dark eyes cut to mine angrily as I walked inside. “It was a pleasure, Miss Swan.”

“Bella, you can take over,” Alice said, removing the apron.

“No, she’s going upstairs. She didn’t sleep the night before and last night, she hovered over me like a mother hen. You can run the shop today, Alice. I’ll stay and help,” Dad growled. “Take the afternoon, Bells.” I nodded. I hugged Masen again and I saw my dad scuffle toward him. I went upstairs and strode past my ‘bed’ and went to my dad’s bedroom. I set the alarm on his night stand, crashing as soon as my head hit the pillow.

When I woke up, a few hours later, I felt better. I made dinner for my family. I also picked up the landline and dialed Angela’s number. I’d pushed everyone away when my dad got sick, but now, I can’t do this on my own. I needed help. The phone rang, and she picked up. “Hello?”

“Hey, Angela. It’s, um, Bella,” I said, grimacing. “Um, Bella Swan?”

“Oh, my word, Bella!” she squealed. “It’s been so long! Are you teaching? Last, I heard, you had come back to New York to help with your dad, but you were so smart, and you were destined for great things.”

“Well, I’m still in New York, working at the bakery,” I shrugged. “Dad’s not doing so good and I figured I stay at home, helping with the bakery and such.”
“Bella, are you okay?” Angela asked, her voice more somber.

I opened my mouth, ready to say that I was fine, but tears began streaming down my cheeks. “Not really, Ang,” I sniffled. “I’m sorry that I haven’t reached out to you before, but …”

“Girl, you know I love you,” Angela said. “Look, I’m working right now. I want to see you. Are you going to be at the bakery tomorrow?”

“Where else would I be?” I asked, sounding bitter.

“We need to chat, Bella,” Angela said. “I’ll be down after the morning rush, about ten?”

“I’ll need to work in the back, but that works,” I said, a tentative smile spreading over my face. “Hair back, Angela.”

“I’ve got this chic new bob, but I’ll pin it back,” she quipped. “Love you, girl. I’m sorry that I … I should have checked on you.”

“It’s not your fault, Angela. I’m just as much to blame,” I whispered.

“We’ll talk about it tomorrow, Bella,” she said. “I’m just glad you called. I’ve missed you. I’ll see you tomorrow, sweetie.”

We ended the call and my dad and sister came up from the bakery. Alice glowered at me, muttering under breath and stomped into the bedroom, slamming the door. Dad came in, rolling his eyes. “Everything okay, Dad?”

“It’s fine. You’re in a good place. You’ve got muffins and scones for tomorrow morning,” he smiled. “I mixed, Alice handled the ovens. You’ll have to make the bagels and bread tomorrow morning, but the dough is rising in the fridge.”

“Thanks, Dad,” I said. “And thanks for the time to catch up on sleep. I really needed it. I dozed off when I was out with Masen.”

“Well, I think that this new arrangement with Alice working on Saturdays and Sundays might be good. You get a day off, with no obligations. Alice will learn some responsibility and the value of a dollar,” Dad said. He tossed me her phone. “I took this away until she can pay for it herself. I also grounded her from all evening activities, leading up to homecoming. She’s going to work in the bakery, earn her keep.”

“Are we going to pay her?” I asked, my brows furrowing.

“She’s working off the cost of her dress,” he replied. “This afternoon was ten dollars and hour, for five hours. So, that’s fifty bucks. She’s got $350 to go, thirty-five hours.”

“What about taxes?” I quipped, grinning evilly.

“Whoops, that would be more like seven dollars an hour,” he chuckled. “Bells, we’ll make this work. Alice needs to help you. I need to help you.”

“Dad, you’re sick and injured,” I growled, pointing his wrist. “You need to …”

“No, we need to work as a family. I love you, baby girl, but you look so sad,” he whispered, his trembling hand caressing my cheek, which was still bruised, but starting to fade. “So tired. I should have pushed this sooner. I’m so sorry, baby girl.” He tugged me into his arms and hugged me.
The next morning, I was better-rested and had a bounce in my step as I made bagels, loaves of bread and some more of the muffins that Masen enjoyed. The doors opened at six and I greeted my usual customers with a smile. The morning flew by and before I knew it, Angela breezed in, looking as beautiful as I remembered. Her sleek black hair was chopped into a chic bob with purple and teal highlights mixed in. She had on a pair of glasses and wore a pair of artfully ripped jeans, a slouchy sweater and huge scarf. I felt very drab compared to her, wearing my yoga pants and bakery t-shirt, cinched with my apron.

“Bella-girl,” she sang, hugging me tightly. “It’s so good to see you!”

“You, too, Ang,” I answered, cringing when I saw flour on her black t-shirt. “Sorry.”

“Meh, it’ll wash out,” she shrugged. She gently grabbed my chin and her hazel eyes narrowed. “Who the fuck slapped you?”

“Alice did,” I sighed. “She spent money on a dress. Money that we don’t have.”

“How bad is it, Bella?” she whispered.

“Bad, Angela,” I whispered. “We’re moments away from being homeless. Alice is unwilling to help and my dad, he’s got enough issues and I’m drowning. Exhausted and drowning.”

“Can you refinance the loan?”

“We can barely afford the loan we have now, and we have nothing in the account,” I said. “I want to meet with investors to give this place a facelift, but …”

“I can help, Bella,” she said, taking my hand and dragging me to a table. “I have some money saved.”

“I need a fucking miracle,” I sniffled. “Or a fairy godmother.”

“And you’ve been dealing with this for how long?” she asked, her hand still holding mine.

“Four years.”

“Why didn’t you call me sooner?” she asked. I shrugged, knowing full well that I was ashamed of the situation - the cost of my dad’s insurance, his doctor’s appointments, the mounting bills and Alice’s inability to be understanding or kind in regard to any of this. She hugged me tightly. “I’m sorry, Bells. I should have … I should have been here for you. I’m such a shitty friend.”

“I’m shitty, too,” I said, leaning my cheek against her shoulder. “I pushed everyone away. I didn’t want anyone to know how deep we were in.” She tightened her hold around me.

“Why did you call yesterday?” she asked, sitting back.

“Um, this guy, Masen, he said that I shouldn’t have to shoulder this alone,” I blushed.

“Masen? A guy?” she sang. “Is he cute?”

“Cute is an understatement,” I muttered, my face flaming. “More like drop-dead gorgeous. I have no idea what he sees in me. I’m drab, short and too skinny.”

“Girl, you are exquisite. A timeless beauty,” Angela chided. “Your hair is curly and in the most
beautiful shade of chocolate brown. Your skin is alabaster and clear, minus this ugly hand mark. I never liked your sister, just saying.”

“I don’t like her either,” I snorted derisively.

“Tell me more about this Masen guy. Are you dating?” she asked, crossing her legs and grinning widely.

“I have a date with him. On Wednesday,” I replied, a nervous smile spreading over my face. “Dinner and a movie.”

“Girl, you have let me help you get ready. I want you to look hot,” she squealed. “What time is he picking you up?”

“Seven,” I said.

“I’ll be here at six, when the bakery closes,” she smirked. She eyed my ensemble. “Do you have anything other than yoga pants and bakery t-shirts?”

“Not really,” I grimaced. “My wardrobe was sold to consignment shops to help pay bills, along with my laptop, cell phone and furniture I’d bought for my apartment.”

“I got you covered,” she nodded.

“Ang, you’re thirty feet tall,” I deadpanned.

“Trust me, Bella,” she said, arching a brow. “You’ll look hot, chic and Masen will not want to keep his hands off you. Now, I’m off for today. I want to help you. Show me how to bake.”

xx AMDFT xx

The next couple of days went by quickly. Angela was over at the bakery when she wasn’t working at the bookstore. She had a degree in finance and was looking for ways for me to consolidate my bills. Alice also started working at the bakery. She manned the front, taking orders and serving customers. Dad hovered to make sure she didn’t do anything untoward, like steal from her family.

When I was working in the evening, I spoke to Masen on the phone in the bakery. He told me a little bit about his family and a lot about Gevalia. From the longing in his voice, I could tell he missed his home. However, he said that Gevalia didn’t have something important to him. When I asked him what that was, he simply replied that it was me. I blushed, and I didn’t know how to respond. He just chuckled, asking me about my time in college, thankfully changing the topic.

On Wednesday, Angela came over at six and dragged me up to the apartment. She shoved me into the bathroom and told me to shower. I did quickly and changed into the clothes she handed to me. “Angela, where did you get these?” I asked.

“The clothes fairy,” she answered, arching a brow, daring me to argue. “It’s a pair of skinny jeans, a shirt and jacket.” I scowled. “Deal with it, Swan.” I rolled my eyes, putting on the clothes. They were a perfect fit. When I walked out of the bathroom, I found her in my sister’s room. “Wear these.”

“They’re Alice’s,” I said.

“Which you probably paid for them,” Angela argued. “They’ll match your shirt.” She looked around the room. “Where’s your shit? I thought you shared a room with that bitch!”
“Nope. I get the sofa,” I sighed.

“Wench,” Angela scoffed. “Come on. We’ve only got about fifteen minutes to try and hide the bruise, do something with your hair and …” She dragged me to the sofa and applied some makeup on my skin with a deft hand. When she finished, she curled my hair and clipped half of it back with a few pins, framing my face with strategically placed curls. “You look beautiful, Bells.” She hugged me and pressed something into my hand.

“A cell phone?” I squeaked.

“One of those pay as you go phones,” she said. “My number is programmed in there. If this Masen guy decides to be a creep, call me. From what I’ve heard, he seems really great and you are a good judge of character, but just in case.”

“Thanks, Angela,” I whispered, tears brimming in my eyes.

“No tears. I didn’t use waterproof mascara,” she quipped. “I know that you’re overwhelmed by my awesomeness, but you’ve got a date with a schmexy man.”

She got up, tugging me to my feet and dragged me downstairs to the bakery. Dad was counting the till and Alice was working in the kitchen. Dad smiled at me, his mustache twitching and he gave me thumbs up. His smile grew and I turned around, seeing Masen, wearing a pair of jeans, a button-down shirt and a leather jacket. In his hands, he held a bouquet of wildflowers. I blinked, shocked at how handsome he looked and how his emerald eyes twinkled. He walked over to me, picking up my hand and kissing my knuckles. “You look exquisite, Bella,” he whispered.

“Thank you,” I whispered back. “So, do you, but you’re practically perfect.”

“My mother would disagree,” he chuckled, handing me the flowers. “To her, I’m a know-it-all and a pain in her ass.” He offered me his elbow. “Shall we, cherie?”

I nodded, taking his arm.

“Have fun, Bells. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” Angela cackled. I heard my father choke and she rubbed his back, whispering in his ear. He gave her a wry look but smiled at me as Masen helped me out of the bakery and into a waiting car.

A/N: We’ll continue the date in the next chapter. It’ll still be in Bella’s POV. Will they kiss? Will they do more? Will she discover who he really is? Leave me some! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 9

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We’ll continue the date in the next chapter. It’ll still be in Bella’s POV. Will they kiss? Will they do more? Will she discover who he really is?

Chapter Nine

Bella

“I hope you don’t mind, but I want to spoil you,” Masen said. “I’m cooking for you for dinner. A family recipe, that I hope you like, Bella.”

“Are we going to your place?” I asked. He blushed, nodding with a crooked grin. “Awfully presumptuous, Masen. Are you going to take advantage of me?”

“Never, chérie,” he said, shaking his head emphatically. “You just take care of everyone. I want to take care of you.” He held up his hand, squeezing my fingers, which were threaded with mine. “I promise not to do anything to make you uncomfortable. If you do, Jake, my driver and one of my good friends, will drive you back to the bakery.”


“I’m staying in the Gevalian condo at Central Park West,” he answered. “It’s usually used for visiting dignitaries and diplomats.” We made our way over the Brooklyn Bridge and soon, we pulled up to a posh building. Masen got out, helping me to my feet. He spoke briefly to Jake, who nodded and waved at us before pulling away.

“Where’s he going?” I asked.

“He’s parking the car,” Masen answered, opening the door and punched in a code to open the inner door. Taking my hand, he threaded our fingers together. We walked through the sleek lobby and went to the elevators, riding up to the top floor. Walking out of the car, Masen unlocked the door and gestured for me to enter. I bit my lip, holding my bouquet to my chest. The condo was gorgeous, decorated elegantly and was easily three times the size of the bakery. “Bella, don’t be timid.”

“I … this place is so nice,” I said, trying not to put myself down.

“With you in it, it is,” he said, tugging on my hand and pulling me into the condo. “Would you like something to drink? Wine? Water? Soda? Tequila?”

“Water, for now,” I giggled.

“Can I take your jacket?” he asked. I nodded and wriggled out of the leather jacket. He slid off his own jacket, putting them both into a closet. He took my hand, guiding me to a beautiful kitchen. He helped me onto a stool. He put a glass of water in front of me, along with some appetizers, expensive cheeses, various meats, olives, crackers and crusty bread. “I hope you’re aren’t a vegetarian.”
“No, I like meat,” I answered. “Why?”

“I’m making boeuf bourguignon. It was a favorite of mine when I was a kid,” he smiled, checking whatever was simmering on the stove. It filled the condo and it smelled delicious. “I started it earlier today since it needed to cook through. I just need to make the side dish since I wanted to ask you if you preferred potatoes or pasta.”

“What did you like when you were a kid?” I asked.

“It should be potatoes, but I’m partial to pasta,” he answered.

“Then, let’s do that,” I smiled, sipping my water and making a plate for myself. Masen beamed, working easily in the kitchen and boiling the water for the pasta. He also opened up a bottle of red wine, saying it needed to breathe. “Did you work today?”

“I had meetings in the morning but had the afternoon free to get ready for our date,” he answered, a crooked grin spreading over his perfect features. “How was your day? Who was that tall woman, with the glasses?”

“That’s Angela,” I answered. “I told you about her. After talking to you, I reached out to her. You made me realize that I can’t do this on my own.” I blushed, twisting my water. “Thank you for helping me realize it. Angela is a finance major, helping me in finding ways to consolidate the bills and my sister has been forced to work at the bakery. My dad had enough of her bullshit.”

“Good,” Masen nodded, his jaw tight. “I’m sorry, but your sister is pretty awful. Reminds me a lot of my entitled brother, but he’s at least learned his lesson. At least, that’s what my father said. We’ll see.” He poured the pasta into the pot.

“Alice will never learn her lesson. It’s all about her,” I sighed, leaning my chin onto my hand, nibbling on the cheese. “As with most teenagers, it’s all about image and having second-hand clothes, no cell phone and all that shit? Heaven forbid!” I wrinkled my nose. “But, I don’t want to spend our date talking about my bitchy sister.”

“As I don’t want to talk about my asshole brother,” he quipped, stirring the pasta. “I want to talk about you.”

“Me? I’m boring,” I snorted.

“Unlikely, chérie. You’re smart, selfless and gorgeous,” he smiled. “Boring is the last thing I’d use to describe you, Bella.”

“Thank you,” I said, my face flushing. Masen walked over to me, his fingers caressing my cheek. He cupped my chin, forcing me to look at him. His eyes were dark, sultry. He blinked down to my lips but pulled away. “Now, you said you’re a diplomat. How long are you here?”

“About six months, but that could be changed,” he answered, pouring the pasta into a colander in the sink. “Hopefully, my assignment will be lengthened.” He put the pasta into a beautiful bowl and covered it with beef dish. It looked decadent. “Come, chérie.” He took my hand, guiding me to an elegantly set table. He helped me into a chair and poured a glass of red wine. He carried the bowl, placing it in front of me and he served me before he served himself, sitting down next to me. He picked up his wine glass. “To new friendships, and more.”

I smiled, clinking my glass with his. “And more,” I breathed. So much more, I hope.

He grinned widely, his smile crooked and so perfect, displaying gleamingly white teeth. “Enjoy,
“cherie,” he said. “I hope you like it.”

“It smells divine,” I breathed. I cut up some of the beef and speared the veggies and pasta, moaning when I tasted it. “Oh, my God. This is the best thing I’ve ever eaten. I need the recipe.”

“Gladly, Bella,” he said. “I made more than enough. Maybe you could take some to your dad?”

“That’s not necessary,” I said, trying to figure out what was in the meal. “You need leftovers for yourself.”

“How about we split it?” he suggested. “I can’t finish all of this. Jake could help, but please, take some for your dad?”

“Okay,” I nodded. “Only because he’d love this. It tastes very similar to something my grandmother made. Is this a Gevalian recipe?”

“A bit, with some French flavorings, too,” he answered. He winked at me. “Butter. A lot of butter. Totally not heart healthy, but so delicious.”

Dinner was filled with wonderful conversation, mainly about favorite foods. Masen learned to cook when he was in college and found it to be relaxing. His favorite food was the meal he’d shared with me, along with some Gevalian delicacy that sounded beyond decadent. After dinner, Masen wrapped up a majority of the food, putting in the fridge for me, saving some for himself. I argued, but he insisted.

“I do have dessert, but what do you think about a movie?” he asked. “I’ve got a wonderful media room with some good options to watch.”

“Okay,” I smiled. He took my hand, threading our fingers together and we went down a hallway to a dark room with a couple of leather couches and a large screen. “Wow, this is really nice.”

“The sound system is amazing,” he said, his eyes twinkling. “Now, are you in the mood for something romantic, action-filled or a combination of both?” He helped me onto the couch, picking up a large control pad. “Here are the options.”

“Holy hell,” I said, as I watched the movies slid across the screen. “Oh! Avatar! I love that movie.”

“Good choice,” he chuckled. “Romance and action.” He pressed the button and the lights went down. I curled up, leaning against the armrest. “I don’t bite, Bella.”

“Um, what?” I blushed.

“Well, I do bite, but only when asked,” he said, his voice deep and husky. He reached for my hand, tugging me closer to his body. I leaned against him, sliding my arm around his waist. “Is this okay? I don’t want to presume …”

“I like it,” I answered, looking up at him. He smiled tenderly at me, his fingers gliding down my cheek, before caressing his thumb along my lower lip. I wanted him to kiss me, but I was afraid. He was only here for six months. Could I open myself up to a romance when it had an expiration date? He pressed a soft kiss to my forehead and popped up the recliner, relaxing a bit. I watched the movie but was acutely aware of the hard body under my cheek. His hand was idly playing with my hair and caressing my back. I felt relaxed, pampered. I just melted against him, inhaling his clean, masculine scent.

“Do you want dessert?” Masen asked after Jake Sully had gotten it on with Neytiri. His voice
sounded a bit choked.

“Sure. Do you want to pause the movie?” I replied. He nodded, stopping the movie and helping me my feet. We went into the kitchen. Masen made some coffee, pulling out a couple pieces of cake. “That looks really good.”

“Gevalian chocolate cheesecake,” he said, putting the cake onto a plate. Using a fork, he fed me, and I hummed, my eyes fluttering closed. I heard a low growl and I opened my eyes, seeing Masen stare at my lips. “Bella, can I kiss you?” He caged me with his lithe body, his eyes simmering. I nodded, and he took my face in his hands – his incredibly soft hands – caressing my cheeks as he stared at me. “You’re so beautiful, Bella.” I smiled, feeling my skin flame from his words. He leaned down, his nose brushing mine. “So, beautiful,” he whispered, his lips barely caressing mine.

I whimpered, my heart taking off. I gripped his button down and he effortlessly picked me up, placing me on the counter. One hand slid underneath my hair and the other hand slid around my waist, holding me closer to him. His lips were soft, moving against mine, teasing and taunting me. I moved my hands up his chest. When my hands took purchase in his hair, he slid his tongue into my mouth. He tasted like dinner, wine and a hint of chocolate. My legs were on either side of his trim hips and I wanted to be closer. However, it felt good to kiss him, to taste him. We were making out like teenagers, innocent and chaste, but the promise of more dangling in the horizon.

Pulling back, Masen panted heavily, his forehead pressed against mine. “You are … I don’t want to stop kissing you,” he said, with a barest hint of a kiss on my lips.

“So, don’t,” I said, my mouth gliding down his square jaw and inhaling deeply at his neck. He cupped my chin, brushing his lips against mine, suckling my lower lip between his. I moaned, tightening my hold of his hair. He pulled me closer and I could feel every inch of him.

*If you catch my drift …*

He stopped kissing me, looking into my eyes. “You are … God, I can’t even describe what I’m seeing, what I’m feeling,” he murmured. He said something in a foreign language. It sounded French, but not. He ran his fingers across my lips and he smiled crookedly. “I feel like this is a dream.”

“A good dream,” I breathed.

“The best dream,” he smiled, kissing me sweetly. He swept me in his arms. I squeaked. “Pick up the cake, *cherie*.” I balanced the cake in my lap and he carried me back to the media room. He sat down, with me between his legs and we continued watching the movie, sharing the slice of chocolate cheesecake. When we were done, the movie was long forgotten, and we ended up making out for the last hour while the movie played in the background. Masen’s lips were soft, sweet and tender against mine. He was respectful, touching only my face, my back and my hips. He never groped my body and he always asked when did something new. He was unlike any man that I’d ever been with. “I don’t want to send you home,” he said, his swollen lips pouting. “Stay with me.”

“I have to get up at four when I live right above the bakery. I’d need to be up and out the door by three from here,” I said, not wanting to leave the comfort of his arms. Hell, the couches in the media room were more comfortable than my dad’s bed. “It’s tempting, though. Tonight, it has been the best night I’d had in a long time, Masen.”

The smile that I got from him was blinding and he kissed me so tenderly, I thought I’d cry. “I’m glad, *cherie*,” he breathed. “That’s what I wanted for you. For us.” His smile fell, and he held me in
his arms. “At least I’ll get to hold you while Jake drives you back to Brooklyn.” He reached into
his pocket, tapping something on his cell phone. “Jake will be downstairs in a little bit. Let’s pack
up the meal and the cheesecake.”

“Wait, there’s more cheesecake?” I asked. “You’re holding out on me.”

“Something sweet to remember me by,” he quipped, helping me to my feet and kissing my lips.
“I’ll just have to remember your sweet kisses, cherie.” He walked us to the front of the condo.
After handing me a bag filled with the leftovers and a piece of the cheesecake, he helped me into
my jacket, brushing my hair over my shoulders. He swiped his own coat, keys and wallet before
opening the door to the condo. He held me close, his arms draped over my shoulders and his lips
pressed to my temple.

Jake was waiting for us. He opened the door for me and Masen helped me into the back of the
waiting car. Masen slid in after me, draping my legs over his and he held me close. I felt safe,
warm, protected. I leaned my cheek against his bicep and he idly played with my fingers, tracing
the veins on my hand and sliding his fingers between mine. We were quiet, contemplative as we
drove through the city and back over the Brooklyn Bridge. Too soon, we pulled up to the bakery. It
was dark, but I knew the lights were on the kitchen.

“Jake, check to see if the bakery is secure,” Masen said, his voice strong, commanding. Jake
nodded, getting out of the car and checking the bakery, I’d assume. “Bella, I have a question for
you.”

“Yes?” I asked.

“I was wondering if you’d like to accompany me to a charity event at the Guggenheim Museum.
It’s for funds for arts education. It’s a black-tie affair and I was curious, wondering, if you’d go
with me? As my date?” he asked, his eyes beseeching me.

“Masen, I can’t. I’m sorry,” I whispered, my heart shattering. “We can’t afford my sister’s
homecoming dress … I couldn’t …”

He frowned, but he looked back at me. “I’d love to be able to help you with your dress, cherie,” he
said.

I sat back, pulling my legs from his. I glared at him. “I don’t need your charity,” I spat.

“Bella, it’s not charity when it’s freely given,” he argued. He threaded our fingers together, kissing
my pulse point and looked at me through his lashes. “Please?”

“When is it?” I asked. “I may have to work.”

“A week from this coming Saturday,” he replied.

“I don’t know,” I whispered. He looked at me and ran his thumb over my kiss-swollen lips. He
smiled crookedly, brushing his mouth over mine and I felt my resolve crumble. “I need to think
about it.”

He kissed me again, swiftly and with a smile on his face. “That’s not a no,” he quipped, getting out
of the car. He walked me to the bakery and his smile faded. “Does this lock ever work?”

“Um, no,” I answered, my nose wrinkled. “Alice lost her key and she jimmed it open. We can’t
really afford …”
“This isn’t safe, Bella,” he said. “What if something happens to you? What if some random guy bursts into your bakery? To do unspeakable things to you?”

“Like you?” I teased.

“I just wanted out of the rain,” he said, his lip snarled. “You’ve become very important to me, Bella. I would hate if something happened to you.” He hugged me close and I melted against him. “I’ll dream of you tonight, cherie.”


“We need to do it again. Soon,” he said, kissing me again and stepping back. “Perhaps on Saturday? You said that your sister will be working at the bakery.”

“How about the afternoon?” I suggested. “I want to be there for her with the morning rush.”

“Excellent,” he said. “I’ll talk to you soon, cherie. And please, think about that charity event.”

He kissed my knuckles, before handing me the bag filled with my food and bouquet. I ducked inside, making my way toward the back of the bakery. I ducked into the kitchen, watching as Masen got into his car. I went upstairs and my smile disappeared when I remembered the cruel reality of my life. I slept on a couch. We were seconds away from being thrown from our home. And from what I saw, Alice had taken her anger out on my remaining clothing. My leggings and t-shirts were in rags on the floor.

What I had with Masen was just a dream … this was my reality.

A/N: Oh, Bella … I’m sorry that I’m torturing you so. I promise, you will have a knight in shining armor … or a prince! He already has deep feelings for you, girl!

We’re going back to Masen next chapter … he’s going to do something about that lock and talk to Charlie about the charity event. Will she go? Won’t she? And who wants to tar and feather Alice? What. A. Bitch!

Leave me some!
Chapter 10

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyers for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

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Chapter Ten

Masen

I didn’t have anything planned on Thursday, the day after my date with Bella. I called my family, checking in with my mother and telling her about my diplomatic dealings, party plans, and discussions with United States officials about a trade agreement, which were still in the planning stages. I also spoke briefly with my father, asking how Emmett was doing. As far as we knew, he was headlong in detox, and was a complete mess. He’d been checked into Four Circles under an assumed name, but I knew that it wouldn’t be long before the paparazzi found out about Emmett’s drug problem and his time at the rehabilitation center. I prayed it was later rather sooner, but it was an inevitability. I already had a statement drafted for when that situation arose, ready to send and to cover our asses.

By mid-afternoon, I was chomping at the bit, bored out of my mind and anxious to see my beautiful Bella. I had a name of a locksmith to repair the doorway of the bakery, but Jake could do the work since he was so handy. I didn’t need to run background checks on him and I definitely trusted him. So, I finally stomped into Jake’s room, eager to see the girl who was consuming my every thought.

He didn’t seem surprised when I requested, “Car, please?”


“So, are you,” I quipped back, tossing him the keys. “What wouldn’t you do for Leah? Hmmmm? And if there was something, anything that prevented Leah’s safety, you’d fix it, right?”

“Okay, I’ll admit, that door is pissing me off. Come on. I’ll fix it. Heaven forbid we get your royal hands dirty,” Jake said, walking over to his closet and pulling out a huge toolbox. I grinned happily.

“Along with being your driver, I’m also your handyman. We just need to stop at a store to pick up a new doorknob. The things I do for your royal ass.” He rolled his eyes dramatically, but his smile was apparent.

“Jake, you’re awesome,” I beamed.

“Name your first kid after me, your princeliship,” Jake snickered. I scowled at Jake and he just laughed. “Let’s go.”

We rode down to the garage, clambering into the car. It was dreary today, colder and rainy. I shivered in my jacket as we drove to Brooklyn and parked across the street from the bakery. We walked inside, finding it nearly empty. Bella was sitting at a table, her head buried over some
ledger books, wearing the most adorable pair of glasses, while Charlie was flipping through a ragged notebook, seemingly a book of recipes. I cleared my throat and Bella looked up, her eyes twinkling and a smile spreading over her haggard face.

*Did she sleep at all last night?*

“Masen,” she breathed, removing her glasses, getting up and smoothing her clothing. She wore a loose, men’s button-down and some leggings. The possessive asshole in me got upset at seeing her in another man’s clothes, but I noticed it was older and close to Charlie’s size. I walked over to her, hugging her tightly. I could feel the tension in her muscles and she clung to me. “This is a pleasant surprise,” she whispered, her voice shaking and sad.

“I wanted to see you,” I whispered back. “And my driver said he’d look at your door. He’s a bit handy.”

“Oh, that’s not necessary,” Bella spluttered, looking at Jake, who had already begun removing the old doorknob. “Really … we’ll fix it.”

“What’s wrong with the doorknob?” Charlie asked, ambling toward us, leaning heavily on a cane.

“Alice got locked out and she jimmed the door. It won’t lock. It happened two years ago,” Bella answered, shooting her father a remorseful look. Charlie’s lips thinned. “It’s not like we had the money to fix it, Dad.”

“My girls are working down here in a shop without a functioning lock?” he growled. He blinked to Jacob and put his hands on his hips. “What’ll this cost me?”

“Some coffee and a bagel,” Jake answered, grimacing as he held up the destroyed knob, tossing into the garbage. “Maybe a muffin?” He looked up at Charlie. “It’s not a big deal. I’ll get this installed and you’ll be set with two new keys.”

“Okay,” Charlie nodded. “Is it a double lock? If something happened to either of my girls ...”

“I got the best lock out there, Mr. Swan,” Jake said. “Short of a thumb print ID, along with a retinal scan.” Charlie rolled his eyes, harrumphing.

I heard a buzzer go off and Bella wriggled out of my arms. I watched her go into the back. Charlie sat down in the seat that Bella vacated. His eyes were sad, and he looked down at the books, shoving them away angrily. “Is everything okay, Charlie?” I asked.

“I’m worried about my baby girl,” he whispered.

“Alice?” I asked, barely containing my ire.

“No. Not her. Bella,” he replied, snorted derisively. “Alice is making Bella’s life hell. She found out about Bella canceling her cell phone and she took it out on Bella’s meager wardrobe, cutting what few things she had into rags and bleaching the rest.” He scrubbed his face and looked at me. “Alice is also jealous of her new relationship with you.”

“Charlie, I don’t understand the family dynamics, but is Alice eighteen?” I asked. Charlie nodded. “Well, every person is entitled to an expectation of privacy. Regardless of the living situation, Alice destroyed private property and she could go to jail for what she’s done.”

“Are you a lawyer?” Charlie asked.
“I have passed the Bar, yes,” I said. “I am a lawyer. I know you don’t want to do that, but Bella’s belongings are entitled certain expectations within her own home. The destruction of her clothing violates those expectations. And technically, she did steal money from you when she bought that dress.” I folded my hands and looked at him. “How bad is it, sir?”

“We may be out of our home by this time next month,” he breathed, looking down at the ledgers. “Bella’s been trying to find investors, but no dice. With my medical insurance - which is at risk of being dropped - the bills for doctor’s visits, upkeep of the bakery and such, we’re drowning.” He shook his head. “I shouldn’t be telling you this. You’re my daughter’s boyfriend. You’re not here to fix our problems.”

I grinned, hearing Charlie call me Bella’s boyfriend. I liked that. I liked belonging to her. “Charlie, I know that you’re struggling. I may have someone who is interested in being an investor. With my work, I have a lot of connections,” I said. “If you or Bella can create a presentation for what you need the money for, I could make sure it gets sent around.”

“With what?” he grumped. “Sorry, Bella had to sell her computer and Alice … she won’t let us touch her computer with a ten-foot pole.”

“It doesn’t have to be a computerized presentation,” I said, knowing that I’d be the investor. I wanted to make their lives easier. Well, Bella and Charlie’s lives easier. Alice … she could just suck it. Shaking my head, I smiled at Charlie. “Anyway, I mentioned this to Bella yesterday at our date. I have a charity event coming up in a couple of weeks. I invited her to be my guest, but she said she had to think about it.”

“Nonsense,” Charlie said, waving his braced hand. “Bells! I need you!”

“In a minute,” she yelled back. “I’m putting the muffins into the oven.”

“The pumpkin muffins?” I asked, rubbing my hands together.

“I think she tried something new. Chocolate decadence muffins?” he shrugged. “She was inspired by some cheesecake you served her last night on your date.”

Bella came back, carrying a plate with two muffins and two mugs of coffee. She put a mug of coffee in front of me and handed me a pumpkin muffin. I beamed, tucking into it and Bella put a muffin on the table near the door for Jake. He thanked her, continuing the installation of the new doorknob. She sat down, taking a sip of my coffee and smirked at her dad. “What did you bellow for me, old man?”

“Nonsense, baby girl. You’re going. You need to have fun,” Charlie said, nodding firmly. He took her hand and stared into her eyes. “Baby girl, your life for the past few years has sucked. I think that Masen is your reward for dealing with my illness and your sister’s bullshit. He’s a winner.”

“Dad, he’s right there,” Bella hissed, her pale cheeks flaming. “I’m sorry, Masen. My dad … he lacks a filter.”

“I find his filter-less remarks refreshing,” I quipped. “So, are you saying yes? I’ll gladly be your reward, treating you like a \textit{princess} for the day for this event. Maybe spoiling you even longer, \textit{cherie}.” I tugged on her hand, pulling her into my lap. “I would hate to go alone, Bella. Jake is a great driver and fine handyman, but he sucks as a date.”
“Plus, I’m engaged. Masen is too masculine for me,” Jake snorted. “Delicious muffins, Miss Bella.” He stood up and checked the door, locking and unlocking it with the keys provided. “Do you want more than just the two keys, Mr. Swan? One for you and one for Miss Bella?”

“We should get one for Alice,” Bella said. “And possibly Angela. She’s been spending a lot of time here.”

“Perhaps two more, Jake,” Charlie requested. “There’s a hardware shop around the corner. Ask for Sam. He’ll fix you up.” Jake shot me a look, concerned about leaving me. I just shook my head and he sighed, ducking out of the bakery with the keys in hand. “Now, back to this charity event.”

“Masen has to show more charity by inviting me. I can’t … it’s black-tie, Dad,” she grumbled, her pale cheeks flaming. “I can’t exactly show up looking like this. And Alice …”

“And as I said yesterday, it’s not charity when it’s freely given, cherie,” I argued, picking up her hand, kissing her palm. I could smell the sugar on her skin, making me want to lick every inch of her. Down, tiger. Don’t scare the girl. “One night. Well, technically two since you’ll need to be fitted for your dress and such. Though, having you on my arm, that would be the most wonderful thing in the world to me, Bella. I’d have the most beautiful date.”

“She’ll go,” Charlie proclaimed, arching a brow at Bella and daring her to disagree. “When is it, again?”

“Next Saturday. You’d need to meet with a personal shopper on Friday for your dress, but that could be done after you’re done at the bakery. Perhaps Angela could go with you?” I suggested.

“Okay, okay. I can’t fight both of you,” she sighed, shooting her father a glower.

“And perhaps this personal shopper can help with …” Charlie suggested, but Bella squeaked, shaking her head emphatically.

I nudged his leg with mine and winked. With Alice’s childish behavior, she had nothing and I wanted to help her. I’d gladly do that. He flipped a thumbs up to me and waited for Jake come back. When he did, he handed the keys to Bella and Charlie. Jake went out to the car, saying we’d needed to go. Charlie got up, moving to the counter and buried his nose in the old notebook. I sighed, taking Bella’s hand, kissing her wrist. “At least, I’ll know my girl is safe,” I said, looking at the lock.

“Am I your girl?” she asked, a beautiful blush spreading over her cheeks along with a shy smile.

“If you want to be,” I answered. I want you to be. “You’re everything I’m looking for in a woman, Bella. As elementary and childish as it may sound, I’d like to be able to call you mine.” She smiled, shyly nodding. I felt my heart stammer in my chest and I cupped her chin. She looked at me, her melted chocolate eyes swirling with emotion. I brushed my lips with hers and she sighed happily. “I’ll talk to you tonight, ma cherie.”

“Kay,” she breathed, her lips barely grazing mine. I kissed her tenderly again, feeling a tightening in my jeans and I knew I had to step away. I caressed her cheek and stepped out into the gloomy afternoon, making my way to the car.

“Mase, she’s got you by the short and curlies,” Jake snorted.

“Must you be so crass,” I growled, rolling my eyes.

“Admit it. It’s true,” Jake laughed, pulling out into traffic.
“It is and I’d do anything for her,” I whispered, watching as we moved away from the bakery. I pressed my hand to the window, wanting to be back with her, kissing her and holding her. Perhaps, even loving her. Could this be my love match? Could she be my future? Heaven knows I wanted her to be …

xx AMDFT xx

The rest of this week and the next week went by slowly. I had a number of royal obligations that forced me to not spend time with Bella. I couldn’t call her that much because of the timing of my ‘down time’ and the time we spent on the phone, was either late at night or after her morning rush. I could still hear the stress in her voice, but she was tentatively excited about the charity event. She had convinced her friend, Angela, to join her at Bergdorf’s for her personal shopping experience. I also made arrangements for them to have a catered meal afterward. I wanted to share it with her, but after hearing Bella talk about Angela, they needed time to reconnect as girlfriends.

With Bella’s job and overwhelming issues, their friendship had fallen to the wayside. I could see how much Bella loved Angela and how much she needed time with her friend. Selfishly, I wanted to spend time with her, but I didn’t want to force Bella to choose between me or Angela.

With that, I planned on using the time while she shopped to look for the perfect jewelry to compliment her dress. The personal shopper was going to, at least, she told me, tell me what color dress Bella was getting and if it was traditional, modern or chic. That way, I would be able to find jewelry for her to wear for the charity event. I wanted to bedeck my girl with jewels, but I knew she’d be hesitant to wear that. So, I would purchase her jewelry, but I would keep it simple, but tastefully elegant. Something that she could wear every day, but make her feel special, beautiful.

She was so beautiful and kind and selfless. I wanted her. I wanted her happy. I wanted her not to have to work her ass off for her family. I wanted to support them, too. Charlie was a good man but was dealt a shit hand of cards. One of his daughters was a saint while the other was a devil, uncaring and cruel.

“Your princelishhip,” Jake snorted.

“Don’t call me that, jack ass,” I sighed. “What’s up?”

“When do you want to leave for the jewelers?” he asked.

I checked my cell phone, I saw that the car I’d sent to Bella’s bakery was driving to Bergdorf’s. “We can leave now. Tia, the personal shopper, will text you with information about Bella’s dress.”

“Why not you?” Jake asked, arching a brow.

“I’m a royal and heaven forbid that some royal scandal happens with a private shopper?” I sighed. “So, I gave Tia your number. Your work number.”

“You owe me, Cullen,” he grumbled. “Let’s go.” We put on coats and I adopted the royal persona, standoffish and distant. With this trip to the jewelers, I knew that some rumors would begin to fly. I wasn’t as famous as the Prince of Wales, but I’d been listed on several magazine’s hottest lists as an eligible bachelor. But, in those magazines, I was listed as Edward and not Masen.

We arrived at a private jewelry store. Jacob stood off the side, looking every bit as menacing as I knew him to be. I met with the jeweler I spoke to on the phone. “Mr. Masen?” said the jeweler.

“Yes,” I answered, shaking his hand. “Felix?”
He nodded. “It’s a pleasure to meet with a client with your stature,” he gushed. “I hope that we can provide you with what you need.”

“I hope that your discretion will be assured,” I said, a tight smile spreading over my face. “My transaction here will not be disclosed in the media, Felix.”

“I can assure you, nothing will be leaked,” Felix squeaked. “We have a lot of high profile clients. Their anonymity is paramount, Mr. Masen.” He looked at me, his beady eyes as wide as can be and his glasses slipping off his bird-like nose. “Your highness.”

“Good,” I replied. “Now, I’m looking to spend a lot of money today to make someone special feel every ounce of beauty that I believe she is. I’d like to see diamond necklaces, diamond earrings and diamond bracelets. No expense spared.”

A/N: We’re going back to Bella and spending some time with her and Angela, plus time for her to get ready for the benefit and the first part of the benefit itself. Leave me some loving and thank you for reading! I appreciate it more than I can express!
Chapter 11

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

We’re going back to Bella and spending some time with her and Angela, plus time for her to get ready for the benefit and the first part of the benefit itself.

Chapter Eleven

Bella

“Girl, a limo with champagne and a private session with a buyer at Bergdorf’s? Your man is loaded,” Angela cackled, drinking her second glass of bubbly. “And this actually champagne. FROM FRANCE! See?” She held up the bottle, her eyes wide behind her chic glasses.

“You’re cut off,” I deadpanned, taking her glass, finishing it myself and putting the flute into the holder in the rear of the limo. She pouted. “Angela, Masen is doing this for me and I don’t want to come off as being white trash. Even though, according to my lovely sister, that’s what I am.”

“Fucking bitch. You are not!” Angela sneered, crossing her arms angrily. “You are the epitome of grace and goodness. Alice is the trashy one. I bet she lost her virginity in the back of van on prom night, with her skirt hitched up around her waist.”

“That was you, Ang,” I giggled.

“Oh, yeah,” she smirked. “But, I wouldn’t put it past her. That girl is a walking-talking STD.”

Crossing her legs, Angela looked at me expectantly. “Speaking of sex … did you have any with smexy, foreign man? He’s sex on a stick with all that hair … I could just imagine it between my legs.”

“Angela!” I hissed. “Seriously?”

“I saw him leave the bakery a few days ago. I only saw his ass and his hair. Yummy,” Angela nodded, holding up a fist. “Don’t leave a girl hanging …” I rolled my eyes, bumping my fist with hers. “Now, back to this dress thing. What color are you looking for? Something bright and bold or classic and refined?”

“I’m thinking classic and refined, with a pinch of sexy,” I shrugged. “Not TOO sexy, but enough to leave him wanting more.”

“That’s my girl,” Angela beamed. “So, tell me about your date? Did you get some action?”

“You’re like a guy, Angela,” I snickered as we pulled up to Bergdorf’s. I blinked up and gulped. “I never thought I’d be able to shop here.” We got out and were greeted by the manager, leading us to the top floor with the couture gowns. “I came here once with Mom, just before she discovered she was pregnant with Alice. She had a gift certificate from a friend. We talked about what we’d buy, but all we could afford was a new scarf and it wasn’t even the whole thing. Mom had to pay for part of it with cash.”

“I bet Renee had fun with it, though,” Angela said, threading her arm through mine.
“Oh, totally. We got dressed up in our best clothes, acting like we were all posh. But, we weren’t. We’re from Brooklyn,” I snickered. “It was a nice fantasy for the day, but this isn’t me.”

“Bells, you deserve the fantasy … more than that, you deserve the happily ever after! I know that you had a great life lined up in Greenwich,” Angela said. I looked over at her, unsure as to how she found that out. I hadn’t told her about my job or anything prior to my return to New York. “Your dad spilled the beans. He was heartbroken that you had to give up your dream to come back here after getting his diagnosis. He’s hopeful that you’ll still be able to teach.”

“My certificate has lapsed. I’d have to take more classes in order to become a certified teacher, which means more money. Money that I do not have,” I said as we stepped off the elevator and onto the shimmering level high-end fashion. “Holy crap. This is … unreal.”

“This is how the other half lives,” Angela said. She walked over to a dress, looking at the price tag. “Fuck, this isn’t a dress. It’s a studio apartment in Alphabet City.” I turned on my heel, wanting to head back to Brooklyn. This was too much. “Oh, no, you don’t! Live a little, Bells.”

Angela dragged me back and standing before us was a gorgeous woman with toffee-colored skin, sleek brown hair and ice-blue eyes. She was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen. “Which one of you is Bella?” she asked, her voice deep and raspy with a slight accent. Angela pushed me forward. I stumbled, shooting my friend a glower. “I should have guessed. Masen did say that you were lovely. I have to agree.” She put her arm around my shoulders. “We’re going to have so much fun.” She smiled warmly at me, holding out her hand. “I’m Tia.”

“Bella Swan,” I answered, shaking her manicured hand.

“Masen said that you are mine to spoil,” she said, rubbing her hands together eagerly. “We have a few things to get for you. First, the dress for the charity event tomorrow. I’ve got a few things pulled, but seeing you in person, I think I want to go a different direction. How opposed are you to showing skin?”

“What?!” I squeaked.

“I have this beautiful Calvin Klein navy blue sheath, but it’s a deep-cut V-neck. Very sexy,” she purred. I stared at her blankly. “Trust me, Bella. You will love ravishing and Masen will be unable to keep his hands off you.”

“More skin. But, don’t make her look like a hoochie. This is a high-society charity thing,” Angela giggled.

“It’s Calvin Klein. She’ll be a couture hoochie,” Tia quipped. “Everything off except your panties. There’s a robe hanging here.”

She breezed out of the dressing room, dragging Angela with her. I took off my clothes, wrapping my body in the silky robe. About ten minutes later, they came back with arms filled with sleek, sexy dresses, all in various shades of blue. Tia took off a dress, pushing Angela out of the dressing room and arched a brow at me. I stepped into the most gorgeous dress ever and was shocked at how much skin it showed. My eyes widened as I saw my cleavage. I tried to reach for the robe, but Tia dragged me out to the pedestal.

“Bella! You’ve got a figure!” Angela squealed, clapping her hands. “And tits!”

“I’m all tits,” I said, hiking up the dress and pouting deeply. “Tia, I don’t feel comfortable in this. I’m a wardrobe malfunction away from indecent exposure.”
“I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable, but I want you to look at yourself,” Tia said, sliding my arms down and turning me to face the mirror. “What do you see?”

“Pale skin, small breasts, tired eyes and gaunt face,” I said, wrinkling my nose. “I don’t see what Masen sees. I’m not beautiful. Plain would be the best way to describe me.”

Tia stood behind me, twisting my hair up and pulling out some tendrils. She pinned the dress, making it fit a little better, but it was still too big and much too revealing. She smiled at me. “I see a beautiful woman with translucent skin, pink lips and chestnut colored hair. You’re slender, but you have womanly curves. You are timelessly exquisite, Bella. I see what Masen sees, but he sees deeper than what’s on the outside, Bella. I know that there’s more than what’s on the outside. I’ve known Masen for a while now. You’re the first woman to really hold his attention. When he told me about you, I could hear his respect and affection toward you.”

“How close are you to Masen?” Angela asked, her lips pursed.

“He’s been a client of mine for some time,” Tia answered. “Only a client, and that’s it. To be honest, Bella’s more my type than Masen.” She gave Angela a gaze, a smirk on her face. “Or you … you single, sweetie?”

“Nope … in a relationship and I like boys,” Angela tittered anxiously. “Let’s focus on Bells. This is her show.”

Tia nodded, looking back at me with a quiet chuckle. “Now, is this your dress, Bella?”

“No. I feel almost naked,” I said, trying to hide my body.

“Okay,” Tia replied, helping me off the pedestal. We changed me into a different dress. This one was a deeper navy-blue with intricate black beading. I felt more covered with this dress, but it was understatedly sexy. It showed the right amount of cleavage and hugged my hips and ass. “Oooh, I like this one. It’s like it was cut just for you.”

“I like it, too,” I smiled. Tia beamed back, helping me back out to the pedestal. There wasn’t a lot of pinning she needed to do, save for shortening the skirt since I was so small.

“Oooh, Bells, you look smoking hot,” Angela sang.

“I agree,” Tia grinned. “With simple makeup, but a smoky eye? Masen will cream his Dior tuxedo.” She changed my hair, pulling it half back, fluffing the rest over my shoulders. “Now, stay here. I’m going to get a purse, some shoes and a wrap. It’s supposed to be chilly tomorrow.”

“What about jewelry?” Angela asked. “Her chest seems awful bare.”

I didn’t hear a response, but from Angela’s squeak, she didn’t say anything. I looked at my friend, arching a brow. “What did she say?” I asked as Tia danced away.

“Nothing,” Angela giggled. “Damn, girl. Your arms are fucking muscular.”

“Just what I want to hear,” I said, holding out my arms and wrinkling my nose.

“No! Not that. They’re still feminine but toned. I’ve got flabby triceps. I can’t ever wear a sleeveless top or dress. Nope, my arms jiggle,” Angela snorted.

Tia came back with a pair of sky-high heels. Angela held my hand as I slid them onto my feet. Tia draped a black beaded wrap around me. “I think this is it, Bella,” Tia breathed. “Classic,
understated and sexy. Now, this will be delivered to The Mandarin Spa, with the accessories. We do need to hem it and take it in around the rear.” She handed me a card. “A full day of relaxation and beauty is scheduled for you and for Angela. Masen will pick you up at the spa. Angela, I need to borrow you for a moment. Come with me? Bella, admire your stunning beauty.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” I deadpanned.

“Well, don’t move. A seamstress will be here momentarily to take those measurements for the hem and pin it for you,” Tia ordered, dragging Angela with her. They were gone for a few moments when an older woman came scuttling in. She spoke to me with a heavy accent but complimented the dress and my beauty. I blushed, muttering my appreciation, though I didn’t see it.

Tia and Angela came back once the seamstress took my pinned dress from the dressing room. I was Tia’s last client for the day and she said that we were going out for dinner. Angela arched a brow, daring me to back out of it. I kept my mouth shut and we went to a Thai place near Bergdorf’s. We drank some Thai beer, gorged ourselves and laughed.

It was the best night out I’d had in years … aside from my date with Masen. I had forgotten how wonderful it was to have a life. To share secrets with girlfriends. To do something other than live in that bakery and fear for Alice’s wrath.

I missed it.

I didn’t want to lose it.

Hopefully, I’d be able to have a life. My fingers were crossed.

xx AMDFT xx

The following day, another car came to pick me up, along with Angela. I was up with the birds, heading down to the bakery to start the morning. Alice hadn’t even woken up. When Dad saw me down in the kitchen, he stomped up to the apartment and dragged Alice out of her bed, kicking and screaming. He pushed me back upstairs and told me to relax while he made sure that my slacker sister worked in the bakery. She scowled when I got into the car. I just waved at her, with a snarky grin.

I was buffed, polished, waxed and plucked within an inch of my life. My skin felt soft and my muscles were relaxed for the first time in almost four years. My hair was curled and pinned back into a half up-do, with sultry and sexy makeup. Tia came with my dress and helped me into it.

“Girl, Masen is going to fucking explode when he sees you.”

“Agreed,” Angela said as she tucked her freshly cut and colored hair behind her ear. “If I were a lesbian, I’d do you.”

“I am a lesbian and I’d definitely do you,” Tia beamed. Her cell phone beeped, making her smile widen. “Angela, I’m going with you. Bella, Masen is here. Have fun and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

She hugged me, and we went out to the lobby. Angela and Tia left, holding the door open for Masen. He looked beautiful, wearing a tuxedo that was cut to his body to perfection. His hair was tousled sexily, with a little bit of scruff on his face. He grinned crookedly when he saw me.

“Bella,” he breathed, his accent made my thighs clench. “You are a vision of perfection.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” I blushed, idly toying with the clutch that held my phone, money, driver’s license and a tube of the lip gloss. “You are … wow … I mean …”
“I’ve rendered you speechless,” he chuckled, walking toward me. He picked up my hand, kissing my knuckles. “I have something for you, cherie.” He threaded our fingers together, guiding me to a private room off the lobby. He reached into his jacket, pulling out a small box. “This is for you, Bella. Something to enhance your beauty.” He handed me the box and kissed my neck. I bit my lip, opening the box and gasped when I saw what was inside of the box.

“Masen, this is … too much,” I breathed.

“Nothing is too much for you, cherie,” he said, plucking out the necklace and gently turning me around, attaching it around my neck. He turned me back and his fingers grazed the necklace. “Perfect.” He laughed quietly. “I’m not going to put the earrings on.”

“Again, this is too much,” I said, taking the earrings and putting them into my ears. “Thank you, Masen. I feel like Cinderella.”

“But, hopefully you won’t turn into a pumpkin at midnight and leave me with just a shoe,” he smirked. “Regardless, I have the most beautiful woman on my arm. I’ll be the envy of every man in the room.” I opened my mouth to disagree and he arched a brow. “Don’t argue, cherie. You’re a vision. Now, I want to spend the night with my girl. We get to enjoy very expensive rubber chicken and schmoozing with New York elite.” His eyes moved to my lips. “May I kiss you?”

“Please,” I breathed. He smiled brightly before brushing his lips with mine, his fingers dancing along my jaw. The kiss was entirely too short, making me yearn for more. He backed away, his eyes soft and loving. I clutched to his lapels, trying not to fall.

“I’ve got you, cherie,” he snickered, his arms moving around my waist. I blushed, nodding dumbly. “Come on, Bella.” He slid his arm around my waist, resting his hand on my hip and guided me out of the small, private room. He moved us through the lobby and gave a curt nod to Jacob who was dressed in a black suit, holding the backdoor of a black limo open. “How’s traffic, Jacob?”

“It’s New York, Masen. It’s bad,” Jacob quipped. He blinked to me, bowing his head to me. “You look beautiful, Ms. Swan.”

“Quit flirting with my girl,” Masen grumbled good-naturedly. “What would your fiancée say?”

“She’d probably agree with me,” Jacob replied, giving Masen a shitty grin.

Masen rolled his eyes, helping me into the rear of the limo, which was elegantly appointed with leather seats, mood lighting and champagne waiting in a silver bucket. He slid in next to me, popping the champagne and pouring us each a glass. The privacy glass was up, cutting us off from Jacob. “To the most beautiful woman, inside and out,” Masen smiled, clinking his glass with mine.

“To a wonderful man, who makes me feel like a princess,” I blushed, sipping my drink. Masen’s smile grew, and he leaned over, kissing my neck. “What can I expect from this charity event?”

“Dinner, silent auction, dancing, dry conversations with snobby elitists,” Masen snorted. I arched a brow. “I’m going since it’s a part of my position. I need to be a diplomat, establishing relationships with these elitists.”

“And I’m your arm candy?” I giggled.

“You’re more than that, cherie,” Masen said, pulling me closer to his muscular body. “You’re going to keep me fucking sane. I hate this part of my job, to be perfectly honest.”

“You said you’re a diplomat. What do you do?” I asked.
“I could tell you, but I’d have to kill you,” he quipped, kissing my nose. I pouted. “Seriously, some of what I do is classified by my government, Bella. I’m not here illegally. I’m not James Bond, either.”

“You sound like him with your accent,” I giggled. “It’s a perfect combination of British, French and a touch German?”

“That would make sense,” he snickered. “I can speak all three languages fluently. But, the language used in Gevalia is close to French, with some Italian influence, too.” He reached over, threading his fingers with mine. He stared at me, a soft smile on his handsome features. “I can’t believe I’m sitting here with you, chérie. I’m so lucky.”

“Wait until my clumsiness rears its ugly head,” I snorted.

“Even then, Bella,” he breathed, kissing me tenderly. He murmured something under his breath. I couldn’t understand it since it was in French or the Gevalian/French hybrid language. I’d taken seven years of Spanish. Not helpful at all in trying to decrypt the sexy conundrum that was Masen, the fuck-hot diplomat from Gevalia. The limo stopped. Masen took the flutes of champagne, kissing me as Jacob opened the door. “Are you ready, beautiful?”

“If I say no, will you take me back to your penthouse?” I tittered nervously.

“I intend to, after this charity shindig, chérie,” he purred hypnotically. “I want to hold you. All Night. Long.” I blinked, my face flushing a furious red. Did he mean sex? I’m not having sex … not yet. We’ve barely gotten to know each other! “Breathe, Bella. I saw the look of panic. Are you thinking that …”

“Sex,” I squeaked.

He chuckled, low and deep. “As much as I want to make love to you, we’re not ready. But, I want to show you how I feel about you, even if it’s just holding you in my arms as you sleep, chérie.” He slid out of the car, offering me his hand and I followed him. I gulped anxiously when I saw a red carpet and photographers. “Just smile, Bella.”

What the fuck am I walking into?

A/N: We’ll continue the charity event in Masen’s POV. Pictures of Bergdorf’s, Bella’s dress, her jewelry and the Guggenheim are on my blog. You can also find me on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me some loving!
Chapter 12

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Chapter Twelve

Masen

As soon as we walked onto the red carpet, I felt Bella tense. I slid my arm around her waist, whispering in her ear. “Just breathe, chérie,” I said. She nodded, a soft smile spreading over her face. The cameras flashed, and I heard the photographers bark questions, but I led Bella into the Guggenheim, stopping briefly for a few pictures before making our way into the event.

We made our way inside. Bella’s eyes were large as she looked around the lavishly decorated museum. I used the opportunity to sign in, using my full regal name. I got our table assignment, threading my fingers with Bella’s. “You okay, chérie?” I asked quietly. I prayed she was. This was a lot for people who were not blue bloods.

“I don’t fit in here,” she whispered, her eyes wide. “This is overwhelming, Masen.”

“I won’t leave your side, Bella,” I vowed. “I don’t like going to these events, either. But, getting to sit next to you, dance with you and spend the evening with you? It’ll make it that much more palatable. More than that, Bella.” I pulled into a quiet corner, tugging her flush to my body. Her curves melded against me and she fit perfectly in my arms. She placed her hands on my lapel, idly playing with the satin. “If I had my choice, you’d be my date for all of these events.”

“You deserve someone more refined,” she pouted.

“I don’t want refined. I want you. Only you!” I said, kissing her tenderly and holding her close to me. “And you are plenty refined. You’re perfect, beautiful, kind, funny, and mine.” She blushed, her eyes widening. I wanted to lose myself in her lips, her body, but not yet. I pressed my forehead to hers. “I’m proud to stand next to you. Don’t even think that you don’t belong here. You are … you are more than worthy. Please, believe me?”

“I’m trying,” she whispered. “Going from wearing yoga pants and t-shirts to couture gowns in one day? My brain is kind of reeling, Masen.” I chuckled, hugging her once more before we went into the main area where the tables were set up. I led us to our table, which included the police commissioner, deputy mayor and one of my classmates from law school, James, who was working for the district attorney.

“Masen, I thought I saw your name on the list of attendees,” James smirked, holding out his hand. He was tall, about my height, with blonde hair, blue eyes and crinkly grin. He was one of the few people who knew who I really was, but never shared my secret. I shook it, smiling genuinely. “You look good, man.”

“So, do you, James,” I chuckled. “How is it working for the DA?”

“I love it,” he beamed. “I met my soul mate while working there. She’s around here somewhere.” He craned his neck until he saw a ravishing redhead. “Vicki! I want to introduce you to one of my buddies from law school.” He blinked to Bella, picking up her hand, kissing her knuckles. “And
who is this beauty?”

“This is Bella,” I answered. “My girlfriend.”

“Girlfriend? In the three years I’ve known you, I always thought you were gay,” James teased. “But, apparently not. You were just waiting for the right woman. How’d you meet this foreign blowhard?”

Bella giggled. “He came into my bakery. We bonded over sourdough.”

“I worked out some aggression regarding my brother,” I snickered. “Bella did the same, but pretending it was her sister.”

“Ah, yes, the infamous Mac,” James said, rolling his eyes. “I’ve heard stories. Have you met him?”

“No,” Bella answered. “Masen told me that he had to fly back Gevalia. Family emergency or something.”

“Or something,” James snickered, shooting me an understanding look. He had an older brother that had habits similar to Emmett. However, James’ older brother, Larry, ignored his family’s plea for help and he ended up in jail on several drug charges. While in jail, Larry, was caught in a prison brawl, killed by another inmate. Larry’s drug habit was a death sentence.

Vicki, James’ date sauntered over to him and kissed him on the lips. She was a statuesque redhead with curly hair and slender body. Her eyes were a vivid indigo and her skin was covered with a smattering of freckles. She was beautiful. She didn’t hold a candle to my Bella, though. Vicki’s voice broke my reverie as I tightened my hold on Bella’s tiny waist. “Baby, they have some beautiful pieces at the silent auction. We should try to bid on them. There’s a Waterford crystal vase that is exquisite!”

“I’ll check it out with you a bit, love. I wanted to introduce you to Masen Cullen and his beautiful girlfriend, Bella,” James said. “Mase, Bella, this is my fiancée, Victoria Rollins.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” I said, shaking her hand. “Fiancée? When did this happen?”

“He proposed on the Fourth of July,” Victoria breathed. “We were with my family up in the Hamptons. As the fireworks were going off, Jimmy got down on one knee and asked me to spend his life with him!” She thrust her hand in Bella’s face, showing her an elegant engagement ring. “Isn’t it perfect?”

“Beautiful,” Bella smiled. “Congratulations! When are you getting married?”

“We haven’t decided yet,” Victoria gushed. “I want a winter wedding, getting married in the snow.”

“I’m partial to summer, heat, tropical locales,” James quipped. “I hate the cold. I’d love a destination wedding in Cancun or Jamaica.” Victoria giggled, taking a glass of champagne from a waiter who’d walked past. “How long are you in the states, Mase?”

“On the record, six months, but I would love to extend my stay, if possible,” I said, kissing Bella’s temple. “I don’t know if I can part with my girl.”

“You two look so much in love,” Victoria breathed. “Look at how he dotes on her, Jimmy!”
“We just started dating,” Bella tittered nervously. “Love?”

I knew I was falling hard and fast for this girl. “Bella is right. We just started dating, but I definitely feel something for her, more than just a casual feeling,” I said. I didn’t want to lay my cards down right away. I wanted her to know the truth; that I was royalty before I told her how I felt.

“Don’t make them uncomfortable, Vicki. Just because we’re all lovey-dovey means that you have to spread that shit everywhere,” James snickered. “She was like this when she met my little sister. Mia brought home her new boyfriend and Vicki was convinced they were made for each other, saying that he was in love with her. When I got a phone call from my sister a couple weeks later, telling me that Alec had cheated on her with her roommate …” James chuckled, kissing Victoria’s lips. “Come on, doll face. Let’s go check out this Waterford vase thing. Maybe this civil servant can make a bid and not be broke. I’ll see you both back at the table. Keep a hold of your girl, Cullen. The deputy mayor is handsy.”

“Good to know,” I chuckled. Bella watched as my friend and his fiancée made their way to the upper levels of the museum. “You want to check out the silent auction items?”

“Not like I could make a bid,” she said, giving me a wry grin.

“You should see some of this stuff, cherie. Even if we don’t bid, we can laugh at some of the exorbitant shit rich people spend their money on,” I snickered, guiding her to the opposite side from James and Victoria went. We perused the items, which had little to no functional value. Bella snickered at some of the random shit that people were actually bidding on. Yes, the money was going toward arts education, but they didn’t need to have a celebrity dog groomer pamper your pet to raise said money.

“Oh, wow,” Bella breathed as she stopped in front of a set of books. “This would be something I’d put my money on. I love the classics, and these are rare first editions.” She reached for a copy of *Wuthering Heights* but drew her hand back. She shook her head and wandered away. I picked up a pen, writing down my name and a huge bid for the whole set. I walked briskly to catch up with her. Her face was wistful, sad.

“What are you thinking about, cherie?” I asked.

“I could have been teaching those classics to high school students,” she whispered. She sighed, shaking her head.

“If you didn’t have the bakery to worry about, would you go back to teaching?” I questioned.

“I never even got a chance to start,” she muttered. “I was settling into my apartment in Greenwich when I got the call from my dad with his diagnosis. So, I packed up my stuff and came back, saving the bakery.” Her lips were pulled down into a slight frown. “My license has lapsed, and I’d have to take classes to become certified again. I don’t really have the money to do that.” She started to walk away, but I gently took her hand, guiding her to a bench. We sat down, and I twined our fingers together. “What is it, Masen?”

“If money weren’t an issue, or the bakery, would you go back to teaching?” I asked. “Be honest.”

“I can’t … I don’t know. My only teaching experience was from when I did my practicum and student teaching,” she shrugged. “I enjoyed every moment of it, but it wasn’t real. I had my cooperating teachers to help me. I never had my own classroom. I don’t even know if I’m that good.” She looked at me and smiled softly. “Who knows? Maybe I was destined to be a baker?”
No, you’re destined to be a queen. You’re destined to be mine. I leaned in, kissing her lips and wanting to lose myself in her body, her mouth. She sighed, leaning her cheek against my shoulder and idly playing with my fingers. “Regardless of your destiny, you’re destined for greatness, cherie. Not many daughters would have come home to take care of their ailing parents.”

“Alice sure wouldn’t,” Bella growled. “Hell, she probably screwed everything up today. We can’t afford to have off days.”

“I know that you’re stressed out, Bella, but tonight is about you. It’s about us. Don’t worry about the bakery, your father, or about your hateful sister,” I said, hissing out the last part.

“You really don’t like her,” Bella giggled.

“No, I don’t,” I answered, picking up her hand and kissing her wrist. “She’s an entitled, spoiled brat. How did she get that way?”

“My father indulged her. He felt guilty about her not having a mother,” Bella shrugged. “So, he catered to her. To both of us, really, but where I was fairly well-adjusted, Alice expected the world to be handed to her on a silver platter. When Dad got sick, she wanted me to do everything for her, but I could barely keep the bakery open, let alone cater to my sister’s whims. So, she took money from petty cash to suit her needs. It started when she was a freshman and has only escalated.”

“That’s how she paid for her homecoming dress,” I responded slowly. “She stole from you.”

“Pretty much. After that, I found a new safe and kept it hidden in one of the locked freezers. Alice doesn’t have that combination or the keys to the freezer,” Bella quipped. “Alice has been even bitchier now that her cash cow has dried up.”

“Why haven’t you pressed charges against her?” I asked.

“As much as I can’t stand my sister, she’s still family,” Bella answered, looking out over the museum. “She’s the only family I have left other than my dad.” She gave me a tentative smile and I understood her reasoning. It’s the same reason I dealt with my brother’s shenanigans. “Now, enough heavy. Let’s look at the shit that I could never afford, even if I won the lottery.” She stood up and sauntered away, giggling quietly.

After wandering around the silent auction, we went back to the table and enjoyed dinner. It was better than I expected, with lamb chops, fresh vegetables and garlic mashed potatoes with delectable white wine. Bella did complain that the rolls were stale, but the rest of the meal was delicious. The police commissioner, deputy mayor and their wives were enchanted by Bella, her sweet demeanor, her smarts and her elegance. Despite her fears about being at this event, she took to it like a fish to water.

With the conclusion of dinner, the dance floor opened up. I took the moment to pull Bella into my arms, holding her close to me as we swayed to the jazz music the band played. Bella leaned her cheek against my shoulder and I kept my lips attached to her forehead, relishing in her softness in my arms. The music changed, and I felt a tap on my shoulder. I saw James. “May I cut in?” he asked. I frowned, until James leaned in. “They’re about to announce the silent auction winners. I’ll keep her occupied while you collect what you bought.”

“I leave you in James’ capable hands. I’ll be right back, cherie,” I murmured, brushing my lips against hers. “Be good, James.”

“Always, Mase,” James chuckled, nodding to the silent auction.
I winked at him, making my way to the organizer. She was about to announce the winners, but I pulled her aside. I wrote a check for the cost of the books and told her that I had a limo outside. I sent a text to Jacob and some of the workers took the books, carefully crated out to the car, placing them in the trunk. I shook the hand of the organizer and made my way down to the dance floor, where Bella was trying to do some sort of line dance with Victoria. I snickered as my girl stumbled over her own feet. I made my way back to her, spinning her in my arms and spending the rest of the night with her in my embrace, dancing, laughing, kissing and falling in love.

Heaven knows, I loved Isabella Swan.

**xx AMDFT xx**

“Despite my trepidation, I had a lot of fun,” Bella said, her feet draped over my lap. “I like James and Victoria. They’re so different from each other but complement each other nicely.”

“It’s nice to see him with someone who loves him,” I smiled, staring at her. Bella’s eyes were closed, and she had a coy smile on her face. “Do you know how beautiful you are?”

“It’s all thanks to that glam squad,” Bella snorted, her eyes fluttering open and she grinned at me. “Tomorrow, I’ll be back to being plain Bella.”

“No, you’ll always be beautiful,” I argued. “With or without the ‘glam squad.’” I pulled her closer, cupping her pale cheek with my hand. “Why do you not believe that you’re gorgeous?” She blushed but shrugged. “You are, and I’ll tell you that forever.”

“Forever, Masen?” she asked, her eyes wary. I nodded, kissing her. I wanted her. I never wanted to be without her. She was the woman for me, and I was not giving up on her. I deepened our kiss, my tongue sliding into her mouth. She whimpered, her fingers tangling into my hair. We made out like horny teenagers until the car stopped. Jacob muttered something over the intercom, making us break apart. “We’re back at the bakery?”

“No, my condo. I thought I was clear. I wanted to hold you. All night,” I whispered against her soft, sweet lips. “Did you forget, _chérie_?”

She nodded, a quiet giggle ghosting through the cabin of the limo. “I don’t have anything to wear to sleep. I can’t exactly wear this gown.”

“I think I can rustle something up, Bella,” I said, removing her legs from my lap and opening the car door. We went to the elevator. I nodded at Jake, who was going to park the limo and make himself scarce. As the elevator slid shut, I enfolded Bella into my arms. She snuggled against me. I loved that she did that. It was like she wanted to get closer to me, never wanting to leave my side. Once upstairs, I opened the door and guided Bella to the living room. She collapsed, tossing her heels onto the ground. “Not a fan of heels, _chérie_?”

“Nope. Those things are death traps,” she said, scowling at the offending footwear that lay on the area rug. She curled up on the couch. I chuckled, ducking into my room and pulled out some shorts and a t-shirt for Bella. When I turned around, Bella was standing in front of me, her lip captured in her teeth. She walked to me, her fingers gliding up the lapels of my tuxedo. “Thank you for a magical evening, Masen. I can’t remember the last time I had this much fun.”

“Me, neither,” I smiled, pulling her closer. “If you don’t … If you want to go home …”

“I don’t. I want to stay,” she said, her voice turning husky and her eyes meeting mine. “I want to remember every moment of today.” She kissed my jaw, trailing sweet, wet kisses to my lips. “I
know I’m not ready to make love, but I want to explore.”

“Oh, cherie, so do I,” I whispered in the darkness. I slid my arms around her tiny waist before I brushed my lips over hers. She squeaked, tangling her fingers into my hair. Bending down, I picked her up, carrying her to my king-sized bed. I lay her on the duvet cover, shrugging out of my tuxedo jacket before I recaptured her lips with mine. Her hands were pressed against my chest, two searing palms on my body, marking me as hers through my shirt. Our tongues tangled as lay next to her, tasting her essence. My hands found her waist and I slid my fingers down to her leg, inching her dress up. “You are exquisite, Bella. This dress and every inch of skin I saw, you drove me wild, baby.”

“And seeing you in a tuxedo? That’s better than porn,” Bella giggled against my lips. “A well-cut tuxedo on a handsome man? Fuck me …”

“My, my, my,” I said, looking down at my girl as she covered her mouth, her eyes wide with embarrassment. “My girl has a dirty mouth.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“Don’t even fucking think of apologizing,” I growled, tracing my finger down her cheek. “My mouth is just as foul, but behind closed doors, love.” I leaned down, sliding my tongue into her mouth and feeling her grind against me. Her fingers found the buttons to my shirt and she wriggled them free. As her hands unbuttoned my shirt, I moved my hand up her satiny smooth leg, hitching it over my hip. She pushed my shirt over my shoulders and untucked my white undershirt to slide her hands along my back. Feeling her palms on my bare skin was the sweetest torture. Bella tugged on my shirt and I pulled back, ripping it from my body.

“Damn! You’re ripped,” Bella breathed. “And a tattoo?”

“A moment of rebellion,” I said, running my fingers along my ribcage where I put my family’s crest. “I wouldn’t consider myself ‘ripped,’ Bella. Jake is ripped.”

“I’m not in bed with Jake,” she said, her fingers gliding along my sternum. “I’m with you, Masen. I want you.”

“I desire you, cherie,” I growled, tracing circles along her calf. “I want to hold you in my arms, feeling your skin against mine. Where’s the fucking zipper?”

She smirked, reaching to the side and slid it down. The dress loosened, and I traced her collarbones, seeing the pendant I’d gotten her in the hollow of her throat. “You look at me like I’m the most cherished thing in your world, Masen.”

“It’s because you are, love,” I murmured, my hands gently pushing the straps of her dress down. I kissed her and soon her dress was off her body, leaving her in a strapless bra and panties that were the same shade of navy blue as her dress. Her body was lithe, sexy, but had womanly curves. She was perfection. Yes, she was beautiful on the outside, but her kindness, her soul, her heart made her beautiful on the inside. I was attracted to every inch of this woman. I wanted her to be happy, healthy, loved, cherished. I wanted to make her feel special, like the woman she was.

Leaning down, I kissed her pink, pouty lips and my fingers danced along her bare skin. She trembled against me, hooking her leg over my hip and rocking her body against my growing arousal. And from the heat I was feeling from between her legs, she was just as turned on as I was. “Bella, love, can I touch you?” I whispered against her mouth, my hands hovering near the clasp of her bra. She nodded, and I deftly unclasped it. Her bra joined the dress on the floor and I gently
cupped her breasts. She whimpered, arching her back in a silent plea for more.

I inched my way down, kissing her pale, fragrant skin. Her fingers tangled into my hair as I wrapped my lips around one of her dusty pink nipples. She rolled her body, pulling me closer to her body. I reveled in her warmth, her softness. Her moans and whimpers were going directly to my crotch, making me even harder. I didn’t care about my release. I wanted to cherish her. Love her.

“Masen,” she breathed, tugging on my hair.

_Fuck, yeah, hearing that? So worth it._

I kissed my way back up to her lips, claiming them with my own. I gathered her in my arms, feeling her bare skin against me. She was so hot, so soft and completely mine. I truly felt how her curves fit me now that we were both nearly naked. Well, she was more naked than me. I was still in my pants, but we fit perfectly together.

Her fingers traced my tattoo and I shuddered, moving ever closer to her. “Your touch … it’s … fuck, don’t stop,” I growled against her mouth. She smiled, dragging her short nails along my nipples and it was my turn to moan. My hips bucked, moving closer to her satin-covered sex. “You’re so hot, baby.” I rolled my hips and she whimpered. “I want to see you come, Bella.”

She pulled back, her eyes hooded, but wary. “Panties stay on, Masen,” she said. “I’m afraid that once they come off …”

“Understood, love,” I said, pulling away and slipping my pants off, along with my socks. I was just as bare as her, wearing nothing but a pair of Calvin Klein boxer briefs. I cradled her against my chest and kissed her hungrily. She melted against me, draping one of her legs over my body. I slid my hand down her body, circling her belly button. She giggled. “Ticklish, Bella?”

“And nervous,” she said. “It’s been … _a while_ … since … um, yeah.”

“Where’s my foul-mouthed seductress?” I teased, my thumb running along her nipple. She bit her lip. “What do you want me to do, Bella?”

“I want you to touch me,” she said, her face flaming.

“I am touching you,” I said, twisting her nipple, making her squeak.

With a glower, she moved her hand to mine and slid it down her slender body to where her panties lay. “Feel how wet I am, Masen,” she said, her voice quiet and commanding. I grinned as I slipped my fingers into her satin panties and moving down to her sex. When my fingers came in contact with her soaked folds, she shuddered, and her eyes rolled back in her head. I circled her clit with my fingers before I eased them into her body. Bella’s whimpers were breathy and needy as she rocked against my hand.

“When was the last time you felt this good, love?” I asked, stroking her from the inside and feeling her body clench around me.

“N-n-n-never,” she breathed. “I’ve never been this turned on. Fuck, your fingers feel so good.”

“Just wait until my mouth is on you, Bella,” I purred, kissing her jaw and looking down to where my hand was buried. I wanted to see her, but she was in charge. The panties would stay on. “When my cock is inside you … loving you.”

“Masen,” she pleaded.
“I want to hear you say my name as I make you come, love,” I whispered in her ear. “I want to feel you …” She clung to my shoulders, her legs spreading further apart and her arousal coating my hand. With a groan, she crashed her lips against mine as the muscles between her legs undulated under my touch and I felt her release. Her voice was breathy as she chanted my name, over and over again as I continued touching her, prolonging her orgasm as my own body decided to lose control, as well. I slid my fingers from her body and tasted her essence from them as she caught her breath. I kept my commentary to myself as I cleaned my fingers of her juices.

“Wow,” she panted, looking at me and giving me a shy grin. “I’ve … it’s been a while … I mean … no words.”

I chuckled, kissing her tenderly. “Me, too, Miss Swan. Now, I’m going to change my boxers since seeing you come … yeah, I made a mess.” She giggled, looking down at my now deflating cock. I brushed my lips over hers three times before I got up and walked to the bathroom, swiping a clean pair of boxer briefs. Bella sat up, looking like a sex-ravaged goddess, with her hair in disarray and her lips swollen from my kisses. “You are a vision, cherie, sitting on my bed, looking the way you do. I’ll be right back. Don’t move, love.”

“I won’t. I promise,” she said, giving me a seductive, sexy grin. I shook my head and went into the bathroom. I shucked off my soiled underwear and tossed them into the hamper. Sliding up the fresh pair, I washed my hands and splashed my face to calm myself down. When I walked back out, I saw that Bella had, unfortunately, moved. She’d hung her dress over the side of the couch in my room. She’d also put on my tuxedo shirt. I stood behind her, holding her to my chest. “You’re like a ninja,” she giggled, turning in my arms.

“Seeing you in the throes of passion is something else, but you wearing my clothes? This is fucking hot, Bella,” I said, hugging her to me. She smiled but yawned. “My girl is tired. She needs to get some rest.”

“If I sleep, then tonight will be over and I have to go back to real life,” she quipped as I lifted her effortlessly. “Tonight, it has been … it’s been a dream, Masen.” I pulled back the covers and put her into the bed. “You tucking me in?”

“Definitely,” I smiled. “But, I do have a question.” I got into bed, lying next to her. She turned and looked at me, curling up around a pillow. “You said that you never felt this way?”

“Is that your diplomatic way of asking me if I was a virgin?” Bella teased.

“Um, well, kind of?” I chuckled anxiously.

She laughed and moved closer, pushing me onto my back and putting her head on my chest. Her arm was draped over my belly and she idly ran her fingers over my stomach. “I’m not a virgin, but the only relationship I was in … my boyfriend was not very good at giving pleasure. He was more interested in getting it. That was in college and since then … I really haven’t a chance to have …”

“Fuck,” I said, shaking my head. “I’m sorry but most of the fun in making love is feeling … Your ex was a tool.”

“No, just selfish,” she shrugged, yawning again and moving even closer to me. “Thank you for the most wonderful evening, Masen. Truly, I don’t want to go to sleep. I want to stay here. Forever … I’ve forgotten what it’s like to sleep in a bed.” I looked down at her and she was already dead to the world, clinging to me tightly.

“Oh, cherie, I want you to stay with me forever, too,” I murmured against her curled hair. “I love
you.” I felt her sigh and she moved even closer. I kissed her forehead and closed my eyes, falling asleep almost immediately. When I woke up, though, my bed was empty, and Bella was gone. On the nightstand, I saw her pendant and earrings. The dress was still on the couch.

What the hell happened? Where did she go?

A/N: Bella has her reasons. Don’t throw sharp objects at me. Please? Pictures of Bella’s dress, the Guggenheim, James, and Victoria are on my blog. Leave me some loving …

Up next will be Bella …
Chapter Thirteen

Bella

I woke up, just before dawn, and I was surrounded by Masen. He was holding me so tightly and so tenderly. His face was completely relaxed. It gave me a chance to stare at him unabashedly. Damn, he was so good looking, with multi-faceted bronze colored hair. His skin was pale, but not washed out. He had a healthy glow about him. His lips were full, and his teeth were straight and so very white. When he smiled, his grin was adorably crooked, but so very endearing. His eyes, though, they lured me in. They were the color of emeralds, not that I could see them as he slept, but knowing that they were hidden behind his lids and beneath those long eyelashes made me want to wake him up, just to see his beautiful eyes.

He was in a deep sleep, deliciously shirtless and cradling me to his body, even as he slept. He was snoring quietly, with his nose buried in my hair. My bladder, however, decided to make itself known. All the wine I’d had last night was catching up with me. Wriggling out his embrace, I padded to the bathroom, peeing and taking care of business.

With the wine, I also had a bit of a hangover. I walked to the kitchen, pouring myself a glass of water and went in search for some Advil or Tylenol. I found pay dirt in the island. I took a couple pills with a glass of water and started back to the bedroom, but my phone was chirping from my purse. Opening up the clutch, I saw numerous text messages from an unknown number. But, I knew right away that anonymous texter was my hateful sister. With the language and hateful ire being spewed at me, it had to be Alice.

You’re such a fucking whore.

I hate you and what you’re doing to me.

Forcing me to do YOUR job, worthless hag!

Whore! Slut! Spreading your legs to get rich! You’re a prostitute, Bella.

He doesn’t love you. You’re just a tight pussy for him to fuck. Did you ever think about that?

You think that you can walk away from the family? Bullshit! Bring your whoring ass home. Dad fell.

“No!” I breathed. I looked at the clock and if I got a cab, I could get home in forty-five minutes. The last message came an hour ago. My eyes welled with tears as I reread the texts from my sister.

Was I just a booty call?

I shook my head and tiptoed back to the bedroom. I took off Masen’s tuxedo shirt, swiping the t-shirt and shorts from the foot of the bed. I took off the pendant and earrings, leaving them on the nightstand. As much as I hated to, I couldn’t let this continue. I refuse to … I couldn’t … I’d send
him back his clothes and shut the door on whatever relationship we had building. I snuck out, swiping a hoodie from the closet and making way down to the lobby. Dad had given me some cash, if I needed it.

Hailing a taxi, I gave them the address to the bakery.

As we made our way through the streets of Manhattan and over the Brooklyn bridge, my tears fell freely on my cheeks. “What’s wrong, sweetheart?” asked the older driver.

“My dad is sick,” I whispered. “I need to get home.”

And I was played.

I am a whore.

The driver, thankfully, didn’t try to engage me in conversation. I paid him and used my new key to open the door to the bakery, making my way upstairs. The apartment was quiet. I looked in on my dad and he was sleeping, snoring loudly from his bed, not sprawled out on the floor like Alice led me to believe. I scowled, walking to Alice’s room and flipping on the lights. I tugged down her bedding and dragged her up off the bed. “You bitch.”

“No, you’re the bitch,” she snapped, wiping her eyes blearily. “You left me … I had to do your job!”

“You’re eighteen, Alice. It’s time you start earning your keep. The world is not handed to you on a silver fucking platter,” I sneered. “And how dare you call me a whore!”

“If the shoe fits,” Alice shrugged, looking at me. “Doing the walk of shame, Isabella?”

“Only because you said that Dad fell, Alice,” I growled. “He’s fine. Asleep!”

“Well, it got you home. You can handle the bakery tomorrow. Alone.”

“No, she isn’t,” said my dad, leaning heavily against the door jamb, holding the cane he used when he was really unsteady. “Alice, you are so ungrateful and spiteful. Your sister had plans last night and you knew it would be a late night. You only think of yourself.” Alice glared at him. “If your attitude doesn’t change, you’re going to lose your sister and your relationship with me. You have a choice, Alice. Pull your weight, or by the holidays, if you don’t grow up, you’re going to be kicked out.”

“But, Bella could stay!” Alice screeched. “She’s just a whore!”

“It’s because she’s running the business. You just leech of us,” Dad yelled at her. “It’s because of her that we still have this apartment and the fucking bakery! Alice, I’ve never been more ashamed of your behavior. Every turn, you make it about you, but it’s not, little girl. It’s time to grow up.” He turned and shook his head, walking back to his bedroom. Alice’s eyes filled with tears and she shot up, stomping out of the apartment, running into me as she left. I sat down on Alice’s bed, allowing my tears to flow freely. I couldn’t dwell on it, though. I wiped my face, grabbing some fresh clothes from the closet in the hallway and ducking into the bathroom. I washed away the curls and makeup from the magical evening. I put on my worn yoga pants and one of Dad’s sweatshirts, needing to feel his comfort. When I was done with my shower, my dad was standing outside the bathroom. “I’m sorry, Bella.”

“Why are you apologizing?” I asked, pulling out my bedding from the cocktail table and making up my couch. “I was selfish. I should have come home.”
“To sleep on a fucking couch?” Dad grumped. “God damn it! This is a nightmare. One daughter is breaking her back to save our livelihood while the other is doing everything in her power to destroy it. One weekend. You deserved one fucking weekend to be young, carefree, happy. But, no. Your selfish sister ruined that, too.” He looked at the clock and wrinkled his nose. “I think it’s safe to assume that Alice isn’t working today.”

“It’s Sunday, Dad. The bakery isn’t open on Sundays,” I said.

“The one Sunday we were open, we made a great chunk of change,” Dad nodded. “I’ll see if Angela can help. You stay here. Sleep, baby girl.”

“Dad, I can help,” I asked. I went to set my alarm, but my father took the phone away and put it on the kitchen counter. “Dad … You need to …”

“It’s my bakery, Isabella,” Dad said. “I’m tired, but I can do this.”

“And Alice?” I whispered, trying not cry out of sheer anger and frustration.

“I’ll deal with her,” Dad growled. With shaking hands, he tucked me into my couch bed and kissed my forehead. “Love you, Bella.”

“Love you, too, Daddy,” I sniffled. He brushed my damp hair away from my face and went downstairs. I closed my eyes and let the tears flow. Alice’s taunts reverberated in my mind, along with her hateful texts and sad reality that I simply wasn’t good enough for Masen. I never was, nor will I ever will be.

When I woke up again, I felt like I was being watched. I sat up, seeing Angela glowering at me. “You know it’s rude to stare, Angela,” I said, rubbing my eyes.

“My apologies,” she said, waving her hand airily. “Charlie relieved me when the Satan spawn returned from wherever she went. She’s getting reamed out. I swear to God; your sister is so fucking stupid.”

“I could have told you that,” I muttered grumpily. “What is it, Angela?”

“I came to deliver some goodies to you. You know, breakfast,” she said, handing me one of my pumpkin cream cheese muffins with some coffee and a paper. I picked up the paper, arching a brow. “Read that after you eat.” She plucked the paper from my hands and sat down on my dad’s recliner. “Tell me about last night.”

“It was fine,” I shrugged, trying to keep my breakfast from making a reappearance. My stomach churned as I thought of Alice’s words and my fears that what she described me as was the truth.

“That evil little urchin,” Angela sneered. “What did your bitch sister say to you? You were practically vibrating with excitement yesterday about seeing Masen. Now? You’re green and you look like someone kicked your puppy.”

I sighed, getting my phone from the kitchen and tossing it to Angela, who read the messages from Alice. I sipped my coffee and looked out the window, seeing the throngs of people going in and out of the bakery. Who knew? Sundays? I shook my head as Angela got up and paced the length of the living room. “Alice is a hateful human being, but maybe what she said was true,” I shrugged.

“You are not a whore,” Angela hissed. “Fuck, what happened to the confident, self-assured girl I knew in high school?”
“A lot has changed, Ang,” I said.

“But, not who you are, Bells,” Angela said, sitting down next to me and hugging me. “Shit, you are everything that is good in this world. You gave up your dream to come home and care for your dad. You saved the bakery.”

“Only to have it shut down because we can’t pay the mortgage,” I snapped. “Angela, life isn’t a fairy tale.”

“Au contraire, my friend,” Angela cackled, opening up the paper and tossing it to me. “Who’s in that picture?”

I looked at the picture, seeing me and Masen. His eyes were on me, gazing at me adoringly, lovingly. I blinked down and read the caption.

*Crown Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen of Gevalia attended the arts education charity event at the Guggenheim Museum with Brooklyn baker Isabella Swan. Love was in the air for the young royal as he danced with his date, never leaving her side for a moment. Could wedding bells be in the future?*

“A prince?” I squeaked. “Masen is a prince?”

“Next in line to rule Gevalia,” Angela sang. “He’s like the ultimate diplomat. He’s a freaking prince! A PRINCE! Girl, you’ve got a living, breathing fairy tale with your very own prince sexy.”

“I thought it was prince charming,” I gasped, gazing at the picture.

“Charming was okay, but Prince Masen? Break me off a piece of that! Hubba, hubba,” Angela crowed, picking up the paper from my lap and blinking at the photo. “And he’s your boyfriend!”

“I doubt that. I’m just a commoner. A whore,” I spat angrily. “Fuck!”

“You didn’t sleep with him, did you?” Angela asked.

“Technically, yes, I slept with him. As in sleep. Not sex,” I said, my face flaming. “We fooled around, but …” I shot up and I ran to the bathroom, barely making it there before I lost my breakfast and some of my dinner from last night. Angela held my hair back as I cried over the toilet. “I’m such a fool.”

“You are not a fool, Bella. Never a fool,” Angela said, hugging me tightly. “Bells, he’s looking at you like you were his sun and stars. Ben looks at me like this.” She tucked a sweaty lock of hair off my cheek. “Ben loves me. Masen must love you.”

“Or he pities me,” I grumped, getting up at walking back to the living room.

“I don’t pity you, love.” I blinked over Angela’s shoulder and I saw a handsome, but confused looking prince standing in my living room. He was dressed casually in a pair of jeans and a button-down, but his eyes were sad, lost with a touch of determination. “I could never pity you. I love you, Bella.”

_A/N: Sorry, cliffy and short chapter. We’re going to hear from Masen next … we’re going to backtrack to when he woke up until this moment and moving forward. Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading!_
Chapter Fourteen

Masen

Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to fall in love with Isabella Swan. She was everything I’d ever hoped for, ever dreamed of, wrapped up in a smart, snarky, sexy, beautiful package. Holding her in my arms was what I wished for and more and I knew I never wanted to let her go. Her body was curled against mine and she was sleeping so soundly, barely moving as I just watched her. Her rest was deep, and she barely roused even though I was pretty restless.

I was giddy as a school boy, seeing his first pair of tits when I had Bella in my bed, my room, my condo, nearly naked. Hell, Bella’s were the best set I’d ever seen. Her entire body was gorgeous, sensual, lithe and so very responsive to my touch. She was everything womanly and feeling her pressed against me made me realize that I couldn’t ever lose her.

Even if I had to abdicate my throne.

Though, Bella’s lineage of being partially Gevalian definitely sided in her favor. As far as I knew, she’d never been married and after our conversation, she was not a virgin, but her ex-boyfriend was a selfish bastard for not wanting to give pleasure to the most beautiful creature that I held in my arms. Two out of three of the criteria my mother imposed upon me isn’t that bad.

But, my mother was a hypocrite. She was pregnant with me when she walked down the aisle to marry my father. They just fudged the dates, saying I was born premature.

See? Hypocritical!

My eyes were drooping, and I held her closer, pressing a kiss to her neck, just below her ear. I could smell her subtle perfume, along with a delectable combination of vanilla and cinnamon from working in the bakery. I sighed against her skin. “I love you, chérie,” I whispered against her pulse point. She held me closer, her lips curling up into a soft smile, as if she’d heard me. Within moments, I was asleep.

However, when I woke up, I was confused. I looked next to me, expecting to see a sleep-rumpled Bella, but she was nowhere to be found and her side of the bed was cold to the touch. She’d been gone for a long time. I scrubbed my face, leaning against the headboard. My vision cleared up and I saw Bella’s dress on the couch. Her jewelry that I’d given her was on the nightstand. I shook my head, getting up and walking to the bathroom. I took a quick shower before making my way out to the kitchen, holding her pendant and earrings in my palm. Jake was sitting there, reading the paper. “Have you seen Bella?” I asked.

“She left,” he answered, arching a brow. “At like four this morning, wearing some of your clothes and looking very upset.”
“Do you know what happened?” I asked, confused by her disappearance. “And what were you doing up at four in the morning?”

“I went for a run,” he shrugged. “I need to keep this buff bod in shape for my wifey.” I rolled my eyes. “Anyway, I was on my way back when I saw Bella in the lobby. She was scurrying out of here, getting into a waiting cab and heading toward Brooklyn.” I gestured to him … encouraging him to go on. I knew he had more information. “So, pushy, your princeliship.”

“Don’t make me pummel you,” I growled.

“I’d love to see you try, Mase,” Jake laughed. “But, I do have more information. What kind of fed would I be if I left you hanging?” He got up, grabbing his computer. “Okay, I know you’re far more trusting than me, but I had her house bugged and a trace on her cell phone after that day when I fixed her lock. You know, just in case …”

“Just in case,” I grumbled. “Isn’t that illegal?”

“Technically, yes, but your mother was adamant that you be protected,” he said, giving me a shitty grin. “She called to remind me of that while you were shopping for Bella’s necklace. Anyway, this came up on her cell phone from an unknown cell number.” He pressed a few buttons on his laptop and I saw several scathing, hateful texts. I sneered at what Bella was being called and how manipulative her sister was being. I figured that out with the final text, at the mention of Charlie. “With that being said, I turned on the microphones at the house and had a friend of mine who works for the police department do a drive by.”

“Alice orchestrated this whole thing,” I spat. “What a cunt! She’s almost as bad as Lady Kathryn.”

“No, she’s worse,” Jake said, his lips tightening into a grim line. “Alice abhors her sister. A lot of it is stemmed from the fact that Bella actually knew their mother and had that mother-daughter relationship. Charlie Swan tried to be both parents to Alice, but he coddled her, and made her into the evil brat she is today. Most people would still be well-adjusted, but Mary Alice Swan has anti-social/sociopathic tendencies. She’s a below-average student with a druggie boyfriend. She always makes things about her when in reality, it’s not.”

“Do you think that she’s stealing money from her family … to pay for drugs?” I asked.

“As far as I can tell, she’s just dating a druggie. She’s not a druggie, just a raging bitch. But, who knows?” Jake snorted humorlessly. He looked at me, his eyes swirling with concern. “Are you pissed that Bella left?”

“Hearing why she did, I’m not mad now,” I shrugged, sipping my coffee. “But, it’s two steps forward and five steps back. Just when I think she’s opening up to me, she clams up.”

“A lot of it is due to Alice. Because of her selfish behavior, Bella has isolated herself to protect herself from being shit on,” Jake explained. “As weird as it sounds, I’ve studied this kind of behavior at Quantico. Bella’s being emotionally abused by her sister, forcing her to shut down.”

“What’s the best way to get her to realize that I’m not giving up on her?” I muttered, angry at Alice and her callousness toward her family.

He smiled softly. “Love her.”

“I already do, Jake,” I said, scrubbing my face. “I love her so much it hurts.”

“And you so want to be that knight in shining armor,” Jake teased. I blushed but nodded. “You
know, she’s going to freak out when she figures out the truth? Technically, yes, you’re a diplomat, but you’re fucking royalty, your princeliship. You’re the next in the line of succession to be king. You own a country.”

“I don’t own Gevalia, asshole,” I scoffed. “I rule Gevalia. There’s a distinct difference.” I got up, walking to the window and looking out at Central Park, staring at the fall foliage. “Do you really think she’s going to freak out?”

“Do I need to remind you about my not-so-subtle panic attack I had when I found out that I was rooming with a prince?” Jake deadpanned. I snorted, remembering how he paled and his breathing became irregular. I calmed him down with some Gevalian vodka and deep breathing exercises that I’d learned from the yoga my mother insisted I do to work on my balance and grace. “Granted, you’re just like the rest of us, but you have minions to do your bidding.”

“Including you,” I snickered. “I should get you a yellow outfit with overalls?”

“Really, Edward Anthony Masen Cullen?” Jake sneered. “Yellow is *not* my color.” He walked over to me, standing next to me. “I know your actions are noble. Be prepared, though, for Bella to have a not-so-subtle panic attack, or worse, she’ll never want to see you again.” My heart plummeted. “But, she’s … she’s been abused for so long by Alice and she’ll need to have her self-confidence be built back up.” He handed me a paper. “It shouldn’t take long, Mase. You two make a beautiful couple.”

Looking down, I saw a picture of Bella and I dancing in the Guggenheim on the *Page Six* section of the paper. It was a beautiful photo and love was emanating from both of us. It also identified me as a royal, predicting wedding bells. I didn’t know her well enough, but I could see us going down that alley. I’d love to see her on my arm, wearing a beautiful wedding dress and becoming my queen. “I need to see her, Jake,” I said. “I have to tell her.”

“I figured you’d want to do that,” Jake snickered. “The bakery is open, but according to my police buddy, Bella’s not working. Charlie is manning the till while the devil-spawn is baking.”

“Let me get my coat,” I said, getting up and pouring the coffee down the sink. “I need to … I have to see her, Jake. I know she feels something for me, but …”

“Her bitch sister is tainting what you have,” Jake growled. “Come on. Let’s go get the girl.”

We rode down to the garage and Jake drove me to Brooklyn. When we arrived at the bakery, it was filled with customers. I smiled, happy that business was improving, but it was like putting on a band aid on a gunshot wound. I stood in line, waiting my turn until I got to the counter. Charlie looked at me, his eyes wary and drawn. “I need to speak to Bella,” I said softly. “She left a few things at my condo …”

“She’s sick,” Charlie muttered. “Exhausted, really.”

From the back of the bakery, I heard her sister. “Her legs hurt. That’s what happens when you spread your legs like whore,” Alice cackled. She came out with a tray of muffins, an evil grin on her face.

I bit my tongue, glowering at her. “What did you send her?” I asked, knowing full well what she’d sent her sister.

“Alice! I can’t believe you!” Charlie sneered. “I’m ashamed of you. I didn’t raise you to act this way. You’re treading a fine line, little girl. One more snide comment and you’re out on your ass,
fending for yourself.”

“You treat your family that way?” I spat. Alice just shrugged, putting the muffins into the display with a smug grin on her face. I adjusted my stature, becoming the confident and arrogant royal I was. I looked back at Charlie, “My name is Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, the next in line for the crown of Gevalia.”

“Fuck me,” Charlie sputtered. He stumbled as he tried to stand, but nearly fell.

“Sorry, sir. I’m very much straight,” I quipped. And in love with Bella.

“Do I need to bow, or something?” Charlie whispered.

“No, Charlie, you don’t. I know you are not well,” I said. I turned my glare to Alice. Her eyes were comically wide, and her mouth was hanging open. I arched a brow before blinking back to Charlie. “I’m here for several months, acting as a diplomat and dignitary for my country.”

Alice’s evil cackle spread through the bakery. “So, Bella really was a whore! Did she give you her royal virginity? It’s been so long since she’s gotten any there’s probably cobwebs in her pussy!”

I bit back a growl, narrowing my eyes at Alice. “I find your behavior unattractive and rude. Your sister has given up everything for you and your family. Would it kill you to show some common decency and respect toward the person who is ensuring you have food on your table and clothes on your back?” Alice’s eyes widened, and she looked ashamed, briefly. I pinched my nose, turning my attention back to Charlie. “Please, can I speak with her?”

Charlie reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. “She’s upstairs, talking to Angela and trying to get some rest since … since my other daughter decided to play a cruel trick on her,” Charlie sneered. He looked at Alice with complete disdain and for the first time, she looked fearful. “Go on up.”

“Thank you, sir,” I said, taking the keys and nodding respectfully to him.

“Whatever you need, your majesty,” he said.

“Please, I’m just Masen,” I snickered. Charlie blushed and nodded, hobbling back to where Alice was standing and dragging her into the kitchen. I took the keys and made my way up the stairs. Unlocking the door, I heard Angela speaking to Bella and my girl shattering in tears. Then, I heard the sound of a newspaper and I cringed, knowing what was happening. I couldn’t really understand what was being said, but I heard Bella jump up and ran toward the bathroom. My heart broke in two as I listened to her retch.

“Bells, he’s looking at you like you were his sun and stars. Ben looks at me like this. Ben loves me. Masen must love you,” Angela said softly.

“Or he pities me,” Bella grumped. I shook my head, making my way into the tiny apartment, seeing a bundle of blankets on a couch, with the newspaper sitting on top of a pillow. This is where she sleeps? Fuck that!

I looked up and saw Bella leaning heavily against Angela. Her face was shattered, puffy from crying. “I don’t pity you, love,” I said tenderly. Bella’s eyes shot up and she looked so lost, so sad, but still the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen. I tried to keep my face determined, but I was confused by the bedding on the couch. “I could never pity you. I love you, Bella.”

More tears welled in Bella’s eyes and they spilled onto her pink cheeks. Angela kissed her cheek,
whispering something in her ear. Bella nodded, her arms moving to hug her midsection. Angela made her way to me. “I know you’d never intentionally hurt her. This was all the bitch’s doing, but you hurt her? I’ll cut off your royal balls and wear them as earrings,” Angela said, tapping my shoulder. “Good luck.”

“Duly noted, Angela. I would never hurt her. I meant it when I said I love her,” I said. Angela glowered at me, her eyes narrowed as she stared at me through her funky glasses. “Seriously, you’re freaking me out, Angela.”

“Just checking,” she said, a smile spreading over her face. “Now, I’m going to save Chuck from the devil child. Maybe he used his cane to knock some sense into that bitch!” She turned and left Bella and me in her living room.

The apartment was small, with worn furniture, but it was homey and comfortable. Bella made her way to the couch, which was made up as a bed and she curled up under a homemade blanket. She looked at the picture, trying to make sense of everything. “You’re a prince,” she said. “Royalty.”

“I am, Bella,” I said, sitting down at an old recliner, leaning forward and wanting to take her hands. Everything about her body language indicated she did not want to be touched. “I’m the next in line to rule Gevalia, after my mother either dies or abdicates her throne due to illness.”

“You’re going to be king.” Bella whispered. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Why did you lie?”

“I never lied, chérie,” I said. “I am on a diplomatic mission. I’m acting in my mother’s stead and I was looking for my brother, Prince Emmett McCarty Cullen. He’s been attending school, university, in the states and he’s gone a bit wild.”

“Did you find him?” Bella asked.

“Yes, the day you had your cat nap in the park,” I chuckled. “Jake, who’s my bodyguard and handler from the United States government, he told me that his resources found my brother in jail. He’s been deported back to Gevalia and it will be a long time, if ever, until he’s welcomed back to the states.”

“And our relationship?” she whispered. “Was it all a ruse?”

“No, Bella. I’ve grown to love you so much,” I said. I couldn’t bear the distance, so I sat next to her and took her hand. “None of this is a joke. I can see so much determination, fire and love you have for your father and your family. In the times we spent together, I could see the happy woman you could be, if not for the burdens you’re facing.”

“How much do you know?” she asked, her eyes narrowed.

“I know almost all of it,” I answered. “I know that you’re struggling financially due to medical expenses incurred from your father’s illness. You’re past due on numerous bills and you’re looking for an investor to save the bakery. None of that matters to me, though.”

“It matters to me, Masen,” she said. “I’m the only person who is capable of supporting my family. My dad pushes himself too hard as it is, and it could cause his disease to flare up. My sister …”

“Don’t even get me started on her,” I growled. “She’s an ungrateful bitch who takes your kindness for granted. I heard what she called you and she couldn’t be farther from the truth.” Bella shot me a look of disbelief. “I’m going to be perfectly frank with you, chérie. I do not give my love away easily. I’m usually the analytical one. I look at every problem or situation at multiple angles. How can I fix it? How can I approach it and make it better? I’m also not one to trust easily.”
“Me, neither,” Bella snorted, looking down at her hand that was cradled in my own. “With Alice as my sister, she finds weakness and exploits it at every turn.”

“And with my minor celebrity, most women look at me like a cash cow,” I said, threading our fingers together. Bella looked at me, her eyes impossibly sad. “But, with that being said, I can’t stay away from you. I know what my heart wants and it’s you. You are not a whore, like Alice said. You are entitled to be a young woman, living her life and having dreams, happiness, goals and love.” I reached in my pocket and pulled out her pendant. “Why did you take this off?”

“I don’t deserve it,” she said, her voice trembling. “With the money you spent on that, I could have …”

“You could have saved your family’s bakery,” I said. “You may not be able to do so, but I can.”

“Masen, no …” Bella breathed.

“I know what you’re dealing with and I want to be your investor,” I said. “I’m not saying this because I love you. I’m saying it because you deserve to live your life, not struggling to keep yourself afloat.” I moved closer, lifting her legs and cupping her cheek. “I can see what this is doing to you, chérie.”

“I can’t lose the bakery,” she sobbed. “I can’t lose everything.”

“It’s not just on your shoulders, Bella,” I said, holding her close. She clung to me and cried, her tears soaking my shirt. “When you love someone, you help shoulder that burden. Your dad does it and you do it for him. Now? It’s my turn to take over the load. Please, Bella?”

“I don’t know,” she said, idly playing with the buttons of my shirt. “I can’t … it’s not your problem, your majesty.”

“Don’t,” I sighed. “I liked it when we were just Masen and Bella.”

“But, we’re not. You’re a prince and I’m a nobody,” she shrugged.

“Not to me. Never to me. You’re everything to me,” I said, cupping her chin, and staring into her watery espresso-colored eyes. I leaned down, brushing my lips with hers. She pulled back, her hand covering her mouth. “Why are you pulling away?”

“I just threw up,” she said, her voice muffled by her hand.

“I don’t really fucking care,” I said, moving her hand and kissing her again. I wanted her to feel that what I wanted for her was real. I loved her. I would always love her. My lips were tender against hers and she melted against me, clinging to my jacket. I cupped her head and held her to my body, losing myself in her soft lips and warm body. We broke apart, panting heavily. “When you love someone, you do what you can to help.” I caressed her cheeks, smiling softly at her. “I love you, Bella.” I took her hand and pressed it to my chest. “My heart is yours.” With shaking fingers, I put her pendant back on. “Think of this as a physical representation of my heart, chérie. I’m yours and I don’t want that to change.”

“I just don’t want you to resent me,” she said. “Or hate me.”

“That would never happen, Bella,” I whispered. I shifted as I felt a spring poke me in the ass. “How can you sleep on this thing?”

“When you work sixteen-hour days, anything will do,” she muttered, shrugging as if she was used
to it. She sighed heavily. “I need to think about you investing. I don’t want you to do this because of our relationship.” I could see her nose wrinkled and her expression clearly said that she was thinking about Alice’s words from her texts. “Most normal people would buy flowers, not financially bail someone out.”

“I can get you flowers, cherie,” I quipped. She rolled her eyes and sat up, her fingers gliding over her pendant. She looked torn. “What is it?”

“I’m afraid to keep this. Alice might …” she began.

“She touches it, I’ll have her arrested for grand larceny,” I snapped. “She’s been a royal pain in my ass since I’ve met her.”

“Fitting,” Bella chuckled, looking at me. “Seriously, though. I need to think about this. I don’t want you getting in trouble, Masen. I really don’t. And I don’t want anyone to think that I’m whoring myself out to save the bakery.”

“Bella,” I sighed, pressing my forehead to hers. “You are not a whore. I don’t even want you to think that … I don’t even remotely think of you that way. I love you. I want to share all that I have with you. I want to be your boyfriend, take you out on dates and spend time with you. You are a vision of beauty, grace and I want to be with you because of your intelligence, your kindness and dedication to your family. Even if you don’t want me that way, as a boyfriend, I still want to help you out with the bakery.” Her eyes widened. “Does that change your opinion, cherie?”

“I …” she trailed off. “I still need to think, Masen. I just can’t … this doesn’t just impact me. It impacts my dad, my sister.” I scowled, not happy that Alice would benefit from my bail out. “I know you don’t like her. I don’t either. She’s a bitch and I don’t think I can ever forgive her for what she said about me, but she’s still my family.”

“She should be held accountable for how she treats you,” I grumped.

“Dad threatened to kick her out when she turns eighteen,” Bella said, her fingers gliding over her pendant. “Don’t hate me, Masen, but I need to think, and I need time.” She looked at me, her eyes swirling with concern. “You dropped a pretty huge fucking bomb on me with you being royalty, and that you loved me. I …” she sighed. “I barely love myself, Masen. I don’t know how to love anyone else. I’m terrified that when I do open up, you’ll leave me, and I’ll be …”

I pressed my lips to hers. “I won’t leave you. Even if I have to abdicate the throne, I’m not leaving you,” I whispered.

“I can’t ask you to do that. You’d resent me like Alice does,” she pouted, fat tears streaking down her pale cheeks.

“Never, cherie,” I said. “But, I’ll honor your request for time and to think. You have my cell phone number. You call me when you’re ready to talk.” I hugged her tightly and from the grip she had on me, she didn’t want me to go, but she needed to think this through. She was being the analytical one. I was the one allowing my heart to do the talking. Pulling back, I kissed her forehead. “I love you, Bella. Whatever you decide, that won’t change either.” I caressed her cheek and got up, heading back downstairs. I looked at Charlie, who was sitting at a table with Angela at the till and Alice, who was subdued and almost broken in the back, crying almost hysterically. Serves you right, bitch. “Charlie, I’ve spoken to Bella regarding the bakery. I know what you’re dealing with in regard to your financial situation.” I slid out a card with my number on it. “Call me, please. I want to give you and Bella a chance to …” Charlie took the number and nodded. I also handed him his keys and turned to leave. It felt wrong to leave, but I’d honor my word.
However, I didn’t know if she’d call me and that caused me to have a heart attack.

Would she call?

Would she let me love her?

Would she love me back?

“How did it go, Mase?” asked Jake. I looked at him and he saw my pained expression. “Oh, man … Masen …”

“She didn’t dump me, but she needs to think. You were right, though,” I muttered. “She’s scared that I’m going to hurt her like Alice does. But, I won’t. I want her to believe me.”

“Time. She needs time, Masen,” Jake said softly.

“And that’s what I’m giving her, Jake,” I sighed. “Just go, please, before I rush up those stairs and never let her go.”

“Got it, boss,” Jake said, pulling away from the bakery. My heart lurched, and I said a prayer that Bella would realize that I wasn’t going to give up on her.

Ever.

A/N: You still with me? Masen is giving her what she needs, but it’s shattering him. Up next will be Bella and a conversation with Charlie and with Angela as she wraps her head around what Masen said.
Chapter 15

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

You still with me? Masen is giving her what she needs, but it’s shattering him. Up next will be Bella and a conversation with Charlie and with Angela as she wraps her head around what Masen said.

Chapter Fifteen

Bella

I sat on the couch after Masen left, holding the pendant in my hand. Tears fell down my cheeks, and I tried to wrap my head around everything that was going on. Masen was a freaking prince. He was royalty. Why would he want to be with a poor baker’s daughter? I meant it when I said that I was a nobody. I was treated like shit by my sister and I barely loved myself. How could I love someone else?

Shaking my head, I thought about his insistence on becoming our investor. Money and relationships … not a good combo. I didn’t want to … I was afraid that if something happened and he didn’t get his investment back, he’d sue our family. For certain, we’d be out on the streets.

I got up, grabbing a notebook from the kitchen and I made a t-chart of pros and cons of Masen helping us out of our financial dire straits. The pros far outweighed the cons. But, the biggest con was the possibility of losing him. He’d made me feel so special. I didn’t want to lose that relationship. If I was even capable of having that relationship. Hell, I mucked that up when I left this morning.

God, I suck.

No, Alice sucks. She’s the one who was planting all this bullshit in your head that you’re a whore.

I added that to the con list and I pushed the paper away. I curled up, hugging my pillow and quietly sobbing until I heard the front door open. I sat up, watching as Alice stomped toward her bedroom. Her face was puffy, and she’d be crying. I looked back, watching my dad as he followed her. He closed the door, walking over to his recliner, sitting down stiffly. He looked at me, his eyes swirling with concern and anger. “What happened, Dad?” I asked.

“Bells, I’m going to tell you what I told Alice. She’s turning eighteen in a matter of weeks. If she cannot pull her weight around here, she’s out. I already told her about how I was now considering going to the police for her stealing money from petty cash for her homecoming dress, which she didn’t even attend.”

“What?” I growled. “That’s total crap! She could have returned the dress and the money!”

“She returned the dress and kept the money,” Dad sneered. “Her boyfriend was suspended, supposedly. He couldn’t even go to the dance. So, yeah.” He looked at me. “Things are going to change here, Bells. You deserve happiness and since you’ve come home to take care of me, you
haven’t had any happiness. You would get up before dawn, work like a dog and be berated by your younger sister. I’m so sorry.” His voice cracked, and he began crying. I shot up from the couch, hugging him tightly. I could feel his body tremble. “You shouldn’t have to shoulder this alone, Bella.”

“I do this because I love you, Daddy,” I whispered, rubbing his back. “I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

“But, at what cost?” he asked. He sat back, taking my face into his hands. “Masen told me about his offer to be our investor.”

“I told him that I needed think about it,” I said, sitting back on my haunches.

“I understand why you want to think about it, but I’m still the owner of the Swan Family Bakery,” he said, taking my hands in his. “I told him yes.”

“DAD!” I growled, standing up and glaring at him. “How … I … I can’t believe this!”

“Let me finish, baby girl,” Dad said sternly. “I showed him your plans and he said that he’d do some research, finding contractors and vendors to give us a good deal. While the shop is closed down for renovations, you’re taking time to yourself. Living your life. Sleeping in a real fucking bed.”

“You’re kicking me out?” I whimpered.

“No, Bells,” he murmured. “I’m giving you a chance to be happy. Does being with Masen make you happy?”

“Very much so, but he’s a prince. I’m a nobody,” I wailed.

“I beg to differ. You’re my princess, my baby girl,” Dad said, arching a brow. “Masen offered a place for you.”

“As his whore,” I sneered, staring out the window.

“God damn it!” Dad snarled. “You are not a god damned whore!” He stood up shakily and turned me around. “He gave me a couple of options. You could stay in his condo, in your own room. Or there’s a small condo in the same building, that could be yours.” I scoffed. “I know how this looks, but you need a break from this, a break from your sister, a break from me.”


“No. You need to get away from Alice’s toxic attitude, her hateful, spiteful words and demeaning actions,” Dad said, taking my face in his hands. “While we closed up the bakery, I laid down some rules for her. In order for her to stay, she needs to step up. With the bakery closed, we don’t need to worry about those shifts. Alice is grounded until her birthday. Only school and home. No boyfriend, no extracurricular activities. Nothing. She also has to help with my care. She crosses that boundary, she’s out. Nothing but the clothes on her back and I call the cops, reporting the stolen money.”

“What did she say?” I asked.

“She didn’t say anything. It was Masen that gave her a wakeup call. He told her what to expect living on the streets and in jail,” Dad smirked. “He was, um, quite graphic.” I blinked, shocked at
this news. “Now, you don’t have to make any decisions about what Masen is offering. But, in my opinion, you need a break, Bella. I love you so much and I hate that you’re breaking your back.” He smiled softly. “Please, think about it.” With a kiss to my forehead, he shuffled to the kitchen.

“Will you be alright, Dad?” I whispered.

“Of course, baby,” he said. “Why?”

“I just need some air. I’ll be back later,” I said, picking up a sweatshirt and a set of keys. I made my way down the stairs, walking through the neighborhood to the park where I dozed off on Masen’s shoulder. I found the same bench, curling up on it and looking at the kids who played on the playground – the same playground that I brought Alice when she was sweet and kind.

Not anymore. My sister was my own nemesis. She made me feel like I was nothing, unworthy of anything of value. She tarnished the relationship that I had with Masen, calling me a whore. In a way, I still feel like I am a whore. With Masen bailing us out and offering me a place to stay in his condo … I’d be available to him …

“You really shouldn’t be out by yourself,” I heard behind me. I turned and saw Jacob, Masen’s friend and bodyguard.

“Shouldn’t you be with …?” I trailed, unsure what to call Masen.

“He’s moping at home. He wanted me to watch over you,” he said. “May I?” He gestured to the bench. I nodded, hugging my knees. “Look, I’m not going to impart my wisdom …”

“Good to know,” I snorted.

“You didn’t let me finish,” Jake chuckled. “But, you’re going to hear it anyway.” I scoffed. “Masen may be a prince, but he’s got to be one of the most amazing men I’ve ever met. He’s smart, funny, down-to-earth and loyal. I also know that your sister is a sociopathic, antisocial bitch, who is so selfish that she doesn’t even realize that she’s got it good. Bella, I know that you’re struggling with the truth of who Masen is, but he adores you. I’ve known him for a long time. He’s going to be the best man at my wedding. He’s my best friend and I love him like a brother. He would not do what he’s doing for you and your family to someone who he thinks is a whore.” Jake nudged my shoulder. “Is that what you’re thinking about?”

I sniffled, nodding. “I’m terrified that he’s going … that he’ll resent me.”

“I doubt that, Bella,” Jake said, taking off his jacket and draping it over my shoulders. “You’re shivering.”

“Thank you,” I whispered.

“I know you don’t know me from Adam, but I hope that we can be friends. I’m saying this, as a friend, don’t discount Masen. He’s good people. The best man I’ve ever met, besides my dad,” Jake said, smiling widely. “And he loves you so much. He’s not going anywhere.”

“He’ll leave for Gevalia eventually,” I muttered.

“He’s not going to give up on you, Bella. But, I’m curious, have you spoken to someone about your emotions, about your feelings?” Jake asked.

“It’s not like I can afford it. Dad and Alice are on the insurance. I’m not. I canceled the insurance when I got hired at the school in Greenwich, using their benefits. I couldn’t afford that, even with
Cobra coverage,” I said. “I’m not crazy.”

“I never said you were, Bella,” Jake said softly. “You told Mase that you weren’t sure if you loved yourself, let alone someone else. A statement like that … you sound depressed.”

“I’m overwhelmed,” I said. “I’m lost. I just … I don’t know what to do. With Masen’s offer, I can’t help but think … What if he wants me to be …?”

“He wouldn’t do that,” Jake spat out. “Masen respects you, loves you. This is Alice’s influence. You’re not a whore. But, Bella, it broke Masen’s heart to know that you were sleeping on a couch. It broke his heart that you were shouldering this alone. You need a break.”

“You hate me,” I muttered.

“I don’t hate you, Bella. I don’t like that you insinuated that Masen would just want you to fuck,” Jake said coldly. “But, that’s not you. I know it’s not.” He put his hand on my shoulder. “Consider talking to someone, even just a friend.” I nodded, unsure how I’d pay for it and I didn’t want to burden Angela with my problems. “Now, it’s getting late and cold. I want to make sure you’re home safe.”

“I’m sorry about what I said about Masen,” I said. “I know he wouldn’t … you’re right. It is Alice. She may be my sister, but she’s so awful. I was so excited when my mom told me she was pregnant with a girl. I would have a built-in best friend. When she was younger, she was nice, but when she started middle school, it’s like she turned into a bitch. She blamed me for everything. It only got worse as we got older. Her digs became more personal.”

“She’s the one who’s wrong, Bella. Not you. Your dad obviously did the best he could after your mom died. He loved and provided for you. It was not your fault your mom died. It wasn’t hers, either. But, it doesn’t mean that Alice should treat you that way,” Jake said. “It’s common human decency.” He growled, his eyes flashing angrily. “If I could, I’d fucking arrest her for being a bitch.”

“You can do that?” I asked.

“No, I can’t do that. Not legally,” Jake snickered. “I could arrest her for the money she stole from you.”

“You’re a cop,” I stated.

“FBI agent,” he nodded. “I’m on loan to diplomatic security for the duration of Masen’s stay. Come on, Cinderbella. It’s cold. You’re wearing my coat and I don’t want my balls to shrivel up. I plan to impregnate my fiancée on our wedding day. I can’t do that if my boys are frozen.”

“Too much information, Jake,” I said. He shrugged, getting up from the bench and we walked to my apartment. Unlocking the door, I handed Jake back his coat. “Are you going back to see Masen?”

“He left me with explicit instructions to stay near you,” Jake said.

“He’s far more important than me,” I argued.

“Mase would disagree,” Jake quipped. “Look, just think about his offer. I know that Charlie accepted his help with the bakery. But, let him in, Cinderbella. He loves you so much. I’ve never seen him like this.”
“I’ll try,” I nodded. “Jake, thank you. And tell Masen, when you go back to him, that I’m thankful for his help. I just need more time.”

“I understand, Cinderbella,” he chuckled.

“Why do you call me that?” I asked.

He shrugged. “It fits. I call Masen ‘princeliship.’ He hates, but he knows that if I give you a nickname, you’re accepted in my mind.” He hugged me. “Sleep well and I’ll talk to you soon.” I ducked inside and saw Alice on the couch. Dad was sitting, his arms crossed.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“You’re getting your room back,” Dad growled. “Alice will take the couch until you make your decision. Alice, what do you want to say to your sister?”

“Don’t, Dad. I don’t want to hear it. It won’t be sincere,” I said. I looked at my sister, contempt oozing from my gaze. “She’s not worth it. I’m tired. I’m going to sleep, enjoying my bed for the first time in four years.” I turned on my heel and into the room I’d once shared with my sister. The room was a mess and her bed was disgusting, covered in food and other shit. I grabbed a pillow, making a pallet on the floor. I curled up and I fell asleep, almost as soon as my head hit the pillow.

xx AMDFT xx

The next morning, I got up with the birds. I showered, and I checked on my dad. He was sleeping. Alice was tossing and turning on the couch, grumbling under her breath about the spring that normally dug into my ass, but was poking hers. I crept to the table, picking up my cell phone. I saw a text on my phone.

_I know I’d said I’d give you space, but I just talked to Jake. He told me about your conversation. Regardless of anything, whether you tell me to fuck off or whatever, I’ll always love you. That will never ever change. You’re my everything, cherie. I’ll be waiting for your call … _ ~ Masen

_I’m grateful for everything you’ve done, Masen. Truly. I just … I’m afraid. So very afraid. I need to talk to Angela. I need to wrap my head around everything. Tonight? _ ~ Bella

_I’ll be waiting, love. I’d wait an eternity for you, Ms. Swan. I hope you know that. _ ~ Masen

_Smooth talker, your majesty _ ~ Bella

_Only with you, cherie _ ~ Masen

_Have fun with Angela. I love you _ ~ Masen

I didn’t know how to respond, but I did care for him. I sent a heart emoticon. As I sent that, Angela sent me a text, asking how my conversation went with Masen. I texted back, asking if she wanted to meet up. I needed her guidance and her friendship. We met up at a local diner, ordering coffee and greasy diner food. “Bella, I love you girl, but you look like shit,” Angela said, sipping her coffee.

“Thanks, Ang,” I replied, rolling my eyes. “To be honest, I feel like shit. I couldn’t sleep after Masen left and I was emotional wreck.” I spun my coffee cup on the table. “Dad said that there would be changes. He forced Alice onto the couch and me into her room. I couldn’t sleep on that bed. I need to … I just have to get away from this environment.”
“Leaving Masen?” Angela asked. I shrugged. “Bella, I’m going to be perfectly honest with you. You walk away from Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, you’d be throwing away a dream. The man loves you. The world can see that from that photo. Is your trepidation about his identity due to what Alice called you?”

“I guess,” I muttered.

“You’re not that, Angela. You never could be that,” Angela hissed. “You’re the kindest, most loving person I’d ever met. Not many people would have done what you did for your dad. Giving up your dream? Moving back home? Dealing with the bullshit?” She reached across the table, squeezing my arm. “Maybe Masen is your reward for being so selfless.”

“He’s not staying here forever,” I said.

“Are you trying to sabotage this?” Angela asked, arching a brow over her glasses. “Bella, you’ve been alone and carrying the load for so long. You deserve happiness. You deserve Masen. You’re not unworthy of him. If anything, he’s not worthy of you.” I gave her a glower. “Seriously, he doesn’t deserve all of your awesomeness. But, I think you should give him a chance, Bells. Not everyone is out to get you. He said he loved you. Do you love him? Do you love Masen?” I blinked at her, my heart stammering against my ribcage. “And if he left tomorrow, would you be okay?”

“No, I wouldn’t be okay,” I breathed.

“Do you love him?” she pressed. I bit my lip as our food was delivered. “Bells? Do you love him?”

“Yes,” I whispered.

“Then, you have your answer,” Angela said.

“There’s one thing that I’m struggling with,” I sighed. “Masen offered me a place to stay with him while the renovations are being completed. I don’t … I can’t stay at the apartment, but I’m hesitant to stay with him. My dad is adamant that I take a break. Alice will help with his care. Supposedly.”

“Okay, that I understand,” Angela nodded. “My apartment is one bedroom, but I do have a comfortable pull out. You’re more than welcome to stay with me.”

“Really?” I breathed.

“Really. And I’ve got a present from your boyfriend,” she smirked. “A whole new wardrobe.”

“What?” I asked. “I mean … what?”

“I worked with Tia and replenished your clothes, Bella. After Alice completely ruined your clothes, you needed something,” Angela said, an understanding smile on her face. “Masen bankrolled it all. I think you’ll like what I picked out for you.”

“Thank you, Ang,” I whispered.

“Don’t thank me. Thank Masen,” she said. “You know what you need to do, sweetie.” She reached for my purse, handing me my cell phone. “Call him, Bella.”

With shaking fingers, I pulled up his contact information. I blinked up to her. She smiled, sipping her coffee. I pressed the button, holding the phone to my ear. He picked up almost immediately, his velvety and accented voice washed over me. “Cherie …”
“Masen … I’m sorry,” I breathed. “I’m sorry about being so stubborn.”

“It’s one of the many things I love about you, Bella,” he chuckled.

“And your kindness is one of the many things that I love about you, your majesty,” I sniffled.

A/N: Sorry … I’m a cliffie whore. LOL! We’re going to pick up with Masen with the phone call and moving forward in their relationship. Thanks for reading!
Chapter 16

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

We’re going to pick up with Masen with the phone call and moving forward in their relationship.

Chapter Sixteen

Masen

I was working out, running in the fitness center of my building. Jake was doing some strength training. I was trying not to think about the beautiful woman who had captured my heart, my soul. All I wanted to do was to call her, steal her away and solve all her problems. I’d discussed one problem with Charlie in regard to be the investor for the bakery. I’d already put wheels into motion when I contacted my financial advisor in Gevalia, transferring money from my private funds for the renovations.

However, when my father discovered the movement of funds and it made for an interesting call at like three this morning.

“What are you doing, Masen?” he asked, his tone wry when he woke me out of restless sleep.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Father,” I said, scrubbing my face.

“My financial advisor said that you were doing some shifting around in your accounts,” he chuckled. “What’s going on?”

“Don’t get upset, but I’ve met someone,” I replied, a crooked smile spreading over my face.

“Are you paying a hooker?” Dad hissed. “Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, don’t make me come over to the states to tan your hide!”

“What?! Fuck! No! Dad, are you kidding me?” I growled. “This girl, Isabella, is the farthest thing from a hooker imaginable. She’s a baker and sole blood winner for her family. Her father is sick with Parkinson’s disease and they’ve accrued a large amount of debt due to his diagnosis. I’ve already spoken with her father. I’m investing in their bakery.”

“Giving her money?” he asked. “Masen … I don’t like this.”

“I’m investing. Her father was adamant that it was a loan,” I argued, sitting up and leaning forward on my knees. “I know you think I’m being foolish.”

“Masen, you are never capable of being foolish,” Dad sighed. “I’m just worried that you’re going to be hurt or …”

“Oh, I’ll become tabloid fodder, like Emmett,” I grumbled. “Dad, everything about this girl … she’s smart, funny, selfless and beautiful. Did you see the picture in the newspaper?”

“I did and I hid it from your mother – she’s on a tear about Emmett’s choices, anxious to lash out at you. You dancing with some unnamed beauty? She’d come kick your ass. Though, even though it
didn’t show her face, but she seems like a perfect match for you,” Dad breathed. “Is she Gevalian?”

“She is. Not a hundred percent, but she’s a majority,” I breathed. “And she’s never been married.”

“You love her,” Dad said, his smile evident.

“So much it hurts,” I answered, picturing Bella in my arms. I looked to where she lay in my bed two nights ago. I remembered her warm body curled against me, how relaxed she was in my arms. “Dad, you have to trust me. I’m not going into this blind. I want to do this. I need to do this.”

“Who am I to deny you, son?” he chuckled. “I’d like to know more about Isabella.”

“Understandable, but not now. It’s three in the morning and I’d like to go back to sleep,” I replied. “I’d forgotten about the time change. It’s nearly one in the afternoon here,” Dad said. “I love you, son.”

“Before we hang up, how’s Emmett?” I asked.

“He’s … he’s struggling. Detox has taken a lot out of him and he’s really sick,” Dad answered, his voice more somber. “He was admitted to a nearby hospital.”

“Is he okay?” I questioned, panicking over my brother’s choices.

“He is now. Weak as a newborn kitten but getting better. Suffice it to say, his recovery will take longer than we anticipated,” Dad explained.

“Have you seen him?”

“I’m the only one he’ll see,” Dad sighed. “He refuses to see Esme, despite her desire to see him and check on him. And he’s pissed at you.”

“Understandable. I pretty much handcuffed him to a bed before sending him on the private plane back to Gevalia,” I snorted. “If you talk to him, please tell Emmett that I love him. I’m thinking about him.”

“I will, son,” Dad answered. “Now, get some sleep, Masen.”

“I’ll try. Love you,” I said, hanging up the phone and looking out the window. It was still dark. I could see the lights of Manhattan twinkling over the trees of Central Park. I sighed, fully awake after my phone call with my father. I got up and pulled up my itinerary on my laptop. I did some work until my alarm went off. I changed into my workout clothes, sending a text to Bella. Much to my surprise, she was up and responded. She hadn’t shut me out. We texted for a few moments until she sent me a heart emoticon.

Jake and I went to the fitness center, working out for nearly two hours, leading up to now. I was a sweaty, disgusting mess when my cell phone rang. I saw Bella’s number flash across the screen. She’s calling me. I damn near dropped the phone with my sweaty palms as I slid my thumb across the screen. “Cherie …” I panted.

“Masen,” she sniffled. “I’m sorry.”

“Cherie,” I chuckled, trying to laugh away my nerves.

“Cherie, my princess,” she cried. “And your kindness is one of the many things that I love about you, your majesty,” she cried. “I’m
“Please, love. Don’t apologize,” I said, sitting down on one of the benches. “And please don’t cry. Can I see you?”

“I’m going to Angela’s place. She’s letting me stay with her. I can’t stay at my apartment. My father said that Alice was taking over his care and all but forced me to take a break,” Bella murmured. “I’ll text you the address. We do need to talk, and I’d rather do it face-to-face.”

Jake stood in front of me, waving his phone in my face. I took it from him, reading the text from the ambassador. “Shit,” I spat.

“What?” Bella asked.

“I have to work. Originally, I had the day off, but I have a meeting at the consulate regarding a trade agreement. I have to go, love,” I said. “Can I see you tonight? Please?”

“Yeah,” she said. “Good luck with the trade thing. And thank you for what you’re doing for the bakery, Masen.”

“Is it open today?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. I got up early and left, meeting up with Angela. I needed some advice,” she murmured. “I’m going to check on the bakery and then, move in with Angela.”

“You could stay with me,” I said, somewhat petulantly.

“I could, but I need to do some of this on my own. Angela is offering me her pullout sofa,” she chuckled.

“You shouldn’t have to sleep on a couch, cherie,” I growled. “You deserve a bed. Not a couch. Not a pallet on the floor. A bed, with fluffy pillows and warm bedding.” I heard her sniffle again. “Please, don’t cry.”

“Why are you so adamant on me sleeping in a bed? I haven’t slept in one in almost four years, Masen,” she argued.

“That’s why!” I wailed. “Bella, before you move in with Angela, please talk to me. Please, love?”

“Okay,” she said. “Tonight?”

“Tonight. I’ll pick you up. If you don’t like what I have to say, I’ll drive you back to Angela’s. Okay?” I said, leaning forward and gripping my cell phone in my hand. “I love you, Bella. Always.”

“I love you, too, Masen,” she said, her voice soft and sweet.

She hung up and I ended the call, staring at the screen of my phone. “Mase, you’ve got to go to the consulate. They’re pinging my phone like crazy,” Jake said.

“Text them back and say I’ll be there in an hour. I have to shower, shave and get dressed,” I said. We left the fitness center and I got ready, dressing in a suit, looping my crest over my chest. Jake and I ate quickly, driving to the Gevalian Consulate. I was led into the ambassador’s office, which would act at as my office during the negotiations that needed to be hashed out so urgently. I spent the entire day in that office, finalizing the precarious trade agreement with the United States.
government, the Italian ambassador and an emissary from Brazil. By late afternoon, things were finalized, and I had a raging migraine.

“You okay, Mase?” Jake asked as the dignitaries left.

“I feel like my head is about explode,” I grumbled, rubbing my temples. “Have you checked on Bella?”

“The bakery was open, but Charlie was informing everyone of changes that were coming,” Jake chuckled. “It was kind of a closing-before-reopening party. Bella was there with Angela, selling the remaining goods at a discount. Alice came after school. She was dressed pretty shabbily. Charlie threw away all her clothes, makeup and sold her laptop. The man was pissed at his daughter. She looked pretty ashamed, too, but I don’t know if it’s an act. The girl’s pretty fucking manipulative.”

“If you had to take a guess, would you think that it’s an act?” I pressed.

“My guess is yes,” Jake grumbled. “Now, Bella listened to your suggestion about not moving in with Angela. She’s anxious to see you.”

“I want out of this monkey suit,” I said, plucking my crest off my body. He nodded, his nose wrinkled at his own black suit. We went back to condo after I made arrangements with the consulate to clear my schedule for the next couple of days. I needed to begin the proceedings for the bakery, transferring the money to pay off their mortgage for the bakery and their apartment and to give them the money to begin renovations. Pulling on a pair of black jeans and a white button-down, I slid my leather jacket on my body. Jake and I got into the car, driving to Brooklyn and parking in front of the bakery. Stepping inside, I saw Bella working on cleaning the front counter. “You should be on a break, Miss Swan. Not working.”

She blinked up at me, her face pale and dark circles under her eyes. However, she smiled, bright as a sunny day as she made her way to me, jumping into my arms. I held her so close, burying my nose into her soft curls. “Masen…” she breathed. I pulled back, taking her heart-shaped face in my hands. She bit her lip and I removed it with my thumb. She tilted her head up, gripping my lapels. “Please, kiss me.” Her voice was barely louder than a breath. I dipped my head, caressing her soft lips with mine. She relaxed, moving closer to me and sliding her hands around my waist as I cupped her neck and snaked my other arm around her tiny waist.

Our kiss was relatively chaste, but I poured all the love I had for the gorgeous creature in my arms. Her hands glided up my back, trying to pull me closer. “Ahem,” came the gruff voice of Charlie.

Reluctantly, I pulled away, tracing her cheek. She stared at me, her espresso color eyes welling with tears. “No crying, chérie,” I whispered. “I don’t want to see tears anymore from you. Please?” She nodded, snuggling closer and sighing deeply. “My apologies, Charlie.”

“Don’t even think of it, but it was getting almost, um, uncomfortable. You remind me of how I acted with my late wife, Renee,” Charlie said, his voice soft. “I can see how much you adore my baby girl. That’s all I ever wanted for her.”

“Dad, stop,” Bella chided.

“It’s true,” Charlie argued. “Now, Alice burnt dinner. I can smell that nastiness down here, but it’s food.”

“Charlie, tomorrow, I have my schedule free to begin everything regarding bakery. We can go to
the bank and pay off your loan. We can also begin discussions for the renovations,” I said, kissing Bella’s forehead. “I’d like to steal Bella away for tonight. We need to finish talking about …”

“Of course,” Charlie said. “Bells, can we talk before you leave?”

Bella nodded and stepped away, following him to the kitchen. The bakery was nearly empty, save for a basket on one of the tables. I opened the basket, seeing it filled with boxes of pastries, muffins and bread. She came back out, wearing a hoodie and carrying a large purse. “My dad wants us to drop off the remaining baked goods at the local church. We were interviewed by a local news blog with information about our renovations. But, as of tomorrow, The Swan Family Bakery is closed for improvements.” She walked to door, flipping the open sign to closed. “Can you pick up that basket?”

“Sure, love,” I smiled, picking up the basket and heading out to the car. Jake grabbed the basket, putting it in the front seat with him. He drove to a nearby Catholic church, dropping off the basket to the food pantry before driving us back to the condo. I asked Jake to give us the space and he said he’d go to the smaller condo, so we’d have privacy. “Are you hungry, Bella?” I asked.

“A little. I had a huge breakfast with Angela but munched on stuff from the bakery while we sold what we could,” she said. “Something light, like a salad?”

“That I can do,” I smiled, pulling out lettuce, cucumbers, salad, hard-boiled eggs, some roasted chicken, avocados and onions. “I know you worked today, but can you help me by cutting up the chicken and eggs?”

She nodded, taking the chicken and eggs with a knife. Expertly she cut up the meat and eggs, putting it into a bowl I’d given her. I tore apart lettuce, sliced the vegetables and tossed them into a large bowl. “What kind of dressing do you want?” I asked.

“Surprise me. I like pretty much everything, except for thousand island,” she said, putting her chin on her hands. I winked at her, pulling out some more ingredients. I mixed together an oil-based dressing, pouring it over the salad. “I’m still impressed that you know how to cook.”

“This is hardly cooking,” I snickered, mixing the salad and pouring a bottle of Spanish white wine, opening it and pouring Bella a glass. She smiled, taking a sip of her wine. “Good?”

“This is delicious,” she breathed.

“A gift from the Spanish ambassador,” I said, pouring myself a glass and pulling out a couple of plates. “I do apologize. I have some bread, but it’s from a grocery store. It’s marked as artisanal, but it’s not really that good. I feel like I’m cheating on your bakery.” She giggled, as I finished making our meal. I took her hand, guiding her to the table and helping her to sit.

“Thank you,” she said. I kissed her temple and picked up the salad, along with the wine. We made our plates and Bella hummed appreciatively when she dug into her salad. “This is delicious, Masen. If being king crashes and burns, you could come work at the bakery or as executive chef for some high-end restaurant.”

“Tempting, love,” I snickered. We finished our meal and Bella was adamant on doing the dishes. I helped and when the dishes were done, I took her hand, threading our fingers together. “You said you wanted to talk? I think that’s best, chérie.”

We walked to the living room, sitting down on the couch and curled up together. “Masen, I want to thank you for what you’re doing for my family, for me. That should have been the first thing out of
my mouth. I’m sorry for not doing that.”

“Bella, I knew about your financial issues from the moment I met you. I hated that you were struggling, and I understand why you didn’t want help from me. I’m not doing this because we’re dating. I’m doing this because it’s what’s right,” I said, my fingers gliding along her soft, pale skin.

“Well, I appreciate it,” she said, her face flushing. She bit her lip, moving closer. “I … I also want to thank you for what you’re offering me, as well. With the clothes?”

“Angela told you?” I quipped. Bella blushed and nodded. “What your sister did was bullshit and it’s the least I could do for you, Bella.” She closed her eyes, fumbling with the buttons on my sleeve. “What is it?”

“It’s just what Alice said …” she forced out. “With all you’re doing … I can’t help but feel … And the offer to stay here?”

“You’re not. Farthest thing from the truth,” I said, trying to keep my temper under control. “Why are you letting what Alice said to you dictate how you feel? About our relationship?”

“Because you’re a prince and I’m just a baker,” she said. “I can just imagine what the press is going to say about us, Masen. I’m a nobody.”

“You’re not a nobody, Bella. You’re everything to me. Never in my life have I felt this way. I’m lost without you, love. I know it seems fast, but I can’t deny what I’m feeling. You’re not a nobody, you’re not worthless and you are not, most certainly, a whore,” I growled out the last word. Her eyes flew up to my face, swirling with wariness and concern. “Bella, I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she breathed. “I just … I want to stand on my own two feet.”

“I get that, chérie. Truly, I do. That’s why I offered you the smaller condo in the building. You don’t have to stay with me,” I whispered. “I don’t want to force you to do something you’re not comfortable doing. All that matters to me is that you sleep in a real bed, be it mine, the bed in the guest room or the bed in the smaller condo.” Tears welled in her eyes. “You are worthy of sleeping in a real bed, Bella. Not a couch, nor a pull out. You’ve been putting everyone’s needs before your own. It’s time for you to be a little selfish.”

“But, staying with you means I won’t be on my own,” she argued weakly. “I don’t want to rely on you because when you’re gone …”

“Who said I’m going anywhere? Bella, I love you. I’m not throwing us away. I’m not giving up the one person that I love more than my own life. I’m willing to abdicate …” I said, taking her face in my hands. She shook her head. “What?”

“Don’t abdicate, Masen,” she breathed. “I can see from knowing you that you’re going to be a wonderful leader.”

I blushed, smiling softly at her. I kissed her temple, pulling her closer to my side. “What can I do to show you that I’m not giving up on us, chérie?” I asked. Her eyes were closed. “Bella?”

“I’ll stay,” she whispered. “I’ll stay here in this condo, but I’ll choose to stay in the guest room. I know you’d rather I stay with you, in your room, but with … with the extra scrutiny, I think it would appropriate.” A coy smile graced her features and she looked up at me through her lashes. “But, that doesn’t mean I’ll stay there.”

her eyes, searching them for trepidation, fear. “And Bella? You’re in charge. Our relationship is not a race or for anyone else but the two of us. Nothing will change how I feel about you. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she smiled. “And I would really love to snuggle with you. The wine, combined with very little sleep and an emotional few days, I just want to …”

“You need comfort,” I said. She nodded. I grinned crookedly, laying down on the couch and tucking Bella to my side. “Movie?”

“Hmmm, not really. Maybe some music?” she suggested, moving closer to me.

I picked up a remote, pressing a button and some quiet jazz filled my condo. She sighed, as did I and we curled up on the couch. Her body grew lax, heavy in my arms. Blinking down, I saw that she was down for the count, with a soft, beautiful smile on her pink lips. “Love you, cherie. I’ll do anything to make all of your dreams come true. Anything.” Kissing her forehead, I held her closer to my body. Now that I had her in my arms, I was never letting her go.

A/N: We’re going back to Bella next chapter and starting the renovations of the bakery. Plus, we’re going to have a date night for Bella and Masen. What should they do? Leave me some loving! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 17

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Chapter Seventeen

Bella

I woke up surrounded by fluffy pillows and burrowed in the warmest, most comfortable duvet cover ever. I was wearing my hoodie, but my leggings were off my body, draped over a nearby chair. Sitting up, I was in an elegantly appointed room, tasteful and modern. There was a note on the nightstand. Picking it up, I opened it and saw a brief, but sweet message from Masen.

I’m working out in the fitness center, cherie. You crashed as soon as the music came on last night. I held you for as long as I could, before carrying you to your room. And this is your room for as long as you want it. If you don’t like anything, we can change it. I want you to be comfortable.

Anyway, I’m yours for the next few days. Business regarding the loan and renovations for the bakery to attend to today, but I want to take you out on a date, love. It’s long overdue. How does making out in the back of a movie theater, dinner and a show, exploring Museum of Natural History seem to you? Sound like fun? There is nothing that I don’t want to do with you, cherie. I want to share it all with you, Bella … truly …

Love you … more than words can describe,

Masen

Smiling brightly after I’d read his note, I got out of bed, padding to the bathroom. I brushed my teeth and took care of my human needs, showering and blow-drying hair. After my shower, I blinked up to the mirror, appraising my appearance. I looked rested, relaxed. No dark circles or lines of worry were on my face. My eyes were not wary. My posture was not defeated, carrying the weight of the world. One phenomenal night of sleep had helped so much. Brushing my hair and tossing it up into a messy bun, I padded back to the room. As I did, I walked past the closet. I poked the door open, shocked to see it filled with clothing.

“Fuck me,” I squeaked. I stepped into the closet, which was as big as Alice’s bedroom at the apartment. I ran my fingers over the fabrics. I looked down at my shabby sweatshirt and leggings, feeling underdressed and unworthy of such beautiful things. I plucked off a shirt from the rack, seeing an expensive t-shirt in my size. “I can’t ever repay him …” I put it back, shaking my head.

“I don’t want you to repay me, love,” Masen said, his accent deep and his voice honeyed. I turned, seeing him leaning casually against the door jamb of the closet. He was wearing some loose shorts with his t-shirt draped over his shoulder, revealing his bare tattooed chest. His pale skin glistened with sweat and he looked healthy, happy and fucking sexy as hell. It took all of my restraint not to ogle him blatantly. “Did you sleep well?”

“So well that I didn’t even feel you move me to the bedroom last night,” I said, putting the shirt
back on the rack. “Masen, this is all so much. I mean, I don’t deserve this. You may not want me to pay you back, but I feel … I’m overwhelmed by your generosity.”

“You deserve more, Bella,” he said, taking the shirt I had in my hand and holding it up to my body. As he looked at it, he smiled. It was beautifully sexy and crooked, making me shiver with want. The shirt was a beautiful shade of sapphire blue, with some ruffles running diagonally across the chest. “This will be lovely on you.”

“Is that a subtle, royal hint that you want me to wear it?” I quipped. He grinned widened, showing his brilliant white teeth and he nodded adorably. I took the shirt, running my finger down a ruffle. “You must love blue. My dress for the benefit was blue … this shirt is blue …”

“I have a fondness chocolate brown,” he said, tucking a curl behind my ear, tracing his fingers down my jaw. “But, any color blue is exquisite against your skin, love. It enhances your natural beauty.”

I snorted, shaking my head. My tits were too small, my hips too wide and hair and eyes were the color of mud. I was not beautiful. Not even close. Attractive? Maybe … with enough makeup, but not beautiful.

Masen stopped me from my self-deprecation, tilting my chin to him. “You’re beyond words when it comes to beauty, Bella. Your beauty shines inside and out, love. I know that you are dealing with self-esteem issues because of your bitch sister but trust me when I say you are the most gorgeous, loving, kind-hearted and brilliant woman I’ve ever met. And I’ve met a great deal of women … some who were pretty famous.” His finger glided along my jaw and he caressed my lips. I melted, lost in his evergreen gaze, tender touch and loving nature. Leaning forward, he brushed his mouth over mine and I whimpered at the gentleness of it. All too soon, he pulled back, “I’m going to shower and get ready. I’ll make us some breakfast. Jake will be joining us in a little bit, cherie. Busy day today.”

I nodded. “Thank you, Masen, for everything you’re doing for me, for my family,” I whispered.

“I’d do anything for you, Bella,” he murmured, squeezing my hand. “I hope you know that.” I smiled shyly, nodding and holding the shirt to my body. “Take all the time you need, love.”

He dropped a soft kiss to my lips, leaving me in the ginormous closet. I pulled out a pair of dark wash skinny jeans and some brown booties, all in my size. Rooting around in the drawers, I found some sexy lingerie. I curled my hair, putting on some subtle makeup I had in my bag. Dressing in my new clothes, I walked to the kitchen, seeing Jake sitting at the counter, reading a paper and drinking some coffee. “Good morning,” I said.

“Mornin’,” Jake smiled. “Coffee? It’s not as good as the stuff at your bakery, but it’s pretty decent. Some fancy schmancy Gevalian blend that Mase loves. It’s got a hint of a chocolate flavor, with a dash of raspberries. Fucking delicious.”

“Sure, I’d like a cup,” I nodded. Jake hopped up, pouring me a cup and sitting down next to me. “I think it’s so weird that you’re so chill when it comes to Masen and him being royalty.”

“When I first found out, I shit my pants,” Jake laughed. “But, the fact that he’s the heir to the throne of Gevalia doesn’t make him any different than you or me. He still takes a shit, has a nasty temper, can’t handle tequila and is horrible at spelling.” I giggled, sipping my coffee. “At first, I was afraid to say something that would piss him off, but Mase isn’t like that. He’s … he’s my best friend, my brother, the best man at my wedding … Regardless of who he is, he’s one of the best men I know. I’m happy you’re giving him a chance, Bella.”
“He’s pretty irresistible,” I said. “I’m just afraid …”

“Don’t be. Masen is one of the most honorable men I know and he’s not like … he won’t cast you aside. He’s loyal and when he loves, it’s unconditionally. He’s also fucking generous,” Jake laughed. “We roomed together in college. There was a security issue and his mom wanted him out of the dorms. He wouldn’t leave without me because we were so close. He got an expensive, secured condo and I stayed with him, acting as his body guard. I also got an Ivy League education as payment for my services as a body guard.”

“Well,” I breathed.

“You spreading lies about me, Agent Black?” Masen growled as he walked into the kitchen, dressed in a pair of jeans and a sweater. His bronze-colored hair was in total disarray, but sexy as hell. “Telling my secrets?”

“They aren’t lies when you can’t spell to save your life, Mase,” Jake snorted, giving him a cheeky grin.

“American spelling,” he grumbled. “I spell everything using the English spelling … yeesh!”

“So instead of c-o-l-o-r, you spell it c-o-l-o-u-r?” I asked. Masen nodded, glowering at Jake. “That’s not a spelling issue, Jake. It’s a cultural thing.”

“I also told her about your temper,” Jake retorted, waggling his brows.

“Why am I friends with you?” Masen sighed, moving closer to me and sliding his arms around my waist. He pressed a kiss behind my ear and inhaled deeply. “I do not have a temper. Do I get pissed when I see something I don’t like? Yes, but it’s not a temper.” He breathed me in again, tightening his arms around my waist.

“Are you huffing me?” I laughed.

“Yep,” Masen answered, pressed his body to mine. “You smell like cinnamon, sugar and something flowery. I just want to eat you.” I shuddered. His voice was so deep and seductive, making me melt against his body. The connotation from his voice when he said ‘eat me’ forced memories of the night of the benefit to come racing back. That night where I shattered from his touch, his kisses, was nothing short of a fantasy come true. “Breakfast, love?”

“Whatever’s easiest, but I’m not hungry,” I shrugged. He kissed my neck again, his hand grazing my ass as he pulled back. “The coffee is enough.”

“Nonsense,” Masen chided. “Coffee is not breakfast. You Americans …” He shook his head, pulling out some fresh fruit and eggs. He was muttering under his breath in French while he made breakfast.

“He hasn’t changed a bit,” Jake snorted. Masen flipped him off as he whipped up some scrambled eggs. “Nothing but love for you, your princeliship.”

“Fuck you, Black,” Masen laughed.

“Nah, I’ll leave that to Bella,” Jake smirked, winking at me and I blushed. “I’m not your type.”

“That’s the damn truth. Though, it won’t be fucking when we’re together,” Masen said, his eyes sliding to mine and softening, but lust swirling in his fiery green depths. “I plan to make love to you, cherie. Always …”
After we ate breakfast, Jake pulled around the car and we drove to Brooklyn. We met up with my Dad at the apartment. He was dressed in a pair of khakis and a polo shirt. His face was covered with some nicks and scratches from his attempt at shaving. With his tremors, it made shaving a challenge. I’d usually shave his face on Sundays and Wednesdays with a razor while he used the electric razor on off days. “Dad, did you shave yourself?”

“I wanted to look nice. Alice had to go to school early for a tutoring session in math,” Dad answered, but his glower told me he didn’t believe her. I didn’t either. Alice didn’t care about school. “I got a few places.”

I nodded, hugging him close. “I’ll help you when we’re done at the bank,” I said. “I’m sorry …”

“Do not apologize, pretty girl,” Dad chided. “You need this break. Alice told me about the ‘tutoring session’ last night.” He kissed my cheek. “How are you, Masen?”

“I’m good, Mr. Swan,” Masen grinned, shaking my dad’s hand. “Shall we?” Dad nodded, and we got into the backseat of the town car. We drove to the bank that held our mortgage of the bakery and our apartment. We met with our loan officer, who was an angry old woman who wanted nothing more than to see us fail. She had this look of absolute glee when we walked in, but that look dissipated when our investor introduced himself. Masen explained that he was investing in our bakery. He handed over the balance of the mortgage to the bank without blinking an eye and a cold grin to the bitchy loan officer. She grumbled but accepted his payment. With the mortgage paid and the ownership of the bakery in our hands, we left the bank and went back to the bakery.

“You should hold onto the deed, Masen,” Dad said, holding the envelope with the deed and paperwork explaining that we’d owned the bakery and building, free and clear. “At least, until we’re able to pay you back.”

“No, you keep it. You may need it when renovations begin,” Masen said, his fingers gliding over my wrist. “No expense spared for those renovations. And don’t limit it to the bakery, either.” He reached into a satchel by his feet. “I’m not sure if you researched contractors or vendors, but I have some suggestions. They’re all local and have reasonable prices, as well as excellent reputations for stellar work.”

Dad took the folder, opening it up and seeing a list of contractors, vendors, and designers. Dad chuckled, pointing to a name. “Linda Newton … she was friends with your Mom, Bells,” Dad said. “I didn’t know she was a designer.”

“When I last talked to Mike, her son, who would pick up pastries for his mom’s store, she went to school for interior design when he started high school. He told me this the summer before I went away for college,” I said. “She’s got a boutique near the elementary school in our neighborhood.”

“Let’s go with her. Keep it in the family,” Dad smiled. “I’ll make the call when we get back to the bakery.” Which we did upon our return to the bakery. Linda was more than willing and very happy to help with the renovations. She came over almost immediately with her sketch book. She worked well with my dad and me, giving us some great ideas for décor of our new bakery/bistro. With her ideas, Masen’s investment and my father’s renewed fervor, I could see the bakery begin to thrive again. We could hire more bakers, a few cooks and a staff so I wouldn’t have to work myself to the bone day in and day out. I could possibly get back into teaching.

“You seem lost in thought, cherie,” Masen said, his hands sliding around my waist and tugging me into his arms.

“Just thinking of the possibilities,” I said, tracing the zipper of his leather jacket. “With your
investment … I can see the bakery having a future again.” I blinked up at him, biting my lip. “It’s an investment, right? You’re not just giving us the money to …”

“Bella, it’s an investment. I know that if I’d give you the money, you would have refused it. Simple as that,” Masen said, tugging me into the kitchen. “With the money I’m loaning you, there’s no timeline for you to pay me back and most certainly zero interest.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a wallet. He tugged out a black credit card. “This is yours.”

“What?! No!” I squeaked, looking at the card with my name etched on its face.

“Bella, listen to me. With the work to complete the vision that Linda Newton is describing, you need to have access to funds. This credit card is linked to my personal accounts with no limit. You use this to make any purchases for the renovation,” he said, pressing the card into my hand. “It’s also for you, too. I want to spoil my girlfriend.”

I arched a brow. “You’ve been far too generous with the new clothing and helping out with all this,” I said. “I don’t want to seem like I’m … that I’m a gold digger.”

“You’re not. I know this,” he said, cupping my face with his warm, soft hands. “I trust you, Bella. I love you and I want to do anything in my power to help you and your family. Well, you and your dad. Alice … she’s a …”

“A bitch?” I quipped.

“You said it. Not me,” Masen snickered. “Now, Linda and Charlie are wrapping up out there, leaving us with the rest of the day to spend time together. May I take you out on a date, Miss Swan? Sweep you off your feet, woo you and do the whole romantic thing?”

“I’d be honored, your highness,” I quipped, kissing him on the lips.

A/N: So, I’d planned on getting the date in this chapter, but instead, I’m going to do it in Masen’s POV. I’m still at a loss as to what they should do. Leave me your suggestions.

Thanks for reading! :-}
Chapter 18

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

So, I’d planned on getting the date in this chapter, but instead, I’m going to do it in Masen’s POV. I’m still at a loss as to what they should do.

Chapter Eighteen

Masen

I watched as Bella discussed what she wanted with Linda Newton and her father. She was animated, ambitious and relaxed. I’d never seen her more at ease in her own skin. Granted, it was just one step to help her. She had a long way to go and there was an unknown component with Alice. She was a wild card.

And I didn’t like wild cards.

“There’s nothing in here,” Jacob grumped as he looked in the industrial coolers. “No food.”

“They sold everything off yesterday, you dolt,” I snickered. “Are you hungry?”

“I’m always hungry,” he smirked.

“Well, I don’t want to rush them, Jake,” I said, gesturing to Bella, Charlie and Linda. “We’ll feed your hungry ass in a little bit.” He pouted, crossing his arms over his chest like a petulant child. “Could you do me a favor?”

“Does it involve eating?” Jacob asked, his brows flying to his hairline. I gave him a wry look. “What, your princeliship?”

“Find out everything you can about the mini-cunt,” I snarled.

“Alice?” Jacob asked.

I nodded tersely. “Who else? She could fuck up everything if she opens her mouth to her friends, to the press. Any tidbit about that bitch, tell me. She does anything illegal? Inform Seth and get her ass arrested. I will not let that manipulative …” I trailed off, clenching my fists. “She’s not going to ruin this for me or for Bella. She’s done enough damage with her spoiled actions and uncaring attitude.”

“I don’t blame you, Mase,” Jacob sighed. “I’ll do some digging. However, with whatever I find, it’s all dependent on either Bella or Charlie pressing charges against her. She’s stolen from them, destroyed property and assaulted Bella with that slap. Nothing can happen if charges aren’t brought against her, Masen. I don’t think either of them could do that to Alice.”

“I know, but keep an eye on her,” I grumbled. “Monitor her at school, her email, her cell phone …”

“Charlie canceled her plan. She’s without cell phone unless she got a burn phone,” Jacob explained. “I can’t track that unless I know the number and they’re not really …”
“Do what you can, Jake,” I whispered. “I can’t lose her. I won’t let Alice, my mother, or anything come between us. I’ve never felt this way about another person. Ever.”

“I’ll do what I can, Mase. If you can, find out some information about Alice. Friends, teachers, enemies,” Jacob shrugged. “I’ll run background checks on all of them. See if I can’t exploit her weaknesses.”

“Thanks, Jake,” I smiled, clapping him on the shoulder.

Bella came over and her eyes were sparkling with excitement. “Things are really starting to come together. Linda is going to get a contractor out here and have him submit for the permits to get this place fixed up. If all goes well, demolition can begin next week!”

“That’s awesome, chérie,” I breathed, hugging her close. “What else did Linda say?”

“She’s going to come up with some more specific design ideas, with colors, fabrics and layouts,” Bella nodded. “She’ll have us meet her in her boutique for that consultation. She’s got a computer program she can use to recreate the new space using the infrastructure of the existing space. Will you come?”

“It’s all dependent on my schedule, chérie,” I said, sliding my arm around her waist. “If I’m available, I’ll be there. Now, do you want to go out to eat with your dad?”

“No, she’s seen enough of my ugly mug,” Charlie laughed. As he said that, Alice walked in, her face pinched and looking pretty worn. “Good day at school, Alice?” he asked sarcastically.

She glared at her father. “No, Father. I got suspended,” she snarled, gripping her bag tightly.

“Why?” Jacob asked, a smirk playing on his face.

“I hit someone,” Alice hissed, eyeing Jake like he was an insect. “They were making fun of me … because I look like a fucking hobo, while whore face here looks like …”

Charlie glowered at her, his hands shaking uncontrollably. “That’s one, Alice. You get to three and you’re no longer my child,” Charlie snarled.

“I’m merely stating a fact,” Alice shrugged, gesturing to Bella. “Dressed like whore …”

“Two …” Charlie growled. “Mr. Jacob, how difficult would it be for you to change the locks on the doors to the apartment?”

“Easy as pie, Mr. Swan,” Jacob replied, giving Alice a menacing look. “I’d love to see you try and survive out in the real world, Alice. No sister to support you. Your father turning his back on you. You’d see how quickly …”

“Jacob,” I said warningly. “Go to Sam’s and get those locks.” Jacob narrowed his eyes, turning and leaving the bakery, his body bunched in anger. “Anything more to say, Alice?” She glared at me, her face red with anger and she looked like she was ready to explode. “Mr. Swan, if you need to, Jacob can be back here at any time to change those locks, as well as disposing of the garbage.” I slid my eyes to Alice, whose face turned to puce. Without a word, she raced up the stairs and slammed the door.

“Well, she’s a spirited one,” Linda said, shaking her head.

“She’s a bitch, is what she is,” Bella muttered. “Welcome to my hell, Linda.”
“I can’t believe she called you a whore,” Linda breathed. “You’re the sweetest girl I’ve ever met. In fact, you remind me a lot of Mike’s boyfriend, Eric. You’re both sweet, kind and selfless.”

“Thank you, Linda,” Bella said, shifting on her feet.

“No problem, sweetie. I knew your mom and I can tell you that if she was alive to see Alice’s behavior, she would have been flung out onto the streets when she said she was suspended. Now? She’s rolling in her grave with her behavior,” Linda quipped. “Charlie, I’ll call you when I’m done with the plans. And if she gets to three, change the locks, give her birth certificate, social security card and send her on her way. That shit don’t fly in the Newton home. Mike back-talked me once. He got backhanded. Never gave me grief again.”

“It’s different for you, Linda,” Charlie said. “If I raised my hand to Alice, she’d call the cops and twist the truth that I’m abusive father.”

“She’s the abusive one, Charlie,” Jacob said, holding a bag filled with new locks. “Do you have documentation of all she’s done? What she’s stolen?” Charlie nodded. “Then, she’s going to be the one in trouble.”

“Regardless, I’d keep an eye on her. She’s a manipulative one,” Linda said. “Charlie, would you like some company?”

“You want to further subject yourself to this madness?” Charlie laughed, gesturing up the apartment. Linda just smiled sweetly at him. Bella tugged on my jacket, giggling into my shoulder. I bit my lip to not laugh out loud, but it appeared that Linda Newton was sweet on Charlie Swan. “It’s your funeral.”

“It’s my pleasure,” Linda said. Turning to Bella, she hugged her. “It was good to see you, sweetie. Once this place is back open, I’ll need to have a standing order of a variety of muffins and those delicious scones for my customers. The seasonal ones you make? Fabulous!”

Bella nodded and watched as Charlie and Linda went upstairs to the apartment. Once the door was shut, Jacob walked over to us. “Is that chick macking on Charlie?” he asked.

“Um, yeah. Linda is really nice, but she’s been around the block a few times. Mike’s dad took off with his secretary, leaving Linda high and dry. She’s been divorced and unattached for almost fifteen years. However, she’s never been as sweet to any of her other ‘boy-toys’ as she was with Dad,” Bella explained.

“That was sweet?” I laughed. “She was ready to rip Alice a new asshole!”

“I hope she does,” Bella shrugged. “Linda is a shrewd business woman, smart and has a keen eye for design. She also hates when people are shit on, like how Alice was dissing me and being disrespectful to my father. Her only son, Mike, was teased, gay-bashed really, when he was high school. He tried to hide his homosexuality, but he was flamboyant, and he was beaten up and sent to the hospital with a broken arm and nasty cut to his scalp from being thrown down the stairs. Suffice it to say, the boys who beat the crap out of Mike spent time up in Sing-Sing. They were … well, they were initiated as the bitches for some gang thugs.” Bella had a wry little grin on her face, sliding on her jacket.

“Ouch,” Jacob said. “But, fitting.”

“Mike was homeschooled after that and he graduated early, with my class,” Bella shrugged. “He’s had a tough life, like me. Absentee father, ridiculed for his sexuality and taking a great deal of time
to finally feel comfortable in his own skin. He’s happy now, living in Queens with Eric. I don’t know much about him, but wedding bells are on the horizon, supposedly.” She bit her lip and smiled at me. “You’ve done so much for me, it’s my turn to do something for you. I want to cook you both dinner!”

“Bella, you don’t have to,” I argued. “I like cooking.”

“I want to,” she smiled. “Can we stop at a grocery on our way back to the condo?”

The next day, Bella and I went out to get her some necessities, such as a cell phone from this millennium and a new laptop. She argued with me as I paid for them, but I told her she could write them off as business expenses. She pursed her lips but accepted them. I also could tell she was excited to have a new laptop since she had to sell her old one due to her financial difficulties. While she set up her new laptop, I planned our date. With the craziness of the day before and an unforeseen meeting at the consulate this morning, I hadn’t had a chance to do so. Using my own laptop, I tried to find stuff to do. For the most part, the paparazzi ignored me. I wasn’t the scandalous Cullen. That title belonged to Emmett, who was finally back at Four Circles Rehab Facility. Right now, I didn’t want Bella to be thrust into the limelight and protect her from the scrutiny of the press. Her profile was on Page Six as she danced with me at the benefit. She was out there, in some form, but she was still anonymous.

As I searched options of what to do on our date, I narrowed it down to seeing a show, either Hamilton or Radio City Holiday Spectacular and then going on a carriage ride around Central Park afterward.

“Masen?” came Bella’s sweet voice.

“Yes, love?” I replied, looking up from my spot at the kitchen island.

“I’m looking at options for record keeping - billing and keeping track of expenses. What do you suggest? Quicken or Access?” she asked.

“I’m partial to Microsoft Access,” I answered. “You can get the full Office package, including Access for a relatively reasonable rate.”

“I don’t know how to use either. My dad was old school when it came to the bookkeeping. He used ledgers. Drove Angela crazy,” she said as she carried her laptop to the kitchen. With an expectant look, she asked, “Could you show me?”

“Always, love,” I smiled, kissing her forehead. “Get this suite and you’ll be happy. It has a word processing option, email, presentations.” She nodded, ordering it online. She grimaced as she saw the total but used the credit card I’d given her. “I’ll give you a tutorial later. For now, I’ve got an important question to ask you. Do you prefer seeing American history on stage or the Rockettes?”

“What?” she laughed, arching a brow at me.

“I’m planning our date and I’ve narrowed it down to dinner, a show and then something special afterward. Do you want to see Hamilton or Radio City Holiday Spectacular?” I asked. Her eyes turned wistful and she sighed shakily. “What is it?”

“The last thing we did as a family before Alice was born was we saw the Rockettes,” she whispered. “My mom was uncomfortable as could be because she was almost nine months
pregnant, but I was enthralled. It was a great time. My dad tried to take us when Alice was five, but he broke down in tears in the taxi. We never got to go, and Alice was bitter that I got to see the Rockettes and she didn’t. I think that’s when she started becoming a bitch.”

“Do you want to go, chérie?” I asked.

“As silly as it sounds, I do,” she sniffled, wiping her tears. Looking at me, Bella giggled and giving me a watery smile. “I wanted to be a Rockette. I practiced my kicking and dancing, but I couldn’t do it.”

“Of course, you can,” I argued. “You can do anything.”

“Seriously, I can’t. I’m so clumsy. I hyperextended my knee when I did my ‘kick lines’, ending up in a knee brace for two weeks,” she laughed. “Plus, their legs are as long as I am tall. I’m too short.”

I kissed her, sliding her to my side and pulling up the Radio City Music Hall website. “Where do you want to sit?” I asked.

“Oh, gosh,” Bella said. “When we went with my mom, we’re up in the nosebleed section. I’d like to be closer, if possible.”

“Main orchestra?” I asked. She shrugged and then nodded. I picked up my cell phone and dialed the attaché assigned to act as my assistant. He picked up and I spoke to him, asking him to get me two tickets for the show on the main floor. Bella was watching me with rapt attention since I was speaking in the Gevalian dialect of French. I was put on hold and I opened up another website for Tavern on the Green. Her eyes widened. I kissed her nose and clicking on the reservation tab. The attaché came back on the phone, prattling that we got the tickets for opening night on November 9th, which was two days away. I thanked him and hung up. “We’ve got seats right here.” I pointed on the map and she gasped. “On opening night.”

“It must be nice to wield that power,” she giggled, snuggling closer to me.

“It has its bonuses,” I shrugged, moving back to the computer and making our reservation for Tavern on the Green. “Do you want to eat before or after the show?”

“Before,” she answered.

“Okay,” I nodded. “Now, let me finish planning this. I want to leave some things as a surprise, love. Go play on your computer.” She scowled at me, but I kissed it away. She smiled, walking back to the living room and fussing with her laptop. I finalized the details, sending a copy of what I was doing to Jacob and the consulate. We’d have to have some sort of protection since this was a public outing, but I asked for discretion. Jacob would be my driver for the evening, but the consulate would have to do some background work for the servers at the restaurant and make arrangements for my final surprise.

Closing my computer, I went to sit down with Bella and tugged her into my lap. “Enough playing with the computer. Play with me,” I purred, nibbling on her ear.

She smiled, putting her laptop on the table. She straddled my legs and we lost ourselves in deep, loving kisses until the sun went down.

A/N: Okay, I swear, I swear the date will happen next time. And it will still be in Masen’s POV. The question remains … will there be a lemon? A picture of Linda Newton is on my
blog. Leave me some!
Chapter 19

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Okay, I swear, I swear the date will happen this time. And it will still be in Masen’s POV. The question remains … will there be a lemon?

Chapter Nineteen

Masen

I was dressing for my date with Bella. Tia was with her, helping her decide on her attire for the evening. In her way, Tia did the same with me, pushing a dark grey Dior suit into my hands with an arched brow. So, I was looking in my closet, trying to find a tie to go with the ensemble Tia brought for me. I decided to keep it simple, swiping a subtly printed black tie. Looping it around my neck, I tied it and slid on my jacket. I added some cologne before walking to the living room.

“Looking sharp, your princeliship,” Jacob sang.

“Thanks,” I smirked, blinking over to him. “You, too.”

“Tia said that I needed to look like a bodyguard of an elite royal. My bargain suits from the bureau weren’t cutting it,” Jacob said, rolling his eyes. “Despite buying my suits at the Men’s Warehouse, I look nice!”

“You do, but it’s opening night. This is cut like a tuxedo,” I said, brushing my hands over the wool. “As is yours.”

“It makes hiding my guns difficult,” he grumbled. “I need more room, or I’ve got this bulge.” I shot him a withering glare. “Not there, you perv!”

“Behave, Jacob William Black, you’re working for the Gevalian government and your actions are representative of us,” I said. He laughed, flipping me off and walking back to his room, grumbling about using his ankle holster. I double checked reservations with my attaché, which were verified, and confirmations sent to my cell phone. I heard the clicks of heels. I blinked up, hoping to see Bella, but seeing Tia. “Everything okay?”

“Bella’s good to go, bitching about you spending too much money on her,” she snickered. “But, I picked out a gorgeous cocktail dress for her. She’s just talking to her dad. He’s talking to her about dating. She’ll be out in a little bit.”

“Thank you for all of your help, Tia,” I said, shaking her hand. “And for this.”

“You mother found out you were going to the opening night of the Radio City Rockettes and she said you needed to be a representative of the Gevalian royal family.”

“Nice of her to call me and tell me,” I grumbled.

“She, instead, called me,” Tia snickered. “Or rather, her people called my boss. Something about the consulate forwarding over your schedule.” I huffed out a breath. “I don’t know how you do it.”
“I don’t. Initially, I fought this assignment, but I’m grateful I’m here and not there. My mom can be an overbearing shrew, but I love her,” I chuckled, tugging on my hair.

“My mom is just as overbearing and she’s not a ruler of a country. If she had her way, I’d be married to a man and popping out kids,” Tia snickered. “I like girls and I’m not having kids. My girlfriend or wife can do that, or we’ll adopt. Anyway, I’ve got to head back to the store. I’m earning some overtime by setting up the holiday window for the couture floor.”

I nodded, getting her coat and waving as she left. Turning around, I saw Bella standing just inside the living room. She wore a black cocktail dress with her earrings and a simple bracelet. “Wow,” I breathed. “Bella … you’re …”

“It’s not too much?” Bella asked, tucking an errant curl behind her ear.

“No, chérie. You look so exquisite,” I smiled, walking to her and sliding my arms around her waist. “I love you, baby.”

She blushed, biting her lip and laying her hands on my chest. “I love you, too, your majesty,” she whispered, her lips curled up into a coy grin.

“Technically, since I’m not the ruler, I would be classified as ‘His Royal Highness,’” I gently corrected. “But, I prefer to be Masen. Just Masen.”

“You need to tell me all about this prince thing,” Bella quipped. “Will you?”

“I’ll tell you anything, chérie,” I smiled. “We have a reservation. Jake is pulling the car around.” I traced my fingers down her cheek. “I can’t believe you’re with me.”

“There are moments when I think I’m dreaming,” Bella whispered, pressing her cheek into my hand. “I don’t want to wake up.”

“It’s very real, Bella,” I said, stepping closer to her. “May I kiss you?”

“Why are you asking?” she asked. “You can kiss me any time you want, your majesty.”

“Highness,” I quipped, brushing my lips with hers. Her fingers slid up my lapels and into my hair as I deepened the kiss, tasting her sweet mouth. I moved my arms around her waist, pressing her body to mine. I was close to lifting her up, carrying her to my bedroom and burying myself inside her. My cell phone vibrated in my pocket. I pulled back, pressing my forehead to hers. I took out my cell phone.

Stop making out with your girl. Take her out on a date, your princeliship ~ J

We’re coming. But not in the way that I want, damn it ~ M

“We need to go, my love,” I breathed, kissing her forehead. “Let me get you your coat.” I walked to the closet, pulling out a cream winter coat. Swiping a red scarf and matching gloves, I helped her into winter coat. She smiled softly, holding the clutch to her chest as I put on my overcoat. Wrapping the scarf around her neck, I led us to the basement. Jake was standing at the black limo, holding the door open. I helped Bella into the backseat, glowering at my friend. “You …”

“She deserves a date, Mase,” Jacob said, giving me a shitty grin. “Not a horny prince pawing at her.”

“I wasn’t pawing,” I scoffed, sliding into the backseat. “Tavern on the Green, Mr. Black.”
“Yes, your princeliship,” Jacob laughed, walking to the driver’s seat.

I slid my arm around Bella’s shoulders. She snuggled against me. “You smell so good, Masen,” she murmured. “You always do.”

“So, do you,” I chuckled.

“I feel like I smell like the bakery all the time,” she replied, wrinkling her nose. “It’s not a good …”

“You smell sweet with a touch of floral and spices,” I said, kissing her temple. “Delectable, my love. You make my mouth water, cherie.” I moved my lips down to her ear, suckling on her lobe. “Maybe you can let me have a taste tonight, Bella. Fuck knows I want to taste every inch of your body.” She let out this sexy little whimper, morphing into a wanton moan. “You want that?”

“You have no idea,” she breathed. “I think you ruined my panties, Masen.” She turned to me, her eyes rheumy and her lips parted. I kissed her mouth, earning me another whimper. “You are going to be the death of me.”

“Nah, you like me too much,” I quipped.

“I love you, your majesty,” Bella purred. “I never thought I could love someone as much as I love you.”

“I love you more, cherie,” I smiled. “And it’s highness.” She just smiled sweetly, curling into my side.

“Why is like that? Why are you called highness?” Bella asked, idly tracing the buttons on my coat.

“It’s usually reserved for prince and princesses. We kind of follow the British model. Both Emmett and I are ‘His Royal Highness.’ The rulers and their consorts, they are called Majesty. So, my mother and father are called Majesty. When I rise to the throne, I’ll be called Majesty, too,” I answered.

“Have you ever had someone outside of the royal line become …” she asked but trailed off. “Never mind.”

“What is it, cherie?” I pressed, threading our fingers together.

“Obviously, we’re dating, but what if this turns into more?” Bella questioned, her lip disappearing into her teeth.

“Bella, this is already more,” I replied. “I can see a future with you. I want it all with you. I know it seems fast. Again, I’m usually the analytical one, not impetuous. I just can’t imagine my life without you. I want to give you the world, cherie.”

“Did you just quote Aladdin?” Bella asked, her eyes wide.

“That would be I want to show you the world, Bella,” I snickered. She stared at me, looking at me as if I was a dream. “Cherie, I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t,” she breathed. Her lips found mine, pressing her mouth to mine. “You won’t.” We were quiet until we arrived at the restaurant. Our fingers were twined together, and we kept them that way as we got out of the car. We made our way inside, greeted by a host. As per the instructions sent over by the consulate, we were seated in a semi-private room. “Wow. This is …”
"You like it?" I asked as I helped her into her seat.

"I’ve never been here. I know it closed down for a while, but this is so romantic and festive," she smiled, gesturing to the Christmas trees. "I think my dad proposed to my mom here, many moons ago." She looked around, her eyes wistful. Blinking back to me, she balanced her chin on her hands, giving me a sexy smile. "Now, what’s your life like as a prince?"

"Very subtle," I laughed. A woman, the server, came up, her eyes warm. She prattled off the specials along with some suggested wine. "Do you want some wine, cherie?" Bella waved her hand, gesturing to me to choose. "Can we have a bottle of the viognier?"

"Of course, sir," she nodded. "Any appetizers?"

"Can we get some roasted figs? And we’ll both have the smoked salmon salad, too. Is that okay?" I smiled. Bella nodded, licking her lips. The waitress wrote down the order and walked away. "Now, to answer your question, life as a prince is not as fabulous as the books make it out to be."

"Explain that," Bella said, sipping her water.

The waitress came back with the wine, opening up the bottle. She poured me some and I tasted it. "Thank you. It’s delicious." The waitress poured the wine into our glasses, informing us that our roasted figs would be out in a little bit. "So, with my position as the heir apparent, the next in line to rule Gevalia, I have very little choice in what I can do. I need to have protection." I blinked to Jacob, who was sitting at a nearby table. "The moment I was born, my future was decided. I was groomed to be a diplomat, a leader. I never had close friends. I had acquaintances, other blue bloods and many of them are manipulative, trying to garner favor with the queen. Or, garner favor with me as the next in line for the throne. I had private tutors, the best education Gevalia had to offer. Jake … he was my first real friend. He saw me as a man, a person and not as the future ruler of Gevalia."

"Jake is very sweet, and I can see why you like him," Bella smiled. "He’s very loyal."

"He’s loyal, funny and he makes me feel normal," I shrugged.

"I bet dating was a challenge," Bella said quietly as our figs were delivered.

"Dating … dating was more than a challenge. At first, before the women would know me, things were fine. But, when they find out that I’m royalty, I’m a cash cow," I explained. Bella frowned, looking down at her hands before pulling them from the table and onto her lap. "What is it, love?"

"Now, I’m like one of those girls," she whispered.

"No, Bella," I said, moving and sat next to her. "You are not like those girls. They wanted jewelry, new cars, condos, houses …"

Bella pointed to her earrings. "Masen …"

"I bought you those," I said, threading our fingers together. "Did you ask for them? Did you ask for help with the bakery?"

"No, but I’m leaching off you," she said, wrinkling her nose. "I don’t like … I know I’ll never be equal to you …"

"You’re not, cherie. You’re more," I breathed, staring into her eyes. "My life is my life, but being with you? It makes everything better. Amazing!"
“I … I just don’t see it,” Bella whispered.

“I see it more and more every day, Bella,” I said, my fingers gliding over her arms. “I know that you’re coming to terms with all of this. I’m patient. I love you and that will never change.”

“But, I’m just a baker,” she said angrily.

“And I’m just an attorney,” I quipped. She gave me a hard glare.

“No, you’re a prince, Masen,” she countered. “You deserve a princess. Someone who’s refined, elegant …”

“I want you, Bella. You are refined, elegant, well-spoken, beautifully, funny, kind, smart, sexy …”

“Masen,” Bella argued. “You’re making me blush. And I’m not.”

“You are, and I’ll tell you that until you finally believe it. I know that you hear your awful sister’s voice in your head. She’s very, very wrong,” I murmured, leaning forward to kissing her. Bella leaned her cheek against my shoulder after kissing me. “And you’re everything to me. Everything.”

“You are to me, too,” she said, smiling against my bicep. “I’m trying to … it’s just that things like this don’t happen to girls like me.”

“They do now,” I snickered, picking up one of the roasted figs. We ate the figs, chatting about my responsibilities as the next in line for the ruler of Gevalia. After eating the figs, we ate our salads and ordered meals. Bella got a grilled pork chop while I got some braised short ribs. We ate dinner, having a much lighter conversation and Bella relaxed. She laughed, her entire facing lighting up. She flirted, her fingers dancing along my hands and up my arms. Dinner was paid for and we got back into the limo, driving to Radio City Music Hall. Bella vibrated with excitement, her fingers threaded through mine. I purchased a program for her and we settled into our seats, about seven rows back, center stage. Jake was seated next to me with a couple of Gevalian employees from the consulate surrounding us.

The lights went down and Bella’s fingers weaved through mine. She pressed her lips to my cheek. “Thank you, your majesty,” she whispered against my ear.

“What am I going to do with you, chérie?” I whispered back, brushing my lips over hers.

“Love me?” she smiled, her fingers tracing down my jaw.

“I always will,” I grinned, sliding my arm over her shoulders as the music began.

A/N: We’ll continue the date next chapter, finishing the show, the Central Park carriage ride and some citrusy times. Full citrusy times? We shall see. Pictures of what they were wearing, Tavern on the Green and Radio City Music Hall are on my blog. You can also find me on Facebook, too: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. I’m also on twitter: tufano79. Leave me some!
Chapter 20

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

We’ll continue the date next chapter, finishing the show, the Central Park carriage ride and some citrusy times. Full citrusy times?

Chapter Twenty

Bella

As much as I wanted to pay attention to the beautiful, selfless man next to me, I was too enthralled by the performance. The dancers were graceful, and the music was amazing. At intermission, I blinked over to Masen, who was smiling at me, with his perfectly lopsided grin. “What?” I asked, blushing.

“You’re beautiful,” he said, brushing his fingers down my bare arm. “You’re watching this, and you have this child-like awe on your face, cherie.”

“Thank you for getting tickets, Masen,” I whispered, leaning forward and kissing his lips. He sighed contentedly, cupping my neck. He slid his tongue into my mouth, tasting me and making me yearn for more. “We should probably behave. I don’t want our picture to show up on Page Six of us sucking face.”

“Do you promise more sucking face later?” Masen quipped, running his finger over my lips. “Because I like sucking face.”

“Yeah, it’s weird to hear you say, ‘sucking face’ with your posh accent,” I giggled. He just grinned, kissing me again before sitting back, twining our fingers together. He reached next to him, pulling out a bag. “What’s this?”

“Open it up, Bella,” he said.

I removed my hand from his and tugged out a program. “Masen,” I breathed. “You didn’t need to get this for me.”

“I wanted to, cherie,” he said. “I wanted you to remember tonight and the program is one way for you to do that.” I looked at him, trying not to cry. “What is it?”

“I’m just happy. I never thought I could be this happy, Masen,” I whispered, hugging the program to my chest. “Thank you so much, for everything.”

“I would do it again for you in a heartbeat, Bella,” Masen smiled, sliding his arm over my shoulders and kissing my forehead. He murmured against my forehead, speaking in his Gevalian dialect of French. We stayed entangled together until the lights flickered and dimmed into darkness. I leaned my cheek against his shoulder, watching the rest of the production. I was in awe of the ‘Toy Soldiers’ routine, entranced at the graceful precision of it.

After the finale, the lights went up. I pouted. “I don’t want it to end,” I sighed.
“We still have one more stop, cherie,” Masen smiled. “Let’s just wait until the crowd empties out. Jake needs to pull around the car.” I nodded, watching as the audience cleared out. A few members looked at us, whispering. When some phones popped up, Masen slid on our coats. He curled his arm around me, blocking me from cameras. Some of the people sitting next to us formed a wall around us. A burly guy whispered in Masen’s ear and we made our way out a side exit.

“Is everything okay?” I asked as we walked through the bowels of the theater.

“The paparazzi are milling around the exit,” Masen answered. “I may not be a big draw, but I’m still a royal.”

“Is this different than the charity event?” I questioned.

He sighed, nodding sadly. “The paps at the charity event were taking photos for the charity. The paps outside? They’re vultures. They’re the ones who practically caused my brother to …” he trailed off. “I need to protect you, cherie.”

“What if … What if Alice …?” I whispered, my eyes widening. “She could fuck everything up.”

“She could, but Jake’s watching her every move,” Masen said reassuringly. “And one toe out of line, she’ll be arrested. I know she’s your sister, but I do not have any qualms in pressing charges against her. She’s done nothing but cause you grief for years.”

“I’m to the point that I don’t care about what she does. Alice has made her bed,” I spat. I blew out a breath, angry that Alice had weaseled her way into my date with Masen. “Do you think my dad has the balls to kick her out?”

“If he doesn’t, I think Linda Newton will,” he snickered. “I liked her.”

“I like her, too,” I smiled. He pushed open the side door and we exited into an alley. The limo was parked just outside, with Jake holding open the door. Masen helped me into the backseat and slid in next to me. “I’m sorry about …”

“Don’t apologize, Bella,” Masen murmured, kissing my temple. “Let’s just enjoy the rest of our evening. Your sister will not ruin this for us.” The car pulled out and made its way back to Central Park. The car pulled up behind a carriage that was bedecked with twinkle lights. “This is the last stop, love.”

“A carriage ride?” I whispered. “I’ve never been in one of these. Masen … this is so romantic.”

“I do aim to please, cherie,” Masen smiled, helping me out of the car. He took my hand, leading me to the carriage. There’s an older gentleman at the helm. He nodded at Masen, giving him a warm smile. “Are you Doc?”

“I am,” he said, his New York accent thick. “When my buddy, Jake called me, he was quite persuasive. I’m glad I could oblige his request. Usually, we don’t run the carriage rides this late. When he said who it was for, I was more than willing to help.”

“We appreciate it, Doc,” Masen nodded. They shook hands and we got into the carriage. Masen covered us with a thick, fluffy blanket. “Are you warm enough?”

“I’m perfect,” I said, threading my fingers with his. “Tonight, it has been a dream. I really don’t want to wake up.”

“It’s not a dream, Bella. You won’t wake up because it’s not going to end. I don’t say the words ‘I
love you’ on a whim. I truly love you and I want you in my life,” he whispered, looking at me and his evergreen eyes sparkling under the twinkle lights. “I know my life is different from yours, but I want to … I can’t lose you.”

“You’re not, Masen. I’ve never felt this way about anyone. I love you more than words can express,” I murmured. I traced the veins on his hands. “I, um, want to show you …” He stilled, blinking to me and his eyes grew dark. “What?”

“Do you want to make love?” he asked, his voice deepening and his accent becoming more pronounced.

“I want you. I want to give you all of me,” I whispered, my fingers caressing his cheeks. He stared into my eyes, love swirling in his evergreen depths. I blinked down, overwhelmed by the emotion in his gaze. He captured my chin, guiding my eyes back to his. “Do you want that?”

“I love you and I want you, so much,” he breathed. Leaning forward, he brushed his lips against mine and I melted against him. My fingers tangled into his hair, relishing in the softness of the strands. He held me to his chest as if I was the most cherished thing in his world. We made out with sweeping kisses and quiet whimpers until the carriage pulled up to the car.

“It’s nice to see a couple so in love,” Doc chuckled. “And not mauling each other.”

“I can only imagine what you see, Doc,” Masen quipped.

“I usually ignore things, but I had one couple go at it,” Doc snickered, but he sighed, shaking his head. “I wish you both the best.”

“I appreciate you doing this for us, Doc,” Masen smiled as he helped me down from the carriage.

“It’s rare that I get a personal request from the Prince of Gevalia,” Doc said, leaning forward.

“Are you Gevalian?” I asked.

“My grandparents were born and raised. They were visiting the states when my father was born here. They decided to stay,” Doc laughed. “My mom is also Gevalian, but she moved here to go to university. So, I’m a full-blooded Gevalian and I think you’re a going to be a great king.”

“I hope so, Doc,” Masen said, his face flushing.

“And you’ve got a real American princess on your hands, your highness,” Doc said, his eyes sliding to me. “She’s a class-act.”

“That she is,” Masen replied, his voice turning into a husky growl. He kissed me sweetly before looking up to Doc. “I hope I have your discretion.”

“Jake made me sign some paperwork,” Doc nodded. “I won’t say ‘boo.’ Remember me when you get married. I’ll be your personal carriage driver after your wedding.”

“We will,” Masen laughed. He shook Doc’s hand before we got back into the car. “Jake, home. Now.”

Jake just chuckled, pulling away from the curb and toward the condo. Masen raised the privacy screen, kissing me deeply. His hands were buried in my hair and I was pressed against the leather seats. His muscular body covered mine and we lost each other in our kisses. I was so focused on Masen that I didn’t even realized we’d stopped. “We’re home, Masen,” I panted against his lips.
“Good, because I need you, cherie,” he said, pulling back and taking my hands. We made our way to the elevator. Riding up to the penthouse, Masen unlocked the door and he swept me off my feet. I gasped, throwing my arms around his neck. Closing the door, he stared at me. “Are you sure?”

“Sure?” I asked.

“Are you sure about this? Us?” he pressed.

“I want to be yours. I’ve never been surer about anything in my life, Masen,” I whispered. “Make love to me.”

He looked at me, his eyes searching mine. When he found whatever he was looking for, he kissed me and carried me to his bedroom. He gently put me on my feet and removed my coat, tossing it onto a nearby chair. “I want you to stay with me tonight. I want to sleep with you in my arms, cherie. Please?”

“Yes,” I nodded, unbuttoning his overcoat. He removed his coat and jacket, tossing it in the same direction as mine. He snaked his arms around my waist and he looked at me with so much love and adoration. I reached for his tie, slowly loosening it and sliding it off him. “You’ve given me so much, Masen. You’re smart, selfless, kind, loving and patient. You let me sort out my shit.”

“I’d do it again in a heartbeat if it meant that I get to keep you,” he murmured in the darkness of the room. The only light was from the bustling city below us. “Let me love you, cherie.”

“Please,” I whispered as I unbuttoned his shirt.

He kissed me, his tongue sliding between my lips. I moaned, shoving apart his shirt and tracing his muscular torso. His fingers found the zipper of my dress and tugged it down. I pushed his shirt off his body as his fingers grazed over the bodice of my dress. With feather-light touches, the dress was eased off my torso, revealing my lacy black bra. I rolled my hips, allowing the black cocktail dress to fall to my feet. “Fucking gorgeous,” he said, his eyes sweeping over me hungrily.

I blushed, my palm gliding along his tattoo on his ribs. “You make me feel gorgeous,” I smiled. I reached behind my back, unclasped my bra and tossed it off my body. Masen growled lowly, murmuring in French. I took a step forward, reaching for his pants and he stopped me, his hands wrapping around my wrists, stopping me from unbuckling his pants. “I thought … you wanted this.”

“I do, love. But, I want to give you pleasure, first,” he purred, his voice deep and desperate with need. He released my wrists and picked me up easily. My hands moved to his neck as he carried me to fluffy bed. Placing me on the pillows, he stared at me. “You look perfect in my bed, cherie.” He lay down next to me, his fingers caressing every inch of my body. “I want to taste you, Bella. I want my lips all over you.”

“Oh, shit,” I whimpered. “Masen …”

He eased off his dress pants, gathering me into his arms and kissing me deeply. His muscular thigh slid between mine and I rolled my body. “I can feel how wet you are, Bella,” he growled against my mouth. “Can I touch you? Taste you?” I pressed into his thigh, putting delicious pressure against my sex. I answered him by kissing his lips and guiding his hands to my panties. He smiled against my mouth, sliding my black panties down my legs. His tongue swept inside my mouth, tasting me and making me cling to him. He kept kissing me, his lips moving down my jaw and along my neck.
“Masen,” I breathed. “Please…”

“Don’t beg, cherie,” he purred, his mouth continuing down my body as his fingers tracing over my breasts before he wrapped his lips around the nipple. I gasped, tangling my fingers into his hair as he nibbled on my breast with his mouth and rolling my nipple with his hand on my other breast. I arched my body against his mouth. He suckled, nibbled and worked me up in a frenzy. He traced my ribcage with his free hand as he maneuvered between my legs. He left a trail of open mouthed kisses along my sternum. He continued his trek down my belly and he nibbled along my hips. His hands were tenderly caressing my skin. He kissed just below my navel, blinking up and licking his lips. “Do you want me to stop?”

“No, don’t stop,” I said. “I need this. I need you.”

He smiled, dark and seductive, as he spread my legs. There was a low, rumbling growl coming from his chest as he looked at me. “I’ve never seen a more beautiful woman, Bella,” he said, looking back up at me. “Every inch of you is exquisite.” I bit my lip. With a cheeky wink, he lay down, running his tongue along my slit.

“Fuck me,” I choked out. He just chuckled from between my legs. The baritone of his laugh reverberated through my body, making me tremble and roll my body in anticipation. His mouth moved over me, kissing me deeply like he kissed my mouth. Suckling my clit, he eased two fingers inside me, curling them upward and making me writhe in pleasure. His mouth was agony and ecstasy wrapped up in a sexy, royal package. I whimpered, bucking my hips against his mouth. The hand that wasn’t inside me, gliding up my skin and cupped my breast. “Masen … oh, God! So good!” He growled deeply, attacking my clit with renewed fervor. I slapped my hands down onto the mattress as my orgasm raced through me like a lightning bolt. I rambled incoherently as the waves of pleasure crashed over me.

I was panting heavily as Masen crawled up my body, his lips glistening with evidence of my arousal. He looked at me, his eyes dark with lust and sex. “You tasted as sweet as I imagined,” he murmured, rolling his hips against mine. My hand snaked up and pulled him down to me, kissing his lips. He moaned against my mouth, sliding my tongue past my lips and kissing me slowly and deeply. I felt it in every inch of my body, wanting to be connected to him in every way possible. He brushed my hair back, staring into my eyes. “I want to make love to you, cherie.”

“Please,” I smiled. “Make me yours, Masen.”

He eased his boxer briefs off his body, reaching into the nightstand and producing a condom. I took it and removed it from the package. I slid it down his substantial length, giving him a few strokes and he growled. “Fuck, Bella. It’s been a long time. I want to be inside you when I come, love.” I spread my legs. He grasped his cock, placing the head at my entrance. He looked down, pushing inside. I whimpered as he stretched me around him. “Bella, you’re so … I love you so much, cherie.”

I bit my lip to stop my tears as I watched him, fill my body with his and heal my heart. “Love is too small a word,” I whispered. He blinked up at me, seeing my tears and wiping them away with his thumbs. “I’ve never felt this way about another person, Masen.”

“Me, too, Bella,” he said, his hips flush with mine. He leaned down, capturing my lips and he began thrusting. Every inch of my pussy was filled with his erection, making me feel wholly complete. He looped one of my legs under his arms. We were a tangle of bodies, sharing one soul. His movements were deliberate and he kept his lips on mine. It was the most magical moment in my short life. Our connection was deeper than the physical, tying me to him in more ways than just love. “Cherie, I can feel you around me. You feel so good,” he whispered against my mouth. He
reached between us, circling his fingers around my clit. “Come for me, love.” I panted against his lips, moving with him. “Baby …”

“Masen,” I whimpered. “Don’t stop.”

“Never, baby,” he said, his accent deep and pronounced. “Fuck!” His hips lost their smooth movements, moving jerkily. “Bella, I’m gonna come. With me, please?” I nodded, feeling the tightening of my body. He crashed his lips against mine, moving so deeply in me. I grasped at his shoulders, moaning into his mouth. The muscles around his hardness tightened, convulsing around him. He moaned into my mouth as we both tumbled over the edge together. He brushed my hair back. We both were covered in sweat from our lovemaking. He tenderly kissed me. “I don’t want to let you go, cherie. I have to take care of this condom.”

“I don’t want let you go, either,” I said, kissing his jaw. He brushed his lips over mine before sliding out of me. I whimpered at the loss.

“Don’t move, Bella. I want to hold you, all night long,” he said, stepping away from the bed. He removed the condom and tied it off, tossing it in the garbage and crawling back into bed with me. He tucked me to his side. “This changes things, Bella.”

“I know,” I whispered, tracing his tattoo. “I hope those changes are good changes.”

“They are, cherie,” he chuckled, his hand gliding along my spine. “I’m yours, Bella. I can’t lose you. I will not give you up.” I looked up at him. He gave me his signature crooked grin, staring down at me. “You’re here. With me and I’m not letting you go.”

“I can live with that,” I murmured, kissing his jaw and snuggling closer to him. “I love you, your majesty.”

He laughed, kissing my lips once again. “You’re not going to stop calling me that, are you?”

“It’s only a matter of time before it’s official, Masen,” I smirked. “But, I do love you.”

“I adore you, cherie,” he said. “I always will.” I felt his cock twitch against my stomach. He smiled, filled with all things sexy and naughty before covering my lips with his. It was going to be wonderfully long night.

A/N: They made love … yay! I hope I did it justice! We’re going to back to Masen next chapter and there will be some drama coming up. Leave me some loving! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 21

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own ... even for just a little while.

We’re going to back to Masen next chapter and there will be some drama coming up.

Chapter Twenty-One

Masen

I watched her sleep. Bella was curled in my arms, completely bare and snoring adorably. I ran my fingers through messy curls. Never in my entire life had I ever been this happy. I knew that I had to tell my mother about Bella. I knew that I had to protect her from the paparazzi and from her sister. Alice … she was up to something. I didn’t trust her.

“Masen …” Bella whimpered, her arm draping over my belly. “Love you.”

“I love you so much, chérie,” I whispered against her hair. “I’m never going to let you go. I’m yours. Irrevocably and forever yours.” I tightened my arms around her, watching as the sun crept along the sky. Bella was usually up with the birds, but she deserved to be spoiled. She had a right to sleep in, in a bed and not a couch.

It shattered my heart to know that she slept on a couch for four years. She was emotionally abused by her sister for that entire time, as well. I hated to think what Alice was doing to their father. Parkinson’s was a horrific, debilitating disease. From what I saw, Charlie was in decent condition, but he needed help, and loving care. He got that with Bella. Heaven knows what Alice is doing to her dad at this moment.

Running my fingers along her back, I relished in her softness and her warmth. She sighed, burrowing her nose into my neck. “Hmmmm, you smell so good, Masen,” she whispered, her fingers gliding along my belly. Her lips dragged along my jaw as her hand slipped underneath the blankets and wrapped around my cock.

“Fuck,” I hissed as she idly pumped my length. “Cherie …”

“You made me feel so amazing last night, Masen. It’s my turn to return the favor, baby,” she purred against my jaw before she kissed me languidly. Her lips glided down my torso, her tongue tracing along my tattoo. I moaned, tangling my fingers into her hair as she kissed further down my body.

“Bella,” I breathed. “You don’t …”

“I want to,” she sang lowly, her lips dragging along my hips as her fingers wrapped around my growing cock. Her tongue ran along the underside of my shaft. My head fell back as her mouth completely enveloped me. She sucked around me, her mouth hot and wet around my hardness. Her hands cupped my balls, rolling them in her palms.

“Fuck,” I growled as she wrapped her other hand around the base of my cock. She bobbed her head, her hand moving opposite of her mouth. “Cherie, that feels … damn it. I want to be inside you
when I come, Bella.”

She released me with a pop, languidly stroking my length and using her saliva as lubricant. “You made me feel … it was indescribable. It’s time to return the favor, Masen.” She twisted her wrist, sliding her hand down my erection. She kissed the tops of my thighs before taking me into her mouth again. Her eyes were closed as she swirled around the head of my cock. Her fingers glided over my body, igniting me into flames.

I bucked against her as her tiny finger caressed behind my balls, growling when she took one of them into her mouth and pumped me. My fingers tangled into her soft hair as she brought me closer to my release. I could feel my balls tighten. “Bella, chérie, feels so amazing. You keep doing what you’re doing, I’m going to come.” She hummed around me, redoubling her effort. I was babbling incoherently, lost in the pleasure she was giving me. “Bella …” I moaned. She twisted her hand and gently ran her teeth along the underside of my shaft. I groaned as my cock hardened. With another swirl around the head, I exploded. With each heartbeat, streams of my release filled her mouth and Bella kept her mouth around me, swallowing all I had to give.

I flopped onto the bed, panting heavily as my heart slowed down. Bella kissed up my chest and curled against me. “I like being able to sleep in. I haven’t done it in so long.”

“How does it have its benefits,” I chuckled. “And I liked the wake-up call, love.”

“You made me feel so cherished, loved … I wanted to return the favor, Masen,” she smirked, sliding her legs along with mine. I could feel her arousal as she undulated against me.

“Did sucking my cock turn you on?” I growled against her lips. I could taste myself on her mouth and normally it gross me out, but our combined flavors were an intense aphrodisiac. I slid my hand down her belly, cupping her intimately. “It would appear so, love.” She moaned, opening her legs as I circled my fingers through her slick folds. I kissed her deeply as I brought her to the brink of pleasure. Feeling her tightness, her arousal coating my fingers, I wanted nothing more than to slide inside her, to feel her around me again. She hissed when I slid my fingers inside her. “Bella?”

“Sorry,” she whispered. “It’s been a long time since I’ve had sex, and you’re kind of huge. I’m a little sore.”

“Chérie, I’m sorry,” I murmured, removing my fingers. “I just wanted to …”

“Don’t apologize, Masen,” she smiled, kissing me sweetly. “You made me feel so good last night.” I tugged down the blankets and got up. I picked her up. “Masen! What are you doing?”

“I think a bath will help with the soreness, Bella,” I answered, carrying her out of the bedroom and into the ensuite bathroom. We settled into the large soaker tub and I poured in bubbles, turning on the hot water. I held her in my arms as the water filled the tub. She snuggled in with me. “Feel better?”

“Yes,” she said. “You spoil me.”

“Now she gets it,” I laughed, my arms wrapped around her tiny waist. “And I’ll continue to spoil you, chérie, for as long as you let me. Forever sounds good.”

“What’s on tap today?” she asked, threading our fingers together under the growing mountain of bubbles.

“I have a meeting at the consulate this afternoon, but other than that, nothing,” I answered.
“What do you do at these elusive meetings?” Bella quipped.

“Trade negotiations, diplomatic meetings, teleconference calls with my family,” I replied.

“Does your family know about me?” Bella asked, her voice timid, unsure.

“My father does. I told him about you. My mother is more focused on my brother who is in a drug detox program. I’m planning on talking to her today about you,” I replied. “Cherie, my mother may pose a bit of an obstacle. She sent me here in her stead to do her job. She also told me to ‘sow my royal oats.’” Bella stiffened. “But, that’s not what we’re doing, love. You’re not that. You could never be that, baby.”

“Could she stop us from being together?” Bella gasped.

“No. I would sooner abdicate the throne and be with you than to bow to her will. I love you and I see a future with you, cherie,” I whispered. “A future where there’s a ring on this finger.” I raised her left hand and ran my thumb across her ring finger. “I want forever with you, Bella. Get that through your head.”

“Even though I’m …” she muttered.


“She’s such a wildcard. I don’t trust her. I really don’t. I doubt I ever will, Masen,” she grumped, curling into me.

“And I don’t blame you, Bella,” I said, kissing her forehead. “Do you have a passport?”

“Um, non-sequitur,” Bella laughed.

“And a valid question since your boyfriend lives in a foreign country in the European Union,” I snickered.

“I do have a passport. One of my friends in college got married over spring break in Jamaica when I was a senior,” Bella answered, rolling her eyes. “I think it’s still valid.”

“If I remember correctly, American passports are valid for ten years,” I said. “You’re good.”

“Why are you curious about me having a passport?” Bella asked.

“Because, I’d love to show you Gevalia,” I smiled against her curls. “Does your dad have a passport?”

“I don’t know if he can travel,” Bella shrugged.

“With a private plane, he’ll be fine,” I chuckled. We stayed in the tub and got out when we were sufficiently wrinkled. I got dressed while Bella blew dry her hair. I went into her room and got her clothing. As I was walking to her bedroom, I saw Jake. He wagged his brows with a knowing smirk. I gave him the finger, ducking into her room and picking out a pair of jeans, a sweater and some lacy underthings. Walking back to my bedroom, Jake motioned me to the kitchen. “What is it?”

“The consulate called while you were … um, yeah,” he chuckled. “Your mother needs to talk to you. There’s a secured video link set up in at the consulate in an hour.”
“Damn it,” I sneered. “Okay. Let me give these to Bella and then we can go.” I started to walk away but stopped. “After you drop me off, you take care of Bella. If she wants to go back to Brooklyn, spend time with her father, you take her. Okay?”

“You got it, your princeliship,” Jake quipped, saluting me.

“Asshole,” I laughed. I brought Bella her clothes and explained to her what Jake had told me. She dialed up her father and they made plans to meet up at Linda’s studio, having a late lunch before Alice came home from school. Bella did not want to see her sister. I honestly didn’t blame her, nor did I push it. With a loving kiss, Jake drove me to the consulate and I went up to the attaché’s office.

“The line is secure, your highness,” said the attaché. “Your mother is expecting you.”

“Thank you,” I nodded, sitting down at the computer. “If I can get the room?”

“Of course, your highness,” he replied, bowing and made his way out.

I typed in my password and logged into the videoconferencing program. My mother’s face filled the screen. “Mother, back up a bit. I’m seeing your nasal hair,” I teased.

“I hate this blasted thing,” she scoffed, moving back. “Better?”

“Marginally,” I snickered. “How are you, Mother?”

“Better now that I’ve actually spoken to you. I’ve been getting updates from the consulate, but I would have thought that my child, the Prince of Gevalia, the next in line for the throne, would call me,” she said, arching a brow.

“My apologies, Mother,” I said, pressing my hand to my chest. “How’s Emmett?”

“He’s doing well,” she answered. “He’s finally able to make some headway with his recovery. He still won’t see me, but your father has made several trips to the clinic.”

“Can he accept phone calls?”

“Not yet. And from what I understand, he still doesn’t want to speak to you,” she sighed. “He did say that he’s grateful for you finding him and sending him home. However, he’s embarrassed by what he’s done and pissed off that you treated him like a child.”

“He was acting like a child,” I explained. “Now, why was I summoned so insistently? I wasn’t due to come to call you until this afternoon.”

“I have plans when you were due to call, Edward,” she chided. “They couldn’t be avoided. I apologize.”

“It’s okay. I just had plans myself … with someone …” I trailed off.

“Jacob? He’s invaluable to you, Edward. You should convince him to work with you full time,” Mother said, a smile gracing her features.

“Not Jacob, Mother. I’ve met someone,” I whispered.

“Is she a royal? Socialite?” she asked, her nose wrinkled. “It better not be one of those Kardashian girls. They are whores.”
“No, of course not. I’ve met the most beautiful woman in the world, with the largest heart and I love her,” I said.

“You love her?” Her eyes were wide and her lips were pursed. “Is it the girl from the benefit? The woman with dark hair and impeccable taste in dresses?”

“I wasn’t sure if you saw that photo,” I breathed. “Impeccable taste?”

“Tell me about her, Edward,” she said, arching a brow. “What’s her name?”

“Her name is Isabella Swan and she runs a bakery in Brooklyn,” I replied. “However, she went to university to become a high school teacher, but she moved home when her father was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease.”

“Is she Gevalian?” she asked.

“Her grandfather immigrated from Gevalia. So, yes,” I sighed, scrubbing my face. “And no, she’s never been married.”

“Virgin?”

“Mother!” I growled. “I’m going to hang up. Your hypocrite is showing.” She pursed her lips. “Mom, I love this girl. I want a future with her. She’s everything I ever wanted in a woman. I’m not going to lose her because of you.”

“Nor do I expect you to,” Mother nodded, her features softening. “I want to meet her. I want to meet her family. I’m not happy that you’re dating a commoner, but if she makes you happy…”

“I’ve never been happier, Mom,” I whispered. “There is one fly in our ointment.”

“What’s that?”

“Bella’s sister,” I grumbled. “Jacob is working on that, but she’s a bitch.”

“Edward,” she chided. “Don’t speak about a girl that way.”

“There’s no other way to describe her,” I sighed.

“Well, I still want to meet her,” she said. “You can come back to Gevalia for the holidays, spending time with your family and hers. Bring your Isabella, her father and the sister.”

“You want to meet them,” I said.

“I want to see if this Isabella is worthy of my oldest son,” she murmured. “Edward, I know we don’t get along well. We both have strong personalities, but it’s because we’re both leaders. Regardless of our personality clashes, I love you, Edward. I’m proud of you and I want to make sure that Isabella is worthy of my baby boy.” Her face was soft and she was looking down at the desk.

“Mom,” I breathed. “I love you, too.”

She blinked up and her royal persona was back in place. “Good. I’ll make arrangements with the jet for you, Isabella and her family. You’ll depart on December twentieth and return after the new year. And, Edward?”

“Yes, Mother.”
“Call me more often, please?” she said.

“I will. I promise.”

A/N: So, the Queen knows about Bella and she wants to make sure that she’s good enough for her child. Anyhow, next chapter will be Bella, her spending time with Charlie, Linda and Alice …

Leave me some!
Chapter 22

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So, the Queen knows about Bella and she wants to make sure that she’s good enough for her child. Anyhow, next chapter will be Bella, her spending time with Charlie, Linda and Alice …

Chapter Twenty-Two

Bella

“Jake, I could have taken the subway,” I said from the backseat of the Town Car. “I’ve lived in this city for most of my life. I’ve never spent this much time in a car. Ever.”

“I get it, Bella, but his princeliship was adamant that I stay with you while you’re with your family,” Jake snickered.

“Who’s going to recognize me?”

“Bella, it’s not about recognition. It’s about safety. Edward Anthony Masen Cullen is the next in line to be the King of Gevalia. Some assholes can use you to get to him. That would kill him, if something happened to you,” Jake said, blinking back to me in the rearview mirror.

“Couldn’t I, at least, sit up front? I don’t like being chauffeured around,” I grumped. “I’m not important.”

“Masen would say otherwise, Bells. You’re his world now,” Jake said softly, smiling gently at me. “He may be a future king, but he’s still a man who adores you. He’d do anything for you and that includes your safety.”

“But, he should have you with him,” I argued. “You’ve been hired by Diplomatic Security to protect Masen. Not his girlfriend.”

“He’s at the consulate. DS is crawling all over that place, along with Gevalian military. He’s protected. And if he wants to leave, one of the military guys can stay with him or I could call Seth. He’s moonlighted as a bodyguard before,” Jake explained. “Bella, he loves you. Let him do this for you. For your family.”

“Except Alice,” I snorted.

“Do you blame him?” he asked. “Your sister is a freaking bitch.”

“Tell me about it,” I deadpanned. “I’ll always have some sort of love for her because she’s my sister, but I doubt we’ll ever be close. There’s too much bitterness in our relationship.”

“Why is she bitter?”

“I had nine years with a mother. She had nine months, in utero,” I sighed. Jake pulled into my street, parking in front of the closed bakery. “It’s weird to see it closed up.”
“But, think of the improvements that are being made to the bakery,” Jake smirked, getting out of the car. “Are you going into the bakery? Your apartment?”

“Yep,” I nodded, tugging out my keys from my purse. I unlocked the door of the bakery, shocked that it had been completely demolished, save for the industrial ovens, mixers and coolers. They’d been moved to the center of what had been the kitchen. In the business plan that Masen, Dad and I devised, we decided to get new equipment. We were selling the old equipment and my dad was wading through offers. “I can’t believe demolition is done.”

“Money talks, Little Bells,” Jake said, draping his arm over my shoulder.

I rolled my eyes, leading him to the back entrance to my apartment. Inside, the house was in a bit of disarray. “Dad?”

“In the bathroom,” he said, his voice tired. I opened the door, seeing my dad on the toilet. He was dressed, but his hands were shaking and he was sporting a full beard. “Baby girl. I’ve missed you.”

“Dad, what’s going on with the house?” I asked, crouching in front of him. “It’s a mess.”

“Alice is … she’s … she’s trying my last fucking nerve,” he spat. “She refuses to help me and she’s ignoring my rules.”

“Dad, I think you need to cut ties with her. She’s an ungrateful bitch, leeching off our family and ruining everything,” I sneered. “Jacob?”

“Yeah, Little Bells?” he replied, poking his head inside.

“Change the locks,” I said. “All of them.”

“Bella,” Dad said.

“No, Dad. This is bullshit. You need help. She’s not doing it and she’s being a bitch about it. She broke the rules. I’m done and I don’t live here. You should be done, too,” I said. He frowned, looking down at his trembling hands. I took them, squeezing his fingers. “Daddy, she’s toxic. I love you, but you can’t live like this.”

“I know, Bella. I know. She’s knew the expectations and she chose not to abide by them. She’s my daughter, though,” Charlie choked out. Fat tears fell down his cheeks. “Where did I go wrong?”

“You didn’t, Dad. You raised her the same way you raised me,” I replied soothingly, rubbing my thumbs on his knuckles. “She has issues.” I looked over my shoulder, arching a brow at Jake.

“Change them.”

“Got it,” he nodded. “I think I saw the new lock stuff in the living room. I’ll change out the locks to both the house and to the bakery. I’ll had to Sam’s to get copies made for you, Charlie and contractor.”

“Linda, too. She’s been working closely with the contractor and the crew,” Dad explained.

“Do you want me to shave you?” I asked.

“Would you mind? Alice refused to do it, bitching that she shouldn’t have to do that,” Dad grumped.

“And your meds? Are you keeping up with your medications?”
“Linda has been coming over on Sundays to help with the meds. She got me a weekly pill dispenser and she comes to fill it up with my medications for the week,” Dad explained. I smirked at him as I filled up the sink with warm water. “What’s that look for?”

“I think that Linda is sweet on you,” I snickered.

“I think she is, too,” Dad blushed. “But, I feel like I’m cheating on your mother.”

“Dad, I’m fairly certain that Mom wouldn’t want you to be alone,” I murmured, tipping his head back while I covered his whiskers with shaving cream. “Complete shave or …?”

“Mustache. Linda likes a mustache,” Dad said, his ears turning a bright pink. I nodded, carefully shaving his face. I left on the mustache and carefully wiped his face clean of the residual shaving cream. “All good?”

I helped him to his feet. He grinned widely when he saw my handiwork. His shaking hand ran over his smooth cheek. “You clean up good, Dad,” I said, kissing his cheek. He smiled shyly as he put on some aftershave and cologne. “Ooooh la la, Daddio.”

“Shut up, Bella,” he laughed.

“Well, I’ll let you finish getting ready. I’ll pack up Alice’s shit. Don’t give in, Dad. She’s … you can’t let her back. She needs to know that her bullshit is over. Welcome to the real world,” I growled.

“I know,” he sighed. “She’s eighteen. She does need to know that her actions have consequences. I am going to give her some money, but I’m removing her from everything associated with the bakery and the bank accounts. If she shows remorse, then I’ll give her …”

“You see the best in her, Dad. If she changes, then give her another chance. I doubt it, though,” I sighed. I kissed him again and went into Alice’s room. I swiped a duffel from the closet, filling it with Alice’s clothes, shoes and underwear. When the bag was filled, I sat down at the desk and pulled out some paper. Picking up a pen, I started writing.

Alice,

You brought this on yourself. Dad was hopeful that you would change. But, a leopard doesn’t change its spots. You’ve done nothing but cause our family grief as of late. You treated me disrespectfully, calling me a whore and treating me like I was your personal slave. When I left, after the bakery saved from financial ruin, Dad gave you rules you needed to abide by. You chose not to follow those rules. You didn’t take care of Dad. You left him, unattended. He could have fallen. He could have been hurt. All because you were too selfish to care about Dad. All you worry about is yourself.

Dad said if you make positive choices, you can come back. I won’t hold my breath. I’ll pray for you and regardless of what happens, I still love you. I’ll never be able to forgive you for what you did to me or to Dad, but I do love you.

When you decide to grow up, call me. 347-555-0913

Until then, you’re on your own. You’re eighteen. You’ve made your bed, now you need to lie in it. Good luck. You’re gonna need it.

Bella
I folded the paper and put it on top of her clothes. I put the one stuffed animal from her bed inside the duffel before zipping it up. I picked up the duffel, carrying it to the living room. Jake was working on the door knob. “How’s it going?”

“Almost done,” he replied. “Though, I’m thinking that you’re going to need a system.”

“This is an apartment. I mean, yes, with Masen’s investment, we own the building, but …” I trailed off.

“I’ll look into it, Little Bells,” Jake said, his nose wrinkling. “For now, I’ve got a new double lock for both doors. I’ll have to get a new lock for the bakery, but the contractors might be able to get a better lock for you.”

“I’ll talk to Linda about it. Dad and I are heading there once I’m done with this,” I said, kicking the duffel.

“That thing is bigger than you are,” Jake laughed. “I’ll bring it down for you.”

“Thanks, Jake,” I smiled. Dad came out and Jake finished the locks, handing me and Dad the new keys. Putting it on my keyring, we headed downstairs. Dad said hello to the workers in the bakery, who were on lunch when we came in. They were friendly and seemed like good guys. I recognized a couple of them from neighborhood. Jake spoke to the contractor, explaining that there was a situation where the locks needed to be changed. Dad said that Alice would no longer be welcome in the bakery or in the apartment. The contractor, Paul, said he’d get in a new lock to the doors by the end of the day.

After talking to the guys, we made our way in the brisk, dreary November day to Linda's studio. It was a chic studio in the bottom of a larger building. Jake held open the door for me and my dad. We were greeted by a chirpy receptionist. She greeted my dad by name and told him to go back to the consultation room. We sat down at a large wooden table. The receptionist came back with a tray of iced tea. “Do you all want something to eat?” she asked.

“No, thank you,” Dad responded. “We’re going out to eat after this.”

“If you need anything, you can just ask, Mr. Swan,” she grinned.

“I appreciate it. Oh, this is my oldest daughter, Bella and a friend of the family, Jacob Black,” Dad smiled. “This is Linda’s receptionist and personal assistant, Maggie.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said, shaking her hand.

With a grin, Maggie left and we sipped the iced tea. Linda danced in a few moments later, carrying her laptop. She hugged my dad with a flirty grin. She smiled at me. “Bella, you look beautiful, sweetie!” She hugged me, too, kissing my cheek. “I love your hair. So pretty.”

“I had a date yesterday. The curls are left over from that,” I answered, blushing furiously as I remembered what had happened on my date. It was a magical evening, ending with a night of love-making. I really liked the love-making. Linda grinned secretively, typing on her computer. I just rolled my eyes.

“So, I’m glad you’re here,” she said. “I’ve drawn up a few ideas for the bakery.”

“Oh, I spoke with the contractor,” Dad sighed. “I’ve changed my locks.”

Linda pursed her lips, her disdain for my sister written clearly on her face. “That girl … she’s …
Charlie, I know you love her. She’s your child. But, sometimes you need to toss them from the nest. Either they land on their feet, like Bella here. Or, they don’t.”

“She just wasn’t doing what she promised to do,” Dad grumbled.

“I’m more than willing to help you, Charlie,” Linda said, her expression soft. “If it weren’t for our dinners, you’d be starving up in the apartment.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, my anger flaring.

“Alice is never home at night, until after the curfew I’d established. When I pushed her on it, she said that she was ‘studying’ but I’ve gotten her progress reports. She’s not studying,” Dad explained, his nose wrinkled. “And she’s still hanging out with that no-good hoodlum, Jasper Whitlock. I heard he was arrested for having drugs.”

“Have you told her?” Linda asked.

“We left a duffel of her clothes outside of the bakery,” Jake answered.

“You may want to tell her. Alice will probably flip her shit,” Linda laughed.

“I’ll do it,” Jake replied. “You’ve got my cell phone number, Little Bells?”

“Yeah,” I nodded. “I should be there, too.”

“I’ll call you, Bells,” Jake said.

“What time does she get home from school?” Linda asked. “It’s been a while since I had a high schooler.”

“She’ll be back by three,” Charlie answered.

“We can quickly go over the choices for the bakery/café. Then, we can see Alice at the bakery, explain why we’re doing this,” Linda said.

“Good idea,” I breathed. “Thank you, Linda.”

After that conversation, we spent an hour going over options for the bakery. We discussed layout, and materials. Linda showed us computer generated mock-ups of the options Linda suggested. She printed out a couple options so we could discuss which ones we liked the best. When we were done, we packed up the pictures and walked back toward the bakery. Linda had another appointment following ours. It was nearly three. I saw Alice walking down the street, with a lanky, grungy, twitchy fucker. He was ambling next to her. “That’s Jasper?” I asked.


Jake picked up the duffel, looking imposing and angry as Alice came closer. She was dressed in her normal clothes and she was laughing. She blinked up, her smile falling from her face when she saw Jake. Her eyes slid to me and a snarl replaced her smile. “Whore …” she sneered.

“Alice,” I responded, sighing. “You brought this on yourself.”

“Daddy?” Alice sniffled, blinking to my father. “You said I was doing fine.”

“You were never home for me to tell you otherwise,” Dad growled. He was leaning heavily against a wall, his fists clenched. “You knew the rules. You knew the expectations and you didn’t follow
through. You were supposed to help me. Ali, I’m sick. I have a degenerative neurologic disorder.”

He held up his hands, which were shaking. His pushed against the wall and he nearly fell, caught by Jacob. “I love you, Alice. I always will, but your behavior is disgusting. You’re an entitled, self-centered brat. You’ve made your sister’s life a nightmare. You ignored me when I needed you the most. I’m done, Ali. Done. I’ve changed the locks. These are your clothes.” Dad nodded to Jake, who put the bag by Alice’s feet. “When you grow up, we could possibly reevaluate everything. For now, you need to know that you can’t treat people this way and expect that everything will be okay.”

“I call Bella a whore because she is one,” Alice growled. “And you are, too. Allowing that guy pay for the bakery? I should call the press and tell them all about how …”

“You do that, and you’ll be arrested for defamation and slander, not to mention neglect,” Jake said, removing his badge. “Special Agent Jacob Black, FBI.” The lanky fucker took off. “Should I be worried about that? Drugs? Outstanding warrants?”

Alice blanched, clutching her backpack tighter. Tears welled in her eyes. “Where am I going to go?”

“You’re an adult, Alice. Figure it out,” I said coldly.

“I’m still in high school. How can I work and go to school at the same time?” Alice whispered. “Where am I going to go?”

“Follow your boyfriend,” Jake snorted. Alice shot him a glower. “Your family has been more than fair to you. I would have just have changed the locks and have you figure it out the hard way.”

“There’s money in the bag,” Dad sighed. “Alice, I love you. I always will, but my health comes first. I can’t rely on you and …” He reached into his pocket, pulling out a bag of pills. Alice’s eyes grew big and she grabbed them from him, knocking him onto the ground. She picked up her duffel, following the same path as her boyfriend.

I crouched to the ground, helping Dad to his feet. “You okay?”

“I’m fine,” he said sadly.

“Daddy?” I whispered.

He shook his head, “I just need …” he grumbled. “I need to be alone, Bella. I love you, sweetie, but I just kicked out my other child, who is dealing with drugs and is heading down a dark path.”

“Dad, you shouldn’t be alone,” I argued.

“I’ll be here,” Linda said, walking toward us. “Bella, sweetie, come talk with me. Jacob, could you help Charlie upstairs?”

“Sure thing, Linda,” Jake nodded.

Linda opened the bakery door, guiding me inside. The crew was cleaning up for the day, waving at Linda as they loaded up their supplies in the back. “Bella, I know you want to be there for your dad.”

“He just kicked Alice out of the house. I should …” I said, pointing to the exit.

“He needs someone who gets the situation,” Linda whispered.
“I lived the situation, Linda,” I sniffled. “For all of Alice’s life, I lived the situation.” She stared at me, her eyes understanding and her palms warm against mine.

“Bella, I know that you’re upset. You’re worried about Charlie, but he needs to talk. We’ve been talking a lot. When Alice wasn’t there, he called me.” She smiled gently. “I like your dad. I know he’s sick and he’s had your support since his diagnosis. Your dad adores you and is so proud. He just needs to process what happened and he doesn’t want to do it with the woman who was the victim of Alice’s abuse. Charlie feels a great deal of guilt for what happened to you at the hands of your sister. He also is ashamed of how bad it got.”

“I get it,” I nodded. “Can you tell my dad that I love him?”

“He knows, Bella. He thinks the world of you,” Linda smiled, hugging me. “And, so do I. You’ve grown up to be such a beautiful young woman.”

“There are days where I don’t …” I snorted. “Look, I’ll go. But, can you have my dad call me before he goes to bed tonight?”

“I will, Bella,” she smiled, hugging me again. She handed me a card. “This is my cell phone number. Call anytime, sweetie. I know I’m not your mom, but if you ever want to talk.” She looked at me, her eyes swirling with concern. “I should have done this a long time ago …”

I nodded, stuffing the card into my pocket. “Thank you for taking care of my dad.” Jake came downstairs, his hands in his pockets. “I’m grateful he has someone other than me, now that Alice has proved to be unreliable.”

“I’d do anything for him. And for you, Bella,” she said quietly. “You were kind to my son when he was struggling with those … those monsters.”

“Mike is a good guy,” I smiled. “Just like his mom.”

“Little Bells, Masen is back at the condo and he wants to talk to you,” Jake said.

“Okay,” I nodded. “Linda, I appreciate all you’re doing for our family. And, perhaps, we could meet for lunch?”

“I’d like that, Bella,” she beamed. “Have fun with your Masen.”

With a shy wave, I left the bakery as Linda went up the stairs. Jake slid his arm around my shoulders. “You and your dad did the right thing, Little Bells,” he whispered. “I gave him Seth’s cell phone number if Alice decides to be a pain in his ass.”

“Good,” I said as we got into the car. I curled up in the backseat, feeling a twist in my gut. “That’s good.”

“You okay, Bells?” he asked.

“I just need to see Masen,” I breathed. “Take me home? I need to go home. I need him.”

“On it, Little Bells. I’m so on it.”

A/N: So, Bella and Charlie kicked Alice to the curb … do you think it will stick? Leave me your thoughts. Up next will be Masen’s POV and him sharing the plans for the holidays. Will Alice get her ass in gear by then? Or will she still be an epic pain in the ass? Thanks for reading!
Chapter 23

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be Masen’s POV and him sharing the plans for the holidays. Will Alice get her ass in gear by then? Or will she still be an epic pain in the ass?

Chapter Twenty-Three

Masen

“Hey, Mase,” said Jake. I was at home, working on the travel plans for Bella, Charlie, and Alice, with the possibility of Linda and her son, too. I’d have to do some background checks on Linda, Michael and his partner before I could even give them the option of joining us. “Charlie actually kicked Alice out.”

“No shit?” I breathed. “What did she do?”

“Not following through on her promises she made to Charlie. The apartment is a mess. Alice had drugs and she called your girl a whore. Again. She also ripped into Charlie, too,” Jake growled. “That girl … she’s trouble. But, the boyfriend? I think he’s got a major influence.”

“You got a name?” I asked.

“I do. Charlie told me. I’m going to tell Seth that name. I may have freaked him out when I flashed my badge,” Jake snorted. “Alice, too. Look, Little Bells is, she’s upset. Understandably so. Charlie’s a mess, too. Linda’s going to stay with him and comfort him.”

“I don’t need that visual, Jacob.” I shuddered, my mind delving into the pervy recesses, all starring Charlie and Linda. Ewwwww! “Anyway, when you get back, I need you to run a background check on Linda Newton and her family members,” I said.

“Did you tell your mom about Bella?” Jake asked.

“That would be affirmative,” I sighed. “Are you on your way back?”

“I’m making Charlie some tea while Linda is talking to Bella in the demolished bakery,” Jake answered. “The place is empty. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know.”

“About the bakery or that the evil sister has been evicted?” I quipped.

“Well, both,” Jake answered. “Look, the water’s boiling. I’ll talk to you when I get back.”

“Drive safely, Jake,” I said, hanging up the phone. I tossed it onto the still messy bed. I smiled, remembering how that bed became messy. Shaking my head, I walking back to Bella’s bedroom. I was nearly done moving her clothes into my closet. After I’d finished my video conference with my mom, I did some work at the consulate before I had one of the military officers drive me back to the condo. I spent the afternoon moving Bella’s clothes. It was oddly domestic and I found comfort in doing so.

I also started working on dinner, making a new recipe. It was a lasagna dish, with alfredo sauce,
spinach, cheese and chicken. I was assembling the lasagna when the door opened to the condo. I blinked up, seeing Bella walking in. Her face was red and her eyes were puffy. I walked toward her. She looked at me, running into my arms and clinging to my sweater. I felt her tears against my chest. “Cherie,” I breathed.

“I don’t know why I’m crying,” she sniffled. “Alice brought this on herself. I … I just …”

“Bella, it’s understandable that you’re upset. Alice made poor choices and those choices resulted in Charlie throwing her out,” I said, sitting down with her in my lap.

“I helped,” Bella muttered. “I packed up her shit, but …” She idly toyed with a string on my shirt. “Dad gave her some money and I put a note in her bag with my cell phone number. I’m terrified that she’s going to go to the paparazzi or do something … like get killed. With her being out there … with her loser boyfriend …”

“I know you’re worried, but she’s an adult and she’s made her choices,” I whispered, kissing her temple.

“It still sucks,” she grumbled, putting her head on my shoulder. “Masen …”

“What is it, love?”

“Promise me you won’t throw me away,” she said, her voice small and uncertain. “Promise me that you won’t find some royal and toss me aside.”

“Never, Bella. You’re it for me. I would never toss you aside. You’re my everything,” I pushed, cupping her face and staring into her eyes. “There is no royal I want more than I want you. The only person that is even remotely an option is a total bitch and a half. I’d rather be unmarried than have her as my wife. Lady Katherine Denali doesn’t hold a candle to you.” I leaned forward, brushing my lips against hers. “I love you with everything that I am.”

“I love you so much, Masen. I never thought I’d be able to love someone as much as I love you,” she said, her fingers grazing along my jaw. “Can we … I just want to curl up in front of the fire in pajamas and cuddle with you tonight. Can we do that?”

“Why don’t you take another bubble bath in our room? I’ll finish making dinner and then we can curl up on the couch, watching the flames in the fireplace,” I said, kissing her once again.

“Our room?” she asked, a brow quirking up. I just grinned widely as I nodded. “Did you use minions to move all of my crap from my room to our room?”

“You’d be proud. I did it all myself, cherie,” I snickered. “I’m an able-bodied man. I’m not going to use minions if I don’t have to. Now, soak, relax and put on something slinky that I can peel off with my teeth.”

“Who said I’ll get dressed?” Bella quipped, getting up from my lap and sashaying to the master suite.

“You’re killing me, Swan,” I laughed. I went back to the kitchen, assembling the lasagna and putting it into the oven. While it was baking, I made the salad and uncorked some white wine. Jake came into the kitchen. “How bad was it? With Alice?”

“Bad,” Jake sighed. “Look, I’m moving down to the smaller condo so you don’t have to worry about me. Bella needs you. She’s amazing, but her sister and her boyfriend are a piece of work. Seth texted me, telling me that there’s a warrant for Jasper Whitlock. Breaking and entering,
larceny, drug possession with the intent to sell, narcotics possession …”

“Any warrants on Alice?” I asked.

“She’s clean, as of now,” Jake explained. “Bella left her a note with her cell phone number.”

“I hope she reaches out, Jake. I would hate for my girl to lose her sister, forever,” I sighed. “I’m praying that Alice pulls her head out of her ass.”

“I’m going to grab a few things, but I’ll move my shit down tomorrow,” Jake sighed. “Do you have anything planned tomorrow?”

I shook my head. “I want to spoil my girl with my time, starting with tonight,” I said. “Thank you for taking care of her today, Jake.”

“Anything for you, your princeliship,” he smirked, ducking into his room and grabbing his laptop along with some clothes. With a wave, he left the condo.

Bella came out of the room, wearing a black slinky robe. Her hair was braided over her shoulder, slightly damp from her bath. “Feel better, cherie?” I asked.

“I love your bathtub,” she said, sliding her arms around my waist. “The jets? Damn. There was one that hit right between my shoulder blades that was heaven.”

“I can give you a massage, Bella,” I whispered.

“No, I’m sufficiently jelly,” she snickered. “Do you need help?” I shook my head, kissing her forehead. She moved to the kitchen island, sliding onto a stool. I poured her a glass of wine. “Thank you. Whatever you’re cooking smells delicious, Masen. My mouth is watering.”

“So is mine and it’s not for dinner,” I growled, looking at her in her attire. “Making me hard, love.”

“Hmm, good to know,” she purred, sipping her wine.

Dinner was delicious and Bella begged for the recipe. After we ate, she packed up some leftovers for Jacob and made me give him some since he obviously didn’t want to live with me in my horniness with my girl. He thanked me and Bella had finished the dishes. She was also making some sort of dessert. “What are you doing?” I asked, my arms around her tiny waist.

“Experimenting,” she smiled. “I saw you had ice cream. I found some pecans and I’ve made a caramel sauce with that.” I hummed against her neck, nibbling along her jawline. “Masen, behave.”

“I’d rather you be dessert, love,” I breathed against her soft skin. I pulled on the edge of her robe, seeing a slender spaghetti strap.

“I’m more than willing to be dessert, baby, but I worked hard on whipping this up. I want you to enjoy it,” she said, dipping the sauté pan into the flames and igniting it. She expertly burnt off whatever she was cooking and looked over her shoulder. “It’s not fancy like your lasagna, but I think you’ll like it.”

I dished out some vanilla ice cream and she dribbled the pecans and caramel on top. I dug in, moaning in pleasure. “Fuck me.”

“Maybe later,” Bella quipped, swirling her ice cream.

“This is delicious, cherie,” I moaned.
“Thank you,” she smiled. “You’ve done so much for me. I wanted to do something, even something small like this, for you. Butter, rum, sugar, vanilla and pecans … pretty simple, really.” We ate our dessert, but Bella’s moans were too much for me. They reminded me so much of how she sounded when devoured her pussy.

“You’re killing me, Bella,” I groaned. She gave me a coy, little grin, fluttering her eyelashes. Putting down my bowl, I swept her into my arms and carried her into the bedroom, making her moan even more.

xx AMDFT xx

As the weeks passed, the renovations in the bakery were going along well. Bella was on the phone with her dad, talking to him about an American holiday, Thanksgiving. “Dad, we’ll figure it out,” she said. I poked her, arching a brow. “Dad wants to have a big Thanksgiving holiday, but it’s not like we can have it at the apartment.”

“Have it here,” I suggested. “The more the merrier.”

“Really?” she asked, her eyes wide. I nodded, pulling her closer and kissing her temple. “Did you hear that, Dad? Let me know.”

With that, planning for my first Thanksgiving began and the guest list was immense. Charlie was coming, along with Linda, her son Mike and his husband, Eric. Jake invited his parents, who were unable to come, Sue, Harry, Seth and his fiancée, Leah. That morning, Bella was up with the sun, dragging me along with her. Together, we prepared a turkey and cooked all the traditional fixings for the party – a ginormous turkey, ham, stuffing, candied yams, mashed potatoes, and various casseroles. She also made some delicious desserts with pumpkin cheesecake, pecan pie and apple crumble with her caramel sauce.

As we sat at the dining room table, I watched as Bella looked over at the faces. Her expression was wistful, almost sad. I reached over and took her hand, kissing her wrist. “I love you, Masen,” she whispered.

“I adore you, chérie,” I said, giving her a smile.

“Jake, Mike, you help me with the dishes,” Charlie groused. “Bella and Masen did all the work today. They deserve to relax and watch the football game.”

“Because that’s so relaxing,” Bella quipped.

“The game will be on, but we can cuddle. That’s relaxing,” I smirked, tugging on Bella’s hand and dragging her to the family room. We curled up on the couch, watching the football game. By the time halftime rolled around, Linda came out with a tray of coffees. I was making Bella cup to her liking when her cell phone vibrated. She took it out, her brow furrowed. “Who is it, love?”

“I don’t recognize the number,” she replied, sliding her finger across the screen. “Hello? Whoa … Alice, take a breath.”

Charlie sat up, his eyes wide. Bella got up off the couch, walking into my office. I followed her, along with Charlie. Jake also came inside, his arms crossed and his eyes swirling with anger.

“Alice, slow down,” Bella replied. “Where are you?” She listened and I heard Alice’s tinny voice. She sounded scared, anxious. “Okay, Alice. I’m coming.”

“No, you’re not,” Jacob growled. I nodded.
“I’m not coming, but I’m sending a friend. His name is Jake and he’s big. He’ll protect you,” Bella explained. “Now, where are you?”

Jacob took the phone, grunting into the phone. Bella ran into my arms, her tears soaking my button-down. I rocked her gently as I listened to Jacob speak to Alice. He hung up the phone, looking at my girl and blinking to Charlie. “She’s in an abandoned building in Alphabet City. Her boyfriend … he’s in a load of trouble. He took it out on your sister.”

“She needs to come home,” Charlie whispered. “I never should have thrown her out.”

“Well, I’m going to get her. I’m bringing Seth with me,” Jacob explained. “Mase, I don’t think we should bring her here.”

“Why not?” Charlie asked.

“I think the best place for her is her own room, Dad,” Bella replied. Charlie looked disgruntled but agreed.

“Okay, Seth and I are going to the building. You’re going to go back to the bakery. Harry will drive you, Charlie and Masen. Harry’s a retired cop and has a concealed weapons license. He can keep you safe,” Jacob explained.

We nodded and Jacob left with Seth. I tossed a set of keys to Harry. We rode down the elevator and clambered into a black SUV. We drove back to Brooklyn. Bella was curled to my side and clearly worried about her sister. In a way, I was worried, too.

But, I was worried that this was just a trick. That Alice was pulling the wool over her sister’s eyes, her father’s eyes.

A/N: So, a technological issue deleted half of this chapter. I thought what I wrote was good … My computer, thought otherwise. LOL. Anyway, we’re going to back to Bella and find out about what’s going on with Alice. We’re also going to lead up to Christmas. Leave me some!
Chapter 24

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Anyway, we’re going back to Bella and find out about what’s going on with Alice. We’re also going to lead up to Christmas.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Bella

I noticed some small changes in the apartment. It seemed warmer, homier. I was pacing the length of the living room. Jake had texted Masen, explaining that they had picked up Alice and she was beaten up pretty badly. My fear was that she was raped. “Bella, she’s going to be okay,” Masen replied, taking me into his arms.

“What a cluster,” I grumbled. “You don’t have to stay, Masen.”

“I’m not going anywhere, cherie,” he said, taking my face into his hands. “I love you. You’re my family.”

“Even though my family is fucked up?” I snorted humorlessly.

“Every family is fucked up,” he smirked, kissing my nose. I slid my arms around his waist and snuggled into his embrace. The door opened and my dad struggled to stand. Masen helped him to his feet while Linda came out from the kitchen, her hands wringing in a towel. Jacob was helping Alice; whose face was a rainbow of colors.

“Fuck,” I spat, walking over to her and wrapping my arm around her waist. “Alice? You should be in the hospital.”

“No. No hospital,” she said, her voice muffled. “I’m okay, Bella.”

“I can do it myself,” she muttered. She moved away stubbornly, but I followed her into the bathroom. She removed her clothes and I saw some bruises on her back. “Bella, I’m fine.”

“Those black welts on your body indicates otherwise, Alice,” I argued. I waited on the toilet as Alice showered. She huffed in the shower. “I know we don’t have the best relationship, Alice, but I’m concerned. You’re covered in bruises and living in an abandoned building.”

“Dad kicked me out,” Alice said, pulling out a towel and wrapping it around her body behind the shower curtain. “He kicked me out because of you, Bella.” She stepped out of the shower and I could see more bruises on her thighs. “I wasn’t raped, Bella. I was pushed against a railing.” She held out her arms. “No track marks, either.”

“Will you stop with the wall? You called me, Alice. You asked for help and you got it. You’d think you’d be a little grateful,” I sighed. “Look, I’m worried. You were kicked out because of your actions, not living up to the expectations Dad gave you and stealing from your family. Not
mine. I want us to have a relationship. I know that you’re …”

“Bella, I’m tired. I don’t want to do this now. I just want some pain killers and to sleep,” Alice grumbled.

“You may have a concussion, Alice,” I argued. “You shouldn’t sleep.”

“Maybe, in time, we can have a relationship. For now? I just need to sleep,” Alice said wearily. She walked to me, her grey eyes appraising me. “Thank you for helping me, Bella. I appreciate it.” She hugged me awkwardly before ducking out of the bathroom.

I huffed out a breath, tugging on my hair and glowering at the bathroom door, which was partially open. There was a quiet knock on the wooden door. “Yeah?”

Linda walked in, giving me a tender smile. “Alice is in her room.” She sat down at the edge of the tub. “What’s wrong, Bella?”

“Alice still blames me for …”

“She reached out, sweetie,” Linda murmured, taking my hand. “It’s a step in the right direction. I’m upset that she was hurt, but she’s here and she’s safe. From what Jacob said, Seth is working with the police department to find Jasper, but as far as we know, he’s in the wind.” She pressed a set of keys into my hands. “Go to my apartment. You and Masen can stay there. I know you want to stay close.”

“What about Mike and Eric?”

“They went back to their apartment in Queens, Bella,” Linda said, hugging me. “I’m staying here. I’ll call you if anything changes.”


Masen and I left my old apartment. Charlie and Linda promised to call if something happened with Alice. We went to her apartment, staying there for a couple of days. Alice was changed, obviously. She wouldn’t talk to Dad, Linda or anyone. She just stayed in her room, sleeping. I tried to reach out, but she was cold toward me, unwilling to even have a conversation with me. After that, Masen and I went back to his condo after the weekend, where we put up a lavish Christmas tree. Alice went to school, which she still had attended while she was homeless. It was the one thing, supposedly, that kept Alice grounded.

That shocked me, to say the least. Alice never really cared about school. She went because she had to, not because she had aspirations of bettering herself.

Three weeks after Alice’s attack, Jasper still hadn’t been found and Alice hadn’t said anything about what had happened to her. Trying to move forward, Masen was preparing for our trip to Gevalia. I was excited but scared at the same time. “Does Alice have a passport?” he asked.

“Um, she does,” I answered. “Last year, she had a class trip to Toronto. It was optional, but she fundraised so she could go.” I rolled my eyes. “She fundraised for herself, but heaven forbid she do something for her family.”

“Has she spoken to you?” he murmured, pulling me onto his lap. I shook my head, idly tracing the veins on his hands. “It appears that her relationship with your dad has improved. He said that they’re having conversations. Short conversations, but conversations, nonetheless.”
“She still blames me for everything,” I grumbled. “It’s not my fault that … that I got time with
Mom. It’s also not my fault that she couldn’t pull it together.”

“It’s not your fault, cherie,” he whispered, kissing my temple. “When we first met, I know I said
that I was here on a diplomatic mission, but my mom wanted me to find my brother. Emmett is
younger than me and he reminds me a lot of your sister. You tell him to do something, but he does
the exact opposite. Shortly after we met, I got a call from Jake, telling me that my brother had been
arrested. He was drunk, drugged up and was threatened with deportation. I got him out of the
police station, cuffed him to the bed and let him sleep it off. After that, I told him that he needed to
straighten up, but I was sending him back to Gevalia to go into rehab. I’m not talking about a spa-
like rehab. It’s more like a boot camp. My brother hasn’t spoken to me since I put him on the plane
back home. I don’t know if my brother will ever speak to me again.”

“We both have issues with cranky siblings,” I snorted, leaning my cheek against his shoulder. “I
hope your brother sees what you did for him. You probably saved his life. You’re a good man,
Masen.”

“Just like I hope Alice sees that what you’re doing for her is the right thing, too,” Masen
whispered, his fingers tracing down my jaw. “I’m going to arrange for Alice to come with us to
Gevalia while everything in my mind is telling me otherwise.”

“You still don’t trust her?” I asked.

“No, I don’t. And from what I could tell you don’t trust her either,” Masen said. “Keep your friends
close, but your enemies closer.”

“You’re right. And I don’t trust her, but she’s my sister. I love her, Masen,” I shrugged.
“Everything she’s done to me, I still love her. How fucked up is that?”

“I still love my brother,” Masen smiled, his lips dragging down my neck and nibbling on my skin. I
shuddered against him. “Now, as much as I want to continue this conversation, my pervy mind is
thinking about living out a fantasy of making love to you in front of our Christmas tree with the fire
blazing. We need distraction, love.”

“You know what? That sounds fucking amazing,” I said, kissing him tenderly. Our clothes were
moved and Masen lay me down on the soft rug in front of the fireplace. His mouth tasted every
inch of me, bringing me so much pleasure. I whimpered in need until he crawled up my body,
nestled in between my thighs. “I need you, Masen. Please?”

“Don’t ever beg,” he whispered as his lips caressed mine. He slid inside me, making me gasp
against his mouth. His movements were slow, deliberate and so fucking loving. We came together,
with soft admissions of love and devotion. When we were done with our lovemaking, he picked me
up and carried me into our room, where he made love to me again.

xx AMDFT xx

A couple of days later, I was out Christmas shopping with Linda, Sue, Leah and Angela. Masen
wanted Jake to go with me, but Leah didn’t want her fiancé to join us since she still needed to shop
for him. Linda invited Alice, but she refused to come. Linda was angry, trying to pull Alice into the
fold, but my sister was stubborn as hell. She made me look chill and I’m as stubborn as they come.

It was a nice day, but cold and snowy. I had a lot of fun and managed to get presents for everyone
on my list, including my sister. I didn’t get her anything big, but it was something. I struggled,
however, getting a present for Masen. What do you get your boyfriend who is the next in line to be
the king of Gevalia? The man could have whatever he wanted.

“Bella, you look a little perplexed,” Sue said, her smile sweet.

“I don’t know what to get Masen for Christmas. He can get anything for himself,” I grumbled.

“Why don’t you get something for his eyes only?” Leah suggested, waggling her brows. “Some sexy lingerie so he can unwrap you like a present.”

“Oooh, I like that,” Angela sang. “Give him a sexy striptease.”

“Maybe,” I shrugged. “About the lingerie. The striptease? I can barely walk. I’m not sexy.” Angela just rolled her eyes, swatting at me.

“You both love cooking, yeah?” Linda said. “I can’t cook to save my life. I’ve been spoiling your dad with take out. He’s tried to cook for me, but his dexterity is … well, it’s not very good with the tremors.” She frowned, huffing out a breath. “Anyway, why don’t you share some of your favorite recipes with Masen. Create a cookbook.” She snapped her fingers. “You know, you could create a cookbook for the bakery and sell them!”

“Focus, Linda,” Sue giggled.

“Sorry, but I think Masen would like that,” Linda smiled. “I’ve got a friend of mine who can take photos for you as you bake and cook along the way.”

“Can it be done in time?” I asked.

“I’ll make it work, Bella,” Linda said, giving me a hug. “Now, how about we try and find something that Masen can unwrap.”

“Linda,” I coughed, my face flushing. She just snickered, dragging me into Macy’s.

A few hours later, I had some pretty raunchy pieces of lingerie. After I’d sent Linda and Sue to find something for my dad and Harry. I felt more comfortable with Angela and Leah. Sue and Linda? They reminded me too much of a motherly type. I should not be buying sexy lingerie with motherly types. When we finished buying the lingerie, Angela, Leah and I went to a nearby café to wait for Linda and Sue.

Leah and Angela became fast friends and I felt normal for the first time in a long, long time. I was out with friends, laughing and not stressing out about whether or not we’d be kicked out of our apartment. I felt like I had a future. I was happy, giggling, and relaxed.

While we waited for Linda and Sue, Leah was texting Jake and her brother. Angela draped her arm behind my chair. “You look good, Bells,” she said. “I’ve never seen you so happy.”

“I’ve never been so happy,” I shrugged. “Even Alice can’t bring me down.”

“I’m shocked that you let her back into the apartment,” Angela spat.

“She was beaten up,” I sighed.

“And her boyfriend is a druggie loser,” Leah offered, putting her phone down. “We’re still looking for him. Has Alice spoken about what happened?”

“We don’t talk, Leah,” I snorted. “My sister hates me and, at times, the feeling is fucking mutual.”
“She is pretty angry all of the time,” Leah shrugged. “Why is that?”

“She’s not angry. She’s just mean,” Angela laughed. “Alice’s problems are never her own. It’s everyone else’s fault, especially the fact that Alice doesn’t have a mother. Now, not to sound like a bitch, but Alice’s attack may not have even been an accident. She was possibly looking for sympathy.”

“Angela!” I gasped.

“What? You probably thought it, too,” Angela smirked. “Man, I wish this had some booze in it.” She finished her venti frou-frou macchiato cappuccino, tossing it into the nearby garbage. “I still don’t trust her. I never trusted Alice. I doubt I will.”

“I’m in the same boat, but those bruises on her body were not self-inflicted,” I shrugged. “But, I wouldn’t doubt she’s up to something. I’m trying, trying to be open and forgiving. It’s just hard after so many years of being shit on by her. Anyway, no more talk of her. Let’s talk about what you’re both getting your significant others, yeah?”

We finished our coffees, meeting up with Sue and Linda. With hugs and kisses, we went our separate ways. Jake picked me up, along with Leah. He escorted me up to the condo and he had a date with his fiancée.

The next couple of days, I worked with the photographer that Linda knew, using her kitchen for the actual baking of the goodies and typed up a number of various recipes that I knew that Masen enjoyed. When I finished the recipes and had the photos, Linda helped me create the book and rush-ordered it so I could have it before we flew out to Gevalia.

“Thank you for helping me with this, Linda,” I said.

“Anytime, sweetie,” she smiled. “Bella, I hope you’re not upset that …”

“That you’re dating my dad?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she chuckled anxiously. “Your dad is a wonderful man and I know that he had a rough time after your mom died. With a newborn baby, a nine-year-old girl and running a business? He handled it as best he could and we helped as much he allowed, but he was stubborn. He reminds me a lot of you.” I blushed, biting my lip and nodding in agreement. “Look, I get your pride, truly. Why didn’t you tell me it got that bad? The debt? The bills?”

“How much did Dad tell you?” I muttered.

“Yes, Bella, I’m happy that you’re on the upswing. You deserve all the happiness in the world, but you shouldn’t have to give up your dreams,” Linda said, squeezing my hands. “You shouldn’t have a family member treat you like the way Alice did. I know I’m not your mom.”

“You’re not my mom, but you are a friend and it’s nice to have someone helping my dad. I’m happy you’re with him,” I smiled, hugging her tightly. “Thank you for that and for everything you’ve done for us with the bakery, your friendship and beyond. I’m grateful for that. I’m also happy that you’re coming to Gevalia with my family.”

“Someone needs to keep Alice in line,” Linda smirked. “Mike and Eric are spending time with Eric’s family, so I was just going to be having Chinese food in my apartment. Masen also personally invited me, as did your father. It’ll be fun. Now, enough heavy talk. Let’s talk a bit about your hot boyfriend and how much he adores you, because he does. Masen worships the ground you walk on, Bells. You deserve that and more.”
“That sounds amazing,” I sang.

The morning we were to leave for Gevalia, I was an anxious nervous mess. My suitcases were filled with presents for my family and some gifts for Masen’s family. They were probably insignificant trinkets, but I felt like I had to bring something.

“Cherie, your father, sister and Linda are heading to the airport. We’ve got to go,” Masen laughed.

“I’m just afraid that I forgot something,” I said, looking at him and biting my lip.

“Whatever you need, we can get in Gevalia, Bella,” he said. He took my hands and enfolded me in his arms. “Why are you freaking out?”

“I’m meeting your mother. Your mother, who is the damn queen of Gevalia,” I hissed. “What could go wrong?” I barely paused and gripped his biceps. “Everything! Everything could go wrong, Masen!”

He wrapped his fingers around my neck and crashed his lips against mine. His other arm banded around my waist, holding me to his body. I gripped his shoulders, responding to his kiss feverishly and tangling my tongue with his. When he kissed me breathless, he pulled back, pressing his forehead to mine. “Nothing will go wrong, cherie.”

“What if I forget to curtsy or bow or whatever? What if your mother hates me?” I said.

“Okay, we don’t curtsy or bow unless it’s out in public. Behind closed doors? We’re a regular family,” he said soothingly, his fingers caressing my jaw. “And my mother will not hate you. She may seem cold, at first. She’s usually leery of strangers. She was adamant that I had full background checks run on everyone who was coming.”

“Oh, God,” I moaned.

“You all came up clean. Even your sister,” he laughed. “Now, you will be staying with me in Masen Manor. We cannot ‘share’ a room.”

“What? I’ve gotten so used to sleeping with you,” I pouted.

“Hush and listen,” he chided. “For all intents and purposes, you will be set up in the Duchess suite. Your clothes and personal belongings will reside there. You, my love, will be staying with me, in my private quarters. There’s a secret passageway to my rooms from the Duchess suite. I can’t sleep without you, cherie, and I don’t intend to.”


“Linda and Alice will have adjoining rooms in the main palace,” he answered. “I’m doing that for two reasons – one, unmarried couples cannot stay in the same room. Some antiquated bullshit or whatever. I’m changing that when I become the king, but that’s neither here nor there. The second reason is that I want Linda to keep an eye on her. I know you don’t trust your sister. I definitely have zero trust in her.”

“That makes sense,” I shrugged. “And my dad?”

“He’ll have his own room and a personal valet to assist in whatever he needs. My father arranged for that valet to be a trained nurse in case something happens,” Masen reassured me. “We also
have a doctor, too, on call if …”

I leaned forward, brushing my lips with his. I ran my fingers over his slightly stubbly cheeks.
“Thank you, your majesty,” I whispered. “I love you.”

“I love you more, my love,” he breathed. “Now, can we go?”

“We can,” I giggled.

“And I’m not ‘majesty’,” he scoffed. “Highness. Your highness.”

“Whatever, your majesty,” I teased. “Take me to your home. The castle on the hill …”

“More like mountains, Bella. But, I’m more than willing. With pleasure, cherie,” he smiled, threading our fingers together. “With pleasure.”

A/N: You still with me? Thank you for reading! Up next will be Masen and the first part of Christmas. There will be a citrus warning for the next chapter … just saying. Some naughty royal debauchery. We’re also going to find out more about Emmett. Will he open up to his brother? Leave me some!
Chapter 25

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be Masen and the first part of Christmas. There will be a citrus warning for the next chapter … just saying. Some naughty royal debauchery. We’re also going to find out more about Emmett. Will he open up to his brother?

Also, thank you Alec for his invaluable knowledge about royalty and suggesting the Château de Chambord as inspiration for the castle of Gevalia. You’re a rock star and I appreciate all your help! Hugs to you!

Chapter Twenty-Five

Masen

Bella was curled up next to me, sleeping and dreaming as we flew over the Atlantic Ocean. Charlie was also snoring while Linda and Alice were awake. Linda was reading a book on her Kindle and Alice was staring out the window, her face pursed in a grotesque frown. Alice blinked up at me, her eyes vacant and she sneered as she got up, stomping to the bathroom in the private jet.

It was going to be a long fucking trip. Why did I invite the devil spawn?

“Your highness,” said the steward. I blinked up and smiled at him, blandly. He was looking at my girl with disdain. “I’ve spoken with the captain and we’re on schedule to land in Gevalia a little after seven in the evening. We were afraid that we would have to go around a storm, but it dissipated, meaning it’s clear skies ahead.”

“Excellent,” I answered.

“Is there anything that you need, your highness?” He blinked around the cabin, his nose wrinkled.

“None of your judgment and attitude,” I replied. He stood up, his eyes wide.

“Your highness?” he sputtered. “I would never.”

“You have, as soon as they walked on the plane. Not royalty and, therefore, not worth your time. Why should you be polite to these commoners?” I sneered. “That man? He has Parkinson’s disease, a debilitating neurologic disorder and is in constant pain, losing more and more fine motor control daily. He worked all his life to provide his daughters, but when he was diagnosed, the woman next to me? The woman I love more than my own life? She gave up her career as a teacher to come home and take over the family business so her father and sister didn’t lose their livelihood or home. I don’t need your sanctimonious crap, your derision. These people are my personal guests and not pieces of garbage. If your attitude is anything like what I’m going to expect in Gevalia, tell the pilot to turn around. I don’t want it.”

“My apologies, your highness,” he whispered.

“Don’t apologize to me. Actions speak louder than words,” I scoffed. He nodded, scurrying away.
“Nicely put, Masen,” Linda quipped. “He was a weasel.”

“He may be out of a job,” I grumped. “I won’t have anyone give my girl or you any grief. Not some smug steward or the Queen of Gevalia.”

“Or Alice,” Linda snickered.

I shrugged, leaning my cheek against Bella’s head. I watched as we flew over the ocean, seeing it morph into cloud cover and land masses. Eventually, my eyes drifted and I woke up when the wheels touched down on the tarmac. When we pulled into the hangar, the doors opened and we were greeted by Felix. He welcomed our guests with a friendly smile. He also stamped passports and escorted us off the plane. I briefly told him about the steward, who was working with the flight crew to remove our luggage and avoiding my anger, clearly. Felix told me he’d handle it and led us to a waiting convoy of cars. I looked over my shoulder, watching as Felix dismissed the steward. The steward was clearly angry, pointing to the car. Felix nodded curtly and two of Gevalia’s military police placed cuffs on his wrists, leading him away to a nearby squad car.

Good riddance to bad rubbish.

Upon our arrival to the palace, we’d have supper with my mother and father before separating for the evening. “Mrs. Newton and Mr. Swan, you’ll be with my cousin, Demetri in the first vehicle,” Felix explained when he walked back to the convoy of SUVs. “Miss Alice, you will join them as well.”

“What about us?” Bella asked, her fingers clinging to mine.

“You’ll be with me, Miss Bella,” Felix said, giving her a gallant bow. “And Prince Edward.”

She blinked to me, arching a brow. “You do not look like an Edward,” she snickered. “Masen is so much more appropriate for you.”

“Legally, it’s my name,” I shrugged. “It’s also my father’s name. To differentiate, he called me Masen. I liked it and it stuck, but my mother? She’ll call me Edward, as will most of the court that you will meet.”

“Do I need to call you ‘Edward’?” she asked as we got into the black Range Rover.

“No, you don’t, cherie,” I snickered. Once the luggage was put into the third Range Rover, Demetri pulled away and Felix followed suit.

“What can I expect when we get to the castle?” she breathed. “Will I have time to freshen up?”

“You will. Supper is a formal affair and we will need to change. I’ve taken the liberty of hiring a lady’s maid to assist you. She’ll help you with your clothes for these formal events,” I said. “Her name is Heidi and will be at your beckoned call.”

“A lady’s maid? Oh, God,” Bella whimpered. “And you? Do you have a valet or manservant?”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Lady Bella,” Felix snickered from the front seat. She squeaked. “And Heidi is my wife. She’s really looking forward to meeting the woman who stole our dear Edward’s heart.”

“If you work for Masen, what did you do while he was gone?” Bella asked. “I’m curious.”

“I do more than just dress him. I’m his personal assistant, really. But, while he was in the US, I
worked with Duke Edward, Prince Edward’s father. And to avoid confusion, you may call him Carlisle,” Felix said, blinking back at Bella. “Only Her Majesty calls them both by Edward and they both know when to go when beckoned.”

“Mother has a slightly exasperated tone when she calls for me,” I snickered. “Now, once we get to the château - it’s not really a castle – you will be whisked away by Heidi and the maids assigned to Linda and Alice. After you’ve freshened up, I will escort you to the formal ‘throne’ room. My parents will be there. I will bow and then take your hand. You will curtsey, keeping your back straight.”

“I’ve been practicing,” Bella snickered. “I don’t want to fall ass over ankles.”

“You’ll be perfect,” I smiled, kissing her forehead. “I will tuck your arm into mine and your family will be introduced. My mother and father are aware of Charlie’s illness. He will have to bow, but only his head. Alice and Linda will curtsey, the same as you. After you’ve been introduced, my mother will lead us into the formal dining room for our meal.”

“You’ll be escorting me, but who will escort Alice?” she asked.

“Demetri will be acting as escort for both Linda and Alice,” I answered. “This is all pomp and circumstance. I promise you, tomorrow, it won’t be as fancy. You’ll see everything is more relaxed.”

“I trust you, Masen,” she grinned. “Will you wear a crown?”

“No,” I laughed. “I will be wearing the royal crest, which is a bright red sash across my body, clipped with the family crest at my hip. The only time I will wear a crown will be when I get married and when ascend to the throne as king. Though, I’d be wearing more of a circlet when I’m married and full crown …”

“Like I know the difference,” Bella laughed. She blinked as the château came into view. It was up lit with green and red lighting. The surrounding area was covered in snow, with fluffy flakes coming down steadily. “Whoa? That’s … I’m going to fuck up.”

“You’re not going to fuck up,” I said soothingly. “It’s all for show, cherie.”

“But, what about the cutlery. I know that there’s going to be fork for every course,” she hissed.

“Work your way in,” I snickered, pulling her to my side and kissing her temple. “And when my mother puts her napkin on the table, she’s finished. We’re ALL finished.”

“Talk about power,” Bella snorted. “Will Linda, Charlie and Alice be made aware of these rules?”

“They will. Demetri is going over them now and they will be reminded as they are dressing for this meal by Renata, the maid assigned to Alice and Linda and Alec, Charlie’s valet/nurse,” I said, sliding my arm around her waist. The Range Rovers swung around, parking in the rear of the château. “Now, deep breath in.” She drew in a breath, holding it as the SUVs stopped. “Blow it, cherie. Breathe, Bella.”

“This is all fucking surreal,” she whispered. Felix got out and he opened the door for Bella, offering her a hand out. I followed, taking a glance at Charlie, Linda and Alice. Charlie was like his daughter, in awe. Linda was obviously nervous and Alice? She found the gravel outside of the château to be more interesting.

“Miss Bella?” My girl looked up and smiled at Heidi. “If you’ll come with me, we’ll get you
changed and freshened up for supper.” They shook hands, disappearing into the château. Renata, a beautiful strawberry blonde, but efficient woman, led Alice and Linda inside, as well.


“A little bit,” he answered. “But, I can make it through dinner. I need to take some medication before that, though.”

I blinked to Alec, an older gentleman with bright blue eyes and graying chocolate hair. “This is Alec. He’ll be your personal valet. He’s also a nurse and experienced with physical therapy.”

“I’ve been made aware of your medical needs, Mr. Swan,” Alec said, his accent thick. “I hope I can assist you in any way possible. If you should need it, we do have a doctor on call and Miss Bella has brought copies of your medical records, if need be.”

“You’ve really thought of everything,” Charlie whispered, blinking over to me. “Thank you, your highness.”

“I’m still just Masen,” I smiled. “Now, no one will fault you if you’re too tired. Your rooms are prepared if you need to go upstairs and rest. My mother understands. She may be the queen, but has learned to be flexible, when it comes to her subjects.”

“No, no,” Charlie responded, shaking his head. “I’ll be fine.”

Alec helped Charlie into the château while I followed Felix to my private dressing rooms. Taking a shower, shaving my face and attempting to wrangle my hair, I changed into a black tuxedo and slid on my crest. It was like putting on a suit of armor. My demeanor changed and I was no longer Masen, but Prince Edward. Splashing on some cologne, I left my room and walked to my parents’ private suite, with Felix by my side.

Inside, Felix left me and I saw my father first. He smiled at me, hugging me close and kissing my cheeks. “Being in love suits you, Masen,” he said. “I can’t wait to meet your Bella. I’ve missed you, son. Parliament misses you.”

“I can imagine,” I snickered. “I’ve missed being home, too, but I’m happy with Bella and being in New York. It’s so different than here.” I looked at him. “How’s Emmett?”

“He’s doing well. He’ll be here for the holidays. Demetri will be leaving tomorrow morning to pick him up. He’ll be back by dinner tomorrow,” he smiled. “He’s looking healthy, but there’s a sadness in his eyes, Masen. Something happened in New York that shattered his soul. He hasn’t talked to me. Perhaps, he’ll talk to you.”

“Emmett must hate me,” I sighed, scrubbing my face.

“He doesn’t hate you. He loves you, but he’s dealing with something and it’s more than just his demons of addiction,” Dad replied.

“At least he’s battling those demons,” came my mother’s voice. She walked out, wearing a beautiful ice-blue cocktail dress and small diamond circlet in her silvery hair. “Edward, come over here. I want to see you.”

“Hello, Mother,” I said, kissing her cheeks. “You look radiant.”

“You look tired,” she retorted.
“Flying usually makes me tired, Mother. You know this,” I smiled. She ran her hands down my arms, taking my hands. She gave me a warm smile. “What is it?”

“I see how much you love Isabella. You have an air of calmness around you,” she breathed. “And such confidence, but that goes without saying, my boy. You’re troubled, though.”

“Bella’s sister, Alice, is here and I’m leery of her intentions,” I shrugged. “Renata is assigned to be with her at all times, and she’s rooming with Linda, Charlie’s girlfriend.” My mother tutted. “It’s nothing scandalous. You know that Charlie is a widower.”

“And Linda is a divorcée,” she scoffed. “I read her background check.”

“Be nice, Mother. Linda has become an adoptive mother to both Alice and Bella. I can tell that she cares deeply for the girls and for Charlie,” I admonished. “Would you begrudge a widower companionship just for the sake of propriety? We do live in the twenty-first century, Mother.”

“I’m always nice,” Mother smirked. I arched a brow and she mirrored my look, her hands pressed into fists at her hips. With a harsh breath, she broke our ‘stare off’ and continued, “Now, I know that Charles suffers from Parkinson’s Disease. If he needs to retire early, he can and I want him comfortable here, Edward.”

“Alec is his valet and Charlie’s a stubborn as a mule,” I laughed. “You’ll like him. He’s a strong man, supportive and loves his daughters. Though, he’s disappointed in Alice.”

“I’ve read that report. She sounds like an entitled brat,” Mother growled. “She better not give me lip or she’ll spend the holidays behind bars. I don’t care who she is.” She blinked to the clock on the wall. “It’s nearly time for supper. You go get your girl and we’ll meet you in a few moments.”

“Thank you, Mother,” I beamed. I kissed her cheek. “Love you.”

She gasped, her hand pressed to my jaw. “I love you, too, Edward.” Her eyes softened and she hugged me briefly before she turned back into the ruler of Gevalia.

I ducked out and saw Charlie, Linda and Alice all waiting in the foyer. Charlie was dressed in a plain, simple tux. I could see how much the flight had affected him. He was a little shaky on his feet. Linda, who was wearing a black cocktail dress and subtle accessories, had her arm around his waist. Alice was in purple and looked like she’d rather get a root canal without any sort of pain block than be here. I smiled at Charlie and Linda as I walked over to Alice. “You’re an invited guest to the royal family,” I said lowly to her. She stiffened. “At least attempt to look like you’re enjoying yourself.”

“My cell phone was confiscated,” Alice sniffed angrily. “Renata said I couldn’t have it while in the castle.”

“You can’t. My cell phone is locked in a secured safe. No photography is allowed in here, save for official portraits with heads of state and those happen in the throne room or dining room,” I explained. Alice huffed. “You can have your phone when you leave the estate of the château, but for now, it’ll stay with Renata. If there’s anyone you need to contact, she’ll be more than happy to assist you, but on a secured line from the communications center. These precautions are for security purposes, Alice. Not a personal slight against you.”

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever.”

I bit my tongue, trying to keep my temper. “I’m the prince of Gevalia. You will treat me, my family and the people working for me with respect. You will never roll your eyes again, or you’ll
spend the night in the security office in a cell.” She blinked at me, her eyes wide. “Understood, Ms. Swan?” She nodded. “I couldn’t hear you.”

“Yes, your highness,” she said quietly, scurrying away and finding her father. He looked at me, giving me a frustrated scowl, but I waited patiently for my Bella.

I didn’t have to wait long. She appeared, wearing a dark green lace cocktail dress and the jewelry I’d given to her for the Guggenheim event. Her hair was curled and pinned up with some diamond pins. She was effortlessly beautiful, but very nervous. I walked over to her and picked up her hand. “Cherie,” I breathed. “You are a vision.”

“So are you,” she whispered. “I wish I could kiss you, but …

“Tonight, after we’ve settled in Masen Manor,” I smirked. “But, please know that I want to kiss every inch of you, love.” I kissed her knuckles before tucking it into my arm. “Supper awaits.” I walked us to the throne room, where we greeted my parents. I could see Mother’s approval of Bella when my cherie curtsied perfectly, giving my family the deference befitting the crown. She also liked Charlie, who bowed deeply, despite his ailment. Linda, she didn’t know how to approach her and her derision of Alice was abundantly clear.

Supper was delicious and filled with polite conversation. I could tell Bella was anxious, as she picked at her meal. My mother, however, was being patient and asking thoughtful questions. She was trying to put my girlfriend at ease. I loved my mother for that and I know that in time, Bella would grow to love Esme Masen Cullen as a person and not as the ruler of a small principality.

After our meal, my mother invited Bella to join her for tea tomorrow. My girl agreed to come, but I could tell she was panicking.

The invitation alone was a clear indication that my mother approved of my cherie. She wanted to get to know Bella and break down that wall.

With gracious smiles, my parents retreated to their private quarters and Charlie, Linda and Alice were escorted to their accommodations. Felix was pulling around the Range Rover to drive us to Masen Manor. Bella, despite her nap on the plane, looked completely spent. Helping Bella into the SUV, I slid in after her and Felix drove us to the far end of the estate. Bella pressed her cheek to my shoulder, immediately conking out.

Felix looked back at us from the rear-view mirror. “Her Majesty seems to like Bella.”

“It would appear so,” I whispered. “I’m glad. I knew that once Mother met Bella, she’d love her as much as I do.”

“No one will love her that much, Edward,” Felix chuckled. “Her belongings are inside the Duchess suite and Heidi will help …”

“Thank you, Felix,” I said, kissing my girl’s forehead. He just chuckled again, pulling in front of the Masen Manor. Bella was guided away from me, half-asleep and disgruntled. I sighed, padding to my bedroom and removing my tuxedo. I put on a pair of sweat pants, leaning against the window as I watched the snow fall. I waited until I heard a quiet knock on my door, indicating that Heidi had left Bella’s room. Ducking behind a tapestry, I made my way to her suite and found her sitting at the edge of her bed. “You look knackered, cherie.”

“Stress and travel. Not a good combo,” she said, smiling at me tenderly. “Heidi said you’d be in here shortly. Where did you come from? Obviously not the door because that’s closed and presumably locked.”
“Closet,” I said, taking her hand. “Where I’m taking you to my suite and having you in my bed.”

“To sleep, right?” she pleaded.

“You’re dead on your feet, Bella. I’d rather you be receptive to my adorations,” I cooed, picking her up and carrying her back to my bedroom. I laid her on my bed and I wanted nothing more than have her there forever. As soon as her head hit the pillows, she was down for the count and curled up into a tiny ball. I turned off my lights, crawling into bed with her. She turned, pressing her cheek against my bare chest. “I love you, my Bella. My duchess …” Because I intend to make you mine and you will be the Duchess of Gevalia, ruling by my side.

“Love you, more,” she mumbled, barely coherently. “Your Majesty.” I snorted, closing my eyes as Bella got the last word in. Even half asleep. With a quiet sigh, I joined her, safe in my knowledge that I was going to make Bella a very important part of my future.

A/N: Sooooo … we’re in Gevalia and preliminary findings indicate that Queen Esme likes Bella. We’ll hear more from Bella in two chapters. I want to stay with Masen for the next chapter so we can have a discussion with Emmett. Will he open up to his brother? I’m also planning on have an AlicePOV, too … but later on while we’re in Gevalia.

Pictures of the Château de Chambord are on my blog (again, thank you Alec for your suggestion), along with Masen and Bella’s attire. You can find the link to that on my profile, as well as access it from my Facebook page: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation.
I’m on twitter, too … tufano79.

Leave me some lovin’! Thanks for reading!
Chapter Twenty-Six

Masen

Early the next morning, I woke up to my alarm. Bella grumbled, burrowing deeper into the pillows. I kissed her, seeing a message waiting on my private line. I got out of bed and pulled on a t-shirt. I walked to my private office and accessed my messages. It was Felix telling me my schedule. I jotted down the handful of meetings I needed to attend, but for the most part it was a lazy day.

Dialing Felix’s extension, I placed an order for breakfast and said that Bella and I would be down in a couple of hours.

“I do apologize for the early call, your highness,” Felix said quietly. “It’s just your mother wanted to verify that you’d still attend the Christmas Eve event at the children’s hospital and your father was insistent that you meet Prince Emmett.”

“Can you arrange for Bella to have dinner with her family while I spend some time with my brother?” I asked. “I want to show her everything Gevalia has to offer, but …”

“He’s your brother, your highness. I understand,” Felix responded. “I’ll handle it all.”

“Thank you, Felix,” I smiled. “Can you also see if we can get some holiday decorations in the manor? It’s very un-Christmasy.”

“I’ll make those arrangements, too,” he chuckled. “It’s good to have you back, your highness. I’ve missed you.”


“Goodness, that came out misconstrued,” Felix sputtered. “I have missed you, as a leader, a friend and my future king. It hasn’t been the same since you left for America. There was an energy in the palace that could only come from you. I know that your parents missed you tremendously. Anyway, you’re back, even if you’re here for a short time … I’ll let you go. Breakfast will be served at half past ten in the manor dining room.” He hung up before I could thank him again.

Padding back to the bedroom, I checked on Bella. She was buried under the duvet cover and curled around my pillow. I crawled into bed, sliding my arms around her tiny waist. “Too. Early,” she muttered. “Sleep. More.”

“You’re adorable in the morning, cherie,” I whispered, kissing her neck. “I remember when you
were up before the sun to work in the bakery.”

“I got spoiled by a hot prince sweeping me off my feet,” she giggled, turning around and grinning at me. “Why did your alarm go off at o’dark thirty?”

“Usually, I work out before I go to work,” I said. “But, I can think of better ways to exercise.”

“What’s that, your majesty?” she purred.

“Loving you,” I growled, kissing her mouth. I moved the covers down and revealed her sleep rumpled clothes on her deliciously sexy body. She moaned against my lips as she tugged on my t-shirt.

“We won’t be interrupted, will we?” she asked, tossing my shirt onto the floor.

“We’re free until half past ten, cherie. Hours of me languishing your body with orgasms,” I said, inching her camisole up to reveal her pert, bare breast. I cupped it with my hand, wrapping my lips around the pink bud.

“Masen,” she panted, arching her back. “Fuck …”

“I plan to do that, too, love,” I said, tearing her camisole from her body. “I just want to see you naked in my bed.” She smiled, shimmying out of her shorts and panties, revealing her naked form. “Fucking perfect, cherie. It’s my dream come true.”

“What’s that?” she asked, her palms gliding along her sides and down to her hips.

“Having the woman, I love more than anything in my bed, naked, writhing and …” I paused, spreading her legs and cupping her pussy, “so fucking wet for me.” I circled my fingers over folds, staring into her eyes. The diffused light from the snow made her look like a damned angel in my bed. “I want you to come for me, love.” I pushed two fingers inside her, feeling her tightness and her juices coating my hand. I blinked down, staring at my fingers disappearing inside her pink, swollen heat. I kissed her hard, pulling her up. “Watch my fingers fuck you.”

“Masen,” she whimpered, looking to where I was pleasing her. “Shit …”

I spread her legs further apart, kissing her neck. “I’ve never felt a pussy so tight, baby. It’s god damned perfection. Made for me.” She panted, her head falling back. “No, Bella. Watch my fingers inside you. Do you see how wet you are?”

“Hmmm, yes,” she moaned. She stopped my hand, pulling it from her core and sliding my fingers into her mouth. Holy fuck me. Her eyes were glazed over as she devoured her arousal off my fingers. She removed my hand, putting it back onto her sex, she kissed me. I put three fingers inside her, curling them just right. Bella was rocking with me, fucking my hand. Her breasts were bouncing with each thrust of my arm. “Harder, Masen.”

I growled against her mouth, bracing her with my leg and I moved my hand harder, faster and deeper in my girl. “Like that, my dirty girl?” She moaned, bucking with me. “Fuck, Bella. You’re so wet. You need to come for me, baby.” She threw her head back as I felt her muscles contract around my fingers. I pressed my thumb to her clit and she gripped my forearm, riding out the wave of her release. I looked down, seeing her hips undulate with each contraction of her orgasm and her arousal seeping onto my palm. “Fucking perfection, Bella.”

She was panting, looking at me dreamily. “Love me, Masen. I want your cock inside me.”
I kissed her, plunging my tongue into her mouth. Her hands pushed my sweatpants down and released my erection. I saw her hand reach between her legs and she rubbed her palm along her folds before stroking me. Feeling her mark me was my undoing. I maneuvered her over my lap and I positioned my cock to her entrance. With a deep kiss, she slid down my length, surrounding my cock with her wetness and heat. I banded my arms around her, rocking her over my body. “I love you more than words can describe. You’re my everything, Bella.”

She smiled, tangling her fingers into my hair while she rolled her hips, taking me deeper inside her sweet, delectable body. Our lips touched and I was lost in her completely. With her lips on mine, her pussy clenching around me and her fingers scratching my back, I could feel my own orgasm build. Staring at me, she whispered, breathy and with such conviction. “I love you, Masen. So much.” Her sincere plea made me erupt and my body ignite. I shuddered under her, gripping her hair as my cock pulsated with each heartbeat. She trembled in my arms as our lovemaking slowed down. She looked at me, her eyes soft and full of love. “You’re my everything, too.”

I kissed her, hugging her to my body. “Come on, chérie. Let’s take a shower and then I’ll give you the guided tour of Masen Manor.”

“You promised fucking,” she quipped, nipping at my ear.

“Oh, I’ll fuck you,” I growled, picking her up and carrying her to the bathroom. I fucked her in front of the mirror.

It was fabulous and far safer than fucking her in the shower.

xx AMDFT xx

It was early evening. Bella was over at the château having dinner with her family after afternoon tea with my mother. I was pacing the length of my living room, waiting for my brother to arrive. Felix left to get him a half hour ago, but he hadn’t returned. I sighed, looking at the decadent tree the staff had set up in the living room, with another one in the foyer and a smaller one in my bedroom.

And by small, it was seven feet tall instead of twelve.

The door opened and I heard Felix talking. I smoothed out my sweater, walking to the foyer. Emmett stood there beside him, looking healthier than I’ve ever seen him. Apparently, he traded drugs and alcohol for running and weight lifting. My brother turned to me, his ice-blue eyes troubled and not matching the wide grin on his face. He hugged me, holding onto me tightly. “Mase,” he breathed. “It’s so good to see you.”

“You, too, Em,” I smiled. “Come on. Let’s relax by the fire. Do you want some coffee? Tea?”

“Coffee sounds good. It’s freezing outside,” Emmett shivered, shrugging off his coat. “Am I going to meet your dream girl?”

“Young, too, Em,” I smiled. “Come on. Let’s relax by the fire. Do you want some coffee? Tea?”

“Coffee sounds good. It’s freezing outside,” Emmett shivered, shrugging off his coat. “Am I going to meet your dream girl?”

“Not tonight. I want to talk to you. See how you’re doing.” I said, pouring us both a cup of coffee from a tray that one of the servants left. “How’s rehab?”

“When I got there, I was in a bad way,” Emmett said, sitting down on the leather sofa. “I went into detox but had to be hospitalized. I was dehydrated and malnourished, unable to keep food down. Once I was stabilized, that’s when the hard work began.”

“When you can’t get high, you gotta find something else,” Emmett laughed. “I didn’t want to start smoking, so my therapist suggested working out. A couple of the guys have boxed and we started this ‘fight club’ where we spar. Nothing dangerous, but a killer workout. Helps with the anger issues I’ve got.”


He blew out a breath, putting his coffee cup down. “I fucked up. I am a fuck up, but I figured I’d live up to the hype.”

“You’re not a fuck up,” I growled.

“From the moment you’ve been born, you’ve been groomed to be king. Me? I was groomed to be ‘second best.’ I’m not king material, Masen. I never was and I never will be,” Emmett explained. “You’re a born leader, a natural diplomat. I’m just a trouble maker with a mediocre IQ and no path in life. So, I went to New York under the ruse of going to university. Not once did I step into a classroom.”

“Emmett,” I sighed.

“What would I do, Masen?” he asked. “I’m second in line to the throne, but even if you have children, I get bumped further down. So, I lived up to my expectations of being a failure. At least I succeeded in that.”

“Emmett, you could do anything even if you’re not the next in line to rule,” I argued. “You’re smart. You have a kind heart. The possibilities are limitless. Why did you …?”

“I fell in love,” he whispered.

“What?”

“One of the few times I went to campus, I met a girl. I fell in love,” Emmett explained. “I wanted everything with her. We had fun. We made love. We had a future.”

“And then?” I asked.

“We didn’t,” he muttered. “We went to a party at one of the frats. I got separated from Rosalie. She was the girl. She was from Rochester, attending New York University to become a doctor or something. She was really smart and gorgeous and mine. She knew me as Emmett and not Prince Emmett Masen Cullen, prince of Gevalia. She suspected that I was more than I led her to believe, but she loved me. Anyway, we go to this party. While we’re separated, Rosalie was roofied, bound and raped in one of the rooms in the frat.”

“Emmett,” I whispered. “Is she alright?”

“I don’t know. I found her, called 911 and she was rushed over Bellevue. When I went back the next day, Rosalie was gone. Her stuff was moved out of her apartment and she was erased from my life,” Emmett said. “Someone I loved was violated and I couldn’t do anything to stop it. I have this ‘influence’ and the person I care for the most is …”

“When did that happen?” I asked.

“End of the spring semester. Um, late May, early June?” he said, wiping his cheeks. “I was so fucking angry. I used drugs and alcohol to help me forget what had happened to her. You have to know, Mase, I never once did anything those rags said when it came to women. I’m not a dog.”
“And you never heard from her again?” I murmured. He shook his head. “Her first name is Rosalie. Do you have a last name?”

“Hale,” he muttered. “From Rochester. She’s twenty-three and was a first-year medical student.”

“Do you know if they caught the guys who raped her?”

“The whole frat was banned from campus, with the president, vice president and upper classmen expelled. The president, supposedly, was the ring-leader,” Emmett growled. “His name was Royce King. He’s a total douchebag.”

“Jacob can do some digging for you, Emmett,” I said. “I can also find out information about this Royce character.”

“I’m terrified that Rosalie will have read the trash on Page Six, seeing me as this colossal asshole,” Emmett grumbled. “It’s not like I was hiding my behavior. My heart was shattered, first when Rosalie was raped and then again when I couldn’t find her. I turned to drugs and alcohol to try and forget. If you hadn’t bailed me out, I probably would have continued using until I died. I felt empty without Rosalie. I still do. My heart hurts, Masen. How can I stop feeling like this?” He looked at me and his blue eyes were anguished. I moved to sit next to him, hugging him and he sobbed against my shoulder.

“I don’t know how to make your heart stop breaking, but I’m here for you, Emmett,” I whispered. “I know we haven’t had the closest relationship recently, but I love you and I want you to be happy.” He pulled back, wiping his eyes. “I’ll call Jacob and have him do some looking into Rosalie Hale, twenty-three from Rochester along with information about Royce King. What frat?”

“I don’t even remember,” Emmett shrugged. “All I remember from that night is seeing Rosalie, naked, bloody and broken. It made me sick. That body which I cherished that morning was completely desecrated by those animals. What if something like that had happened to your girl? How would you react?”

“I can’t honestly know and I pray I never have to experience it, Emmett,” I replied. “Let me help. Please?” He nodded woodenly. “Why didn’t you tell Dad?”

“He’s a prude,” Emmett scoffed. “He still believes that if a woman dresses provocatively, she’s asking to be raped.”

“I wouldn’t say that, Em,” I argued. “He’s old-fashioned, but never once has he said that a woman is asking for it.”

“Please, don’t tell him,” Emmett pleaded. “Or Mother, either. I’m already a black stain on her legacy.”

“They should know why you turned to drugs and alcohol. They don’t need to know the specifics, but at least that someone that you loved was attacked brutally and cut you out of her life,” I suggested.

“I’ll consider it,” Emmett said. “I’m not making any promises. I’m still coming to terms with what happened, Mase. It would be better if I knew what the hell happened to Rosalie. Does she still love me?”

“I’ll call Jake first thing tomorrow morning,” I nodded.

Emmett stared at me, his blue eyes wary and appraising my expression. He blew out a breath and
leaned forward, sipping his coffee. “I wish this was tequila.”

“Not happening, brother,” I snickered. “No alcohol in the manor. Not even Listerine or cold medicine.”

“Thank you for taking my sobriety seriously, Mase,” Emmett smiled, the wariness and pain ebbing from his eyes. “Now, tell me all about Bella. She sounds like a wonderful woman …”

A/N: Kind of a short chapter, but you heard from Emmett and found out why he turned to drugs and alcohol. We’ll find out more about Rosalie in later chapters. Up next will be Bella and her tea with the queen, dinner with her family and leading up to Christmas, starting with the charity event at the children’s hospital.

Leave me some! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 27

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be Bella and her tea with the queen, dinner with her family and leading up to Christmas, starting with the charity event at the children’s hospital.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Bella

“What do you wear when you have tea with the queen?” I muttered to myself. I stood in the ginormous closet in the Duchess Suite, looking at the racks upon racks of clothes. They were all in my size, organized by color and occasion. Secretly, I wished that there was a labeled ‘Tea Clothes’ section, but no such luck.

“Lady Bella?” came the accented voice of Heidi. That’s going to take some getting used to. I stepped out of the closet and she bowed to me. That, too. I’m not that important. “Do you need some assistance?”

“Um, well?” I squeaked. “I’m supposed to have tea with Her Majesty.”

Heidi smiled, gliding into the closet and tugging out a lovely maroon sweater dress. “Her Majesty is traditional, but not stuffy. This would look lovely on you with your coloring with a pair of dark tights and boots.”

“I’m terrified she’s going despise me,” I said, worrying on my lip. “I mean, I’m a nobody.”

“You’re not, Lady Bella,” Heidi admonished. “You’re everything to Prince Edward. I can see how much he adores you. The love in his eyes? He would give you the world, if it were possible.”

“It’s weird to hear him called ‘Edward.’ I’m so used to calling him Masen,” I giggled anxiously, twisting my hair in my fingers.

“Edward is a family name,” Heidi explained. “When he was younger, I called him Masen, too. Her Majesty insisted that we call him Prince Edward when he announced his claim to the throne after his return from the states, shortly after he graduated from university. He’s been groomed for that moment since he was born.”

“I can’t even imagine,” I whispered. “To have your whole life dictated like that. I mean, when I was a kid, I wanted to be a ballerina, then a doctor, then fireman and went to school to be a teacher. However, I ended up the same as my dad – a baker.”

“The royal family is given the choice of what they want to do,” Heidi said, sitting me down at the dressing table and curling my hair using a curling iron. “Prince Edward wanted to go to the states for university. He attended and he got his degrees. Only after his return, did he make his decision to ascend to the throne upon Queen Esme’s decision to pass the baton to him.”

“And if he didn’t choose to become the next in line?” I asked.
“Prince Emmett would have been given the opportunity and continuing along the line of succession until someone took the responsibility. I never doubted, though, that Prince Edward would not take the next steps to become the heir-apparent. His subjects adore him. He’s truly a man of the people. He’d do anything for them,” Heidi smiled. “Plus, he’s easy on the eyes.”

“You’re telling me. He’s the crowned prince and I’m the troll under the bridge,” I snorted.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Lady Bella,” Heidi chided, her lips pursed and her green eyes flashing angrily. I frowned, sitting down on the bed. “You’re incredibly beautiful, with a warmth and tenderness inside you. You’re smart and you make Prince Edward smile in a way that I’ve never seen before. He’s truly in love. Truly happy.”

“He wasn’t before?”

“In love? No. Happy? I wouldn’t use that word to describe him. Content would be more apt,” Heidi said, twisting my hair up and away from my face. She pinned it up and looked at me in the mirror. “No one wants to be just content. Now? Prince Edward has everything he wants. Love, happiness and duty to his country.”

“I just hope that I don’t mess things up,” I shrugged.

“I doubt that, Lady Bella,” Heidi snickered. “Come on. You need to finish getting ready. Her Majesty may not be stuffy but she values punctuality. We don’t want you to be late.”

“Crap,” I squeaked.

With Heidi’s help and fashion expertise, I put on a maroon turtleneck sweater with some funky jewelry. I added some black tights and a pair of black booties. It had snowed some more last night, blanketing the estate with another layer of snow. The château, in the distance, looked like a postcard and I had to pinch myself that this was my life. I was having tea with the Queen of Gevalia. I prayed that I didn’t spill tea over her or do something to embarrass myself.

I wouldn’t put it past me. I’m such a freaking klutz.

Sliding on a tan coat, Felix helped me into the waiting Range Rover and drove me to the château. He led me inside, up a rear entrance and to the private residence. Masen’s father was standing inside, a smile on his face. He shook hands with Felix before sending him on his way. “You look rested, Bella. Were the accommodations at the Manor to your satisfaction?” he asked, his voice deep, resonant and even more accented than Masen’s. He took my coat, hanging it in the hall closet.

“I felt like I was sleeping on a cloud,” I said. “And I appreciate your hospitality, um, your majesty?”

“I’m like Masen, a ‘highness.’ But, only in public. Inside these walls, I’m Carlisle or Dad,” he chuckled. “Only the title of Majesty goes to the king or queen.”

“You’re not the king?” I asked. “I’m sorry. That was rude.”

“No, it’s not. The inner workings of the monarchy are confusing. Even though I was raised as a member of royal family, I needed a flow chart when my engagement to my Esme was announced,” he laughed. “My official title is Duke Edward Carlisle Cullen. I’m the leader of the House of Lords in Parliament. Though, I’ll be retiring at the end of this term.”

“I bet you’re looking forward to that,” I smiled.
“Yes, and no,” he nodded, offering me his arm. “Masen will take over my position, representing the capital in the House of Lords. Prior to his departure to the states, he was a representative in the House of Commons, stepping in for a member who’d died. He won the election easily. The people love Masen. He’s young and is able to connect with the public in a way that I’ve not seen.”

“He’s inherently good, but can be a hard ass when need be,” I shrugged.

“That is true,” Carlisle guffawed. He turned to me, his eyes ice blue and looking at me intently. I tried not to shrink under his scrutiny. “You’re good for my son. I’m glad that he found you, Bella.” He hugged me, much to my surprise. He tucked me under his chin, wrapping his arms around me. I gently slid my arms around his waist, returning his embrace. “Now, my wife is very excited to get to know you.”

“I’m freaking out,” I said, looking up at Carlisle. “I mean, she’s the queen.”

“She’s just a person. Like you and me,” Carlisle smiled, escorting me into a beautifully decorated library. It had a Christmas tree inside, along with a grand piano. “Esme? Edward’s Bella is here.”

The Queen turned around, looking at me. Her green eyes swept over me. Her lips were pursed and she clasped her hands in front of her body. She was petite, with styled white hair and alabaster skin. Despite the white hair, the Queen looked ageless and elegant. “Thank you, my love,” she said. “Are you going to Parliament?”

“I just need to do a few things,” Carlisle responded. “Sign some paperwork and prepare a few things for when we reconvene in the new year.”

“Don’t forget to contact the children’s hospital for our Christmas Eve visit,” she murmured. “We need to confirm.”

“Already done, Esme,” Carlisle smiled, kissing his wife’s cheek. “Enjoy your tea, Bella.” He left the room and I felt very exposed standing in front of the ruler of Gevalia.

“Relax, Bella,” Esme said. “I’m not going to bite.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” I whispered.

“Esme, sweetheart,” she offered. “In these rooms, I’m not royalty. I’m merely a woman, a mother, a wife. And I do hope that I can get to know you. Please, have a seat, Bella.” She gestured to a chair and I walked over on shaky limbs, sitting down gratefully after she did. “How do you like your tea?”

“Honestly, I’ve never had tea,” I answered. “I’ve only ever drunk coffee. I’ve had iced tea, but that’s obviously not the same and only in the summer.”

“I don’t care tea much myself and in Gevalia, we’re known for our coffee,” Esme smiled. She pressed a button and a young woman appeared. “Can you bring some espresso and cookies for Lady Bella and me? The macarons, biscotti, and raspberry truffles.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” the woman said, giving a brief curtsey. She scurried out of the room.

“Now, Edward told me that you went to university to become a teacher?” Esme asked.

“I did, but my father became ill before I could put my education to use. I was hired at a charter school in Greenwich, Connecticut. I’d moved into a small apartment, but he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. He couldn’t do his job and my sister was too young to help. She was only in
eighth grade. I moved back home, taking over the family business,” I replied.

“Would you ever want to go back to teach?” Esme questioned.

“I’d love to be able to reach out and teach. It’s my passion. I love it, but, I can’t. It’s not really an option. My certificate has lapsed and I’d have to take more classes to become accredited again,” I breathed. “For now, I just need to focus on the bakery. We’re renovating it, making it more than just a bakery. It’ll become a café, with breakfast and lunch options, along with coffee and specialty drinks.”

“Edward mentioned that you’re of Gevalian descent. Your grandfather immigrated to the United States?”

“My great-grandfather. He was the one who opened up the bakery,” I smiled. “It’s his recipes that we use, along with some neighborhood favorites. We have a fairly large Gevalian population in my neighborhood. We all look out for each other.”

“It’s good to have that connection,” Esme nodded as the maid returned with a tray of coffee and cookies. “Thank you, Sienna.” She left the tray on the table, leaving the room. Esme poured me a cup of espresso, handing it to me gracefully. She did the same for herself, sipping it. “This is a rare treat. My doctor said that coffee is not good for my heart, but I think bending the rules for Edward’s true love would be an amendable compromise.”

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“I’m fine, but my doctor is a worrywart,” she snickered. “My mother had a weak heart and he fears I have the same thing. Numerous visits and tests by world-renowned cardiologists have indicated nothing. But, he’d rather err on the side of caution. I’m not going anywhere.” She looked at me and she gave me a tender smile. “I know that you lost your mother.”

“I’d hate for Masen, erm, Edward to lose his,” I whispered. “Losing a parent, it’s the worst feeling in the world.”

“It is. It’s a club that, inevitably, all will become a part of,” she muttered. “I remembered when my mother died. I thought I would …” She closed her eyes, looking vulnerable, human. She opened her eyes, staring at me. “I know that you’re nervous, Bella. This world is overwhelming. I’m not going to lie. There are rules and expectations for us to follow.” I bristled, trying to keep my face impassive. “But, sometimes rules are meant to be broken. I sent my son in my stead to the states to find his brother and to have fun. Seeing you and how much he loves you? I know that you are destined to be by his side, ruling Gevalia.”

“Your Majesty,” I croaked. “I …”

“Edward … no, Masen, he adores you and will do anything for you,” Esme breathed, putting her coffee cup down and taking my hands. “I have no doubt that my son wants to give you the world.” She smiled at me. “I know that you’re dealing with a financial crisis and that Masen has helped you. He’s very generous, giving. He also loves with his whole heart, entire soul.”

“He’s given me so much, Esme,” I whispered. “I have nothing to give in return.”

“I disagree, sweet girl,” Esme replied. “You’ve given my son happiness, joy and love. Cherish that. Now, your sister? She’s …”

“A bitch,” I growled.
Esme laughed, nodding in agreement. “She is and I don’t trust her. She’s been giving Renata and Linda a hard time. Why is she being so rude?”

“She’s an entitled, self-serving brat,” I shrugged. “My dad kicked her out of the house a couple of months ago because of her behavior. She stole from her family, taking money from petty cash to purchase a dress when we didn’t have the finances for it. She’s also emotionally abusive toward both of us. I left a note, asking her to call me if she needed anything. On Thanksgiving? She reached out. She was beaten up pretty badly. She’s been living at home since then, but I don’t trust her. I don’t think I ever will. I love her because she is my sister, but I don’t trust her. Nor should you. Lock up your good silver.”

“Her rooms are closely monitored and she’s been warned by my son that if she steps a toe out of line, she’d be spending the night in a cell,” Esme smirked.

“That would be Club Med compared to the streets,” I snorted. “Now, what is this children’s hospital event? Masen mentioned it.”

“We go, as a royal family, to the hospital to distribute presents to the children who are stuck inside for Christmas. The presents are donated to the hospital by the family and members of parliament. We read The Night Before Christmas and take photos with the press. Carlisle or Edward usually dress up as Santa to deliver the gifts,” Esme explained.

“Wow, that sounds …” I trailed off. “The kids must love it.”

“They do. Some of them are terminal and others are orphans. This is a rare moment where they feel the magic of the season,” Esme smiled. “I think they will adore you. You and Edward can read the story together.”

“I don’t speak … I can speak Spanish, but only a few choice phrases,” I said, my eyes wide. “I don’t know French or whatever dialect is spoken here.”

“We’ll work on that,” Esme smirked. “Now, tell me more about your bakery.”

The rest of the afternoon flew by and Esme Cullen was a wry, witty and loving woman. She came off as cold, initially, but she had to maintain a distance from her subjects. Speaking to her, one-on-one, displayed a wonderful person who I greatly admired. I could see where Masen got his loyalty and brilliance, along with his ability to love so thoroughly. By the time I left to go to dinner with my Dad, Linda and Alice, she was not the Queen of Gevalia, but a person, a woman, whom I greatly respected and appreciated.

A couple of days later, we all met up at the château, dressed in festive holiday clothes for the trip to the children’s hospital. I also met Masen’s brother, Emmett. He was massive, with a dimple in his chin and a child-like grin. In his eyes, however, there was an empty sadness. Masen told me that Emmett was battling his own demons but was inherently a good man. Emmett was also acting as Santa Claus.

Masen did tell me that the press would be there. Our relationship would be made public. I panicked about that, but if I wanted to continue dating Masen and our relationship developed into more, I’d have to contend with the press. We rode to the hospital in the black Range Rovers. Felix was driving slowly since it was snowing. Again.

“You do this every year?” I asked, smoothing my skirt. Heidi had curled my hair and applied my makeup before handing me an outfit to wear, which was a black skirt with knee-high boots, along with a red shirt and a black and white jacket. My overcoat was black with a green scarf and hat set.
“We do. We always find ways to give back to our country,” Masen explained. He was dressed in a pair of dark-wash jeans, a red sweater, a white collared shirt and camel-colored leather sport coat. On his feet, he had a pair of Doc Marten boots, making him look young and approachable, but still chic. “It’s not like we don’t have the money.”

“I think it’s awesome that you do this,” I smiled. “The kids, they must love it!”

“They do,” he chuckled, threading his fingers with mine. “But, I think they’ll adore you. They’ll see you and you’re going to be a real-life princess to them.”

“I’m not,” I blushed.

“Not now, but, I’d like you to be,” he whispered, kissing my wrist. He’d been threatened by Heidi that if my makeup was messed up by his lips, he’d be spending Christmas Eve by himself, locking his secret entrance to my suite. “I love you, chérie, more than words can express. I know that we’re still early in our relationship, but I see us having a beautiful future together. My mother thinks the world of you. Whatever you said to her while you had tea …”

“Drank coffee,” I snickered.

“Her doctor must have loved that,” Masen deadpanned. “Anyway, she was impressed. It takes a lot to impress Esme Cullen.” He smiled softly, looking down at my hands. “I hope you see the same future that I’m imagining, Bella. I want you. Forever.”

I bit my lip, desperate to believe that we had forever. “I want that, too,” I whispered in the darkness of the Range Rover. “I love you so much, Masen. You’ve given me so much and I don’t know how to repay you.”

“You never have to repay me, chérie. Giving to you is a gift in itself,” he said, leaning forward and brushing his lips with mine. “Be happy.”

“That, I can do,” I smiled against his mouth.

The Range Rover arrived at the hospital and we got out. The press were outside, taking pictures. I was blinded by the flashes, holding onto Masen for dear life. The press also yelled out questions. I didn’t understand them since they were speaking rapidly in French, German and heavily accented English. Esme waved her hand before turning to head inside on the arm of her husband. Masen and I followed after them with Emmett bringing up the rear. Inside, the main atrium of the hospital was decorated festively and the room was packed with doctors, nurses, children and their families. Presents were distributed and we took pictures with the children. Masen played the piano, encouraging the children to sing along with well-known carols. I was shocked at how good he was, moving his fingers easily over the keys. I was sitting next to him on the bench when I felt a tiny hand on my leg. A little girl was by my side, her blue eyes wide and sad. She had a broken arm and scratches on her face. I looked around to see if I could find her family, but I bent down and put her on my lap. She put her cheek on my shoulder, idly playing with my hair as Masen continued his sing-along.

A few moments later, Emmett came out, dressed as Santa and drawing the kids away. The little girl clung to me. Masen turned, looking at her. He spoke to her quietly, asking her about her mother and father, in French. The girl, Angèlique, replied, in kind, saying that her parents were killed in a car crash and that she was alone. My heart shattered for her, holding her closer to me. Masen picked up a stuffed bear with a bright red bow, handing it to her. She smiled shyly, holding the bear with her good arm. “What do you want to call your friend?” Masen asked, repeating the
phrase in French. Angèlique responded, holding me tightly. “She wants to know your name, cherie.”

“I’m Bella,” I whispered to her. Masen translated for me. Angèlique said something and Masen chuckled. “What did she say?”

“She wants to name her bear after the Princess Bella,” he said. He grinned at her, murmuring something to her. “I told her that it was a wonderful idea.”

“I’m not a princess,” I said, running my fingers through her blonde curls.

“To her, you are, Bella,” Masen argued. He smiled tenderly, his finger tracing down Angèlique’s cheek. “She’s asleep.”

A nurse came over, crouching in front of us. She spoke to Masen and was teary eyed as she looked at the girl in my arms. I was confused as they were both speaking in French. The nurse bowed to us and scurried away. “What were you talking about?”

“She told me that Angèlique refused to be touched by anyone, except for when she was being examined. Even then, she was skittish. She’s wary of strangers and has no one in her family who can take her. She’ll become a ward of the state when she’s released because her parents are both gone,” Masen explained. “Seeing her approach you and want love from you? It gives the nurses and staff hope that Angèlique will recover from her accident.” He blinked to me, his eyes welling with tears. “You are so good, Bella. This little one saw that goodness and wanted a part of it. She trusted you, instantly.” He ran his hand over her tiny head. “You’re destined for this, cherie. And I can see that you will be a wonderful mother.”


“No, not yet,” he whispered back. “But, in the future?” I smiled at him, nodding slowly.

“Is there anything you can do for her?” I asked. “Ensure that she’s with a good family?”

“You want to take her with us, don’t you?” Masen asked.

“I know it’s not feasible. We’re not foster parents, but I want her to be okay. I don’t want her to think that we’ve abandoned her,” I said. “Do you know how much longer she’s going to be in the hospital?”

“Until after the new year,” Masen answered. “We can come visit her any time you would like, Bella. She’s obviously attached.” Angèlique sighed, snuggling closer.

“We can?” I breathed. Masen nodded with a crooked grin. The nurse came back, prattling something to Masen. “What?”

“It’s time for bed,” he said. I stood up, balancing her in my arms. The bear fell from her hands and Masen picked it up. I followed the nurse into a room with four beds. I put her down and Angèlique woke up. She started crying, reaching for me. Masen spoke to her soothingly, repeating his words in English. “We’ll be back, little one. You need to sleep and dream sweet dreams.” She whimpered, muttering something. “We promise. Princess Bella and I don’t back out of our promises. Tomorrow, after church, we’ll be here.”

“You mean that?” I asked.

“I don’t back out of my promises, to beautiful little girls or future princesses,” he smiled. The nurse
came back with a book and Masen read *Good Night Moon* to Angèlique. Her fingers were wrapped around mine and she fell asleep. *Bonne nuit.* We left her room and met up with the rest of the family. Esme was smiling at both of us. It was a tiny smile, but her eyes displayed her true emotion of pride. We left the hospital, discussing our plan to come back after the Christmas church service with Carlisle and Esme. Once inside the Range Rover, Masen spoke to Felix. “There’s a little girl in that hospital who lost her whole family. She’s become attached to Bella and my heart just goes out to her, Felix.”

“Heidi and I are both certified foster parents,” Felix replied. “We can reach out to the social worker, asking to help with the girl.”

“Come with us tomorrow when we visit her,” Masen smiled. I grinned, too, sliding my arms around his waist. “I hope we can make her wishes come true.”

“Give her a truly happy Christmas,” I breathed. “I love you, Masen.”

“Love is too small of a word, Bella,” he said. “I’m truly blessed to have you in my life, cherie. I’m never letting you go.”

A/N: Things went well for Bella and Esme. Plus, Bella’s goodness emanated from her and caught the attention of a wayward, sad little girl. No, Bella and Masen will not adopt Angèlique, but perhaps Heidi and Felix will be her foster family. Up next will be a little different chapter. It will be in the form of a newspaper (or a couple) articles about Bella, Masen, and the royal family’s visit to the hospital. It will be a shorter chapter before we pick up again with Masen. Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 28

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be a little different chapter. It will be in the form of a newspaper (or a couple) articles about Bella, Masen, and the royal family’s visit to the hospital. These articles will be akin to something you’d read in US Weekly or the tabloids. It will be a shorter chapter before we pick up again with Masen.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Royally Matched?
by Alexa St. James, staff writer, US Weekly

Tis the season for love to be in the air! At the annual trip to the children’s hospital in the capital, the royal family of Gevalia, Queen Esme, Duke Edward and their sons, Prince Edward and Prince Emmett visited the children, spreading some holiday cheer to the kids stuck in the hospital during the holiday season. However, on the arm of our Crown Prince, there was an elegant woman. This usually was just a family affair, but Prince Edward brought his new American girlfriend to the hospital.

And, to be honest … We LOVE her!

Isabella Swan is a New York City native, a couple of years younger than Prince Edward. She was a bit baffled by the press but smiled gently, and genuinely when Prince Edward slid his arm around her waist, tenderly kissing her temple. His Royal Highness was clearly smitten, looking at Isabella lovingly as they entered the hospital. She interacted with the children, calling on her college education as a school teacher. She was quick with a smile and real with each child. Though, during the Christmas singalong, a young girl approached Isabella. Our American Princess scooped the girl into her arms and the love flowing between the two was palpable.

And Prince Edward? He looked like he wanted to melt. His eyes shimmered with adoration for his girlfriend. He was protective and affectionate, kissing her frequently and always touching her in some way.

Could there be Royal Wedding Bells?

This reporter thinks yes. Queen Esme clearly respects and loves Prince Edward’s girl. It’s only a matter of time before we see a sparkler on her finger. Stay tuned for more updates about Prince Edward and American Princess Isabella!

A Real-Life Fairy Tale
by Sara Lyon, staff writer, Arts and Entertainment for Gevalia Times
Secretly, we all wished that Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen would magically show up at our
door and sweep us off our feet. Right? We’ve watched him grow up from an adorable little boy, to
a lanky, but still gorgeous teenager to a sexy, debonair adult. His bronze hair was the perfect
combination of sleek and sexily disheveled. (And is it as soft as it looks?) His lips, so soft and pink,
were always in a smile, displaying his pearly whites and I know that I wanted him to give me that
crooked smirk.

And ONLY me.

Don’t get me started on his eyes. Jade-colored, with a devilish twinkle and eyelashes that most
women would give their left ovary for.

Prince Edward was the ultimate. He is the ultimate! He’s smart, sexy, handsome, kind and a
royal!

A dream come true, right?

Then, he comes home from the States with this equally gorgeous woman, with chocolate brown
hair, alabaster skin and ginormous eyes that look like an anime character. Secretly, I’d hoped that
she was his new assistant, but then I saw how he looked at her at the hospital trip.

He loved her. He worshipped her. He wants her to have his royal babies.

Welp! There goes my dream of wanting to become a princess.

I want to hate this chick, but I just can’t. Isabella Swan is everything good in the world. On top of
being drop-dead gorgeous, with curves in ALL the right places and hair that is the most delectable
shade of espresso and caramel highlights (it’s like a caramel macchiato, in hair form), she’s got a
heart of gold. From what I could find on her, she went to university to be a teacher. She was hired
at some prestigious charter school in Connecticut but backed out of her contract to help take care
of her ailing father. She gave up her dream to take care of her family. On top of that, like a Disney
princess, her mom died in childbirth when she had her little sister. I feel bad about that. I couldn’t
imagine not having a mom. My condolences, Princess Isabella.

Now, one thing I know for sure is that Isabella is living out my dream of being a princess. I
wonder when I’ll find my Prince Charming? Isabella, send me some of your good man Karma my
way. I want my own real-life fairy tale.

Oooh, isn’t Prince Emmett single? Coincidence … so am I! Call me, Prince Em!

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American Princess or American Opportunist?
by Laurent DuBois, editorial writer, RoyalBlog.gev

Everyone is just FAWNING over this American girl. She’s so beautiful. She’s so perfect. She’s the
ideal match for Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen.

I call bullshit.

It’s abundantly clear that the royal family have not done their due diligence when it comes to
running a background check on this girl. It’s going to bite them in the ass. Isabella is going to fall
pregnant and we’ll have a royal bastard on our hands. Everything about her just screams ‘whore.’
An inside source, close to Isabella’s family, said that she twisted the truth when it came to her family’s financial dire straits. Her father, presumably, has Parkinson’s Disease. They’ve got a boatload of bills. Yeah, right … They were moments away from being evicted from their tiny apartment and losing their family bakery in Brooklyn. But, Prince Edward swooped in, saving the day.

Can we say, he got played?

I wonder how far Isabella had to spread her legs to get him to save her home, her livelihood?

Say it with me. Gold. Digger.

Whore.

Now? She’s staying at the royal palace, sharing a room in Masen Manor with Prince Edward. I don’t know about you, but I’ll be watching for a baby bump soon. It’s the only way Isabella will manage to keep Prince Edward. Even then, I hope he realizes that she’s an opportunistic loser, only thinking of herself and not of him.

Statement from Her Majesty, Queen Esme of Gevalia

It’s been brought to my attention that a certain member of the ‘press’ printed a scathing article about my son and his long-time girlfriend, Isabella Swan. We value freedom of the press here in Gevalia, but we do not tolerate lies being spread using the press and social media. We also do not tolerate the character of my son or Isabella being slandered publicly without … how did they put it?

Their ‘due diligence’?

My statement is as follows: My son, His Royal Highness, Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, did financially assist the Swan family in regard to their home and place of business, The Swan Family Bakery. The bakery, located in Brooklyn, in a predominately Gevalian neighborhood, was opened by a Gevalian immigrant in 1897, staying with the Swan family for generations. According to the paperwork, this is a loan and not a handout.

It sickens that the implication that Isabella performed a sexual act to get this loan. That is a vile, repulsive and hateful statement to make, without any sort of proof, which you will NEVER find, because it’s not true.

Additionally, Mr. Charles Swan, Isabella’s father, does suffer from Parkinson’s Disease, a degenerative neurologic disorder. This illness forced him to stop him from doing his job and Isabella took over running the bakery, foregoing her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher.

I’m sickened by this abuse of the press. Freedom of the press is one thing, but defaming another human being just to sell papers? Ad space online? It’s deplorable. My legal team is working on a lawsuit against RoyalBlog.gev, along with the writer who posted that scathing article online without any sort of concern for the fallout of his words. Any questions, please contact the head of our legal team, Michèl Rainier.
A/N: So, there are a couple of articles … two adoring Bella and one just blasting her. Plus, Esme put them into their place. Who do you think the ‘inside source’ is? Three guesses … the first two don’t count. LOL.

We’ll be back to Masen next chapter, with some citrusy goodness and taking Bella around the country and the chapter following? Alice at the New Year’s Eve celebration.

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Twenty-Nine

Masen

Upon our return from the hospital on Christmas Eve, we had a quiet meal in my parents’ private quarters. We also exchanged a few small gifts before we all went our separate ways. Bella called them ‘stocking stuffers.’ They were small trinkets, representative of Gevalia for each member of the Swan family. Charlie and Linda got a gift basket of various coffees that were popular in Gevalia. We also included a coffee liqueur, as well. The coffee baskets came from Emmett. Bella and Alice got smaller baskets with the coffees, along with a box of chocolate truffles. Mother gave Bella, Linda and Alice exquisite lace scarves, made by the finest artisans in our tiny country. Charlie got a cashmere scarf.

We went back to Masen Manor. I spent the night making love to Bella, showing her how much I adored her. Seeing her with that little girl made my heart soar. I wanted nothing more than to start a family with her, after making her mine. Forever.

I wanted to make her my wife.

I knew it was too soon, but I could see a future with her. I could see her ruling by my side.

As I held her, after making love to her for the third time, I stared at her. Her naked body was pressed to mine, curled to my side. I ran my fingers through her hair, just watching her sleep comfortably.

My reverie, unfortunately, was broken as my cell phone vibrated on the nightstand. I picked up the phone, grimacing as I saw my mother’s private number pop up. I slid out of the bed. I looked at my girl, happy and loved for the first time since her dad’s diagnosis. I wanted to make sure she had that. For as long as possible.

Pulling on my sweats, I ducked into my private living quarters. “Mother? It’s three in the morning.”

“Go to a computer. I’ve sent you a link, Edward,” Mom said, her voice taking on a hard edge.

“Hold on,” I said, sitting down at my desk and waking up my laptop. I opened my email, I found the link my mom sent. It was a blog post from one of the nasty ‘reporters’, trashing my girlfriend. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“The inside source?” Mom snarled. “I have no doubt that it’s Bella’s sister.”

“Do you have proof?” I asked. “I know you have security cameras.”

“No proof. Her phone is still locked up in Renata’s room, along with Linda’s. The phones in the
palace cannot make outside calls unless you put in the correct code,” Mom huffed. “Either she
gained access through the palace phones, using a servant to make the call, or she met up with this
… asshole … outside.”

“Charlie and Linda have enjoyed the capital, but Alice has stayed in the palace, holed up in her
room,” I answered. “She must have called upon one of the servants. Befriended them and got
access to the phone.” I pinched my nose. “Interview the staff.”

“Felix is already on it, Edward. You do need to … you have to tell Bella,” she muttered. “I know
this will shatter her heart.”

“What are we going to do with this libelous drivel?” I sneered.

“I’ve already drafted a response and I’m working with our legal team to handle the blot site. This
site has posted negative press about the royal family, but this is the most atrocious thing I’ve ever
read. We’re working on getting a retraction, along with closing the site down. They’ve posted
awful things about you, Emmett, me and everyone in the royal family. We’re used to it, Edward.
You’re sweet Bella? She’s not.”

“This is going to … her self-esteem is pretty low. All thanks to her lovely sister,” I growled. “I
wanted nothing more than to give Bella a memorable, perfect Christmas. Now? It’s marred by this
blog post.”

“Be that as it may, the press about Bella far outweighs the negative. Every article is positive, save
for this blog post,” Mom breathed.

“What about Alice?” I asked.

“Until we get solid proof that she’s the source, we can’t do anything,” Mom sighed.

“We could question her,” I smirked.

“Not until we have something concrete, Edward,” Mom argued. “As soon as we have that, I’m
throwing her in a cell. She didn’t even thank us for the presents we gave her. She just shrugged,
tossing them aside. Those scarves cost …”

“I know how much they cost,” I nodded. “And Bella was certainly appreciative.”

“I never expected a hug. She was so grateful,” Mom breathed. She was quiet.

“Mom?”

“Bella needs a mother so much,” Mom whispered. “Linda is a lovely woman, but I can see …
Edward … Masen … love her. Don’t let her go and love her.”

“I do, Mom,” I murmured, shocked to hear my mother call me by my nickname and not my given
name.

“I approve of her, my sweet boy,” she said. “She’s everything I ever wanted for you, Masen. She’s
smart, compassionate, loving and makes you happy. Never in my life have I seen you so relaxed, so
happy. I’m sorry for trying to push you into an arranged marriage, Masen. Having a love match
with your father? It made ruling Gevalia easy. To have a partner, someone who supported me and
loved me unconditionally? I get it and I support it, sweetheart. Come see me tomorrow, after
church, so I can give you …”
“Not yet,” I said. “I see a future. Forever, really, with her. I just don’t want to rush it. But, in time, I will get the ring for her.”

“Okay, Masen,” she chuckled. “Now, I’d like to get a few hours of sleep before church tomorrow. You do the same.”

“When should I tell Bella?” I asked.

“You know what to do,” she replied cryptically. “Get some sleep, Masen. Be ready to go to eleven o’clock mass.”

“Yes, Mom,” I nodded. “I love you.”

“I love you most, my sweet boy,” Mom sniffled, hanging up the phone.

I didn’t sleep at all that night. I just held Bella until the skies lightened. It was snowing again, with fat, white fluffy flakes. Bella sighed, snuggling closer to me. I kissed her forehead. “I love you, chérie.”

“I love you, too, Masen, but I can feel how tense you are,” she muttered, her voice drowsy and slightly slurred. She blinked up at me, her eyes unfocused and her hair rumpled. “Talk to me, baby.”

“Let’s shower first and enjoy some breakfast, a quiet moment before …” I trailed off, brushing my lips over hers. We got up, going into my private ensuite. I lavished her with attention, kissing her and making love to her in the shower. Dressing separately, I took Bella to the private living room, where breakfast had been set up. I held her in my arms as we shared food, teasing and loving each other.

“Okay, you’ve managed to distract me, but I can still feel how tense you are, Masen,” Bella chided, still in my lap. “You’re not breaking up with me?”

“Never, Bella. But, there is something I need to show you,” I said, moving her off my lap. I picked up my laptop and set it on the table. “There were articles written about our trip to the children’s hospital. Many of them were positive and the press adored you.”

“But?” she breathed.

“There was one reporter, and I’m using that term loosely, who completely bashed you,” I grimaced, pushing the laptop toward her. She bit her lip, reading the article. Her eyes filled with tears and she sniffled. A few tears escaped down her cheeks and she shot up, stomping to the window. “Bella, none of it is true.”

“Alice did this,” she growled. “She’s your source. Fucking bitch. I hate her.”

“My mother and I believe she’s the source, too, but we’re trying to figure out how she was able to reach out to the press. Her cell phone is still locked in Renata’s safe and you can’t dial out unless you have an access code.”

“Heidi leaves a paper with a six-digit code in my room. Is that what you’re talking about?” Bella asked, still looking sad and broken.

“Yes. It changes daily. Our head of information technology creates those codes everyone. It’s for
safety and privacy reasons,” I said. “We believe that Alice may have buddied up to a member of the staff. We just don’t have proof.” I slid my arms around her waist. “My mom has already issued a statement, blasting the writer and we’re working with our legal team to get a retraction and apology.”

She wriggled out of my arms, sitting back down, and scrolling down on the laptop. “The comments are quite inflammatory against the writer. He’s being completely torn apart.” She bit her lip and wiped her cheeks. “One of the nurses at the hospital completely rebuked his claim. Call me an angel and a perfect match for you.”

“I don’t disagree with that statement. You truly are an angel and I’m not letting you go, cherie,” I murmured. I crouched down next to her, wiping her cheeks and smiling at her. “I love you.”

“I know you do, but this is … how often does this happen?” she asked, her nose wrinkled.

“More often than we care to admit, but it’s never personal. It would attack a policy or legislation, not about who we’re dating or personal relationships. If anyone has to deal with it, I’m the target, being the next in line for the throne and being single. Well, up until I left, I was single. Now? I’m with you. You’re my future, Bella,” I whispered. “With that being said, you may be … there may be more press like this in the future.”

“I won’t let this make me throw us away. You’re my future, too,” she smiled, leaning forward and brushing her lips with mine. “I’m not saying that it doesn’t hurt, Masen. The fact that Alice may have …”

“I know, cherie,” I frowned. “We’ll get to the bottom of this. I promise you. Okay?”

“I trust you, Masen. I trust you, your parents and your brother. I don’t trust my sister and I never will,” she frowned. With a sigh, she closed my laptop. “I’m going to finish getting ready for church. I just … I need to absorb all of this.”

“Are you okay?” I whispered.

“Not right now, but I will be,” she said, brushing my hair away from my forehead. “Meet you downstairs?”

“Always, Bella,” I said, cupping her cheek. She kissed me and left my rooms. I shook my head, afraid that she was not okay. That she was trying to be okay, but her heart was shattering because of Alice’s supposed involvement. With a sigh, I went called Alec, trying to reach Charlie. I talked to Bella’s dad and he was heartbroken that the press had attacked his oldest daughter. He was also pissed off that Alice may have been involved. I expressed my concern about Bella’s emotional well-being. Charlie said he’d talk to her, agreeing with my assessment.

Even now, Bella’s self-esteem was being attacked by her sister.

Supposedly.

Very likely.

I hated that. I hated that the one person that should have Bella’s back is the one person who is ruining her life. I couldn’t imagine Emmett stabbing me in the back like Alice does to Bella. Emmett and I disagree, but we still love each other. We support each other.

With a firm shake of my head, I went to get dressed for church. Putting on a grey suit, white shirt and burgundy tie, along with my crest, I finished wrapping Bella’s present. I slid it into my pocket
and read the comments on the blog post by Laurent DuBois. The comments were scathing toward Laurent and I was shocked that he had responded.

I’ve been contacted by royal counsel. I’ve also read the comments on this post. It would appear that I was too hasty in my assessment of Miss Swan. I did not do my ‘due diligence’ when it came to researching my subject. After receiving a phone call from the royal attorney, I did my research and my comments were unfounded. I apologize to Isabella and to her father, Charles. I will be removing this post, along with a personal apology to Prince Edward’s girlfriend and her father.

I smirked, happy to read that he’d apologized. I took several screen captures, preserving the positive comments and support that my girlfriend received from my subjects. I closed my laptop, heading downstairs and saw Bella in the foyer of Masen Manor. She was dressed impeccably in a burgundy dress that matched my tie. On top of her dress, she wore a white winter coat, the scarf my mother gave her and a pair of beige heels. Her hair was curled, pinned back with tendrils framing her face. Her eyes were red-rimmed and puffy, but she looked beautiful. When I got closer, I saw that she wore her pendant and matching earrings. “You look beautiful, Bella,” I whispered.

“Thank you,” she said, giving me smile. “You look very princely.”

“I have to look princely. Christmas mass is a big deal,” I said, sliding my arms around her waist. “Are you okay?”

“I had a good cry with Heidi,” she chuckled. “Then, she showed me a picture of Laurent DuBois. The man is quite unfortunate looking. I’m not surprised that he complains and writes untrue stories.” She slid her hands up my lapels of my suit coat. “I’ll be fine, Masen. I love you and I know that my life will change because of my relationship with you. In some ways, it will be more stressful. In other ways, it will be more amazing. You want to know why? Because, I’ll be with you. You’ll be with me, holding my hand and supporting me. With you by my side, I can do anything.” She grinned at me, her espresso-colored eyes twinkling beautifully. I leaned down and kissed her, tasting her sweet lips.

Her words solidified my feelings and I knew that Bella Swan was destined to be my wife.

Felix cleared his throat and we clambered into the waiting Range Rover, driving to the palace. We all rode together in a caravan of limos to the cathedral in the capital. The press were swarming the steps of the church, taking photos of us as we walked inside. Charlie and Linda attended as well, along with Alice, looking like she’d rather get a root canal without any sort of anesthetic. I kept my face politely impassive, holding Bella close to my side, but I was seething internally.

Mass was over an hour long and we left after my mother gave a donation to the church orphanage and school on behalf of the royal family. Back at the palace, we had our royal Christmas photos taken in the throne room and went up into the private residence for dinner, along with the Christmas gift exchange. As the staff was preparing the dining room, I pulled my mother aside. “I know what I told you this morning, but I would like …”

“I’ve already removed it from vault, Masen,” Mom grinned, squeezing my fingers. “Though, the ring is very old-fashioned. When are you going to ask?”

“New Years,” I smiled. “And can I have a jeweler fashion it into something more current? In style?”

“Go with Felix and Emmett,” she said, kissing my cheek. “I’m happy for you, Masen. She’s a wonderful girl. I love her very much and I can see how much you cherish her. But, I’d speak to Charlie. It’s the right thing to do.”
“I will, Mom,” I nodding. I hugged her and she gasped in shock. We never really showed affection, but I couldn’t NOT … I was going to be asking Bella to be my wife. My mother approved of her.

It truly was a perfect, **wonderful** and magical Christmas.

But, the new year? It will be a dream come true.

**A/N:** So, yeah? What do you think? Leave me your thoughts. Up next will be … originally, I wanted it to be Alice, but I want to spend some more time with Masen. We’ll finish Christmas, exchanging gifts. Then, have him bond with Emmett, ask Charlie for Bella’s hand and find out about Rosalie, on Emmett’s behalf. Plus, we’ll have some citrusy times. I glossed over them in this chapter, but we’ll have some more Masen/Bella schmexing. Alice will be up in chapter thirty-one.

Pictures of the presents they all received, along with Bella and Masen’s clothing and the unfortunate-looking Laurent are on my blog. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me some!
Hey all ... this is NOT an update. It's a message. For those of you in my Facebook group (Tufano79's Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation), you know that I'm struggling. Real life is currently kicking my ass. I'm barely able to keep my head above water. When I make some sort of headway, something pulls me back down. I worked eighty hours last week with concerts, field trips and wrapping up the first quarter. I'm working the same this week, plus the weekend.

With that being said, all of my stories are on hiatus since my muse is being a persnickety, fickle little bitch. Right now, writing fic feels more like work and not that much fun. I haven't written anything in almost a month. The free time I have to write, I just want to sleep or relax. Or cry ... crying seems to be a popular option right now.

I'm sorry about the delay, but I can't post anything if I have nothing written. In fact, this is the most I've written (save for work emails) since the end of September. And it's not even a fic ... Sigh ...

Thank you for your patience and I'm hoping to have something written soon. I just need to take some time for myself. I can't say when I'll be back, but I will be. I won't leave stories unfinished. That's just not me.

I'm signing off for now ...

Hugs,

Tufano79
Chapter 30

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be … originally, I wanted it to be Alice, but I want to spend some more time with Masen. We’ll finish Christmas, exchanging gifts. Then, have him bond with Emmett, ask Charlie for Bella’s hand and find out about Rosalie, on Emmett’s behalf. Plus, we’ll have some citrusy times. I glossed over them in this chapter, but we’ll have some more Masen/Bella schmexing. Alice will be up in chapter thirty-one.

Chapter Thirty

Masen

After dinner, we sat down in the living room to exchange gifts. Bella was chatting with my brother, who was enamored with her. They smiled easily with each other. I could see him become protective of her, welcoming her into our fold. Mom and Dad were talking with Charlie and Linda. I sat down next to Alice, who was scowling at the Christmas tree.

“Would you like something sweet? Some coffee?” I asked. She didn’t respond, only shrugging. “Alice, we’ve extended an invitation to you and to your family. Charlie, Linda and Bella have accepted the invitation with graciously. You, on the other hand? Have not.”

“It’s because I’m being treated like a criminal,” she grumbled, her nose wrinkled. “Some military guy pulled me into an interrogation room and grilled me like I was …”

“You do know why, Alice?” I asked. “Did he show you the blog post?” She ignored the question, her hard gaze focused on the tree. Her lips were pursed and I could hear her teeth grinding. “Your silence says so much, Alice. You’d do that to your sister? Appalling, really. You sold your soul to the devil, just to make your sister hurt?” I sat back, holding the brandy snifter. “It’s only a matter of time. Trust me, Alice.”

“You don’t know anything,” she sneered. She shot up, leaving the room and heading toward her room. I blinked to Renata. She gave me a curt nod, following Alice. Her true colors were showing and not painting her in a positive light.

“Masen, help me with the presents,” Emmett said, arching a brow.

I stood up, brushing off my dress pants and walking to the tree. It was overflowing with gifts to Bella and her family. We rarely exchanged gifts with each other since we had the means to get whatever we wanted, when we wanted it. We didn’t act like entitled royals. We gave a lot back to our country with donations and our service. “Wow, Mom and Dad really went all out for Bella, Charlie, Linda and Alice,” I chuckled.

“Speaking of Alice,” Emmett grumbled, tugging on my arm. He dragged me to the far side of the tree. “I spoke to Felix, who had a conversation with everyone on staff.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. She did get access from the phone by befriending a servant. That servant has been fired and
is in prison,” Emmett explained.

“Did the servant say why?” I asked, my clenching into hands into rigid fists. “All servants sign an NDA. They’re paid well. I don’t understand.”

“The servant’s brother was killed while on active duty for the legally required military service,” Emmett sighed. “He was nearly done with his tour when he was shot by a sniper rifle.”

“So, this servant’s brother was killed and that gives her the right to …” I growled. “I’m sympathetic for their loss, but it doesn’t negate their own duty.”

“The servant was a man,” Emmett explained. “And I think that the servant and Alice did more than just exchange his access code for the phones.” He dragged me to my father’s study and pulled up a few photos from the surveillance cameras. Alice and this man were making out, clearly leading to more. His hand was inside Alice’s jeans and she had a look of pleasure on her face. “They ducked into his private quarters, where there are no cameras.”

I pinched my nose. “And this guy? What’s his name?”

“Oliver,” Emmett nodded. “He was ineligible for military service due a heart defect. Oliver was pissed off that his brother, who was serving two tours to maintain his family’s honor, was killed. He … wanted us to pay and targeting Bella was his way to make you hurt the worst. Oliver said that you never served for the military, nor have I.”

I pursed my lips. “This is a clusterfuck, Em.”

“Agreed, but enough of this. We need to pass out presents,” Emmett said, squeezing my arm. He frowned and blew out a breath.

“What’s wrong, Emmett?”

“Have you heard anything about Rosalie?” he asked.

“I asked Jacob, but he hasn’t responded,” I murmured. “What else, Em?”

“I’m … when I’m cleared … I’m going to enlist. I know that you can’t serve in the military,” Emmett said. “Being the next in line for the throne, but I can. I need … I have to do this. I’m finally feeling like my life has some sort purpose, Mase.”

“I could serve, Emmett. I’ve considered, to be honest,” I shrugged. “Becoming a part of the air force, flying planes? Do you think you can handle it, though?”

“I’m not going to make a decision right away. I’ve got some time before I’ll be released from the rehab facility. And who knows? They may not even take me with my history of drugs and alcohol,” Emmett explained. “Come on. Let’s enjoy the rest of this Christmas and spoil your girl.”

“Works for me,” I said, giving my brother a half-hearted grin.

We passed out the presents. Charlie was on the fence as to what we’re going to do with Alice’s gifts. Linda, in her wisdom, said that they’d keep the presents and make the decision about the gifts after they calmed down. When the gifts were opened, we were all curled up on the couches and listening to some instrumental holiday music. Bella was staring at the gorgeous bracelet I’d given her from the crown jewels. She protested at the extravagance, but I insisted she keep it. I also got her some smaller, more intimate presents that I’d give her when we were alone, in Masen Manor, without any sort of audience.
We left the palace a little before nine. Bella was quiet, reflective. When we arrived back at Masen Manor, Bella led me to the living room. The tree was twinkling warmly and my staff had lit a fire. I sat down on the couch, holding Bella in my arms. She snuggled close to me with a heavy sigh.

“You okay, cherie?”

“I’m … I’m … I don’t know how I am,” she shrugged. “I’m eternally grateful for this wonderful holiday. Your parents are so down to earth for being royalty.”

“Just because we rule the country, doesn’t mean we aren’t normal,” I snickered, kissing her forehead. “And my parents adore you.”

“Your mom is awesome,” Bella whispered. “She reminds me, a bit, of my own mom, if my mom had a cool accent and a wry sense of humor. I miss her but being around Esme makes that ache not as noticeable. You know?”

I snickered. “My mother … she appears to be a hard ass, but she’s really a big, old softy.” I folded her close, pressing my cheek to her curled hair. “You just seem tense. I get why … I’m just worried. Can you handle this? Can you handle us?” She was quiet, idly tracing the veins on my hand and moving up to the watch that she’d purchased for me for Christmas. It was wood and my name was etched on the underside of the watch face. It was elegant and the most interesting thing I’d ever received. Her silence, however, was worrying me. “Bella?”

“I can handle it. I’m just hurt that someone felt the need to burn me like that. And that someone was my sister,” Bella growled. “She’s … I hate her, Masen. I thought I could love her, forgive her, but I can’t. I know that it’s not verified.”

“Well, to be honest, we’re closer to figuring that out than you realize,” I muttered. “We’re trying to put the dots together …”

“It’s Alice,” she sighed. “When will you lock her up? Today? Tomorrow?”

“We’re still investigating. She’s being closely monitored,” I said, cupping her chin gently and looking into her impossibly sad eyes. “But, as far as I’m concerned, I’m done with your sister.”

“Me, too,” Bella murmured, turning in my arms and stroking my cheeks. “For now, I want to forget about my sister and all her bullshit. I want you. Make love to me, Masen. Please?”

“Let’s go up to my room, love,” I whispered.

“No. Here. In front of the Christmas tree and the fireplace. It’s a bit of a fantasy for me,” she said, her legs sliding on either side of my hips. “Please?” Her fingers twined in my hair and I pulled her flush to my chest. The Manor was empty, save for me and Bella. We would not be disturbed.

“Oh, yes. “Masen?”

“I love you, cherie. Your wish is my command,” I growled, crashing my lips against hers. She melted against me, twisting my hair into her fingers. I cupped her ass and slid my tongue between her lips. As we kissed each other hungrily, I inched up her sweater dress. Pulling away, I eased it off her body. She was on my lap in a pair of leggings and a sinful looking bra. Her breasts were pushed up and she was breathing heavily. “You’re so fucking perfect, Bella.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” she quipped. “And you’re far too dressed, Your Majesty. I’m here in my bra and leggings while you’re still looking like Nanook of the North.”

Her hands moved down my torso and she pushed my sweater off my body. She made quick work of the buttons of my dress shirt, parting them with her fingers and tracing my abdomen. I kissed
her, lifting her and pressing her against the cushions of the couch. I rolled my hips, feeling her heat through the fabric of her leggings, my pants and boxers. She pushed my button-down off my shoulders as I kissed her deeply, tasting her mouth. She was moaning against me, her fingers clawing at my back. I tore at her leggings, which ripped easily and revealed a matching pair of panties to her sexy bra. “You’re … no words to describe your beauty, Bella.” I brushed my lips against hers, traveling southward and tasting her alabaster skin.

“Masen,” she breathed, wanton, needy. I just continued teasing her, taunting her. I ghosted my mouth over her breasts before easing onto the ground. I kissed her belly, massaging her thighs as I moved closer to her pussy. “Oh, God … you’re killing me.”

“Never, love,” I chuckled, blinking up at her. I stared at her. She was laying against the cushions, her legs spread and her lips swollen. “I plan on making you come. Trust me, baby.” I hooked my thumbs on her burgundy, lacy panties and slid them down her legs. I blinked down. Between her legs, she was soaked, dripping with her arousal. I licked my lips eager to get my taste. I leaned forward, inhaling deeply before taking one long, slow lick along the length of her slit.

_Succulent perfection …_

“Oh, fuck,” she moaned. “Masen … more!”

I eagerly complied, pushing my tongue inside her as I rolled her clit with my fingers. She was rocking with me, her fingers tangled in my hair to keep my face buried between her legs. _Gladly, cherie_. I devoured her, tasting every inch of her sex. She was mewling, begging for her release, but I was teasing her. A slight flick to her clit, a twist of my wrist as I plunged two fingers inside her pussy, a graze of my pinky along her rosette of her ass … she was being brought to the brink of ecstasy. I tasted every bit of the ecstasy as I tongue fucked her.

Never would I tire of this … to see her completely vulnerable and turned on. Her lower lips were swollen and glistening from her arousal, along with my desperate need to taste her. She was perfection personified. She was my one, my person, my _cherie_. She. Was. Mine.

“I’m coming, Masen,” she whimpered. “Oh, GOD!”

I redoubled my efforts, curling my fingers inside her body and sucking on her clit. Her hold on my hair was painful, but worth every moment of her pleasure. I could feel her muscles inside clench and her arousal coated my tongue. I kept my mouth on her until her body just deflated in orgasmic pleasure. I kissed her inner thighs as I shimmied out of my slacks and boxer briefs. My cock was so hard, I was aching. Bella’s swollen pussy was right there. I slid my arms under lax body. She gave me a drunken smile. I just grinned back as I kissed her, removing her bra. She let out a loud moan, tasting herself on my lips. She muttered something that was barely coherent, but from her hands reaching for my ass, I could only assume she wanted me. Inside. I continued kissing her as I slid my hardness along her slit. “Masen … make me yours. Love me.”

“Always,” I whispered as I thrust forward, feeling her warmth surround me. Our lovemaking was slow, deliberate and intentional. I wanted to give Bella all of me. I wanted to show her unconditional and irrevocable love. I filled every inch of her, reveling in her heat. My cock was coated with her arousal and the inner-caveman loved that I was claimed by her body, her scent, her soul. In a few moments, I’d return the favor, filling her with ribbons of my cum, marking her as mine. We were so entwined that I didn’t know where she ended and I began. It was the best thing in my world. If I could, I’d want to be with her like this forever.

_Not really conducive when running a country, Mase._
I kissed her deeply, hooking one of her legs with my arms. We were as close as two humans could be; sharing one body. As Bella began to quake from my deep thrusts, I looked into her eyes. “I love you, chérie. Always. Forever. Never doubt that.”

“Masen,” she breathed, tumbling over the edge, with me following soon behind. I was panting heavily, my face buried in the crook of her neck and Bella was idly scratching her fingernails down my back. I eased up, pulling her onto my lap and feeling the evidence of our coupling drip out of her and onto my thigh. She snuggled against me. “Each time, Masen, it gets more amazing.”

“It does, love,” I said, covering our naked bodies with a throw. “Give me a few moments and then I’ll carry you upstairs for round two. I need another taste.”

“Only if I get mine, too,” she giggled, her lips gliding along my jawline. “We taste good … together.”

“Hmmm, we do, Bella,” I purred, crashing my lips against hers. We languidly kissed until I picked her up and carried her to my private suite. With a flick of the lock, we were inside and I made love to the woman I was going to marry. But, she didn’t know it …

Yet …

xx AMDFT xx

The next day, Bella and I had a lie-in. We spent the day in my bed. I left, only for a few moments, to pick up food that we desperately needed to refuel our sex-ravaged bodies and to send a message to Felix, telling him that if he came into the Manor, I’d fire his ass.

He knew I was kidding and getting a lot of quality time, as he put it, with Bella.

The day following Christmas, I was up early. Jacob had sent an email and was relentless in sending texts to me regarding Emmett’s situation. After talking with my mother, who was already up, I arranged a day of relaxation and beauty for Bella and Linda with my mother. Heidi would also attend, acting as their liaison with the spa, along with the private security force that always came with my mother.

As I was getting ready to call Jacob, I ran into Alec and Charlie, who were returning from the gym inside the palace. Charlie looked invigorated, his cheeks pink and his gait normal. His hands were barely trembling. “Masen!” he beamed. Alec sputtered. He was not used to anyone being that informal with me, especially someone who was not family. Typically, I was addressed as Your Highness or Prince Edward.

“Charlie, you’re looking well,” I said, shaking his hand. “Working out with Alec?”

“He’s giving me some exercises to help with balance,” Charlie said. “And the new medication protocol that my doctor put me on is really helping.”

“That’s great news,” I said. “Alec, if you don’t mind. I’d like a few moments with Mr. Swan.”

“Of course, Your Highness,” Alec nodded, bowing stiffly.

“I’ll escort him back to his quarters when we’re done,” I smirked, guiding Charlie into a ginormous library. “Please, have a seat. Would you like some coffee? Water?”

“I’m fine,” Charlie nodded. “Is everything okay?”
Everything’s fine, Charlie,” I said. “I … I just wanted to talk to you about Bella.” I sat down for a moment, only to get up again and pace in front of the large picture window overlooking the Manor. “You know I love your daughter, right?”

“I can see it, in everything you do for her,” Charlie murmured.

“You know I’d do anything to protect her?” I asked, turning to look at him. “To make her happy.”

“Of course, Masen,” Charlie breathed. “What is it?”

“I love Bella very much and I … with your blessing, of course … would like to ask her to marry me,” I blurted out. “Not today or tomorrow, but soon. She’s everything to me. I’d walk away from the throne for her, but my mother adores her.”

“Your mother dotes on Bella. It’s pissing Alice off something fierce,” Charlie chuckled humorlessly. He blinked to me, his lips pressed into a firm line. “Alice may be my child, but she’s planning something. It started with that article.”

“Her ‘accomplice’ has yet to implicate her and we do not have proof it was truly her,” I growled. “And she won’t implicate herself, obviously.”

“You should fly her back to the States,” Charlie said gruffly. “I don’t trust her. I hate that I’m saying that about my child, but she’s … she’s ruining this for herself.” He shook his head, clasping his hands together between his legs. “In regard to Bella, you’ve had my blessing since you walked into my bakery, telling me that you loved my daughter.” His eyes filled with tears. “You can give her the life she deserves, Masen. You make her happy and she’s able to be … she can have a life and not be chained to the damned bakery.”

“Charlie, she did that for you. To help your family,” I said, moving to sit next to him. “Bella adores you, respects you and would do anything for her family.”

“She gave up her dream to be shit on by her little sister,” Charlie grumbled. “Just when I thought she’d turned over a new leaf …” He stood up, his eyes hardening. “I won’t let that happen again to my baby girl. I’m done with Alice … if you don’t send her home. I will.”

“Charlie, wait. Don’t. If she’s here, we have more control over her,” I said. “If we send her back to the states? She could fly off, half-cocked. While staying here, she’s under lock and key. Renata is constantly with her. It’s like she’s in prison.”

“A very fancy prison,” Charlie deadpanned. “I trust you to know what you’re doing. I just hate that …”

“I get it, Charlie,” I smiled, squeezing his shoulder. “Are you okay?”

“Not right now, but I will be,” he whispered. “Can I just stay here for a few moments? Alone?”

“Of course,” I nodded. “For as long as you like. If you need help getting back to your quarters, press zero and someone will help you to your suite.”

“Thank you, Masen,” Charlie sighed, turning to look out the window.

I turned, leaving him in the library. I saw Alec, who had showered and changed. “He’s inside. Stay close, Alec. He’s struggling with …”

“Understandable, Your Highness,” Alec nodded. “Prince Emmett is waiting for you in the dining
room. Felix will be driving you to the capital.” He bowed again, standing outside of the library like a sentry.

In the dining room, Emmett is flipping through his phone. His brow is furrowed. “You okay, Emmett?” I asked.

“Phone call from the rehab. Verifying my return after the new year,” he replied. “You ready? You have the ring?”

I nodded, patting my coat pocket. “I just need to grab my coat. I talked to Charlie about …” I smiled.

“Good. And did he approve? Give his blessing?”

“He did,” I breathed. “But, he’s struggling with Alice.”

“We’re all struggling with Alice,” Emmett sighed. “Come on. Felix is waiting for us at the rear entrance.” I nodded and we got our coats from the closet. With a wave to my father, who was reading in the study, we got into the waiting Range Rover. I saw two other SUVs driving toward the exit. “Mom, Linda and Bella, along with their security team.”

“I wonder if Alice is pissed that she wasn’t included,” I chuckled. Emmett shrugged. Felix pulled away and I blew out a breath. “I heard from Jacob about Rosalie and the guys who …”

“Do I want to know?” Emmett choked out.

“I’ll start first with Royce and his cronies,” I began, opening the file on my phone. “Royce, after he was expelled, was linked to at least five other rapes on campus. He’s currently waiting in Riker’s Island for his many trials for rape, sexual assault and attempted murder. His accomplices are testifying against him for lesser charges.”

“I hope someone made Royce their bitch,” Emmett growled. “That he knows how it feels to have his choice taken away.”

“Karma is a bitch,” I sniffed. “And so is Royce.”

“Nice,” Emmett sneered, a scary smile spreading over his face. “Now, what about Rosie?”

“She’s not in a good place, Emmett,” I muttered. “Jacob checked on her and she’s back at home, in Rochester. She’s pregnant.”

“What?” Emmett choked out.

“From what Jacob told me, she’s about seven months along and barely surviving. The only time she leaves the house is to go to the doctor,” I breathed. “Jacob said that she doesn’t interact with anyone and is giving the baby up for adoption.”

“The baby could be mine,” Emmett said, blinking to me. “I have to see her, Masen. I can’t go back to rehab. I need to be with her.”

“I know you want to, but as of right now, you’re not welcome in the states, Emmett. You were deported,” I frowned. “Have you tried to calling her?”

“Her phone has been disconnected, Mase,” Emmett cried, fat tears falling down his face. “You have to talk to her for me. You’re still the diplomat assigned to the states until mid-February,
right?” He took my hand, squeezing it too tightly. “Please, Masen. I know I’m a fuck up, but I have to know … I need to know she’s …”

“I’ll go see her, Emmett,” I said, cupping his face. “I’ll have Jacob do some more work. As soon as I’m back in the states, I’ll make my way out to Rochester to see her.”

“If I write her a letter, will you … can you get it to her for me?” Emmett asked, sounding so lost and broken.

“I will,” I nodded. “I’m sorry, Emmett. I couldn’t even imagine … if this happened to Bella? I’d be …”

“I know, Mase,” he muttered. He hugged me and wiped his face with his sleeve. “Now you get why I …”

“I do,” I sighed. “But, did you have sex with anyone else after Rosalie’s attack?” He flushed and shrugged. “Emmett?”

“I was too high. I don’t remember,” he hissed out. “I wanted to forget what I saw. I wanted to forget that she left me. I love her, Mase.” He blanched, looking at me with wide eyes. “What if I did what those animals did to Rosie?”

“No, Emmett. You may have been on a bender, but you’re not a rapist,” I argued. “Have a little faith in yourself, Em. You were lost and now? You’re finding your way back.”

“I couldn’t have done it without you, Masen,” Emmett said, giving me a sad smile. “I hated you when you dragged me out of the precinct, making me dry out. Now? I know you were trying to save me. You did. Can you please, save Rosie, too?”

“I can’t make that promise, but I will reach out to her, Emmett,” I whispered. “That I can promise.”

“Okay … good,” he breathed. He sat back, huffing out a heavy breath. “Enough heavy. Let’s get your girl her engagement ring. One of us needs a happily ever after. Might as well be Prince Charming …”

“Shut up, Emmett,” I laughed. He just grinned, ruffling my hair.

A/N: What do you think about the revelations about Rosalie? Is the baby Royce’s or Emmett’s? (If you remember, Emmett had made love to her prior to her attack). Also, Alice’s imprisonment? I don’t trust her. Nor does Charlie or Bella. But, Masen is using the old adage … keep your friends close, your enemies closer … keeping her in the palace to keep more vigilant watch of her.

Leave me your thoughts. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 31

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

I don’t normally like using alternate POVs, but I think we need to get into Alice’s mind. She’s a back-stabbing bitch and we’re going to find out her reasoning. Without further ado, here’s the next chapter.

Chapter Thirty-One

Alice

I was in my room.

No, wait.

I was in my prison cell with a queen-sized bed, a duvet cover, feather pillows and my dad’s girlfriend.

Ugh, Linda … can’t stand that bitch! If I have to smell her cloying, noxious perfume for another goddamned minute? I swear I’m going to cut a bitch.

While I was sitting in my room, I was being watched by my warden, Renata. She was barely taller than me, but she wielded a key, locking me inside and held the combination to the safe which held my cell phone. Ever since I was a ‘person of interest’ in that whole tabloid scam, I was not to be trusted.

I was shocked, to be honest.

I was stunned that I was given as much freedom as I’d received.

Suckers.

Though, I thought I was more careful. I’d played the ‘role’ of a loving, caring sister and doting daughter to the best of my ability upon my return from forced exile. Even though, I wanted to slit my wrists with how fake I was being. I hated my family. I abhorred my life. A sister who was ‘sainted’ and a father who was loser and was unable to provide for me. I’m the kid. My needs should be met, damn it! I shouldn’t be forced into indentured servitude because my dad’s hands shake uncontrollably and he could barely walk at times.

Regardless, I’d hoped that the ‘screen’ would hold true.

Yeah, that would be a no.

I picked a decent-looking servant who had a sob story and close to my age, losing his brother in some godforsaken, unnecessary war and an obvious bone to pick with the royal family. I led him on, had some really bad sex and gained access to the palace’s phone system with his personalized code. I said that I needed to call my best friend, but in reality, I was eager to spill the beans on my skank sister.

I had a phone number and email address of an owner of a tabloid blog. It had been texted to me by
an unknown number prior to my departure to Gevalia, along with a name. I reached out to Laurent and told him all about how Isabella spread her whore legs to entrap Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen. She was not worthy of royalty. She was not worthy of anything. I couldn’t stand her and her sanctimonious, holier-than-thou martyr thing she had going on.

Boo hoo, you have to work seven days a week. It’s called being an adult, honey.

Bella made my life hell, forcing me to work her shifts at the bakery and now? It’s my turn to return the favor.

According to dear old Dad, Bella was a lifesaver. She gave up her dreams of being a teacher to move back home to save the bakery. Yes, Charlie was sick. But, it wasn’t fatal or anything. So, what, if he almost cut off his fingers because his hands were trembling so much? He should have sold the bakery. But, no. He worked with Bella and they tried to save it.

Yes, it was our legacy.

No, it was their legacy.

My legacy was to leave New York as soon as possible. I should have left, hitchhiking my way to California when Dad kicked me out all those months ago.

Though, he had no real reason to do so. I was a freeloader and stole from the family, he’d said. I needed that homecoming dress. I was on the court. I deserved that money, damn it!

I wasn’t helping the family. What about when Bella was out with the prince? She was slacking and I was forced to work her shifts. I didn’t want to work at the bakery. I hated the bakery. It was the bane of my existence. It kept my father away from me. He worked so much and ignored me because I looked so much like my dead mother.

Charlie also just listened to his angelic, beloved Bella. Whatever she said, it convinced him to throw me out, with just the clothes on my back and a couple hundred bucks. When they did that, I turned to Jasper. He was my boyfriend and my closest confidante, but he was also a drug addict, drug dealer and a pimp. He never pimped me out, but he was getting desperate and he looked at me like I was his cash cow.

Untouched, untainted pussy for him to sell.

Not if I had a choice …

I was just the stain on our family. I killed my mother when I was born. Charlie could barely function when I was a little kid, grieving his wife. He tried, but whenever he looked at me, he saw the memory of his dearly departed Renee. I was the spitting image of my mom, it would seem. Bella tried to be a mother to me, but she was still a kid. When I was little, I thought my big sister was awesome. Then, I hit sixth grade, I found out she was a loser and a nerd. She also had those experiences with Mom that I never had. I hated her for that. I got a grieving, lost man of a father and a homely, nerdy older sister who was just worthless to me.

I had my other family, my friends, my boyfriend and my wits. That’s all I needed.

Money, however, would have been nice. I couldn’t exactly steal from the bakery anymore since it was closed down and had new locks, with a high-tech security system that I didn’t have the code for. Fuck my life!

While I was kicked out of the house, I still managed to go to school. My housing situation had
undoubtedly changed, but I was not going to be an ignorant loser. Jasper had dropped out, selling his drugs on a street corner and getting his ‘take’ from his girls. One night, a little over a month after I’d been thrown out, Jasper came back from his corner. We’d found shelter in a dilapidated brownstone. He called it our palace, but it was anything but a palace. It was a dump, with rats and holes in the roof. It was, however, better than living on the streets. It had working fireplaces, where we could light a fire for heat. It was also across the street from a YMCA, where I could take a shower before going to school.

Anyway, Jasper came back, strung out on heroine. He looked at me, his eyes glazed over and his lip curled up into a sneer. “Why am I not pimping you out, Mary Alice?” he asked, his voice slurred and his movements uncoordinated. “You could make me a mint! Your tight pussy and virgin ass? Hmmmm … guys would be lining up around the corner, baby. Come on. Let’s get you changed so you can make your daddy some money.” He tore at my clothes, but I batted his hands away.

I was not a whore.

That would be Bella … she was the whore in our family. I had principles, beliefs!

Jasper didn’t like that. He beat the shit out of me and tried to rape me. I knew he wasn’t all there. He’d fried his brain with the meth he cooked up yesterday. I couldn’t stay with him anymore. I knocked him unconscious with a two by four, leaving the brownstone. I was terrified and I called Bella.

Despite all I did to her, she was there for me and she helped me.

You know who else was there?

Bella’s boyfriend. The PRINCE of Gevalia … she was still whoring herself out.

I bit my tongue and thanked her, hugging her before I went into my room. That night, I was in agony. Every part of my body ached, but mostly my heart was broken. Jasper was supposed to have my back. He said he loved me. He hated my family as much as I did. He was supposed to be on my side, but he was a mess. Hell, I don’t even know if he’s still alive. He was breathing when I left but knocked out cold.

Another month had passed and I lived back in the apartment with my dad in Brooklyn. I went to school, biding my time to strike when the going was good. The next thing I knew, our family had been invited to Gevalia for the holidays. I was afraid that I’d be left behind, but the PRINCE included me in the trip, trying to be a gracious host. I was granted a passport and we flew out a few days before Christmas.

I thought I’d have more freedom, but no. I was stuck in a room with my dad’s girlfriend, Linda. She could barely hide her disdain toward me. My cell phone was taken away by Renata and I was expected to behave a certain way. I tried. Truly, I did, but when I was questioned like a criminal, I shut down.

Bella … she was going to pay. The PRINCE was going to pay, too.

Neither one of them deserved this happiness. They took away my freedoms, my choices. In return, I’m going to make their lives hell.

But, how can I do that? All of the phone codes had been changed, thanks to my conversation with Laurent. I didn’t have access to a computer and Linda, Renata and Heidi, Bella’s servant, hovered
over me like I was going to steal the good silver.

**Who’s to say I haven’t already?**

xx AMDFT xx

Nearly a week had passed since Christmas. The palace was all up in arms for a New Year’s Eve celebration with the royal blue bloods. Everyone who was anyone was invited to this black-tie affair.

*Including me …*

I was standing in my bedroom, being fitted into a beautiful navy-blue evening dress. Renata was pinning my gown, taking a great deal of joy in stabbing me with the straight pins. “Fuck! I’m bleeding in this couture gown,” I barked.

“My apologies,” Renata said, her voice dripping with disdain. “But you are representing your family, the royal family. You need to look the part. Though, you will be closely observed, Lady Alice.”

“I know that,” I sneered. “It’s borderline creepy, Renata. I like my privacy.”

“That privacy has been revoked when you betrayed your sister and leaked that bogus story to the press. If I had my way, you’d be in a prison cell,” Renata snapped, jabbing another pin into my shoulder. “But, your ‘accomplice’ hasn’t implicated you, proving your involvement. He said that he was the source, but the information was too personal for him to know.” She poked me again with a sadistic grin. “Now, I will be close by all night. One toe out of line and I have the authority to throw you into a cell. Your freedoms completely revoked.”

“My dad won’t let that happen,” I scoffed, crossing my arms defiantly.

“Your father approved this,” Renata smiled, her expression cold and calculating. “He’s done with your shit, too. You’ve made your bed, Alice. Now, you have to lie in it. Are you ready to serve jail time for slander? Defamation of character?” She stepped back. “I’m going to change. I’ll be back in a little bit to escort you to the party. One toe out of line and you’re done.”

She locked me in my room. I sat down and crossed my legs angrily. This trip was getting worse and worse.

An hour later, I was escorted to the grand ballroom. The room was decorated elegantly with black, gold and silver. I scowled, looking down at my dress. It was navy-blue and clashed with the decorations. Everyone in the room was dressed in black, silver or black. “You did this on purpose, Renata,” I hissed.

“Maybe,” she smirked, her accent becoming more apparent. “This is a fashion event, Lady Alice. Turnabout’s fair play.”

“Fuck you,” I snapped, turning to leave. I was blocked by two beefy men, soldiers who were wearing tuxedos and angry grimaces. I could see their weapons hidden under their jackets. “I want to go.”

“You can’t,” Renata chuckled. “We’ll be watching you. Best behavior, Lady Alice.”

She took my arm, leading me further into the ballroom. When I was fully inside, I saw Bella and Masen standing next to each other, a few steps below a raised dais. Bella’s dress, which pained me
to say, looked exquisite. It was a soft rose gold, shimmering under the twinkling lights of the Christmas tree and dimmed overhead halogen lamps. Her ears were sparkling with diamond earrings and around her wrist was a ginormous diamond tennis bracelet. She also had on a small hair comb, glimmering behind her ears. She looked poised, happy and relaxed. Masen hovered next to her, his hand resting on her hip and he looked at her lovingly. He was very handsome in a black tuxedo and a golden sash draped across his chest, with a crest pinned at his hip.

On a raised dais, the queen and her husband, the duke were smiling pleasantly, standing next to Masen and Bella. The queen was in a subtle glittering gown with a diamond crown atop her silvery hair. Her husband was next to her, in a traditional tuxedo and silver sash across his chest, pinned to his body with the same crest that Masen wore. On the other side of the royal couple, stood Emmett. He was dressed similarly to his father, but with a gold sash.

“Where’s my dad?” I asked, scowling at Renata.

“Seated at the head table. We’ll go sit there now,” Renata said, dragging me to a beautifully set table. My dad and his girlfriend were seated next to Heidi and Felix. All of them were dressed elegantly. Heidi was in a gold ball gown and Linda was in a silver dress with her hair swept up into a chic chignon. As much as I hated her, she did look good. So, did my dad. His hair was cut and styled. His usual mustache had been shaved off. He looked dapper. “Mr. Swan, here’s your daughter, sir.”

“Thank you, Renata,” Dad smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. I sat down, wishing I had something to take the edge off. My fuck buddy had provided me with recreational ecstasy and a few grams of pot. So, I reached for a glass of wine. Before I could take the goblet, it was plucked away from me by Felix. I scowled at him angrily. “Best behavior, Mary Alice.”

“Whatever, Dad,” I scoffed. “Why can’t I stay in my room?”

“Because we’re invited guests of the royal family,” Dad said, his smile firmly pasted on his face. “To refuse the invitation would be a faux pas. You will stay here, smile and act like a loving sister to Bella, supporting her relationship. If you can’t do that, you will be sent to the lock up and I won’t be able to do anything to help you.”

I pursed my lips, not responding and sitting back in the posh golden chairs. The royal family sat down across from us. Masen helped my sister into her seat and kissed her temple lovingly when he settled down next to her. I swiped a water goblet, sipping it and trying not to stew about how everyone was turning their backs on me. I didn’t do a damn thing wrong.

Sure, Mary Alice. You keep telling yourself that.

Dinner was dreadfully boring. The food was good, with a mix of German heartiness, French buttery goodness and Italian flavor. I kept my face impassive, bordering on bored and angry as I ate dinner. Emmett tried to engage in conversation with me, but I ignored him. Once dinner was done, I stood up and Renata was suctioned to my side. “Can’t I pee without being watched?” I sneered. Renata just smiled, gesturing to the bathroom.

We walked through the tables and into a large bathroom with several stalls. “I’ll wait outside, Lady Alice,” Renata said coldly. I rolled my eyes and ducking into a stall. I shimmied my dress up, taking care of business.

“Oh, bugger off, Renata,” came an accented voice. “What can she do in the loo? We need to have some girl talk. The girl is sequestered and being punished unnecessarily.” There was flick of the lock and I stepped out, seeing a tall blonde woman with a garish, over-the-top gold dress. “I’ve
heard a lot about you.”

“Shame, I can’t say the same,” I said, arching a brow.

“We’re on the same side, Alice,” she purred, her voice quiet and deadly. Gracefully, she raised her hand and I shook it dubiously. “Lady Kathryn Denali, daughter to Duchess and Duke Carmen and Eleazar Denali, next in line to the throne, behind those two gibronis, Prince Edward and Prince Emmett. AND up until Edward left for America, his betrothed.”

“You were engaged to Masen?” I asked.

“It wasn’t official or anything, but I was supposed to be his queen. Not your American whore sister,” Lady Kathryn scoffed. “I know you’re on lockdown because of that tabloid leak.”

“How did you …?” I squeaked.

“Who do you think sent you that text? My minions know all and see all, Alice,” Lady Kathryn smirked, crossing her arms over her obviously fake breasts. “I know you don’t know me from Adam, but I want to help end this little romance. Prince Edward was meant to be mine. With my help, we can put an end to his relationship with Isabella and ruin her reputation permanently. She’ll be broken beyond everything ever possible.” She handed me a card. “You find Danielle in the kitchen. She’s my contact. Slip her this card and I’ll know to put my plan into motion.”

I looked at her uncertainly. “You think this will work? And that we’ll both avoid matching prison cells?”

She just grinned brightly. “We’ll see, Alice,” she sang. “Now, before Renata bursts an aneurysm, we need to get out of here.” Turning, Lady Kathryn unlocked the door and revealed a fuming Renata. “Oh, relax. Red doesn’t really match your hair, love. I was just helping Lady Alice with her dress.” She glided past my jailor, a smirk firmly placed on her face.

Blinking down to the card, it was a lunch order of some sort of sandwich. It made zero sense, but if she believed she could make a difference and break up Masen and my sister … what did I have to lose?

The question remained … do I trust this badly dressed psycho?

A/N: So, Alice is in bed with Lady Kathryn. Will she take that next step to bring down Masen and Bella? Leave me your thoughts …

Pictures of the ball will be on my blog, which you can find in my profile. I’m also on Facebook, Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: Tufano79.

Up next will be the last of the ball, New Year’s Eve celebrations and some more citrusy moments with Masen and Bella, in her POV. Thanks for reading and for your patience!
Chapter 32

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own ... even for just a little while.

Up next will be the last of the ball, New Year’s Eve celebrations and possibly some citrusy moments with Masen and Bella, in her POV. Thanks for reading and for your patience!

Chapter Thirty-Two

Bella

I was sitting next to Masen, heir to the throne of Gevalia, sipping real champagne, from Champagne, France. I was wearing crown jewels, in the form of diamond-encrusted hair combs that belonged to Queen Esme’s mother, Princess Eliza and the wife to King Edward Anthony Phillippe Masen.

Masen wanted me to wear a tiara, but seeing as we weren’t engaged, Esme didn’t think it would be appropriate. So, they compromised with the hair combs. Heidi made me look every bit as regal and royal as Esme, befitting the arm of Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen.

I never felt more out of place, to be honest.

I felt like a sham, like the whore that the reporter called me.

Masen told me that most everyone else adored me. The Gevalian public were enamored with my ability to be genuinely good, kind, loving and everything that the country needed in a princess. The queen, then, issued a statement, backing our relationship and giving me the royal approval to date her son, perhaps even marrying him. I had the public’s approval.

I put on a strong front. I smiled for photos at the church on Christmas Day when all I wanted to do was curl up into a ball and not leave my bedroom. The week in between Christmas, Masen and I were holed up in Masen Manor, making love and just being. Masen wanted to take me on a tour of his country. I also wanted to see more of Gevalia, but I was terrified of another scathing article written by Laurent.

“Cherie?” Masen whispered, his warm hand grasping mine and twining our fingers together. “Are you okay? You’re spacing out, love.”

“My apologies,” I whispered back, giving him a tiny grin. I blinked to where my sister was sitting and scowling at her meal.

“I call bullshit,” Masen snorted, kissing my bare shoulder. He gently ran his finger along my jaw and turning my head toward his. “I can see your cogs twisting, Bella. You’re thinking about how you’re going to be trolled again. I assure you. You will NOT be torn apart by another nasty article.”

I stared at him, lost in his evergreen depths. “You can’t promise that, Masen,” I said. “Gevalia has free press. People can write whatever they want. They can write that I’m a whore or that you’re settling.”
“I’m not settling,” he said, brushing his lips over mine. “I love you. I want you. Only you. You’re the woman I’ve always dreamt of, *cherie.*” He stood up, holding out his hand. I blinked up at him. “Take it, Bella.” I slipped my hand into his and he gently tugged me to my feet. Looping my hand through his arm, we left the head table. The Queen arched a brow, but Masen flashed a charming grin. We ducked out of the ballroom and out onto a marble balcony overlooking the gardens. I could see Masen Manor twinkling in the distance.

“Masen, you realize it’s winter,” I snorted.

“I do, but I need some fresh air. I also don’t want our conversation to be overheard, especially by Lady Kathryn,” he sneered. I arched a brow. “Bella, you’re *it* for me. I can see a future, a forever with you. I know that what Laurent said rattled you. The fact that your sister is complicit? That doesn’t help matters. The people of Gevalia see how amazing you are and how happy you make me.”

“Now, why don’t you want Lady Kathryn to hear?” I asked.

“Because she’s crazy,” he sighed. “She has this sick, twisted belief that we’re getting married. We’re not. We never were. We’re family, not by blood, but still family. Lady Kathryn is the royal version of Alice, to be honest. I’d be terrified if both of them got in league with each other.”

“Can’t we just throw my sister into jail?” I grumbled. I slid my arms around his waist. He sighed, holding me to his muscular chest as the snow gracefully fell from the sky, looking like a million falling stars. “She’s obviously behind it.”

“We’re building a case, *cherie,*” he muttered. “We’re waiting for the final nail in the coffin. Renata has been trailing her like a hawk and we’re very close to finding the links implicating your sister.” He squeezed me tighter until we heard a soft sound of someone clearing their throat. Masen turned. “Yes?”

Felix said something in French that I didn’t understand. I looked up at Masen. “What did he say?”

“Proof,” he replied, a dark smile spreading over his handsome face. “Come on, Bella. Let’s go back inside and enjoy the party before we turn into icicles.” We walked back into the ballroom, which was filled with dancers. A few tables had been removed, making more room for the guests. My sister was missing, along with Renata. “Dance with me, *cherie.*”

“Where’s Renata?” I asked as Masen spun me onto the dance floor.

“Escorting your sister back to her room,” Masen explained. He smoothly moved us along the mahogany floors to the romantic ballad that was being played by jazz band on the opposite end of the room. “There’s something brewing, Bella and we’re going to put an end to your sister’s shenanigans.”

“Do I want to know?” I whispered, gripping his hand a bit tighter.

“I’ll tell you later. Tonight, I want to give you this moment to be the belle of the ball,” he quipped. “Get it? Belle?”

“You’re lucky I love you,” I giggled, kissing his jaw. “But that was pretty bad.”

“I got you to smile, Bella,” he said, dipping his head and kissing me so tenderly. The world fell away and we were lost to each other. It wasn’t until the song ended that we stopped kissing.

“May I have this dance?”
I turned and saw my dad standing behind us. He had on a wry smirk. “Dad,” I squeaked. “I’m …”

My father waved his hand, dismissing my apology. He held out his arm and I stepped into his embrace, dancing with my father to another jazz standard while Masen danced with his mother. “You looked so relaxed with Masen,” Dad whispered. “He obviously makes you happy, Bella.”

“Yeah, he does,” I whispered, feeling the unsteadiness of his gait. “How’s Linda? Alice?”

“Linda and I are doing great,” Dad beamed. “She’s made me happy for the first time since your mother’s death. I was a shell of a man and she made me whole again.”

“I’m so happy for you, Daddy,” I breathed. “I like Linda. She’s been amazing with this whole thing with Alice and she makes you smile.” I blinked up at him. “Are you going to get married?”

“That remains to be seen,” Dad shrugged. “I love Linda very much, but I don’t want to sidle her with my medical issues. I don’t want to make her a widow.” I arched a brow. “Bells, I know how much I broke apart when Renee died. Yes, her death was tragic and unexpected. She was young and strong, but not strong enough to survive losing pints upon pints of blood after Alice’s birth. I don’t want Linda to … I don’t want her to feel what I felt when I lost your mother.”

“Dad, it’s not really your choice,” I said. “She’s going to feel that if you’re married or not. I can see how much she adores you. Don’t deny yourself happiness because of your fear.”

“You should take your own advice, Bells,” Dad smirked. “I know that you love Masen. He loves you more than life itself and you’re feeling like you’re unworthy.”

“I’m not,” I said, my voice barely audible over the music.

“That’s where we disagree. You’re more than worthy, sweet girl,” Dad said, a shaky palm cupping my cheek. “I know those words are not yours. It’s your sister’s cancerous beliefs wriggling into your mind. And that’s my fault. I should have stepped up earlier. I was so consumed with stress regarding my diagnosis and fear of losing the bakery. I’m so sorry, baby girl.”

“Dad, don’t,” I sighed, leaning my cheek against his shoulder.

“Be happy, Bells. Listen to your own advice,” he smiled, kissing my forehead. The song ended and we walked off the dance floor. I sat down with my dad and chatted with Linda, asking them about their adventures in Gevalia. They’d done some touristy things in the capital while Masen and I hid out in Masen Manor. When I wasn’t talking with my dad and Linda, I was dancing with Masen, Emmett and even Carlisle. Carlisle, while being royalty, was the worst dancer of the bunch. He had two left feet, but he still smiled and enjoyed every moment.

I was spun around, into Masen’s arms. “It’s nearly midnight, cherie,” he smiled. “I want to be the one to kiss you at midnight.”

“I don’t think your mother would approve of her husband kissing me,” I snickered, trailing my hands up his arms and idly toying with his soft bronze-colored hair.

“You’re probably going to get a kiss on the cheek, but I get to kiss you at midnight, love,” Masen murmured, his hands resting just above my ass as we swayed to the upbeat music the band was playing in preparation to bring out 2018 and bring in 2019. “I’m so happy that I get to ring in the new year with the woman that I love more than my own life. The first of many New Year’s celebrations, Bella.”

Ten …
“How many?” I asked.

“The rest of our lives, if you’ll have me,” Masen said, cupping my cheek. “I mean it, cherie. You’re it for me.”

“I love you, Masen,” I breathed.

“I love you, too, Bella,” he murmured, his lips barely touching mine.

“Happy New Year!” was called all around us, in English, French, German and Italian. People around us were kissing, hugging and laughing. Masen held me closer, his mouth descending down onto mine and I was lost to him, tasting his lips and feeling his velvety tongue invade my mouth. I whimpered, moving further into his embrace.

“Forever is not long enough,” he said when he broke away from me. “I want an eternity with you.”

“That sound perfect,” I breathed, smiling at him. “Do we have to stay?”

“For a little bit, but I promise to take home soon,” he purred, a seductive, sexy grin spreading over his face. “I want to give you the first orgasm of 2019.”

Masen and I spent the night making love after the ball. His movements were so reverent, so tender as he moved inside me. His words of forever and promises of a happily ever after made my heart soar as I orgasmed over and over again, arching against his body. Every inch of his body was made for me.

The next day, we were forced out of the house for the Annual New Year’s Eve Parade. It was freezing cold and I was exhausted from our lovemaking. We were seated in a carriage, being driven by one of the royal stablemen. I was dressed in a dove grey winter coat and a coordinating hat, scarf and glove set. Masen was in navy overcoat and the Cullen Crest. “I haven’t seen my sister,” I said, sitting closer to Masen in the carriage.

“She’s been detained,” Masen replied, waving his hand gracefully. “Her accomplice finally broke when a lifetime in prison was tossed onto the table.”

“For giving away a code?” I squeaked.
“He wasn’t the sharpest tool in the shed,” Masen smirked. “But we said we could hold him indefinitely for contempt. If he didn’t say anything, he’d spend the rest of his life in a prison cell. Technically, he did commit treason and could be sentenced for life.”

“Now?” I asked.

“He’ll get a lessened sentence and will be exiled from Gevalia for the rest of his life. We will provide him with the means necessary to start a new life, but he will no longer be welcome here,” Masen explained.

“And my sister?”

“Will be tried for treason and will not get the same deal as her accomplice,” Masen sighed. “I’m sorry, Bella.”

“Don’t apologize, Masen,” I said, snuggling closer to him. “Alice made her own choices. She may be my sister, but she’s no longer my family. I’m done with her.” I looked at him, staring into his eyes. “You’re my family, Masen. I love you and I love that you’re so protective.”

“I’ll do anything to make sure you’re safe, love,” he smiled, kissing me tenderly. “I do want to warn you, though. You’re in the public eye … Your life will change. I should have thought about that.”

“I’m ready, Masen,” I nodded. “I want to share my life with you, however that is possible.” His responding grin was beautiful. He cupped my face, kissing me sweetly. As I kissed him, I felt my heart explode and I never felt happier.

A/N: This is most I’ve written in almost two months. Am I happy with it? Meh … but I had to start somewhere. Now, we’re not done with AMDFT. And don’t count Alice out. She will come back and things will get bumpier before we get to the end. Please, leave me some loving! And thank you for reading!
Chapter Thirty-Three

Masen

Charlie and Linda were preparing to head back to the states. He had a doctor’s appointment at the end of the week with his neurologist. My parents made arrangements for their departure. Alice was being detained in the cells beneath the palace. She was on day three of her interrogation. She adamantly refused to answer questions, only saying that she didn’t do a damn thing wrong.

The bug in the bathroom on New Year’s Eve said another thing. As did her accomplice, who was being deported and exiled from Gevalia. Alice was going down.

She would not terrorize my girlfriend anymore.

Bella was over her sister’s bullshit and was getting angry that Alice was denying any wrongdoing. So, I was going to take my girl on a short trip in Europe before returning to the United States. We were going to Paris for a couple of days before spending time in Spain. Bella always wanted to go to Paris and see the Eiffel Tower, *Mona Lisa* and Notre Dame. I’d been to Spain on holiday and loved its romantic feel.

I wanted to woo my girl; sweep her off her feet and by giving her the world, I’d do just that.

With my mother’s blessing, I made the arrangements for three days in Paris and three more days in Barcelona before flying back to New York City. I had a few more official actions to complete as a diplomat before my return to Gevalia for the Gevalian Independence Day celebrations at the end of February. I was hopeful that when I returned, I’d have a new fiancée and Bella would become my queen, my wife, my partner.

I’d finished designing her engagement ring and it was nearly complete, using the diamonds from my grandmother’s engagement ring. It was an eclectic blend of an old-world style, with a modern, contemporary twist.

“Masen, I’m going to the airport with my dad and Linda,” Bella said. She was adorably dressed in a white puffy winter coat. Her brown curls were hidden underneath a blue hat, with a coordinating scarf and gloves. “I just want to see them off. I haven’t been away from my dad since his diagnosis. I’m … worried.”

“Bella, Linda loves your dad,” I said, pulling her into my arms. “She’ll take care of him, *cherie*.”

“It’s not that,” she shrugged, her hands resting on my chest. “It’s my dad and his stress over my sister and her bullshit. It’s the renovations of the bakery. It’s … I feel like I’m letting him down, Masen. I’ve been at every single one of his doctor’s appointments, save for the one where he was told that he had Parkinson’s. Once I found out about his diagnosis, I came back home and you know the rest. I just want to … I want to see him off.”

“You’re not letting him down, Bella,” I murmured, brushing my lips over her forehead. “It was
Charlie who suggested we extend our stay in Europe. He knows that you’ve been working nonstop since coming back from Connecticut after his diagnosis. I made the arrangements for our vacation.” I cupped her cheek, staring into her chocolate-colored eyes. “Now, go say goodbye to your dad. I love you, Bella.”

“I love you, too, Masen,” she smiled, kissing me tenderly. She met up with Felix, who had parked the Range Rover outside of Masen Manor. My bodyguard and valet gave me nod as he got into the driver’s seat, pulling away on the gravel driveway.

When she was gone, I walked to the palace through the gardens and made my way down to the cells where Alice was being held for questioning. I made my way through the twisting maze of hallways to the interrogation room. My mother was leaning against the wall, glowering at Alice as she was snoozing on the small cot inside. “She’s sleeping?” I asked, leaning down to kiss my mother’s cheek.

“She’s sleeping,” Mom huffed, crossing her arms over her body. “I want to smack that girl stupid. The way she treats her family is abhorrent, disgusting. She is the picture of an entitled, selfish brat. I know it’s due in part to Charlie catering to her. He felt guilty due to the loss of her mother. He had to be both mother and father. But, regardless, Charlie did impart a sense of right and wrong. Alice, however, is a sociopath. She only sees how it impacts her. She’s always the victim, in her mind.”

“What about Lady Kathryn?” I asked. “She openly colluded with Alice.”

“We went to go bring Lady Kathryn in for questioning. She’s been swept away on a trip, to a country without an extradition treaty with Gevalia,” Mom sneered and rolled her eyes. “I sent people to arrest Carmen and Eleazar, but they said that Kathryn was working on her own, with her own staff. They’ve been brought in for questioning. We’re doing some investigating. Carmen and Eleazar may be stripped of the titles, but Kathryn … she’s fucked with the wrong family.”

“Language, Mother,” I chided.

“It’s the damn truth, Masen,” she said, looking at me.

“What are we going to do with Alice?” I asked.

“She’s not a Gevalian citizen, but she will be deported back to the United States, where she will be taken into custody and be tried for her crimes back in the states,” Mom answered. She smoothed her dress and stood taller. “I think I’m going to talk to this little heathen.”

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“I can and I will. I’m not questioning her. I’m just going to lay down my cards to show that she’s fucking,” Mom smirked. She slid into the interrogation room, slamming the door. Alice squeaked and fell onto the floor. “Oh, did I wake you?” Alice opened her mouth, ready with some snarky response but the guard inside reminded her that my mother was the Queen of Gevalia, and needed to be treated with respect. Alice wisely closed her mouth and slid back onto the cot, her legs curled to her body. She glowered at my mother, not giving her an ounce of respect that she deserved. “I hope you find your accommodations comfortable.”

“They’re peachy,” Alice deadpanned. “I don’t understand why I’m being caged up like an animal. I didn’t do anything wrong. I was telling the truth about my slut sister.”

“That’s where you are wrong, Alice,” Mom said coldly, sitting down demurely at the table and folding her hands in front of herself. “What you did was called defamation of character. You also
signed an NDA. Remember that paper you signed when you got settled into your room? Renata has a copy and so do I.” She reached into her pocket, producing a copy of the NDA. “By signing this paper, you were not to divulge any information about the royal family, Alice. You broke that by contacting that reporter. He’s since retracted the article, with a formal apology. My son and your sister are beloved in Gevalia and from what I’ve seen, adored in United States.” She took out her phone, handing it to Alice. Her eyes widened as she flipped through various websites and news articles about Isabella Swan, the American Princess in the making. She’d sent me the same set of links this morning.

With a snarl, Alice tossed the phone onto cot. “What does this have to do with me?”

“It means that you’ve backed the wrong horse, Alice,” Mom chuckled. “Now, here’s what’s going to happen. You will be brought to the high court and you will be found guilty of slander, defamation of character and breach of contract, breaking the non-disclosure agreement. After that, you will be sentenced and deported back to the states.”

“Good. I want to go home. I never wanted to be here in the first place,” Alice shrugged.

“Where you will be charged with the same crimes, little girl. My son, the man your sister loves, is a lawyer and he said that the charges could equal time behind bars and a hefty fine. If you can’t pay the fine, you’ll stay in jail. You’re eighteen and will be tried as an adult. Your father has washed his hands of you.”

Alice’s face fell as tears welled in her eyes. “He told me. He pretty much told me that I’m no longer his daughter. That I was a stain on our family and that I bring nothing but shame to him.”

“That sounds about right,” Mom nodded. “And I can tell your upset about this, right?”

She looked up to my mom, tears streaming down her cheeks and nodding. “I have no one.”

“You have no one to blame for this but yourself,” Mom said, a dark smile spreading over her face. “After today, I’ll never think of you, but you will remember me and what you did to my family.” Blinking to the guard, she nodded solemnly. He stalked over to Alice, tugging her to her feet.

“What? Wait! No!” Alice sobbed. “Please …”

“Take her to the central prison so she can be arraigned. How long is the backlog?” Mom smirked.

“For minor cases? She may see a judge by June,” the guard replied, clapping on a pair of handcuffs. “Of 2020. Or was it 2021?” He took her arm, dragging her out of the interrogation room as she sobbed and sniveled for another chance.

Mom turned and walked outside. She wore a triumphant grin. “One thing out of your way, Masen,” she said, wiping her hands like she was flinging away an insignificant gnat. “Now, finish making your plans for your holiday with Bella. The Picasso museum is quite lovely.”

“Who’s to say that we’re doing much of anything in Spain?” I smirked. “I may just keep her in our five-star resort, making love to her for the entire time we’re there.”

“I don’t want to know that, Edward Anthony Masen Cullen,” Mom said, arching a brow. “I really don’t.” She scoffed, marching out of the cells. I just chuckled, heading back to Masen Manor to finish my holiday with Bella. I had every intention to spoil her rotten, with my time, my love and my body.

I couldn’t wait.
A/N: So, originally, I’d planned on having their holiday be in ONE chapter, but I decided to break it up. So, we’re going to have two more chapters for their holiday. Masen will be Paris and Bella will be Barcelona/Madrid along with their return to the United States.
Chapter 34

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Masen

Paris

We arrived in Paris a little after midnight the day following Alice’s exit from the palace. Bella was so excited as we took a private limo from the airport to the Four Seasons, George V. Her face was pressed to the window, trying to see as much of the city as she could. “Cherie, we’re going to see Paris. I promise. You don’t need to leave nose prints on the glass,” I teased, chuckling quietly.

“Hush,” she said, blindly smacking at me. “Prior to being in Gevalia, the only time I left the country was going to Mexico for spring break. I saw the inside of bars at night and boiled my body on the beach during the day. It was fun, but not very cultured. I tried to convince my roommates to do more interesting things besides getting sloshed and finding random dudes to fuck, but I was deemed a stick in the mud.”

“You are hardly that, love,” I said, tugging her into my lap and rolling down the window. “La Tour Eiffel …”

“Oh, wow,” she breathed, her hands gripping the door. “So beautiful. Can we go up it? I mean, with you being a royal … don’t we need security?”

“We do have security. Alec is driving the car and will act as the head of security while we’re on our trip,” I explained. “We can’t be like regular tourists because of my status as a royal, but we will do as much as we can. Tomorrow … or rather, later today … I plan on spoiling you. Ever been to Chanel?”

“Masen,” she growled, turning to look at me, her brown eyes narrowed. “I don’t want to be spoiled. This trip is enough.”

“Well, since we have a black-tie event at the Louvre tomorrow evening. You need something to wear,” I smiled. “What else can I have you wear? The best …”

“You little sneak,” she huffed, giving me an adorable little scowl. “There’s a black-tie event at the Louvre?”

“Some fundraiser for orphaned children, giving them arts education and outlets for their creativity. My parents were supposed to go, but they are sending me instead since we’re in town,” I chuckled, my lips ghosting over her neck.

“I don’t want to embarrass you, Masen,” she whispered, her eyes swirling with trepidation. “I’m … not royalty. I’m not you. I’m just me.” She shrugged, idly playing with the watch around my wrist.

“You’re not me. That would really fucking weird,” I teased, sliding my mouth up to her earlobe and flicking it with my tongue. She shuddered, melting against me as my arms slid around her tiny
body. I turned her head to face me and I stared at her, smiling tenderly. “Bella, you could never embarrass me. I’m proud to be on your arm. I’ve never loved anyone as much as I love you.”

She blinked, looking at me and her eyes were swimming with tears. There was disbelief and shock in her expression. She’d been loved by her father but her sister had torn her down so much that she didn’t trust anything or anyone. She truly believed that she was a whore and incapable of being loved. With a watery smile, she slid her arms around my neck and cuddled against me for remaining few moments we were in the car. The Mercedes pulled up to the rear of the hotel, where the concierge was waiting for us.

Alec parked the car, opening the door and helping Bella and I out of the car. She managed to pull herself together, sliding her purse over her head and taking my hand. The concierge, a stuffy French man named Jacques, approached us. He prattled to me in French and I smiled softly, accepting his gushing excitement about hosting a royal in the George V. Alec produced an NDA which the concierge signed. With a curt nod, we were led up to the beautiful suite I’d booked for our three days in Paris.

“I’m going to take a shower,” Bella said. “I smell like plane.”

“It was a private jet, love,” I smirked.

“It’s still a plane, with recycled air,” she retorted, arching a brow. She glided toward our bags and tugged out her toiletry bag along with something sheer and lacy. “I’ll be out soon, baby.”

“Do you need me to wash your back?” I asked, giving her a devilish grin.

“I think I got that,” she snickered. “I am hungry, though. The snack on the plane wasn’t very filling.”

“That I can do,” I said, cupping her cheek. She stood on her tiptoes and brushed her lips against mine. “I love you, chérie.”

“I love you, too, Masen. More than I could possibly ever fathom,” she murmured. She ran her thumb over my lower lip before ducking into the bathroom.

I adjusted my hardness pressing against my jeans before I walked to the desk and ordered a charcuterie platter, along with some beaujolais and chilled Perrier. Within ten minutes, our food was delivered by Alec. “You’re the waiter, too?”

“Making sure that it’s not poisoned,” Alec replied, placing the platter on the small dining table near the French doors. I’d pulled the curtains back to show the Eiffel Tower, lit up and sparkling in the distance. “Great view. Lady Bella will love that, your Highness.”

“I hope so,” I said. “You okay with running point with the security precautions?”

“I’ve already spoken with the head of the security at the Louvre and with the prime minister being there, it’ll be insane. You and Lady Bella will be fine,” Alec nodded. “I’ll make arrangements for the rest of your expeditions tomorrow morning, after I’ve gotten some sleep. What time will we be leaving for the shopping trip?”

“After one in the afternoon,” I replied. “Thanks, Alec. You’re the best.” He gave a brief bow before leaving the room. I double locked the door, stripping out of my sweater and toeing off my dress shoes. As I was sending a text to my mother and Emmett, saying we were in Paris, Bella walked out of the bathroom. Her hair was wet, falling over her shoulders in mahogany ringlets. Her pale skin was pink from the heat of her shower and her lithe body was barely covered by her sheer
negligée. I could see the outline of her delicious body, tempting me with every inch of her curves. “I have some food, cherie.”

She gave me a shy smile, walking to me and sitting down on my lap. “This is perfect, Masen. I didn’t want a full meal, but I needed something more than the muffin and banana I had on the two-hour flight.” She tore off some bread and spread some cheese onto it, layering it with some roasted peppers and salami.

“Wine?” I asked.

She nodded, taking the proffered wine glass. “Delicious, Masen.”

“Agreed,” I chuckled, pouring a glass for myself and making my own snack. “Feel better after your shower?”

“Totally. It’s the most amazing thing. Ever,” she giggled, sipping her wine. “I think … tomorrow … I may need some help washing my back?”

“Oh, I fully intend on scouring every bloody inch of you, cherie,” I purred, my fingers gliding along her spine. She shivered, staring into my eyes. “You’re looking at me like you want to devour me.”

“What could be more perfect than making love in the city of love?” she cooed, moving so she was straddling my body. Her eyes twinkled as she rolled her hips over my hardness. I moved my hands up her thighs, kneading her bare ass. “Surprise, your Majesty.”

“Oh, Isabella,” I chided. “You are a naughty girl.”

“Not always,” she chuckled, her face flushing the most delicious pink. I moved the tray back and lifted Bella onto the table. She squeaked when her bare ass touched the wood. “Masen … what are you doing?”

“You had your snack. I want mine,” I breathed, spreading her legs and staring at her glistening, bare pussy. I pulled her to the edge of the table, pressing an open-mouthed kiss to her inner thighs. She whimpered, falling back on her elbows. I inched her nightie up, revealing more of her gorgeous body. I slid my fingers along her legs, moving closer to her swollen core. I inhaled deeply, nearly coming in my jeans from the scent of her arousal. Leaning forward, I swiped my tongue along her slit.

“Fuck me,” she squeaked.

“Oh, I intend to, cherie,” I purred. “After I devour your succulent pussy, love.” I dove in, sliding my tongue inside of her body. She rocked against my face, grinding her body over my mouth. Her sweetness coated my lips, soaking my face. She was so turned on, rolling seductively on the tiny dining room table that was in our suite. The food I’d ordered fell to the ground as she wriggled under my grasp. The tiny straps of her nightie fell off her shoulders, revealing the swells of her breasts. She never looked more beautiful, or more tempting.

“Masen,” she breathed, reaching down to tangle her fingers into my hair. “Don’t stop, baby. Feels so fucking good.”

I smiled against her body, moving my lips from her core to her clit. I sucked it between my lips as I slid two fingers into her soaked pussy. Her gasps turned into desperate moans as her hips bucked with each curl of my fingers and swipe of my tongue. Her bare breasts were now peaking over the bodice of her nightie, tempting with her dusty rose nipples. Her mouth was open, pleading and
yearning for more. I wanted to savor every ounce of her body, the beauty of her arousal and the need within her eyes. I hummed deeply, nibbling lightly on her clit. She cursed, shuddering as her wetness flowed freely down my palm. “Fuck my fingers, Bella. I want to feel you as you come.”

“Shit,” she snapped, sitting up and looking down her body to where I was kneeling between her legs. Her nightie had fallen and was now around her waist, revealing her pert breasts, with nipples so hard from my ministrations. “Masen, I want to come. I need to come. It hurts, baby.”

“I’ll make the pain stop, Bella,” I said, pumping my hand as I kissed her pussy like I kissed her mouth. She rocked against me, cupping her breasts with her hands. Her fingers twisted her nipples. With each thrust of my arm, her whole body trembled. Her core was clenching around me. “Oh, fuck, Bella. I can feel you … let go, love. Come for me.”

“Mmmmmm,” she moaned, looking down at me. “Harder, Masen.” I complied, slamming my hand into her body and sucking on her clit. She rolled her body, coming undone. With a slight nibble to her clit, she shattered with a silent scream. Her body arched in ecstasy. I kept thrusting my fingers inside her as I watched her lose control. She collapsed on the table, her legs closing. I slid my hand from her warmth and I licked my fingers clean. “Masen, you’re too good at that.”

I didn’t respond verbally. I just looked at her as she leaned up on her elbows. I continued to lick her essence off my fingers. She sat up, grabbing my hand and wrapped her mouth around my middle finger. “Fuck, Bella.”

“Yes, you’re going to fuck Bella,” she purred. Easing off the table, she tugged on my neck and kissed me deeply. I bent down, picking her up by grabbing her thighs. She wrapped her legs around my waist and I carried her to the bed. After placing her in the center of the king-sized mattress, I unbuckled my belt and shimmied out of my jeans and boxer briefs. Bella removed her nightie, tossing it haphazardly onto the floor. I crawled up her body. She kissed me as her fingers wrapped around my hardness. I hissed as she stroked my length. “Inside me, Masen. Please?”

I grasped my cock and lined up to her leaking core. With a swivel of my hips, we were one. “Oh, Bella … ma cherie.” I leaned down kissing her as I thrust into her. The sound of our bodies coming together filled the room. Our whispers of love and whimpered pleas of more added more to our lovemaking. Bella’s hands were on my shoulders. Her legs, gripped behind my back and trying desperately to get closer to me. Her muscles tightened around my hardness. “I love you, Bella. You feel so fucking amazing.”

“Masen …” she whimpered. She pushed on my shoulder and I rolled us so she was perched on my lap. She rolled her body, kissing me with an all-encompassing need. She took me deeper inside, filling her completely. My hands gently groped her breasts before sliding down my palms down her slick skin to her ass. There was no space between us. “I love you so much, baby. Never before … I can’t … I don’t want to lose you.”

“Never, chérie,” I purred, sitting up and kissing her. Our lips melded together as she tugged on my hair. My arms wrapped around her tiny body and she sobbed with need. “Oh, Bella. I can feel you, so wet on me. Come with me.”

“Yes,” she nodded, rocking over my cock. We moved together, one body, one love and one soul. With another searing kiss from her, Bella clung to me as she rode the waves of her orgasm. Her release triggered mine and I spilled deep inside her. We stayed wrapped in a tangle of arms, legs and heavy breathing. I brushed her drying curls from her face and languidly kissed her. She smiled against my lips. “You treat me like I’m the only woman in the world.”

“You are … in my world … you are,” I answered reverently. “My Bella … my everything.” My
present and my future, forever. She wrapped her arms around me and we lay down in the bed, still tangled and we drifted off to sleep. My dreams were immediate and they featured Bella, wearing a crown, a gorgeous white dress and my ring on her finger. My Queen.

xx AMDFT xx

After a lazy morning in bed, making love and eating breakfast, we got dressed. Alec got the car and we drove to Chanel to pick out a cocktail dress for Bella, along with shoes, accessories and jewelry. She gawked as I signed the credit slip. She also spluttered when she saw that the boutique was closed for her shopping excursion.

“Okay, don’t get me wrong. I’m very grateful for all you’re doing for me. But, I kind of feel like Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman, minus the whole hooker thing,” Bella giggled, looking at the bag that had her dress inside.

“Did you just quote She’s All That?” I teased.

“The fact that you know that movie is quite shocking,” Bella laughed. “You watched that movie?”

“It was a dark time in my life,” I snickered. “And I watched it in college with Jake. We made it a drinking game. I don’t remember what the game was, but we got obliterated, completely smashed.”

“Nice,” Bella sang, rolling her eyes. “Now, what is this event at the Louvre for?”

“Arts education for orphans,” I answered. “And raising funds for a new exhibit at the museum. There will be several dignitaries there, along with the French Prime Minister and some movie stars.”

“Holy crap,” Bella squeaked. “I …”

“Will be fine,” I said, squeezing her hands. “You are smart and beautiful, worthy of everything. Now, I’ve made arrangements at the spa to help you get ready for the event. While you’re doing that, I’m going to arrange the rest of our time here in Paris. Anything you want to do besides going to the top of the La Tour Eiffel?”

“Nôtre Dame, L’Arc de Triomphe and the palace at Versailles,” Bella breathed, biting her lip. “I know that all of that is probably not possible. We’re only here for two more days.”

“I think I can work with that,” I nodded. We pulled up to the hotel, parked in the rear of the property. The manager from the spa was waiting inside. “I love you, chérie. Enjoy being pampered.”

“I love you more, Masen,” she grinned. With a sweet kiss, she went inside of the hotel and into the spa. Alec escorted me up to the suite and left me to make arrangements for the rest of our time in Paris. Anything you want to do besides going to the top of the La Tour Eiffel?”

After I’d finalized those plans, I had a Skype session with Felix and my mother regarding my remaining time in the United States. I had a number of diplomatic dinners and meetings in New York, Washington D.C. and Chicago. On top of that, the news that Bella was a New York City native had exploded on the web. Charlie was staying with Linda because the bakery was inundated with paparazzi. There were stories online and in print about my girl. Nearly all of them were positive, but there were a handful that didn’t paint Bella in the most positive light.
When I’d hung up with Felix and my mother, I called Jacob and we made arrangements for more security for Charlie, Linda, her son Michael and obviously, Bella. For me, and Bella, Jacob would be our primary security safeguard. He also discussed getting another FBI guy on loan to diplomatic security. His long-time partner and friend, Jared, would also help out with our protection. For Charlie, Linda, Michael and sometimes Angela, we decided to go with a private security firm. Seth suggested a group of retired cops and military. With a swipe of my personal credit card, Bella’s family was protected for the foreseeable future.

I got showered and dressed after that, putting on a Dior Homme tuxedo. I slipped on my Christmas present from Bella – a unique wooden watch, sleek and polished black – before splashing on some cologne. I heard the door open. I blinked up, watching as Alec escorted Bella and one of the attendants into our suite. I arched a brow. The bedroom door was clicked shut. “What’s going on?”

“Bella needed to get dressed up here,” Alec explained. “I had the manager come up to help her, after she’d signed an NDA with the certainty that we’d make her life a living hell if she blabbed.” He smiled softly, looking at the closed door. “She and Yvette bonded over their mutual love of Gevalian chocolate and bitchy sisters.” I hardened my look. “Prince Edward, the employees here are held to a high level of discretion. They would be destroyed by hotel, blacklisted. Not to mention our NDA … I know that you’re filled with trepidation about that relationship, but Yvette was vetted and her story checked out.”

A petite blonde exited the room where my girl was getting ready. She prattled about Bella was just putting on finishing touches, along having a conversation with her father. I thanked her and nodded to Alec. He escorted her out, slipping her some money as a tip. As Yvette left, Alec followed her and said he was going to pull the car around. I heard the clicks of heels. Turning around, I saw Bella standing just outside of our bedroom. She wore the most beautiful rose gold colored Chanel couture dress. She had on a pair of Christian Louboutin’s along with a coordinating clutch. Her jewelry was elegant. She wore a pair of drop moonstone and diamond earrings and a matching ring. She tucked a curl behind her ear, biting her lip as she blinked up at me. “They buffed and polished me within an inch of my life. I’m having heart palpitations at how much money I’m wearing,” she chuckled anxiously. “This is more than two years of my college education.”

“You are a vision … perfection,” I whispered, walking over to her and lifting her hand to my lips. I kissed her knuckles and ran my thumb over the ring she wore. I was surprised that she accepted it. Then again, she only believed that these jewels were on ‘loan.’ Little did she know that the jewelry wore was already bought and paid for, by me, with my own credit card. “I’m going to have the most beautiful woman on my arm.”

A bright pink blush spread over her cheeks as she shifted on her feet. “Masen …”

“It’s the truth, cherie,” I said, sliding my arm around her waist. “We’re going to have fun tonight. I love you and I’m so lucky to have you with me, Bella.”

“Kiss me, Masen,” she breathed.

“I don’t want to ruin your makeup,” I quipped.

“Fuck my makeup. I want to feel your lips against mine,” she answered.

I eagerly complied, tasting the sweetness of her lip gloss. We nipped at each other’s mouths, allowing us to get lost in a moment until my cell phone vibrated in my pocket. I pulled back, leaning my forehead against hers. “We need to go, love.”

“Kay,” she nodded. I picked up the wrap we’d gotten to match her dress, putting it over her
shoulders. I slipped on an overcoat, helping Bella into the elevator. We got into the Mercedes limo and drove to the Louvre. There was a red carpet, along with photographers and members of the foreign press. I was not going to make any comments but Bella and I would walk the red carpet.

Arriving on the red carpet, Bella and I smiled, holding hands and posing for the hundreds of cameras. I could feel Bella tremble against me. I wasn’t sure if it was because of the chilly temperatures or Bella’s nerves. Ten minutes later, we were inside and were mingling with the likes of Degas, Monet, and Van Gogh. We spoke with foreign dignitaries, international celebrities and fellow royals.

Yeah, Bella damn near had a heart attack when she met Prince William and his wife, Kate.

From England.

The heir to the throne, after Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles.

I was standing at the bar, getting some drinks for Bella and me. “You know, a prince mingling with a commoner? Not a smart idea,” said a heavily accented voice. “Isn’t she a bit plain, too?”

Turning, I saw Irina, Lady Kathryn’s aunt and disgraced former lady. She was Eleazar’s sister and her family shunned her when she got pregnant out of wedlock, then terminating the pregnancy. “What are you doing here, Irina?”

“My husband,” she quipped, wriggling her fingers and showing me a garish, gaudy wedding set. “He’s a French filmmaker and a huge devotee of this fundraiser.” She took the glass of wine I’d ordered for Bella. “I’ve been in contact with my dear niece, Edward.”

“You’ll address me properly, Irina,” I growled, plastering on a menacing smile. “It’s ‘your Highness’.”

“My apologies, your highness,” she said with false sincerity. “But you should know that your precious Bella is not all she’s cracked up to be. My niece is looking into that and you will be so embarrassed that you’ll have to abdicate your throne. Keep your eyes peeled. We won’t be stopped.” She gave me a blithe smile, taking the glass and sashaying away. “Enjoy the benefit, Prince Edward.” She draped herself onto an older man, who pulled her further into the crowd.

I slipped out my cell phone, sending a text to my mother and Felix regarding Irina and her complicity in aiding Kathryn’s escape from Gevalia. I barely contained my anger when my beautiful girl glided back to me, her face glowing and a soft smile spread over her gorgeous face.

I prayed that I managed to stop this before it became too much. I did not want this to become a wedge between me and ma cherie.

A/N: Pictures of Paris, the black-tie event and such are on my blog. You can find a link on my profile. Up next will be the remainder of Paris, along with their time in Barcelona/Madrid and subsequent return to the states. Bella’s up next, with her thoughts. Is she going to notice something’s up with Masen? Leave me some!

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 35

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Up next will be the remainder of Paris, along with their time in Barcelona/Madrid and subsequent return to the states. Bella’s up next, with her thoughts. Is she going to notice something’s up with Masen?

Chapter Thirty-Five

Bella

Paris

We spent a few hours at the Louvre. We’d taken pictures with the celebrities and dignitaries. Additionally, we enjoyed a delicious meal and exquisite wine. Masen showed me the museum, but he seemed distracted. He also seemed to keep me away from an ugly blonde with a serious case of helmet hair and an overly made-up face. Whenever she tried to come over to talk to us, Masen would either find another group to talk to or described a painting or sculpture, describing the artwork with dulcet but stressed tones.

After a special night time excursion to the Eiffel Tower, exploring the top of it, kissing like a pair of horny teenagers and driving back to the hotel. When we got back to there, Masen made the sweetest love to me, cherishing every inch of my body. I never felt more loved. He held me like I was going to disappear after we finished making love. His green eyes just stared at me and his hands caressed my skin lovingly and reverently.

The next morning, we packed up our bags and checked out of the hotel. Alec drove us, first, to Notre Dame. We were given a private tour by the head of the cathedral. Masen thoughtfully translated for me. I took pictures with my cell phone, in awe of the beauty and serenity of this place. “These windows are gorgeous. I’ve never seen such intricate work in stained glass,” I whispered.

“The pale in comparison to you,” Masen replied, kissing my temple. I slid my arms around his waist and we wandered around the cathedral.

We left after an hour and went to a private tour of the Palace of Versailles. I wasn’t as impressed with the palace. Now, don’t get me wrong, it was beautiful but décor was over-the-top. Also, the tour guide was a pretentious bitch, fawning over Masen. Alec had to intervene at one point since she was being a little overly touchy-feely. Suffice it say, our tour ended shortly after that.

We got back into the Mercedes, driving to the airport. Masen held me in his arms, his lips caressing my cheek. “Not that I’m complaining, but you’re being awfully snuggly, Masen.”

“I just love you,” he murmured, squeezing my hip. “Did you enjoy Paris?”

“It was beautiful. I would love to come back, but not for three days. I’d love to spend more time here,” I breathed, sliding my arms around his neck. “Thank you for this.” I brushed his hair back and running a thumb over a wrinkle between his brows. “What’s wrong, Masen? You’re quiet and I don’t like this.”
“I’m just … I’m worried, cherie,” he whispered. “I just want you happy, Bella. I want us to have a future … a forever.”

“F-F-F-Forever?” I squeaked. He blushed and nodded, kissing me sweetly. “Masen …” I wanted that so much. I could see a future with him. I was terrified that he’d realize that I wasn’t worth it. I loved him more than words could describe. I stared at him and his eyes were swirling with love and adoration. “I love you, too. Those words feel small compared to what I feel, but …”

“I totally understand, Bella,” he smiled and brushing his fingers over my cheek. “Now, Barcelona … what do you want to do?”

“You,” I purred, curling closer to him. “Masen, I’ve seen your itinerary when you return to the states. You’re going to be so busy. I want this moment to last.”

“I think that’s doable,” he said in return, kissing me and sliding his tongue between my lips. We were lost in each other until we arrived at the airport. We went through customs, having our passports examined before getting onto the private plane. Settling into our seats and within fifteen minutes, the plane was in the air.

xx AMDFT xx

**Barcelona**

We checked into the Mandarin Oriental Barcelona after an hour and half flight. We arrived just before sunset, but you couldn’t tell since it was pretty dreary. Again, Masen had arranged for the most exquisite suites. I was exhausted and I crawled to the ginormous bed, curling around a feather pillow. “Come take a nap with me, Masen,” I smiled.

“Nap or nap?” he quipped, waggling his brows.

“Sleep, baby,” I giggled. “I’m tired. Some insatiable prince kept me up most of the night before we got up early to do some touristy things, at my behest. Besides, I still smell like plane. Private plane or not, it’s still gross.”

“We could use that huge bathtub to get that nonexistent plane smell off,” he smirked. “The view from the bathroom is gorgeous. We can make love, overlooking the city center.”

“Channeling our inner-exhibitionists?” I teased.

“Funny, Bella,” he laughed, getting up and sauntering into the bathroom. I giggled and removed all my clothes. I leaned casually against the door jamb of the bathroom, naked as the day I was born. He was bent over the bathtub, pouring in bath salts and bubbles. His shirt was off. His back muscles rippled as he readied our bath. I cleared my throat. Masen turned around, his eyes popping out when he saw my nudity. “Now, that’s far more beautiful.” He stood up, grabbing my hand. He pulled me into his arms and cupped my ass. I kissed him, unbuttoning his jeans and pushing his pants and boxer briefs over his hips. He stepped out of his jeans. “Come on, love. Hop in.”

“If I hop, I’ll break something,” I snickered, stepping into warm, fragrant water. Masen followed and sat down, pulling me between his legs. My back was pressed to his chest. His lips found my neck and his hands slid up my body, cupping my breasts. “Eager, are we?”

“If I hop, I’ll break something,” I snickered, stepping into warm, fragrant water. Masen followed and sat down, pulling me between his legs. My back was pressed to his chest. His lips found my neck and his hands slid up my body, cupping my breasts. “Eager, are we?”

“For you? Always,” he said, twisting my nipples. I moaned, my head falling back against his shoulder. His mouth traveled up my neck and suckled my earlobe. I reached behind me, feeling his growing arousal. I stroked his impressive length. “Hmmm, cherie, that feels so good. But, I’d rather feel your pussy.”
“Dirty talker,” I said, turning around and straddling his legs. I ran my fingers through his hair, inching closer to him. His hands gripped my ass as he stared at me. “What? You’re looking at me like I’m going to fly away.”

“I just want to see you as I slide inside you,” he breathed, grasping his cock and pushing into me. His eyes were dark with desire and he held me so tightly. I whimpered as I stretched around him. My fingers dug into his shoulders. “So beautiful as we share one body.”

“Will we ever get tired of this?” I asked, kissing him deeply. He held me tightly, thrusting into me.

“I certainly hope not, cherie,” he breathed. His hands slid over my body, cupping my breasts. I moaned, rolling over his hardness. “Making love to you is the best thing in this universe.” I kissed him, tasting his mouth and moving ever closer to him. Our hands roamed over each other’s bodies as the water sloshed around our legs. Masen picked me up, putting me on the edge. “Look at the mirror, Bella. Watch as I make love to you.”

“Oh, God,” I whimpered as I looked over his shoulder, watching as he slid back inside me. His back was a pattern of strong muscles and as he thrust into me, his ass flexed beautifully. His lips traveled down my neck, pounding into me. He looped one of my legs over his arms, spreading me further. I was never one to watch while making love. I was very self-conscious about my body. Watching Masen as he filled me was beyond erotic. “Masen … I’m …”

“Me, too, cherie,” he growled, cupping my ass off the edge of the bathtub. I was pressed against the wall; every inch of my body being moved by the force of his thrusts. I ground against him, feeling every inch of his body move with mine. “Bella, I’m going to come, love.” With a snarl, he bucked into me and filled me completely with his release. His orgasm triggered mine and I arched against him. As my muscles clenched around him, he kept slowly thrusting into me until he eventually slipped out of me. Gently, he pulled me back into the water and held me tightly. We stayed in the bath until the gray day turned to a turquoise twilight.

“We’re pruning, your majesty,” I quipped, threading my fingers into his.

“I know,” he chuckled. “We also need to actually shower. The bath felt good, but I think I need a repeat of our sexy-times in the shower.” He grimaced as he shifted in the bathtub. “Or not. Maybe, we can just shower. I’m old …”

“Whatsoever, Masen,” I giggled, kissing his jaw. “But I’ll start the shower if you could possibly order us dinner. Making love to you made me hungry.”

He brushed his lips over mine. “Done, cherie. This hotel has delicious tapas. I’ll order a variety for us. I think tonight, we’ll stay in and feast on each other, along with other things.”

xx AMDFT xx

We spent the entire night and the following day naked and playing with each other. Masen made love to me so many times that I was absolutely boneless. He growled against my core when he plunged his tongue into my core. Nearly a day of making love, he tasted both of us. It was highly erotic and, to be honest, I felt fully claimed by him.

The second day, we explored Barcelona, namely the churches. Masen and I were in disguise since our pictures had been splashed all over the news websites thanks to the benefit at the Louvre. My hair was tucked into a beanie with a pair of glasses and a huge anorak. Masen wore a baseball cap, looking so much younger and unlike the royalty that he was. Our disguises proved to be beneficial since it was rainy and dreary as we meandered through Barcelona.
That evening, Masen had somehow arranged a private viewing of the Picasso Museum, along with a private catered meal. With another beautiful cocktail dress that we’d purchased in Chanel, we rode in a sleek limo to the museum. Masen was wearing a black suit, without a tie. He was fiddling with his cell phone, texting with someone. “Who are you talking to?” I asked.

“That’s Jacob. He’s doing some work for me,” Masen answered, sliding his phone into the pocket of his suit. “Do you remember when my brother kind of lost it in New York?” I nodded. “The girl he’d been dating had been brutally attacked and Jacob is using his law enforcement contacts to do some recon on her attackers, along with locating where she’s currently living. She fell off the grid after she was discharged from the hospital.”

“Did Jacob find her?” I whispered.

“He did but trying to actually talk to her has proven difficult,” Masen explained. “The attack has made her wary of strangers. She’s irrevocably broken, I’ve been told. On top of that, she’s pregnant.”

I gasped, my jaw dropping. “Is it Emmett’s?” I asked. His troubled look indicated that he didn’t know. “Oh, my God. No wonder she’s broken. Poor thing. I can’t even … to have your choice taken away?”

“Emmett is just lost with this news,” Masen sighed, pulling me closer. “It’s why he turned to drugs, alcohol and nameless, faceless women. He said he loved her. He was there that night when she was attacked; he found her. But, when he went to visit her after the attack, she was gone from the hospital. No word, no information.”

“Poor Emmett,” I frowned. “What’s this girl’s name?”

“Rosalie. Rosalie Hale,” Masen answered, pulling me closer and kissing my temple. “She was a graduate student.”

“You’re going to find her. Talk to her,” I said.

“I am. Emmett is still not allowed back in the states,” Masen sighed, tightening his arms around me. “When we get back, I’ve got a plan to drive up to Rochester and meet up with Rosalie and her family. Now, I want to focus on the beautiful woman I’ve got in my arms.”

“One more thing before we …” I shrugged, kissing his neck. “I want to go with you when you go to see this Rosalie. I think … I think I could help.”

“Just when I can’t love you more,” he breathed, cupping my face. “You do something that makes me fall all over again, cherie.” He brushed his lips over mine and pressed his forehead to mine. He murmured, “Je t’aime plus que ma propre vie.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“I love you more than my own life,” he answered, his green eyes shimmering with love and desire. He kissed me sweetly, sliding his hand into my hair. We made out until we arrived at the Picasso Museum. I was a turned-on mess as we got out of the car. The curator was waiting for us with a wry grin. Masen, in perfect Spanish, spoke to her and thanked her for everything she’d done. We were led inside of the museum where there was a beautiful table set up with an array of finger foods and a bottle of Albariño. Masen helped me into a seat, draping my black fringed wrap over my shoulders. I smiled at him. “It’s a bit chilly in here.”

“Thank you,” I blushed. “This is amazing, Masen. We’re eating dinner in the Picasso Museum.”
“I know a guy,” Masen quipped, pouring a glass of wine for me, handing it to me. He poured another glass, sitting down across from me. “Hmmm, this is good. Much like a Viognier, but with a subtle tone of peach.”

“Your wine palate is more sophisticated than mine,” I chuckled, sipping my wine. “I can make a killer scone, but to be able to distinguish an Albariño from a chardonnay? Not so much. And whatever is for dinner, it’s mouthwatering!”

“Grilled scallops and chorizo with green pea puree. We also have paella, empanadas and crostini,” Masen said. “I would have preferred making this all for you, but I spoke to a chef buddy of mine to do this for us.”

“Who?” I asked, arching a brow.

“Albert Adrià,” Masen replied. “He’s in town with his brother, Ferran, for some celebrity benefit event. We were invited, but I bowed out since it was scheduled after our departure.”

“How do you know him?” I questioned as Masen put some tapas onto our plates and handing me one.

“We’ve used him for several events in Gevalia,” Masen answered. “Please, eat.”

We tucked into our tapas, talking about Masen’s remaining time in New York City. The next two months were jam packed with meetings, public appearances and diplomatic events. For each of them, Masen asked me to be his date. He knew that I couldn’t attend all of them, but he was so proud to have me as his girlfriend. Even after the debacle with Alice, the world saw me as an underdog and the next ‘Meghan Markle’. Though, I was, obviously, not as famous as her. According to the newspaper articles, I was elegant, down-to-earth and truly an American Princess, complete with her own Prince Charming.

I didn’t believe a word that was printed. Okay, maybe the ‘down-to-earth’ statement. But I was not elegant. You can put me into couture gowns with expensive jewelry and high heels, sure. Am I elegant? That would be a no.

I’m still just a baker from Brooklyn, with aspirations to make my father comfortable and to be happy. I would love to be a teacher, to use my degree. I also wanted to pay back Masen, who’d helped us renovate our bakery and paid off my student loans. He did that on the sly. I went to send a payment and had the check returned, saying my loan had been paid off. Masen said it was a gift. He’d told me after we’d made love and you’d think that being naked and wrapped up in the arms of the prince would soften the blow. Not so much.

I was determined to pay him back.

Even if he wouldn’t accept it, which he said he wouldn’t, I’d find a way to pay back that money … for both the renovations and for my student loans.

We finished our meal, capped off with some delicious flan. Masen took my hand and we wandered around the museum as our meal was wrapped up. Our fingers were woven together as we looked at the avant-garde paintings and sculptures of Pablo Picasso. I loved his use of color but preferred my artwork to be more realistic. I’d enjoyed our excursion to the various churches and looking at their exquisite stained glass slightly more than this private viewing in the museum.

No matter what, I just enjoyed spending time with Masen. He’d doted on me, loved me and his love was unconditional. When we returned to New York, his schedule was going to be insanely
busy and this time between the two of us would be practically nonexistent. I’d have to check on the renovations at the bakery while he did his diplomatic work during the day and at night, we’d go whatever functions he’d been slated to attend.

With a hefty donation to the museum, Masen and I left. Alec drove us back to our hotel with a kind reminder that we had an early flight tomorrow morning. By seven, we’d be airborne, flying back to the states. In our suite, Masen and I made love. His body moved sinuously within me and his lips rarely left mine. As we fell asleep, our bodies were tangled in a heap of naked limbs and soft touches.

We were lost in our own world. A world filled with love, completion and happiness. I never wanted to leave.

Reality, on the other hand, had other ideas.

A/N: So, we’re done with their time overseas. Bella and Masen will be returning to the states. First up will be a trip to Rochester. Masen wants to find out about Rosalie and hopefully, do some ‘damage’ control. Not in the way you’re thinking … he wants to see if Rosalie still has feelings for Emmett. Also, there will be drama.

Pictures of their time in Barcelona are on my blog. You can also find me on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me some!
Chapter 36

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

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Chapter Thirty-Six

Masen

Bella was curled up on my lap, sleeping deeply as we flew over the Atlantic, hurdling to Teterboro. We’d left very early the following morning, only to be delayed due to a nasty storm. I’d also been a horny bastard the preceding night, keeping her up just to make love to her and feel as close as possible.

As we flew back away from Spain, I just relished in her soft hair, pliant body and completely relaxed form. I know Bella was excited to be going home. There was, however, a lingering fear in her eyes. And it niggled in my brain, too. She was terrified of the paparazzi. She’d handled them like a champ at the New Year’s Eve Gala and again at the Louvre. They were contained in those instances, with specific rules that had to follow. The paps were different out in the wild. They could be ruthless, cunning and even deadly.

Need I remind you of Princess Diana? I still had anxiety when we approached that stretch of road where Diana had been run off the road all those years ago.

“Your Highness, we’re approaching our destination. We’re about fifteen minutes away from Teterboro,” said the flight attendant. “Lady Bella needs to be back in her own seat.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, kissing Bella’s temple. The attendant left, settling down in her own seat near the cockpit. I brushed Bella’s hair away and stared at her sleeping face. She was so relaxed, so beautiful. “Cherie, wake up.” I brushed my lips over her forehead.

“Hmmm,” Bella retorted grumpily as she snuggled closer. “No … Sleep.”

I laughed, shifting her so she was back in her own seat. She blinked up at me, her eyes bleary and her face flushed. I stared at her as she rubbed her eyes and shifted to get comfortable. “We can sleep once we get back to the penthouse. Jake is waiting for us.”

“I would like to see my dad,” she pouted.

“Bella, it’s almost midnight. He’s probably asleep. We can go see him tomorrow,” I said, buckling her into her seat.

“I’m not a baby, Masen,” she grumbled, giving me a wry grin. “I could have buckled my own seatbelt.”

“It gives me an opportunity to touch you, Bella,” I snickered. “Are you okay?”
“Other than tired and wanting to curl up next to you in bed? I’m fine,” she answered, with a shrug of her shoulders. “I’m glad we’re home, but completely jetlagged. I want to sleep for days.”

“Well, you can lavish in my penthouse. I’ve got a meeting tomorrow morning,” I said, threading our fingers together. Her nose wrinkled as she looked at me. “A royal’s work is never done. You can relax and then go visit your dad tomorrow after you get caught up on sleep.”

“A meeting?” she asked.

“It was actually scheduled for about six hours ago. I have to meet with my staff at the consulate,” I smirked. “Get finalized details for my remaining time in the states.” Bella’s brow furrowed and she moved in her seat. “What is it?”

“I know that Gevalia is your home,” she muttered. “I just hate that there’s a finite amount of time we have together.”

“Bella, in February, I’m not leaving you. If I had my way, I’d have you come with me. This is not casual, chérie. I mean it when I say that you’re it for me. I can’t imagine not having you by my side,” I said. My thumb stroked over her engagement finger and I prayed she got my meaning. I knew that in my carryon, the ring I’d had redesigned was nestled next to my passport and wallet. I wanted that ring on her finger before we flew back to Gevalia for the Independence Day celebrations in late February. I wanted the world to know that I was no longer one of the world’s most eligible bachelors but tied to the most beautiful and selfless woman on the planet.

She stared at me, her eyes still a little unfocused and a wrinkle between her brows. “What about my dad? Linda? The bakery? I … I don’t want to just leave them, Masen. They’re my family. My dad is healthy now, save for a few stumbles and quakes in his hands. It’s only a matter of time before his condition worsens.”

“And he’ll receive the best care, chérie,” I vowed. “Regardless of our relationship, I’d never deny you access to your family. I love you. I love Charlie and I want nothing but happiness for the both of you.” She bit her lip as she threw her arms around my neck. The seat belts strained as she whispered her words of appreciation and love. She was finally getting it; that I’d do anything for her. We stayed connected, kissing and hugging until the wheels of the private jet hit the runway.

After making our way through customs and getting our passports stamped, we met up with Jacob. He smiled brightly, hugging Bella and giving me a firm handshake. “Making good choices, Agent Black?”

“Always, your princeliship,” Jacob quipped.

“How’s my dad?” Bella asked as we loaded up our luggage into the back of the black SUV.

“Still staying with Linda,” Jacob replied. “The paparazzi are stalking the bakery for any sort of glimpse of either one of you, despite the fact you’ve been on holiday. Seth and a few other security guys have been keeping an eye on the bakery and on Charlie. He’s fine. Really looking forward to seeing you, Bella.”

“Tomorrow?” Bella chirped.

“Since this royal jerk face is at the consulate with the Gevalian secret service ninjas, I’ll be taking you to seeing your dad, Bella,” Jacob snorted.

“Jerk face?” I scoffed. “And they are not ninjas. They’re highly trained and specialized military men and women. Get it right. They could kill you without even breaking a sweat, Black, or
wrinkling their clothing. They just have zero personalities and absolutely no sense of humor. Quite dull, if you ask me. It’s why I prefer you over them.”

“Whatever, Mase,” Jacob laughed as he opened the door, helping Bella into the SUV. I followed, threading my fingers with hers after we’d buckled in.

“At least you’re safe, Masen,” Bella said, clambering into the car. “I don’t know what I’d do if something happened to you.”

“I feel the same way about you, chérie,” I whispered, kissing her temple. She sighed and snuggled against my shoulder. Within moments, she was asleep. I blinked up, seeing Jacob staring at us in the mirror. “What?”

“You deserve this, Mase. You deserve her,” he said quietly. “Don’t fuck it up.”

“I don’t intend to, but there are other powers that …” I trailed off. “Keep her safe, Jake. Promise me.”

“With my life, Masen,” Jake vowed.

xx AMDFT xx

I worked for three days. Bella spent time with her dad at Linda’s in the afternoon, but the evenings were with me. When Jake was out with Bella, he was trying to get in touch with Rosalie Hale. Her cell phone had been disconnected. Jacob finally reached out to Rosalie’s parents, Lillian and Roger. They were hesitant to talk to Jake, but when he said he was FBI, they were more willing to share. Rosalie was ‘living’ with her parents. However, the word living was not an appropriate term to describe what the woman was doing. She was subsisting. She barely moved and was borderline catatonic, only leaving her room to go to the doctor’s appointment for the baby she was carrying.

The baby she was giving up for adoption.

We were driving to Rochester, with Jake at the helm and Bella by my side. Roger and Lillian said that we could talk to her, but there was not a chance she’d respond. Lillian also knew that I was Emmett’s brother, concerned for the girl that had been dating him prior to her attack.

“I’m nervous, Masen,” Bella whispered. “What if we cause her to get worse?”

“I’m hopeful that if she knows that Emmett still cares about her, she’ll react,” I answered, kissing her wrist.

“Or cause her to lose it completely,” Bella frowned.

“From what Mr. and Mrs. Hale said, the assholes who tore her apart are in jail and will be in there for the rest of their natural lives,” Jacob said, his voice cold. “Rosalie was not their first victim.”

“Assholes,” I growled.

“Monsters,” Bella spat, moving closer to me.

“Are we close, Jake?” I asked, my nose wrinkled. Jake gave a curt nod, pulling into a posh neighborhood. We drove through the tree-lined streets to a beautiful home overlooking the lake. Parking the SUV, we got out and were greeted by an attractive older couple. The woman had blonde hair and was petite. As we got closer, you could see how much she ached for her daughter.
The man was tall, taller than me and nearly as tall as Jake. His brown hair was peppered with gray and his face was pulled into a frown. “Mr. and Mrs. Hale?”

“Yes, and call me, Lillian. This is my husband, Roger,” she said. “Prince Edward?”

“Please, just call me Masen,” I smiled. I shook their hands. “I’m not here as a prince, but as someone who is concerned for his brother and, at one time, his girlfriend.”

“Rosalie hasn’t said anything since she gave her statement,” Lillian muttered. “I never knew that she had a boyfriend. She was dating your brother? Another prince?”

I nodded. “He’s my younger brother. He was here on a student visa,” I said, following them into their beautiful home. “He’d met her while he was at university.”

“She was such a driven student and focused on her dream of being a doctor,” Roger explained. “She avoided boys, only dated a few of them and she never told us.” He bit his lip and his brown eyes filled with tears. “Then, we get the most disturbing call from the New York Police Department. Our baby girl had been raped and was in the hospital. We drove all night to get to her. She gave her statement, her voice distant and broken. She barely remembered what happened because she had been drugged.” Roger clenched his fist, tears falling freely. He stood up abruptly. “Excuse me.” He stomped out of the house and onto the back deck.

“I apologize for him,” Lillian whispered. “Despite the outcome of what had happened to Rosalie, he’s angry at the world; at those animals who felt the need to take what didn’t belong to them.”

“I can’t even imagine,” Bella murmured. “I’m so sorry, Lillian. You don’t seem as upset as your husband.”

“Oh, I’m upset, but I have to strong for my baby girl,” Lillian sighed, pinching her nose. She blinked up to the second floor. “My child is pregnant and this should be a happy time. Our first grandbaby. But, instead, we’re putting the child up for adoption because she’s not sure which monster impregnated her.”

“Again, I’m sorry for what happened to Rosalie,” I whispered. “I know that she’s … struggling.”

“She’s barely living,” Lillian sniffled, dabbing her eyes. “She’s a shell of who she used to be.”

“If possible, I’d like to talk to her. My brother, Emmett, really cared for her and was heartbroken when she disappeared,” I frowned. “I can understand why …”

“Rosalie felt like she wasn’t worthy of anything. If it weren’t for the baby she was carrying, my daughter would have ended her life,” Lillian sneered. “If she was dating your brother, she probably felt like she wasn’t worthy. She said during her statement that she was used goods, not capable of any love.”

Bella growled lowly and her hands clenched into tight fists. I reached over to her hand, threading our fingers together. “I can’t even begin to fathom what she’s going through,” I muttered.

“And Masen, as much as you may want to speak to Rose, she is not comfortable around men,” Lillian said, her nose wrinkled. “She’s had panic attacks around men who aren’t her father. Even with Roger, the man who loves her more than his own life, she’s jumpy and won’t let him touch her. She’ll, at least, be in the same room with him.”

“Can I try?” Bella said, giving Lillian an understanding smile. “I’ve never been in her situation, but I’d like to try. Emmett more than just cared for her. I know for a fact that he loved her.” Bella bit
her lip, waiting patiently. “Please?”

After a few moments, Lillian nodded. “Come on. I’ll take you upstairs to meet her. Though, don’t hold your breath,” Lillian said, standing up and wiping her hands down her jeans. With a nod, Lillian led her to the stairs. Bella gave me a shaky grin, following her up the stairs to meet with Rosalie.

A/N: Cliff hanger … and a bit of drama. What will happen with Bella’s conversation with Rosalie? Pictures of the Hales’ home, Rosalie and her parents are on my blog. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me some!
Chapter Thirty-Seven

Masen

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Bella

“We’re trying to get Rosalie help,” Lillian said quietly as we stopped outside of a closed door. “She’s just shut down. Please, don’t push too hard.”

“Before I go in there, why didn’t Rosalie terminate the pregnancy?” I asked.

“By the time we found out, it was too late,” Lillian answered. “Despite Rose not eating much food, she was gaining weight, particularly in the middle. We brought her to the doctor and she had a panic attack when they wanted to go a pelvic exam. They gave her a mild sedative and we discovered she was just over five months pregnant.”

“Normally, they give the morning-after pill in the case of . . .” I trailed off.

“It’s not a 100% effective,” Lillian said, her arms crossed over her chest. “Obviously.”
“My apologies, Lillian,” I whispered. “I …”

“It’s not your fault, Bella,” Lillian breathed, relaxing and giving me a pained smile. “I just hate what those monsters did to my baby girl. She’s pregnant with her own baby girl that she won’t even acknowledge …” She opened the door to a darkened room. “Maybe, you’ll have more luck than we did.”

I nodded sadly, stepping into the room. The walls were decorated with a soft pink and her furniture was black and white. Remnants of her last bit of innocence. Curled up underneath the comforters was an unmoving lump. I made my way into the dark room, sitting down on the chair next to the bed. The covers shifted and I was greeted with a pair of empty blue eyes. “Hello,” I said, quietly and evenly. “My name is Bella.” She blinked slowly, her face impassive. “And no, I’m not any sort of counselor or therapist. I’m not here to shrink you.” Her brows quirked.

I leaned back, picking up one of the books stacked on her nightstand. It hadn’t been opened. “This book is really good. You should consider reading it. I really like the aspect of people living on the moon. Though, Levana was a raging bitch. You don’t know much about her in this book …”

Rosalie shifted, her lips pursed. Her hand moved to her stomach but she pulled it away like she’d burned her palm. Her eyes slammed shut and she rolled over, turning away from me.

“I’m here because we have a mutual acquaintance,” I said. “Someone who is very worried about you and loves you very much.” She shook her head. “I’m here with …”

“N-N-N-No,” she said, her voice raspy from disuse. “I’m n-n-n-not w-w-w-worthy. N-N-N-No l-l-love.”

“Rosalie, I’m friends with Emmett,” I murmured. She turned her head, her eyes wide, but still so empty. “I’m here with his brother.”

“He can’t see me. I don’t want him to see me,” she said, sitting up and curling into a ball. “I’m … ruined.”

I moved to sit on the bed. “What those animals did was beyond reproach,” I sneered, taking her hand. “I am so sorry …”

“I was aware of every moment,” she choked out. “I couldn’t stop them. My body was frozen in fear along with whatever drugs they put in my body.” She blinked to me, fear creeping into her gaze. “And this?” She gestured to her belly. “I wanted to have children. With someone I loved, after I’d gotten married … and now? The mere thought of a man touching me?” She let out a strangled whimper.

I reached over to her and took her hand. She was trembling. “Deep breaths, Rosalie,” I said quietly, rubbing her hands in mine. “The panic attack might not be healthy for …” I trailed off, looking at her stomach.

“Rose,” she whispered, clamping her eyes shut. “Call me, Rose. And despite how the baby was conceived, she’s healthy. I just can’t keep her. Not with how she was conceived. With an adoption, she’ll have parents who will love her unconditionally and not a constant reminder of the worst night of her existence.” Her hands were pulled from mine and they hovered over her belly but let them fall listlessly onto her bed. “And I can’t even think about Emmett. He won’t want me. I don’t want me.” She frowned deeply. “I also read about what he did after my attack …”

I grimaced. I was hoping that she hadn’t heard about Emmett’s choices that got him deported from
As soon as I gave my statement, I wanted to get out of the city. I needed to feel safe. I didn’t really think about …” Rose explained. “Even in my own room, I still feel those guys on my skin, inside my body.” She got up, waddling to the window and sat down on the frilly chair overlooking the lake. “When I leave here, I’m an anxious, jittery mess. I freak out when I’m in a room with my dad. My dad, who is the kindest man I’ve ever met, I’ve ever known, makes me nervous. I’m terrified that he … I know he won’t, but my mind just can’t wrap around it. I see a man and, in my brain, all men take. All men hurt.”

Her voice was sing-song and her gaze was fixed on a tree next to the deck. Her face was pale, covered in a sheen of sweat. Rose was locked in a vision, a flashback, or something. I moved, crouching in front of her. “Rose, breathe, sweetie.” She was gone, muttering under breath. She kept repeating the word no and pleading for it to stop. “You’re safe. They can’t hurt you anymore.” I took her hands. Rose flinched, but I felt her relax a bit. Twenty minutes later, she finally started to come out of whatever she was in. “You with me, Rose?”

“Um, I … tired,” she rasped. Standing up on shaky limbs, she took unsteady steps toward her bed. I wrapped my arm around her shoulders. I helped her toward the bed. “Stay?”

“Don’t you want your mom?” I asked.

“She hovers. I know why, Bella. I’m not exactly normal anymore,” Rose muttered. “Just stay until I …”

“Okay, Rose,” I smiled, taking her hand. She eventually drifted into a fitful sleep. I wrote down my cell phone number on a piece of paper, along with my email. I asked her to call me or email me when she wanted to talk again. As I was walking out of the bedroom, Rose cleared her throat. I turned, seeing her blinking at me sleepily. “I left my cell phone number and email address for you, Rose. I’m here for you, if you want to talk.”

“Bella, I don’t know if I can ever really see Emmett, but I do still care about him,” Rose whispered. “Can you please tell him that?”

“I will, Rose,” I nodded. She gave me a pained smile before her eyes drifted shut again. I made my way downstairs. Masen was talking with Lillian as they sipped coffee in the kitchen. Roger was still outside, smoking like a chimney. “She’s resting.”

“I heard her talk,” Lillian whispered, blinking at me with wide eyes. “You got my baby to talk.”

“I don’t know why,” I shrugged. “But, she’s … she’s struggling. And understandably so. I left my cell phone number and email address.”

“I also gave Lillian my contact information,” Masen said, his accent deep and honeyed. “I told her about Rosalie’s relationship with Emmett. Regardless, he’d want to know if she was okay. My brother loves your daughter.”

Lillian nodded, a watery smile ghosting over her features. “We’ll see what happens. Our next big step is the birth of Rosalie’s baby and her adoption. I don’t want to lose my grandbaby. I respect her wishes, but I …” She shook her head. “My apologies. This has hit all of us hard.”

“We’ll be thinking of you,” I said, hugging Lillian. She clung to me, letting out a sob. We stayed locked together until Masen cleared his throat. “We’ll be in touch. You can use my phone number, too.”
“I will. Thank you. Both of you,” Lillian murmured.

We said our goodbyes to Lillian and a very upset Roger before getting back into the SUV. Jacob was more somber than usual as we drove to a small bed and breakfast. We were considering driving back to New York City, but an incoming snowstorm put a damper on our departure. We hunkered down in the bed and breakfast, clinging to each other as we made love. My heart shattered for the broken woman who’d had her choice taken away. Masen was saddened that his brother may never have a chance of true happiness since Rose felt she didn’t deserve it.

We were snowbound in Rochester for two days before Jacob and Masen arranged for a private jet to fly us back to Teterboro. The roads were too slick and Jacob didn’t feel confident in his driving skills in the snow, especially the nearly two feet of the white fluffy stuff we’d received. Seth arrived on the private jet, driving the SUV back to New York while Masen, Jacob and I flew back.

The time in Rochester was both troubling and a brief reprieve from the craziness of Masen’s schedule. It also discouraged the paparazzi, who had left my father’s home in Brooklyn and from their spots across from the street from the penthouse.

Little did I know that it would be the calm before the storm.

A/N: A shorter chapter, really, but it didn’t need to be any longer. You found out about Rosalie. Will she be in Emmett’s future? And the baby … do you blame her? Leave me your thoughts.

Up next will be a slight time jump and we’re flipping to Masen’s point-of-view. We’re also going to have some more drama. Will Lady Kathryn or her aunt, Irina, cause undue havoc for the Gevalian royal family? Thank you for reading!
Chapter Thirty-Eight

Masen

Sitting in my office, I was trying, in vain, to get ahold of Emmett. I’d called him and told him about Rosalie upon our return from Rochester. He was upset, and understandably so. He was worried and he wanted to make it all better for his girl. His antics in the states caused an issue. He was not allowed on United States soil unless he was on a diplomatic visit.

Checking on his ex-girlfriend who had been sexually assaulted did not constitute a diplomatic visit.

In reality, it was the sexual assault that caused all of the drama with my brother in the first place. He was absolutely lost and wrecked over what had happened to Rosalie. He coped with it the only way he knew how … almost causing an international incident.

Almost …

Now? He won’t even answer my calls. I don’t even think he’s getting my messages.

With a sigh, I hung up and dialed my mother. She’d have the information. Hopefully. “The prodigal son calls,” Mom quipped when she picked up her phone.

“Hello, Mother,” I snorted. “How are you? How are the Independence Day festivities coming?”

“I’m fine and the festivities are coming along nicely. We’re making the final preparations for the parade and annual ball. It will be a wonderful celebration. I’ve also been reading your progress from your various meetings and things are going well, Masen. Your role as a diplomat has been stellar and I couldn’t be prouder,” she said. “I bet you’re anxious to come home, yes?”

“Not really. I forgot how much I loved the states and the slight anonymity that goes along with it,” I chuckled. “Look, I’ve been trying to contact Emmett … The rehabilitation facility said that he’s not taking any calls.”

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“‘I’m fine and the festivities are coming along nicely. We’re making the final preparations for the parade and annual ball. It will be a wonderful celebration. I’ve also been reading your progress from your various meetings and things are going well, Masen. Your role as a diplomat has been stellar and I couldn’t be prouder,’” she said. “I bet you’re anxious to come home, yes?”

“‘Not really. I forgot how much I loved the states and the slight anonymity that goes along with it,’ I chuckled. “Look, I’ve been trying to contact Emmett … The rehabilitation facility said that he’s not taking any calls.”

“‘He’s not taking calls because he’s enlisted in the military,’” Mom answered. “However, they should have told you, Masen.”

“I wasn’t exactly forthcoming in who I was, Mom,” I replied, my eyes wide with shock. “When did he enlist?”

“‘Shortly after you called him,’” she explained. “‘After you told him about Rosalie, he couldn’t stay in that rehab clinic. He also knew that he couldn’t come to the states because of his actions. With a few calls, Emmett is in basic training for the Royal Air Force.’”
“The air force?” I asked. “He’s going to fly planes?”

“No, not fly planes, but be an air traffic controller,” Mom answered. “With his drug issues and some visual acuity discrepancies, he can’t fly.”

“Discrepancies?”

“Your brother is color blind and has a mild case of astigmatism,” she said. “Lasik helped, but he still needs glasses for reading. So, it’s the best of both worlds. Emmett can get the regimented control he needs and a way to focus his attention on something other than Rosalie.”

“He still loves her, Mother,” I murmured. “And in some way, she loves him, too. In her own way.”

“She didn’t even contact him,” Mother scoffed.

“She was raped and drugged, Mother,” I growled. “Contacting her boyfriend was probably low on her priority list. And that’s awfully cold. You saw what happened to Emmett when … I don’t know what I’d do if that happened to Bella. I’d want to rip out the animal’s throat and stuff it up his ass.”

“Edward!” she scolded. “Language.”

“It’s the truth,” I sneered. “I appreciate the information about Emmett. If you could pass along the message that I’d like to speak to him, that would be great. However, I’m very pissed off at your behavior about Rosalie. She didn’t choose to be sexually assaulted.” Before I could tell my mother to fuck off, I hung up the phone and leaned forward. I thrust my hands into my hair, trying not to punch my desk or strangle my mother from across the Atlantic.

“Your Highness,” came the quiet voice of my assistant. “Your next appointment is here.”

I was too angry, too hyped up. “I need some time, Celeste,” I said, trying to keep my voice even. “Offer him some coffee and a snack. I had a troubling phone call with …” I trailed off. “Ten minutes, I believe.”

“Of course, Your Highness,” she said, bowing deeply and shutting the door with an efficient click.

I got up from my desk, walking to the window, overlooking the snow-covered courtyard. I leaned against the window and tried to calm down. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out my cell phone. I found Bella’s number, my thumb hovering over her name. I shook my head, sliding my phone back into my pocket. I didn’t want to trouble Bella since she was already nervous about her father’s doctor’s appointment. Charlie’s tremors had returned to his hands and he was having conversations with his long-dead wife. Bella was afraid that her father’s illness was progressing, with hallucinations leading to dementia. Hopefully, with an adjustment of his medications, Charlie will stay the course.

Bella was not ready to lose her father.

She lost her mother when Alice was born. Her sister is currently being held in a Gevalian prison, waiting for her arraignment hearing. It was so far down on the docket that it hadn’t even been scheduled yet. Her father was battling a debilitating disease and she couldn’t lose him. Not yet.

“Your Highness, are you ready?” asked Celeste.

_Not even remotely._ “Send them in,” I responded.
I sat in the backseat of the SUV as Seth drove me to Brooklyn, to the apartment above the bakery. Bella was adamant on staying with her dad tonight since his doctor’s appointment had worn him out. He’d gone through some pretty significant testing to check the progression of his disease.

“Um, Your Highness, there’s some press outside of the bakery,” Seth said, his voice turning to a growl.

“Is there a back way into the building?” I asked.

“Yeah, through the alley,” Seth replied.

“Drop me off around the corner and I’ll make my way inside. Call Jacob to get these vultures out of Bella and Charlie’s hair,” I snarled. “They have no respect.”

I pulled out a baseball hat and slipped out of my overcoat. I eased on an oversized winter coat to disguise my expensive suit. Seth pulled off to the side, a block north of the bakery. I stuffed my hands into my pockets, burying my head into the coat. I walked briskly to the alleyway behind the bakery. I used the key that Charlie had given me once the locks had been changed. I slipped inside, hearing Jacob and Seth growling at the reporters outside of the bakery. I walked up the back steps, letting myself into the apartment. Inhaling deeply, I smelled something delicious being made inside.

Bella was in the kitchen, making dinner and from what I could see, it was my recipe of beef bourguignon. “Cherie,” I breathed.

She turned and put her spoon down. “Masen,” she said, choking back a sob. She threw herself into my arms, clinging to me. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

I tugged off my hat and slid my arms around her tiny waist. I buried my head into her shoulder, kissing the fragrant spot behind her ear. She melted against me, her body relaxing. “What happened, cherie?” I asked.

“Nothing. Linda was awesome. She asked all the right questions, but to see my dad so confused was heartbreaking,” Bella said, guiding me to the couch. “Thankfully, it was a simple adjustment of his meds, but it could have been so much worse, Masen.”

“And now?” I whispered.

“He’s resting,” she replied. “Today took a lot out of him.”

“Where’s Linda?”

“She’s out to dinner with Mike and his boyfriend,” Bella shrugged. “Charlie was supposed to go with them, but his confusion, exhaustion and day spent at the neurologist’s office; he urged her to go and have a night off. I was planning on staying, regardless.”

“How will you know the medication is working?” I pressed, slipping off my coat and taking her hands. I ran my thumbs over her knuckles, feeling her body tremble. “Bella?”

“I’m sorry. I haven’t really eaten all day and I’ve been an anxious mess,” she said, giving me a sheepish grin. Tears slid down her pale cheeks. “I can’t lose him, Masen. I’ll be all alone.”

“No, cherie, you won’t,” I said, wiping her tears away. “I’m with you. My mother and father both
adore you and Emmett, while he’s dealing with some issues, is enamored with you, as well.”

“Emmett! Oh, my word,” she cried. “How is he? I’ve been so …”

“Bella, he’s fine,” I said soothingly. “He’s enlisted in the Royal Air Force to become an air traffic controller. He was upset over Rosalie.” I pulled her into my arms, kissing her forehead. “And Bella, don’t even think about being upset. Emmett needs to come to terms with what happened to Rosalie, just like she has to deal with the aftermath. In time, both of them can find their happiness.”

“Rose is very broken, Masen,” Bella choked out, blinking up at me. “She believes all men hurt. She cannot even trust her own father. It will be a very long time before she can even begin to think about having a relationship with anyone other than a therapist.”

“Have you spoken to her, chérie?” I asked.

“We’ve texted,” Bella shrugged. “She’s told me that she’s chosen a family for her baby. A couple from Minnesota, a lesbian couple who have tried for years to get approved for a baby but had been turned away because of their sexual orientation. They’re going to be in the delivery room when the baby’s born.”

“That’s great news,” I smiled, holding her closely. “I’m glad that she found a family for her child.” Bella nodded, threading her fingers with mine. “It smells good in here, Bella.”

“I used your recipe. I called your mom. She had the palace cook send me the recipe,” Bella snickered. “Jake went out to get the ingredients while I helped Dad get settled after his appointments. He couldn’t unbutton his shirt and his mind was befuddled. He had to be sedated when he went in for his MRI.”

I heard Charlie’s voice, calling for his daughter. She started to move. “No, love. I’ll help him.” Bella arched a brow. “He may need to use the bathroom. Some things a daughter shouldn’t have to do for her father.”

“He hates when I have to do that for him,” Bella frowned. “Thank you, Masen.” She kissed me tenderly, padding to the kitchen.

I got up, sliding off my suit coat and rolling up my sleeves. I made my way down the short hallway, knocking on the door. “Charlie?” I called through the door. “Everything okay? Can I come in?” I heard a quiet yes and made my way into his room. He was sitting up in the bed, his hand gripping the edge of the mattress. “Did you have a good nap?”

“I feel hungover,” he snorted, looking up at me. His eyes were weary. “I can’t move. I mean, I can, but I feel very unsteady. I tried standing, but …”

“Can you lift your arms?” I asked. He frowned as he shook his head, weakly moving his arms from the mattress only for them to fall listlessly back down. I gave him an understanding smile, sliding my arms under his. I helped him to his feet, shuffling him to the bathroom. Each step grew steadier and he was mostly moving under his own steam when we arrived at the bathroom. He swatted me when I tried to help him with his pajama bottoms. I held my hands up, chuckling as I stepped away and let him pee in peace. I was leaning against the wall when the door opened. He was leaning against the sink. “You okay, Charlie?”

“Dizzy. I haven’t eaten anything since breakfast,” he explained.

“You and your daughter are too much alike,” I snorted. “She’s making dinner. It smells like it’s almost ready.”
“Just a few minutes,” he said. “Can you help me back to the bedroom? I want to put on actual pants and not sweats.” I nodded, wrapping my arm around his waist and guiding him back to his room. I helped him back onto his bed, swiping a pair of jeans from the dresser. “Masen, I know that Bella is struggling with my set back.”

“What did the doctor say?”

“It’s a medication adjustment. There’s no further degradation in my brain. There was an adverse reaction,” Charlie explained. “I go back in two weeks to see if the new cocktail is helping. If not, then we’ll adjust more. Though, talking to my dead wife was fucking bizarre. She reamed me out about Alice.”

“She’s a smart apparition,” I teased.

“Damn straight,” Charlie laughed, but sobered. “Masen, there will come a time when it will be more than a medication adjustment.”

“She’s afraid, Charlie,” I murmured.

“So, am I,” Charlie sighed. He shook his head, giving me a smile. “I’m not going anywhere. Not anytime soon. This was a bump in the road, Masen. A small bump. Now, whatever my daughter’s making smells delicious. My stomach is about to devour itself.”

“Come on. It’s an old family recipe that I made for Bella on our first date,” I grinned, helping him off the bed.

We ate dinner and Bella was calmer, seeing her dad interact with us and not talk to a figment of his imagination. By the time we were done with dinner, Seth came up and ate a bit before leaving for the night. Jacob was staying in the bakery, in the small office, where a cot and some pillows had been set up from the previous times, he’d stayed with them. Jake couldn’t fit on the couch and Charlie was adamant that his daughter would never sleep on that threadbare piece of furniture ever again.

After an uncomfortable night sleeping in the world’s tiniest bed, I was drinking some coffee in the kitchen. I needed the caffeine in order to be human. Jake came bounding up the stairs, his eyes narrowed angrily. He gave me a once over. “You look like shit, your princeliship.”


He slapped down a newspaper, turned to a gossip column.

Isabella Swan Spent the Day at Mount Sinai

Isabella Swan, the long-time girlfriend to Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, Crown Prince of Gevalia, was rumored to have spent the entire day yesterday at Mount Sinai Hospital in Brooklyn. Sources say that Isabella was there for her father, but a separate source indicated that she was seen at the women’s clinic, her eyes red-rimmed and her face tear-stained.

And Prince Edward was nowhere to be seen.

Was there a royal baby?

Did Isabella Swan go to the women’s clinic to have an abortion? Was she not ready to be the
mother of an illegitimate bastard royal child? The timeline was a bit rushed, but she could have had an abortion, killing the next heir to the Gevalian throne.

We tried to get commentary from the staff, but they adamantly refused to acknowledge our questions, stating it would be a HIPAA violation.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I snarled.

“Nope,” Jake said. “Yes, Bella was at the women’s clinic, but it was get her birth control injection. While Charlie was being scanned, Dr. Volturi pulled some strings to get her in and out. Her face was red because Charlie was very agitated before he went into the MRI, calling her some nasty, foul names. That’s when Dr. Volturi stepped in.”

“This is worse than what that skeeve, Laurent said,” I snapped. “This will shatter her!”

“I’ve already seen it,” Bella said, her voice flat. She held up her cell phone. “It was plastered all over my Facebook page. You know that I wouldn’t …”

“Bella, stop,” I said, flying to her side. I hugged her and she was stiff in my arms. I narrowed my eyes at Jake. He nodded, ducking out of the apartment, presumably to find out who had been the ‘source’ to leak that Bella had spent the day at the hospital and at the women’s clinic. “Cherie, talk to me.”

“This is your life?” she asked. “No privacy? News splashed across the headlines?”

“The American gossip media is far worse than anything I’ve ever seen, Bella,” I muttered. “There are gossip rags in Gevalia, but they’re more akin to printing the truth and not half-truths and spun lies.”

“Except for Laurent,” Bella growled.

“Well, he’s an exception to the rule. He’s also had a change of heart, doing research and realize that what he’d written was bullshit,” I snorted. I pulled back, looking into her eyes. They were empty, hollow. Her face was pulled into a grimace and she was still rigid in my arms. “I’m sorry, cherie. I don’t know why or understand the purpose of stories like these.”

“I don’t either. I’m … I’m just emotionally exhausted from my dad’s appointment. Seeing lies about how I supposedly aborted our bastard love child haven’t really helped my emotional state,” she retorted, snorting humorlessly. Looking up at me, she stroked my stubbly face. Her eyes held a little bit lighter but were still troubled. “I’ll be okay, Masen.”

“I love you, Bella. I don’t want to see you in pain,” I whispered, brushing my lips over hers. “I would do anything to shield you from this.” I gestured to the newspaper, a look of disgust on my face.

“Just … hold me,” she sighed, snuggling back into my arms and pressing her ear over my heart.

“Forever, cherie. I’ll hold you forever.”

A/N: So … what do you think? Leave me your thoughts. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 39

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

So, Charlie had an adverse reaction to his medications but seems to be doing better. There were also rumors about Bella going to the women’s clinic … spinning her to be something awful. We all know she’s not, but this ‘spin’ is more than likely Lady Kathryn and Irina’s doing. Up next will be a bit of a breaking point … in Bella’s POV.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Bella

Sitting in the newly completed office of the bakery, I was looking over several resumes for new employees. The bakery renovations were nearly finished. All we needed was people to work in the bakery. With my dad’s questionable health and my newfound celebrity, we needed to hire people to run Swan Family Bakery. Both Dad and I were adamant that we needed to hire from within our community.

“Oh, this girl, I like her,” Angela chirped. “She worked at the bookstore and was awesome.”

“Worked. Past tense?” I asked, arching a brow. “Was she fired?”

“She wasn’t fired. She went away to college but didn’t really care for the university she’d chosen. It was too big and she wanted something smaller,” Angela shrugged. “She came back home, taking a gap year and asking for her job back. We’d already hired someone to replace her.” Angela handed me the resume and application. “This girl, Bree, has retail experience and is great with people, friendly and outgoing.”

I read over her application, smiling as I saw how thorough she was in her answers. “I’ll bring her in. She could be helpful at the counter and working as a server for the café. I need people who are willing to work in the kitchen, though. I don’t want to be the one, getting up at four in the morning, to start baking our family’s recipes. I can oversee the bakery, but I don’t have the heart to run it like I did before,” I frowned. “And to be honest, I don’t know if I’m staying the states, Ang.”

“Are you planning on moving in with Masen?” Angela asked, leaning forward and grinning.

“He hasn’t asked, but everything we’ve ever done has alluded to us being together for the foreseeable future … possibly for the rest of our lives,” I smiled, blinking up at her. “I love him, regardless of who he is. He’s been so supportive and perfect throughout all of this …” I gestured to the renovated bakery. “He hasn’t walked away with the bullshit of my crazy family. He’s …”

“Prince Charming,” Angela quipped. “And he is.” She looked at me, but her smile faded. Reaching across the desk, she squeezed my fingers. “How are you doing with the tabloids?”

“They suck, Ang,” I growled. “Did you see the article about how I supposedly aborted a baby? I went to the women’s clinic to get my birth control shot. Not that it’s anyone’s business. It’s my body.” I got up and grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge in the kitchen. “That’s the only thing that’s making me freak out about my relationship with Masen. I love him. He’s an amazing, wonderful and generous man. I just hate having my personal life splashed over the newspapers. It’s
bullshit.”

“Does it bother Masen?” Angela asked.

“He’s more accustomed to it,” I retorted, idly pealing the wrapper off the bottled water. “He’s upset that the American tabloids are quick to judge and print lies without any sort of research. We also have some resistance in Gevalia. There’s this woman, Lady Kathryn … who was under the impression that she was going to marry Masen, but didn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell … who conspired with my bitch sister. Alice was arrested and is in a holding cell in Gevalia.”

“And Lady Kathryn?”

“She fled the country, flying to a location that didn’t have an extradition policy with Gevalia. She may be the one who is behind these scathing comments online and in the media,” I sighed. I picked up the newspaper with the article from when Dad was getting his MRI, the one saying I’d been the women’s clinic. “The ‘source’ behind this was paid by an offshore account. They’re trying to pinpoint who paid them, but the bank was in Europe. They were fired and blackballed out of the medical profession because they had violated HIPAA. Regardless, the damage is done. This is just the tip of the iceberg, Ang. It’s getting worse. I’ve had to cancel the landline at home and I’m very close to getting a new cell phone number to prevent random reporters trying to contact me for comments about my relationship with Prince Edward.”

“Miss Swan?” asked one of the workers. “We need you to sign for the new bakery equipment.”

“I’ll be right there,” I smiled. I picked up a pen, walking out into the large, open area for the bakery. A large man was leaning against the oversized box. He blinked up at me, grinning amiably. “Got all of our goodies?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he chuckled. “All brand new and state of the art, Miss Swan.” I took the clipboard, signing for the equipment. “We’ll unload it today and install it tomorrow. It’s getting close to quitting time.”

“Thank you,” I said, handing him back the clipboard. “My father will be down here, along with Linda and her son, Mike. They’ll tell you where to put the equipment, but the contractor also included it in the design map.”

“We’ve got that, Miss Swan,” he nodded, giving me a smile. “We’ll be out of your hair in an hour or so.”

“She’ll be gone before that,” Angela quipped. “She’s got plans tonight, right?”

I rolled my eyes. “You shut it,” I snorted. The delivery man laughed, leaving the kitchen. I checked my watch, wrinkling my nose. “I do need to go. Masen and I are going to the Met for a production of La Bohème. Afterward, we’re going out to eat with some city bigwigs.”

“Girl, you are so late!” Angela growled. “The Met?! You need to be dressed to the nines, with hair curled and fancy makeup. Jacob! Get your protective ass in here! Princess Summer-Fall-Winter-Spring needs to be beautified!”

Jacob strolled in, wearing a pair of jeans, black sweater and black leather coat. He was smirking. “I’m certain Masen would say that she’s already beautiful,” he quipped. “But we do need to go. Regardless of your beauty, Bells, there’s a glam squad setting up in my condo to make you even more ravishing.” He grinned at Angela. “As always, a pleasure, Angela.”

“Later, Jakes,” Angela said, waggling her fingers at him. I pulled on my coat and loaded up into
the SUV parked in the alleyway behind the bakery. We made decent time to the condo and I was ushered into the smaller condo where Jake had been staying once we had returned from Gevalia. Jake didn’t want to walk in on his best friend as we made love. Suffice it to say, we were insatiable for each other.

I was buffed and polished, my hair twisted up into a chic chignon and my makeup applied delicately. The dress I wore was a deep eggplant color, with a slit that went up to my thigh. When I was dressed, Jake rode up to the penthouse with me, wearing a sleek tuxedo. “You’re coming, too?” I asked.

“Yeah. Seth is picking up my fiancée. He’s your protection tonight. I’m having a rare date with my future wife,” Jake chuckled, offering me an arm since I was teetering on too-high heels. “But, I’ll be packing, too. Just to ensure you and Masen are safe.”

“When is your wedding?” I asked, taking his elbow.

“July 20th,” he smiled. “Not soon enough, to be honest. We’ve been engaged for two years. Leah’s family is quite conservative. So, I’ve had to bend over backwards to appease her father and that included moving out of our shared apartment. I couldn’t afford it on my own. It was shortly after that I’d moved out that my bosses at the FBI told me about a diplomatic mission. I’d been personally requested by the Gevalian consulate to act as personal valet and security for a visiting dignitary. I knew it was Masen. We’d lived together for four years while at university. I love him like a brother and respect him as the future ruler of Gevalia. He’s the best man for my wedding.”

He looked at me. “I hope to see you there as Masen’s date.”

“Is that an invite, Black?” I snickered.

“It’ll be sent to the royal palace, Bells,” he said, opening the door of the penthouse. Masen was inside, speaking abruptly to someone on his cell phone. I couldn’t understand him. Masen looked up, a smile spreading over his face. He hung up the phone, sliding it into his pocket. “Everything okay, Mase?”

“Just fighting with my mother,” he grumbled. “She’s … she’s being very … mothery,” He trailed off, waving his hands. “But, I’m not worried about her right now.” He glided over to me, sliding his arms around my waist. “Seeing you makes everything so much better. You’re gorgeous, cherie.”

“Thank you, Majesty,” I purred. “And mothery? What does that mean?”

“She’s being very rigid, royal and stubborn,” Masen sighed, leaning forward and pressing his forehead to mine. “She’s up in arms over something that is beyond her control and she’s barking at me to fix it. I can’t. No one can, really.” I pulled back, arching a brow at him. “Rosalie …”

“What about her?” I asked.

“She wants Rosalie to perform a DNA test to verify that the baby is not Emmett’s,” Masen grumbled. “I told her that I was not going to make her do that. Rosalie’s well within her rights to give up the baby for adoption. And to force her to do that when she can barely handle being pregnant? My mother sometimes forgets that not everyone is her subject, forced to bend to her will.”

“You told her about how Rosalie got pregnant, right?” I growled.

“I did, but she’s obsessed,” Masen hissed. “I’m not going to approach Rosalie and I’m going to act
as an attorney on her behalf if my mother tries to do something to her, forcing her to get a DNA test. I know it’ll piss my mother off …”

I cut him off, kissing him on the lips. He melted, sliding his arms around me and deepening our kiss. His hands moved from my back to lay on my ass. I gripped his lapels of his Dior tuxedo, trying to get closer.

“Yo! Porn stars! Knock it off,” Jake laughed. Masen growled, pulling back and flipping off Jake. I just giggled, hiding my face against Masen’s shoulder. “Now, if you’re done molesting each other, you’ve both got a date at the opera and I’ve got plans with my fiancée.”

“I hope we get to see her, Jake. It’s been too long since I’ve seen Leah. I have to question her sanity in marrying you,” Masen quipped, draping a wrap over my shoulders.

“You’re hysterical, Mase. A laugh riot,” Jake deadpanned. “Let’s go, your princeliship.”

We rode in the SUV to the Met, meeting up with the deputy mayor and two other foreign dignitaries. Jake greeted his fiancée, Leah, with a sweet kiss and we were introduced. She was wearing a gray and pink dress with her hair in a sleek bob. She was effortlessly elegant and perfectly matched with Jacob. I felt at ease with her and we became fast friends. We were led into the theater, seated in a private box with a great deal of security, Jake being the most obvious with his hidden shoulder holster and overbearing presence.

I was enamored with the production. I’d never been to the opera before and I was enthralled with the beauty of the music, the pageantry of the performers and the talent of the singers. I was shocked that none of the singers were amplified by a microphone. Masen and one of the other dignitaries, an Italian diplomat, explained that the building was a ginormous amplifier and that the performers used the shape of the theater to make their voices louder. The diplomat smiled at me and said that the most prestigious opera houses were in Italy. He gave me a smarmy smile, personally inviting me to go to all of them, as his special guest. Masen said something sharply in Italian that made my flirtatious neighbor shut up and sulk for the remaining part of the performance.

After the performance, the Italian diplomat left us and went back to the Italian consulate. As we waited for the SUV to pull up, I checked my cell phone to see if my father or Linda had contacted me. They hadn’t, but an unknown number had texted me.

I’m going into labor … I don’t know if I can do this. Help … Bella, please. I need someone who is NOT my mother to be next to me. Please?

“Rosalie …” I breathed.

A/N: Pictures of the Met, Bella’s dress, Leah and the production of La Bohème are on my blog. That opera is one of my favorites. I’ve seen it live in Chicago once (with my mom … one of the last times we’d gone out before she got really sick) and again through a live-feed from the Met with my students about ten years ago.

Now, as I said in my FB group (Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation), I know how I want the climax to occur, but I’m not sure how to get there. Leave me some loving. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 40

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Now, as I said in my FB group (Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation), I know how I want the climax to occur, but I’m not sure how to get there. Leave me some loving. Thank you for reading!

Chapter Forty

Bella

After the performance, the Italian diplomat left us and went back to the Italian consulate. As we waited for the SUV to pull up, I checked my cell phone to see if my father or Linda had contacted me. They hadn’t, but an unknown number had texted me.

I’m going into labor … I don’t know if I can do this. Help … Bella, please. I need someone who is NOT my mother to be next to me. Please?

“Rosalie …” I breathed.

Masen

Bella blinked up at me, handing me her phone. My heart fell to my feet and it shattered for the broken woman reaching out to my girlfriend. I kissed her temple. “My apologies, everyone,” I murmured. “We’ve got a family medical emergency to attend to.”

“Is everything alright?” the deputy mayor asked.

“It will be,” I said, guiding a trembling Bella into the idling SUV. Seth was behind the wheel, with Leah and Jake sitting in the very back of the car. “Again, my apologies.” I helped Bella inside and gave Seth a nod when I closed the door. We pulled away. “Seth, go to the condo. I’m going to call my pilot to get us flown to Rochester.”

“Mase?” Jake asked, leaning forward.

“I got a text from Rosalie,” Bella muttered. “She’s going into labor. She texted me while we were in the opera. She sounded shattered and she doesn’t want her mother next to her while she gives birth to her baby. She’s … so lost.” Picking up her phone, she called Rosalie and I listened to her patiently speak to the girl who’d captured my brother’s heart. Bella was so calm and loving on the phone, murmuring that she was on her way.

“Masen, you’ve got meetings the rest of this week,” Jake hissed from behind me. “You can’t go.”

“We fly out tonight and I fly back,” I snapped. “You stay with her, every moment.”

“You need to sleep, Mase,” Jake sighed.

“I’ll sleep when I’m dead,” I growled. I tugged out my cell phone and called my pilot. “Luc, I need you to lodge an emergency flight plan to Rochester, New York and back by tomorrow morning. I’ll
“Your Highness, I’ll make the arrangements,” Luc said, his voice raspy from being woken up. “I’ll be at the airport within an hour.”

“How long is the flight?” I asked.

“From preflight to landing, an hour and a half,” Luc responded. “What’s the emergency, Prince Edward?”

“Family emergency and Bella needs to be with her, um, cousin,” I said evasively. “But, I have meetings that I need to attend tomorrow. You’ll be up all night.”

“I’ll survive, Your Highness,” Luc chuckled. “I’ll make those arrangements.”

“Thank you,” I said, hanging up the phone. Seth parked the car in the garage. “Jake, I’m sorry about …”

“I’m well aware of the necessities of Jake’s job,” Leah said, waving her hand. “I was excited about spending the night with him, but it’ll make our reunion on our wedding day even better.”

“Fuck me sideways,” Jake groaned. “I was going to get some?! Damn it.” He was smirking, but Bella was shrinking in on herself. She felt guilty about wanting to help out her friend, causing me a sleepless night and separating Jake from his fiancée. I gave Jake a scowl and he sat back, threading his fingers with Leah. She smacked his shoulder, giving him a glower. They were hissing in the backseat as I helped Bella out of the car.

“Seth, could you drive Jake and your sister back to your parents’ place?” I asked.

“You’re not supposed to be alone, Masen,” Jake argued.

“I think I can handle riding up an elevator,” I snorted, giving my best friend and body guard a look. Before he could respond, I closed the door and Seth pulled away. I threaded my fingers with Bella’s, kissing her wrist. “Talk to me, chérie.”

“I can go on my own to see Rosalie,” Bella said quietly. “Jake can have his time with Leah.”

“Bella, love,” I murmured, walking into the elevator. I slid her into my arms. “As much as you want that, it’s not possible. With our public relationship and those vultures, it’s best that you have Jake with you. He’s a trained assassin, really. Your picture has been splashed across newspapers and magazines across the country.”

“I’m going to a labor and delivery ward in Rochester,” Bella sighed. “I can blend in.”

“And you could have some nurse or orderly give some scathing comment to the press, furthering any gossip that you’re at the hospital for our baby and all hell breaks loose,” I argued. “I want you to be safe, chérie. With Jake there, he can get you in and out without any sort of chaos or drama.”

“I hate it when you’re right,” Bella pouted, pressing her cheek to my chest. “Damn you and your brilliant mind.”

“Ivy League education, baby,” I snickered, kissing her neck. She leaned against me until we arrived at our floor. I blew a raspberry into her neck and she giggled. I tugged her into the penthouse. We changed out of our dress clothes and into something casual. I also packed a garment bag with my suit for my meetings the following day. We ate a snack and Bella checked in with Rosalie again.
She was still in labor, but according to the doctors, it would be some time before the baby would make appearance.

And Rosalie was doing this on her own. She refused to have anyone in the delivery room except for the doctor, nurses and Bella. I found it a bit odd, but in Bella, Rosalie found someone who could listen to her and not try to fix her. Bella was being a friend, a confidante. It made me love her more, if that was possible.

While she was on the phone with Rosalie, I wandered into the office and checked in with Luc. I was sitting at my desk, opening the locked drawer that held the ring I’d had designed for Bella. I plucked it out of the box, looking at it under the soft light of my desk lamp. It sparkled beautifully and I could imagine it on Bella’s finger. Charlie had already given me his blessing. The timing, however, had never been right. I wanted to do it on the Eiffel Tower, but it was raining. We were more focused on exploring our bodies in Barcelona and I didn’t want to propose to her whilst we were both naked, connected intimately. Upon our return, Charlie’s relapse and medicine issues had kept us separate. Tonight, was the first night we’d had any sort of time ‘alone’, but even then it wasn’t truly alone. It was a working date, attending with dignitaries and New York bigwigs.

“Masen, should I pack a bag …?” Bella asked, stopping inside the office. I blinked up at her, holding the ring in my fingers. “What’s that?”

Not exactly romantic, but no time like the present ...

“It’s a ring, cherie,” I murmured. I stood up and walked toward her. I leaned down, kissing her tenderly. She was stiff. “Bella, breathe.”

“It’s a sparkly ring,” she whispered.

“Nothing but the best for the woman I love,” I whispered back. I knelt down, looking up at her. “I wanted to make this a grand romantic gesture, but it’s apparently not us.”

“You’ve done some amazing romantic things, Masen,” she giggled, biting her lip and her eyes trained on the ring.

“I’ll make it up to you, but I’ve wanted this on your finger since New Year’s Eve,” I said, picking up her left hand. She blinked up at me, tears welling in her eyes. “All my life, I wanted someone to be by my side who would challenge me, love me and make me a better person. I wanted it all, true love, happiness, friendship, chemistry, and respect. I never thought I’d get to find it. You’re my everything, Bella. You are my best friend, who makes me laugh when I’m down, who challenges me with your intelligence and wit and guides me to be the best man I can be. You are my lover, making me feel so much more. When I close my eyes, I dream of you, of your hand in mine and standing by my side as we grow older. I want to be your best friend, your lover, your husband and father to our children. Isabella Marie Swan, ma cherie, will you marry me?”

She looked at me, her eyes brimming with tears. She held up her hand to her face. I was shaking, terrified that she was going to say no. Her eyes blinked shut and tears came down her cheeks, glistening on her pale, creamy skin. She knelt down with me, throwing her arms around my neck. “Yes, Masen,” she whispered against my shoulder. “I never … I never thought I could have a happily ever after.”

“Tourjours, mon amour,” I whispered. “You are my happily ever after. My forever.” I brushed my lips over hers and she sighed against my mouth. Deepening our kiss, I nearly had her on the floor of my office when the landline on my desk rang. “Merde.” I glowered at the phone, but shook my head. Then, I looked at her as I helped her onto the leather sofa, holding out the ring. “May I put
this on your finger?"

She nodded and I slid it over her knuckle, ignoring the phone as it rang off the hook on my desk. It was a perfect fit, nestled on her hand. I lifted her hand to my lips, kissing her ring. I kissed her again and helped her off the floor. “It’s gorgeous, Masen.”

“I had it redesigned just for you. The original ring was a bit dated, but the stones were gorgeous. If you don’t like it …” I murmured.

“No, it’s perfect,” she beamed. She kissed me, her fingers tangling into my hair. I wanted to drag her into our bedroom, making love to her all night. The phone rang again.

“Damn it,” I snapped. “Real life is interrupting us, cherie.” I kissed her nose and answered the phone. It was Jake. “We’re coming, Jacob. Relax.”

“I thought you two were getting it on,” Jake snickered. “If I’m not getting any, neither are you, your princeliship. I’m on my way up to the penthouse. You better be fully dressed, asshole.”

Before I could respond, he hung up and I gave Bella a grimace. “Jake’s on his way,” I said. “And Luc said that the plane is ready to go, just waiting for us.” I cupped her cheek, staring into her eyes. “I really wanted to make a grand gesture for our engagement.”

“Masen, it was perfect. It was us,” she breathed, leaning into my palm. “I don’t need grand gestures. I need you. Always.” She kissed me, sighing as I held her closely to my body. Jake let himself into the condo as I kissed my fiancée languidly and hating that we were flying away, not celebrating our impending marriage.

“LUCY! I’m HOME!” Jake sang. He came into the office, snorting. “Can’t you two keep your paws off each other?” We broke apart and Jake’s eyes widened. “There’s bling on her finger, Masen. Sparkly bling. On her wedding finger. When did this happen?”

“I just happened, Jake,” I answered, sliding my arms around Bella’s waist. “She walked in when I was looking at it and I couldn’t resist.”

“More like you got caught,” Bella teased, snuggling closer to me. “Regardless, it was a perfect proposal and what I wanted. I don’t need to have my name splashed across the sky in fireworks. It was us. Just us.” Her phone chirped, causing her smile to fall. “Rosalie … she’s kicked her mother out of her room. Lillian’s hovering.” Bella blinked up at me. “We also need to tell Charlie and Linda about our engagement.”

“You all can do that in the car,” Jacob quipped. “I’m happy for both of you.” He hugged Bella, kissing her cheek. “You make him so happy, Bells.” He blinked to me, shaking my hand. “Don’t fuck this up, Mase. I’ll kick your ass. I like her more than you.”

“It’s because I’m very likable,” Bella laughed, twisting her fingers with mine. We walked out to the foyer, layered on our coats. I slung my garment bag over my shoulder, making our way down to the basement. As Jacob drove us to Teterboro, we called Charlie and told him about my impromptu proposal. Charlie laughed, saying it was about damned time. Linda was gushing excitedly, thrilled that Bella and I found our happiness with each other. She started prattling about helping with planning when Bella’s phone vibrated with a new text from Rosalie. Hastily, we hung up the phone so Bella could respond and we pulled up to the private airfield.

Clambering into the private jet, I gave Luc a grateful smile. He nodded briskly from the cockpit. His copilot was less than enthused, grumbling under his breath in German. I sat down next to Bella
after I’d stowed my garment bag in the closet just inside the cabin of the plane, brushing my finger over her engagement ring. Jacob sat across the aisle. Ten minutes after we got on the plane, the doors were closed and we taxied down the runway. We were airborne ten minutes after that, flying to Rochester.

An hour later, we landed in Rochester. There was a car waiting for us, thanks to Jake’s quick thinking. I spoke briefly with Luc, explaining that I’d be back to the airport by five. Luc had already filed a return flight plan, only leaving the time blank. We shook hand, getting into the waiting black van. “How will you get back to the airport, Masen?” Bella asked.

“I have an American driver’s license,” I snickered. “I’m fully capable of driving myself.”

“You’re just as recognizable as me, if not more so,” Bella frowned. “Jake?”

“I’m driving you back to the airport, your princeliship,” Jake chuckled. “Bella will be okay in the hospital for the half hour it takes me to drive you to and from the airport.” He gave me a look. “I don’t like being separated from you, but Seth will be waiting for you at Teterboro when you land. Just text him when you take off.”

Pulling up to Strong Memorial Hospital, Jake walked to the front desk. He spoke to the volunteer seated there. My face was hidden by a hood and I had my back facing the exit. I held Bella in my arms, my lips attached to her temple. Her hands were gripping my jacket and she was quiet. Jake walked over to us. “She’s in labor and delivery. We’re relegated to the waiting room, but Bella can head into Rose’s room.” He nodded to the elevators.

We rode up to the labor and delivery floor, where I saw Roger and Lillian sitting in the waiting room with an older couple, but still young enough to have children. If I had to assume, the other couple was probably adopting Rosalie’s baby. Lillian was crying and wringing her hands nervously. Roger was sitting stoically, gripping the arms of the chairs. Bella walked over to Lillian, who clung to Bella with a powerful hug.

“Your fiancée is quite a wonderful woman,” Jake said quietly, pulling me to a set of chairs on the other side of the waiting room.

“She’s my everything,” I whispered, echoing what I’d said when I’d proposed. “I wish I was able to show her how much … instead, we’re here. I’d rather be home, making love to my fiancée.” I blinked up, watching as Bella disappeared behind the doors of the ward. I chuckled. “I have a fiancée. We’re getting married, Jake.”

“Have you told your mother?”

“She knows I had a ring. Hell, she was the one who gave it to me,” I shrugged. “Her only order was that by the time I’d returned to Gevalia for the Independence Day celebrations, I needed to be engaged. She had a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, but I knew she was serious.”

“And that means that your mother gets to plan some royal wedding,” Jake chuckled.

“She’s going to want cart blanche on everything, but this is as much Bella’s wedding as it is mine,” I growled. “They will collaborate. Bella will have a say as to what’s going to happen for our wedding.”

“Smart man,” Jake nodded, leaning back and closing his eyes. “Now, I’m exhausted. I get a bit of nap while we were at the opera.”

“Not a fan?” I snickered.
“Fuck, no,” he grumbled. “That shit was boring.” He gently guided me back in the seat. “Sleep, Mase. You’ll be back in the air before you know. We’ve got three hours before we head back to the airport.”

As much as I wanted to sleep, I just dozed. I did speak briefly to my mother about my proposal. However, until we could make a public announcement, we decided to keep it on the down low. With my time coming to an end in the states, it was decided we’d have an interview with the Gevalian press, along with a professional engagement photo shoot, to be announced during our return to Gevalia.

I sent a text a half hour before I needed to leave for the airport to Bella. She came out, her face pinched. “Cherie, are you okay?”

“Rose is … she’s fracturing under the pressure. She’s begging to die. She wants her doctor to give her medicine to put her asleep and never wake up,” Bella whispered. “Her labor is slow-going. She’s six centimeters dilated.” She slid her arms around my waist. “Are you leaving?”


“I’m fine for now, but if Jacob could pick up something on his way back, that would be great,” Bella answered. “Have a safe flight, Majesty. I love you and I can’t wait to be your wife. Thank you for understanding my need to be here.”

“I’d do anything for you, chérie,” I purred. “I love you more than words can describe.” I kissed her tenderly, pressing my forehead to hers. “I’ll talk to you soon. I’ll call you when I land in New York City.” She nodded, tightening her hold on me before ducking back into the ward. With a sigh, I turned to Jake. “Time to go, Black. I’m trusting you with her care.”

“I’ll protect her with my life, your princeliship,” Jake said solemnly.

xx AMDFT xx

I am barely aware of the meetings that I was forced to attend. I nodded, smiled and went through the motions. As I sat through my meetings, Bella would periodically send me updates, but Rosalie’s labor was moving at a snail’s pace. If things didn’t speed up, they were going to perform a C-section by nightfall. With each passing hour, Rosalie’s fragile psyche was falling further apart.

When I was done with my meetings, I checked on Charlie and Linda. They both gave me hugs and congratulated me. We made tentative plans for dinner prior to our departure to Gevalia. I did have dinner with them, waiting with bated breath to hear anything about Rosalie and the birth of her baby. By the time I got back to the condo, Bella finally texted me that Rosalie had her baby girl. As soon as the baby was born, she was placed in her adoptive mother’s arms. Bella just held her new friend as she sobbed in anguish over her lost innocence and giving up her first-born child, conceived out of hatred and violence.

Bella said that she was going to stay with Rosalie until she was out of the hospital and meet with her therapist. Jake said he’d booked the entire bed and breakfast we’d stayed at previously. They were going to get a few hours’ sleep before heading back to the hospital.

I crashed around eleven, missing my girl and the exhaustion of being up for nearly twenty-four hours had caught up with me.

Three days passed. Bella and Jake stayed in Rochester. I attended my meetings and events in the evening. There were a few articles about my ‘estrangement’ from my girlfriend, but nothing really
newsworthy. Jake had insisted that he and Bella maintain a low profile in Rochester, leaving the bed and breakfast in disguise. However, the weather helped, too. It had snowed nonstop since I’d left.

Princeliship … Bells and I are driving back for Valentine’s Day. Rosalie is backsliding, but is willing to go into in-patient care. She damn-well insisted that we leave. She knew she was spiraling into a deep, ugly depression. They’re talking suicide watch … The baby was definitely NOT Emmett’s. Based on the coloring, the biological father was an African man. One of Rose’s attackers was a black man, with a violent past. It’s a mess … -J

DNA test? – Mase

The baby was swabbed and the results have been forwarded to the NYC District Attorney’s office - J

Please, promise me you’ll drive safe. How’s Bella? – Mase

She’s anxious to get back home. She misses you and is exhausted b/c she’s had to be so strong for both Rose and Lillian. Roger’s checked out. He’s drinking most of the time. It’s a clusterfuck – J

Hopefully, Bella will tell me more when she gets back to New York – Mase

We’ll be leaving early tomorrow morning. I know your schedule is free tomorrow night. You can FINALLY celebrate your engagement – J

I smiled at Jake’s comment. I responded with a thumb’s up, setting my phone aside to make plans for Valentine’s Day. With the craziness that had occurred, I made arrangements for a quiet evening at home with the two of us. Starting with a home-cooked dinner and ending with dessert of me feasting on Bella’s body, cherishing and worshipping her for her love and selflessness.

A few hours later, that night, I was drifting off, trying to read a proposal from the Gevalian parliament. My dad wanted my take on a new bill brought forth the new leader of the House of Commons. My phone rang on the nightstand. It was my dad’s number. “Speak of the devil, Dad,” I quipped.

“Do you have a computer nearby?” he asked, his voice trembling.

“Dad?” I muttered.

“Your mother is on the phone with the press and trying to make sense of it all,” Dad growled.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, getting out of bed. I went to my laptop, waking it up and opening a web browser. “Tell me, Dad.”

“Three things … one, Lady Kathryn, along with her family, have been stripped of their titles. They were arrested in Monaco for spreading lies against the crown and Lady Kathryn colluded with Alice and that reporter. Two, there were pictures leaked of Isabella and your friend, Jake, in the hospital in Rochester. He was hugging her and her engagement ring was in clear view. The press took it for proof of her cheating on you.”

“How did they find out?” I growled. “She and Jake were careful, hiding their faces …”

“Outside, yes. Inside? Not so much, but that’s not really feasible, Masen,” Dad breathed. “It appeared that Lady Kathryn was in contact with her aunt, Irina, who has connections in New York. She used those connections to reach out to have someone do surveillance on you, on Bella, on
Charlie and on Jake.” He paused. “The pictures look like they were taken with a camera phone. We’re working with a PI to figure out who took those photos and how they were connected to Kathryn and Irina.”

“You said there were three things,” I whispered.

“Masen, there was an accident,” he muttered. “The paparazzi were staked outside of the hospital when Jake and Bella left. It had snowed and … Just look up the information on the computer, Masen.”

“I want to hear it from you,” I cried. “Not some bullshit tabloid site. Is she dead? Is Jake?”

“I don’t know, Masen. But, we’re doing everything in our power to help you,” Dad breathed. “For now, you need to contact Charlie if they hospital or police already haven’t done so. Then, you need to …”

“If you say stay away, I will pummel you through the god damned phone, Dad,” I snarled. “I know that Bella did not cheat on me with my best friend. I know that this is all some sort of set up. Lady Kathryn, her aunt and Alice … they got what they wanted. But, I’m not staying away from Bella. I love her. I’m marrying her and I’m going to her.” I hung up my phone, looking up information online.

It was everywhere. The story was splashed on the tabloid media and even filtered onto the mainstream media. What made me sick was the crumpled, distorted wreck that was once the rental car that Jake had arranged for while they were in Rochester. It was flipped on its roof, covered in snow and deep inside a ravine off the side of the highway. I choked out a sob, seeing the scene.

*How could anyone survive that?*

“Bella … *mon amour, ma cherie,*” I cried, touching the computer screen. “I’m coming for you. I swear. And whoever did this will pay.” I slammed my laptop shut, dialing my friend and fellow lawyer, James. “I need your help, man.”

“I just heard,” he said. “It’s all over the news. I’m so sorry.”

“I want to bring those assholes down who did this. Can you help me with that?” I asked, tugging on jeans and a sweater.

“I can’t, but I’ve got a buddy in the Rochester DA’s office who can,” James replied.


*A/N: Cliffhanger … I’m sorry, but this was the climax I wanted. Now, what do you think happened to Bella and Jake? And how is Kathryn and Irina connected to all of this? Leave me your thoughts. I will try to update quickly to not leave you on edge for too long.*

*Pictures of Bella’s engagement ring, the hospital, and the aftermath of the accident are on my blog. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation and twitter, too: tufano79. Thanks for reading.*
Chapter 41

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Previously, I had a cliffhanger … I’m sorry, but this was the climax I wanted. Now, what do you think happened to Bella and Jake? And how is Kathryn and Irina connected to all of this? Leave me your thoughts. I will try to update quickly to not leave you on edge for too long.

I will be slightly back-tracking, to earlier in the evening in this chapter to … well, you’ll see. Thank you for sticking with me.

Chapter Forty-One

Bella

I was sitting next to Rosalie as she slept fitfully. She’d delivered her baby girl three days ago after a C-section. She refused to hold the baby, explicitly saying she was simply an incubator and that Lauren and her husband, Tyler, were the parents. Lauren, Tyler and baby Olivia left the hospital the day previous, after Rosalie signed the adoption paperwork, relinquishing her parental rights. The original adoptive parents had backed out when they got a baby closer to home who was willing to have a more open adoption, a woman who wanted to have some sort relationship with the baby she’d given up for adoption.

The baby was clearly not Emmett’s. One of her attackers had been an African American student who was the vice president of the fraternity and the baby had dark skin and black curls. The DNA had been sent out to the lab to verify paternity, but her baby had been conceived when she was attacked.

“Bella,” Rosalie whispered, blinking up at me.

“You need your rest, sweetie,” I smiled, taking her hand.

“So, do you,” she muttered. “I know I’m an awful person, a despicable friend. I feel so badly that I pulled you away from your boyfriend.” She looked down at the gorgeous ring that sparkled in the lights. “Sorry, your fiancé. You should be with him. Celebrating with him, going out for Valentine’s Day.”

“I’d forgotten about Valentine’s Day,” I snorted. “Masen proposed, giving me this gorgeous ring, but I’d neglected to get him anything for Valentine’s Day.”

“You can give him you,” she shrugged. “Spend time with him. I’m going into an in-patient program. I won’t be able to have visitors. Not anyone other than family, not for a while.” She sat up, grimacing as her stitches pulled. “You’ve proven to be a valuable, loyal and amazing friend. You calmed me down in a situation that was …” she trailed off. “I want to be that type of friend for you. Now? I can barely stand the sight of my own body. I’m sick of who I am. I love you, Bella. As much love as I can give and that’s not a whole hell of a lot. The minute amount I have, it’s for you. Some is for my parents, but I …”
They hover,” I chuckled. “That’s because they worry, Rose. They heard you, begging for death.”

“I still want to die,” she muttered. “No matter how much I shower, I can’t stop that feeling of being used.” She looked at me, drawing her legs up and wrinkling her nose. “Thank you, Bella. I will never forget what you did for me.”

“I hope you can get over this,” I murmured. “I hope you can get your happily ever after with Emmett.”

“Doubtful,” Rose snorted humorlessly. “If you could tell him that I still care for him. Maybe, when I’m … not on the verge ending it all, I might reach out to him. I don’t know. Right now, I just can’t look past tomorrow, an hour from now.”

“One day at a time, Rose,” I smiled, squeezing her hand. “Will you be okay? I’m going to step out and talk to my friend who’s been hanging with me.”

“I want to sleep. I’ll be fine,” she said, curling back up and tugging the blanket up to her chin.

“And Rose, regardless, you call me at any time. I’m here for you,” I said, standing up from my spot next to her bed. “So are your parents. Your friends.”

“I know,” she sighed. “I just feel closer to you than to my friends from university or even from home. They don’t understand why I can’t ‘bounce back’ from what happened.” Rosalie just rolled her eyes, flipping off the lights and ending our conversation. I frowned, walking toward the doorway. “I may never ‘bounce back.’”

“You need to adjust to a new normal,” I suggested. “I’ll be back, Rose.” She didn’t answer. Her quiet breaths indicated she’d passed out, exhausted from the emotional turmoil of the past few days. I turned, leaving the room and walking toward the waiting room. After she’d given birth, she was moved off the labor and delivery floor and into a regular room, away from the new mothers and the happiness of babies being born. It was all too much for her. I walked to the waiting room, finding Jake reading a book. “Hey, Jake.”

“Bells,” he said, smiling at me. “How’s Rosalie?”

“She’s … she’s got a long way before she’ll be even remotely okay,” I shrugged. “I’m ready to go home. In fact, Rosalie said that she’s going into an in-patient program. She is appreciative of what I did for her, but she said that I need to be home with Masen. Can we head back to New York tomorrow? Be back in the city by tomorrow night?”

“Done,” Jake nodded. “Do you want to surprise Mase?”

“No, I want to tell him. Or rather, if you want to tell him. My cell phone battery has died and the charger is back at the bed and breakfast,” I grumbled. “I’m an idiot.”

“You can use my charger,” Jake said, unplugging his Android cell phone.

“I’ve got an older iPhone,” I said, hugging him and kissing his cheek. I ruffled his hair and he muttered under his breath about how Apple products sucked. I giggled as I got up, heading to the bathroom while Jake was texting on his phone. When I got back to the waiting room, Jake said that Masen was so happy that we were coming back. I was reaching for his phone to do some texting of my own, when Lillian and Roger came over, asking if we’d join them for dinner down in the cafeteria. With a forced smile on my part, we went down and had dinner.

I liked Lillian and Roger, but I could see why Rosalie couldn’t handle them. They were very pushy
and controlling. I got along better with Roger than with Lillian. He had a gruff demeanor like Charlie, wanting to protect his baby girl. I struggled with talking with Lillian because she was the epitome of a mom. It had been so long since I’d had an interaction with a mother that I struggled with her affections and mannerisms.

At dinner, we talked about Lauren, Tyler and baby Olivia, who had left the day prior. Lillian had held her grandbaby before she watched her leave with her new adoptive parents. Roger was still so stoic, holding it all inside. It would just be a matter of time before he exploded.

We also talked about Rosalie’s decision to go into a psychiatric facility. With her emotional scars, it was the best decision for her. She needed to be away from the reminders of her lost innocence and with people who could help her without being too controlling, too coddling or too close. Lillian was understanding. Roger was pissed off, wanting to keep her close but terrified that his baby girl was still afraid that he’d hurt her.

As we were throwing our garbage away, Jake snarled lowly. His phone was blowing up with texts and social media alerts. “God fucking damn it,” he snapped.

“What?” I asked, wiping my hands on a napkin.

“Vultures,” he sneered. We ducked into a nearby stairwell. He handed me the phone and I saw texts with links of various articles about me, Masen and now, Jake. I scanned the most recent link, shocked at what was posted online. “Your engagement is not a secret and we’re supposedly in a secret love affair, fucking behind Masen’s back.”

“Who sent you those links?” I asked, handing back his phone, my hand trembling.

“Seth and Leah. They’ve been monitoring the web with any news about you, Mase or why we’re here,” Jake answered, tugging on my arm and up the stairs to the waiting room. “We need to go, Bells. I know you wanted to wait until tomorrow to leave, but with these pictures and articles, the wolves will descend.”

“We were so careful, Jake,” I growled. “We stayed hidden.”

He stopped on a landing, pressing his finger on a link. “This was taken yesterday, Bells. In the waiting room.” He scrolled on the photos until we got to tonight. “This was an hour ago when you ruffled my hair. Someone is feeding the press these pictures. Someone has leaked our whereabouts. It’s not your fault, or my fault. It’s that asshole’s fault. Someone in this hospital is leaking these photos.”

“Doesn’t that violate some sort of law?” I asked as Jake pulled his phone away from me. He began climbing the stairs again, taking two at a time. I struggled keeping up with him.

“We’re not patients. We don’t have any sort of expectation of privacy. The only place we were safe was in the treatment rooms or patient quarters,” Jake answered. “Regardless, it’s highly unethical. People in a hospital are in here, dealing with emotional and scary situations. Taking photos in here is definitely questionable, to be honest, but not illegal.”

He stopped just outside of the floor where Rose was staying. “What’s the plan?” I asked.

“Do you have anything you need at the B&B?” Jake asked.

“My phone charger, but I can always get a new one,” I answered. “The clothes are …”

“My guess is that they know where we’re staying and it won’t be safe there. If need be, I can have
one of my friends in the bureau pick up our shit. I have a couple of books and my kindle, along
with my clothes,” he mused. “Nothing that can’t be replaced.”

“Your laptop?” I asked.

“In my bag,” he replied, patting his messenger bag slung over his body. He looked out into the
waiting room. “Stay here. I’m grabbing our coats. We’ll need to wind our way to the car, trying not
to attract attention.” He handed me his bag, darting out of the stairwell and to the waiting room.
Lillian and Roger were there, confused. Jake quickly explained that we needed to go. He gave them
a quick hug, handing his card over to Lillian, before ducking back into the stairwell. Handing me
my ginormous coat, he tugged on his jacket and hat. I wrapped a scarf around my face, pulling up
the hood. “Come on, Bells. Down these stairs to the basement and then back up the opposite side
will get us to the parking garage.”

“How do you know this?” I asked.

“It’s what I’m trained to do, Bells,” he shrugged. “I need to keep you safe. It’s my job.”

“No, your job is to protect Masen,” I argued as I followed him back down the stairs.

“And you’re engaged to Masen, so my protection now falls onto you, brat,” Jake snorted. “Come
on.” We made our way to the basement of the hospital. It was a dark, dank space that was used for
storage. There were gurneys, IV poles, medication lockers and various pieces of medical
technology. Jake pulled out his phone to use as a flashlight, since we didn’t want to alert the
vultures where we were. Winding our way back up another set of stairs, we snuck out a side exit.
In the cold, huddled in the snow, were about twenty-five reporters, with cameras and recorders,
buzzing around the main entrance of the hospital. They were on public property, but still lying in
wait.

“Fuck me,” I squeaked.

“Yep. They’re waiting for us,” Jake hissed, grabbing my arm. “Let’s get the hell out of dodge.” We
stepped through some knee-high snow, shivering in the blustery wind and trudged into the parking
garage. We took a roundabout way to the rental van. It was black and nondescript, which was
perfect for what we needed. The one thing it wasn’t … good in the snow. The damn thing had no
traction and we’d spun out more than I was comfortable with. Jake was a stellar driver. The van
just sucked in the weather. I missed the SUVs, with all-wheel drive. “When this is all said and
down, I’m taking my girl on a vacation to a beach or some shit. No more snow.”

“It’s like it never stops,” I said, kicking my feet off the side of the van. Jake unlocked it and tossed
his stuff in the back while I clambered into the passenger seat. “Are we heading back to New York
City?”

“Nah. With this continued weather and slick spots, I want to get to Ithaca,” he answered, turning
over the van. “We can get a motel room, leaving early in the morning.”

“Do you think they’ll follow us?” I asked.

“It all depends on how mobile they are,” Jake laughed, his brows wagging. “They looked pretty
damned miserable …” He trailed off and he saw a horde of people running our way. “You’ve got
to be kidding me.” He put the van into reverse, peeling out of the spot and out into the snow-
packed roads.

“Jake!” I gasped, buckling my seatbelt. He finagled his own seatbelt over his head and tore through
the parking lot. There were cars following us, far too close. “Can you handle this?”

“In a van? Probably not,” he answered honestly. “Though, I’d prefer a car with actual control. Say a prayer, Bells. We’re going to need it.” He barreled his way toward the I-390. The van was moving too fast, fishtailing with each turn. The cars behind us had better control, chasing us onto the highway. The entrance ramp was like an ice-rink. I sobbed as Jake made his way across the lanes, pulling into the far-left lane. We’d lost a few of our trailing pack of paparazzi, leaving only a handful of SUVs and trucks. He reached into his pocket, handing me his phone. “Text Masen. Tell him we’re leaving Rochester tonight. My passcode is 0920.” He gripped the steering wheel, sliding across three lanes of traffic, trying to evade the remaining cars. We ended up in the right lane, riding on the shoulder. “Mother fucker!” He looked behind us. “Back off, you assholes!”

I flipped Jake’s phone in my hand, unlocking it. I opened up the text thread to Masen. Briefly, I read what he’d said to Jake and what Jake had said to him. I began tapping out a message to Masen when the van jumped forward. The phone fell from my hands. I reached down for it as there was another forceful bump. My head slammed against the dashboard. “Fuck!”

“The interstate is super slick,” Jake growled, his face dripping with sweat. “They won’t back off and now, they’re rear-ending me because they’re losing control. Are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” I said, rubbing my forehead. I pulled my hand back, seeing blood on my palm. “Your phone is down there. I was trying to reach it.”

“Later,” Jake ordered, trying to move away from the maniacs chasing us. They stayed on our tail, screaming through opened windows and taking photos as we traveled down the highway. I hid my face, terrified we were going to die as we were escaping this nightmare.

We drove down I-390, heading toward I-90. We were nearly to the off ramp when a large Escalade veered in front of us, slamming on his brakes. “LOOK OUT!” I screamed, pointing out the window. Jake did the same, hitting his brakes, but it was too late. We crashed into the Escalade, flipping over the top of it and landing on the embankment, off the shoulder. I don’t know how long we slid, but it sounded like something dying.

When we stopped, I whimpered in anguish. My head was throbbing, along with my legs, hips and chest. “Jake,” I croaked, reaching over to his side of the car, only to feel hot metal. “Jake!” I tried to wriggle out of the seat, but every inch of my body screamed in agony. I tried, fruitlessly, to move, because I was stuck in the car and with each movement, I felt more and more sluggish. With a whimper, I stopped struggling. “Help … please … I don’t want to die …”

And I drifted … to a place where I wasn’t in pain.

A/N: Okay, so I wrote this chapter in like two hours. That’s the fastest I’ve written a chapter in almost three years. Yes, it’s short. Yes, it’s got another cliffhanger (don’t throw sharp objects at me). But, we found out what happened with Bella. Very simply, Jake was driving a POS van with next-to-no traction control, in the snow and ice, with some psychopaths following him. He could have slowed down, but he needed to get Bella out of there.

Think of Princess Diana … how she died …

But, Bella will not die (nor will Jake). Do you all know me? HEA, baby! There’s going to be bumps along the way. Leave me your thoughts. Thanks for reading (and sticking with me!)
Chapter 42

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Okay, so I wrote the previous chapter in like two hours. That’s the fastest I’ve written a chapter in almost three years. Yes, it’s short. Yes, it’s got another cliffhanger (don’t throw sharp objects at me). But, we found out what happened with Bella. Very simply, Jake was driving a POS van with next-to-no traction control, in the snow and ice, with some psychopaths following him. He could have slowed down, but he needed to get Bella out of there.

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Chapter Forty-Two

Masen

With Seth, we drove to Brooklyn. I’d called Charlie and he was coming with me to Rochester. Seth used his police connections to find out where Bella and Jake had been transported after their car accident. Jake was airlifted back to the same hospital where Rosalie had her baby. He was in stable, but critical condition. Bella was also taken there, but in an ambulance. Her injuries were not life-threatening, but still serious.

What worried them the most was the fact that she wouldn’t wake up after she was extracted from the rental van. She was still unconscious. I prayed she was okay. I needed her. She was my other half. She was my soul mate and the woman who would rule by my side. I was nothing without her.

I couldn’t lose her. I refused to lose her.

Arriving in Brooklyn, Seth ran up to get Charlie from Linda’s apartment. They both came down. Charlie was disheveled. His hair was messy and he was a bit confused. “You okay, Charlie?” I asked.

“My daughter is in some hospital in Rochester. I’m far from okay,” Charlie snapped as he got into the car, struggling to buckle in.

“Do you need your medicine?” I asked, feeling the sting of Charlie’s anger. With steady hands, I helped him buckle up and he grumbled under his breath.

“I’m waiting for it to kick in,” he said, giving me a sheepish look. “Sorry for being grumpy. My baby girl was in an accident and there’s nothing I can do about it. And thank you for helping me with the seatbelt.”

“We’ll be in Rochester by morning. I wanted to fly, but with the weather being as crazy as it’s been, Luc couldn’t get clearance to land. It’s still snowing. We’re driving,” I explained. “You can get some more sleep in the car.”
“I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep until I lay eyes on Bella,” Charlie said, his hands shaking and shifting uncomfortably next to me. “Do they know why Jake was in the accident? What happened?”

With a sigh, I handed him my phone. I showed him the various articles from the tabloid sites, online magazines and local news media. Pictures of Bella’s engagement ring were clear as day as she was photographed with Jake as he hugged her, consoled her and protected her. The past few days had wrung my fiancée through the emotional blender. Jake was being a friend – only a friend. In the pictures, there was no obvious affection, only friendship.

An unnamed source said that they’d heard Jake and Bella ‘go at it’ in a broom closet. There were even a few photos of Roger Hale from the back. The article said that when Bella wasn’t with Jake, she was flirting relentlessly with an older man. “It’s all lies,” I sneered.

“Damn right, it’s all lies,” Charlie spat. “How can people print this bullshit?”

“Freedom of the press,” Seth and I answered. We shared a look in the rearview mirror, hating that such filth could be passed on as the truth.

With a heavy sigh, I continued, “However, what was printed was slanderous and we can sue them for defamation of character. I’ve also got a friend of mine who works in the DA’s office who is going to help me get the animals who’d chased them, causing that accident and bring them to justice. He can’t do anything, but he has connections with the judicial system in Rochester. They will be prosecuted to the highest extent of the law, even if I have to try them myself.”

“Is there news about the accident on here?” Charlie asked, handing me back my phone.

“Not officially on the media. There are a few pictures of the aftermath,” Seth replied. “Because of the cause of the crash and the fact that paparazzi were at fault, they wanted to hold off before releasing a statement.”

“Do you know anything, Seth?” Charlie whispered.

“It’s bad. Essentially, ten paps were determined to get the picture,” Seth explained. “They wanted definitive proof that Bella had cheated on Masen. They followed Jake out of the parking garage, causing an unsafe, high-speed chase on dangerously slippery roads. Jake is a great driver, well-trained thanks to his time with the FBI, but with the van he was in, he struggled. One of the paparazzi cut him off and Jake rear ended him, flipping the van and sending it careening down the highway and ending up on the shoulder. Jake’s side had collapsed, pinning him inside. Bella was easier to extract.”

“Both are alive,” Charlie whispered. “Right?”

“As of now? Yes. I don’t know the full rundown, but Jake is the more seriously injured of the two,” Seth said.

“Shouldn’t Leah be coming with us?” I asked.

“She’s coming with our parents. She’s also calling Jake’s dad, Billy, who lives in La Push to see if he can fly out,” Seth said. “They’ll be here later tomorrow afternoon, once all the arrangements have been made.”

“See if he can fly out?” Charlie asked.

“Billy Black has a slight case of agoraphobia and aviophobia,” I answered. “He’s terrified of
crowded places, like the city and airplanes. Billy was a cop, but was injured on the job. He retired and he moved himself out of the city, driving across the damn country to La Push in the Pacific Northwest. Now, he acts as the police chief for the tribal force of the Quileute people. He’s great grandfather had Quileute blood or something. So, he organizes them, providing them with training. He rarely leaves the house, though. Only to go shopping or for tribal meetings. Billy had to be heavily medicated in order for him to attend Jake’s college graduation. Jake loved his dad for coming, but hated that he was so looped up.”

“What’s the probability that Billy will come?” Seth muttered.

“Slim to none, unless Jake is on death’s door,” I sighed. “Jake’s got twin sisters, Rachel and Rebecca. Rachel lives in Forks, works as a nurse at the local hospital. Rebecca washed her hands of her family years ago, for some unknown reason. Neither Jake nor Rachel talk about her.”

The rest of the drive was pretty quiet. Charlie did drift off. His medication made him sleepy. I was checking my phone for updates from James and news from my parents, who were both planning on flying out in support of me and Bella. Mother was a bit standoffish, while my father was worried for me and for Bella. Emmett wanted to come, but he couldn’t get leave from the air force. Plus, he was still not welcome in the states.

We arrived at Strong Memorial Hospital just as dawn was breaking. The drive took longer than anticipated. I gently shook Charlie awake. He was confused, but okay. We walked into the hospital. Charlie asked for Bella and we were led to a private medical suite. Bella was on the gurney, strapped to a bunch of machines. Her beautiful face was covered with cuts and bruises. Her right hand was encased in plaster, but my eyes were drawn to her left leg. It was twice its normal size.

“Mr. Swan?”

Charlie turned, seeing an older man standing just inside the room. “Yes? I’m Charlie and this is my daughter’s fiancée, Masen.”

The doctor nodded, looking at me. “Your Highness,” he murmured. “I’m Dr. Snow.”

“I’m not … not here. I’m her fiancée,” I growled, sitting down and taking Bella’s hand. “Where’s her ring?”

“We had to remove it to run tests on her,” Dr. Snow answered, walking to a plastic bag. He reached in, plucking a smaller bag from inside and handing it to me. “Her ring and pendant are in there.”

I nodded, taking the ring out and sliding it back onto her hand. I kissed her palm, brushing her away from her face. “What happened with her? Will she be okay?”

“I can only discuss this with family,” Dr. Snow said tersely.

“He’s family, Dr. Snow,” Charlie growled. “What’s wrong with my little girl?” He kissed Bella’s forehead, glowering at the doctor. “Tell me, please.”

“She’s in stable condition. She’s got a concussion. She hit her head against the dashboard,” Dr. Snow explained. “On top of that, she has some bruised ribs, a sprained wrist and probably the most serious of her injuries is her leg.” He lifted the blanket, revealing a large brace around her leg. It started at her shin, traveling to mid-thigh. “She has a torn ACL. It will require surgery to repair. We’ll have to wait until the swelling goes down, but it can be done laparoscopically.”

“Why is she asleep?” I whispered.
“She was brought in unconscious. We ran a brain scan and she doesn’t have any injuries. The best thing for her is to rest,” Dr. Snow explained. “We’re closely monitoring her to ensure she doesn’t fall into a coma.”

“How long will she be here?” Charlie asked. “And is her privacy a priority? You saw the accident that was caused …” His hands clenched into tight fists. “Those monsters spread lies about my little girl and this is the damned result.”

“I can assure you, Mr. Swan, that her identity will be kept a secret. I’m sickened about what happened to her,” Dr. Snow muttered. He shook his head, blinking to me and barely containing his snarl. “I promise you that no one will …”

“You better believe it,” I snapped. “If one word about her condition is leaked to the press, you will be slapped with a lawsuit sooner than you can breathe ‘malpractice.’ Same thing goes for the man who was brought in with her.”

“Understood, Your Highness,” Dr. Snow nodded frantically.

“Stop with that. I’m just Masen,” I sighed, kissing Bella’s hand. “I’m her Masen.” I stared at her, trying not to cry. “Come back to me, cherie. I love you.”

“We both love you, sweet pea,” Charlie breathed, kissing her forehead. “We’ll be here for you. Always.”

xx AMDFT xx

I was being shaken. “Masen! Wake up!”

“Later,” I grumbled, waving whomever was trying to wake me up. “No. Sleep.”

“Mase, please?”

I blinked my eyes open, seeing Leah. Her eyes were red-rimmed and her face was drawn. “Leah? Is Jake okay?” I asked, my voice raspy. “When did you get here?”

“A few hours ago. I spent two hours on the phone with Billy,” Leah sighed, blinking to Bella and then to Charlie. “I know you want to be here for her, but can you come with me? I need a friend. So, does Jake.”

I tugged out my phone, checking for any messages from my parents. Shortly, after we arrived in Rochester, Emmett texted me that my parents were en route to the states. I didn’t know when they were arriving, or where they were going to land, but they would be here at some point within the next twenty-four hours. “Just give me a second.”

“Okay,” she said, ducking out of the room.

I walked over to Charlie, who was snoring in the recliner. I hated to wake him, but I did. I spoke to him quietly. He smiled at me and told me to go. I gave him a brief hug before kissing Bella’s forehead. She sighed, snuggling into the pillows. I hated to leave her. My best friend needed me, too. I met up with Leah and we walked up to the ICU. “What did Billy say?” I asked.

“He was torn,” Leah sighed. “He wanted to come, but he …” Leah shook her head. “I love Billy, but he needs therapy. Years and years of therapy.”

“How’s Jake?” I asked.
“He just back from exploratory surgery. He had internal injuries,” Leah replied. “Broken arm, two
broken legs – one is a spiral fracture – a concussion and broken left arm.”

“A spiral fracture?” I breathed.

“His right leg is in some sort of metal contraption, holding his leg together,” Leah breathed. “They
also had to remove one of his kidneys and his spleen.”

“Fuck,” I growled. “Those vultures caused this. They couldn’t leave well-enough alone. They
spread lies about Bella and Jake, putting them into this awful position.” I shook my head. Anger
simmered through me and I wanted to make them pay. I wanted them to feel the pain they caused.

“Masen,” Leah said, tugging on my jacket arm and into an empty room. “I know you’re upset. You
have every right to be. As much as you want to rage, you have to be strong for both Bella and Jake.
They’re going to have a long recovery.” Leah’s eyes filled with tears and she choked out a sob. I
pulled her into my arms. Leah fell apart and I held her as she sobbed for her fiancé. She pulled
back, wiping her cheeks. “I’m sorry. You’re dealing with a lot.”

“So are you. I’m sorry, Leah. I’m a dick,” I growled. “You were impacted by this bullshit, too.”

“I have no doubt that you will bring the reign of terror down on those parasites. I remembered how
much of a badass you were in law school,” Leah snorted, wiping her cheeks. “Come on. Harry and
Sue want to see you.”

We walked up to the ICU. We were buzzed in and ushered to Jake’s cubicle. I barely recognized
my best friend. He was so broken. No part of his skin was not covered in bruises or scrapes. His
chest rose and fall mechanically with the breathing machine. It was so weird to see him so still.
“Oh, Jake,” I breathed.

“He’s a hero, Mase,” Leah murmured. “He’s Bella’s hero. He’s my hero.” She sat down next to
him, threading their fingers together. “They put him in a medically induced coma so his body can
heal.”

“How long?” I asked.

“I don’t know. It’s a wait and see situation,” Leah muttered. “He will wake up, but not until he’s
ready.”

“He’d probably be better if his father was here,” another female voice sneered. “Coward.”

“He’s not a coward, Mom,” Leah growled. “Billy was fucked up when he was shot. You didn’t see
the injuries Billy had to recover from. The man was practically trampled in that crowd. If need be,
Billy would come out here. He’d have to be drugged, but he’d be here. Give him the benefit of the
doubt, Ma.”

Leah’s mother, Sue, scoffed, stepping into the hospital room. “Mrs. Clearwater, Billy Black was
captured in a huge stampede at the Garden, after someone shot off a gun,” I said. “Or what was
perceived as a gun, but was some fireworks. There was no part of his body that wasn’t broken. I’d
have panic attacks if I was put in that position.”

“I have panic attacks in big crowds,” Leah said, “and that didn’t happen to me. Back off, Ma.” She
blinked to me. “I’m sorry, Masen. My mother has a tendency to run off her mouth. I get that from
her.” With a scowl at her mother, she sighed. “Behave. Masen is dealing with his own set of
bullshit.”
“My apologies, Masen,” Sue said, giving me a sad smile. “I’m just pissed.”

“We all are, Mrs. Clearwater,” I agreed. “And there will be hell to pay.” I took a deep breath. “I know that you all are worried about Jake, but can I get a few moments with him? Alone?”

“Of course, Mase,” Leah said, brushing Jake’s hair back from his forehead. “Love you, baby.” She left the cubicle, taking her mother with her.

I sat down next to Jake, looking at him and my heart shattering. “Brother,” I whispered. “I’m so sorry for what happened. I’m sorry that you were caught in the middle of that bullshit …” I closed my eyes, feeling tears build up behind my lids. “You protected her when I couldn’t and now? You’re in here. I don’t know how to fix this. Jake … you’re the best friend I’ve ever had, other than Bella. I hate that you’re hurt. I hate that those animals felt the need to spread their lies and chase you through a god-damned snowstorm to get the perfect shot, proving the ‘affair’ between you and Bella.” I took his hand, staring at his sleeping face. “I will make them pay, Jake. I swear.”

My cell phone vibrated and I took it out. Charlie sent me a text, saying that Bella was coming out of whatever she was in. I leaned down, kissing Jake’s cheek. “I’ll be back, Jake. I promise.” I left the room, hugging Leah and Sue before going back to Bella’s room. Charlie was standing outside, wringing his hands. “Is she okay?”

“The doctor is doing some cognitive tests,” Charlie answered. “She was agitated when she woke up.”

“Understandable,” I muttered, wanting to be in there with her. A few moments later, Dr. Snow came out. “Is she okay?”

“She’s alright, In pain, obviously, but she remembers what happened, her name and everything,” Dr. Snow smiled. “You both can go inside.”

“Thank you, Dr. Snow,” Charlie murmured. We slid into the hospital room. Bella was sitting up, her eyes bleary. “Sweet girl …” Charlie shuffled to her and took her hand. “My sweet, sweet girl.”

“Hi, Daddy,” she whispered, her voice raspy and worn. It sounded like she’d screamed a lot. “I’m sorry …”

“Don’t even think about apologizing. It was not your fault,” Charlie whispered, cupping her cheek. Charlie blinked to me and I sat down on Bella’s other side. She saw me, her eyes filling with tears. “Masen, I didn’t do …”

“I know, cherie,” I breathed. “You need to calm down.” I sat down on the bed, sliding my arm around her shoulders. She gripped my shirt, sobbing and moving closer to me. “Bella … please … I’m sorry. I’m so sorry that you were put in this position. I’m going to do everything in my power to make it better.”

“Just hold me, Masen,” she sniffled. “Love me. That’s all I need.”

“I’ll do that forever, Bella,” I vowed, kissing her forehead. “I love you.” She didn’t respond. I looked down, seeing she was already back asleep, her face relaxed. “Always.”

A/N: We found out about what happened with Bella and Jake, along with information about Jake’s dad. The good news is that both Bella and Jake will be okay, physically. Up next, Esme and Carlisle arrive with the cavalry. Leave me your thoughts. Thanks for reading!
Chapter 43

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Up next, Esme and Carlisle arrive with the cavalry. There will be some impending drama and confusion.

Chapter Forty-Three

Bella

“Hey, chérie, deep breaths,” came the velvety, accented voice of Masen. His hands brushed over my face and I whimpered in pain. “Sorry, love.” He came into view, fuzzy and out of focus, but I could tell that his evergreen eyes swirling with worry. “You’re safe.”

“I’m safe,” I choked out, hissing as every inch of my body was wracked in pain. “I hurt, too. A lot.” I looked at Masen, who had been by my side since I woke up this morning. We’d only spoken briefly before I slipped under, my body exhausted from the accident. However, I was assaulted with nightmares of the accident and that’s what woke me up. Masen had gently roused me just before the van flipped over the SUV. As I focused more on him, Masen had dark circles under his eyes and was sporting some pretty substantial stubble. He looked dangerous and so very concerned. “When was the last time you slept, Masen?”

“I slept, a little,” he chuckled, pressing the call button on my bed. “I’m trying to stay up until my parents arrive.”

“Your parents are coming?” I squeaked, trying to sit up but my body refused to cooperate. I moaned and he gently pushed me back onto the bed, brushing my hair back as tears slipped from my eyes. “Masen, they don’t have to. In fact, they …”

“They’re coming and landing at Teterboro as we speak. Seth is picking them up and driving them here,” Masen explained, threading our fingers together. A nurse came inside, a warm smile gracing her face. “Maggie, Miss Swan said she’s feeling pain. She tried to move around and …”

“It’s been a few hours since your last pain booster,” the nurse, Maggie, said. “What’s hurting, Miss Swan?”

“Head, wrist, face, torso, leg. Pretty much my entire body,” I deadpanned. “What doesn’t hurt is the question?”

“I have a standing order of morphine,” Maggie answered. “I’ll be right back.” She ducked out of the room and returned a few moments later with a syringe. I grimaced. I hated needles. “It’ll go into your IV, Miss Swan. It will also make you sleepy.”

I frowned, remembering the nightmare I’d had that Masen had to wake me from. “I don’t want to sleep,” I whispered, tears welling in my eyes.

“Bella, you need to rest, my love,” Masen chided gently, threading our fingers together. “And the way you can rest is if you’re not in pain. Please?” I bit my lip, but nodded. He kissed my forehead as Maggie injected the medication into my IV. I felt some warmth in my arm, spreading through
my body. “Better?”

“I’d feel better when I know how Jake is,” I asked, leaning my cheek against his shoulder. “Thank you, Maggie.”

“I’ll check on you in a little bit,” Maggie said, ducking out of the room and closing the door.

“I hope that my dad is getting some rest,” I whispered. “He looked miserable when he was here.”

“Leah, Sue and Harry are settled in a secured hotel. Seth worked with the local police department for extra protection, in light of what happened,” Masen explained. “Also, all of the assholes who chased you and Jake are in custody, with the exception of the guys who were injured in the accident. They are in a locked ward here at the hospital with injuries varying from mild concussions to a broken nose.”

“And Jake?”

“He’s in serious condition, but stable,” Masen explained. “He’ll be okay. He’s got a bit of recovery ahead of him.”

“So, do I,” I mumbled, feeling the painkillers pump through my body. “My knee …”

“You’re going to have surgery to get that repaired,” Masen murmured, hugging me closely. “Now, just rest, love.”

My brain couldn’t fight it anymore and I slipped back into slumber. When I woke up again, Masen was snoring quietly in the recliner. Maggie was checking readouts on my monitors. “How long have I been out?” I asked, my voice raspy.

“A few hours,” Maggie answered. “I’m on my way out. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

“I’m a little hungry,” I whispered. “And my throat hurts.” Maggie bustled to the bedside table, pouring me a glass of water. She slipped in a straw, pushing the table over my legs. I sipped it, giving her a half-smile. “Thank you.”

“What do you want for dinner?” Maggie asked.

“Nothing too heavy. My stomach is unsettled,” I sighed. “But, I’m hungry.”

“Your stomach is probably unsettled from the morphine,” Maggie explained. “I’ll get you some soup, some Jello and perhaps some toast. Tea or coffee?”

“Tea, please,” I answered. “And can you get him something, too?”

“Done,” Maggie grinned. “He hasn’t eaten all day. He’s been hovering over you. He’s quite devoted. And so handsome. You’re a lucky girl.”

I frowned, shifting in the bed. “Too lucky, it would seem.”

“Look, I’m not a fool. I know who he is and who you are. What happened to you and your friend was complete and utter bullshit,” Maggie spat. “The hospital is … well, they’re performing an internal investigation about who took those photos and leaked them to the press. There’s also a statement that was released by his parents.”

“What?” I asked. “Why didn’t he tell me?”
“Because he just found out when the evening addition of the New York Times came out, along with an online statement, too,” Maggie explained. “They’re not happy with what happened, mentioning how vapid the paparazzi were and uncaring of your safety. Princess Diana was brought up numerous times and how the tabloid media was the worst kind of attack on anybody.”

“Can I see it?” I whispered. Maggie handed me a paper, but my vision was so unfocused from my concussion. It made my head hurt even more. “Damn it.”

“Do you want me to read it to you?” Maggie asked.

“No, no …” I said, shaking my head, and grimacing as it throbbed painfully. “Probably, I’ll hear it directly from the source.”

“I told my mother that she has to wait until you’re feeling better,” Masen said groggily. “Preferably, after you’ve had your knee surgery.” He rubbed his eyes, sitting up and giving me a look.

“I’ll leave you be,” Maggie smiled. “I’ll be here tomorrow. Your night nurse is Freddie. She’ll be here in a few moments.” Maggie left, closing the door.

“Where’s my dad?” I asked, looking at Masen. He looked a little better, but still exhausted.

“He’s resting. The long drive took a lot out of him. Alec, the man who acted as his valet, is with my parents and is taking over his care,” Masen answered. “He’ll be here in the morning.”

“You should get some rest, Masen,” I chided. “Go back to the hotel and sleep in a proper bed.”

“I’m not leaving you,” Masen growled. “I wasn’t there to protect you. Now? Not so much. I’m staying with you until you’re discharged, cherie.”

“Masen, you’re going to have to leave at some point,” I snickered. “You have to shower and sleep in a bed. That recliner cannot be all that comfortable.”

“Means nothing,” Masen sighed. “Bella, you are the most important thing to me. I feel so awful that … that because of me you’re in here. I love you and …”

“I love you, too,” I whispered. “And this is not your fault.” He picked up my hand, kissing my knuckles and staring at me like I was the most beautiful creature. I felt far from gorgeous. To be honest, I felt grimy and gross. “Could you do me a favor?”

“Anything, cherie,” Masen said, cupping my cheek.

“I need a toothbrush and toothpaste. I feel nasty,” I snorted.

“That can be arranged,” Masen chuckled. “You can’t exactly get up, but I’ll get what you need.” He pressed a soft kiss to my forehead and brushed his lips over mine. He got up and left the room. I relaxed, sinking into the bed. I could tell from his expression and his obsessive hovering, he was blaming himself for what happened to me and Jake. Blinking down to my ring, I frowned.

If you love him, let him go …

I didn’t want to let him go. He was my best friend, my lover and my everything. I closed my eyes, tears streaming down my cheeks. I was so confused. On top of being in so much pain, I wanted nothing more than to go off into the sunset with Masen. The reality of it is that I don’t if it was possible. Could I get over this? Could we?
I spent two days in the hospital before I was seen by an orthopedic surgeon. My dad came the following day, spending the afternoon with me while Masen was practically pushed out of the room to go to the hotel to shower, shave and sleep. Masen, along with Queen Esme, the commissioner of the Rochester police and the governor of New York, were giving a press conference regarding what had happened almost three days ago.

“So, Miss Swan, with the MRI and X-ray, we can correct the damage done to your knee laparoscopically. The recovery time is about six months, but would be longer if we did an open procedure,” Dr. Gerandy, the orthopedist, explained. “We can go in next week to repair the damage and you’ll be good to go.”

“Why not now?” Dad asked.

“We’d like the swelling to go down before we go in there,” Dr. Gerandy smiled. He was an older gentleman, with kind blue eyes and black hair, littered with gray and thinning on the top. “I also want to run another MRI before going in.”

“But, I’ll have a full recovery?” I questioned.

“With proper physical therapy and time, yes,” Dr. Gerandy answered. “Now, how is your wrist? Your ribs?”

“Everything hurts and I would love to take a shower,” I answered. “I feel gross.”

“I think we can remove the Foley catheter tomorrow and one of the nurses can help with that,” Dr. Gerandy nodded. “We’re also going to keep you in here until your surgery. We’ll move you off this floor and into our VIP wing. You’ll have some more privacy.”

“Let me guess that this is response to what happened to me?” I snapped. “Some asshole from your hospital felt it necessary to spread lies about me and my friend.”

“Bells,” Dad chided.

“What? It’s the truth!” I growled.

“I know what happened, Miss Swan, and I’m so sorry,” Dr. Gerandy breathed.

“Your apologies are empty until you find the person behind those leaks,” I hissed, crossing my good arm over my body. “I’m in this hospital bed, as is a friend of mine. Speaking of which, how is Jake? I can’t exactly go see him since I’m tethered to this bed.”

“I’m not at liberty to discuss his case with you, nor am I on his team,” Dr. Gerandy explained, his face flushing. He picked up his tablet, smoothing his white coat. “I’ll check on you tomorrow. Maggie will be here in a few moments with a pain booster.”

“What was that?” I asked as the door closed.

“HIPAA, I’d guess or he signed something. An NDA?” Dad shrugged. “My guess is that with all that happened, the queen and Masen probably met up with attorneys to …”

“Do you know anything about Jake?” I whispered. “Daddy?”

“He’s doing well. Still under sedation,” Dad answered reassuringly. “Jake will make a full
recovery, Bells. I know you want to see him, but be patient.”

“I’ll try,” I grumbled, pinching my nose.

xx AMDFT xx

I was moved to a cushy, private room the following day. The days bled together as I was healing. Either Masen or my father were by my side as I slept, getting better. With each day that past, I was on less and less medications. My aching body felt better and I felt more clear-headed. The medications that they’d given me made me loopy and tired.

After a week in the hospital, my knee surgery was scheduled. The swelling had gone down. The damage was not as substantial as originally believed. My ACL was torn, but it wasn’t completely transected. The morning of my surgery, Masen was by my side. He was holding my hand. On a necklace around his neck, he wore my engagement ring. I wanted it on him. I was twisting the blanket over my legs. I was nervous. I’d never had surgery before.


“Have you ever had surgery?” I asked. “I’m freaking the fuck out.”

“I had my appendix removed when I was fifteen,” Masen chuckled. “I was as sick as a dog and completely unaware what was going on. I woke up with the worst stomach pain. Ever. Then, I was whisked to the hospital. When I woke up the next day, the stomach pain was gone and I had four new scars on my belly. I’m not the best person to ask, Bella. Regardless, you’re going to be okay. You’ve got the best knee surgeon in the state. Dr. Ramón has worked on professional athletes.”

“What about Dr. Gerandy?”

“After reviewing his credentials, Charlie and I felt that Dr. Ramón was a better fit,” Masen murmured, his thumb rubbing over my knuckles.

A shorter man with shoulder-length black hair breezed in. He had an easy smile and a full sleeve of tattoos on both arms. “I heard my ears ringing,” he said, his voice deep and resonant. He blinked to me, holding out his hand. “I’m Dr. Barry Ramón. You must be the lovely Isabella Swan.”

I shook it with my left hand, giving him shy grin. “Nice to meet you, Dr. Ramón. Um, what can I expect from this surgery?”

“The surgery itself is about two hours long,” Dr. Ramón said. “Technically, you can be discharged today, but with your other injuries, we’d like to keep you for another day. If all goes well, you will be released to go home at some point tomorrow.”

“How will I get around? With my wrist, I can’t really use crutches,” I frowned.

“Your wrist isn’t broken. It’s just a sprain,” Dr. Ramón answered. “And you’re in good shape. That’s why I want you to stay overnight. With some help with a physical therapist, you can put some weight on your knee.” He moved the blankets off my leg. “Now, it’s time for an autograph.” He chuckled, pulling out a purple marker and put his initials on my injured knee. “Just to make sure that we fix the right leg.” He squeezed my shoulder. “It’s going to be alright, Miss Bella.”

“I hope so,” I muttered, letting out a shaky breath. “Thank you.”

“It’s time to go,” Dr. Ramón said. “We’ll give you a few moments to canoodle and then we’ll roll you back.”
“Canoodle?” Masen snickered. The doctor smirked, sauntering out of the cubicle where I’d been staying. “I’ve never heard that word. I’ve been speaking English almost as long as I’ve been speaking French and German.”

“It’s another way to say snuggle,” I giggled. He beamed, sliding his arms around my body and holding me close. His subtle cologne made me feel safe, comforted. However, in the back of my mind, I was freaking out. “I’m scared, Masen.”

“Don’t be, love,” he said reassuringly. “Dr. Ramón is the best.”

“The worst thing I’ve ever had done to me was getting my wisdom teeth out when I was a junior in college,” I whispered. “That’s not a major surgery on one of your extremities.”

“Cherie, you will be okay. I promise you,” he murmured, brushing his lips over mine. There was a quiet cough. He pulled back, smiling at whomever interrupted us. “It’s time, Bella. I’ll be right by your side when you wake up.”

“Okay,” I said, squeezing his fingers.

“I love you, Bella,” he breathed, kissing me once more.

“I love you, too,” I murmured. He stepped back and the nurses rolled me back to the surgical suite. With some assistance, I was transferred to the surgical gurney.

“Alright, Miss Swan, I need you to count down from one hundred,” said the nurse. She put the mask over my face, muffling my voice as I started counting.

“One hundred, ninety-nine, ninety-eight, ninety-seven, ninety-six …” I slurred before drifting off.

xx AMDFT xx

“Mother, I can’t believe you’re saying this,” I heard. The words were disjointed and I could barely comprehend. It sounded like a dream, but I knew I was coming out of the anesthesia.

“Edward, you know I love Bella like a daughter. I’m just curious how she could handle being thrust into the public eye on a more permanent basis,” Esme said. “I think that you should walk away.”

“No, Mother. I refuse to do that. I’m the reason why she’s in here,” he snapped. “Those assholes followed her in a snowstorm and caused an avoidable accident.”

“It’s not your fault, Edward,” Esme said, trying to placate him.

“It’s not hers, either. Regardless of fault, I just don’t think that she’ll be able to handle the scrutiny of the press,” Esme murmured. “She’s not strong enough.”

“And you’re a cold-hearted bitch,” Masen growled. “Mother, your words helped with the press, but now, they are hurtful and undeniably true. I love you, Mother, but I love her more. She’s everything to me. You approved of this marriage. I’m going through with it, regardless of your blessing or not. She’s strong, beautiful, graceful and loving. Despite the situation, Bella never wavered. The only thing that wavered was your belief in her.”

Their voices faded away. I was only left with a shattered heart. Esme didn’t believe in me. Masen was trying to fight for me, but it sounded like he was losing that battle. I truly wasn’t good enough for Masen.
“Miss Swan?” I blinked my eyes open. Freddie was standing next to me. “Are you in pain?”

“Yes,” I choked out; my voice raspy. Tears were welling my eyes. “Can you find my dad? Charlie Swan? I really need him, please.”

“What about your fiancé?” Freddie asked. “He was …”

“No, my dad,” I said, cutting her off. “I want my dad.”

“Okay, sweetie,” Freddie replied, squeezing my hand. “He’s in the waiting room. It’ll be okay.”

“No, it won’t,” I whispered after she left. “It never will be. Not after what I heard.”

A/N: Sorry, another cliffie … please, stick with me! Much love to all of you! Up next is Masen and more conversations with the Queen Mother. She’s on my shit list, just saying … Leave me some thoughts.

FYI - *A Modern Day Fairy Tale* will be going on a one-week hiatus. Next week is the tech week/performance week for my production of *The Addams Family*. Updates will resume on April 15th (teaser) with an update on April 19th. Thank you for your patience and support.
Chapter 44

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next is Masen and more conversations with the Queen Mother. She’s on my shit list, just saying … We’re going back to Carlisle and Esme’s arrival, a conversation with his family, a press conference and up to Bella’s knee surgery.

Chapter Forty-Four

Masen

I was sitting next to Bella. She was sleeping uncomfortably. I was waiting for my parents to arrive. Seth had called me when he’d picked up my parents at the airport. With another security detail from diplomatic security, they were driving to Rochester.

“Your Highness?”

I looked up and saw a woman, wearing a black pant suit and a concerned smile. “May I help you?” I asked.

“I’m the mayor of Rochester, Mayor Warren,” she said, bowing uncomfortably. “On behalf of the city and state of New York, I’m so sorry for what happened to your fiancée and head of security.”

“Thank you for your apologies. However, it does little to assuage my fears and concerns about the cause,” I snapped. “I appreciate the visit, Mayor Warren, but I’m not at liberty to discuss this until I’ve spoken to my attorney and my family.”

“Understandable,” she murmured. “I just wanted to let you know that we are handling an investigation into what happened. All of the reporters involved have been sanctioned and have been fired from the publications. Additionally, criminal charges are being brought forth against the monsters who caused the accident. All medical expenses are being covered by the city.”

I pursed my lips, nodded curtly. “For both Jacob and Isabella? Plus, any other expenses due to the cost of the accident?” I asked.

“Of course,” Mayor Warren nodded. “We’ve also posted extra security around the hospital and increased police patrols around the hospital and at the hotel where they are staying. Again, my apologies and we’ll do everything to right this wrong.”

I gave her a terse smile, turning back to Bella and effectively dismissing the mayor. She left and I stayed until my cell phone rang in my pocket. Charlie shuffled into the room, sipping some soda and settling into the recliner. “Dinner okay?” I asked.

“It’s hospital food,” Charlie snickered. “She still asleep?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Look, I need to step out. My parents are here.” I held up my phone, showing a text from Seth. Charlie nodded and I kissed Bella’s forehead. “You have my number, right?”

“I do,” Charlie replied. “I’ll sit with her. Leah and Seth also said they’d take turns, too. Just in case
I get too tired. Good luck with your family.”

“I’m going to need it,” I snorted. With another wistful look to Bella, I left her room. In the waiting room, I was greeted by one of Jake’s colleagues from the FBI, a tall man, Sam. We shook hands and he led me to the back entrance of the hospital. We weren’t taking any chances with paparazzi, even though they’d been forced off the hospital grounds. “Sam, do you know any more as to what happened?”

“We have the security tapes and we’re looking into it. I’m heading up the investigation, working with the Rochester police department. We’ve got everyone who worked on the floor where Bella and Jake were staying, helping Rosalie Hale … Could she be involved? Could she have sold the story? She’s …”

“Not a person of interest. She was admitted to the hospital to give birth to a baby girl,” I answered. “She was raped, quite brutally, and a baby was conceived that night. Bella and Rose became friends. Rose is also very important to my brother. She’d never do this. She’s barely able to function, let alone be a mastermind behind this situation.”

“My apologies, Your Highness. I have no doubt in what you told me, but I’m still looking into her,” Sam said with a brusque nod. I sighed. Nothing would change his mind until he crossed Rose’s name off the list of suspects.

The rest of our drive was filled with a tense silence. We arrived at the hotel, pulling up to a rear entrance. Alec was waiting there with Felix and my mother’s secretary, Elizabeth. The three of them bowed as I got out of the car. I followed Felix, walking through the bowels of the hotel and to the elevators, riding up to the presidential suite. “Your Highness, your father is resting, but Her Majesty is up and anxious to speak to you,” Felix said quietly in French.

“It appears that the cavalry has arrived,” I replied, in kind. “Why are we speaking in French?”

“Too many ears,” Alec growled. “We know that the police and FBI are running an investigation, but we’re also covering our bases.”

“Her Majesty told us not to share that information,” Elizabeth snapped. “Prince Edward …”

“Is standing right here, Elizabeth,” I snapped back. “I know my mother has her reasons for doing things, but I’m grateful that Alec told me the truth. I’ll hear the rest of it when I see her.” The elevator doors open and Felix used his key to open up the suite. Elizabeth followed me inside while Alec and Felix stepped into another suite across the hall.

My mother was sitting in the living room, reading reports that were scattered on the cocktail table. Her reading glasses were perched on her nose. She blinked up, pulling them off and pursing her lips. “You look like you’ve been dragged through the gutter, Edward,” she chided.

“I’ve been up for nearly forty-eight hours, Mother,” I said. “The woman I love was in a horrific car accident. I’m more concerned about her than how I look.” I sat down across from her, picking up a packet of papers. “What is this?”

“Preliminary reports of the accident, along with names of the websites and news organizations that were involved in the story of Isabella and Jacob,” she answered. “We’re also trying to work with the hospital to see if someone who was working there took the photos of Isabella and Jacob while they were unaware.”

My mother was pissed. She was using full names. She was in Queen Mode, trying to handle all of
the problems on her own. “What’s the plan? Are you coming to visit Bella? Jake?”

“We need to nip this media thing in the bud,” she retorted, arching a brow. “With the mayor’s approval and in conjunction with the police, we’re putting on a press conference. I also think the governor will be there and one of the senators. Essentially, we’re calling out the animals who caused this avoidable situation. I’m doing all of the talking. You will stand there and look like the bereaved fiancé.”

“She’s not dead, Mother,” I said. “Don’t you think I should be the one to speak? Leah? We are the people who have been affected most by this tragedy.”

“Because I don’t trust you to speak without emotion. Edward, this needs to be handled delicately,” Mother said.

“Delicately? Those animals tried to kill her while getting a picture. A picture! They were so hell-bent on proving that Bella was cheating on me with my best friend. You know it isn’t true. I definitely know that they would never betray me like that, but because of some shaky, fuzzy photos the press was ready to vilify her,” I yelled. “Instead, they caused the accident. They don’t need delicate. They need a swift kick in the ass.”

“Delicately is the wrong word,” she said, wrinkling her nose. “I think we need to handle this diplomatically. I don’t want you to be sent home in disgrace like your brother.” I bit my tongue, not wanting to blurt something out that would cause a rift between my mother and me. “I can see you stewing. Your nostrils are flaring and your ears are red. Take a shower, get some sleep and we’ll have our press conference tomorrow morning at eleven in the atrium of the hospital.”

“I can’t believe you’re being so cold about this,” I said, standing up and brushing my hands on my jeans. “What happened was awful and sometimes, diplomacy needs to be thrown out the fucking window. This is one of those times. Now, I’m going to call the hospital and check on Bella and Jake.” Before she could respond, I turned on my heel and walked to a room where the door was open. I closed it sharply, sliding down the unforgiving wood and feeling tears glide down my cheeks.

What a clusterfuck.

xx AMDFT xx

After a brief phone call to the hospital, talking to both Bella and Charlie, I showered and crawled into the king-sized bed in my suite. I must have crashed as soon as my head hit the pillow. I slept hard until my alarm went off on my phone. When I woke up, my father was in my room. He was reading a newspaper. “Are you going to browbeat me, too?” I asked.

“No. I think your mother is being far too harsh on you and too diplomatic on the press,” he said, closing the paper. “We had quite the argument, but you know how your mother gets.” He looked at me, his brows furrowed. “How’s Bella?”

“She’s banged up. Her injuries are not serious, thankfully. She will have a bit of a recovery,” I answered. “And I will be by her side every step of the way.”

“And Jacob?”

“His injuries are more severe. He had internal bleeding and had to have exploratory surgery to contain it,” I muttered. “I’m terrified that his time with the Bureau will be cut short because of his injuries.”
“Jacob’s strong, Masen,” he said, squeezing my hand. “As is your Bella.”

“From Mom’s frosty demeanor last night, she doesn’t agree with that assessment,” I sneered. “Now, I’m going to shower and try to choke down some food. I want to see Bella before this press conference.”

“There’s a suit and tie for you to wear for the event. I had to talk your mother out of you wearing your royal crest,” he sighed. “I’ll get you some breakfast. We’ll head out in an hour.”

I showered again, shaving my scruffy face and donning the Armani suit hanging in the closet. I tied the tie and put on some cologne. I checked in with Leah, curious as to how Jake was doing. She said he was still sedated, but showing signs of improvement. After getting off the phone with Leah, I called Charlie. Bella was getting some tests done on her knee to see if the swelling had gone down. I told him about the press conference. He was leery about it. I explained that it needed to happen. The tabloid media needed to be held accountable for what they did.

After a tense breakfast, we drove to the hospital. Charlie had texted me, explaining that Bella’s tests were taking longer and wouldn’t be back until after noon. I would have to wait to see my fiancée. Damn it. In the atrium of the hospital, there was a podium with a slew of microphones and a bevy of reporters, varying from local news stations to the international press. Leah was there with Seth, Harry and Sue. I hugged them, happy to see them support us during the press conference.

My mother walked with a purpose, moving regally. Promptly at eleven, she stepped up to the podium and began her speech. She publicly chastised the American tabloid media. Their infatuation with fabricating the truth and spreading lies were cruel, resulting in an avoidable but tragic accident. She explained that Bella was special to the Gevalian royal family, as was Jacob. The actions of the photographers and ‘reporters’ were abhorrent and disgusting.

She prattled on for a few more moments while I stood stoically. As far as the press knew, we had not announced our engagement. My relationship with Bella as my girlfriend was well-documented. I wanted nothing more than to berate the animals who’d caused this situation, but my mother was using diplomacy. With that diplomacy, all of Bella and Jacob’s medical expenses were covered, along with a hefty settlement. My mother explained that this was a way for the tabloid media to atone for their sins.

She stepped of the raised platform as the press clamored to ask questions. Many were directed at me and Leah, but we didn’t respond. We couldn’t answer the questions because we didn’t want to feed the beast. We were ushered off the platform as the governor began explaining that there was legislation being drafted regarding the paparazzi. I didn’t pay attention as I moved through the crowd and up to Bella’s private room.

A week passed and Bella’s surgery for her knee had been scheduled. After she was rolled back into surgery, I went into the waiting room. Charlie was there, talking to my father. My mother was still trying to do damage control with the whole situation with the press. Alec and Felix were working with the authorities to find out who’d leaked those photos. They had a few leads, but nothing concrete.

The two and half hours of Bella’s surgery ticked along slowly. Charlie was checking the clock or his watch every thirty seconds. I had a book sitting in my lap, but I read the same sentence over and over again, not penetrating into my brain. Freddie, one of the usual nurses that attended to Bella, came out and she led me and Charlie back to her room. Bella was no longer sedated, but still asleep.

“Edward,” came the sharp voice of my mother.
“Fuck,” I grumbled. Charlie chuckled, ducking into the bathroom. My mother walked briskly toward me and arched a brow once she caught up with me. “Yes, Mother?”

“I haven’t been in to see Isabella,” she said, her voice prim and her lips pursed. She was still in Queen Mode.

“She’s just going to be sleeping, Mother,” I said. “You’re not going to see much.”

“I know that,” she replied, waving her hand. “I just …” She trailed off as we made our way into the hospital room. The lights were dimmed and Bella’s leg was elevated underneath the white blankets. “Oh my …”

“What?”

“She looks so fragile,” my mother breathed. “Can she handle this? Your life? She’s going to be under media scrutiny if you get married.”

“What?” I asked, trying to keep my voice down. Bella shifted under the covers, her brows furrowing. “If I get married?”

“Now, don’t get all in a conniption,” she sighed, running her hands along my shoulders. I stepped back, my anger growing with each passing moment. With a pointed look, she gestured to Bella’s room and spoke in hushed tones. “It’s just that since you’ve been with her, she’s been inundated with press, both good and bad. Most of it has been good, thankfully. However, this scandal with Jacob is … it’s, unfortunately, believable. I know that you believe she’s innocent, and so is Jacob, but to the world, you look like you were played. Your fiancée with your best friend? I saw the photos. I’m looking at the larger picture, Edward.”

“They were innocent hugs and comforting moments. Bella was here, in this hospital, helping a friend deliver a baby who was conceived after a rape,” I hissed. “There’s nothing remotely romantic about that situation. Don’t you get that?”

“I just need you to think about you and this situation in regard to our status as royalty,” she said, clutching her purse. Her lips were mashed into a thin line, clearly growing impatient with my attitude.

“Mother, I can’t believe you’re saying this,” I spat.

“Edward, you know I love Bella like a daughter. I’m just curious how she could handle being thrust into the public eye on a more permanent basis,” she said. “I think that you should walk away.” She blinked up at me and her green eyes were hard. Her mind was made up.

I couldn’t do that. I refused to walk away from my fiancée. I’d sooner abdicate the throne then give her up. She was my one, my everything. Ruling Gevalia without Bella would be absolute hell. My mother would be adamant on an arranged marriage.


“No, Mother. I refuse to do that. I’m the reason why she’s in here,” I growled, narrowing my eyes at her. “Those assholes followed her in a snowstorm and caused an avoidable accident.”

“It’s not your fault, Edward,” my mother said, trying to placate me. “It’s not hers, either. Regardless of fault, I just don’t think that she’ll be able to handle the scrutiny of the press,” she murmured. “She’s not strong enough.”
“And you’re a cold-hearted bitch,” I snarled. “Mother, your words helped with the press, but now they are hurtful and undeniably true. I love you, Mother, but I love her more. She’s everything to me. You approved of this marriage. I’m going through with it, regardless of your blessing or not. She’s strong, beautiful, graceful and loving. Despite the situation, Bella never wavered. The only thing that wavered was your belief in her.”

My mother pursed her lips. “I don’t think that she’s good enough for you. Not after this. I love you, but I need to think of Gevalia and not of your heart,” she said, turning on her heel. “I’ll see you back at the hotel.”

“No, Mother. I’m not going back there,” I said, following her out of the room. “After what you’ve said? Do you really think I could forgive you?”

“It’s not about forgiveness. It’s about duty, Edward,” she replied. “I raised you to have honor and to abide by your duty.” She didn’t even look back as she walked toward the waiting room. My heart was stammering and I turned, punching my fist into a wall once she was out of sight.

“God damn it!” I wailed, clutching my hand. I felt bones crunch when I made contact with the wall. There was also a fist-sized hole in the wall, as well.

“Your Highness,” breathed Maggie, another one of Bella’s nurses. “Are you okay?”

“No, I’m not,” I hissed. Everything is falling apart. My mother has turned into a monster and is forcing me to choose between the woman I love and my home.

“I know you want to be by Miss Bella, but your hand is already swelling,” she murmured.

“I’ll pay for the damages,” I muttered.

“It’ll be fine,” she chided, guiding me away from Bella’s room. “Let’s get you an x-ray. You may have broken your hand.”

Without a word, but silently stewing, I went to the radiology suite. As my hand was x-rayed and I was diagnosed with a fracture of two of my knuckles. Thankfully, I was given a brace and not a cast. Unfortunately, by the time I was done with the doctor, it was well past visiting hours. Even Freddie wouldn’t let me back to see Bella. I was forced to leave the hospital. Felix drove me back to the hotel. I asked him if I could stay in his suite with him and Alec. I was too upset to even fathom going into the presidential suite where my mother was staying. Felix gave up his bed, while he slept on the pull-out couch.

I felt guilty and was more than willing to sleep on the couch, but was grateful for the bed. I set my alarm on my cell phone before I crashed, exhausted from the mild pain killer that I was given by the doctor and from being emotionally spent due to the happenings of the day.

When I woke up the next day, I was a little woozy and I had a headache from the pain medication. I took something over the counter and I dressed in a pair of jeans and a heavy sweater. Alec drove me to the hospital, stopping a floral shop on the way. I was eager to see Bella. I felt awful not being there when she woke up, but my mother had other plans.

Damn her and damn her duty …

I also felt guilty about not visiting Jake as much as I should. I’d hung out with him occasionally, but he was adamant I spend time with my fiancée. Perhaps this afternoon, I could spend time with him.
Arriving on the ward, I walked down the hall to the room where Bella was staying. I smiled as I opened the door, but it fell quickly. The bed was neatly made and it was emptied of all the flowers and cards from well-wishers. Charlie was sitting on the recliner, shakily folding clothing. “Charlie? Where’s Bella? Is she having more tests?”

He blinked up to me, his brown eyes swirling with sadness and disappointment. “She’s been discharged.”

“Why didn’t … I wanted to be here,” I whispered. “What’s going on, Charlie?”

“She heard the conversation between you and your mother, Masen,” Charlie sighed, running his hands through his graying hair. “It shattered her. Broke her heart.” He looked at me and his lip was curled up angrily. “Your mother fucked things up. My baby girl felt like she wasn’t worth anything and so upset. I have never seen her so broken.”

“Charlie, I love her,” I cried.

“I know you do, but she can’t … she needs time. Bella lost her mother at a young age and she felt a kinship with yours. To hear that she wasn’t strong enough from her, she’s done. She’s lost two mothers at this point and she needs to grieve,” Charlie said, reaching into his pocket and holding out something. I saw a sparkle and I choked out a sob, seeing Bella’s engagement ring held between his shaking fingers.

“Can’t lose her. Please, tell me … where is she? Is she in Brooklyn?” I asked.

“She’s gone, Masen,” Charlie sighed, putting the ring onto the bed. “Once she was discharged, she left.”

“Do you know where she is? I have to find her. I’m not walking away from her. If I have to abdicate the throne to be with her, I will. She’s everything to me,” I said, kneeling at his feet. “Please, Charlie?”

“Time, Masen. Please, give her time,” he whispered, cupping my cheek. “I know you love her. She loves you, too. It’s just all too much. There’s only so much that one person can take before breaking. Bella is far beyond that.” He stood up, picking up the overnight bag and shuffling out of the room. I sat there, on the linoleum floor, trying to pull myself together, but my heart left when Bella did.

Picking up the engagement ring, I stood up and walked out of the room. My mother was standing just outside, wringing her hands and her green eyes shimmering with tears. “Are you happy, Mother?” I sneered. “You got what you wanted. To be honest, I’m done. I’m done with duty, with your bullshit and with you.”

“Masen,” she whispered. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to …”

“You’re sorry? That’s pathetic, Mother. You’re worse than the tabloid media that you publicly chastised. You want to know why? Because Bella loved you. She respected you and you championed for her,” I said coldly, looking down my nose at her. “Now, I have to try and save my relationship that you conveniently fucked up. Don’t call me. Don’t talk to me. I’ll be diplomatic, but as far as I’m concerned, I’m done with you.” I pushed past her, ignoring her cries out to me.

I had a fiancée to find.

A/N: Things are a mess. Yes, Bella is upset and rightfully so. Are they done? You’ll just have
to read and find out. But, those of you who know me … you already know the answer … RL has too much tragedy. *HEA* … that’s all I’m saying. We’re going back to Bella after this, seeing into her mind and how she’s dealing with the aftermath of the accident and Esme’s cold words.

Please, don’t hate me. Hugs!
Chapter 45

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

We’re going back to Bella after this, seeing into her mind and how she’s dealing with the aftermath of the accident and Esme’s cold words.

Chapter Forty-Five

Bella

“How’s the fish, Bella?” asked Billy, Jake’s father.

“It’s good, but I’m still not really hungry,” I said, pushing the plate away. “I’m …”

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” he said, giving me an understanding smile. “You just need to eat something before you take your pain pill.”

I sighed, pulling the plate back and forcing a few bites down my throat. I didn’t really taste anything. Everything seemed like ash and dull since I left Rochester. Jake, who had been in the ICU, practically demanded to come and visit me after my surgery. He saw me and I told him what Esme had said, her words that rolled around in my head, shattering my already fragile confidence. Despite his injuries, Jake comforted me, along with my father. We also made arrangements for me to leave New York.

Being there was too much. Toxic, really.

I was laying on my back, tears streaming down my cheeks. My father had stepped out to make a few phone calls and arrangements for our return to Brooklyn. The problem was that we had a second story walk up. I couldn’t walk up the stairs. Linda’s apartment wasn’t much better.

“Bells,” I heard.

I sat up, wiping my face and seeing Jake in a wheelchair, pushed by Seth. “You need to rest, Jake. You’re recovering from major surgery.” His face was still ashen and he had lost weight.

“So are you,” he smirked, taking my hand and frowning when he saw my bare finger. “What’s going on, Bells? Why aren’t you wearing your ring?”

“I had to take it off when I had my knee fixed,” I answered petulantly.

“Talk to me, Bells,” Jake commanded softly. “Charlie told me briefly what happened, but I want to hear it from you.”

“I’m not good enough,” I whispered. “Esme doesn’t think I’m good enough for her son.” I blinked up, tears streaming down my face. “And I’m not, Jake. I’m a mess. I’m not strong. I’m worthless and I don’t deserve him. So, I’m listening to Esme.”

“Fuck, no …” Jake growled. “Don’t get me wrong, but Esme is a bitch.”

“I thought she cared about me,” I hissed. “Instead, I get my heart ripped out and stomped on by
her. How can I ignore that? I’ve lost two mothers, Jake. One from an unforeseen complication of pregnancy and the other from being a hateful, cruel, vindictive bitch. I loved Esme.’

“Do you love Masen?” Jake whispered.

“I do, but sometimes, love isn’t enough,” I whispered back. “I hate that …”

Jake squeezed my fingers and he tugged out a cell phone. Sliding his finger across, he pressed a button. “Dad? Yes, I’m feeling much better … no, I’m not upset that you couldn’t make it out. I get it. After this accident, it will be a long time before I drive in the snow … Look, I have a friend and she’s in a bit of a bind.”

After talking to Billy for a few minutes and my father talking to him, as well, we made arrangements for me to fly out of Rochester and to the Pacific Northwest. Seth was flying out with me, helping me in my wheelchair and driving me to La Push, to the Quileute Reservation. It was a long trip. I was achy and tired by the time we pulled up to the green ranch-style home. A tall man, with russet-colored skin and a beamingly white smile, greeted us. I could see the familial relationship to Jake immediately. I also noticed he stayed on the front porch.

That was three days ago.

It felt very odd to be in a stranger’s home, but Billy was so much like Jake that I felt at ease almost immediately. Seth acting as a buffer also helped, but he left early the following morning after I’d been settled into the guest bedroom.

“Bella?”

“Hmmm?” I said, blinking up to Billy.

“You’re spacing out, sweetheart,” he chuckled.

“I’m still … I hurt,” I shrugged. “I think I’m going to take my pain medication and ice my knee.”

“I’ve got a meeting with the tribal council. Rachel will be here in a few moments. She’s just getting off from the hospital,” Billy explained. “I’ll be back in a few hours.”

“I’m probably going to sleep, Billy. I’m still …” I trailed off, wrinkling my nose as I stood up with my crutches. “I still feel like there’s a hole where my heart should be.” Billy got up and hugged me. I accepted his embrace, but it was clumsy since I was trying to balance on my good foot and not fall.

“You’re safe here,” Billy murmured. “Jake promised not to say anything, as did your father. However, wouldn’t you want Masen to know where you are?”

“I can’t, Billy,” I sniffled, crutching back and wiping my cheeks. “I just need to heal, physically, emotionally and mentally. Thank you for opening up your home to give me the space to that.”

“I couldn’t get over my fears to be there for my son. I could, at least, be there for you,” he whispered, kissing my temple. “I love Masen like my own son and I know that …”

“It’s not him,” I said. “It’s his mother.”

“I’ve met her and she’s a piece of work,” Billy chuckled humorlessly. “I know she has to be. She rules a whole country. But, you’d think she’d be more understanding when it came to her own children and the people her children loved.” He checked his watch. “I’ve got to go, Bella. Rachel
will be here soon.”

“I’m just going to watch some television and then go to bed,” I said.

“Don’t forget to ice,” he said, picking up his jean jacket and cowboy hat. “Rachel will set you up.”

He took a few deep breaths before ducking out of the house. I heard him speak to Rachel and I saw her glide into the house. She gave me a wide smile. “You’re up and about.”

“I just finished dinner, but I’m gimping to the couch,” I quipped. “How was work?” I sat down on the couch, lifting my leg and adjusting the pillows underneath. Rachel draped the large ice pack over my knee. “Thank you. Work?”

She sat down on the recliner, eating some of the fish fry her father had made. “Boring … for the most part. There was a trucking accident on the 101. We got the minor injuries, but some of the more severe injuries were sent to the medical facility in Port Angeles. When you’re feeling better, we should go to PA. It’s a lot of fun. Very touristy.”

“Maybe,” I hedged, flipping the channels. “I just want to stay here, though.”

“I don’t blame you,” she said, sipping a beer. “I talked to my brother and he told what happened. He’d be here, but he’s not cleared to travel yet. He’ll be out of commission for a few weeks.” She waved her hand at the television. “Real Housewives … there’s a marathon. We need some mindless brain candy.”

“Watching these super rich, spoiled bitches are a little too close to what happened to me, Rach,” I said, wrinkling my nose.

“They welcomed the cameras into their homes,” Rachel said, arching a brow. “Completely different from the animals that caused your accident. Just watch one episode and if you still don’t like it, we’ll find something else.”

“I’d like to shower and I know your dad doesn’t feel comfortable …” I said.

“After one episode,” Rachel snickered.

xx AMDFT xx

A few days later, Rachel was over again and checking the incision from my knee surgery. “Looks good, chickadee,” she said. “The stitches can come out in another week. Pain?”

“I’m down to one pain pill a day,” I answered as she rewrapped my knee. “Have you talked to Jake?”

“To Leah. He’s been released and is staying with Leah and her parents as he continues his recovery,” Rachel explained. “When I called during my break, he was taking a nap.” She looked at me and her dark, nearly black eyes were swirling with sympathy. “Leah said that Masen is staying with your father. He refuses to acknowledge his mother. What she said. What she did …”

“Rachel,” I sighed. “I flew out here to get away from …”

“Bells, Masen adores you,” Rachel breathed, taking my hand. “Why are you giving up?”

“I’m not giving up. I just need to … I need to be away from it all,” I shrugged. “Rachel, I need a friend and not someone to give me more advice.”
“I am your friend, sweetie. I’ve seen the pictures of you and Masen and it’s clear that he’d give you the world,” Rachel said, squeezing my hand. “But, I’ll shut up.”

“Girls, I have dinner ready,” Billy called.

“It better not be fish, old man,” Rachel quipped, handing me my crutches. “You’re growing gills.”

“It’s not fish,” Billy laughed. “Come on!”

I stood up, hobbling to the kitchen and following Rachel into the kitchen. A stack of hamburgers and hotdogs were on the center of the homemade table. There was also pasta salad, potato salad and chips. Billy put another bowl on the table, overflowing with salad. “I hope you’re both hungry.”

“I always am,” Rachel chirped, sitting down after helping me into a chair next to her. “Bells? You’re getting too skinny.”

“A hamburger, please,” I said. They did smell good. “And some pasta salad.”

Billy piled some pasta salad onto my plate while Rachel swiped a hamburger. The plate was put in front of me and I took a breath. I picked up my hamburger, ready to enjoy my dinner. There was a quiet knock at the door. “Really?” Rachel growled.

“You just stay here. I’ll open the door,” Billy said, patting Rachel’s arm. “You work too hard, sweetheart.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Rachel said.

Billy got up and walked through the small dining room to the front door. “What are you doing here?” Billy asked coldly. I didn’t hear a response, but Billy sighed. I blinked up at Rachel, confused. Billy walked back into the kitchen, his lips pursed and his eyes stormy. “Bella, you have a visitor.”

“No one knows I’m here,” I choked out. “Only Jake, Seth and my dad.”

“And some very smart Gevalian security guards,” said an accented, female voice. Esme stepped into the kitchen, still looking like a queen, but dressed in a pair of khakis and her silver hair swept up into chignon. “I’d forgotten how difficult it is to drive on the right side of the road.”

“You came here? Alone?” I asked.

“No one knows I’m here, Bella,” Esme murmured. “I apologize for interrupting your dinner, but once I found out where you were, I flew out and I needed to make things right.”

“You came here? Alone?” I asked.

“No one knows I’m here, Bella,” Esme murmured. “I apologize for interrupting your dinner, but once I found out where you were, I flew out and I needed to make things right.”

“Come on, Dad. Let’s go to the Lodge,” Rachel said.

“I’m not leaving,” Billy said, his eyes narrowed coldly at Esme.

“At least, let’s give them some privacy,” Rachel sighed, tugging Billy out of the kitchen. “Yell if you need us, Bells. I have zero qualms in kicking some royal ass. You broke her heart, you frigid bitch!”

“Rachel,” I chided. “She’s still a queen. You need to be respectful.”

“I know I did, Rachel,” Esme said, her face falling and her hazel eyes filling with tears. “That’s why I’m here. Let me make things right.” She gestured to one of the chairs. “May I?”
I shrugged, pushing my plate away. The hamburger and pasta salad were going to go uneaten. My stomach was churning and my heart was even cracking further. I stared at her, the walls coming up and I tried to click off my emotions. “If you’re here to twist the knife, you can see yourself out.”

“I’m not, Isabel … Bella,” Esme murmured. She was wringing her hands fitfully. “I … I want to fix this.”

“I don’t believe you,” I argued. “And if you’re worried about the money for the renovations, I’ll find some way to pay you back.”

“Damn it, it’s not about the money,” Esme growled. “That was a gift. You know this.”


“Bella, I’m … I need you to listen to me,” Esme said, her voice calm and steady, but her hands were shaking. “You have every right to be pissed at me. I’m pissed at me. Everyone is pissed at me. And, I don’t blame them. I fucked up. I’m trying to fix this.”

“Did you ever think that this is not fixable?” I asked, arching a brow and crossing my arms. I was putting up a brave front, but I was so upset that I wanted to sprint from the room. The problem was that I couldn’t sprint. I could barely walk. “With your words, you managed to wipe out whatever was left of my self-confidence.”

“And I will do whatever it takes to help you,” Esme whispered, reaching for my hands and I put them into my lap. Esme shook her head and tucked a stray curl behind her ear. “I was never a good mother. I had children because it was expected of me, to carry on the family line. Don’t get me wrong; I love my boys.”

You have a strange way of showing it, I thought to myself.

“Edward … Masen, was born first and he was groomed from the moment he was born to be king. Emmett came next and while he was second to the throne, he didn’t have the same expectations thrust onto him. Both of my sons are smart, loving, and bound by loyalty.” She frowned, looking down at her hands and twisting her wedding band. “My husband, he was the nurturer. I was the disciplinarian. My first duty was to my country. Carlisle, he saw to the children’s needs.” She blinked up to me. “Now, my need to put my country first cost me my son the one thing that had brought him more happiness than I’d ever seen Masen would do anything for you, including give up his title as Crowned Prince.”

“He can’t do that,” I whispered. “I’m not worth it.”

Esme moved closer to me and she took my hands. Her palms were clammy and her hands were cold. I started crying. I didn’t want her to see me cry. I felt like all I do is cry. “Ma biche, I’m so sorry for what I did to you. Hindsight, is twenty-twenty, as they say. You have not had it easy. Your sister’s constant torment, your father’s anger and frustration, the media scrutiny and now, my harsh, unthinking words.”

I tugged my hands away, staring at her. She was becoming blurry with the tears that brimmed in my eyes. “I’ll never be good enough. Masen deserves better. Not me. Now, I want you to leave so I grieve the loss of everything that mattered to me … a love based in fairy tales, my future and a woman who I thought cared about me, but was just another person to treat me like shit. Get out.”

“I’m not leaving. I refuse to walk away,” Esme growled. “I messed up … no, fucked up. My son deserves the best and that is you. I was speaking out of anger.”
“What is said in anger is usually the truth, Esme,” I said, my voice sounding wooden. “I’m not the best. Far from it.”

“I’m not the best either.” Esme argued. “But, you’re the best for him. I know you don’t like me. You have no respect for me. I deserve that. Masen does not to be shut out because of my words. Do you love my son?”

“More than words can describe,” I muttered. My eyes fluttered shut and I imagined Masen’s handsome face. His crooked smile, his evergreen eyes and his warmth. “I just … He won’t forgive me. Just like I can’t forgive you.”

“I deserve that,” Esme sniffled. “Don’t punish Masen for my inability to look past the situation to the people involved. I will forever be sorry for how I made you feel. Knowing that I did this to you and to him, it breaks my heart. There’s more to life than duty, honor and loyalty. Come home. Come back to New York.”

“I’m not ready. Billy has been amazing. His daughter, Rachel, has been so helpful with my recovery. She’s a nurse. I can’t be a burden to my father or to Linda. Stairs are just not feasible. I ran away and I don’t want Masen to feel responsible for me. I’m … also anonymous here,” I explained. The fact that I hadn’t left the house also helped, but Esme did not need to know that. “I need a few weeks to be more mobile. Getting here was tough. If it weren’t for the help I’d received from Seth, I wouldn’t have made it.”

“Seth? Leah’s brother?” Esme asked. I didn’t respond, just closing my eyes and trying to maintain my strength and dignity. Esme stood up, putting a card into my hand. “I’m staying in Forks. I’m not leaving without you, Bella. I refuse to give up on you. I don’t want to be another person to treat you like shit.”

“Too late,” I said dismissively, tossing the card on the floor.

With that, Esme got up to leave, walking to the front door. Billy was waiting there. I saw them out of the corner of my eyes. “My son told me what happened to them and how the media tore that girl apart. I love Masen like he were my own son. He’s filled with so much patience and compassion. The fact that you threw her to the wolves was unspeakable. Horrific. She loved you, Your Majesty. She saw you as another mother. I don’t know it all, but you should be ashamed of how you acted. You made the right decision in trying to talk to her, but she’s been hurt, irrevocably, by people who were supposed to care and love her – her sister, her father and now, you.” He crossed his arms over his chest. “She can’t lump Masen in with that because he never hurt her. She just felt undeserving of everything.”
“I don’t know how to fix this,” Esme said. “I ruined …”

“I think it’s best you leave. I respect you for trying to fix what you’ve ruined. That sweet girl needs time,” Billy explained. He closed the door, looking at me and his lips curled down into a deep frown. He crossed over to me, sitting down next to me and gathering me in his arms. Once I felt his arms around me, I finally let go, sobbing into his chest. “Let it go, sweet girl. Let it all go.”

A/N: Esme’s trying to make it better. Can she? Will Bella listen to her? And don’t be pissed at Bella … think about what she’s going through? Anyhow, pictures of Billy, Rachel and Billy’s home are on my blog. You can find a link for that in my profile. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me some loving!

Thanks for reading.
Chapter 46

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Esme’s trying to make it better. Can she? Will Bella listen to her? And don’t be pissed at Bella … think about what she’s going through?

Also, thank you for those of you who are being supportive of *A Modern Day Fairy Tale*. Your kind words mean more to me than I can express. I’m also a firm believer that if you should praise publicly and criticize privately. If you have a concern about my story. PM me … just saying …

Chapter Forty-Six

*Bella*

The next few days passed by in a blur. Esme came to visit each day, but I stayed hidden out in my room. I used Rachel’s tablet to watch television, using her Netflix account. I didn’t really pay attention. It was just noise. Billy listened to me as I told him the full story of what happened, starting with my mom’s death, my dad’s illness and my sister’s hatred. He knew the rest of the story, with the media because Jake had told him when we spoke to him about my flying out to Washington state.

When I wasn’t talking to Billy, I was starting rehab with Rachel. She’d removed my stitches and I was trying to strengthen my knee. She brought some materials from the hospital and worked with me when she was off work before going back to her house on the reservation. Eventually, I had to go back to New York. I couldn’t stay hidden in La Push forever.

After a week of constant visits, Esme came back. She was still dressed casually, but I could tell that she was leaving. She was still upset. “I need to fly back to New York,” she said, her voice cracking. “Bella, I understand that we may never be okay. I’ll never be able to regain that trust.”

“You’ve got that right,” I muttered under my breath.

“Hate me all you want, but don’t throw away your relationship with Masen because of *my* mistakes,” Esme said, sitting down across from me and taking my hand. I stared at her; my lips pursed. “I know you still love him.”

“That hasn’t changed, Esme,” I whispered. “But, I’m not good enough. He deserves someone …”

“Like you,” Esme said, pulling me closer. “You are good enough. You’re better than good enough. You’re better than me, Bella.” She stood up, kissing my forehead. I pulled back, turning my face away. “I’m so sorry. I wish I could take my hurtful words back. I wish I could be a better person and make it all better.” She put something on the table. “This is a ticket back to New York. Well, tickets. I know that you can’t maneuver the airports on your own because of your injury. I’ve also …”

“I don’t want your money, Esme,” I scoffed. “I don’t want the press to label me as a gold digger.” Esme looked at me, her brows furrowed. “I can take care of myself. I’ve done it most of my life.”
“It’s a gift, Bella,” she murmured. “Come home, sweet girl. Please?”

I didn’t respond. Esme brushed her hand down my hair once more before ducking out of the house. Billy came into the living room, taking the seat that Esme was sitting in. “How much did you hear?”

“Enough to know that she is right, in her own way,” Billy said. “Bella, I know that woman broke your heart. I understand your pain. You feel betrayed by someone who you thought loved you.”

“Who betrayed you?” I asked.

“Rachel’s sister, Rebecca.” Billy answered. “After my injury, ending my police career, I fell into myself. I was agoraphobic and afraid of everything. Rachel and Jake were understanding. Rebecca, she told me to buck up and deal with my issues. It was her that essentially forced me into this exile, away from my son and terrified of being injured again. She pushed me out into the world before I was ready and I fell apart. Rebecca called me weak while her siblings reamed her out for being heartless and cruel. I couldn’t handle being in New York, so I left. I came here. Rachel and Jake refuse to talk to Rebecca because she refused to believe that her way was right.”

“It’s not,” I frowned.

“No, it’s not. My shrink disagreed with her and every other counselor said she caused more harm than anything,” Billy said. “I love my daughter, but I can’t forgive her. Not yet. She hurt me. She hurt her siblings. All because she felt that I was too weak to deal with my injuries and the aftermath of my injuries. Now, you have a chance to get your man.”

“He probably hates me,” I whispered. “I left without saying good bye. I left my engagement ring.”

“I think he understands, Bella,” Billy said, squeezing my hands. His smile was sincere and from the twinkle in his eyes, it seemed like he knew more than he was letting on.

“You’ve spoken to him,” I said.

“I’ve spoken to my son, who’s been in touch with Masen,” Billy explained. “He’s just as heartbroken as you, but he’s pissed, too. He’s ready to walk away from the crown to be with you and he’s written off his mother, too. From what I’ve been told, she’s in hot water because she left without any sort of protection. Felix drove her here and he looked beyond pissed.” He put the tickets into my hand. “Call this number and everything will be arranged.”

“Are you coming with me?” I asked.

“I can’t handle flying, Bells. Being stuck inside a long flying tube?” Billy answered. “Rachel said she’d go with you before she left for work. She wants to check on her brother, anyway.”

“I don’t know,” I sniffled. “I’m terrified of going back there. I’m freaking out that Masen will …”

“Love you forever. There will be some bumps in the road, but I have a feeling,” Billy smiled. “Call that number.”

“You kicking me out?” I snorted.

“I’m giving you a gentle nudge,” he smirked, getting up and walking to the kitchen.

It took me two more days before I made that phone call. Rachel sat next to me as I made arrangements to fly back to New York City. I called my father and told him that I’d be back by the
week’s end. I could tell that he was happy. I was freaking out. I was terrified of what the press would say. I scared that Masen would realize that I wasn’t good enough for him. I’d run away, hidden from my problems as opposed dealing with them head on.

Early Friday morning, Rachel drove us to Seattle and parked at the King County Airport. “Not SeaTac?” I asked.

“Private plane, chickadee,” Rachel smirked. “Regardless, this will be a challenging trip. How’s your knee?”

“I’m okay,” I said, adjusting my hold on my crutches. “A little sore. I’ll be happy when I’m free of the crutches.”

“Soon enough. Once you get back, you’ll have to start physical therapy. I’ve given you a start, but I’m not a physical therapist. I’m certain that Masen or your father already have that figured out,” Rachel said, leading me through the airport. “Do you want a wheelchair?”

I knew I was going to be sitting for over six hours on a plane. However, the growing ache in my knee made me nod. Rachel darted to the entrance and returned with wheelchair. I sat down, balancing my crutches and our carryon luggage as we made our way to the chartered jet that had been arranged for us. When we arrived at the gate, I looked around anxiously. I was terrified that Masen was there. I needed the flight to figure out how I was going to explain my disappearance.

He wasn’t there. It truly was a chartered flight. There were three other passengers besides us. I recognized one of the passengers as an internet mogul. He’d been featured on the cover of several magazines as the next techno-wünderkind. The other two passengers, I’d assumed, were his staff.

“Okay, do you want a trashy romance novel or a different trashy romance novel?” Rachel asked, holding up two books.

“I … I need to think,” I said. I reached into my bag and took out a small notebook that Seth had given me from Leah. I ran my fingers over the chipboard cover, which had a blue and white floral pattern. “I need to figure out how fix the monumental fucked up thing that I call my life.”

Rachel gave me an understanding look. With a slight squeeze to my hand, she picked up one of the books and put in her earbuds. After a few moments, we took off. The flight crew gave us some drinks and snacks. I opened my notebook and began scribbling in it. I spent the first hour getting my thoughts in order. It all came down to accepting Masen for who he was and what he was going to be … the King of Gevalia.

Could I accept that?

xx AMDFT xx

“Bells, wake up,” Rachel said, gently shaking me. I blinked my eyes open. She was smiling at me and her black eyes were twinkling. “We’re back in New York City. Well, Teterboro.”

“Why are your eyes glittering?” I asked. “You look too happy. What’s up?”

Rachel blinked to the tech giant, who grinned crookedly at her. She wriggled her fingers at him. “I have a date with him tomorrow night. Oliver … he’s so sweet and adorkable. We got to talking after you nodded off. He’s … yeah.” She blushed. “Come on. My brother arranged for a ride for us to your dad’s apartment. Then, I’ll be going to Casa de Clearwater to check on my little bro.”

“Give Jake a hug for me,” I said as I got up stiffly. Rachel handed me my crutches and I made my
way down the steps of the private jet. Rachel hugged Oliver and they parted ways. He got into a waiting limousine “He is cute. A little skinny and those glasses are a bit much, but he’s cute.”

“I’ve had beefy. With the exception of my brother, most guys that are muscle-bound are dumber than a box of rocks. I’ve had slovenly. Doesn’t do it for me … I dated this one guy in Forks. Yeah, he was sweet but I couldn’t get turned on. Call me vain, but I like my guys to look like they actually give a shit about how they look,” Rachel said, slipping her bag over her shoulder. “I’ve never had a nerd. And a sexy nerd? Hmmmm … I’ve heard good things about their prowess in the bedroom.”

“You read too many trashy romance novels,” I teased as we made our way to the black SUV waiting for us. I recognized Felix. He gave me a warm smile. Rachel clambered into the car, pulling out her phone. “You’re still here, Felix?”

“I’m here as a personal request of His Highness,” Felix replied, nodding toward me. “And I couldn’t stand the thought of you being hurt again, Lady Bella.”

“You should hate me, Felix,” I frowned.

“No, I don’t. I hate those animals who caused your accident. I’m fucking pissed at Her Majesty for making you believe that you were less than worthy,” Felix growled, helping me into the backseat of the SUV. “You had every right to be upset, Lady Bella. We all were. Probably, the most upset was Carlisle. He saw a side of his wife that he didn’t like. He had been staying in Masen Manor while he’s coming to grips with Her Majesty’s actions.”

“Oh, no,” I sniffled. “Are they …?”

“They’re talking,” Felix said soothingly. “Like any other couple, Duke Carlisle and Queen Esme have marital issues. They just maintain a unified front, for the most part. This is the first time they disagreed, publicly.” He leaned forward, kissing my forehead. “Now, we have a drive to Brooklyn. Your father and Prince Masen are eager to see you again.”

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“Are you sure?” I asked, buckling up.

“I’m more than positive, Lady Bella,” he quipped, starting the car and driving toward Brooklyn.

“See?” Rachel snickered, wagging her brows. “Oooh, Oliver wants to take me to a jazz parlor in Harlem. I don’t know anything about jazz, but it’s with a schmexy nerd.”

“You are obsessed, Rachel,” I quipped. “Please, be safe.”

“I will. He’s picking me up at Casa de Clearwater. He’ll meet my brother. Even with two broken legs, a bum wing and recovering from exploratory surgery, he could squash Oliver like a bug.”

We dropped Rachel off first. I spent some time with Jake and he apologized for crashing the car. I hugged him, telling him that it wasn’t his fault. Then, I signed his cast before leaving the Clearwater’s apartment in Queens. Then, I got back into the car and drove to my neighborhood in Brooklyn. Felix was quiet as he parked the car in the alley behind the bakery. I grimaced at the stairs I had to climb.

“I could carry you,” Felix said.

“No, I’m fine,” I murmured. As I said that, my dad opened the door and he hugged me. “Daddy …”
“I’ve missed you, baby girl,” he whispered against my hair. He pulled back, cupping my face with trembling hands. “Are you okay?”

“I will be,” I said. “I’m glad to be back home.”

“I’m not going to beat around the bush, Bella,” Dad murmured. He took my hands as Felix dragged my bags up the stairs. “Masen’s here. He’s been staying here since he gave his mother the blow off. She’s been staying at the condo in Central Park West. He could have stayed in the smaller condo, where Jake had stayed, but Masen’s beyond pissed at his mother. And her disappearing act? He was drafting a letter of abdication.”

“He can’t do that,” I said. “He’s a good man and will be a great leader, a respected and loved king.”

“Come on, baby girl,” Dad smiled, helping me into the apartment. It was slow-going since I couldn’t really go up the stairs. When I made my way inside, my dad kissed my temple and shuffled to the bedroom.

Masen was waiting for me at my dad’s apartment, sporting a full beard and a wary expression. I limped to sit down, crying and twisting my hands anxiously. I blinked up at him, seeing nothing but understanding and love. Just underneath that, I could see betrayal, anger.

“I get why you left. I don’t blame you,” Masen murmured. “With everything, it was overwhelming. The media, your sister, the invasion of your privacy … I just hate that you didn’t talk to me.”

“I heard what your mother said, Masen,” I muttered. “With everything that happened, what she said made sense. You deserve so much more than me. I’m a coward and I don’t …”

“I only want your happiness, Bella. Were you happy with me? Are you happy with me? Could you be happy with me?” Masen asked.

“Very much so,” I replied honestly. I’ve been miserable since I’d left the hospital. Part of it is due to our separation, another part has to do with the lingering feeling that I’m not good enough.

“I love you, chérie,” he whispered, moving to sit next to me and taking my hand. It was swamped by his large hand. It was warm and familiar. I was so tiny compared to him. “I’m ready to walk away from everything to be with you. I want a future with you. If that means I abdicate my throne and live my life in New York, trucking my way through life as an attorney, I’ll do it gladly.”

“Don’t give up your future for me, Masen,” I growled, shaking my head. “I’m … not …”

“You are worth it,” Masen smiled, cupping my gaunt cheek. I’d lost a lot of weight since I left

“I know,” I whispered. “I talked a lot with Rachel, Jacob’s sister. I’ve been so focused on taking care of everyone that I neglected to take care of myself. I did for a bit when we started our relationship, because both you and my dad forced me to do that. Then, something clicked, like it always did, and I came in last place. Years of emotional abuse from my sister, combined with my fears of inadequacy and validation from the press and your mother, I just …”

“Anyone would have crumbled. I did,” Masen said, running his fingers through his too long hair. “The difference is that I was born into it. You were forced into it. I won’t continue to force you … If you want to end things …”

“I don’t want to end things, but I need time. We need time,” I murmured. “If you want to end things, I’d understand. I fucked up, Masen.”

“It was a combination of things. You, however, did not fuck up. It was my mother and her uncaring comments. I have to know, though. Do you still love me?” Masen asked, feeling unsure and afraid.

“That’s the only thing that I’m sure of is that I love you,” I breathed. “You must not trust me after I bolted …”

“Bella, cherie, as I said before, I don’t blame you,” Masen murmured, caressing my cheek. I pressed my face into his warm hand. He took out the engagement ring from his pocket. He held it out. “I thought … my … I still want that future with you, Bella. We can have a long engagement.”

“What about the press?” I sniffled, my brows furrowing.

“Fuck the press,” Masen growled. “The only thing they deserve is a swift kick in the ass and to pay for what they did to you – which they are. The only two people who matter in this equation is you and me. Do you love me?”

“Yes,” I nodded.

“Do you want to marry me?” he asked. “And none of that nonsense that you’re not good enough. You are good enough. You’re the best … for me.”
“I do want to marry you,” I whispered, tears welling in my eyes. “Can you forgive me for what I did? I love you, Masen.”

“I love you, too, cherie,” he said, brushing his lips over mine and tenderly taking me into his arms. “There’s nothing to forgive. It’s as much my fault as it is the paparazzi.”

He slid the ring onto my finger and held me in his arms. As soon as I was back with him, I drifted off to sleep with Masen following shortly behind.

A/N: They’ve got a long way to go. A lot of demons to slay, but they are still together. They both love each other and it’s a step toward their happily ever after. Up next will be a reunion of Masen, Bella and Jacob. We’ll also hear about Rachel’s date with Oliver before they head back to the condo in Central Park West … Will Esme be there?

Leave me your thoughts … thanks for reading.
Chapter 47

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

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Chapter Forty-Seven

Masen

I woke up, still on the couch in Charlie’s apartment. Bella was curled to my side and she was out. Charlie was leaning against the peninsula in the kitchen. “Are you happy?” he asked, his voice quiet and reverent.

“I am,” I said, kissing her forehead and holding her closer to my body. “We’re not out of the woods, but I got the ring back on her finger.”

“You should hate me, Masen,” Charlie sighed. “I helped her leave. I was there when she took off her ring and she handed it to me. I don’t know who was shaking more, her or me. She didn’t want to leave. Your mother’s words … they shattered her. Broke her into pieces.”

“Trust me, I know,” I snarled. Bella whimpered and I kissed her hair. “I’m sorry, cherie.” Charlie sat down across from me. “I’m still tempted to abdicate.”

“Gevalia would lose out on a great leader, Masen,” Charlie argued. “Look, a lot of what happened is due in part because of me. If I’d stopped Alice’s behavior sooner, Bella wouldn’t be so hesitant to trust or her self-confidence so shattered.”

“Regardless, I’ve got her back and I’m not letting her go. I’m also not going to let my mother get away with her words,” I hissed, shifting Bella into my arms. “After … when I go back to Gevalia, I’m not going to stay in the palace. I want to focus my attention on Bella, on helping her and improving our relationship. I love her, Charlie. I love her more than words can say.”

“What are you going to do now?” Charlie asked.

“Now? I’m taking her to bed,” I answered. “We’ll figure out next steps after we both get a good night’s sleep.” I stood up; Bella held securely in my arms. “Charlie, thank you for letting me stay here. I couldn’t …”

“Son, I get it,” Charlie smiled. “I’m just as pissed off at her as you are. And by her, I mean your mother. And Bella’s sister and the assholes who spread those lies about Bella.” He got up, running his hands down his jeans. “I’m going to Linda’s. We’re going to have a nightcap.”

I smirked. He’d been spending a lot of time at Linda’s, especially at night. I carried Bella into her bedroom. Charlie had it cleaned up and renovated. All traces of Alice’s immaturity had been erased and a sleek bedroom/home office was in its place. I laid Bella down onto the bed. I removed her knee brace and tugged off her sneakers. She was exhausted and she barely stirred. I tucked her into
the queen-sized bed. I removed my clothes and tugged on a pair of sweatpants, curling around her. She turned, groaning and tucking her head underneath my chin. “Shave the beard, Masen,” she mumbled, barely coherently. “I miss your jaw.”

“Done, cherie,” I chuckled and sliding my arms around her body. “I love you. Always.”

“Love you,” she said, her face pressed to my chest. I smiled and held her closer, my eyes fluttering shut. For the first time in nearly three weeks, I’d gotten a full-night’s sleep. When I finally woke up, I felt the soft caresses of Bella’s fingers on my chest. She was tracing my tattoo. “Hey … I miss your face.”

“I’m still here,” I quipped. “I missed more than your face, cherie. And not that I’m complaining, but what made you come back? And where did you go?”

“I stayed with Billy, Jacob’s dad,” Bella answered, her fingers gliding over my belly. “Jacob, Charlie, Leah and Seth helped me. While there, I did a lot of thinking and talking to both Billy and Rachel. They protected me when I needed it. They also pushed me.” She sat up, running her fingers through her messy hair. “And I came back because I needed to face my fears. Your mother showed up about a week after I’d arrived.”

“My mother came?” I asked, sitting up and staring at her. “That’s where she disappeared to. My father returned to Gevalia after your accident, but my mother remained. After he’d left, she disappeared. But, she came back after a few days and hid out in the condo. I think she went back to Gevalia, but I’m not certain. I haven’t spoken to her since the day of your surgery. I’ve been avoiding her, avoiding the press.”

The press had issued an apology, a very public and a much-needed apology. In addition to the apology, Bella and Jacob received a hefty settlement. I know that Bella wasn’t aware of it, but Jacob had already signed the paperwork accepting the eight-figure amount from all of the major press outlets. Bella’s settlement was slightly smaller because her injuries were not as severe, but my friend, James, was going to bat for her to get her as much as Jacob. They both were victims of the accident. They both would have to deal with the aftermath.

“Masen,” she whispered, her fingers guiding me to look at her. “You’re a million miles away.”

“Just thinking,” I said, taking her hand and kissing her palm. “I’m going to take a shower and get rid of this.” I tugged on the beard covering my face. “Then, I’ll make you breakfast. Your dad showed me some recipes that you loved when you were a kid.” Her nose wrinkled. “What’s up?”

“I need to shower, but I can’t really get into and out of the bathtub. I don’t trust my balance,” she said.

“Your dad has a stool. Linda suggested it for him since he’d taken a few stumbles,” I murmured.

“Is he okay?” Bella asked.

“He’s fine, but the weather was a bit nasty and caused Charlie to twist his ankles,” I explained. “He’s fine, but the weather hasn’t been very cooperative. It wasn’t nearly as snowy as Rochester, but it’s been cold and nasty.” She nodded, settling back onto the bed and grimacing. “Do you want some ice?”

“Yeah,” she nodded. “And a snack so I can take my pain medication. I did a lot of walking yesterday.” She tugged her carryon bag onto the bed and got out her medication. I went to the kitchen, swiping some ice, a water and yogurt. She thanked me, digging into her snack. I put a
pillow underneath her leg and draped the icepack over her knee. She smiled at me thankfully. I grabbed my toiletry bag, some fresh clothes and a new towel from the linen closet.

“Do you need anything else, cherie?” I asked.

“I’m fine. I’m going to text Rachel and Jacob; check to see how they were both doing. Perhaps, we can see them?” she said. “Not today, but at some point. I only saw them for a few moments before Felix drove me back here.” I nodded, smiling at her crookedly and kissing her forehead.

It took me a long time to get ready because I shaved off the growth on my face. After I patted down my skin with aftershave, I went back into the bedroom. Bella was still on the bed. She was talking on the phone. “Girl, you better call me. I know you’ve got stars in your eyes, but you don’t know Oliver from Adam … we’ll see you and Jake tomorrow.” She blinked to me, her eyes widening and a coy smile spreading across her lips. “Be safe, sweetie. Talk to you later.” She hung up her phone. “I can see your lickable jaw. Much better, Masen.”

“Are you better, Bella?” I asked. “Your knee?”

“Yeah,” she nodded. “I need to shower, though. I feel nasty.” She stood up, swapping her crutches and limping out of the room. She had a bag across her chest. I arched a brow. “My clothes and stuff. If I had my brace on, I could forego the crutches, but I don’t trust my balance.”

“Do you need help?” I asked. She blushed and shook her head. “Bella, I wasn’t there for you … because … I want to help you.”

“I know you do, but I need to be able to stand on my own, both literally and figuratively,” she said, taking my hand. I cupped her cheek and stared into her eyes. I knew she was talking about more than her injuries. “We’ll talk when I’m out of the shower and I don’t smell like plane.” Her nose was wrinkled and she kissed my jaw before ducking into the bathroom. I hung out by the door before walking into the kitchen. There was a shaky note from Charlie.

I stayed with Linda. You and Bella need some time to talk, without a nervous, overbearing father in the room. I’m going to be in the bakery this afternoon to finalize choices for the staff. Angela will be there, too. I’m certain she’ll want to see Bella. Call me when you’re done. Love you both – Dad

I made breakfast for us, with freshly made biscuits and gravy, eggs and cut fruit. I was finishing making coffee when Bella came out. She had on a pair of jeans, a loose tunic and balanced on one crutch. I noticed around her leg; she wore her knee brace. Her hair was braided, resting over her shoulder. She looked a lot more awake. “I hope you’re hungry, Bella. Please, sit.”

She hobbled to the dining table and sat down. She leaned her crutch against the couch. I carried our breakfast, serving her and pouring her a large mug of coffee. “Where’s my dad? Is he with Linda?”

“He left a note. He spent the night at her place,” I answered. “He knew we needed to talk and he didn’t want to hover.” I made my own plate, sitting down next to her. We ate breakfast. It was a tense meal. Bella was stiff and I could tell she was still upset, leery of us. Our relationship. I was in the same boat. “I can’t take the tension, cherie.”

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled, sipping her coffee. “I hate this distance between us, Masen.”

“I’m the one who should apologize, Bella. In this entire situation, you were an innocent,” I breathed. “I’m so sorry that our relationship put you in a situation like this.”

“Masen, please don’t blame yourself,” Bella murmured, taking my hand. “You said yourself that you were born into this life. I chose to be a part of it. I know I need a thicker skin.” She frowned,
tracing the veins on my hand. “I need help. I probably wouldn’t have run if my self-confidence was normal. My sister emotionally abused me from the moment I moved back home to help dad. I should have fought back, but it’s not in my nature. I hate conflict. I worked my ass off to save the bakery and if you hadn’t helped us out, we’d be on the streets by now.” She looked up at me. “And I fully intend to pay you back.”

“Okay,” I nodded. I knew it wasn’t about the money but a point of pride. “Thank you, Bella.”

“I’m not finished,” she said. “Masen, you were born into this. You were more adept to handle the press and I know that I need to become more …”

“You don’t need to do anything,” I argued.

“Masen,” she breathed, flipping my hand over and threading our fingers together. “I need help. I need to realize that I am worthy of happiness. Up until the accident, I was happy with you. Knowing that you forgive me, it makes my heart whole.”

“There was nothing to forgive. I get it,” I smiled, kissing her knuckles. “There are moments when I wanted to run away. Hell, I did. When I came here for uni. And to be honest, the paparazzi were never this bad. I think that Lady Kathryn or her minions had a hand in this.”

“Alice?” Bella asked.

“She’s been in solitary confinement in the Gevalian prison system. She’s had no visitors except for her court-appointed attorney,” I replied. “And even then, she hasn’t really spoken to him. He only told her when her arraignment was scheduled. She’s going to be in the prison for a while before she’ll be deported back to the states. Unfortunately, it was her conversation with Lady Kathryn that put all of this into motion.”

“What’s going to happen to her?” Bella muttered. “Lady Kathryn?”

“She’s been stripped of title and is no longer welcome in Gevalia. Should she return, she will be thrown into prison for the rest of her life because of her actions. However, they’re still investigating the whole thing; trying to figure out who sent the photos to the press,” I explained. “Now, I want to talk about our next steps. Obviously, we’re engaged. But, I think we need to take time to truly get to know each other. No press, no stipulations, no timeline. I have to go back to Gevalia and I want you to come with me.”

“Masen, I don’t think I can handle staying in the castle,” Bella said, shaking her head.

“Nor do I expect you to,” I replied soothingly. “When we return to Gevalia, we’ll be staying in the summer home. It’s closer to the Swiss border, on the Gevalian side of the Alps. While we’re there, we can truly learn about each other. We’ll help with your physical recovery and we’ll work together to make our relationship even stronger.”

“That sounds pretty idyllic,” Bella breathed, a tentative smile spreading over her face. It fell and she looked a bit panicked. “Eventually, we’ll have to go back to the castle. I can’t … your mother, I can’t forgive her for what she did, what she said.”

“I don’t expect you to,” I said, cupping her cheek. “I’m having a hard time, too. The entire family is struggling with her harsh and unfeeling words.”

“She told me, when she tried make amends, that she was not a good mother, but a great ruler,” Bella muttered. “I can see that. But, there’s got to be a way where she can be both. I see it in you. You’re kind, fair, gentle, and loving. You can also be strong, hard-nosed, and an amazing leader.”
“It’s because I had the influence of both of my parents,” I smiled. “Now, I was supposed to be back by the Gevalian Independence Day, which was last week. I’m making arrangements for our return to Gevalia by next week. My father is handling the Gevalian side of things, while I’m finalizing our travel plans from here. We’ll be flying into Geneva and settling into summer home. We’ll stay there for as long as you need, cherie.”

“That sounds pretty perfect,” Bella said, her body relaxing and she gave me a true smile.

We spent the rest of the day, rebuilding the comfort in our relationship. We laughed, we cried, we made out and we just were. In the afternoon, we went downstairs to check on Charlie and Bella was hugged fiercely by Linda and her friend, Angela. I hung back, spending time with Charlie as he watched his daughter begin living her life, not hindered by emotional abuse, money woes and physical exhaustion. Charlie raised a shaky hand to me and smiled. I hugged him, watching the woman I was going to marry get a little stronger.

xx AMDFT xx

The following day, Bella and I went over to the Clearwater’s home. Felix acted as our security and would stay with us until we’d fly back to Gevalia. In the back of the SUV, Bella was gripping my hand. “You okay, cherie?” I asked.

“I’m anxious to see Jake. When I was over here a couple of days ago, when I first arrived back in New York, Jake was asleep. I also want to hear about Rachel’s date with her techno boy,” she said, blinking over to me. “I know she made it back. She’d texted upon her return to the Leah’s parents’ home. I could tell she wanted to dish, but I had a gorgeous prince in my bed.” She looked at me. She bit her lip, making my cock harden. She blew out a breath, leaning her cheek against my bicep. “Too bad we can’t do much with my gimpy leg.”

“I think …” I began, pulling her closer. “I think we need to take as much time as we need. Do I miss being inside you? Yes. I love being able to show my love physically. For now, I think we need to focus on us and not our physical desires. I want to take you out on dates. I want to spend time with you, as a boyfriend, a fiancé, a lover, and friend. I want you to have the life you deserve. I would love for you to become a teacher, to use your education.”

She shook her head. “I would love to be a teacher, but it’s not my passion. Not anymore,” she murmured. “And when we get married, I don’t think that a princess would be a very effective teacher.”

“No decisions will be made right now, love,” I said. We sat in the back of the SUV until we arrived at Leah’s childhood home. “We’re here.”

“More stairs,” Bella grumbled. She glowered at her knee and wrinkled her nose.

“Just five steps and then you’re okay once we’re inside. Jake told me that everything important, such as the bathroom and dining room, are on the same floor,” I explained, kissing her forehead. Felix parked in the alley next to the Clearwater home. I slid out of the back of the car, taking Bella’s crutches as she followed me. With a wrinkled nose, she hobbled up the stairs and was greeted by Seth, who hugged her tightly. He looked at me, his eyes were cold and he shook my hand. This is going to be a long day. Seth hates me.

“Seth, be nice,” Leah snarled as we walked into the house. “Masen is a good guy. It’s his mother that sucks.”

“Seth, if I didn’t have two broken legs, I’d kick your ass,” Jake laughed. “His Princeliship is one of
the best men I’ve ever known.” He rolled into the foyer and grinned widely. His bruises had faded, with some scrapes on his face and he looked okay. He had a brace around his wrist and one of his legs was wrapped in plaster, with the other in a removable boot. “Bells, you look good. Did my dad feed you a boat load of fish?”

“I think I started to grow gills,” Bella quipped. She walked over, hugging him tightly. “Thank you for your help, Jake. It was exactly what I needed. Where’s your sister?”

“I’m here,” she chirped, walking up from the basement. “I was talking to Ollie.”

“One date and you’re calling him Ollie?” Bella snorted. Rachel just grinned widely, hugging Bella and kissing her cheek. “Any action?”

“A sweet kiss and we made plans to go out tomorrow,” Rachel beamed, turning to me. She held out her hand. I shook it. “We met briefly at Jake’s graduation. It’s nice to see you, Masen.”

“You, too, Rachel,” I said, giving her a brief hug. We didn’t get a chance to talk for very long. Sue Clearwater bellowed that dinner was ready and we all clambered into the dining room. Leah and Jake talked about their wedding. With Jake’s time off from the bureau due to his injuries, he stepped up to help a lot. Their wedding was still scheduled for July 20th. Leah asked Bella to be one of her bridesmaids and my girl agreed, hugging Leah.

With that, the women kicked us guys out and into the living room. Harry put on some spring training baseball while Seth and I sat on the couch. Jake was in a recliner, his feet up and an icepack on his wrist. “When are you heading back to Gevalia, Mase?” Jake asked.

“Beginning of next week,” I answered. “I was supposed to return last week for the Gevalian Independence Day, but obviously I was still here and I wasn’t going to leave Bella.”

“You’re not going to the castle, are you?” Seth growled; his eyes narrowed at me.

“You, too, Seth,” Jake admonished. “I know you feel for Bella. We all did. And what Her Majesty said to her was abhorrent, but she tried to make it right.” He looked at me. “His question does have merit.”

“No, we’re not going to the castle,” I chuckled.

“Good,” they both retorted.

We watched the baseball game and an hour later, the women came back with some dessert and cups of coffee. Bella curled next to me, twining our fingers together. It was a nice, quiet and normal evening. It was so quiet that Bella drifted off, her legs draped over mine. Seth left, having an early shift the following morning and Harry and Sue went to bed, as did Rachel, still recovering from jetlag.

Leah looked at Bella, who was snoring quietly. “I’m glad that things worked out for the two of you,” she said quietly. “I like her. A lot.”

“Me, too. And I hate that she was ripped to shreds by the press and by your mother,” Jake growled. He kissed Leah’s hand and squeezed her hip.

“You were also ripped to shreds, Jake,” I frowned. “Your integrity was questioned.”

“I’ll survive,” Jake shrugged. “I mean, the bureau is running its own investigation. I know that I didn’t do anything wrong. And once the bureau has completed their investigation, they’ll know
that I didn’t do anything wrong.” He blinked to Bella. “Take her home, Mase. I appreciate you coming by and I still love you like a brother, but your focus needs to be on her.”

“In a bit,” I murmured. “Jake, I didn’t get a chance to talk to you … not really. After Bella’s surgery and the giant clusterfuck that my mother caused, I never got to thank you. I know that you’re in a world of pain and being investigated by your bosses. You could have just walked away.”

“I would never do that, Mase. You’re my brother and I love you. Just like I love Bells like a sister,” Jake smiled. “I’ll be okay. You just be happy. And be ready to give the best ‘best man’ speech at my wedding, bud.”

“Done, Jake,” I chuckled.

“Call me when you get settled in Gevalia,” he said, nuzzling Leah’s neck. She grinned as I picked up Bella and carried her out to the SUV.

We drove back to the apartment and it was blissfully quiet. I carried Bella to the bedroom, laying her on the bed and stuffing a pillow underneath her leg. There was another note from Charlie, giving us some space. I went back into the bedroom and got ready for bed. Bella snuggled against me, her body conforming to mine. I pressed a kiss to her forehead. “I love you, cherie. Always.”

xx AMDFT xx

The next couple of days were spent finalizing plans for the bakery and hiring a staff to man it. Charlie was going to be in charge, with Angela as the manager. It would officially open in July. The kitchen was nearly complete, but there was some hold up with tiles and such for the front of the shop. Bella helped out, making suggestions for the menus, which they were expanding to include some light lunch options and specialty drinks, imported from Gevalia.

When we were done with that, Charlie and I helped Bella pack up her belongings and ship them to Gevalia, directly to our family’s summer home. Charlie was undoubtedly sad about his oldest child moving out, but he knew it was coming. He was happy for her and vowed to visit as often as he could.

If I had to guess, he’d be moving to Gevalia before we got married. With Linda.

As I was taping up one of the final boxes, my cell phone chimed. *Your mother is back in Gevalia, Masen. We’re going to have some counseling to deal with what happened to Bella and Jake. I’ve made all the arrangements for you to fly into Geneva and spend as much time as you need in the summer home. I love you and I’m proud of you. ~ Dad*

I sent a quick thank you and after the boxes were loaded up into the SUV to be packed into the private plane, we drove back to the condo overlooking Central Park. We spent another two days packing up my shit into the ginormous trunk. Bella also had clothes that were placed in there as well.

“I’m going to miss this place,” she said, going through the fridge. She was sitting on a stool, tossing stuff into the garbage. “What is this?” She held up a bag of something. Whatever it was, it was moldy and gross.

“I don’t know, but I didn’t buy it. It may have belonged to Jake or my mother got it,” I shrugged.

“Yuck,” she shuddered, tossing it daintily into the garbage. “Seriously, though. It’s where a lot of our relationship took root, Masen.”
“This place isn’t going anywhere, cherie,” I said. “This belongs to the Gevalian government. Whenever there is a visiting dignitary, they stay here. Or in the smaller condo.”

“Hmmm,” she said. “Is that why you stayed with my dad? You didn’t want to see your mother?”

“Yes,” I answered. “Bella, I was never as furious as I was when she suggested that I … her words were so uncaring. I know that she flew out and tried to convince you to come back.”

“It was her words that did force me to come home,” she muttered. “But, not for the reasons you think.”

“Explain it, Bella,” I said, hopping up on the counter and looking at her.

“She tried to explain that I was worthy and that she spoke out of anger and frustration,” Bella said. “I still am struggling why you think I’m …”

“You’re everything,” I growled.

“I’m not, but I’m working on it,” she sighed with a sad, weary smile. “I was upset at her words, yes. I felt like another person had made me feel like shit. And she did, but it was my perception that made it worse. I’ve never really fought for anything besides the bakery. I let my sister walk all over me and your mother did the same. As much as I hate it, and hate her words, I loved her, Masen. I had someone that I could turn to. Don’t get me wrong, I love Linda. She’s great for my dad. But, something about your mom accepting me …”

“It made it worth it,” I finished for her.

“Yeah. Like, I was worthy of you,” she breathed, taking my hands. “I lost my mother because she died when she had Alice. I was devastated, but I bounced back. I was nine, almost ten. It’s just taking me longer to grieve the loss of your mother. I thought I had her respect, her love. She said she did respect and love me when she came to Forks, but they’re just words. I don’t believe it and I doubt I ever will. In time, I may be able to move on from this, but not now.” She turned back to the fridge, crossing her arms. “I think this is done.”

“Whatever we missed, the cleaning crew will throw away,” I said, tugging out the garbage bag and wrapping it up. I tossed it down the garbage chute. “Tonight’s our last night in New York …”

Bella twisted her hair up into a messy bun. “And by tomorrow night, we’ll be in the Gevalian royal summer home.”

“I want one more magical night with you, in the city where we fell in love,” I said.

“Masen, I can barely walk,” she quipped, pointing to her leg.

“Just a carriage ride through Central Park, then dinner?” I suggested. “We have no food in here and we can’t survive on love alone.”

“I look like crap,” Bella laughed. Her face was devoid of any makeup and her hair was piled on her head, disheveled but very sexy.

“You’re perfect,” I said.

Her face blanched and she looked out the window. “What about the press?”

“One of the Kardashians is in town. We’re safe,” I quipped. I stood up, holding out my hand.
“Please, chérie?”

“Okay, Your Majesty,” she purred, standing up and balance her crutch under her arm. “But, if I show up on Page Six, belittled that look like a drowned rat, I will pummel you with my crutches.” I slid my arm around her waist and kissed her, my tongue sliding between her lips. She moaned, clutching my shirt and her crutch fell to the floor. “Those lips are quite persuasive, Masen.”

“Good,” I chuckled, holding onto her hips as I bent down to pick up her crutches. “Let’s go, love. One last night in New York.”

We spent the night, traveling through Central Park in a horse-drawn carriage. Felix was our driver. He paid the owner three times the usual amount to act as our protection. We spent the entire ride cuddled up together and kissing like two randy teenagers. Bella’s eyes were not filled with fear, but with adoration. We were happy, undoubtedly and blissfully happy.

After a late dinner at a pizzeria, we went back to the condo and spent most of the night talking. We talked about our plans when we got back to Gevalia. We made tentative plans for our wedding, who we’d invite and not invite. We talked about her mother and how much she missed her. We discussed my fractured relationship with my mother and if there was a possibility that it could be healed.

By the time the sun was coming, we had to get into the SUV and head to Teterboro. Gevalia was waiting. We both were exhausted, but felt so intimately connected that the exhaustion meant nothing. However, we both crashed as soon as we took off, flying toward Geneva. Almost eight hours later, we landed and we were driven in a bullet-proof Range Rover through the Swiss Alps to the Gevalian summer palace. Bella’s eyes widened as it came into view. I threaded my fingers with hers, smiling softly and nuzzling her cheek. “Welcome home, chérie.”

A/N: I was determined to finish this chapter by the end of my spring break. Dag nabbit, I did it! Anyhow, pictures of Casa de Clearwater, carriage ride, the Swiss Alps and the Gevalian summer home are all on my blog. We will be switching back to Bella and having a bit of a time jump, to be honest. Right now, it’s the beginning of March in the story. (Bella and Jake had their car accident on Valentine’s Day). We’re going to find out more about how the pictures were leaked and who was behind it. We’ll also celebrate Masen’s birthday and perhaps, some schmexy times.

Leave me some!
Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

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Chapter Forty-Eight

Bella

“Another one, Lady Bella,” said my torturer, erm, physical therapist, Karen. “Last one. Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go!”

“I hate you,” I grumbled as I finished my exercises, pressing against her hand. I fell back on the table and wiped my brow, which was covered in sweat. Karen helped me back and she picked up the massage cream. “Okay, never mind. I don’t hate you. Massage away, Karen.”

“The scar is looking better,” Karen murmured as she placed a roll of towels underneath my knee. She began working her strong fingers into my leg and I took deep breaths, trying to ignore the pain. I wrinkled my nose, seeing a long, nasty scar running from my lower thigh to the top of my shin. It was red and puckered, nasty and angry. So different from the initial scar I’d received from my surgery in New York. We’d been in the summer Gevalian palace for about three months. Shortly after our arrival in early March, I was feeling better and I was heading to the kitchen without my crutches or knee brace. My knee was still unstable and I took a tumble, completely jacking up my knee, reinjuring it and causing me to have an open ACL reconstruction surgery by the palace physician. What had been tiny laparoscopic scars was now a zipper from the top of my shin to my lower thigh. “It’s ugly, Karen,” I grumbled.

“It’s already fading, Lady Bella,” Karen said, giving me a warm smile. She was an older woman, in her late forties, early fifties, who worked with her husband, Doug, for my physical therapy. “You’re getting stronger every day we work. I’m thinking that you will be completely free of the crutches by the time you celebrate Prince Edward’s birthday in a couple of weeks. He’s mentioned that he has plans for the two of you.”

“What about the brace?” I asked. I blinked at her. “And, what plans?”

“I think we may be able to streamline it,” Karen chuckled. “My husband will get the measurements for you, fitting you by the next week. And, I’m sworn to secrecy.”

“Thanks, Karen,” I smiled as she finished my massage. When she was done, she attached electrodes to my knee and I spent fifteen minutes getting my knee stimmed and iced. I attached my knee in the clunky knee brace, I hobbled to where Masen was working out. He was running, his gait perfect and his bare chest streaked with sweat. I wanted to lick his tattoo, tasting his skin. I also missed running. Not that I was any good at it, but seeing Masen’s smooth and graceful stride on the treadmill made me jealous of my own gimpiness. I cursed the paparazzi for causing the
accident that resulted in my injuries.

_Fucking vultures._

I sat down, blatantly ogling my fiancé. He was singing to whatever song was playing on his iPod and focused on his feet pounding the treadmill. He blinked over to me, a crooked smile spreading over his face. Despite the speed he was running, he crooned some love song in French. I didn’t know what he was saying, but he was giving it his all. He slowed down and hopped down, ending the song while on his knee and holding my hand.

“You’ve missed your calling, Masen,” I giggled as he beamed at me goofily. “You should have been a singer.”

“Surely you jest,” Masen chuckled, standing up and picking up the t-shirt that was draped over the side of the treadmill. “I can play the piano, guitar and violin, but singing is not my talent. Emmett is a beautiful baritone.”

“What you lack in talent, you make up for in enthusiasm,” I said, standing up and putting my crutches under my arms. “How was your work out?”

“Good. Yours?” Masen asked, guiding me through the gym and to the waiting Range Rover outside the rehabilitation facility. Felix nodded from his spot in the driver’s seat. Once we were settled, he pulled away and drove us back to the summer home.

“I’m frustrated that I’m not healing as quickly as I’d hoped,” I frowned, scowling at my knee. “You had a major set-back, _chérie_,” Masen breathed, taking my hand and kissing my knuckles. “You’re making a lot of progress. Before you know it, you’ll be running right along with me.”

“Unlikely,” I snorted. “I’ll be happy just to walk without a noticeable limp.” I leaned my cheek against his shoulder and he kissed my forehead. “Have you spoken to your dad? Emmett?”

“My dad called this morning while you were sleeping,” Masen said, his fingers playing with the end of my ponytail. “He’s getting ready to retire and we need to head back to the capital, probably after my birthday.”

“I noticed that your mother issued several statements, explaining away your absences from the required state affairs,” I murmured. I read the news, translated from French or German, online. Esme had been nothing but apologetic and supportive since the accident. However, she wanted Masen and I to stay in the castle. Anytime she spoke to Masen – which was few and far between – she begged him to return. He refused to do so. He was adamant that we spent time together as a couple, without the scrutiny of the press or the stress of trying to please her.

We were in the relationship. Not her.

Carlisle understood and he encouraged it. Emmett agreed and he backed us up. My father, Linda, Billy, Jacob and our friends in New York thought our time in the summer palace was an ingenious idea, away from the limelight of capital and the scrutiny of the press. The only one who didn’t understand was Esme. She was trying to fix our relationship, but it would be a long time before I’d be able to forgive what she’d said in anger.

I would, however, never forget.

The one thing that Masen and I did agree on was that regardless of our situation with Esme and the distance between us, we’d always support her publicly. Behind closed doors, it would be where
we’d be coldly polite. Regardless, Esme’s relationship with her oldest son had been irrevocably damaged because of her words and resulting actions.

“Cherie, we still have time, but my father is ready to step down from his post in Parliament. I will be taking his place in the House of Lords and I am in charge of finding a replacement for Duke Eleazar since he had been stripped of his title because of his involvement with his daughter’s actions,” Masen explained, pulling me from my reverie.

“Duke Eleazar was Lady Kathryn’s father?” I asked.

Masen nodded. “The entire family has been stripped of the land and titles. We’re currently looking into finding the next in line, outside of the Denali family, who has royal blood, to fill Eleazar’s seat in the House of Lords,” Masen smiled as we pulled up to the palace. “We’ve found a connection, but we may have to teach them about the ways of the blue bloods.” The SUV stopped and we made our way inside the palace.

“Could you elect someone?” I murmured as we made our way to the kitchen. The chef, Mrs. Cope, greeted us sweetly.

“House of Commons has elected officials,” Masen explained, grabbing us some water. “The House of Lords is strictly for the nobility. Gevalia is divided up into thirty-two smaller districts, similar to the counties you have in each of your states. Each district has a noble representing its people.”

“What is classified as a noble? I mean, what are the ranks?” I questioned, sitting down at the kitchen table. Mrs. Cope brought over a light meal, with some sparkling water.

“Obviously, Queen or King is the highest ranking. We also have regents who can rule in our place. When my family flew to New York after your accident, Emmett was technically the prince regent, leading in our stead. The next level is the duke. My father is a duke,” Masen explained.

“But, not king?” I asked, arching a brow. “When we get married, I would be a duchess?”

“Technically, yes,” Masen nodded. “Though, you’d be my queen, my partner and ma cherie.” He smiled softly at me, picking up my hand and kissing my wrist. “Beneath a duke is a marquess, followed by earl, viscount – which is what Eleazar was for his district – baron, baronet and ending with knight. The title of knight, or dame in the case of a woman, can be bequeathed by royalty. Once a year, we knight people who have demonstrated a great love of Gevalia or honored soldiers. This year was supposed to be the first year where I would grant the knighthoods, performing the ceremony at the Gevalian Independence Day events.”

“That’s why your mother had to issue those press releases,” I said, frowning. “I’m sorry, Masen.”

“Don’t apologize, Bella,” he replied. “The ceremony was still performed. My mother did it upon her return to Gevalia.” He finished his meal, as did I, but I was focused on him shirking his responsibilities because of me. “Stop stressing, cherie. It was handled and I’ll have other opportunities to do that. Now, let’s get cleaned up. I want to take my fiancée out on a date tonight.”

xx AMDFT xx

A few days prior to Masen’s birthday, Emmett flew down from his base just outside of the capital to celebrate Masen’s birthday with us. He had gotten bigger, more muscled, and his eyes were clear and bright. He looked so much healthier than when I first met him, after a month-long bender.

“You’re getting older, big brother,” Emmett chuckled, sitting on the back patio of the palace. The backyard was the Swiss Alps. “I’ve forgotten how beautiful this view was.”
I was sitting on the chaise lounge, curled up between Masen’s legs. He was drinking some wine and sharing it with me. Emmett was sipping some fancy Swiss soda and nibbling on fresh fruit from a platter behind him. “I love the main castle, but this view is quite idyllic. I don’t want to go back,” Masen sighed.

“We have to,” I quipped. “Your dad wants to retire, Masen.”

“Emmett, go take Dad’s place,” Masen grumbled, his lips finding the soft spot behind my ear. I shuddered, snuggling closer to him and wishing we were alone.

“I would, if I could, Mase, but I’m in the air force for two years,” Emmett chuckled. “Besides, I’m not the legislative type.”

“You’ll have to be,” Masen laughed. “When our mother decides to step down and I’m coronated, you’ll have to assume my role in the House of Lords.”

“But, that’s years down the road, Masen,” Emmett quipped, an easy smile on his face. It fell quickly. I shuddered and Masen tightened his hold around my body. “I’ve got some news for you two.”

“From the look on your face, it’s not good news,” I sighed.

“It’s news about the accident and the pictures leaked to the tabloids,” Emmett explained.

Masen tensed behind me and one of his hands tightened into a fist. I loosened it, threading my fingers with his. “What is the news, Emmett?” I asked.

“There was a clear link that Kathryn and Irina were the ones who were behind the photos. Both of them were in the states and had hired a private detective, trailing Bella,” Emmett said. “When she arrived in Rochester, the private detective somehow got the employee list of the hospital. He found an orderly who had a huge gambling problem, in desperate need of money. The photos were taken by this orderly and sold to the tabloids for a huge amount of money. After they were published, another substantial amount was deposited into his account.”

“How do you know it was linked to Kathryn and Irina?” Masen asked. “Surely, they weren’t that stupid to use their own accounts?”

“They were that stupid,” Emmett snickered with a dramatic eye roll. “The money came from Irina’s husband’s account.”

“What does that mean?” I whispered.

“The orderly has been fired from the hospital for violated numerous privacy rules,” Emmett said. “He was also arrested for violating HIPAA and for taking a bribe. Irina’s husband came forward and said that his wife had asked him to deposit the money. He’s testifying against her and Kathryn in exchange for a lesser sentence. I think he’s going to get probation for bribery and extortion. He’s also divorcing Irina, washing his hands of her.”

“What about Irina and Kathryn?” Masen snarled. “Are they being charged?”

“They are and are already in custody for what they’ve done to you and Jake,” Emmett said to me. I bit my lip and shifted in Masen’s arms. “Was my sister involved?” I asked.

“No. She wasn’t. She hasn’t any contact with anyone but her court-appointed attorney since she
was thrown into Gevalian jail,” Emmett chuckled. “I know that she was made aware of your accident and she was upset, very upset. She’s been asking to see you.”

“Maybe, at some point, I’ll go see her,” I shrugged. “Anything else, Emmett?”

“The FBI is performing an investigation on Jake,” Emmett muttered.

“What?!” Masen and I gasped. It was my turn to tremble in anger.

“Why didn’t he say anything? I spoke to him a few days ago, chatting to him about his wedding,” Masen said.

“With the damning photos and tabloid coverage, they’re covering their bases,” Emmett shrugged. “From what I’ve heard from Jake, it will be open and shut. He didn’t do anything wrong. With the criminal case of Irina and Kathryn, it’s pretty clear-cut that both you and Jake were innocents caught in the crosshairs.”

“That doesn’t mean I’m not going to talk to him about this the next time I’ve got him on the phone,” Masen retorted grumpily.

“Enough bad news … I want to hear about your birthday plans, Mase,” Emmett said, trying to lighten the mood. “Are you going to share with your only brother?”

“Nope,” Masen quipped. “I only have one wish for my birthday and that’s for me and Bella to be together. No paparazzi, no interfering family and no drama. Just us.”

“Do you know his plans?” Emmett asked me; his nose wrinkled.

“All I know is that we’re leaving the summer palace the day after tomorrow to locations unknown, but I need my passport,” I said, shooting Masen a mock scowl. He just grinned wolfishly, kissing my nose. “Shouldn’t I be the one to make his birthday plans?”

Something where very little clothing is required? I miss our naked fun time …

“Technically, yes, but for my birthday, I want to spoil you,” Masen said, his voice taking a seductive tenor. His lips caressed my neck and his hand slipped underneath my tank top, inching up to the underside of my breast. I shuddered, wanting his hand to cup my breast, but his brother was sitting across from us.

“Stop seducing your fiancée, Masen,” Emmett scoffed. “I’m single and my hand just isn’t cutting it anymore.”

“You could start dating,” Masen suggested.

“I can’t. I still love Rosalie,” Emmett sighed. “I know that she’s … she’s working through her issues.”

“Have you spoken to her?” I asked. Emmett shook his head, his hands twisting the napkin in his lap. “That would make sense. When I was making plans to leave, she was going into an inpatient program. I’m not sure how long she was planning on staying in there. The birth of her baby really messed her up. Hell, it messed me up and I wasn’t the one who was pregnant. I could see how much giving birth had caused her physical, emotional and mental pain. She had to relive the worst night of her life.”

“Was the baby mine?” Emmett asked, his voice choked. “I know I don’t have a right to know.”
The baby wasn’t yours, Em,” I said. “DNA tests proved that it was one of her attackers. Rose’s daughter was adopted by a couple who adored her from the moment she was placed into adoptive mother’s arms.”

He nodded, getting up from the chair. “I’m … I’m going to lay down,” he said woodenly.

“Are you okay, Emmett?” Masen asked worriedly.

“Not right now, but I will be,” Emmett answered honestly. “I’ll see you both in the morning. I need to head back to the capital to finish my training tomorrow.” He bent down, kissing my cheek and patted Masen’s shoulder.

“Should we be worried?” I breathed, turning to face Masen. I draped my legs over his and sat, cradled in in his arms.

“I’ll check on him,” Masen said, cupping my cheek. “But, I think he’s going to be okay. That was his fear … that the baby was his. From what he told me, he and Rosalie had always used protection, but nothing is completely fool-proof. Regardless, knowing that those animals had … Emmett’s sure to be mind-fucked.” He kissed me, obviously needing reassurance, deepening it with a sweep of his tongue at the seam of my lips. I tangled my fingers into his hair and pressed my body to his. He growled, his hands moving to my ass. He groaned when my fingers grazed along his hardness. “Fuck.”

“Let’s do that,” I giggled against his mouth. “It’s been so long, Masen. I need you.”

He pulled back, staring at me. “I need you, too. But …”

“But … always with a but …” I grumbled.

“Cherie, I love you and I want to be with you, too. Do not mistake that,” he said, wriggling his hips and pressing his hardened length into my hands. I whimpered, wanting that length to be inside me. “I just would rather not make love to you on the chaise lounge in the backyard of the summer palace.” He traced my features, his gaze soft but filled with desire. “I want to make love to you on a beautiful bed, worshipping every inch of your beautiful body.”

“We can do that. Now. Upstairs,” I smirked, moving to get up.

“We can do that. On my birthday …” he countered. “Can you wait a few more days? I don’t want anything for my birthday but you.”

“I can wait, Majesty,” I quipped. “But, I did get you a present. What kind of fiancée would that make me if I didn’t get you a birthday present?” Before he could respond, I did. “A bad one. Come on, Majesty. If we can’t make love, we can at least make out while we watch a movie.” I stood up, balancing on one crutch. Masen followed me and adjusted his erection. He took my hand, threading our fingers together and led us to the basement movie theater. We spent the night not watching two movies.

By the time we went to bed, I was so turned on that it was painful.

A few more days …

xx AMDFT xx

“Paris?” I asked as we arrived at the private airstrip in Geneva. He showed me the flight plan. “We’re going to Paris?”
“You said you wanted to go back,” Masen said, a smile spreading over his face. “I want to give you an opportunity to see Paris and not as the girlfriend of a diplomat who was working nonstop while we were there. I want to spoil you. Starting with taking you to the Eiffel Tower during the day.”

“I still can’t do stairs, Masen,” I said, gesturing to my knee. I was wearing a smaller, sleeker brace and was free of my crutches. “Well, I can, but I’m so slow.”

“There’s an elevator, cherie,” Masen quipped, helping me onto the waiting private jet. A little over an hour later, we landed and were driven to beautiful hotel. Hotel Monge was a small boutique hotel, discreet and protected. There were a number of familiar Gevalian security personnel. “I wasn’t taking any chances, Bella. Suffice it to say, I’m using my celebrity for selfish reasons.”

“What did you do?” I asked as we made our way inside. A chic woman behind the front desk nodded reverently. Masen returned her nod with a smile. We entered the lift and once the doors closed, I pinched his side. “Masen!”

“Your fingers are like damned pinchers,” Masen snickered, rubbing his ribs.

“I’ll keep pinching until you tell me what you did,” I said, arching a brow.

“I may have … bought out the entire hotel,” he answered, giving me a sly grin. My jaw dropped, clearly shocked at his admission. “I was certain that I didn’t want to take any chances. The rooms are occupied by Gevalian security.”

“You bought out an entire hotel,” I gasped. “Masen! People are going to talk! This shit isn’t normal!”

“It’s not, cherie, but when it comes to your safety, our safety, this is normal,” Masen explained. “Usually not to this extent. With what happened to you and your trepidations about the press, the seemed to be the best option.” The elevator opened and we were outside of a small foyer, similar to the one in the condo in New York City. “Typically, we purchase enough rooms to have a buffer between the general public and our rooms. Not an entire hotel. This place, however, is smaller.” He pulled out a key and unlocked the door. “After you, love.”

I took a step over the threshold. “Holy crap,” I squeaked. “This is gorgeous.” I walked to the window, seeing Notre Dame off in the distance. “How long are we here?”

“We leave on Saturday, after my birthday. So, we’re here for a little less than a week,” Masen answered. “Now, there’s a café and some coffee waiting for us. I’m dying for some pastries. Nothing is as good as yours, but Felix said that they are to die for.”

We spent the rest of the day wandering around the area near our hotel. We had a late snack, followed by dinner and then making our way to an adorable gallery. There were beautiful paintings and sculptures on display. We both found a beautiful sculpture that really spoke to us for Jake and Leah, for the wedding. It was beautiful glass sculpture, looking like a wave. Masen spoke to the artist, purchasing the piece and we made arrangements for it to be shipped to my father.

The next day, I was treated to a spa package. I wanted Masen to join me, but he said it was for me. He looked down at my knee, which was quite swollen and a bit painful. We’d pushed it too far the day before and with his never-ending resources, he arranged for a sports therapist to give me a full-body massage. I was also getting a manicure, pedicure, haircut and waxing treatments. That night, I was dressed in a beautiful cocktail dress. We went on a boat ride on the Seine, complete with a four-course feast and the best wine I’d ever tasted.
On the morning of Masen’s twenty-ninth birthday, I’d arranged for a delicious meal to be delivered so we could share breakfast in bed. I set my alarm, allowing the cart with our meal to be pushed into our suite. I tipped the server and tried to figure out the best way to carry our meal into the bedroom without spilling it all over the floors.

“Cherie?” came the sleep-gravelly voice of my fiancé. I turned and saw him, wearing a pair of loose pajama bottoms. His chest was deliciously bare, accenting his ridged abdomen and tattoo along his ribs. “I got up to pee and my snuggle buddy was missing.” He rubbed his eyes, padding into the living room. “Are those crepes?”

“I was going to serve you breakfast in bed,” I said. “But, my balance is questionable at the moment.” He slid behind me, his arms wrapping around my waist. His lips found my ear and he growled lowly against my skin. His hand eased under my camisole, caressing my belly. “Masen …”

“I appreciate breakfast in bed, but I’d rather have you in bed,” he purred. His hands dipped beneath the waist band of my satin sleep shorts. “I said I wanted you for my birthday. Why wait?” His hand moved further south, to the top of my mound. His fingers dipped lower until he found my clit. I whimpered, pressing my ass into his crotch as he slowly teased my folds. With a low growl, he pulled his hand away from me and turned me around. “We will enjoy breakfast in bed, cherie. You’re the breakfast.” He bent down and swept me off my feet. I gasped, holding onto his muscular shoulders.

With sure strides, he carried me back to the bedroom and carefully lay me down on the bed. He pressed his body against mine, his green eyes nearly black with desire. Gently, with his knee, he spread my legs. I bent my right one and kept my left one straight, since it was the leg I’d injured. I could bend it, but it was still tender.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” Masen said reverently, his fingers dancing along my collarbones and down my chest. “I’ve missed you, Bella. I’ve missed sharing how I feel about you.”

“You show me. Every day, Masen,” I whispered. “I love you so much. I know that we had a rough patch …”

“Love is too small a word,” he murmured, brushing his lips with mine. I moaned, tangling my fingers into his messy hair. His hands slid up my camisole above my breasts. Rough palms gently squeezed my boobs as his thumbs caressed my nipples. My moans grew louder as he tore the camisole from my body. His mouth moved down my chest, capturing one of my nipples. With his tongue, he suckled it and nibbled on it with his teeth. I was writhing beneath him, my back arching for more of his touch, his mouth, his feel. “Are you wet, Bella?”

“Drenched,” I breathed. “I think I’ve been turned on since we had our make out session at the summer palace, ‘watching’ that movie.”

He smiled up at me, sliding down my body and tugging off my sleep shorts. I hadn’t worn any underwear. My sex was bare, glistening and swollen with need. I sat up, giving him a coy grin. I idly ran my fingers over my chest, moving down toward my center. Masen pulled me to the edge of the bed and thread his fingers with mine. With a long, slow lick, he tasted me. The feeling of his hot, wet tongue made me explode. It had been nearly five months since we’d been intimate. Our sweet kisses and heavy petting had done little to quench the debilitating thirst I had for the man devouring my pussy.

He wasn’t kidding when he said that I was breakfast. He feasted on me until I’d had two orgasms, quaking with pleasure and longing. Masen eased off his sleep pants, revealing his hard and leaking
cock. He stroked it, coating his length with my wetness. I pleaded for him to get inside. He was careful as he thrust against me, the head of his cock teasing my clit. With a slow, deep stroke, he finally slid into me. “Fuck me,” he groaned. “I’ve missed sharing this with you, cherie. I love you. I’ll always love you. Let me show you how much I love you.”

Our lovemaking was slow and tender. I was so overwhelmed with emotion that I felt a few tears slip from my eyes as Masen and I both barreled toward our mutual release. From his soft expression, he understood and he was with me, in every way. “I love you, Masen. I love you so much,” I panted as my orgasm crested over me. He responded by spilling inside and kissing me deeply.

We spent the day in our hotel suite. We ate cold crepes and fresh fruit. We never bothered getting dressed. By the time night had fallen, we’d made love so many times that my body felt like jelly and I was deliciously sore. From the way that Masen was moving, he was in the same boat, but it didn’t stop him from thanking me for his birthday present. I’d gotten him a pocket watch, with a Gevalian coin that boasted his profile. I also got him cufflinks and ‘love stones.’ They were trinkets, but he adored them all the same.

The day after his birthday, we went to the Eiffel Tower with a truckload of incognito security. We rode up in the elevator, taking pictures and doing the tourist thing. We were dressed, our identities hidden. We were able to walk among the other tourists without anyone recognizing Masen as the Prince of Gevalia, or me, his girlfriend. We’d had yet to announce our engagement, but I knew it was on tap when we returned to the capital city.

We made love that night, relishing our final day of freedom before returning to the Gevalia. I knew that it was upsetting Masen, but he had responsibilities to fulfill. He also wanted me to start planning our wedding. He was going to be an active voice in our plans, but this was going to be my day and whatever my heart desired for our nuptials was what I was going to get. I quipped and said that I wanted to get married in Vegas.

Masen just gave me a deadpan look before responding with a firm no.

We woke up on a drizzly Saturday, packing our belongings and leaving our chic boutique hotel home for the past week. As we drove to the airport, he held my hand. “I’ll always be on your side, cherie,” he vowed. “You’re worth it. You’ll always be worth it.”

“So are you,” I smiled, kissing him tenderly. “And I’m worthy of you. I love you, Your Majesty.”

“Not yet,” he chuckled, holding me close. “With you, I’ll always just be Masen.”

“No, you’ll be my true love,” I argued, leaning my cheek against his chest. “My only love.”

“Forever,” he added, his lips brushing over my forehead. “Forever …”

A/N: So, as I said, a time jump. We went from the beginning of March to the end of June. We will be switching back to Masen … back in Gevalia. We’ll hopefully have some resolution between Masen and his mother, leading up to Jake’s wedding.

Pictures of the summer ‘palace’, the hotel, Bella’s presents to Masen and the wave sculpture are on my blog. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me your thoughts. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 49

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

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Chapter Forty-Nine

Masen

“Your Highness, you have a meeting with the head of the financial committee in an hour, a late lunch with the agricultural committee to discuss the potential threats of climate change on the export of our coffee and an afternoon session of the House of Lords,” said Heidi, who’d stepped in as my personal assistant. Felix was my head of personal security. Alec had requested to be moved into Bella’s service.

Much to my mother’s chagrin …

Her staff was also pissed at her for her actions and words in the states.

“My Highness?” Heidi pressed.

“My apologies, Heidi,” I sighed, looking up from my computer. “Is my schedule on my computer?”

“Yes, sir,” she nodded. “Along with a draft of the legislation from the agricultural committee. Be familiar with that for your lunch.”

“It was my bedtime reading for the past week, Heidi,” I snorted. Heidi arched a brow, crossing her arms. She suspected that Bella and I had been making up for lost time since her accident. Every day since we’d made love in Paris, we’d be insatiable. “I swear, Heidi. I have not been slacking in my duties as the leader of the House of Lords.”

“I didn’t say that, Your Highness,” Heidi said, a smile spreading over her face. “With your move into the royal apartment in the city center, out of Masen Manor, and the apparent rift between you and your mother …”

“The public don’t know, do they?” I asked.

“No. Only those of us who are within the inner circle are aware of your estrangement,” Heidi said. “Now, you’ve got an hour before your meetings begin earnest. Check in with your fiancée. She’s called, stressing out about ‘messing up the ginormous place that is not an apartment, but a penthouse … no, not a penthouse, a museum! We’ve got so much freaking room!’ That’s a direct quote from Bella’s mouth.”

“Pretty good impression,” I snickered. “You almost have that an American accent.” Heidi wrinkled her nose, ducking out of my office. I sat back in my leather chair. The office had once belonged to my father, my grandfather. Now, I was sitting in the same chair that they had. It was daunting, but I was trying to not stress out. Compared to the responsibilities of being king, leading the House of
Lords was a cake walk. According to our constitution, I was nobility’s voice to the queen. Speaking for them … advocating for our people. It meant that I had twice weekly meetings with my mother.

Those were very difficult meetings. I talked to her about the issues of the people, cold and detached. When she tried to engage in personal conversations after those meetings, I’d just leave. It broke my mother’s heart, but she’d broken mine and Bella’s with her callous words.

Shaking my head, I opened my computer, dialing Bella on FaceTime. She answered after three rings. Her hair was curled around her heart-shaped face and her cheeks were pink. “Masen, this place … it’s … I got lost going to the bathroom,” she hissed, her eyes wide.

“Hello, to you too, cherie,” I snickered. “I take it you found your way out of there?”

“Bite me, Majesty,” she quipped with a quiet giggle, her nose wrinkled.

“I did. Last night,” I purred, waggling my brows. Bella’s blush deepened and she bit her lip. “Is everything unpacked? All of your belongings arrived from the states?”

“Alec delivered the boxes. I never realized how many books I had,” she giggled, tucking her hair behind her ears. “They’d been in storage since I moved back home. Anyway, whatever wasn’t sent, we can pick up when we fly out to the states for Jake’s wedding. Dad’s arranged for the grand reopening of the bakery to be while we’re in town.”

“That’s perfect,” I smiled.

“They’re actually doing a piece in the paper,” Bella murmured. She blinked up, her brown eyes swirling. “I was thinking. We still haven’t announced our engagement. Perhaps … we could … I don’t know …”

“Grant an exclusive interview?” I finished for her. “Announce to the world that I’m yours and you’re mine?”

She nodded. Her look was hungry and filled with desire. “I’ve worn this ring since March. I’m proud to be your fiancée. I’m honored that you love me, even after what … even after I left without any sort of explanation. I’m so sorry about that … I’m still in shock you forgave me, Masen.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” I whispered. “You were in a very difficult, emotional and painful position, Bella. I get it. Everyone gets it and they’re on your side. My mother is trying to make amends. It’ll take time, to be honest. I love you. Since we’ve returned to Gevalia, the country loves you.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” Bella snorted. “Anyway, I got a phone call from your father. He would like us to come over for dinner on Sunday. They want to celebrate your birthday and your new position.”

I nodded. “Okay,” I sighed. “We’ll go after church.”

“I’ll let Carlisle know,” Bella smiled, her body relaxing. “With that, I’m going to try and make this place more homey and less like a contemporary art museum.” She picked up her phone, giving me a glimpse of her cleavage and creamy skin. “I love you, Masen. I’ll see you when you get home.”

The rest of my afternoon was monotonous, tedious and boring. However, I managed to have productive meetings with various committees and the afternoon session of the House of Lords. That night, I made love to my fiancée, christening the kitchen, followed by the newly completed library.
By the weekend, I just wanted to hole up in the apartment in various stages of undress. I was over being diplomatic. I just wanted to cater to the beautiful woman who wore my ring. We did do that on Saturday. Sunday, we had to be up early to attend weekly church services. I believed in God and attended church every Sunday until I was in university. Now, upon my return to Gevalia and with my upcoming wedding, we needed to be seen at church services, even if our engagement hadn’t been officially announced to the public.

Arriving at the cathedral, we walked inside. Bella was wearing a beautiful summer dress that fluttered over her hips, down to her knees and a pair of flats. Her hair was curled and she walked confidently on my arm. She still had a slight limp from her knee injury, needing some assistance with balance. “Your parents are here,” Bella said quietly, gesturing to my mother and father sitting near the front of the sanctuary. As if she’d heard Bella, my mother turned and smiled.

I led Bella to the pew. My parents moved down, giving us space to sit with them. Bella curtsied before sitting down next to my mother. We didn’t get a chance to speak since the service began shortly after our arrival. An hour later, we left the sanctuary, surrounded by Gevalian security. The press was waiting outside, taking pictures of us as we made our way back to the waiting cars.

“Why don’t you ride with us, Edward?” Mom asked, an expectant smile on her face. I nodded and we managed to get into the Range Rover. “We’re making your favorites. I was so glad to hear you were coming to dinner. I’ve missed seeing you, Masen.”

My father and Bella were speaking quietly, giving my mother and I some privacy. I looked at her and she was wringing her hands, looking anxious and sad. With a deep breath, I replied, “It’s been some time since we’ve spoken, Mother. Well, spoken personally.” Cold, Masen … yes, you’re pissed at her but she is still your mother and your queen.

She deflated, idly toying with her purse. “I know that I’ve broken your trust, Masen and could have ruined everything,” she whispered. “I just want my son back.”

“He may never come back, Mother,” I hissed under my breath. She reached over, taking my hand. I stiffened, but didn’t pull away.

“Can we talk? After dinner?” she whispered. “Just the two of us?”

“Not if you’re going to bad mouth my fiancée, Mother,” I snapped, glowering at her.

“No. Never … I was angry with the press, with everyone and I took it out on you and Bella,” she breathed. “She’s made you so happy.”

“After dinner,” I nodded. “One word of bullshit and we’re out of there.”

“You could stay tonight,” my mother suggested, her brows pulled together. “Masen Manor is standing empty since you’ve returned from the summer palace.”

“I’m sorry, Mother. I’ve got early meetings tomorrow morning at the parliament building and the apartment is closer to the city center,” I said. “Plus, Bella is meeting with education minister to discuss a literacy program for the children in Gevalia.”

“Oh, really?” she asked.

“Bella graduated with a degree in teaching, primarily in secondary education and English. She wants to work on making reading accessible for children with learning disabilities,” I explained. “She got the idea while she was recuperating and rehabilitating her knee. She’d read information about our educational system and was saddened that students with disabilities are not reaching their
full potential. But from her research, it appears that a good number of children are falling through the cracks. Parents don’t want their children to hold the stigma of having a learning disability. That’s what Bella is meeting with the minister about; regarding the children who are arbitrarily passed from one grade to the next, without meeting necessary benchmarks.”

“I never even thought about that,” Mother murmured. “There’s a stigma for students with disabilities?”

“Parents don’t want their kid labeled,” I shrugged. “Bella explained it to me. It doesn’t make sense because if they have that label, they can get the educational assistance they need.”

The car pulled up to the palace and with the assistance of the new staff, we all got out of the car. Benjamin, a man who’d been hired by Felix, was the new head of palace security, along with Liam and Demetri, acting as my parents’ private bodyguards. Elizabeth was the only familiar face, standing inside the private palace residence. I also knew that Renata had retained her position as the head of housekeeping, acting as my mother’s personal maid.

We were led to the living room and I noticed that my brother was in there, dressed in his uniform. He gave me a man-hug and curling Bella into his side. Settling into the couches, Emmett told us about his training and his first assignment on a base near the Adriatic Sea, working with the Americans on a recon mission. He couldn’t say much, but it was so nice to see my brother having motivation and drive for something other than drugs, alcohol and getting laid.

Once our ‘dinner’ was ready – which was more like a late lunch, as was the custom on Sundays in the royal household – we went into the dining room. While we ate, my father asked Bella questions about her plans with the educational minister. Bella, despite having putting together a rather large apartment while I worked, explained her thoughts, research and proposed educational reforms for the Gevalian people. She’d have to do some more research, backing up her findings with evidence, but I saw an excitement and ambition I’d never seen before in her. She was dedicated to the bakery, but it was clear that she missed her calling to be an educator.

When I looked at my mother, she was clearly shocked at Bella’s enthusiasm, knowledge and confidence while she was describing her plans. I barely hid a smirk as my fiancée showed just how strong she could be. By the time dessert was served, my father volunteered his time and my brother agreed to help as much as he could while he was on leave from his deployment for Bella’s educational reform plans. I’d already promised my support and I’d spoken to both houses of parliament, curious as to their thoughts about educational reforms.

My father took Bella into his office to further discuss her plans while Emmett left to head back to base. My mother and I went out into the gardens. It was a lovely day, mild and sunny. I’d removed my suit coat, rolling up my sleeves as my mom wore a pair of capris and a pretty blouse.

“Bella has some innovative and amazing ideas for our educational system,” Mother said. “She’s very smart and passionate.”

“She is,” I nodded, strolling next to her. “She went to university to be a teacher. With our relationship, she can’t work in a school, but she can assist with educational reform. She also said she wanted to do something involving literacy. She needs to brush up on her French and German.”

“Or encourage the youth of Gevalia to learn English,” she smiled. “Masen, I know that my actions in America were … shocking.”

“That’s an understatement,” I snarled. “You threw Bella under the bus. She was injured and heard everything you said, while coming out of sedation. Her mind was a mess to begin with and for you
to make her feel like shit, shattered her tenuous hold of her self-confidence. She loved you, Mother. She respected you and found someone who could be another supporter. Instead, you turned into someone who broke her heart. Why?"

“I was losing you,” she whispered. “My son was growing up and becoming his own man.”

“Mom, I’ve been a man since I turned eighteen,” I scoffed.

“Legally, yes, but now, you’re … you’re engaged. You will rule this country and will be king,” she breathed. “Already, you’re a wonderful leader. The people adore you. You’re approachable, genuine and smart. You also are strong and will be a formidable ruler, not taking any bullshit from parliament or from me. I’ve seen you come into your own and it was your relationship with Bella that completed you.”

“And yet, you belittle her, nearly making me lose her,” I sighed, scrubbing my hands through my hair. “Again, why?”

“Selfishly, I wanted it to be me to help you be the leader you’re supposed to be. I’ve been grooming you to be king since you were old enough to walk,” Mother sighed, sitting down on a bench. I settled in next to her. “You followed me around, acting as my shadow, for years. And then, you stopped. You turned to your father, your brother, your friends. I became an outsider.”

“I didn’t want a queen; I wanted a mom,” I explained. “You forgot that while I was your first born, I was also your son. I knew you were important, but I just wanted you to be there for me. To kiss my boo boos, to hold me when I was sick and to be at my school plays. It wasn’t you. It was dad, or my nannies. I turned out okay, but when Bella disappeared, I made a promise to myself that I would never treat my children how I was treated by you. Regardless of my station in life, I will always be there for my children. Not as a Crowned Prince or a King, but as a dad. You treated Bella the same way you treated me, as simply one of your subjects to be ordered about. She’s still an American citizen, but all she wanted from you was your support and your respect.”

“I never realized,” Mother whispered, tears welling in her eyes. She took my hands, staring into my eyes. Her evergreen orbs were the same mine. In fact, before her hair turned gray, we were almost mirror images of each other. “Will you ever forgive me? Will Bella? I don’t want this rift to deepen and cause irrevocable damage to our family. I do love you, Masen. I love Bella, too. I’m sorry for how I acted in America and how detached I was as a mother. It was, is, a delicate balance to be a parent and a monarch. Apparently, I was more attuned to ruling than parenting.”

“I forgive you, Mother, but it will take time for our relationship to heal,” I explained, hugging her and leaning my cheek against her hair. “It’s one of the many reasons why I’m staying in the apartment near the city center and why Bella and I went to the summer palace. We needed time for us to be a couple, without the pressures of making public appearances and scrutiny from the press or from you. Bella’s life has changed. She will need to learn how to be a royal, understanding the expectations of being my fiancée, my wife and my partner. She’s giving up her home and trusting me to guide her. She’ll need you, too. In time.”

“I’ve tried to apologize, but she refuses to accept it,” Mother frowned.

“Time, Mom. Just give her time,” I said. “Bella’s a big believer in actions. They speak louder than words. Show her that you’re genuine in making things right and not just saying it.”

“I want to do right by you, Masen,” she whispered. “And by Bella.” She slid her arm around my waist and we sat in the gardens as the sun dipped below the horizon. As I told my mother, only time would tell.
Three weeks after that, Bella and I were flying back to the states for Jake and Leah’s wedding. Bella was also eager to see her dad. They had talked on the phone and FaceTimed, but it wasn’t the same as being in the same country. He had gotten into a trial and was doing well with his illness. He had also moved in with Linda Newton, freeing up the apartment for a tenant. However, we were staying in the apartment and not in the Gevalian condo. Jake and Leah’s wedding was actually being held not far from Bella’s neighborhood in Brooklyn. In fact, with Charlie’s blessing, Jake and the rest of his groomsmen were using the apartment to get ready for his upcoming nuptials.

While we were crossing the Atlantic Ocean, Bella was looking over the grand reopening plans for the Swan Family Bakery on her tablet. It included the new menu, employees, schedules and advertisements. Angela was going to be the general manager, with Linda’s son, Mike, stepping in as assistant manager. He’d been let go from his job and had moved back home. He had a degree in advertising and designed all of the press releases, social media blasts and online presence for the new, improved bakery.

“My dad scheduled the grand reopening on Wednesday, after Jake’s wedding,” Bella said. Blinking over to me, she gave me a grin. “Have you reached out to your contact with Vanity Fair?”

“Scheduled for Thursday and we’ll depart for Gevalia on Saturday, after you’ve had some time to spend with your family,” I smiled. “Are you ready for that interview and photo shoot?”

“They were invited, Masen. Yes,” she nodded, closing her tablet like a book and crawling into my lap. I held her in my arms. “Will I get used to the press invading my privacy? Probably not. Will they print only glowing words about us? Definitely not! Am I scared of them? Not anymore. What happened in February was a fluke and was stemmed from two bitter, jealous harpies, coupled with a nasty, ugly snowstorm and some really dangerous driving. Talking to you, Carlisle, Emmett and even your mom, stilted as that maybe, has helped. Now, enough thinking and talking. It’s been far too long since we’ve canoodled, Masen.”

“Is that a subtle hint that you want to join the mile-high club?” I quipped, giving her a cheeky grin.

“Maybe,” she sang. Blinking around the private jet, she wrinkled her nose. “Maybe not. I know that this is your private jet, but it’s still a plane. Why do people want to fuck on a plane?”

“The thrill of being caught,” I shrugged. “I wouldn’t know, though. Every time I’ve been on a plane, I’d been with either my parents, bodyguards or foreign dignitaries. I had zero interest in fucking any of them on a plane. You, however? I would love to take you to the back, strip you of your clothes and kiss every inch of your creamy, delectable sin. I devour your wet, pink pussy before sinking inside you and make you come until the flight attendants would tell us to put our seats back into their upright position.”

“Fuck me,” she whimpered, shifting in my lap. Her fingers were dancing in my hair. “As much as I want that and I do …”

“We only have an hour or so before we land,” I chuckled, tracing my hand up her thigh.

“And what I want to do to you will take longer than an hour,” she purred, kissing my lips tenderly. She moved back to her seat, leaning her cheek against my bicep. I leaned my head on hers, watching as the city lights of New York grew closer. Landing at Teterboro, we got into a waiting SUV and drove us to the apartment in Brooklyn. Charlie and Linda were waiting for us, a late meal
on the dining room table. Charlie looked amazing. His eyes were bright and he moved solidly, without the assistance of a cane or stationary objects in the room. He also smiled softly at his girlfriend and hugged his daughter with steady arms. Things were finally beginning to look up.

After christening Bella’s childhood bedroom, we fell asleep only to get early wake up calls from Jacob and Leah. With a sigh, we were separated for the day while Bella had her final fitting for her bridesmaid dress, followed by the hen party. I wasn’t sure what the plan was, but Bella was spending the night at the Clearwater home. I was doing the same with Jacob, getting my suit and going to a Yankee’s game for his bachelor party.

Shortly before noon, I arrived at a tailor’s shop. Felix was walking beside me. He was armed to the teeth, prepared to fight to the death, but looked like a regular guy going to a baseball game. Jacob was inside of the tailor’s shop, wearing a navy-blue suit. Seated next to him was an older gentleman with a warm smile. “Mr. Black,” I breathed, walking over to him. He stood up, shaking my hand and drawing me into a brief hug. “It’s been too long, sir.” I turned to Harry, who was drinking some coffee on a stool. “Harry … always a pleasure.” He nodded, holding up his coffee cup.

“Masen, you look good, son,” he said, his voice deep. “And how many times do I need to tell you to call me Billy.”

“My apologies, Billy,” I chuckled. “How was your drive?”

“It was good. Long,” Billy shrugged. “I just can’t handle flying.” He shuddered, grimacing as he sat back down.

“Just like I can’t handle snow,” Jake quipped, turning around. “Masen, you fucker. Get your ugly mug over here so I can give you a hug.” I laughed and he hopped down, hugging me tightly. “It’s so good to see you, man.”


“They had to take it in,” he said, running his hands down his lapels. “Yours is hanging in the changing room. Bella spoke with your personal shopper to get your measurements. Spoiled ass princeliship.”

“You love me,” I snorted.

“Sometimes,” Jake snickered, standing back on the raised platform. An older woman scuttled over to him, adjusting his suit. A younger guy helped me into a changing room and I saw a light grey suit hanging on a thick wooden hanger. I removed my jeans, Yankee’s jersey and sneakers and slid on the suit, which fit me perfectly. I stepped out and was dragged to another raised platform.

“You’re going to show me up at my own damned wedding.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked as the woman who’d worked on Jake was now flittering around me. “All of the other groomsmen are wearing the same thing, Jake.” Turning to the mirror, I smirked. “Though, the workmanship is stellar. Better than the suits hanging in my closet back in Gevalia.”

“When you want a new suit, call me,” said the woman. She stood up, arching a brow at me. “I’m of Gevalian descent. My mother moved here from Gevalia after meeting my American father. I have a great respect of the country and of your family, Your Highness.” She curtseyed stiffly. “My name is Anya.”
“It’s a pleasure, Anya,” I smiled, taking her hand. “I will be in touch about new suits.” Anya grinned, putting a card into my hand. “Now, we need to do some adjustments to your suit, Your Highness. It’s a little too long in the arms. It’ll be ready by Mr. Jake’s wedding day.”

An hour later, the three of us were all settled up with our suits. Jake, Harry and Billy were both wearing navy and peach-colored ties, while the groomsmen and ushers were wearing the light grey with navy ties. Jake handed his suit to his dad, who was not coming with us to the baseball game, even though I’d made arrangements for a private suite. Going to a baseball game proved to be too much for Billy’s agoraphobia.

Settling into the back of the SUV, I looked at my friend. He was thinner, obviously still going through rehabilitation from his injuries. “You look good, Jake,” I said.

“I’ve lost muscle tone and it’ll be about a year before I’m cleared for more than desk duty,” Jake snorted. “I’ve also been cleared of any wrong-doing by my bosses, but their faith in me was rattled. Hell, I’m still rattled. I get why my dad packed up his shit and moved to Bumfuck, Washington after what happened to him on the police force. Regardless, I’m going back to work once we get back from our honeymoon. I’m switching from a field operative to computer crimes. I’ll spend my days attached to a computer. Yay!” He leaned forward, swiping a water bottle. “How are you? I heard you’re back in the capital, taking over for your dad.”

“We moved into the royal apartment, but yes, we’re back in the capital,” I said.

“How’s your relationship with your mom?” Jake asked, his lips pursed. Understandably, he was pissed at her and had every right to be. “Has she apologized to you? To Bella?”

“She’s apologized, but it will be a long time before we’re okay,” I replied. “Bella and I are stronger than ever. The time we spent away from my family and away from the scrutiny of the press was the best thing we’d ever done. We went on dates, got to know each other and grew as a couple. It was necessary and solidified our relationship.”

“So, you’re still engaged?” Jake asked.

“We are, but it hasn’t been announced formally yet. We’re having an interview with Vanity Fair after your wedding and after the grand reopening of the bakery,” I smiled. “Bella won’t be wearing her ring during your wedding. It kills me that she won’t be able to show it off, but we want to keep it on the down low until the interview.”

“I’m happy for you, Mase,” Jake smiled. “You deserve it. You’re an amazing man and will be a wonderful leader. Now, enouh of this emotional schmoopy shit. I want to see my Yankees kick some ass.”

“Emotional schmoopy shit,” I repeated slowly, a crooked grin spreading over my face. “That’s quite a description, Jake.”

“Fuck off, your princeliship,” Jake laughed, tossing his empty water bottle at me.

“I’ll leave that to Leah,” I snickered.

A/N: Up next will be a brief overview of Jake and Leah’s wedding, the grand reopening of the bakery and the interview with Vanity Fair. We’re also going to see some returning characters. Who do you think?

Pictures of the tailor shop, Jake and Masen’s suits and Yankee Stadium are on my blog. You
can find a link for that on my profile. I’m also on Facebook … Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79. Leave me your thoughts.

We are on track to have fifty-five (fifty-six with my random A/N) chapters. We’re getting close to the end. A few more loose ends to tie up before I can hit the complete button. Thanks for reading!
Chapter 50

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be a brief overview of Jake and Leah’s wedding, the grand reopening of the bakery and the interview with Vanity Fair. We’re also going to see some returning characters. Who do you think?

Chapter Fifty

Bella

Sitting next to Masen, I watched as Jake and Leah danced at their wedding. My feet were in Masen’s lap. “It was a perfect day,” I said, reaching over to Masen’s hair and brushing it back off his forehead. “Beautiful wedding.”

“It was a beautiful wedding,” Masen agreed, kissing my left hand. My engagement ring was on a necklace, as we’d decided not to steal Leah and Jake’s thunder. “I can’t wait until this is us.”

“Only, I’m certain that our wedding will not be this understated,” I snorted. “How much of a media circus will our wedding be? Not that I mind … I want the world to know that we’re solidly a couple.”

“It will be insane. Especially in Gevalia,” Masen chuckled. He lifted me onto his lap, his hands gliding over my back and nuzzling my neck. “Have you seen the footage of Prince William when he married Kate Middleton? Prince Harry marrying Meghan Markle?”

“Oh, fuck,” I giggled.

“You’re a normal woman from New York, marrying a prince,” he said, his lips moving along the column of my neck, moving to my ear and suckling on the earlobe. “A modern-day fairy tale, cherie.”

“Complete with the dead mother, a single, broken father, evil sister and sad backstory, forced into indentured servitude because of our woes. Holy hell, my life is a Disney movie,” I quipped, melting against him. He pulled back, his handsome face in a deep frown. “What? What’s with this face? I don’t like the frowny face, Masen.”

“I hate that you had it so bad, Bella,” he whispered, tracing my cheek with his fingertip.

“I don’t have it so bad now,” I whispered back, taking his hand and kissing his palm. His gaze softened, kissing me tenderly and holding me to his body. I draped my arms over his shoulders, idly playing with his hair as it brushed the collar of his suit. He sighed heavily, clearly still upset at my life prior to our relationship. “Masen, please don’t dwell on the past. We can’t change it.”

“We can only learn from it. I know,” he said, staring at me. “Where did your therapist get that little gem? The Lion King?”

“I think so,” I snickered, kissing his nose.
“I need all the single ladies out on the dance floor,” the DJ announced. “It’s time to toss the bouquet. Single guys … you’re on deck!”

Leah glided over to me, grabbing my hand and tugging me off Masen’s lap. “Come on, Bells,” she sang. “You’re still single.”

“No … I’ll break something,” I whined, following her to the center of the dance floor. Rachel hugged me and I pouted as I stood next to my friend. “Rachel, I will be pummeled by these girls. I’m puny compared to them. I’m also gimpy.”

“You’ll be fine, Bella,” Rachel scoffed, flipping her long black hair over her shoulders. “I have an in with the bride. She married my baby brother.” She clapped her hands together with an evil grin. The DJ was playing Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” as Leah sashayed to the front of the dance floor. She was wagging her bouquet, a beaming grin on her face. Rachel rubbed hands together, taking a more athletic stance. In her bridesmaid dress, it was hysterical. I just hid behind her, praying I wouldn’t get trampled by the thirty women huddled on the dance floor. As the chorus swelled, Leah turned around and prepared to throw the bouquet. Instead, she ran to me and handed it to me. “Told you!” Rachel crowed.

“What?!” I squeaked, holding the beautiful bouquet in my hands.

“We all know you’re next,” Leah said, hugging me and taking a quick glance at my necklace with my engagement ring. The photographer came over and took our picture before she was led to a chair where Jake was waiting to tug off her garter. Jake pulled the same stunt that Leah did, tucking the garter into Masen’s pocket. The four of us smiled happily and the rest of the wedding was a blur of cake, champagne and dancing.

We stumbled into the SUV at two and barely remembered the drive back to the apartment. Masen and I were too lost in each other, making out like horny teenagers. We got back to the bakery and Masen flipped the lock, lifting me onto the new counter. He pulled up my dress and shredded my panties, devouring my sex before sliding into me. The only sounds made were Masen’s skin slapping against mine, the subtle hum of the coolers and rain splattering on the windows. As we came together, Masen whispered his love for me and brushed my curls away from my face.

He carried me upstairs, reverently removing my dress and we made love in my bedroom until the skies lightened from midnight blue to a soft lavender. “The next wedding will be ours, cherie,” he murmured sleepily. “I love you more than words can describe.”

“I love you, too,” I breathed, curling to his side. He kissed me and we drifted to sleep as my neighborhood began waking up.

xx AMDFT xx

After spending the day following Jake’s wedding in bed and recuperating from our marathon lovemaking session, we worked with my dad, Angela, Linda and Mike to finish planning the grand reopening of the Swan Family Bakery and Café on the days leading up to the grand reopening. Today, we were taking photos for our new website, along with beginning to test some new recipes from my grandfather’s cook book. Mike was also posting photos on the Facebook page, a newly created Instagram and Twitter page and email blasts to our customers. In addition to pictures of the new recipes, the renovated bakery and state-of-the-art kitchen, Charlie, Angela, Mike and I were photographed as the owners. We’d take a photo with all of the staff on the day of reopening ceremony.

The following day, we met up with the reporter from the New York Times and Brooklyn Magazine.
The focus of the interviews were on me and Charlie. Masen made himself scarce, not wanting to have his celebrity overshadow our moment. He was spending the day at the Gevalian consulate, doing some diplomatic work and playing catch up from his responsibilities as the head of parliament. He’d be here for the ceremony.

I was working in the kitchen after the interviews and photoshoot. Angela came back and leaned against the coolers. “You look good, Bells,” she smiled. “Happy. Completely sated, too.”

“Angela!” I laughed, tossing a towel at her. “I could say the same to you. How are things with Ben?”

“We’re not talking about my relationship. We’re talking about yours,” Angela quipped. “Seriously, though. How are things going with Prince Charming?”

“Better … amazing … surreal,” I smiled, kneading the sourdough for sandwiches. “We’re stronger than ever and he treats me like I’m the most important thing in his world.” I looked at her. She knew about what Esme had said and the subsequent fallout from her uncaring words. “Since we’ve left New York and had a chance to truly heal, we’re really good.”

“You’re not wearing your ring,” Angela murmured.

“I can’t wear it while I’m doing shit like this,” I retorted. I wiped my hands, pulling out my ring from my shirt. “Also, our engagement is not public, yet. It will be after Thursday. We’re giving an exclusive interview to Vanity Fair. After that, this ring will stay on my finger until our wedding.”

“Does the queen mother agree to this union?” Angela asked, her nose wrinkling. “Bitch.”

“She’s apologized, numerous times,” I answered, going back to the sourdough. “I’ve accepted her apology, but I still don’t trust her. It will be a long time before I can … I will never forget. Just like I will never forget what Alice did to me. Because of the hand that I was dealt, I struggled with low self-esteem and self-confidence issues. I’m still working on being stronger, but hearing that from her … it shattered me, Ang. I know I shouldn’t seek validation of Esme, Masen or anyone, but when I was being shit on by my sister, my dad and the world around me, I needed someone on my side. Masen appeared out of nowhere, like a dream, and everything changed. It didn’t stop those feelings of inadequacy and frustration. He helped. He showered with me love, unconditional, beautiful love. I was free of my obligations and free from the fear of losing this place, losing my home and supporting my father. I still felt like I wasn’t good enough for him. In my drug-induced stupor, coming out of anesthesia, I overheard Esme say that I wasn’t good enough; I wasn’t strong enough.”

“Did she say why she said those things?” Angela asked, hopping up on the counter opposite me.

“She was thinking of her country and the reputation of her son,” I snorted. “She thought little about the reactions of the woman she was trashing. Hindsight, as you know, is twenty-twenty. Her son turned his back on her, as did her husband and staff. Publicly, we’re kosher, but in private, it’s very tense.” I blinked up at her. “You do not breathe a word of this to anyone, Angela. Not even Ben.”

“Bella, I love you, girl,” she breathed. “I would never betray your confidence, sweetie. I’m not like your bitch sister. I also hate that you went through that alone. I’m grateful that Jake was there to help and that you found another confidante with Rachel and Jake’s dad, Billy.”

“You’re not mad at me for leaving?” I asked.

“I would have left, too,” Angela said. “This place was toxic for you. I get it. Like I said before, you
look happy and free. No more worry wrinkles.” She hopped off the counter and hugged me. “I’m so happy for you, Bells. I better get an invite.”

“Better than that, you’re my maid of honor,” I whispered.

“Good,” she beamed. “Now, let’s get this place ready to go for the shindig tomorrow!”

After an afternoon of preparing and baking, we were ready for the ceremony. I went upstairs, showering off the feeling of flour and grime off my body. The door opened and Masen slipped in behind me, his hands cupping my breasts. “Cherie,” he breathed against my neck. I arched my back and felt his growing length press against my ass. “I’ve missed you.”

“You were gone for eight hours,” I said, turning to kiss his eager mouth. He growled, lifting my leg onto the ledge of the bathtub. He gripped my hip and eased his erection into me. “Fuck …”

“Eight hours too long,” he growled, languidly pumping into me. I moaned, reaching between my legs and circling my clit. “Fuck, that is hot. Play with your pussy, Bella. Make yourself come as a fuck you, filling you with me.”

“Damn dirty mouth,” I smirked, looking back at him. He returned my smirk, his eyes flashing ferally as his hips picked up speed and intensity. I held onto the wall with one hand and with the other, I circled my clit. Masen gripped one of my hips and cupped my breast, twisting my nipple. My moans grew louder as the familiar coil in my belly tightened. I pushed against him as he grunted lowly, fucking me from behind. “Masen …”

“I can feel you, love,” he panted. “Come for me.”

A few moments later, I shuddered, feeling every inch of him and my body clenching around him. He gripped my hip, tightening his hold on me. I felt him grow inside me, twitching and filling me with his release. I straightened slowly so I wouldn't lose the connection to him. He gently took my face and kissed me as our bodies calmed. He slipped out from me and I whimpered. He pulled back, his green eyes shimmering with love. “I feel the same way, cherie.” He kissed me gently and lowered my leg. He turned me around, putting some shampoo into my wet hair.

“I already did that,” I said, tracing his tattoo with my fingers.

“I want to do it,” he murmured, kissing my nose.

The rest of our shower was reverent and sweet. Every inch of our bodies was cleaned. We dressed in comfortable clothes, ordering Thai food and lounging in the living room. While sitting there, Masen told me about his time at the consulate, Skyping into a meeting with several committee meetings. We also talked about our interview, what questions we’d answer and questions we’d avoid. Masen had also verified the time and location for the interview, which would be at the Gevalian condo.

“Bella, I think you should wear your ring tomorrow,” Masen said, taking off my necklace and sliding my engagement onto my finger. “You’ve been photographed with it on in Gevalia.”

I nodded, twisting it underneath the soft light of my father’s apartment. “I like that. I’m proud to wear this ring.”

“I’m proud to have you on my arm as my fiancée,” Masen smiled. “And in the future as my wife, Isabella Marie Swan Cullen, Duchess of Gevalia.”

“Hmmm, I like that,” I breathed, sliding onto his lap and kissing him on his jaw. “I love you,
Masen.” He held me tightly, nuzzling my neck and repeating my sentiments. We watched a movie, eventually making our way to the bedroom, falling asleep almost as soon as we curled up in bed.

The next morning started early. I went downstairs to check on the pastry chefs and cooks who were hired to man the kitchen in the bakery. Masen was barely coherent, sipping an espresso and nibbling on one of the fresh Gevalian pastries. “How are they, Masen?” Dad asked, leaning casually against the counter.

“As good as I remember from my childhood,” Masen replied. “I love the raspberry tart. It’s the perfect combination of sweet and tart, with a hint of creaminess with the crust.”

“We added a thin layer of cheesecake on the bottom. It was my grandfather’s idea,” Dad chuckled.

“Dad, you’re having a bakery boner,” I quipped, walking over to him and draping my arm over his shoulder. “Whenever he tried a new recipe, he’d gush and get all excited. When I got older, I’d call them bakery boners.”

“Much to my chagrin,” Dad grumbled. He checked his phone. “We’ve got an hour before the ribbon cutting ceremony. From the sounds outside, it looks like it’ll be a full house.” He disappeared, talking to Angela and then went back to filling the display cases.

I took out my cell phone, shooting pictures with it and posting it to all social media platforms. I took goofy pictures of Angela, Mike, Linda, my dad and Masen. He even flipped the phone, taking a selfie of the two of us. He saved it, making it the background of his phone. I kissed him, doing the same to mine. A shrill alarm sounded and my dad blew out a breath. “It’s time.”

The blinds opened and Felix unlocked the doors. My dad took my hand and we walked outside. The crowd that was waiting on the sidewalk completely boggled my mind. There were television cameras, local newspapers and all of our regular customers. My dad walked to the podium of microphones. He looked around, smiling nervously. “The Swan Family Bakery has been a part of this neighborhood for generations. He scraped his savings and opened up this shop. It stayed in our family since he purchased the small storefront. Since then, we’ve expanded, little by little. We fell on hard times. We bounced back.”

He looked at me, taking my hand. “When I took over for my father at the age of twenty-two, we were in one of those hard times. I managed to scrape through my savings, with the assistance of my wife and my community to make the bakery into something more. Now? We’re reopening The Swan Family Bakery and Café, taking it into the next decade, the next generation. Again, I had the support of my family and my community. My daughter took over the helm when I got sick, making it into something beautiful and special. It was her idea to renovate this place. We were moments away from losing this place, but with help from my family, we were able to save it.” Dad looked back at Masen, tugging on his arm. “My son and my daughter are making my grandfather’s dream come true.” He kissed Masen’s cheek and did the same to me. “I love you both.”

Daddy,” I whispered, trying not to cry.

“No tears today, sweet girl,” Dad said.

“It’s a happy day, chérie,” Masen murmured, walking over to me and sliding his arm around my waist. I snuggled into him. He cupped my cheek and brushed his lips over mine.

“Without further ado, the grand reopening of The Swan Family Bakery,” Dad sang, taking a huge set of golden scissors from Linda. I turned and grasped the handles with him, cutting the ribbon going across the doorway. Cameras were flashing and soon the crowd of people were heading
inside. I sat down with Masen on a bench outside of our shop, watching as orders were placed and people were happily enjoying their delicious goodies. My dad sat down next to me. “You okay, sweet girl?”

“Crowds,” I said, shrugging. “I don’t particularly care for them.”

“Agreed.” Masen quipped. “They are a security nightmare.”

“I’m surprised that no one in the press asked anything about you, Masen,” Dad said.

“I’m not here as a prince. I’m here as a son,” Masen smiled. “As a supporter, as a part of your community, Charlie.”

“Thank you, Masen,” Dad breathed, squeezing Masen’s hand. “I’m so lucky to have you on my side.” He got up, rubbing his hands together. “Now, I’ve got to make sure that everything is running smoothly. Take all the time you need.”

“We’ll be right in,” I said. “Just a few minutes. Let the crowd die down a bit.” But, it didn’t. It was a steady stream of customers throughout the morning. We also gave an on-camera interview with the local news that was broadcast on a morning show and will be shown again during the evening show.

Like my dad, I made my way through the crowd and thanked them for supporting us. As the morning drifted to the afternoon, I was sitting at a table, talking with Linda and Mike. Masen was chatting with my dad. The doors opened and I saw a familiar blonde head of hair. She blinked around the shop. She looked healthy. Her face was not haunted and she moved smoothly. “If you excuse me,” I said to Linda as I got up from the table. “Rosalie?”

She turned and gave me a smile. A genuine, real, and beautiful smile. “Bella,” she breathed, hugging me. She pulled back, rubbing her hands over my arms. “I heard what happened that night. I was in the car with my parents and I heard about the accident. Are you okay?”

“Every day getting stronger,” I answered. I lifted my skirt to reveal my scars. Rose grimaced. “Heels are a little out of the question. How are you? You look good. Happy, healthy.”

“Almost four months in the nut house will do that for you,” Rose quipped, tucking her hair behind her ears.

“Rosalie,” I growled. “Really?”

She chuckled. “Bella, I was in a bad place when we met. I was moments away from ending it all. Those animals took away my choice and hurt me in ways I could never even imagine. Talking to psychiatrists and therapists, working out my rage and shame, it’s helped me. Plus, medication has helped me a lot, too. I’m still attending sessions, but every day is getting better. I’m even going to go back to school. Shift my focus, of course. I want to become a psychologist, help people like me, who were victims of assault. I want to put my experiences out there and make a difference in the world.”

“You already have, Rose. I’m so happy for you; that you’re doing so well. Are your parents here?” I asked.

“They’re in New York, packing up my apartment,” Rose answered. “We left in such a hurry that we just ignored my studio near campus. My landlord, the prick, was threatening to toss my shit out of the windows, but my parents went in with our attorneys. We’re getting all of my money back from the moment I was attacked.” She looked around, a grin on her face. “This is beautiful, Bella.
It’s been your family for generations?

“My great-grandfather opened this place,” I said, leading her inside and to the counter. I heard Masen laugh. Turning, I saw him hugging his brother, dressed in full Gevalian military uniform. “Oh, wow …”

Rose turned and her cheeks flushed a brilliant red. She adjusted her blonde curls, brushing invisible dirt from her clothing. “Oh, wow is right,” she whispered. “I never thought I’d see him again, Bella. Do you think he’s disgusted with me?”

“I doubt it,” I said as I blinked over to Masen and Emmett. The latter looked as nervous as Rosalie did, but his eyes were swirling with love and relief. The crowds parted and they had an anxious, but sweet reunion. Masen slid his arm around my waist. “You did this, didn’t you?”

“The Emmett part? Yes,” he smiled. “I made the arrangements while you were working with your father. I had to kick some major ass, but I wanted Emmett to be here.”

“How did you know that Rose was going to be here?” I asked, kissing his lips.

“Angela and I were talking and she told me that she got an email asking about the opening. She recognized the name from the newspapers and asked about it. I found her phone number and asked her to come, personally,” Masen explained, his hands resting on my hips as he leaned against the brick wall. “I want Rosalie and Emmett to get their happily ever after. We did.”

“We’re not at the ‘ever after’ part of our fairy tale, Masen,” I chided, arching a brow at him. “I am so happy with you. I love you, Your Majesty.”

“Not yet,” he growled before kissing me. I melted against his chest and we kissed without a care in the world.

xx AMDFT xx

I was sitting on a chair, getting my hair curled and my makeup applied by a small army of stylists. To my right, there was a rack of clothing, all designer. To my left, Masen was also seated and he got his hair trimmed and he was reading over the questions the interviewer had for us. They were basic, with the opportunity for more detail, but we had final say on what was printed for the interview and the photographs for the magazine.

I was anxious, wanting to nibble on my fingernails. That would not do. I had a manicure/pedicure done and the technician gave me a glower anytime my hands drifted to my mouth. I was focusing my attention on the music playing and not hurling all over the makeup strewn in front of me.

“Cherie, we’ll be fine. Deep breaths,” Masen said, getting up from his seat.

“We’re just making a huge announcement. No biggie,” I quipped dryly.

“Or, in other words, a Thursday,” Masen teased. “Bella, you’ve come so far. I know that you’re nervous. Just have a conversation with the writer.”

“Do we have a name?” I asked.

“Bree Tanner,” he said, reading from the list of questions. “We’re just talking Bree, telling her our story and announcing …” He trailed off, blinking down to my twisted ring. I’d removed for my manicure and kept it hidden until we finished our interview.
He pecked me swiftly before ducking into a bathroom to change into the suit the magazine had provided. I sat in the chair for another half hour before I was deemed complete and I changed into a sleek, understated dress. It was elegant, but still held an element of quirkiness, letting my personality shine. Slipping on my flats - which angered the stylists but I showed them my gnarly scar and explained that I’d kill myself in heels – we went up to the condo. Felix and Alec were there, watching as the camera set up lights and staged the living room.

Bree Tanner was waiting for us. She was a petite, little thing with an adorable pixie haircut and chic outfit. She introduced herself, sitting down on one of the chairs, curled up like a kitten. I liked her and felt at ease with her. We told her our story, starting with Masen’s only foray of breaking and entering and our initial bond over sourdough. We spoke briefly about the bakery, about my father’s illness, my time in college, Masen’s visit to the states that precipitated our meeting, the accident in Rochester, and our plans for the future. Our brief break was not mentioned, nor would it ever be because of Esme’s quick thinking and need to atone for her sins.

“This is where you get to hear some news first, Bree,” Masen said, in response to her question. He threaded our fingers together and moved our joined hands to his knee. My ring, which had been moved to the front of my hand, shimmered under the bright lights. “Since returning from New York and traveling back to Gevalia, Bella and I have grown much closer. She’s the best friend I’ve never had, a confidante and ma cherie. While we were in Gevalia, during her convalescence from her knee injury, I proposed and she said yes.”

“Oooh, I’d love to hear details,” Bree cooed.

“They are private,” I said, blinking over to Masen. The world could know that we were engaged, but the actual proposal was something special and just for us. Yes, it happened quickly and was tainted by the false rumors of the tabloid media, but it was still something we held sacred. “All that matters is that I said yes and we’re planning a wedding.”

“Can you at least tell us when that will be?” Bree asked.

“It takes time to plan a royal wedding,” Masen chuckled. “And I want nothing for the best for my fiancée, and future wife, the Duchess of Gevalia. As soon as we know, you’ll be the first to know.”

“After family, of course,” I giggled.

“Family first,” Bree nodded. “May I see your ring?” I held out my hand and she grinned widely. “Absolutely beautiful … very regal. Congratulations! You’re the next Meghan Markle, becoming an American princess.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” I snickered. “I am very blessed to have a wonderful man, like Masen, to choose me.”

“Fate chose you for me, chérie,” Masen breathed, brushing his lips over mine. “And I wouldn’t have it any other way. I love you, Bella.”

“As I love you, Masen,” I said, pressing my forehead to his.

A/N: We have one more real chapter, perhaps two and then I have two epilogues planned. Pictures of Jake and Leah’s wedding, the renovated bakery and Bree are on my blog. You can find a link for that on my profile. I’m also on Facebook: Tufano79’s Twilight Fanfiction Appreciation. Twitter, too: tufano79.

Up next will be their return to Gevalia, wedding planning, the official engagement
announcement and closure about Alice … what will happen to her? Leave me some!
Chapter 51

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Up next will be their return to Gevalia, wedding planning, the official engagement announcement and closure about Alice … what will happen to her? Leave me some!

Chapter Fifty-One

*Bella*

We flew back to Gevalia, walking directly into a media firestorm with the announcement of our engagement. We barely had time to shower and change before we were whisked away to a televised interview. Masen and I worked nonstop for nearly a week, granting interviews for the Gevalian press. We also took our official, royal engagement photos in the gardens of the palace, which were posted all over the world.

The hoopla never died down. Our quiet life from before was now gone. Masen already had a staff, a personal assistant and such with his job as the head of the House of Lords. I did not. On a rare quiet morning a month after our return to Gevalia, I was having interviews for my own staff. I needed a publicist, an assistant and a driver. Alec was the head of my security and had been chauffeuring me around. He’d rather focus his attention on my safety.

There had been some displeasure with the official announcement of our engagement. Along with threats that an American princess would be the downfall of Gevalia. Both Masen and I were threatened. Our apartment was secured, but when we left, we were exposed. We needed some extra security. Okay, a lot of extra security.

Esme wanted us back in the Palace, staying at Masen Manor. Masen wanted to stay where we were, but with more security personnel. We won that battle, but were in the process of hiring more, along with my own staff.

*I had a staff. Holy crap.*

“What do you think of the most recent candidate?” Heidi asked me. “You seemed to click with Jane.”

“She was knowledgeable about the educational reforms and literacy advocacy,” I said.

“Keep in mind, you also need to plan for a wedding, Lady Bella,” Heidi quipped. “While your plans for revamping the educational system of Gevalia is impressive, you have to make plans for your wedding to Prince Edward.”

I smiled, but it was bittersweet. My smile fell, twisting my mom’s wedding ring my dad had given prior to our departure back to Gevalia. He wore it on a chain when it was too tight while she was pregnant with my sister. He felt that it was now my time to have it. It sat on my right hand, sparkling underneath the lights. My *mother* should be here to help plan my wedding. She wasn’t. Linda was amazing, but she wasn’t my mother. My relationship with Esme was still on shaky ground.
"We have time," I murmured. "For the wedding that is …" I wiped my cheeks, feeling dampness and tears had spilled onto my cheeks.

"Are you okay, Lady Bella?" Heidi asked.

I looked up at her. Her eyes were swirling with concern. "I apologize. I’m very excited about getting married. It’s just hard to start thinking about planning the wedding. My mom is not here. She died when she gave birth to my younger sister. She won’t be here to see me get married. My dad’s dating someone, but they’re in New York and you know that my relationship with the Queen is …" I trailed off, wrinkling my nose. "Well, I don’t feel comfortable going over table settings and finalizing details about the ceremony with Queen Esme. We’re not exactly besties."

Heidi barked out a laugh. I arched a brow at her. "I don’t think Queen Esme has any ‘besties.’ Perhaps Duke Carlisle," Heidi giggled. "I didn’t know about your mother. My deepest condolences about her passing."

"Thank you," I muttered.

"With that being said, I think that Jane would be an amazing assistant for your educational platform, arranging for meetings and organizing your time. If possible, I’d like to help with the wedding planning," Heidi smiled. "I’ve known Prince Edward since he was a teenager and I’ve worked for the royal family for quite a while. I know I’m not your mother."

"You barely look older than thirty," I said, my eyes wide.

"I was blessed with great skin," she smirked. "And good genetics." She reached over, squeezing my fingers. "Now, the rest of your morning is free. I’ll make the call to Jane tonight and we can spend the rest of the morning making preliminary plans about your wedding. I can also school you in the ways of the royals. You’re not in Kansas anymore. I wonder if they have a handbook?"

I laughed. "A handbook? On how to be a royal?"

"I’m serious," Heidi said. "Totally serious."

"Oh, my God," I sighed, leaning my cheek against the glass tabletop.

xx AMDFT xx

A couple of weeks passed and our lives did calm down. Masen was back working and spending a great deal of time at the House of Lords. They were working long hours to try and pass part of my educational reform act before they took a month-long vacation. I was getting ready for a photo op at the hospital, the children’s ward, from Christmas.

"Lady Bella, we need to get going," Jane said. "Alec and Jacques have pulled the car around."

"Do you have the books and stuffed animals for the children?" I asked, smoothing my hair.

"They’re in the car," Jane replied. Her cell phone chirped. Her brows shot to her hairline, biting her lip.

"What is it?" I asked. "You look nervous."

"Elizabeth just sent a text. Her Majesty is joining you," Jane whispered. "She had an unexpected cancellation, freeing her up to join you."
I had extended the invitation to Esme, hoping to reach out with an olive branch. Esme had quickly dismissed my invitation, saying she was unable to come for whatever reason. I was secretly relieved and a bit pissed, off. She said that she wanted to make amends; she wanted to heal our relationship. Ever since we’d returned from the states, she’d been friendly, but didn’t take the next step to improve the situation that she caused. “Well, that’s great. Are we meeting her there?”

Jane scrolled on her phone. She nodded. “Elizabeth said that she’ll arrive at the same time as you, if we leave now.”

“Right,” I nodded, slipping on my heels. We went outside and clambered into the bullet proof SUV. We drove through the streets, arriving at the hospital. There was another SUV waiting outside. I blew out a breath. *You can handle a few hours with Esme. Smile for a few pictures.* Alec opened the door, his hand assisting me out of the SUV. “Thank you, Alec.”

“His Highness would have my head if you were hurt,” Alec quipped, a wry grin on his face.

“You cannot be serious?” I asked.

“Not really, but you’re still recuperating, Lady Bella,” Alec said, stepping back when I was safely on the sidewalk.

Esme and her security walked toward us. She was dressed casually, with an elegant flair, with a pair of dress pants and a chic sweater. She walked to me and hugged me. I returned her embrace, shocked at her public display of affection. “You look beautiful, Bella,” she whispered against my hair. “I love you in that color.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” I replied, curtseying like I’d been instructed by Heidi. “I’m so glad that you’re able to come out today.”

“I wasn’t sure if I could come, but I rearranged my afternoon to spend time with my future daughter-in-law,” Esme breathed. “I was thinking that, perhaps, we could have lunch and then go wedding dress shopping? I pulled some strings and I made an appointment at a private salon, with a Gevalian designer. If you’d like …”

“Oh, wow,” I said. I hadn’t even begin to think about the wedding. Heidi and I created a shared drive on Google, tossing ideas in there when saw something we’d liked. That was the extent of our planning. We were waiting on a date from the church, but we knew it would be happening either in late spring, early summer of the next year. “Thank you, Your Majesty. It would be amazing to go find dresses.”

“And you have full control over the dress you want, Bella,” Esme said, looping her arm with mine. “I will not be a ‘monster-in-law’, forcing you into something overly gaudy or tacky.” I snickered and we made our way into the hospital.

We were met by the medical director. We shook hands with him and made our way into children’s ward. The main area of the ward was filled with sick kids, all of whom were there by themselves. Parents were either at work or they were in the foster system. I made my way through the room, greeting all of the kids. I handed out stuffed animals to the younger kids and books to the older kids. I snuggled kids who were there by themselves, reading them stories and trying my hardest the soothe their loneliness.

I was in a private suite with a three-year old boy, who was battling leukemia. His single mother was at work and he was sick from his latest treatment. I was gently rocking him, reading him one of my favorite Dr. Suess books. He was very warm, running a mild temperature and he was idly
toying with my ponytail. When I finished the book, I cradled him and he got heavy, exhausted from
his illness.

“You’re so good with children, Bella,” Esme said quietly. She smiled at Alec as she stepped into
the hospital room. “I was talking to the doctors and usually this child, Jeremiah, is adversarial
when his mother is at work. He just took to you and I can see you as a mother to your children. I’m
so blessed to have you in our lives, Bella. You have so much goodness in you.”

“Thank you,” I murmured, pressing a kiss to Jeremiah’s forehead. He snuggled closer, burrowing
against my body. “Being around these guys … any kid, really, is soothing and familiar. I went to
college to become a teacher. Because of my situation with my family, I never got a chance to step
into a classroom. Helping kids is something that I can do here.”

“You are helping children, Bella,” Esme smiled. She walked over to us and brushed her fingers
over Jeremiah’s gaunt cheek. “You give them strength, love and hope. You made their lives better
today because you were here.” She gave me a proud grin. “However, we do need to get going for
lunch.”

I nodded, picking up Jeremiah and gently placing him in the crib. The nurse adjusted him and we
slipped out of the room. With a few more photos and gifts to the children, we left and drove to a
nearby restaurant. We ate dinner and spoke about the educational reforms that I was proposing.
Esme was impressed with my knowledge and passion for the topic.

We finished our meals, driving to a chic part of the capital. I recognized various popular designers,
like Dior, Chanel, Prada and Dolce and Gabbana. There were also names that I didn’t recognize,
but I really liked what I saw in the windows. Perhaps I would make a stop here when I was not
looking for my wedding gown. We got out of the car and walked to an elegant salon. We were
greeted by an older woman and I was whisked into a dressing room. I noticed that Jane, Heidi,
Elizabeth and Renata were at the shop.

I was dressed in a gown that I did not care for, but I needed to start somewhere. When I was
clipped into the dress, I walked to the salon. “Daddy?” I breathed.

“Surprise,” he quipped, standing up and walking to me. He kissed my cheek. “You look beautiful,
Bells. As beautiful as your mother did on our wedding day. Maybe even more so.” His nose
wrinkled. “Well, this dress doesn’t really work. You look like a doily on your grandmother’s
dresser.”

“I agree,” Esme snickered. “This dress is not for you. Moira, can you think of something else?”

“I think you would be beautiful in lace,” Moira, the store’s owner replied. She was the older
woman who had put me in the doily dress. “Do we have an idea of when the blessed event is going
to happen?”

“May thirteenth,” Esme answered. “Or June fourth. Whichever is best for Lady Bella and Prince
Edward.”

“I like May … it’s close to Mother’s Day,” I murmured. “It’ll be a nice way to honor my mother to
get married on that day.”

“It may still be chilly,” Moira said, thumbing through a few dresses. “Something with sleeves, a-
line?” She handed five dresses to her assistant. “And we probably need something for the
reception, too. Something fun, that you can move in.” She handed another slew of dresses to a
separate assistant. She blinked to my father. “Do you have a picture of your wife when you got
married? We could design something that lends itself to your mother’s dress?"

“We got married at city hall,” Dad explained. “I wore a borrowed suit and your mom wore a sundress. It was all very casual. It would not translate well into a royal wedding.”

He did pull out a faded photo from over thirty years ago. My parents were standing in front of the bakery. Dad was beaming happily, his arm around my mom’s waist. His hair was longer and he had a full beard, as opposed to a mustache. My mom was petite like me, with a flowy, yellow dress and a bouquet of daisies. I smiled, feeling a pang in my chest. I missed her so much. Moira looked over my shoulder. “May I?” she asked. I nodded, handing her the picture. “We can make this work. The shape is quite lovely.” She prattled something in French, handing me back the photo. I looked at it again before handing it back to my father.

“I’ll make sure you get a copy of that, Bells,” Dad whispered. “It’s far too long since I’ve looked at it and I think you need to have it, too.”

“Lady Bella, please come. We have several beautiful options for you,” Moira sang. I hugged my father and went into the dressing room. I tried on about fifteen dresses. None of them sparked something in me. The closest dress was lace dress that hugged my curves. It had a sweetheart neckline, but the bodice had sheer arms and a beaded back. I loved the shape of the dress, but felt it was too ostentatious. With that, Moira said that she’d design something with the same shape, but with more lace and subtle beading.

We went our separate ways after the afternoon the salon. My father came back to the apartment with me while Esme went back to the palace. “Not that I’m complaining, but when did you get here?”

“Your fiancé made arrangements for me to fly in,” Dad smirked. “He wanted to surprise you for your birthday and when you went shopping for your wedding gown. He said that you were having nightmares and waking up crying, calling for your mother.”

“I don’t remember that,” I whispered.

“Night terrors … you had them when Alice was a baby,” Dad said. “When Masen said you were having problems, I asked if I could come out. He sent the plane and I arrived yesterday morning, staying at the palace. Linda wanted to come, but she had several appointments she couldn’t get out of.”

“I’m just grateful that you’re here, Dad,” I whispered as I slid my arms around his waist. “It was a wonderful surprise. How long are you here?”

“I have to head back on Sunday. Angela was kind enough to mind the bakery while I flew out here,” Dad explained as I led him to the couch. “Now, tomorrow, why don’t you show me your new home? You seem so happy here.”

“I am, Dad.” I said, putting my cheek on his shoulder. I could feel a ghost of a tremor. “I just wish you could be here more. I know that New York is your home, but my place is here.”

“Sweet girl, I am getting ready to retire. Our family will always have a stake in the bakery. As much as you and your sister do not get along, she will be offered a chance to … step in to run it, if she grows up. Your children will have the legacy, even if they are going to be royal blue bloods.”

“We may have a black sheep,” I snickered.

“Bella, regardless, you will always have a place in New York. When I hand over the reins,
officially, to Angela or Mike or whomever is going to step in to be the owners of the bakery, you will have the right of first refusal and you have a say as to what happens to the bakery. Hell, it was your ingenuity that gave the bakery a new life as a café,” Dad said proudly.

“Speaking of Alice …” I trailed off.

“What about her?” he asked.

“She’s been asking to see me,” I shrugged. “Her court date has been set and she’s been pleading through her attorney to speak to me.”

“What do you want to do?” Dad questioned. “I know your sister betrayed you and she abused you emotionally and mentally.” He frowned, taking my hand and running his fingers over my knuckles. “I’m so sorry, Bells. I should have done something more. I catered to Alice, wanting to be both a mother and father to her. I felt like she was cheated out of so much. Instead of helping her, I turned her into an entitled, selfish brat.”

“Dad, it’s not your fault. It’s Alice’s, really. She was just a hateful, spiteful girl. I will always love her because she’s my sister, but I cannot associate myself with her. It’s not healthy,” I shrugged. “Maybe, in time, I may be able to forgive her and let her back in my life, but it will be a very long time, if ever.”

“I think you need to tell her that,” Dad suggested. “I received a few phone calls from her. She was shocked at the conditions in the Gevalian prison and had a rude awakening. Not everything is sunshine and puppy dogs.”

“Maybe, I’ll see her,” I hemmed. “I’ve got time. Her court date is in October. After that, she’ll be deported back to the states. Her status as a Gevalian will be revoked and she’ll be permanently banned from entering the country.”

“It might be a long time before you see her, after she’s deported, Bells,” Dad said sagely. “Just food for thought, baby girl.” He settled back on the couch, draping his arm over my shoulder. “Now, let’s plan the rest of my trip while I’m here, Bells.”

“Sounds like plan, Dad.”

xx AMDFT xx

My dad celebrated my birthday with me in Gevalia. We had a private meal, with Masen, at a nearby restaurant. We were in secured dining room and enjoyed many Gevalian favorites. We also celebrated at the at the palace with Esme and Carlisle before my dad flew back to New York. I clung to him at the airport. I was happy that he was here for while I celebrated my birthday, but despised the fact that he was flying back home.

The weeks following my birthday, I was still going through royalty boot camp, learning the expectations of being an American princess. In addition to that, Jane was fielding calls from the Gevalian prison, presumably from my sister or her attorney. I was still on the fence about meeting with her.

“Cherie, I’m home,” Masen called as he entered the apartment.

I was flipping through some floral designs for our reception that Elizabeth had brought over with Heidi. “I’m in the kitchen, Mase,” I called back. “Looking at pictures of flowers for our wedding. Come help me pick. This is your wedding, too, bub.”
“Yes, dear,” he laughed, dropping his bag outside of the kitchen. He was wearing his suit, but his tie was loosened. “Holy shit. This is a lot of pictures of flowers, Bella.”

“And every single one has a specific meaning, Masen. We don’t want to pick marigolds and doom our marriage,” I deadpanned. “I have some chicken in the oven. What do you want as a side?”

“What kind of chicken, Bella?” he asked, sitting down next to me and tugging the album out of my hand. “Wow, that’s fucking ugly. My mother suggested this? What type of flower is that? I’ve never seen that before.”

“I have no idea, but it’s a definite no, Masen,” I snickered. “And I made chicken Milanese.”

“I’ll make some risotto,” he smiled, kissing my temple. “Let me change and then I’ll get started on that.”

“What about the flowers? I’m overwhelmed, Masen!” I frowned. “I want our wedding to be elegant and sophisticated, but reflective of our personalities. Something fun and unique.”

“I’ll be right back, love,” Masen chuckled, ducking back into our bedroom.

I huffed out a breath, flipping through the album and putting sticky notes on designs I liked. As I was working, my phone rang from its spot on the counter. It was a local, Gevalian number. I slid my finger across the screen. “Hello?”

There was a voice on the other side, speaking quickly in French. I caught every third word and then it was repeated in English. “You have a collect call from the Central Gevalian Prison from Alice Swan. Do you accept the charges?”

“No,” I answered, ending the call and scowling at my phone.

Masen padded back into the kitchen. “Everything okay?”

“Another call from Alice,” I muttered.

“Her court case is scheduled for next week, Bella,” he said, sitting down next to me. “Our court attorneys told me earlier this week.”

“Should I see her?” I asked him, twisting my engagement ring.

“I think you should, Bella. It’ll give you a chance to have closure,” Masen said, taking my hand. “It’ll give you a chance to put Alice’s actions behind you and close that chapter in your book.”

“What will happen to her after she’s deported?” I murmured.

“She’ll be flown out of Gevalia and back to New York. What happens to her is up to her when she gets back to the States,” Masen shrugged. “From what I’ve heard from Charlie, he’s washed his hands of her. She needs to understand that she made her choice.”

“She did,” I sighed. I looked back at my phone. I picked it up, scrolling through the recent calls. I dialed back the most recent one. I spoke to one of the guards at the prison and made arrangements to meet with Alice, face-to-face. Masen was right. I needed closure. I needed to move on and not worry about her. “Masen, I know that my sister fucked up, but I don’t want to send her back to the States empty handed.”

“I’ll make arrangements for a small account to be set up. We’ll also pay for her flight back to New
York,” Masen said, snuggling against me. “You’re so amazing, Bella. I love you, cherie.”

“I love you, too, Masen,” I smiled, kissing his soft lips.

A couple of days later, I was sitting in a grey, dingy, frigid room. There was a grey table with attached grey stools. The windows were narrow, with bars on them. I tugged on my cardigan, wishing I was wearing something warmer. It was freezing in here. Alec stood behind me, with Felix standing watch outside the door. Masen wanted to come with me, but with his celebrity, we decided that it was best that he stayed at home. I caused enough ruckus with my arrival. There were a slew of reporters outside of the prison, wanting to know why I was visiting.

Of course, I ignored them. That was the best option. I’d leave the comments to Jane. She was amazing with pushing out press releases and spinning things in a positive way. I was really happy with hiring her. In addition to being a great assistant, and a fabulous PR person, she’d become a wonderful friend.

“Lady Bella, your sister is on her way,” said the warden. He was tall, balding and gruff with a tiny mustache and a too-small suit. I nodded and twisted my mother’s ring on my right hand. “If there’s anything, or if you feel threatened, just hit the panic button underneath the table.”

“Thank you,” I said, nodding firmly. The warden stepped out and my sister was brought inside. She was in a grey jumpsuit. Her hair was limp and pulled back into a messy ponytail. Her skin was pale and she had a few bruises on her arms. She sat down across from me, cuffed to a metal bar and we were alone, save for Alec. “I’m here, Alice.”

“I know. Thank you,” she muttered, looking down to the table. She wouldn’t meet my eyes. “I wasn’t sure if you’d call or come. You have every right to hate me.”

“I don’t hate you, Alice. I don’t understand why you did what you did, but you’re my sister. I’ll always have some sort of affection toward you,” I shrugged. “Why? That’s what I want to know. Why did you do it?”

“I was jealous,” she answered, blinking up to me. “You had nine years with Mom. You were the apple of Dad’s eye and I was just a cruel reminder of what Dad lost when Mom gave birth to me. I hated you. I hated that you had those moments with her, when I had nothing.”

“You never had nothing, Alice,” I sighed. “Dad adored you. I tried to help you, take care of you, but when you hit third grade, I was the bane of your existence. When we got older and Dad got sick, I was your fucking slave, Alice. I worked my ass off in order for you to have a childhood. How do you repay me? By bad mouthing me to the press and causing an avalanche of bullshit that culminated in a serious car accident. I almost lost my life, Masen, and my future, because of your hatred.”

Alice stared at me and I saw how haunted she was. Her grey eyes were empty. She was a shell of her former self. Being in prison had changed her. I could see a glimpse of remorse in her eyes. “I’m sorry, Bella. I wish I could take things back. I wish I could change things, go back in time. If I had, none of this would have happened.”

“You’re right,” I nodded. “Alice, in a few days, you will be deported from Gevalia.” I folded my hands and my engagement ring twinkled in the dim light of the dingy room. Her eyes widened when she saw my ring. “I will not be returning to the states, not as Isabella Swan. I will be the wife of the heir of Gevalia. Eventually, he’ll become king.”

“Bella …”
“I’m not done, Alice,” I said, arching a brow. “Regardless of how you treated me before, I forgive you. I also love you. You’re my sister and I will always love you. What I can’t do is forget what you did.”

“I’m so sorry, Bella. I will forever be sorry,” she sniffled.

“I accept your apology, Alice.” I reached into my bag and handed her a folder. I pushed it toward my sister.

“What’s this?” she asked.

“When you leave Gevalia, you will not allowed back. This is information about an account that Masen and I set up for you,” I explained. “Dad … he doesn’t need your brand of bullshit. This should be enough for you to start new somewhere.”

“What can I do?” she cried.

“I can’t answer that for you. Dad said he would want to know once you get settled, but you cannot move back home. Get your GED, go to college, go to work … do something with your life,” I said, standing up and smoothing my sweater. “Once I leave here, I won’t worry about you. You’ve made your choices and those choices have lasting effects. Our relationship will never heal. I will never forget what you did and what you almost cost me. I’m better than that. I deserve better than that, Alice. You also deserve a chance to turn your life around. Take this and make a difference.”

Alice opened the folder. Her eyes widened and she blinked up at me. “Bella …”

“This needs to last, Alice. You can’t call me. You can’t call Dad. You’re an adult. You need to grow up,” I sighed. I turned and Alec gave me an encouraging smile.

“Like with Dad, can I reach out to you?” she asked, her voice quiet. “Even an email?”

“My email address hasn’t changed,” I answered, looking back at her. She gave me a tiny smile, clutching the folder in her hands. I returned her smile and turned on my heel. I was led out of the freezing prison and into a waiting Range Rover. It was harsh, what I did to Alice, but necessary. She had everything handed to her. She squandered the love from our father. She betrayed me. She was an entitled brat and now, she had to learn to survive on her own.

“Where to, Lady Bella? Your afternoon is free,” Alec said as he settled into the front seat.

“Back to the apartment, Alec,” I answered, crossing my legs. “I have a prince to seduce.”

A/N: Alice was forgiven, in Bella’s own way. She got some money to start fresh in the states. You’ll find out what happened to her in the epilogue, which is coming up soon. We’re almost to the end.

Now, we’ve got some schmexy times coming up next chapter and some more forgiveness? Will Esme be forgiven? Leave me some loving …

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 52

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

Now, we’ve got some schmexy times coming up next chapter and some more forgiveness? Will Esme be forgiven?

Chapter Fifty-Two

Masen

“We’re dismissed until after the first of the year,” I said, banging the gavel. “Enjoy your holidays, everyone. Excellent work!” The members of parliament got up and left the chambers. I packed up my bag, tucking my laptop into its sleeve. Heidi was at my side, handing me a folder. I looked at the paperwork inside, seeing that it was the finalized transfer of funds into an account for Alice. “Thank you, Heidi.”

“Lady Bella met with Alice and she received the same information,” Heidi said as we walked to my office. “We will be tracking her to verify that she won’t have any further contact with Mr. Swan or their property.”

“Keep me appraised, Heidi,” I said, reaching for my overcoat and sliding it over my shoulders. “Now, I’m off to see my fiancée. I can imagine that she’s got to be exhausted from meeting with her sister.”

“From what I heard; the meeting didn’t last as long as anticipated. She went back to the apartment after her time at the prison. The paparazzi were hovering outside of the prison. Jane drafted a statement, explaining her presence there,” Heidi said, handing me her tablet.

I briefly read it and was pleased with what Jane had said. The gist of the statement was that Bella was meeting with her estranged sister, who had acted inappropriately while she had visited our home. She’d explained what had transpired between Alice and our family that landed her in jail. They wanted to meet prior to Alice’s deportation from Gevalia, putting their situation behind each other. I smiled, handing Heidi back her tablet. “Excellent response. Bella did well in hiring Jane.”

“She was the most competent of the candidates, Your Highness. She also has a temperament that matches Lady Bella well. She’s snarky, but calm. Lady Bella and Jane bicker like old ladies, but they are also good friends,” Heidi said, a smile on her face. “I’m certain you’re looking forward to some time off.”

“That’s relative,” I snorted. “I may not be working for parliament, but I do have obligations with the royal family. Photo ops, interviews, parties and public appearances. We’re also preparing another interview with Vanity Fair, a more in-depth interview announcing our wedding date.”

“Well, I’ll make sure that I have your schedule sent to your cell phone,” Heidi nodded. “I’ll see you on Monday. Are you going to be at the apartment or at the palace?”

“Heading to the apartment. We’ll be at Masen Manor until after the first of the year. We’ll return to the apartment the weekend before parliament returns for the winter session,” I nodded. “Have a good weekend, Heidi.”
“You, too, Your Highness,” Heidi beamed, curtseying before scurrying out of the office. She nodded to Felix as he slipped inside, standing imposingly at my door.

I put on my coat and left the parliament building. The weather was nippy, as was the norm of mid-October in Gevalia. You could smell the possibility of snow, but it never reached the ground. I eased into the back of the Range Rover, checking my cell phone as we pulled away. The drive back to the apartment took about twenty minutes. I smiled at the doorman, making my way to the elevator and rode up to the penthouse.

Opening the door, I tossed my keys onto the foyer table. “Cherie, I’m home,” I called out. I was greeted by silence. “Hello?” I looked around, seeing a folded card next to the key bowl. I picked it up, opening it.


I blinked up, seeing the lights dimmed and candles lit around the apartment. A slow, predatory smile spread over my face and I walked to the kitchen. I found a bottle of champagne, strawberries and some homemade chocolate mousse. I picked up the three items and put them on a waiting tray, with two champagne flutes and another card.

_You found my goodies … I’m hoping you can use those goodies on me, Majesty. The question remains … do you have to unwrap your Bella? Or, am I naked, spread and waiting for you to devour me? Bedroom, Masen … come find me. Love, your turned-on, wet and wanting fiancée._

“Fuck me,” I growled, tugging off my tie and picking up the tray. I made my way to the bedroom. The lights were dimmed and more candles flickered on every flat surface, along with some fresh flowers. Sitting on the bed and leaning against the headboard was a very naked and aroused Bella. Her pale skin was glowing under the candle light. Her long hair was draped over her shoulders, grazing her breasts. Her legs were spread and I could see her merest hint of her core.

“I see you got my clues,” she purred. She sat up, her fingers gliding over her breasts as she flipped her hair back over shoulders. I nodded dumbly, putting the tray down on the bedside table. I sat down next to her, cupping her cheek and staring into her eyes. I wanted to see if she was okay. She’d met with her sister and probably said goodbye to her, presumably forever. “Masen, I’m alright. I want to move on from my past and into my future. That future is with you.” Her fingers found my shirt, making quick work of the buttons and gently pushing it off my shoulders. “I love you, Masen. I need you. I need us.” She kissed me, her fingers gliding over my chest.

Her mouth brushing over mine triggered something in me. I cupped her neck, pressing her back onto the bed. My clothes were shed from my body. Soft caresses turned to insistent and needy groping. Her hand wrapped around my length, stroking me insistently. My fingers sunk inside her, feeling her arousal and desire for me. With whispered pleas, two became one and we made love.

_We made love all night, healing the last of Bella’s wounds from her sister’s emotional abuse._

_We had sex, partaking in a Bella and Masen sundae and making a spectacular mess of the bedding._

_We fucked in the shower, washing off the whipped cream, chocolate mousse and strawberry bits._

_After changing the sheets, we settled into bed, and I idly played with one Bella’s drying curls. “Are you really okay, cherie?” I asked. “With your visit to Alice?”_

“I am. I gave her the information for her new start,” Bella answered, yawning. “She was shocked
that we were willing to help her, but it grateful. I was shocked she said any word of thanks. She really figured out that her way of handling things was wrong.”

“Do you know what’s going to happen to her?” I pressed.

“I don’t know,” Bella shrugged. “I told her to get her GED and start fresh. What happens to her is in her hands, to be honest.” She snuggled closer to me. “I’m moving on from this, Masen. I wouldn’t have been able to if it weren’t for you.”

“No, it was you who managed to put her in her place and move from the abuse she doled out to you, cherie,” I whispered to her forehead. “I’m proud of you and I love you so much.”

“I love you more, Masen,” she said drowsily. She kissed my lips, sliding her arm across my belly. I held her tightly, my eyes drifting closed and falling asleep as the sun breached the horizon.

A couple of days later, Alice was officially deported from Gevalia. Bella and Alec drove her to the airport. She was flying back to New York. From what Bella told me, Alice was going to take the money we’d gifted her and start fresh in Texas. She had a friend, Cynthia, who moved to Austin and offered Alice a couch until she got on her feet. Alice hugged her sister and was officially out of our lives.

But, not out of our thoughts.

I know I’d keep track of her, for Bella, if she wanted to reconnect with Alice.

I also know that Bella would keep her old email address active, if her sister wanted to contact her.

Sitting in the library, after Alice had left, Bella was flipping through a bridal magazine and I was reading a book. We were relaxing after almost four months of nonstop craziness since our return to the capital. My phone vibrated next to me and I picked it up. Sliding my finger across the screen, I answered, “Hello?”

“Hello, Masen,” Mother cooed. “Are you busy?”

“Busy being bums,” I snickered. “We’ve been going nonstop since our return to the capital. We’re relishing in the quiet and the opportunity to sit, doing absolutely nothing.”

“Oh,” she replied. There was a lot of dejection in that single syllable. “I was hoping … I’d like to see my oldest son and his fiancée. I miss you, Masen,”

“I know, Mom,” I murmured, standing up and walking to the window. Bella watched me; her brows furrowed. “Look, this is the first day we haven’t had anything planned. Even that was a stretch. Bella saw Alice off at the airport this morning. Bella and I have a date with our couch, some takeout and some Netflix. You know how busy we’ve been.”

“I was still hoping,” she grumbled. “Things are better between us, but there’s still a distance, Masen.”

“I still need time,” I sighed, pinching my nose. Bella walked up to me, sliding her arms around my waist. I hugged her close, kissing her forehead. “I love you, Mom, and I know you want to try and correct the damage you’ve caused.”

“It’s hard to do that when you won’t let me try,” she muttered petulantly.
“How about tomorrow, after church?” I suggested. “We’ll come over after services.”

“We have a lot of planning to do and there’s the matter of Bella’s dress,” Mom said. “You can’t be there for that.”

“I wouldn’t want to be. I want to be surprised when I see Bella walk down the aisle to me when she becomes my wife,” I breathed, looking down at my fiancée. “Tomorrow, then?”

“After church,” she said. “We’ll have a late lunch and then we’ll do some serious wedding planning. I will need to call Charlie. He said he wanted to be included. We can video conference.”

“Okay, Mom,” I chuckled.

“And Masen?” she whispered.

“What?”

“I love you. And I love Bella. Give her a hug for me?” Mother breathed. “I know I didn’t say it a lot, but I’m so proud of you and happy that …” She trailed off. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Before I could respond, the phone call disconnected. “Everything okay, Masen?” Bella asked, threading her fingers with mine.

“Mom said that she loved me,” I whispered. “In all of my life, I could count on one hand how many times she said to me out loud. She’s really trying to make things right.” I looked down at her, brushing my lips over her forehead. “We’re going over to the palace after church. Wedding planning, she said.”

Bella dragged me to the couch. She gently pushed me onto the cushions, straddling my hips. “Did you doubt your mother’s love?” she asked, her fingers gently massaging my neck.

“No. It’s unconditional, but she never told me. She never said that she loved me and that she was proud of what I’ve done,” I muttered. “She said she loved you, when her actions …”

“Her actions after her harsh words do speak volumes. She knows she fucked up,” Bella argued, arching a brow. “She flew to some Podunk town in Washington state to drag me back to New York. She saw what she caused. Now, she’s trying to show it.” She kissed me, smiling at me softly. “Have you forgiven your mother?”

“In theory,” I answered.

“Masen,” Bella sighed, glowering at me. “Be serious.”

“I am being serious,” I snickered. “Have you forgiven her?”

“I have, Masen. Will our relationship be the same after what happened? No. I think our relationship is a bit better. There’s no … pretenses. She knows that she can’t walk over me and I know that I can put her in her place without any fear of recourse,” Bella explained. “You have to forgive her, Masen. I was talking to Heidi and people are starting to notice the distance between you and your mother.”

“They are?” I whispered.

“Yeah,” Bella nodded. “Look, we need to move past what happened in February. It’s been eight months, Masen.” She threaded her fingers with mine. “It’s time to let it go. I love you. Your mother
loves you and she wants to make things right. It’s time to stop being stubborn.”

“Oh, I agreed. “Have you told her that you’ve forgiven her?”

“When the time is right,” Bella responded. “She needs to hear it from you, first. But, only if your mean it.” I stared into her eyes, seeing nothing but sincerity and love. “Now, what’s this about watching Netflix and chilling?”

“That was the parent-appropriate reason why I wanted to stay home,” I quipped, sliding my hands up along her ribcage and dragging her sweater with my hands. I tossed it from her body. “The real reason is far more X-rated.”

“Sounds positively delightful,” Bella purred, flinging her bra over her shoulder. “Fuck me, Majesty.”

“With pleasure, Lady Bella,” I growled, twisting our bodies so she was pinned to the couch.

xx AMDFT xx

After church services, we went to the palace and Bella was whisked away by Heidi, Elizabeth, and my mother. They were heading to some posh bridal salon to finalize details about the wedding dress. Jane was with me, along with Felix, and my father while we were in Masen Manor, trying on tuxedos for the reception. For the wedding, I’d be wearing my full regal attire, with a military jacket, my noble crest and a sash with my family’s colors and a nod to the Swan family colors, too.

“I think you should have a more traditional tuxedo for the reception,” Jane said as I stepped out in a chic twist on a tux from Prada. “The designs that Lady Bella and Heidi have been looking at are more traditional, not that.”

“I agree,” I said, tugging on the too-short jacket. “Though, these pants my ass look fabulous.”

“Masen,” Dad chided, shaking his head. “Language. It’s not becoming to speak like that as a prince.”

“I’ve heard you say worse, Dad,” I snickered, ducking back into the bedroom to remove the tuxedo. “And in three different languages.” I hung up the tuxedo, grabbing the next one on the rack. It was a classically tailored tuxedo, but in a deep charcoal grey. Leaving the bowtie hanging around my neck, I stepped back into the living room. “I like the fit of this one.”

“But grey?” asked my brother, leaning against the door jamb.

“I thought you were deployed,” I smiled, looking at him. I walked over to him, shaking his hand and moving to give him a hug.

“My mission ended early and I’m off for a week before I go to my next location,” Emmett answered. “Have you finalized a date? I want to talk to my commanding officer to make sure I have time off for your nuptials, Mase.”

“May thirteenth,” Dad answered, a grin on his face. “Bella wanted to honor her mother. And the thirteenth is close to American Mother’s Day. Gevalia is absolutely beautiful that time of year.”

Emmett pulled out his phone, putting the information into it. “I should be here, working on base in May,” he explained. As he was flipping his thumb over the screen, his phone vibrated. His smile widened and he eagerly responded to whatever had flashed on his screen.
“Who has you grinning like a loon?” I asked, letting the seamstress adjust the tuxedo. I liked the cut and fit, but wanted a black tuxedo. I whispered to her in French, explaining my needs and wants for the suit on my body. Emmett huffed, arching a brow. “Sorry, Emmett. Getting married. This is kind of a big deal, bro.”

Emmett just waved his hand, sitting down next to my father. “You and I both know that people are not going to be looking at you, Mase. Their eyes will be on Bella. What will she wear? Will she be traditional or more cutting edge?” Emmett mused. “You’re just her arm candy, despite you being the damned royal.”

“Answer the question, asshole,” I laughed, subtly flipping him off as I scratched my nose. “Who are you texting?”

His smile softened and he leaned forward. “Rosalie. We got to talking at the bakery reopening. She’s … struggling, but we’re rebuilding our friendship and possibly, our relationship.”

“Did you talk about your choices after she was raped?” Dad asked, his voice filled with disapproval.

Emmett scowled, twisting his watch and shifting on the couch. “I didn’t know what to do. I was pissed at those animals who had torn her up. I was pissed at her, because she left without telling me. I get that she was …” He trailed off, scrubbing his face. “I just got drunk to forget the pain. Her pain. My pain. Honestly, I don’t remember what happened after I got drunk or high.”

“It’s a valid question, Emmett,” I retorted. “Did you have random sex?”

“I did,” he grumbled, shame coloring his voice. “But, that was … months after Rose’s attack and after many unreturned phone calls, texts and emails. Sex masked what I lost with Rose. It was empty. After a handful of encounters, I turned back to drugs and alcohol. That was when you stepped in, Mase. I’d make out with girls, but it never went further than that. The one thing that Rose wanted me to verify was that I never forced women. If I had, she couldn’t continue talking to me.”

“Did you?” Dad practically growled.

“What?! No!” Emmett snapped, shooting to his feet. “I was drunk, not stupid. I hear no, I walk away. Especially after what Rose …” He stalked to the window and crossed his arms angrily. “I’m not a monster. I was just hurting, angry at the world. I talked to therapists when I was in rehab. I talked to psychologists when I enlisted. I’m being honest to Rose about my mistakes. I will always be an addict. It’s a life-long ailment. I made mistakes. I hope to atone for those mistakes. I pray that Rose and I, we get a chance to explore a new relationship. I love her. She has feelings for me. I’m not … I can’t let that go. Whatever relationship that Rose is willing to give me, I’ll take. I want her to be a part of my life.”

I blinked at my father, arching a brow and subtly shaking my head and hoping that he got the clue to let this go. He held up his hands in surrender. Draping my arm over Emmett’s shoulders, I said, “I’m glad that you’re rebuilding your relationship with Rosalie. I’ve only spoken to her briefly, but she’s a very smart and beautiful woman who was hurt so terribly.”

“I just hope that I get a chance to truly redeem myself in her eyes,” Emmett whispered, shaking his head. “I want my own happily ever after. I want a chance to love her again. Love her like she deserves to be loved.”

“You will, Emmett,” I said.
“Your Highness,” Jane chirped.

“Yes,” we all replied.

“Prince Edward,” Jane chuckled. “Your mother just called. She and Lady Bella are on their way back. She would like to speak with you upon her return. Heid, Lady Bella and I are going to work on décor for the reception.”

Remembering what Bella said about forgiving my mother. I was curious if she’d spoken to my mother, accepting her for who she was and her version of tough love. “Thank you, Jane,” I nodded. “Where should I meet her?”

“In the royal palace, her private quarters,” Jane said, reading from her tablet. “They’ll be back in a half hour. Shall I bring you both lunch?”

“Have lunch arranged for Prince Edward and Her Majesty in her quarters. Then, have some lunch set up for Lady Bella and me here in Masen Manor,” Dad ordered. “I want to get to know my daughter-in-law and help with these illustrious wedding plans.”

“Of course, Your Highness. Right away,” Jane breathed, bouncing away and making the appropriate arrangements.

I went back into the bedroom, stripping out of the marked tuxedo and putting on my dress slacks and button-down. Draping my sport coat over my arm, I spent the last few moments with my father and brother, talking about my time at parliament and our family’s plans for the holiday season, including celebrating American Thanksgiving with Bella and the various charity events and masques that required our attendance. I’d missed out on all of that because I was in the states, but with our engagement, our attendance would be necessary and it meant a full schedule from the beginning of November until the end of January.

My beautiful fiancée breezed into Masen Manor, kissing me deeply, but too swiftly before my brother and father whisked her away for lunch. I walked across the gardens to the palace and made my way to the private quarters. I smiled at Elizabeth, who was scurrying out of the room and found my mother in the small dining room, sipping some tea. I closed the door and she looked up. In her green eyes, I saw happiness but wariness. She was still afraid that I was going to shun her.

“How was dress shopping?” I asked, walking toward her and giving her a gallant bow.

She nodded and gestured to the seat across from her. “I was excellent. Bella found both of her gowns … fit for a queen. And that’s all you’re going to know.” She smirked a bit, sipping her tea. “Did you find a tuxedo for the reception?”

“Yes. The tux that I tried on was in charcoal grey, but in black, it’ll be perfect,” I answered. Our lunch was delivered and we tucked into our light meal. “Mom, are you okay? I mean, you seem like you’re hesitant to talk to me.”

“I’m not hesitant,” she replied, dabbing her mouth. “I just don’t want to lose you. I’ve already lost you once.”

“You didn’t lose me,” I sighed, arching a brow.

“I did, Masen,” she muttered. “I lost you the moment that I spoke about Bella, telling you to end it. You adore her. She’s your perfect match, your first and true love. My callous words shattered her, shattered our relationship … a relationship that already on thin ice to begin with … I did that and I’m trying to accept it. I’m trying to accept the fact that you and I will never be okay.”
“Mom …” I tried to say.

“No, I need you to listen to me, Masen. I love you. I will always love you and I’m so proud that you’re my son. You will be the best leader for Gevalia after I’ve abdicated the throne. I love Bella and I know that the two of you will be the best representation of Gevalia,” she sniffled, wiping her eyes.

“Mom, will you stop?” I barked, arching a brow. “What you said and did to Bella was awful …”

“And I will spend the rest of my life trying to make it right,” she cried. “I just hate this distance between us.”

“I do, too,” I murmured, taking her hand and waiting for her to stop crying. I wanted to hug her, but my mother was never one for affection. Her tears continued to fall and I got up, gathering my mother into my arms. She sobbed against my chest, clinging to my arms. “Mom, you have to forgive yourself for what happened. It’s tearing you apart.”

“You don’t forgive me,” she sniffled.

“Mom, I do forgive you,” I said, wiping her tears away. “Bella forgives you.”

“She told me while we were picking out her veil,” Mom said, looking up at me. “She said that she hated the distance among our family. She also said that we needed to move on from our past mistakes, focusing on the future.”

“My fiancée is pretty smart,” I chuckled, sitting back and looking at her.

“And so incredibly strong,” Mom said, giving me a watery smile. “I misjudged her, Masen. I’m so sorry.”

“No more apologies, Mom,” I pressed. “We need to move on and forgive each other. Forgive yourself … can we do that? Can you do that?”

“I will, Masen,” she said, giving me a smile. “I love you, mon fils. I’m so proud of you.”

“I love you, too, Mom,” I breathed. “Now, can we eat? All that wedding planning and trying on those tuxedos made me really hungry.” She laughed and picked up her fork. With a wink, I did the same. And with that meal, the relationship with my mother changed. Our relationship became one of a mother and a son, not a queen and her subject.

xx AMDFT xx

“Thank you, again, for a meeting with me,” chirped Bree. “This interview will be one of the biggest in Vanity Fair history. The photos are beautiful and your story is so romantic.”

“Posting our first interview online was smart, but this in-issue version, with more in-depth questions and more details about our story will be awesome,” Bella breathed. “Plus, I don’t have the same hate-hate relationship with the press.”

“Not all media is like what you encountered in the states, Lady Bella,” Bree said softly, giving my fiancée a tender smile. “Though, I like the atmosphere in Gevalia. The respect and level of culture is enlightening and refreshing. I may have to see if I can transfer to the Gevalian office and be on the official royal media staff.”

“Not just covering us, I hope. We’re relatively boring,” Bella giggled. “Well, now, we’re relatively
boring. Before, not so much.”

“This is true,” I chuckled, kissing her temple. “When will the article be published?”

“The photos are being edited and I need to do some work on the article, but I think it’ll be posted in the January issue. More than likely, you will be the cover. You’re both a beautiful couple, extremely photogenic. I’m totally jealous at the sheer amount of beauty I see in front of me.”

“That would be him,” Bella snickered, snuggling against me.

“I beg to differ, chérie,” I purred, nuzzling my lips along her neck.

“And you’re both freaking adorable,” Bree said, standing up and brushing her hands along her skirt. “As always, it’s been a pleasure. I hope you and your family enjoy the holiday season. Any big plans?”

“Too many to count, but this weekend we’re celebrating an American holiday,” Bella smiled, standing up to hug Bree. “Thanksgiving … we have a lot to be thankful for. I’ve got to give the staff a grocery list and recipes for our meal. Oh, and we need to pick up my family from the airport. They’re arriving today!”

“Happy Thanksgiving, and I wish you nothing but the best,” Bree said, leaving the apartment, smiling flirtatiously at Alec. He blushed and danced on his feet as she sashayed past him. With a coy smile and a discreet wave, he looked back at us. His smile fell, reaching into his pocket and grabbing the keys.

Picking up Linda, Charlie, Jake, Leah, Rachel, her boyfriend, Oliver, Mike, Angela and Ben from the airport, we made our way to the palace. Rosalie was invited, but was staying with her parents to celebrate Thanksgiving with them. She wasn’t ready to get on a plane or to venture out in those crowds by herself. Emmett was upset, but made plans to have a Skype date the day after Thanksgiving.

Our family was staying at Masen Manor while Bella and I would stay in the palace, in a separate set of living quarters. On Thanksgiving, the women and Charlie got up early. I was shocked that my mother was among them. From what I was told, they were going to make the Thanksgiving meal. By three, the meal was prepared and set out onto the dining room table, which was elegantly set by our staff.

Settling into the seats, Charlie clinked his glass and held it up. “In our family, we have a tradition. Before we eat our Thanksgiving Day meal, we say one thing we’re thankful for. Since we started that tradition, our family has gotten much bigger and we have so much to be thankful for. For me, I’m thankful for the new family that has accepted us into their family and for the support they’ve given us.” He raised his glass to my mother and father, before nodding to me and Bella. “You next, baby girl.”

“Oh, right,” Bella snickered. “I’m thankful for my father’s continued good health, the love he’s found in Linda, our extended family and most of all, I’m thankful for the forgiving nature of my fiancé, Masen and his patience in dealing with me. I never thought I could be so happy. I love you all.” She took a sip, smiling sweetly at me. “Masen, your turn.”

“Masen, if I may,” Mom murmured, holding her champagne glass.

“Oh, of course, Mom,” I nodded. “It’ll give me a chance to wow my fiancée with my words.” Bella giggled, leaning her cheek against my bicep. I turned and kissed her tenderly. “Love you, chérie.”
“Love you, more, Masen,” she whispered back.

“It’s so beautiful so you both so happy. You both move like magnets. It’s the most amazing thing to see,” Mom sniffled. She wiped her cheeks and stared at the table, filled with our friends, extended family and staff members who were considered to be family. “Charlie, I like this tradition and I like this holiday of Thanksgiving, giving us a chance to reflect and cherish our own happiness.” She looked down, blowing out a breath. “I am thankful for a great many things.” She blinked up and looked around the table. “I’m thankful for my family. My husband, who helped me see the error of my ways. I love you, Carlisle.”

“And I you, mon amour,” Carlisle smiled.

“I’m thankful for my sons. Emmett, you’ve grown so much this past year. I know you suffered a loss with what happened to your Rosalie, but I’m thankful that you’re happy and healthy again. I’m thankful that you’ve ... accepted our love and assistance. I love you, Emmett. I haven’t said enough, but I love you and I’m proud of you.” She squeezed his hand, looking over to me. “Masen, my oldest son and the man who will rule this country. I couldn’t be happier for you and Bella. Together, you will both usher Gevalia into the next century and you will be our legacy. I’m thankful for your forgiveness, your strength and your happiness. Bella, I’m thankful for you for being you; for loving my son and for being the woman he will need. I love you and I will do everything to be the woman, the mother you need me to be.” With a smile, she raised her glass. “Most importantly, I’m thankful for my family.”

“Here, here,” Emmett boomed, raising his glass.

“To family,” I said. “Our family and loving our family.”

“To family,” everyone replied.

A/N: This is the last traditional chapter. I have one more chapter before the epilogue and it will be an article. Bree Tanner’s article for Vanity Fair. Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 53: A Vanity Fair Article

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

This is the final chapter … before the epilogue. The end is in sight.

Chapter Fifty-Three

A Modern-Day Fairy Tale
by Bree Tanner

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of interviewing royalty. Vanity Fair was given an exclusive about Gevalian Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen announcing his engagement to an American, Isabella Swan. Good news is that they are still engaged.

We have an American princess in the making. Move over Meghan Markle …

They are also disturbingly adorable and undeniably beautiful.

Regardless of their beauty, we wanted to share their story and pass along more information about their upcoming nuptials. Their story was filled with ups and downs, but most importantly, a happily ever after destined for royalty.

Prince Edward, commonly known to his friends and family as ‘Masen’, was sent to the states on a diplomatic mission for six months, starting in October of last year. After meeting with him at our initial interview, he shared that he was also there to find his brother who had turned into that royal that was splashed on every tabloid cover, partying it up and making some questionable choices. But, that’s another part of the story.

One night, when sneaking out of a charity event, Masen snuck into a Brooklyn bakery. It was raining and he’d slipped from his security detail. He made his way inside of the Swan Family Bakery where he was almost bludgeoned by the owner, Isabella Swan.

Can we say ‘meet cute’?

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Can we say ‘meet cute’?

In reality, Masen was trespassing. The Swan Family Bakery technically was closed for the day, but Isabella, or Bella as she prefers, and Masen bonded over obnoxious siblings, family obligations and beating the hell out of sourdough.

“It’s a great stress reliever,” Bella said, with a coy, little grin at our first interview. “I still make sourdough bread when this one forgets to pick up his socks to put them into the hamper.”

“I’m getting better,” Masen laughed, nuzzling her neck.

Now, in regard to their initial bond, some of that they requested we not share some of the information about their siblings. We value Masen and Bella’s privacy, along with the other parties involved, and will respect their request. However, we can say that Prince Emmett McCarty Cullen, Masen’s younger brother, is deployed with the Royal Air Force, as an air traffic controller. Bella’s
younger sister, Mary Alice Swan, recently had some difficulties with the law, but has since moved to Austin, Texas and is working on completing her education.

In regard to those family obligations, they were more cumbersome. Upon their meeting, the Swan Family Bakery was in financial dire straits. With medical bills mounting from Bella’s father, Charles Swan, their expenses were just too much. They couldn’t afford to maintain the bakery, pay their mortgage and address the pile of medical bills from Mr. Swan’s diagnosis of Parkinson’s Disease, the needed medications and physical therapy he required. Upon his diagnosis, almost six years ago, Bella gave up her dream of being a teacher and moved home to save the bakery when her father could no longer work.

The bakery was almost lost.

Masen said that he saw how Bella was working from four in the morning until well after midnight every night, by herself, slaving away to keep the bakery running and provide a life for her family. She struggled and the bakery was struggling. He had to step in.

In addition to being a prince, he wanted to be a knight in shining armor, riding in on his white horse. In his own special way …

Now, the bakery had been in their family for generations and Eleazar Swan, the original owner of the bakery, was a Gevalian citizen, moving to be with his American bride.

With a loan from Masen, the bakery was given new life and a much-needed renovation. It’s now a cafe in the heart of the Gevalian part of Brooklyn, a gem of the community. And, as Bella said, with a smirk and a dangerous eyebrow, “The loan has been repaid.”

“It didn’t need to be, chérie,” Masen snickered, kissing her nose. “But, thank you.”

From Bella’s point of view, it was a point of pride to pay back that loan. As someone who is still paying off her student loans, I know the feeling when that balance says zero. It’s the best damned feeling in the world.

Back to the American fairy tale …

We were granted an exclusive interview. Masen and Bella sat down with us to answer some questions about their relationship and their wedding. When we first met them, announcing their engagement, they hadn’t settled on a date. It’s been set and we have a date for when we will all be fawning over our television, watching our very own American Princess marry her Prince Charming.

Vanity Fair (VF): Again, congratulations on your engagement and for sitting down to sit with us.

Masen Cullen (EMC): Always a pleasure, Miss Tanner. I hope you’re enjoying your time in Gevalia.

Isabella Swan (IS): It’s a beautiful country. I’m happy to call it home.

She threaded her fingers with Masen’s and he tugged her closer, kissing her temple.

VF: With your engagement announced, have you settled on a date to tie the knot? I know that there are a million people who want to know. I’m including myself in that number.

IS: We have set a date. We’re getting married on May thirteenth. We’re doing this to honor my mother, who passed away when she had my sister, due to complications in childbirth. That date is
close to the American Mother’s Day. I felt it important to have some connection to my mom.

Tears were shimmering in her eyes. Masen leaned over and whispered in her ear, too quiet for anyone but Bella to hear. She nodded, turning to him and brushing her lips with his. She settled into his arms, twining their fingers together and looking back up, a watery smile on her face.

IS: I’m so sorry. Even though she’s been gone for nearly nineteen years, I miss her every day.

VF: Understandable. Your mother, while she’s no longer with you in a physical sense, she’ll be with you in your heart when you marry Masen.

EMC: I couldn’t imagine saying it more beautifully. Nothing can bring back your mother, but this is a perfect way to honor her.

VF: With a date determined, have you picked colors, wedding dress, bridesmaids, groomsmen?

EMC: We’re not having bridesmaids and groomsmen, save for the best man and maid of honor. My brother, Emmett, will be my best man and Bella’s best friend, Angela Weber, will be the maid of honor. I don’t know anything about the wedding dress.

IS: Nor will you until I walk down the aisle, bub.

EMC: I want to be surprised, chérie. Regardless, you’ll be a beautiful bride, walking down the aisle to me to be my wife. Is it May thirteenth yet?

VF: Not quite.

Masen smirked, with a low chuckle. Bella blushed, squeezing his fingers and inching closer to him on the beautiful settee in their modern apartment in the Gevalian capital.

VF: Now, in addition to planning your wedding, you’ve both moved into new roles. Bella, what are you doing with your spare time? Are you acclimating to living in Gevalia? Is it different than New York City?

IS: Gevalia is different from New York City, that’s for sure. I grew up in the Gevalian neighborhood in Brooklyn. We were a very close-knit family, despite living in the big city.

VF: If it was so close-knit, why did you struggle so much with the bakery?

IS: Everyone was struggling. There were a lot of small, family businesses that were struggling. We weren’t the only ones. When my dad was first diagnosed, we had a lot of help, but after a while that assistance tapered off. I also hid the fact that we were struggling as much as we were. We were open when we were supposed to be and never stopped serving baked goods. Part of it was my own stupid pride. The other part was a bit of blindness of our neighborhood. It wasn’t until we reopened after our renovations that folks realized how much we struggled. My father and the management team at the bakery have been receiving letters and comments about how much they missed our bakery. But, things are going well for the bakery, from what I’ve been told.

VF: You don’t have an active role in the bakery?

IS: Not at the moment since I’ve been living in Gevalia since March. We returned to the states for the grand reopening. I see posts on the bakery’s website, Instagram and Twitter pages. My best friend, who is the manager of the bakery, tells me nothing but good things and I’m happy with the result of the renovations; with the new life that had been breathed into The Swan Family Bakery.
Information for the bakery’s social media is on our website. The photos are mouthwatering. The next time in New York City, I’ll be making a stop at the bakery to pick up one of everything … carbs be damned!

VF: And, what are you doing here in Gevalia? Are you baking?

EMC: She’s baking for me. She’s forcing me to go to the gym. I love her Gevalian chocolate brownies with salted caramel drizzle.

VF: Oooh, I so need that recipe!

IS: I’ll email it to you! It uses bourbon and rum in the batter. But, in regard to what I’m doing in Gevalia, I’m calling on my education degree and I’m working on educational reform. Gevalia is very forward thinking in its educational system, but has some backwards thoughts when it comes to students with special needs. I’ve visited several schools and these children are simply falling through the cracks, not getting the tools they need to be successful.

EMC: I never realized this until Bella brought it to my attention. It’s a country-wide reform plan. With Bella’s educational expertise, changes are already in place. The children are getting the support they need and actually look forward to going to school.

IS: I’m also working on a literacy program, making reading more accessible and a lot more fun. I am a ginormous book nerd. Give me a book, a comfy chair and some quiet music, I’m a happy camper.

VF: What book are you reading now?

IS: A ton of bridal magazines … I need ideas for our wedding!

EMC: My mother and Bella’s father’s girlfriend have sent over many ideas for decorations, flowers and such. If she doesn’t open the emails, they send them to me. We’re nearly done with our planning, but one of the perks of our life is that we have people to help us with these decisions.

IS: We? There is no ‘we’ in making decisions about our wedding, Masen. I love you, baby, but all of our wedding planning has fallen onto my shoulders. You just need to show up, looking all royal and handsome.

EMC: I’ve made a few decisions. I picked out my tuxedo.

At this point, Bella arched a brow at Masen. He gave her an adorably crooked grin, sliding his arms around her tiny body. They spoke quietly and Masen laughed, kissing her tenderly. She just melted against him before smacking his shoulder and calling him a jerk.

VF: You are both so perfect for each other. I know that the world cannot wait to see the two of you married. Little girls are anxious to see you as an American princess and men are incredibly jealous that Bella will be your wife.

EMC: Well, they can stay jealous. She’s my other half. She brings light into my world, color spread across the canvas of my life. I’d never realized how much I went through the motions before I met her. I’m blessed in more ways than words can describe. I love her and I’m counting the minutes until she is my wife.

VF: Everyone just swooned, Your Highness.
IS: This is how he is on a daily basis. I’m a lucky, lucky girl.

And she truly is. The love surrounding Lady Isabella Swan and Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen is blinding and undeniably beautiful. They move like magnets. When one moves, the other moves in concert. It’s truly remarkable to see in person.

Just like Masen, we are counting the moments until we get see this royal wedding. Not because we want to know what Bella will be wearing (which we do, desperately). Not because we want to see a truly ‘happily ever after,’ because they are so rare. Not because we want another American princess …

We want to see the conclusion to A Modern-Day Fairy Tale. Or is it the beginning? Find out on May thirteenth …

A/N: And that’s all she wrote. This is the last real chapter of my Royalward story. We’ve got two epilogues before I’ll mark this bad boy as complete.

Leave me some loving!

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 54: Epilogue 1

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

We’ve got the epilogue number one coming up. Can we say wedding bells? I’m going to be splitting the POVs. Normally, I like to keep to one POV for a chapter, but with it being their wedding, I want to do it in both of their eyes. Also, with the wedding, I will breezing over some spots because I’ve never been to a royal wedding.

On with it …

Chapter Fifty-Four: Epilogue One

Masen

Five Months Later … May 11th, 2020

“The tuxedo fits like a glove, Your Highness,” said the tailor as he adjusted the fit of my pants. “Your bride will be amazed when she sees you in this, Sire.”

“Well, she’ll see me in this at the reception,” I chuckled, adjusting the sleeves of my shirt. “I’ll be wearing my military uniform for the wedding ceremony.”

“You served in the military?” he asked.

“On paper only. I served when I was in secondary school, working with the military on basic training,” I snorted. “My family believed my future would be better served if I attended university.” I smoothed my hands down the lapels of my black tuxedo. “If need be, I could fight. My mother served in the military the same way I did, by completing basic training whilst she was in secondary school.” I turned around, buttoning my suit coat. “Am I good?”

“You are, Your Highness,” he smiled, nodding. “I’ll press your tuxedo and it will be delivered to the palace the morning of your wedding.”

“I appreciate it,” I said. He bowed and left the room. I removed the tuxedo, hanging it on the wooden hanger. I changed into a grey suit and nodded to Felix. “Two more stops, Felix.”

“Let me guess, picking up the wedding bands and your bride’s gifts?” Felix grinned.

“That’s one of two,” I answered, rolling my eyes.

“What’s the second stop, Your Highness?” Felix asked as we walked back down to the waiting Range Rover.

“The airport. I’m having a couple of people flown in for the wedding,” I smirked.

“Does your fiancée know?” Felix chuckled, starting the car and driving toward the jewelry store I’d used to reset Bella’s engagement ring. I also had a matching wedding band made for her, along with a jewelry set for her to wear on our wedding day that coordinated with our wedding colors, ivory, green, rose gold and blush. According to my mother and everyone else, it was a timeless
“She’s the one who suggested I extend this invitation, but with stipulations,” I replied. “Bella stayed in touch with Rosalie and she said that she wanted to come to the wedding. We’d sent an invitation, but the RSVP was never returned.” Felix arched a brow, looking back at me while at a stoplight. “Rosalie was the woman who had been viciously attacked …”

“Oh, right. The woman that Emmett was involved with and she got pregnant after being raped,” Felix frowned.

“And who suffered from an acute case of agoraphobia,” I answered. “Along with another friend of ours …”

“You used the private jet to have your friends be flown in,” Felix nodded, a smile spreading over his face. “You’re such a good man, Your Highness.”

“I try,” I shrugged. “Rosalie couldn’t handle the crowds of the airport and my other friend, Billy, Jacob’s dad, couldn’t handle the airplane. With the private jet, both problems were solved, along with some anti-anxiety meds for Billy.” I checked my watch. “And they’re arriving in an hour.”

“So, in other words, move my ass?” Felix laughed.

“Bingo,” I snickered. He nodded, driving to the jewelry store. I went inside. The workers fawned over me, kissing my ass. I inspected the jewelry, happy with the results and signed for it. It was wrapped up and we drove the airport. In a perfect world, I wished I could have dropped it off at the palace. I had over a million dollars of jewelry in our car. Plus, a bodyguard with two semi-automatic handguns and a prince who could kick ass.

I’d rather not kick ass three days before my wedding.

Just saying.

We arrived at the airport just as Rosalie and Billy were coming through customs. I handed Felix a poster and he darted into the airport. I sent a text to Bella.

She was doing her final fitting for her wedding dresses. She had a traditional dress for our ceremony, with another dress for the reception. Bella was adamant to wear something ‘normal’. She’d purchased her reception dress from a store in New York City on a brief trip in January when her father took a slight tumble. He was fine, only spraining his wrist. Bella needed to see him and I flew her over to the states. While there, Charlie took Bella to some salon in Midtown, purchasing her reception dress. My mother was not pleased, but I managed to talk her down, explaining that we’d taken over the wedding. Bella wanted to express her personality and would do so in her dress for the reception.

The door opened before Bella could respond. Felix was helping Billy, who was half-looped from his anxiety meds. Rosalie was on his other side, balancing two carryon bags. I hopped out, assisting Billy into the backseat and buckling him in. “Is he okay?” I asked.

“He didn’t think his anxiety meds were working and he took another dose,” Rosalie answered. “After a half hour, he was passed out. It took a lot of coffee to get him upright to walk out to the car, Your Highness.”

“Please, call me Masen,” I said, helping Rosalie into the car. “We’re friends. At least, I hope we are.”
She nodded, giving me a warm smile. “We are friends, Masen. And thank you for making the arrangements with the private plane. I wanted to come to your wedding to Bella, but I still can’t handle large crowds. My parents wanted to come with me, but I needed to move on with my life. I can’t live in their home forever.”

“You’re a strong woman, Rosalie,” I said. “You’ve come so far.”

“And I’ve got a long way to go,” she shrugged. “I’ll never be truly okay, but I’m learning to cope with what happened to me.” She blinked out the window and fiddled with her purse strap. “Men still terrify me.”

“I should have had Jane or Heidi come with me,” I frowned. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t, Masen. Men I don’t know,” she clarified. “I was leery of Billy, until I realized he’s more fucked up than me.”

“His reasons are a bit more … he was a cop and he lost everything on the job,” I explained. I blinked over to Billy who was snoring against Felix’s shoulder. I reached into my pocket, sending a text to Jacob. We’d need his help to get his father inside Masen Manor. We sped through the capital, arriving at the palace. Alec, Jacob and Emmett were waiting outside. Rosalie blushed, fidgeting in her seat. I hid my smirk when the door opened. Emmett’s eyes widened when he saw Rosalie. He rushed to her, offering his hand and helping her onto the gravel. Their fingers were twined together, floating away from the car.

“Looks like Emmett is not helping,” Jacob snickered, looking at his father. “Damnit, Dad. I’m shocked he even got onto the plane, Mase. He must love you.”

“That’s because I’m awesome,” I retorted.

“I came because I wanted to be there for Bella,” Billy slurred, scowling at his son who was assisting him out of the car. “That girl is so sweet and I wanted to see her with a smile on her face, not broken like when I first met her.”

“She’s radiating happiness nowadays,” I said, guiding Billy and Jacob into Masen Manor. We led him to one of the bedrooms on the main floor. Jacob helped him into bed and dragged me to the living room. “What?”

“Bachelor party, bub,” he smirked. “You need to have one.”

“No, I don’t,” I grumbled.

“Bella’s having a bachelorette party,” Jacob argued. “Well, not really a party, but a gathering at the apartment. Leah and Rachel are working with Heidi to set something up for your girl.”

“I can handle a gathering,” I sighed. “No strippers … and no drinking until we can’t feel our teeth, Jacob William Black. I will kick your ass.”

“Good, that’s what Emmett and I planned,” Jacob said, smacking my shoulder and causing me to stumble.

“Fuck, Jacob. Are you bench pressing Mack trucks in your spare time?” I said, rubbing my arm.

“I need to get back into fighting form. I’m back on active duty for the FBI. I can’t be slacking off,” Jacob retorted. “Now, go change and meet us in the kitchen for the first part of your bachelor party.”
Bella

I held up a piece of dental floss. I blinked at it. “What is this?” I asked, looking at Rachel, who had given me the piece of string I held between my fingers.

“It’s a bikini,” Rachel said. “To wear while you’re on your honeymoon. Or not wear.”

“It won’t cover a damn thing, Rachel,” I coughed. “You realize that when I get married in three days, I won’t just be Isabella Swan. I’ll be a princess. I need to have decorum, or some shit. I can’t be walking around wearing dental floss with half of my ass hanging out.”

The bikini was snatched from my hands. Heidi arched a brow. “I’ll pack it, Miss Rachel,” she smirked.

“I don’t think the queen would approve, Heidi,” I sighed.

“She’s not going on your honeymoon, Lady Bella. I can also say that your privacy will be closely guarded,” Heidi giggled, gliding out of the room.

“Open mine next, Bella,” Linda said, putting a beautifully wrapped gift onto my lap. “It’s nothing like Rachel’s gift, but I think you’ll like it.”

I smiled, tearing out the tissue paper and opening the card. It was very sweet and loving, making my heart lurch for my mother. Linda had made my father happy. She was stepping in as a mother figure in my life, but she wasn’t my mom. I put the card to the side, hugging Linda. She swayed us gently, whispering in my ear. “I know you’re happy with Masen, but I see how much you miss your mom.”

“Linda …” I muttered.

“We’ll talk after everyone leaves, sweetheart,” she smiled, brushing my hair away from my face. She kissed my cheeks before settling back down next to Leah. I wiped my cheeks and pulled out an exquisite white lace nightie and matching lingerie. “I wasn’t sure if you had something to wear underneath your dresses or to wear on your wedding night.”

I had something, but this was so much better. “This is perfect, Linda,” I said, running my hands over the sheer chiffon skirt of the nightie. “It’s innocent, but sexy. Thank you.” She waved her hand, giving me a bright smile.

When I was done opening the presents, all sexy lingerie or risqué swimwear, we sat down at the dining room table to enjoy some dinner and wine. Angela wanted to arrange for a stripper, but I refused since of the whole decorum thing. Instead, we were having a lavish meal and what Angela described as a lingerie shower. It was something quiet and low-key, which was exactly what I needed. With the wedding and everything leading up to it, I was beyond stressed.

After dinner, everyone offered me marital advice. Some of it was valid. That came from Heidi and Linda. Some of it was downright raunchy. Rachel, Leah and Angela delivered that raunchy advice. I turned into a tomato, knowing that the raunchy advice had been taken and delivered.

That morning and quite frequently.

You know how some couples have a sexbargo before their wedding? Not Masen and me. He was insistent on practicing for the honeymoon. I was on board for that plan.
Around ten, everyone left, with the exception of Linda. We were cleaning up the mess from the party; washing dishes and packing the new pieces of lingerie into my honeymoon suitcases. She took my hand after we packed my belongings and settled on the bed. “I know that you’re happy with Masen. I can see that twinkle in your eyes when you’re with him.”

“I’ve never been so happy, Linda,” I breathed. “I never imagined that I would be marrying a prince and living this dream.”

“I also see … you have wistful moments. I know you miss your mother,” she breathed, taking my hands. “Renee was a beautiful, wonderful woman. I remember her from the neighborhood. She adored you and your father so much. Even though she never met Alice, I’m certain she would have loved her, too, despite her …”

“Unfortunate choices in life?” I sighed, shaking my head.

“That would be an apt description,” Linda muttered, rolling her eyes. “Regardless, I know that this moment is bittersweet. When I got married to Michael’s father, my parents were both very ill. I got married without anyone to give me away. I was happy, but I missed my parents. Shortly after our wedding, my dad passed on and my mother followed soon after.”

“I’m so sorry, Linda,” I whispered, hugging her.

“It was a long time ago. Just like when you lost your mom; it was a long time ago. It doesn’t make the pain any less,” she said, squeezing my hands. “I love your father very much and I love you, too. I know that I’m not your mom, but if you ever need someone to talk to, you can always talk to me.” She also reached into her pocket and placed something in my hand. “I also want you to have this, sweetheart.”

I took it and saw beautiful lace handkerchief. “It’s gorgeous.”

“My mother walked down the aisle to my father, holding this handkerchief,” she explained. “I didn’t when I got married, because I got too upset when I saw it. I want you to have this, holding it as you walk down the aisle to Masen. This is Irish lace, from my grandmother’s wedding dress.”

“This should go to Mike,” I breathed. “It’s his legacy.”

“He’s the one who said that you should carry it,” Linda beamed. “Now, this weekend is going to be crazy and if you need a moment or if you’re overwhelmed, please don’t hesitate to come to me. I already think of you as a daughter. I’m proud of you and will always love you.”

“I love you, too, Linda,” I said, hugging her again and relishing in her tight embrace. It was reminiscent of my mother’s hugs, but slightly different. I snuggled closer and she brushed her fingers through my curls. “Thank you for being exactly what I needed tonight.”

“Always, sweet girl,” she sniffled, wiping her cheeks. “I always get too emotional when I drink.”

“It’s an emotional time,” I shrugged. “I’m getting married.”

“To a prince,” she squealed.

“And I need my beauty sleep. Rehearsal tomorrow, Linda. Come on, you can stay in the guest room,” I said. “You need your beauty sleep, too.”

xx AMDFT xx
We were standing the cathedral. I was in a light gray suit with a pink tie. Bella was in a beautiful pale pink, almost white, cocktail dress. She was holding a small nosegay, her arm hooked with Charlie’s. He was beaming as he walked her down the aisle toward me. I couldn’t wait until tomorrow when it was going to be official.

“She looks beautiful,” Emmett said, poking me in the back. “Imagine tomorrow when she’s walking to you in her wedding dress.”

“I am,” I breathed, watching as they made their way toward us. Stopping at the steps, the music faded away and the bishop explained what would happen next. With each word, my heart stammered against my chest. Bella’s hand was placed in mine and we walked to the raised dais. Bella handed the nosegay to Angela. We listened to the bishop as he described what would happen.

The readings, followed by his sermon, the vows, ring exchange and honoring Bella’s mother and my grandparents.

The final step would be our first kiss as husband and wife, which would happen on the steps of the cathedral.

We’d greet our subjects as we ride through the capital in a horse-drawn carriage. It would be Bella’s first act as a princess of Gevalia.

“Do you have any questions, Your Highness? Lady Bella?” the bishop asked.

“Why can’t we kiss in the church?” Bella blurted, pouting adorably.

“It’s simply not done, Lady Bella,” he explained. “I know that it’s how you do things in the states, but not here.” His face was already turning red in anger and possibly embarrassment. Our living in sin was a big issue and the bishop threatened on not performing the ceremony. My mother raised holy hell. Begrudgingly, the bishop agreed to perform the ceremony. “I’m not changing my mind on this. Are there any more questions?”

Bella’s eyes flashed in anger and her lips thinned. I slid my arm around her waist, kissing her temple. “No, thank you.”

“If not, I’ll see you both a noon,” he said brusquely. He turned, skulking out of the cathedral and disappearing in the back.

“Well, isn’t he pleasant?” Angela snickered. “Did you have to do pre-Cana with him?”

“Unfortunately,” Bella deadpanned. She shuddered and snuggled closer to me. “Now, who’s hungry?”

Emmett raised his hand. “I’m always up for food. I’m a growing boy.”

“Growing wider,” Jacob snickered. Emmett flipped off Jacob. My mother scoffed, rolling her eyes. She chided my brother and we all left the cathedral. In a caravan of Range Rovers, we made our way to the palace. The dining room was set up for a lavish pre-wedding dinner. The grand ballroom was currently being transformed into a gorgeous wedding wonderland.

After a delicious dinner, Bella and I stood up. She slid her arms around my waist, looking at the
elaborately wrapped gifts in front of us. We’d spoiled our families, with gifts for our bridal party, friends and parents. “First and foremost, thank you, everyone for being here to celebrate our wedding. I can’t believe it’s here and I can’t wait until Masen and I are officially husband and wife.”

“Me, neither, cherie,” I smiled, kissing her soft lips. “For those of you who traveled from the states, you have already received your gifts upon your arrival. I hope you enjoy your time in Gevalia, taking in its treasures and sights during your time here.”

“That chocolate is the most delicious thing I’ve ever eaten,” Leah giggled. “We’re going to have send truckloads back to the states.”

“All you need to do is ask, Leah,” Bella replied. “And there’s plenty of chocolate on the menu tomorrow. Gevalian chocolate fondue was a must.”

“Yes!” Leah said, throwing up a fist pump.

Everyone laughed and I blinked to Jacob. He gave me a secretive smile.

We were all sitting around a fire pit in the garden of the palace. I was sitting on a chair, drinking a glass of hundred-year-old scotch. Jacob was sitting next to me, staring into the flames. My father and brother were discussing his time in the military. Charlie was becoming fast friends with Billy, trying to convince him to move back to New York City.

“You seem quiet, Jake,” I said. “Everything okay?”

“Better than okay,” he breathed, his face brightening and his smile almost blinding. “Can I tell you something? You won’t tell anyone? Not Bella? Well, I think Leah might tell Bella, but regardless …”

“You’re rambling, Jacob,” I snickered.

“Sorry,” he said, taking a sip of his own scotch. “Leah’s pregnant.”


“If you’re really asking how, I’m worried about your relationship with Bella, princeliship,” Jake laughed.

“Shut up, jack ass,” I sighed. “Congratulations, Dad! Seriously, when?”

“She’s about four months along,” Jake answered. “We didn’t want to announce anything until we got past the first trimester. We also didn’t want to steal your thunder with your wedding. I just wanted to let you know because my wife’s filter is nonexistent and she is craving sweets, sex in public places and chili con queso.”

“Sex in public places?” I hissed; my eyes wide.

“We almost got arrested in Teterboro for going at it in the family bathroom,” he sighed, scrubbing his face. “It’s hot as all fuck, but I really don’t want to be arrested for having sex with my wife. I’m a federal agent.”

“That would be pretty hysterical,” I chuckled. Jake gave me a glower. “But, highly improper.”

“Imagine you getting caught … the scandal it would cause,” Jake sighed, arching a brow at me.
“Crown Prince, next in line for the throne of Gevalia … a scandal would be an understatement,” I laughed. “Regardless, I’m so happy for you.” I held out my glass in congratulations.

“Thanks, Mase,” he beamed, tapping the crystal glass with mine. “Look, I know that … with you living here … You’re my best friend and I love you like a brother. Will you be the godfather to my child?”

“What about Seth? He’s living in New York City and …” I trailed off.

“I want you, Masen. I love Seth and he’s a good man, but he’s not you,” Jake breathed. His dark eyes implored me. “Please, Masen?”

“I’d be honored, Jake,” I replied. “Your child will be incredibly spoiled. Uncle Masen will make sure of it.”

“Not too spoiled,” Jake laughed.

I turned to our guests. “We’d like to thank our families for supporting our wedding. We have gifts for our parents and bridal party,” I explained. I handed the handful boxes to my brother and parents.

Bella gave Charlie, Linda and Leah the presents she purchased for them. With a nod, they opened their gifts. Bella tugged on my hand, having me sit down and she curled up on my lap.

“Oh, Masen,” my mother cooed, holding up a beautiful Waterford vase. “This is lovely.”

“I know you like Waterford,” I shrugged.

“Bella picked it out, didn’t she?” Mom snickered.

“And Linda’s, too,” Bella responded as Linda opened up her gift. “Both of them were too gorgeous to pass up. I hope you both like them.”

“I’ve never had anything so beautiful,” Linda breathed. “And Waterford!”

“I’m glad you like it, Linda,” Bella smiled. “And you, too, Esme.”

They both said thank you and we turned to our fathers. For my father, I ended up getting him a bottle of his favorite Scotch, that cost a mint. Bella got Charlie an elegant cane. He had good days, where you could barely tell that he had Parkinson’s disease. On his bad days, he shuffled and needed some extra support with his walking. In New York, he used crutches left over from when Alice had broken her ankle when she was a freshman. Bella wanted to give him something distinguished.

When he opened up the long box, he gazed at her with tears in his eyes. She hopped up and wrapped him into a tight embrace. They cried and hugged for some time. My mother caught my eyes and she smiled tenderly at me, before blinking back to Bella and Charlie.

They broke apart when Angela gasped, “Holy crap! Are these real?!?”

Bella pulled away from her father and looked at her best friend and maid of honor. “Nothing but the best for my girl,” she quipped. “And you’re wearing them tomorrow, Angela.”

“To borrow?” Angela squeaked.

“No, to keep,” I answered for her. “You’ve done a great deal for Bella and her family, in addition to being her friend. This is a thank you from both of us.”
Angela barreled over to Bella and hugged her tightly. I heard hushed whispers and sniffles. Angela stepped back, wiping her cheeks before walking toward me. She went to curtsey, but I stopped her and hugged her close. “We’re family, Angela. You gave my fiancée the love and support she desperately needed at her lowest.”

“Treat her right, Masen,” she whispered against my neck. “Or, prince or not, I will kick your ass.”

I laughed, pulling back. She glowered at me, pointing at me. “Duly noted, Angela. I promise to you; my solemn vow is that I will love her always.”

“Good enough,” she said. Angela kissed my cheek and sat back down next to her boyfriend, Ben.

Emmett walked over to me, draping his arm over my shoulders. He was smirking. “Bella’s maid of honor got diamonds and I got cufflinks? I got the shaft, Mase.”

“Didn’t you read the card, Emmett?” I asked, arching a brow.

“No,” he replied.

“Read the card, jackass. I got you more than just cufflinks,” I snorted. He scowled at me before looking back to his seat. Rosalie was sitting next to him. His eyes softened and he sighed. “You okay?”

“I am. Rosie and I … we’re going to try a relationship again. It’ll be long distance for the time that I’m deployed. She also needs to finish graduate school. She’s going to be a psychologist,” he said proudly. “We’ve been emailing and using Skype to talk, but seeing each other, face-to-face, really solidified our decision. We rebuilt our friendship and now, we’re going to reestablish our relationship. We’ll take it slowly, as slowly as Rosie needs it to be. I love her, Mase.”

“You’ve told me, Em,” I breathed. “I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you, Masen,” he said. “Now, I’m going to read that card to see what my other gift is.”

“Jackass,” I laughed, watching as he slid back into his seat to read his card. Bella walked up to me, sliding her arms around my waist. She beamed up at me. “Happy, chérie?”

“Undoubtedly,” she said, her voice breathy. “I can’t believe that it’s happening tomorrow. I want to fast forward time and be your wife now.”

I chuckled, kissing her lips and caressing her alabaster cheek. “You and me, both, Bella. But in less than a day, we’ll be husband and wife.”

She eagerly nodded. “I don’t know how I’m going to sleep,” she whispered. “It’s going to be bad because you’re staying at the apartment and I’m staying in the palace.”

“The bed will be entirely too big without you,” I sighed. Reaching into my jacket, I pulled out a card. “Read this before you go to bed, chérie.”

“Are you going to make me swoon?” she giggled, taking the card and holding it to her chest.

“That was the plan,” I smirked, brushing my lips over hers.

“Well, I’m going to head upstairs to bed,” she said. “Angela, Linda and I will be staying the palace. Esme is bringing in an entire glam squad. If I’m not able to sleep, I’m going to need it.”

“You’ll sleep fine, Bella,” I said. My hands slid down her waist and squeezing her ass. She
whimpered, gripping my suit lapels. “I’ll see you tomorrow at the cathedral. I’ll be in full royal regalia.”

“I’ll be the one in white,” she whispered, kissing me deeply.

I moaned, wishing I could take her into my childhood bedroom and have my wicked way with her. She pulled away, walking out of the dining room with Angela, Linda and my mother. Charlie came up to me, handing me his own envelope. “What’s this?”

“A letter from me, Masen,” he said, giving me a sad smile. I was marrying his baby girl tomorrow. He was happy for her, but sad for himself. His oldest daughter was growing up. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” I turned, hugging him and kissing his cheeks. “Take care of my baby, Masen. Love her like she deserves.”

“Always, Charlie,” I said, squeezing his arms. “Sleep well.”

“You, too,” he replied, shuffling off with the guests who were staying in the manor.

With some more goodbyes, Emmett and I went to the apartment with Felix. My father would come over the following morning. “Do you want a drink? Some scotch?” Emmett asked. “Your last night as a free man.”

“I think I’m going to go to bed and read this from Charlie,” I said. “What time do we need to be up?”

“The photographer will be here by ten,” Emmett replied. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Mase. Sleep well.”

“You, too, Emmett,” I answered, turning to go to the bedroom I shared with Bella. I stripped off my suit, settling into bed. I took out the letter given to me by Charlie.

Dear Masen,

Tomorrow, you’ll be marrying my oldest daughter. I couldn’t ask for a better man to make Bella happier. You walked into our lives at the darkest moment. We were days away from losing our home. Bella was working eighteen hours a day, so sad and so lost. She was emotionally abused by her sister, with no real help from me. I just let it happen.

That will be something that I will have live with for the rest of my life. My daughter paid for my mistakes because I was trying to make up for my wife’s death, indulging in Alice’s whims. Both of my girls got the short end of the stick when it came to parents. If I could go back in time, I’d … do more to ensure the happiness of my children.

Hindsight is, as they say, twenty-twenty.

With your love and support, my daughter has blossomed. She became the woman I’d always wanted her to be. Not the downtrodden, broken and sad woman … my heart just shattered when I saw how much she struggled daily. Thank you for giving her a reason to smile, to believe in love, to allow herself to be loved.

I know that the road to this moment was not easy. I’m still trying to forgive your mother for what she said about my baby girl. She’s done a great deal to improve our relationship and the relationship with my daughter, but knowing that my girl felt like she wasn’t good enough, not strong enough broke my heart in a million pieces. The fact that she had to leave New York to heal, to get away, made me even angrier. I understood why she had to leave, but the fact she didn’t feel
safe in her own home ...

Regardless of the path it took you to get here, you are giving my daughter her happily ever after. Love her always. Treat her with respect. Make her happy, always. I love you, son. Regardless of who you are … prince or pauper. You made my daughter happy and for that, I’ll always love you.

All my love,

Charlie

“I promise, Charlie,” I whispered. “Bella will always be my number one priority.” I tucked the letter into a box on my nightstand. I curled around Bella’s pillow and managed to fall asleep, dreaming of my wedding and the honeymoon, filled with a lot nakedness with my wife.

Oh, yes …

xx AMDFT xx

Bella

May 13th, 2020 – The Gevalian Royal Wedding Day

Despite my eagerness about my wedding day, I managed to get some sleep. It was probably the best sleep I’d had in nearly a month. When I woke up, I felt refreshed and beyond giddy. Angela was sitting on my bed, rather Masen’s bed. I’d slept in his childhood bedroom. “Good morning,” I said, stretching my body.

“I have coffee for you, Bells,” she said, putting a large mug on the nightstand. “There’s a breakfast buffet in the kitchen. You’re also not to wash your hair. That’s from the glam squad.”

“Kay,” I nodded, sitting up and taking a sip of the coffee.

“I’m really happy for you, Bells. Masen is a great guy and the fact that he’s a prince is pretty fucking awesome,” Angela giggled.

“I love him despite the fact he’s a prince. If he was as poor as could be, I’d still love him. I’d love him if he was goat herder from Timbuktu,” I snickered.

“A goat herder?” Angela laughed.

“What? It was the first thing that popped into my head,” I shrugged. Taking another sip of my coffee, I got out of bed and picked up my toiletry bag. “I’m going to shower. I’ll meet everyone in the kitchen after I wake up.”

“Esme left something for you in the bathroom. There’s also your gift from Linda in there, too,” Angela explained, getting up and sliding out of the bedroom.

I padded to the bathroom, seeing the sexy lingerie from Linda and a blush pink robe from Esme. I turned it over, seeing my new name in glittering rhinestones. On the front, above my left breast was the word ‘Bride.’ I grinned, stripping out of my pajamas and into the shower. I flipped my hair up into a messy bun. I took a relaxing shower and put on my lingerie, tightening the robe around my waist. “Damn, this corset makes my waist look so tiny.” I ran my hands down my sides before heading to the kitchen.

“Good morning, Lady Bella,” said Jane. She was dressed in a sleek black suit. She had a portfolio
in her hands, presumably of the schedule for the day. “I hope you had a restful night’s sleep.”

“T did, Jane,” I smiled. “Where is everyone?”

“Miss Linda is getting her hair curled. Lady Angela is talking to her boyfriend and Her Majesty is …”

“Right behind you,” Esme snickered. “Thank you, Jane. Can you please check on the limousine for Lady Bella? We don’t want her late to her own wedding.”

“Of course, Your Majesty,” Jane smiled, curtseying before scurrying out of the kitchen.

“Come, Bella,” Esme said, guiding me to the table and having me sit. “Let me make you something to eat.”

“Esme, I can make my own meal,” I chuckled.

“It’s your wedding day, Isabella. I want to spoil you,” Esme chided, piling a plate with the sweet and savory dishes on the kitchen counter. She poured me another cup of coffee and glided over to me, putting the plate in front of me. “Enjoy, Bella.”

“Thank you, Esme,” I said, tucking into my meal. “Did you sleep well?”

“A bit fitfully, to be honest,” she answered, sipping from her cup. “My oldest boy is getting married today and while I’m happy for the two of you, I’m a bit sad that my son is … he’s growing up and moving on without me.” She sat back, staring at me. “But, in all reality, he’s been moving on without me for most of my life. I was more concerned with being queen than being a mother to my sons.” A flutter of sadness washed over her face. “It’s a regret I’ll have to live with for the rest of my life.”

“Masen and Emmett understand why you lived the way you lived,” I murmured. “Masen said that he forgave you. Regardless of your role in their life, they still love you and will love you for the rest of their days.”

“I love them more than words can describe and I wasted time,” she sighed. “I may not have been a great mother, but I’m planning on being the best grandmother possible.” She arched a brow, smirking at me.

“Is that a nudge?” I quipped, smirking back.

“I would shame all mother-in-laws if I didn’t nudge,” she laughed. “And being the mother of boys, I’d love to spoil a baby girl.”

“I really don’t have much control over the gender, Esme,” I retorted. “I’m also on birth control. I’ve been on it since I was sixteen when I was plagued with horrible cramps and erratic periods.”

“So, stop,” Esme returned, giving me a smile. “I’m certain Charlie would love grandchildren, too.”

“When we’re ready,” I chuckled, challenging her and giving her a grin. “I love Masen very much, but we want to be a couple before adding children into the mix. He wants to feel more at ease in position in parliament and when he ascends to the throne. I love children and I know that we will have a family, but when we’re ready.”

“I can respect that,” Esme nodded, bowing her head to me. “Are you nervous?”
“No. I’ve never been at ease in my life, Esme,” I breathed, pushing away my nearly empty plate. “I can’t wait until I’m Masen’s wife.”

“He’s eager, too,” Esme said. She got up and walked to the peninsula. She pulled out a large box, walking back to the table and placing the box in front of me. “I wore this on my wedding day. I would be honored if you would do the same on yours.”

My eyes widened and I looked at the box. It was gorgeous, deep ebony and embossed with golden filigree. “Esme …”

“Open it, sweet girl,” she urged, squeezing my hands. “I want you to have it. I love you and I love that you made my son so unbelievably happy.” I hugged her and she gasped before wrapping her arms around me. I don’t know how long we stayed in our embrace, but when we pulled back, we both had tears in our eyes and our cheeks were flushed. She wiped beneath her eyes. “Today is not a time for tears, Bella.”

“I know, but …” I trailed off. “Thank you for accepting me and loving me.”

“I love you and I will tell you as much as I can, my daughter,” Esme said, pushing the box to me. “Now, as your queen, I command you to open the box.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” I replied cheekily as I opened the box. Inside, there was a beautiful tiara, bedecked with white and pink diamonds. I couldn’t even fathom how much it cost. It was the most gorgeous thing I’d ever seen as it twinkled in the early morning sunlight. “Oh, my God. This is …”

“Yours, Bella,” she said. “My gift to you. Wear it today, on your wedding day and when you have a daughter, pass it on to her. And if you don’t have a daughter, give it to your future daughter-in-law.” She took the tiara, placing it on my head. “Fit for a queen.” She kissed my temple. “Time to get ready. My son is waiting for you.”

I nodded and went into the living room, shocked to see that it had been transformed into a salon. Heidi saw me, grabbing my hand and gently pushed me into one of the chairs. My hair was curled, twisted and twined into an elaborate, but perfect updo for my wedding. The tiara was intertwined into my hair, with my veil cascading down my back. As my hair was completed, makeup artists applied my face. When they stepped away, I was shocked at beautiful I looked. “Wow,” I breathed, running my fingers down my curls. “I’ve never looked so good.”

“According to Masen, you always look beautiful,” Angela said, holding a white bag. Her short hair was curled. She had on her blush bridesmaid dress. She looked gorgeous and happy. I was about to tell her when she held up the bag. “Speaking of your future hubby, this is from him.”

“When did he get this to you?” I asked, taking the bag.

“He gave it to me at the rehearsal dinner when you were with your dad,” she answered. “We’ll get your dress ready and you some time to read the card.” She kissed my cheek and darted out of the room.

I crossed my legs, pulling out the card. It was an embossed card with his initials. I ran my fingers over the raised letters before opening up the card. His elegant script was inside.

My dearest Bella,

Today is the second-best day of our lives. The first one was the day that I met you. You changed me for the better. You made me realize that there was more to life than honor and duty. You are my best friend, my soul mate and my everything.
I love you so much, Bella. I can’t wait to wake up with you every day, to face each challenge with you by my side. I excited about starting a family with you, having a little girl with your eyes and loving heart. Or a boy with my messy mop of hair. Regardless, a child … I’m so excited.

What makes me even more excited is that I get rule Gevalia with you by my side. I can’t imagine doing that without you. You guide me in ways that I can’t even begin to fathom. You’re smart and savvy. You’re also so strong. Together, we can make a difference in Gevalia. I’m already seeing it with the reforms in our educational system. You should be so proud of that, chérie.

In a few short hours, we will be husband and wife. That role is far more important than anything else ... I love you and will love you for the rest of our days, Lady Isabella Marie Swan Cullen, Duchess of Gevalia.

All my love and adoration,

Masen

“You better not be crying, Isabella,” Angela chided, her hands on her hips. “We don’t have time to redo your makeup.”

“I’m not crying,” I sniffled, wiping beneath my eyes. “Masen is ... yeah ... he’s got a way with words and I really can’t wait to be his wife.”

“Well, let’s get you dressed, chickadee,” Angela sang, pulling on my hands.

xx AMDFT xx

Masen

I was standing at the front of the cathedral. Emmett was behind me. My mother and father were seated in the cathedral, waiting for Bella and Charlie to walk down the aisle. I could hear the press outside, scrambling to take photos. Time seemed to stand still until the doors opened. When they did, the sunlight spilled into the sanctuary. I blew out a breath, tears brimming in my eyes.

“You’re so lucky, Mase,” Emmett whispered in my ear. “She’s beautiful.”

I nodded, believing him since I was trying not to cry. The music began playing and I watched as Charlie and Bella walked toward me. Around her neck, I saw the pink diamond necklace I’d bought for her along with the matching earrings. Her dress was all lace, with long sleeves and was cinched at the waist, floating away from her body elegantly as it trailed behind her, with her cathedral length veil. Atop her head was one of my mother’s favorite tiaras, an exquisite pink diamond encrusted circlet that fit perfectly on her.

Charlie stopped at the foot of the dais, looking at his daughter and barely keeping his emotions at bay. They stayed there until the music faded away. The bishop nodded to me and I stepped down, meeting her. I needed to touch her. I needed to see if she was real. “Who gives this woman to this man?” the bishop asked.

“Her family and I do,” Charlie said, his voice wavering. He placed her hand into mine. A shimmer of electricity traveled up my arm and she looked up at me from behind her veil. “Love her always, Your Highness.”

“Always, Charlie,” I murmured, stepping down to be on the same level as her. Carefully, I lifted the veil to reveal her beautiful face. She stared at me, tears shimmering in her dark, perfect eyes. I caressed her cheek, helping her up to the dais. “You look like a dream, chérie.”
“I’ve never seen you in your military uniform. You look so handsome,” she breathed. I leaned forward, wanting to kiss her. The bishop cleared his throat and I sighed, stepping back. She blushed, biting her lip as she handed her bouquet to Angela. We took hands and the ceremony began in earnest. I knew it would be beautiful, but I was so focused on the perfect, beautiful woman standing in front of me. All I wanted was to hear her say ‘I do’, pledging to be my wife and for me to be her husband.

For our vows, we went the traditional route. I wanted to write my own vows, but the bishop didn’t think it would be appropriate. With overwhelming emotion, we recited our vows and exchanged rings. The bishop announced our blessed union and we walked down the aisle of the cathedral. The press was standing outside, cheering for our union and once we were underneath a floral arbor, I looked into my wife’s eyes. “I love you, Lady Cullen,” I whispered.

“And I love you, Prince Edward,” she breathed. “Now, kiss me before I spontaneously combust.”

“Gladly, my wife,” I growled, cupping her cheek and kissing her soundly on the mouth. I heard shouts of joy and the repetitive clicking of cameras. I moved my head, deepening our kiss and sliding my tongue past her lips. She whimpered, clinging to my wool jacket as we lost each other in one hell of a kiss. We broke apart, breathless. “I promise to kiss you like that, every day.”

“Rewriting our vows, Masen?” she giggled as we made our way down to the waiting horse-drawn carriage.

“Just you wait, Isabella,” I chuckled, waving at the crowd.

“Is that a promise, Your Highness?” she asked.

“You bet your adorable little arse it is,” I quipped back.

xx AMDFT xx

After going around the capital for the parade, we went back to the cathedral for photographs to be sent to the press. The photoshoot took two hours and took place in the church and in the palace. Bella was whisked off to be changed into her second gown. I removed my military regalia and dressed in my sleek tuxedo. As I was buttoning my shirt, my wedding band twinkled in the sunlight. It was a perfect representation of us. My ring was platinum and rose gold.

“It’s surreal, right?” Dad asked, leaning against the door jamb.

“Yeah,” I nodded, twisting my ring before turning to him. “But, a good type of surreal.”

“I know you struggled with the bishop. He’s on his way out, but your mother wanted him to be the one who married you and Bella. He married your mother and I, way back when.” He picked up the boutonniere, pinning it to my lapel. He adjusted it, smiling softly. “We wanted you and Bella to be married by him, but we can understand if you want a private ceremony, with a priest or officiant of your choice …”

“When we renew our vows, we’ll go that way,” I said, pulling out my sleeves from my suit coat. “Bella knows how much I adore her.”

“And after that kiss, so does the rest of her world,” he snickered. “You really put on a show.”

“I love her, Dad,” I shrugged. “I’m not going to deny it, nor am I going to hide it.”

“I understand, but there’s a time and place,” he said, arching a brow. “Don’t go farther than what
“I’m not going to have sex with her in public, Dad,” I growled, narrowing my eyes at him. “Have a little faith in me. I’m not a complete perv.”

“I never said you were,” he smirked, giving me a wry look. “Now, we’re having a few drinks in the dining room before we head down to the ballroom for your reception.”

He rubbed my shoulder and we went to the dining room. Our close friends and family were drinking champagne. Angela, Linda and my mother were missing, along with my wife. Jake walked over to me, handing me a flute. “You managed to get through the ceremony. Did you cry? When you saw her? Did you cry? I cried when I saw Leah. I wanted to sob like a baby … so happy that she was mine.”

“Yeah,” I chuckled, sipping my drink. “How much have you had to drink?”

“Two glasses,” he answered. “Is this real champagne?”

“Nothing but the best for a royal wedding,” I snickered. “How’s Leah doing?”

“Pissed that she can’t drink,” he grumbled. “We’re over the moon about the baby, but we were treating this trip as another honeymoon. We wanted to let loose and we can, to an extent.”

“Does Billy know?” I asked.

Jake’s beaming smiled told me my answer. He blinked up at me and nodded. “He’s over the moon. He’s so excited to become a grandfather.”

“Will he move back to New York?”

“Actually, after discussing it with him and Leah, we’re leaning toward relocating to Seattle. One of my mentors worked there and he’s leaving the bureau due to injury. He recommended me for a promotion to be in charge of the field office in the Pacific Northwest. It’s a few forms and signatures away from being complete,” Jake said, his face relaxing. “Leah’s parents have connections in Portland, so it’s a smart move.”

“Whatever you need, Jake,” I said, squeezing his bicep. “I’m happy for you.”

He didn’t respond, but was staring over my shoulder. I turned and saw Bella walking out in a blush wedding dress. Her hair was swept up into an elaborate twist with my mother’s tiara atop her head. She held her bouquet, which was the perfect complement to her dress. I blindly handed my champagne to Jake, gliding to my wife. I slid my arms around her tiny body. She looked up at me with a gorgeous smile. “You were gorgeous before, but you look practically angelic, cherie,” I whispered, caressing her cheeks.

“I wasn’t sure about the dress, but I wanted to support my American roots,” she breathed, sliding her hands along my arms. “You look scrumptious, Masen. I loved you in your military regalia, but this is … hmmm.” She looked up at me through her long lashes. “Can we just sneak off and …”

“Tempting, love,” I growled, pulling her closer to my body. “We will sneak off at midnight, to fly to our honeymoon.”

She pouted. “No wild monkey sex?”

“We will, I promise,” I laughed, kissing her tenderly. “I want to consummate our marriage quite
thoroughly. There will be no part of your delectable body that won’t be worshipped by your adoring and horny husband.” I squeezed her ass before pulling back. We enjoyed some appetizers and champagne with our family and friends.

After an hour, we were led to the ballroom. More pictures were taken before we were introduced. Bella’s eyes widened when she saw the nearly one thousand people inside the ballroom. We settled into our seats and our meals were served after the bishop said grace. When we were working on dessert, a Swan family recipe, the speeches began. Charlie spoke first, talking about how proud he was of his daughter and how much he adored me for her. He was emotional and understandably so. Bella was crying as he spoke, hugging him when he finished his speech.

Angela and Emmett went next, not doing the traditional best man or maid of honor speeches. With it being a royal wedding, they couldn’t share funny stories of how we met or quirky tales about our relationship. They did share those stories at our rehearsal dinner, warming my heart at how much Bella was loved by her best friend and how much brother looked up to me as we grew up in the palace.

The final speech was my mother. She stood up, her own crown sparkling under the soft, incandescent light. She held her champagne flute delicately. “I will not speak for very long. I know we want to celebrate the marriage of my son, Prince Edward to his lovely wife, Isabella. Today was a beautiful, perfect day to see these two people married. My son could not have chosen a more perfect partner to be his bride. My son, I love you and I see nothing but greatness for you. Daughter of my heart, you make Edward so happy and the love I have for you is so deep. Be happy, and love each other always. If you have those two things, everything else is easy. To Edward and Isabella, the Crown Prince and Princess of Gevalia!”

Everyone raised their glasses and I kissed my wife, smiling against her mouth.

xx AMDFT xx

Bella

May 20th, 2020 – Turtle Island

Sitting on the chaise lounge, overlooking the turquoise waters of the Coral Sea, I sipped a tropical drink. I had finally recovered from our twenty-four-hour flight from Gevalia and was able to enjoy the idyllic locale that Masen had found for us on our honeymoon. Masen walked toward me, wearing a pair of board shorts and a sexy pair of sunglasses, carrying a tray with food. I arched a brow over my own sunglasses, drooling over the hotness that was my husband.

I clenched my thighs, feeling the sore muscles of my core and evidence of our lovemaking. Despite having him a few hours ago, I needed him again and my bikini flooded with my arousal. “Cherie,” he smiled, putting the tray down underneath our palapa. “You’re looking very pink, love.”

“Can you reapply, after we eat our snack?” I asked, sitting up and looking at the goodies on the tray.

“I was thinking we could go back to our villa,” he growled, smiling at me with a crooked, delicious grin. “There’s parts of you that were neglected this morning.”

“Ooh, can we?” I breathed. He nodded as he sat down, popping a piece of mango into his mouth. I nibbled on the fresh fruit and cheese on the platter. “It’s so beautiful here. Peaceful and lush.”

“I think after the craziness of our wedding and adjusting to royal life, you deserved some peace,
quiet and relaxation,” he murmured, pushing his sunglasses onto his head. “You deserve this, chérie. We deserve this.”

“You still haven’t told me how long we’re staying in paradise,” I snickered, take another drink of my mango colada.

“We’ll head back on the first of June. I need to be back for the summer session of parliament,” he explained, leaning back and rolling his head. I bit back a groan, shifting on the chaise. “Are you okay, love?”

“I just need you, Masen,” I whispered, looking at him hungrily.

He stared at me for a few moments before calling for a server. With a few words, the server picked up our food and drinks while we packed up our stuff. I put on my coverup and we walked along the beach to our private villa. Once we were inside the villa, Masen pinned me to the door. “A lifetime of making love to you will not be enough, Isabella,” he growled. He pressed his lips to mine, picking me up and kissing me deeply. I gripped his shoulders as he carried me to our messy bed. My coverup was torn from my body and he stared at me. I lay on the white sheets, panting in my black string bikini. “Too many clothes, chérie.”

“I agree, Masen,” I said, sitting up and untying the string of his board shorts. I tugged them down, revealing his naked body and erect cock. “Hmmmm, someone’s excited.”

“Always for you,” he murmured, groaning when I sank my mouth around his length. “Fuck me.”

“That’s the plan, baby,” I quipped, twisting my hand around him.

“As good as that feels, I want to be inside you. I always want to be inside you, Bella,” he choked out as he untied my bikini top. I threw it off as his hands moved down my sides and near ripped the bottoms off my body. He pressed his lean naked body against mine and I felt his cock near my core. His fingers found my clit, teasing me as we kissed each other feverishly.

“Masen, please,” I pleaded against his mouth.

“The reverential tone in his voice made tears prick in my eyes. “Masen … I …” I breathed, gazing into his jade-colored eyes, swimming with nothing but love and desire.

He lifted my leg, continuing to stare into my eyes. “I vow to love you for the rest of our lives,” he whispered, sliding into me and making me whimper in pleasure. Since our first night making love as husband and wife, he had rewritten our vows, telling me how much he adored me. He told me a new vow each time we made love. “You’re so tight, Bella. So wet.”

“Only for you, Masen,” I whispered, rocking with him. He swiveled his hips, hitting that perfect spot inside. I gasped, gripping his shoulders. He kissed me, rolling us so I was perched on his lap. He had slipped out and I grasped his hardness, guiding it back into my body. Sliding down his
length, I stared at him as I rolled over him. He cupped my breasts as I rode him, feeling every inch of him fill me perfectly. His thumbs ran over my nipples. I moaned, arching into his hands.

“Beautiful,” he murmured, trailing his hands along my ribcage. I leaned back, bracing my hands on his thighs. One of his hands squeezed my breasts and the other went to my clit. “I can feel how wet you are. How much you need me …”

“Always,” I panted, meeting him, thrust for thrust. “I love you, Masen.”

He sat up, banding his arm around my waist as he kissed me hungrily. I tasted my essence on his lips. I swiveled my hips and I felt my body clench around him. “Come for me, Isabella. Take everything you need.”

“With you,” I pleaded against his mouth, scratching my nails down his back. He cupped my ass, swirling his fingers around my other entrance. I whimpered, losing all control as my body reacted to his caresses. He grunted, sweat accumulating between us. We were slick and it felt so deliciously erotic, feeling every part of his body moving with mine.

“Isabella,” he choked out, gripping my ass harshly as he crashed his lips with mine. I felt his cock harden within me and I clung to him as our bodies exploded in pleasure. We kept moving until we calmed down, kissing each other languidly and caressing any available skin. “I adore you, princess.”

“Love doesn’t even come close, majesty,” I sighed, brushing his sweaty hair back from his forehead.

“No, it doesn’t, Bella,” he breathed, staring at me. “Not even close.”

We spent the rest of our honeymoon, making love and relishing our time on Turtle Island. We did make a short trip to Fiji for a weekend, but for the most part we were barely dressed and attached to one other, either in bed or christening every flat surface in the villa.

Masen also helped me learn about my new role as a princess. Jane would now be my personal assistant and upon our return, we’d hire a staff for my required expectations as a royal. I’d have a publicist, stylist, security, and liaison to the Gevalian public. I was quite popular since I was not born royalty. People felt I was approachable, friendly and real. I would gladly do everything to help the Gevalian people.

On the first of June, we packed up and loaded up into the Gevalian private jet. “Anxious to get back to Gevalia, cherie?” Masen asked, twining our fingers together.

“I’m eager to get home, Masen,” I said, smiling tenderly at him. “Gevalia is home.”

“Home is wherever you are, Bella,” he grinned, kissing me gently. “I love you, cherie.”

“I love you more, Masen,” I sighed, snuggling to his side. He kissed my forehead and we took off, heading home.

Never did I expect to live this dream and have Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen as my husband. Regardless, I got my happily ever after with very own Prince Charming.

A/N: One more epilogue. More of a future-take, really. You’ll find out what happened with our favorite royal family and their friends. Pictures of the royal wedding are on my blog. Thank you to Clo for creating the manip of Masen and Bella as they exited the church. Love
you, girlie!

Also, thank you to Alec for his royal expertise … Massive pillow hugs to you, sweetie!

Leave me some loving! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 55: Epilogue 2

Disclaimer: All characters are not mine. No copyright infringement was intended. Thank you to Stephenie Meyer for creating Edward and Bella for our enjoyment. I just like playing with them, making them my own … even for just a little while.

This is it, folks. The final chapter for A Modern-Day Fairy Tale. It will be a future take of Royalward … His coronation is loosely based on the coronation practices of the English monarchy. Thank you, again, Alec, for your royal expertise. Wikipedia, you’ve been helpful in providing me the nuances of a royal coronation.

Chapter Fifty-Five: Epilogue Two

Five Years Later

Masen

“Your Highness, Her Majesty is on line one for you,” my new assistant, Renata, said from the doorway.

“Thank you, Renata,” I replied, picking up the phone. “Hello, Mother.”

“Hello, Masen,” she said. “Congratulations on getting that education reformation bill passed. Isabella must be so proud. With all of these changes, Gevalia is becoming one of the leaders in education. It’s all because of her.”

“She definitely was the catalyst for these reforms,” I chuckled. “But, she wasn’t the cause. She just pointed out the issues and we worked to make a change. How are you, Mother?”

“I’m very good. Planning a charity event for medical research,” she said. “Charlie’s helping, along with Linda.”

“More Parkinson’s funding?” I asked.

“Not just Parkinson’s, but other neurologic disorders,” she explained. “We’re finalizing details, but it will be after Emmett’s wedding to Rosalie. So, sometime in October. Anyway, I didn’t call you just to talk about the charity event. Can you and Bella come over for dinner after mass?”

“Everything okay?” I questioned.

“Everything’s fine, Masen,” she chuckled. “I just miss my oldest son and my daughter.”

“Okay, Mom. We’ll be there,” I nodded.

“Masen, I love you,” she whispered.

“Love you, too, Mom,” I replied, hanging up the phone and arching a brow. Shaking my head, I called for my assistant.

“Yes, Your Highness?” Renata chirped.

I’d hired Renata when Heidi expressed an interest to moving to Bella’s team as her publicist. I was sad to see her go, but my wife and Heidi had formed a close bond. They were more than just an
employee and employer; they were friends and confidantes. With Angela living in New York with her now husband, Bella needed a close friend. She was close with Rosalie, but their relationship was different. They were friendly, but more akin to sisters than friends. In a way, Rosalie became the sister she’d lost in Alice.

“Prince Edward?” Renata prodded.

“My apologies, Renata,” I grinned. “Do I have any more appointments today?”

“No, Your Highness,” she said, checking her tablet. “Shall I call for your car?”

“Yes, please,” I said, packing up my laptop and sliding on my suit coat. I heard her call for Felix and I checked my diary for my schedule for the day following. I had a few meetings with the leaders of the various committees, but no full parliamentary proceedings until after Emmett and Rosalie’s wedding in October, about a month away.

“Have a good night, Your Highness,” Renata murmured.

“You, too, Renata. Say hello to your girlfriend for me and thank her for me for the book,” I grinned, sliding my bag over my shoulder. She waved at me as I slipped out of my office. My bodyguard in the parliament building, a fresh-faced man named Carter, followed me to the exit. I nodded at him as I slid into the bullet-proof Range Rover. “Hey, Felix.”

“Your Highness,” he replied. “Are you heading back to the palace?”

“Yes, I am. I want to surprise my wife,” I chuckled.

We’d lived in the apartment for another year after our wedding. However, when Emmett returned from his deployment with the air force, he needed a place to live. He didn’t want to live in the palace and Masen Manor was too big for him. After discussing it with Bella, we moved back into Masen Manor and Emmett moved into the apartment.

My brother also finished his college education, getting his degree in engineering. With his time in the air force, he found he had an aptitude for engineering and mechanics. He wanted to use what he learned to make a difference in our tiny country. While he completed his education, he maintained a long-term relationship with Rosalie. I’d managed to get Emmett diplomatic clearance to return to the states. On one of his trips two years ago, he convinced Rosalie to return with him and she stayed with our family for a month.

She would have stayed longer, but she had a panic attack, flying back to New York. In her mind, she felt pressured to have sex with my brother. In reality, he hadn’t pressured her at all. She was upset and afraid that her not wanting to be intimate with him was causing him to hate her. Bella flew out with Emmett and she spent a few days calming Rosalie down. Her perceived pressure was all mental. Emmett said that he’d wait forever for her.

She asked for some time, a break.

Emmett was heartbroken, but he respected her decision.

By Christmas, Rosalie asked Bella to help her surprise Emmett. Bella and I arranged for her return. Emmett was shocked, to say the least, and their relationship went to the next level. They both went back to her apartment in Soho, packed up her belongings and she moved into a smaller apartment in the same complex of Emmett’s in Gevalia. Within six months of her moving to Gevalia, they were engaged and the wedding was scheduled for the middle of October of this year, nearly a year and a half after they were engaged.
“I’ll see you tomorrow, Your Highness,” Felix said as he parked my car. “Seven?”

“Half past,” I replied, grabbing my bag and heading into Masen Manor. I let myself inside, tossing my bag into my study. The house smelled delicious of what my wife was making for dinner. I snuck into the kitchen, finding her at the stove and dancing to the music playing on our sound dock. I snaked my arms around her waist, making her jump. “Hello, princess …”

“Masen,” she chided, turning to me and smacking my arm. She kissed me sweetly before scowling at me. “I should just put a bell on you, ass.”

“It doesn’t really go with my ensemble,” I snickered, squeezing her ass. “How are you, love? Feeling better?”

She’d woken up this morning with a queasy stomach. She threw up a few times before she managed to get ready for work. She only had a few meetings with the education minister. “It was weird, Masen,” she shrugged. “I felt better after I ate breakfast. Coffee, though, is off the menu until my stomach decides to behave.”

“I’m worried, Bella,” I frowned. “This is fourth day you’ve woken up with an upset stomach.”

“I’ll be fine,” she said, waving her hand. “If it continues for a few more days, or if I can’t keep anything down, I’ll make an appointment with the doctor.” I pursed my lips, putting my hands on my hips. “Or, I’ll call tomorrow.”

“I’m just concerned, cherie. I don’t like seeing you with your head in the toilet first thing in the morning,” I grumbled, cupping her face and staring into her expressive, chocolate eyes. “Call the doctor, please?”

“I’ve got an appointment with Rosalie to have a fitting for my matron of honor dress tomorrow morning. I’ll try to get in after that,” she acquiesced “Why don’t you change while I finish making dinner? I made your favorite. I think I got the recipe down for beef bourguignonne down.”

“It smells delicious, Bella,” I smiled, kissing her lips. She nipped at my mouth and shoved me out of the kitchen. My Bella was adamant on not having people catering to our every whim. She was proud of maintaining a clean house and cooking our meals. I enjoyed folding laundry and vacuuming. We had a team come in and deep clean once a month, but we managed Masen Manor on our own. Bella and I took turns cooking meals, grocery shopping with either Alec or Felix. Despite our status as royalty, Bella wanted to maintain a normal of a life as possible. A newlywed couple, navigating living together and growing as a couple. We had our growing pains, arguments and stressful moments, but we were happy and still nauseatingly in love.

I put on a pair of jeans and a hoodie before walking to the kitchen to make the salad and pour a glass of wine for both of us. “I don’t want any wine, Masen,” she said, turning to me when I uncorked a bottle of Malbec. “With my persnickety stomach, I’m sticking with water and ginger ale.” She held up her glass, filled with ginger ale.

I poured myself a glass and made our salad, sitting at the counter as she told me about her day with education minister, an avuncular man who reminded Bella of her college advisor. As she served our meal, I told my wife about my mother’s request to come over after mass. She smiled, happy to oblige and asked of her father and Linda were coming, as well.

They split their time between New York and Gevalia. Linda still had a lucrative interior design business and her son had married a sweet man, George, and they had adopted a baby girl, Poppy. Linda and Charlie never got married, but they both loved each other very much, committed to each
other and extremely happy. They would fly back to New York after Emmett and Rosalie’s wedding. At least, that was their plan when we’d last spoke to them a couple of weeks ago.

Since Bella cooked dinner, I did the dishes and she went to veranda. The weather was still balmy, with a hint of chill, in early September. I poured myself another glass of wine and sat down on the same chaise with my wife. “So, what do you want to do for your birthday, princess? You’re turning thirty-one.”

“A quiet date night with my husband, without an entourage of security,” she snorted, snuggling into my arms.

“Alas, my love, that is not doable. We’re kind of important and famous,” I laughed. “It’s for our safety, Bella.” She pouted adorably, threading our fingers together and twisting my wedding band. “I’ll try to swing it that I’ll drive us for your birthday, Bella. We’ll still have an entourage, but not in our car. Any requests?”

“I’m simple; dinner and a movie,” she shrugged. “I don’t want to dress up. I just want to spend time with my husband.”

“Done,” I breathed, nuzzling her hair.

“You know what else I’d like?” she asked, looking over her shoulder at me. I arched a brow, prodding her response. “You, me, our bed and no clothing.”

“I thought you’d never ask, princess,” I growled, scooping her up and carrying her to the bedroom.

Bella

“Oh, Alec, do not take those turns so quickly,” I grumbled, cracking the window and sipping my ginger ale. I felt fine when I went to bed last night. I felt more than fine since Masen and I spent the rest of the evening making love, in bed, in the shower and Masen licking me until I screamed in the bathroom.

Yeah, we were insatiable for each other, even five year and half years after our wedding.

“My apologies, Your Highness,” Alec spluttered, slowing down our SUV. “We’re almost to the bridal salon for Lady Rosalie. Do you need me to get anything for you?”

“Can you pick up some ginger ale and some crackers?” I asked. “I had some toast, but I’d like some crackers.”

“Of course,” he nodded, pulling into the bridal salon.

He parked and helped me out of the SUV, walking with me into the salon. Rosalie’s head of security, Liam, was waiting just inside. He nodded at Alec as we made our way to the fitting rooms. Rosalie was speaking on her phone, smiling at me when she saw me. She ended her call, gliding over to me and giving me a hug. “Hey, Bella,” she said.

“Did you visit your dress?” I quipped.

“I did,” she giggled, dragging me to the fitting room where her mermaid gown was hanging. “I can’t wait to wear it, Bella. I can’t wait to marry Emmett.”
“That’s how I felt about marrying Masen,” I replied wistfully, squeezing her hands. “I was so eager to be his wife. I wanted us to begin our life as a married couple.”

“I’m eager to be his wife, but terrified of losing my identity. We met with Her Majesty to discuss our new monikers after the wedding. You and Masen are the Crown Prince and Princess of Gevalia. He’ll become King and you’ll be Queen?”

“Technically, Queen Consort. I’m not of royal blood,” I answered, wrinkling my nose. “Someone is wearing some nasty perfume.” My stomach flip flopped and I moved away from the offending smell. I sat down, sipping from my ginger ale. “What will you be?”

“Are you okay, Bella?” Rosalie asked, sitting next to me.

“I’ve been feeling queasy for the past few days,” I shrugged. “It’ll pass. Talk to me about your discussion with the queen.”

She gave me a glower, but her eyes widened. She took my hand, smiling timidly. “Could you be pregnant? Queasy stomach, sensitive to smells …”

“We stopped using birth control a year ago,” I muttered. “My periods have been wonky, adjusting to not being controlled by hormonal shots. I just had a period a couple of weeks ago.”

“Bella, I know we don’t speak about that ‘dark time’, but you’re having morning sickness. That’s how I realized that I was pregnant after I was attacked,” Rosalie explained. “Come on!”

“Where are we going?” I asked as she pulled me to my feet. The room spun and I moaned, sitting down heavily.

“Sorry,” she gasped. “Don’t throw up.”

“Don’t make me get up too quickly,” I snapped. She gave me an apologetic grin, walking over to Liam. They spoke quickly and Liam held up his phone, presumably calling Alec. I took deep breaths and sipped the ginger ale. “I’m sorry about snapping at you.”

“You’re fine,” she said. “You had to deal with me when I was an emotional wreck all those years ago. You’ve got the patience of a saint, Bella. Now, we’re going to go back to the apartment. Liam is on the phone with Alec, asking him to pick up a test.” She held out her hand and I stood up at my leisure. When I was certain I wasn’t going to decorate the bridal salon floor with vomit, we went out to her waiting Mercedes limo. Liam drove us to the apartment and explained that Alec would be about five minutes behind us.

Our former apartment had been redecorated, but still had a contemporary feel to it. Where Masen and I have a more neutral palate when it came to decorating, Rosalie and Emmett were more colorful. It was still elegant and beautiful, but had an added element of whimsy and fun with their pops of color. In the apartment, Rose made me a more substantial breakfast, packed with protein and nutrients. As I dug into the omelet, Alec came in, his eyes wide and his face pale.

“Your Highness, I didn’t know,” he said.

“I don’t know either and that’s why I needed the test,” I retorted. “Please don’t say anything.”

“The clerk at the store recognized me as your bodyguard. She asked if it was for you. I lied and said it was for my wife. You may want to inform Heidi, just to be safe,” Alec said, handing me the bag. “Anything to related to you and Masen is gobbled up like a fat kid loves cake.”
“I haven’t heard that description in years, Alec. Now, I want cake,” I grumbled.

My bodyguard snickered and Rose pointed me to the bathroom. Despite being nauseous and slightly dehydrated, I managed to pee on the stick. While I waited for the test to register, I sent a text to Heidi. I told her about Alec’s ordeal at the store and the nosy clerk. She didn’t respond to my possibility about being pregnant, but she did say that Alec’s quick thinking might throw them off the scent. He’d married Jane after a short courtship and they already had two children. It wouldn’t be out of the realm of possibility that they would be pregnant again. Masen teased Alec, calling him Captain Sperminator.

There was a quiet knock on the door. “Bella? You okay, sweetie?” Rosalie asked.

I shook my head, listening to my alarm going off wildly in my hand. “Yeah. I was spacing out,” I answered, turning off my phone and swiping the test off the counter. Rosalie was standing outside, twisting her hands. “I’m sorry. Are you okay?”

“I’m perfectly fine. I want to know what the test says,” she replied, a wide grin spreading over her face.

“You’re not freaking out?” I squeaked.

“My first pregnancy was fucked up, but I’m not scarred at other people’s baby bellies,” she said, rolling her eyes. “What does it say?”

I flipped over the stick and I gasped. I showed it to Rosalie, who hugged me tightly. “I need your help, Rosalie,” I breathed.

“Anything, Bella,” she replied.

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Masen

“Bella, chérie, I adore you, but we’re going to be late,” I laughed.

“Sorry,” Bella said, smoothing down her eggplant sheath dress. “I couldn’t find my other shoe.” I looked down at her nude heels. “I wanted to wear black, but the shoes I wanted disappeared.”

She rustled through the closet and pulled out a khaki coat. I helped her with her coat and we got into a waiting limousine. Our car followed my parents’ Rolls Royce. We walked into the cathedral, sitting down behind my parents with Rosalie and Emmett. Bella and Rosalie were seated together, whispering quietly.

“What are they talking about?” Emmett asked, elbowing me.

“I don’t know, but maybe planning Rosalie’s bridal shower or bachelorette party?” I shrugged.

Emmett nodded, picking up the hymnal and singing as the ceremony began. The new bishop presided over the mass. The man who had married my parents and Bella and I had retired shortly after our ceremony. The man who replaced him was friendly and flexible. When I’d ascend to the throne, he would preside over that ceremony, and I was grateful for that.

After mass, we all drove back to the palace for a late lunch with the family. The food, as always, was delicious. We went out the solarium for dessert. Bella and Rosalie were drinking tea while the rest of us enjoyed coffee. “Thank you for coming over for lunch,” my mother said, smiling at us. “I
know that you all are busy.”

“We’ll always make time for family, Esme,” Bella said softly. “I’m sorry that my dad and Linda couldn’t be here. Linda’s granddaughter, Poppy, was really sick and they had to fly back to New York.”

“Have you heard anything?” Dad asked.

“She’s in the hospital with pneumonia. She had the flu and it went down to her lungs. She is hospitalized, but on the mend, according to Linda,” Bella explained. “They’re staying until Poppy is out of the woods, but will come back for the holidays.”

“I hope that Poppy is okay,” Emmett breathed. “She’s such a cute little thing.”

Bella nodded, a smile spreading over her face and she slid her hand into mine. I lifted our hands, kissing her knuckles. “Mother, you were very insistent on us coming to the palace today after mass. Is everything okay?”

“It’s time for me to retire,” she said, without any sort of preamble. “I’ve lived and ruled Gevalia for my entire adult life, shortly after my mother’s untimely death. I love this country. I love serving this country, but I’m getting tired.”

“Are you okay, Mom?” Emmett asked. “You seem fine.”

“My mother had a serious heart condition, exacerbated by ruling. When she had her heart attack, ending her life, I was despondent. I was thrust into the role of queen, juggling being a newlywed and a new mother,” Mother said. “I was almost obsessive about my heart health. Despite doing all the right things, I was diagnosed with a heart condition. It’s relatively minor, but it’s still a condition. The treatment includes lessening my stress level. With that, it’s time for me to abdicate the throne, passing it onto you, Masen.”

My eyes bugged out, shocked at her admission. I was just now getting used to my position as the head of the House of Lords. “Mother … I’m …” I choked out.

“You’ll never feel like you’re ready, Masen,” she said gently. “I navigated the change while I was grieving the death of your grandmother, being newly married to your father and just having you as a baby. I’ll be with you, to guide you as you ascend to the throne, Masen. I wouldn’t step down if I didn’t feel like you weren’t ready. I’m so proud of you.”

“When would you want Masen to have his coronation?” Bella asked, her face soft with understanding, but her eyes swirling with pride.

“Gevalian Independence Day, in February,” my father replied. “Your mother was coronated at the same time, about two months after her mother’s death.”

“Will you announce your abdication?” I asked.

“Not right away,” Mom said. “We’ll announce at the holiday gala. It’ll be enough time after Emmett’s wedding and with enough time for us to plan for your coronation.”

The rest of the time at the palace was spent planning the transition from my job as the Leader of the House of Lords to the King of Gevalia. Emmett, after my coronation, would assume my position. He was freaking out because he understood engineering and mechanics. He was not a politician or a schmoozer, like me. However, he could be a charmer. We’d need to work on that and he’d come work with me before his wedding.
As we walked back to Masen Manor, I was quiet and slightly panicking about my mother’s announcement. Regardless, I knew I’d be okay with my mother’s guidance and Bella’s support. I wasn’t going into this alone. I had my family who loved and respected me. My wife was my biggest cheerleader and her adoration was my backbone.

I could do this.

xx AMDFT xx

“Your Highness, everything is planned for Princess Isabella’s birthday,” Renata said. “She did say that she would rather spend the night at home, but your meal is being catered.”

“Thank you for your help, Renata,” I said, signing off on some new bills that would be brought to a vote the following week. “If you want to go, you can. I’m heading out in a little bit.”

“I’ll have Felix pull up. Oh, and your brother said that he would be back on Monday. He apologized for leaving so abruptly, but Rosalie’s father went in for emergency surgery,” Renata said, her nose wrinkled. “Appendix, I believe. She wanted to be there to help with his recovery.”

“Understandable,” I chuckled. “Can you send some flowers to Mr. Hale?”

“Already done, Your Highness,” Renata smiled.

“You’re a rock star, Renata. I don’t know what I’d do without you,” I laughed.

“Completely flounder?” she giggled, grinning cheekily. “Do you have your gift for Princess Isabella?”

“I do, Renata,” I sighed, rolling my eyes. “Go home to your girl. Enjoy your weekend.”

“Will do, Your Highness,” she nodded, tossing her purse over her shoulders. She waved at me before ducking out. I finished signing the paperwork and put it on Renata’s desk to be delivered first thing Monday morning. When my cell phone vibrated, it broke my thoughts and I saw a text from Felix. I put on my overcoat, swiped her present and my bag and left the parliament building. Walking into Mason Manor, I was surprised to see the entire entrance and main floor covered in flowers and candles.

I didn’t plan for this. What’s going on?

“Bella?” I called out. I balanced the present for her with my bag. I tossed the bag into my study and made my way into the kitchen. It was empty. “Cherie? Where are you?”

“Dining room,” she answered. I made my way into the dining room, seeing it filled with the dinner I’d ordered for her birthday. “Hey, baby.”

She was wearing a pretty navy-blue dress and her hair was curled beautifully. “You look gorgeous, Bella. All dressed up for your birthday. But, if I remember correctly, you wanted dinner and movie.”

“Things changed,” she smiled, gesturing to the seat across from her. “We’re having dinner and then …”

“What?” I asked.

“You’ll see,” she smirked. “Thank you for this, though. All my favorites.”
“Nothing but the best for my exquisite wife,” I said, sitting down and pouring us some wine. Bella sipped a little bit and we dug into the delicious meal I’d had catered for us. We talked about Rosalie’s dad and his emergency surgery. He would be fully recovered in time to walk his daughter down the aisle. She also mentioned the status about her unofficial niece, Poppy. She was back home and well on the way to being fully healthy.

“Alice called me,” Bella said as we were finishing up the main course. The staff I’d hired cleared our plates and discreetly left the manor. She shifted in her seat. She knew that I was not Alice’s biggest fan. Alice had cleaned up her act and found her niche in Austin. I still hated that felt the need to belittle my wife when she was younger. “She called me to tell me that she was getting married.”

“Really?” I said.

“Ironically enough, she found another guy named Jasper, but this one was a true southern gentleman. She asked me to come to her wedding,” Bella explained. “I said that I’d have to let her know, but I’d like to go.”

“When is her wedding?” I asked.

“Since they’re paying for it themselves, in two years,” Bella said. “Her new Jasper is a rancher and has a little boy from a previous relationship. They met when he was in Austin for his sister’s birthday. Alice served them at the restaurant she was working at.”

Alice was working her way through university, getting her degree in business. Using the money we’d given her, she rented a small house and invested the rest, hoping to make it last. She got her GED and applied for University of Texas at Austin. Despite her bratty beginning, she had turned her life around. She’d also reached out to apologize to her father for her behavior and they were working on healing the rift between the two of them.

“Anyway, she said she wanted to finish her degree, too. With her degree in business, she could take over the bakery when my father decides to step away, permanently,” Bella explained. She reached over and took my hand. “I know you don’t like her. Things have improved with us and she continues to apologize for how she treated me. Will we ever have the same relationship that I have with Rose? No. Do I still love her? I do, Masen. She’s my sister. I also respect her for turning her life around. I also want her in my life, in some way. Things are changing, Masen.”

“I’ll support you in whatever you decide, chérie,” I said, kissing her lips. “And things are changing. In six months, I’ll be king. Holy fuck.”

“And I’ll be your queen,” Bella smiled, reaching over to breakfront. “For you, Masen.” She put a box in front of me, wrapped in light blue paper.

“It’s your birthday. You should be getting the presents, love,” I laughed.

“Humor me?” she breathed, nudging the box closer to me.

I nodded, tearing open the box and finding an envelope on the inside. I tugged it out, opening it and reading the short, heart-felt message inside.

*Your Majesty,*

*In six months, you’ll become the King of Gevalia, ruling our world and being the best man you could be.*
In seven months, you’ll become a father ... a Crown Prince or Princess ... to take the mantle when you step away.

We’re having a baby!

All my love,

Bella

I couldn’t believe my eyes. I looked into the box and found a sterling silver rattle with something tied to it. I picked it up, unrolling the paper and seeing an ultrasound picture. “A baby?” I breathed. “You’re pregnant?”

“A little over two months along,” Bella said. “It was Rosalie who pointed out that my stomach issues might be morning sickness. I took a pregnancy test and then we went to the royal physician. He brought in an obstetrician and we had an ultrasound.”

I looked at the grainy picture, tears brimming in my eyes. I ran my finger over the tiny dot that was my son or daughter. “I’m so happy, Bella,” I whispered, allowing tears to spill over. I moved to her and knelt before her. I placed my hand on her still flat belly. “Daddy loves you, little one.”

Her fingers trailed through my hair and she gave me her own watery smile. “I wanted to tell you as soon as I found out, but Rose helped me make arrangements for this little surprise. That’s why I told Renata about the change in plans. I’m certain you didn’t want this type of news out in the public, not yet.”

I got up from my knees and kissed her tenderly before sitting back down, with my beautiful wife and mother to my child into my lap. “You’re right, cherie. I want to keep this between us for now.”

“Rosalie and Alec know,” Bella said, her face flushing. “No one else, though.”

“We can tell them at the holidays,” I suggested. “I don’t know if you’ll be showing …”

“I can feel the difference in my body already. My boobs are huge and my stomach is much more solid,” she snickered. She pressed her hands to her belly. “I think I can keep it hidden with fancy dressing. The wedding may be a challenge. We had to some adjustments to the dress, accounting for my ginormous tatas. The dress itself is flowy and a baby bump can be camouflaged.”

“It’ll be hard for me to not acknowledge the baby, or your belly,” I whispered, threading my fingers with hers over her tummy. “But, we’ll keep it between us.” I kissed her again. “Now, I have a present for you. It’s nowhere as special as this one, but I hope you like it.” I plucked the gift bag from the chair next to me. I handed it to her and she smiled tenderly as she opened up the boxes. I’d gotten her a sapphire jewelry set that I wanted her to wear on my coronation day.

“Masen, it’s all so beautiful,” she breathed, running her fingers over the gems.

“Wear it when I’m crowned king, Bella,” I whispered. “Please?”

“Of course, Majesty,” she whispered, blinking up at me. She traced my buttons on my dress shirt. “As much as I want to enjoy this delicious dessert, I would like to celebrate my birthday with you and your fingers, mouth, and cock.”

“My dirty girl wants to play?” I purred. She nodded; her eyes hooded. “Your wish is my command, cherie.”
Bella

I looked at my reflection on Rose and Emmett’s wedding day. My maroon bridesmaid dress was a bit snug, but you couldn’t tell I was nearly four months pregnant. I ran my hand down my tiny baby bump, smiling softly. “Your Highness, you’re needed for photos,” said the wedding coordinator, Maggie.

“Thank you,” I smiled, picking up my bouquet. Rose and Emmett were married by the new bishop in the capital. The ceremony was traditional with a modern twist. It was perfect for the two of them. The new Duke and Duchess of Talovian, a city just outside the capital, were introduced and you could feel the excitement and happiness emanating from the two of them.

Masen walked over to me, sliding his arm around my waist. He was dressed in his military uniform. “You okay, chérie?” he asked. His eyes flicked down to my growing stomach. “Our little one?”

“We’re both fine. I just needed a few moments to myself. It was a bit claustrophobic with everyone in Rosalie’s family,” I answered. “Plus, my tiara needed adjustments. Heidi repinned it into my hair.” I was wearing a diamond and pearl tiara, borrowed from Esme. It coordinated with my diamond and pearl jewelry that Rosalie had gifted me for the wedding.

“I think Lily suspects you’re pregnant. She gave me a knowing smile,” Masen chuckled. “Do you know how hard it is to not tell everyone?”

“I can imagine. I wanted to tell my dad, but we agreed that we’d make the announcement after the wedding,” I sighed. The photographer called us over. “Come on, Majesty. Let’s get our pictures taken.”

Emmett and Rosalie’s wedding was beautiful and elegant. It had all the pomp and circumstance as my wedding to Masen, since he was a prince of Gevalia. There was also an element of romance since their relationship was imperfect, making them more real. It was known that Rosalie was assaulted and it took a long time for her to heal. The extent of the assault was never revealed, protecting her privacy and her sanity. Rosalie was a rape crisis counselor and had a private psychological practice, working with women who were in relationships that were not healthy and survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse.

As the wedding came to close, Masen and I were seated at the head table. My legs were draped over his lap. My feet were killing me. Wearing heels and being pregnant was not a good combination. He was massaging my feet as we watched Rosalie and Emmett dance happily. “Another American Princess,” I chuckled, leaning my cheek on Masen’s bicep.

“Technically, she’s a duchess,” Masen quipped. “But, she is now royalty.”

“I’m so glad that they got their happily ever after. You did that, Masen. When you arranged for Emmett to come to the bakery opening? It gave them their second chance,” I murmured.

“Emmett told me about how much he loved her and he still did, despite what happened between the two of them,” Masen said, moving me so I was sitting on his lap. “How I could not help them? I found my dream with you and before Rosalie’s attack, Emmett had that happiness. I had to make my brother happy.”

“And you did, Masen,” I said, kissing him gently. “I love you, baby. If you handle your ascension
to the throne with the same grace and decorum that you did when helping your brother, you will be an adored King. I’m proud of you, of your loving heart, your kind soul and ambitious drive.”

“I can’t do it without you, princess,” Masen told me reverently. “You make me want to be a better man. I love you so much and I’m so grateful to have you in my life. Who would have thought our chance meeting would have led to this?"

“We were fated to meet and destined to fall in love,” I said.

“I agree with that, cherie,” he laughed. “I also think we were fated to get our own happily ever after.” His hand was gently resting on my tiny baby bump. It was hidden by the table and we grinned goofily at each other, still head over heels in love, even nearly seven years after our fairy tale beginning. “I think we need to do our own celebrating. I want to spend the whole night worshipping your body.”

“Is that a royal decree, Majesty?” I purred.

“I believe it is, Bella,” he growled back, nipping at my lips.

“Who am I to deny that, Your Highness?” I replied breathily, kissing him deeply. He stood us up and we made our way through the ballroom. We managed to sneak out, undetected, and we walked back to the manor where my husband lavished my body, particularly my baby belly. I knew that our child would be adored by both of us. I just couldn’t wait to share the good news with our family.

A couple of weeks later, after Emmett and Rosalie returned from their honeymoon, we invited our family over to dinner to make the big announcement. Our baby was now looking like a baby and not like an alien inhabiting my stomach. My father and Linda returned from New York, staying through the holidays. As our family enjoyed dessert, Masen and I stood up at the head of the table.

“First and foremost, welcome back Rosalie and Emmett from your honeymoon,” Masen said quietly, holding up his coffee mug. “I hope you had a restful time while away.”

“That’s one way of putting it,” Emmett said, looking at his wife with a seductive grin. Rosalie blushed, smacking Emmett’s arm and he laughed.

“Also, welcome back to Charlie and Linda. We’re so happy that Poppy, Mike and George are all okay,” Masen breathed.

“She adored that ginormous teddy bear you sent them, Masen,” Linda said softly. “The thing was bigger than she was and she was crawling all over it, even falling asleep on it.”

“Mike sent us a text with a photo,” I grinned. “I had it printed and it’s been framed. I can’t wait to see her again. I miss my niece.”

“They’re planning on flying over for Christmas,” Charlie explained. “George managed to get some time off and Angela agreed to work the holidays at the bakery. She says hello, by the way and is demanding you call her.”

“I will. We have some news to share with all of you and it’s part of the reason for this meal tonight,” I breathed. “Other than wanting to see our families.” I looked up at Masen and he slid his arm around my waist, resting his other hand on my belly. “Masen and I decided a year or so ago to stop using birth control. We wanted to spend time as just a couple, allowing us a chance to adjust to our new positions in our relationship and for me, to acclimate to living in Gevalia.”
“Two months ago, Bella wasn’t feeling well with an uneasy stomach and an aversion to certain smells. I wanted her to go to the doctor, but she said it was just a touch of the flu. This flu, however, will be lasting nine months. In late March, early April, Bella and I will be welcoming the next heir to the Gevalian throne,” Masen said, staring directly at me.

“A grandbaby?” Esme asked, her voice wavering.

“Yes, a grandbaby,” I answered, wriggling out of Masen’s arms. I got copies of our latest ultrasound, passing them out to our family. Esme, after seeing it, jumped up and hugged me tightly. I felt her tears on my shoulder as she rambled in French, seemingly about the first royal grandchild. “Are you okay, Esme?”

“I’m just so happy,” she replied, wiping her cheeks. She looked down at my stomach, which was still pretty tiny. “May I?” I nodded and she put her hands on my belly. “How far along are you?”

“A bit over four months,” I said. “The doctor said I haven’t popped yet, but I can feel it coming soon.”

“My baby is having a baby,” Esme cooed, scurrying over to her son and hugging him tightly.

I turned to my father, who was looking at me with tears in his eyes. “Daddy?” I whispered. “Are you okay?”

He stood up shakily, shuffling over to me. He took my face, giving me a watery smile. “I’m okay, baby girl. I’m happy for you, but I’m afraid. I would hate for Masen …” he whispered.

“It was a fluke that caused Mom to die during Alice’s birth, Daddy,” I whispered. “I’m okay. We’re okay. Masen won’t become a widower. You won’t lose me. I promise.” He pulled me into his arms, crushing me to his chest. We stayed in that embrace until I pulled back, wiping my dad’s tears away. I took his hand and pressed it to my belly. His face softened as he looked at me. “Your grandbaby will be okay as will I.”

“I love you, Bella,” he said, kissing my cheek. “And you better be good for your mother, baby. She’s very special to a lot of people.”

“That she is,” Masen said. “And Bella is getting the best medical care. Her obstetrician is one of the best in Europe. We’ve been keeping a close watch on her. So far, everything looks great, perfect.”

“Do you know if you’re having a boy or a girl?” Carlisle asked.

“Not yet. It’s still too early to tell,” I answered.

“Are you going to find out?” Emmett questioned.

“We are going to find out,” Masen said. “We’re having a hard time with names, but the gender can possibly guide us in the names.”

“Why didn’t you say anything sooner?” Linda asked.

“We didn’t want to steal the thunder of Emmett and Rosalie’s wedding. With Masen’s ascension and coronation, we felt that they deserved the spotlight,” I answered. “Though, Rosalie already knew.”

“You did?” Emmett asked. “And you didn’t tell me?”
“It wasn’t my place, Em,” Rosalie replied, taking his hand. “I recognized the symptoms since I lived through it after … my attack. I helped her tell Masen, but I kept it between me and Bella.” She grinned at me. “And I’m grateful for you keeping it quiet until after our wedding. You didn’t have to, but it was very kind of you to do so.”

“What are we going to do now?” Charlie asked. “Will you announce it to the public? There were some rumors of pregnancy when a few photos from the wedding surfaced. The tabloids either said you were pregnant or just getting fat.”

“Well, I am getting fat,” I snorted. “I have to go shopping for looser clothing. Heidi and I have date planned next week. We can have her issue a press release about the baby after I tell her.”

“I think we need to announce the coronation first,” Esme said. “I’m over the moon about the baby, but the public needs to know about my abdication and Masen’s intention to ascend to the throne.”

“Why not announce both in the same press statement?” Emmett suggested. “People already adore Mase and Bella. Knowing that my big bro will become king and a dad will be amazing and rally the public.”

Masen and I shared a look. Both pieces of news were huge, but we didn’t want one overshadowing the other. Perhaps announcing Esme’s retirement, Masen’s ascension and our expanding family at the same time would be the best option. “I think that works, cherie. What do you think?”

“I agree, Masen,” I nodded, taking his hand and twisting his wedding band. “For now, though, I think we need to focus on celebrating our newest addition. I want some cake.”

“Or, does baby want cake?” Emmett laughed.

“We both want cake,” I snickered. “Do not deny the pregnant lady.”

“Never, cherie,” Masen chuckled, guiding to me my chair.

xx AMDFT xx

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Announcement Regarding the Gevalian Royal Family

As of November 1st, 2025, the Gevalian Royal Family has several announcements to make. At the beginning of the next session of Parliament, Emmett McCarty Cullen, Duke of Talovian and younger brother of Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, will assume the role of head of the House of Lords. Duke Emmett had been seen shadowing Prince Edward for the past few months, though the reason was never disclosed to the press. He will be sworn into service in early January, taking over for Prince Edward.

Now, why is Prince Edward stepping away from parliament? He’d led parliament in the most prosperous five years in Gevalian history. During his tenure, a great deal of new legislation had been passed, ranging from trade agreements, the restructuring the taxation system and the most impressive changes in educational reform. Gevalia is now one of the leading countries in education, specifically with students with learning disabilities. This is due in part from the influence of Princess Isabella Marie Swan Cullen, Prince Edward’s wife of over five years. She’d received her degree in education and she worked closely with the Education Minister and educational subcommittee of the House of Commons to provide as many opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities.
According to the palace, Queen Esme Elizabeth Masen Cullen will be stepping down as Queen, affective February 22nd, 2026, the Gevalian Independence Day. Her son, Prince Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, will ascend to the throne on the same day, being coronated by the Archbishop of the Gevalian Catholic Church. The plans for Prince Edward’s Coronation have begun and he will take the royal oath at 11:37, the exact moment Gevalia became a free country, over eighty years ago.

In addition to becoming King, Prince Edward is also adding another title his moniker. Princess Isabella is pregnant with the couple’s first child and is due to give birth in late March, early April. There will be a time of adjustment for the royal family, but a newborn prince or princess is always a welcomed announcement!

We wish all the best to the Royal Family and look forward to the future with King Edward and his Queen Consort, Isabella.

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Masen

Dressed in complete royal regalia, complete with the new crest of my blended family, I waited in what was the bridal room of the church. I could hear the choir singing my praises and celebrating my coronation. I shifted underneath my surcoat; I adjusted the necklace that was cutting into my neck. There was a quiet knock and Felix opened the door, protecting me even as I prepared to become king. “Your Majesty,” he said, bowing deeply to my mother as she glided into the room.

“I’m here to see my son before he takes his oath as King, Felix,” she murmured. He let her inside, ducking out of the room. “You look so handsome, Masen.”

“I’m nervous as hell,” I laughed. “Are you sure you don’t want to wait?”

She took my hands, staring into my eyes. “You’re ready, my son, my little Edward,” she whispered. “I love you and I’m proud of you. You will bring Gevalia into the next era of greatness. You’ve already started with what you accomplished in parliament.” She ran her fingers through my messy hair. “You couldn’t comb your hair?”

“I inherited this mess from you, Mother,” I snickered. “And it’s stylish.” I blew out a breath. “Thank you for being here, Mother. I love you and I … I hope do an adequate job to make you proud.”

“You already have,” she smiled, kissing my cheeks. “Come, Edward. It’s time.”

I was led to the rear of the church and the doors were opened to majestic fanfare. My mother nudged me through the door and I began walking down the aisle, stopping at the foot of the raised dais. Bella, in her own robes, and a bejeweled crest, was seated to my right. Her hair was unadorned, but swept up into an elegant updo. You could barely see her pregnancy under her robes and dress.

“I am here to present unto you, Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, your undoubted King. Wherefore all you are come this day to do your homage and service, are you willing to do the same?” asked the archbishop.

The members of parliament and dignitaries in attendance responded to the archbishop’s request. I bowed my head in reverence to their solemn proclamation. The archbishop acknowledged their
responses, stepping up to the dais and gestured to the steps in front of him. Carefully, I knelt before him, placing my hand on the oldest copy of the Bible.

“Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the peoples of the Sovereign Country of Gevalia, and of your Possessions and other Territories to any of them belonging or pertaining, according to their respective laws and customs?”

“I solemnly promise to do so,” I said confidently.

“Will you to your power cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all your judgments?”

“I will.” I nodded. “All this I promise to do. The things which I have there before promised, I will perform and keep. So help me God.”

I kissed the Bible and stood up, moving to the seat next to Bella. A full mass was performed before the rest of my coronation ceremony. After communion, I stood back up and my surcoat was removed, revealing my military dress uniform. I walked to the Coronation Chair to be anointed. I sat down and a silver canopy was raised above me. The archbishop placed the sign of the cross on my forehead, hands and heart with small silver spoon. After my anointing, I stood up and knelt before my subjects while the archbishop recited several prayers in Latin. As I knelt there, a new, deep purple robe was draped over my shoulders.

Standing up, I went back to the chair where I received the ceremonial Sword of the State. It was strapped around my hips, hanging heavily on my body. My brother handed me the Orb, a hollow golden sphere that was decorated with precious and semi-precious gems found in Gevalia. My wife slid a ring on my hand, marrying me to my country. My father handed me the Sovereign’s Scepter of Peace.

I continued to sit as my mother walked down the same aisle, carrying the crown she wore since I was a baby. As she arrived at the dais, she bowed deeply as she handed the crown to the archbishop. He walked behind me, raising the crown above his head. Placing it onto the marble, he said, “God, the crown of the faithful; bless we beseech the and sanctify this thy servant our king, and as thou dost this day set a crown of pure gold upon his head, so enrich his royal heart with thine grace and crown him with all virtues through the King Eternal Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.”

He picked up the crown, standing behind me. Holding it above my head, he said, “God crown you with a crown of glory and righteousness, that having faith and manifold fruit of good works, you may obtain the crown of everlasting kingdom by the gift whose kingdom endures forever.” With a flourish, he gently placed the crown on my head. My heart stammered beneath my ribs as I looked up, seeing my family, my friends – Jacob, Leah and their three children, along with other friends from the states - my country and my love standing before me.

I stood up and carefully moved to the golden throne inside the church, where I was enthroned. The aristocracy paid homage to me, swearing their fealty, beginning with my parents and lasting until the last of the aristocrats bowed before me. Once all of the aristocrats had paid homage, my Bella was anointed, invested, crowned and enthroned by my side. She wore a beautiful diadem, sparkling with diamonds and pearls. She looked at me, her eyes wide, but swirling with happiness and pride.

Almost three hours after the ceremony for my coronation, we processed out of the cathedral and into a waiting heated carriage, taking us to the palace. We had pictures taken there and we stood at the balcony as the air force did a fly-past, congratulating my coronation.

A coronation ball was thrown in my honor, celebrating our independence and my tenure as the
King of Gevalia. I was dressed in black tailed tuxedo, with a white waistcoat and my blue crest pinned across my chest, with a diamond brooch at my hip. A golden crown sat atop my head, with diamonds and black sapphires adorning it. Bella walked in, wearing the most beautiful pale blue gown, with the sapphire jewelry I’d given her for her birthday. On top of her head was a diamond tiara and she wore a sash over her shoulder, with a diamond brooch at her hip. “Your Highness,” I purred, taking her hands. I wrinkled my nose, feeling the gloves. I missed her warm hands. “You look beautiful, Bella.”

“As do you, Your Majesty,” she smiled, smoothing my lapels and adjusting my crown. “Are you ready for this?”

“I’m ready to dance with my wife,” I snickered.

“After a long state dinner, Masen,” she chided.

I sighed, looping her arm through mine and we went down the banquet hall. When we reached the entrance, the servants bowed before us and opened the door. “Please rise for His Majesty, King Edward Anthony Masen Cullen, and his Queen, Isabella Marie Swan Cullen.” Everyone stood up, bowing as we glided past the dignitaries, visiting world leaders and Gevalian aristocracy.

Settling into our seats, the meal was served and it was delicious. When the meal was finished, I guided Bella out to the dancefloor. An elegant waltz began to play and we moved easily to the simple choreography that my mother insisted we learn. When the first dance was done, our guests joined us and I held my wife in my arms. “Today has been a dream,” I whispered against her curled hair. “I hope I can be the king I’m supposed to be. Good and just, bringing my country into the next century. I also hope I can be a good father.”

“You already are, Masen,” Bella said gently, guiding my hand to her belly. She smiled at me, her face tender and so beautiful. “While you were getting fitted for this handsome tuxedo, our baby finally decided to let us know their gender.”

“Really?” I asked. “What did the doctor say?”

“We’re having a baby girl,” she breathed. “A little princess …”

“A girl?” I whispered, a crooked grin spreading over my face. She nodded. Not caring about the people around us, I took her face in my hands and kissed her. Bella laughed against my lips, her fingers curling around my lapels. “Bella, I can’t even describe how happy I am.”

“You don’t have to. I already know because I’m right there with you,” she said. “I was also thinking about a name. I’d like to honor my father and both of our mothers. Charlotte Elizabeth Marie Cullen – Charlotte for my dad, Elizabeth for your mother and Marie for my mother. It was her middle name.”

“That’s perfect, chérie,” I sighed, pressing my forehead to hers as we swayed to the music. “I love you both, so much. I know that because my status has changed with me becoming king, but you will always be first in my book. I will be the best husband and father to you and our little Charlotte.”

“I know you will be, Masen. We both got our happily ever after in our modern-day fairy tale,” Bella said reverently.

“We did, chérie. We certainly did,” I responded, kissing her again.

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