I'm Still Holding On
by sushiloveswhitlock

Summary

Bella was abandoned by a boy she loved and a family she adored. She found happiness until tragedy struck her life. Jasper left the Cullens in search of a new life when he realized something was missing. What happens when they meet up? Can they both find happiness together? AU

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

A/N Well here is a story that is very loosely based on my OS, I Burn for You. It is very different than Bound in Blood and I hope you like this. It was one that was pulled due to content which is why it is now here.

I'd like to thank Alexis Danaan for being an awesome beta for this story. You've made my drafts very pretty, thank you.

JaspersWoman is my awesome prereader. Love your feedback! I also had JaspersBella and SparklingFae help out with a few of the chapters so I'd be remiss if I didn't say thank you.

JamesRamsey joins up later in the story as my second set of eyes. She's done a wonderful job in making sure a lot of the details are covered.

Last but not least, wify, DarkNNerdy. She's the one that encouraged me to write the OS and then she's given her support wholeheartedly. Thank you wify! LOVE YOU HARD!!!

I don't own the story, SM does. If I did, I would have changed things up just a bit and made things more interesting.

This story was rec'd by the following
Wordy Bitches
http://wordybitches.com/?p=7473

See the end of the chapter for more notes
PROLOGUE (June 2006)

BPOV

Somber colors mixed with freshly pressed uniforms surrounded me as I walked quietly out of the building and into an awaiting car. I said nothing, I just stared straight ahead. The car started; one of many in the motorcade. I squeezed my eyes tightly and hoped that I could make it all disappear. I wanted things to be normal again but they weren’t. They never would be.

The car followed others and drove slowly through the city. Lights flashed everywhere. Officers who stopped traffic along the way saluted as we passed by; people waved and some honked their horns. I turned my head away from the window and shut my eyes to try and make the scenery in front of me disappear. Maybe, if I tried hard enough, I could open my eyes again and it would have all been a dream. At the same time, I felt horrible at being morbidly fascinated by the rituals; the pomp and circumstance and the traditions, while my heart ached at the same time.

I opened my eyes as the car slowed to a stop and I was escorted out to the grave site. There was more slow walking as I was led to the front row. I tried to remain as stoic as possible as I took in the scene before me. More uniforms. More black; black silk, black wool, black shoes that were polished to a mirror shine. Black ribbons across shiny badges. I saw glimpses of other colors, mostly grey, but they only added to the sorrow. Hell, even the sky took part in mourning.

I wanted to block out the image in front of me so I kept my head down and stared at the grass.
There were so many varying shades of green as I gazed intently at the blades. The haunting sound of Amazing Grace was being played to the left of me so I turned briefly to look. A man wearing a kilt and playing the bagpipes stood on a small hill and the sound caused my chest to tighten.

*No, I will not break down again. Not here.*

I swallowed hard and looked back down. Words were spoken, I think they were stories. I heard them but didn’t comprehend them other than they added to my sorrow.

My head lifted slightly as I stared at the polished mahogany in front of me. A flag was carefully draped over it; not touching the ground. I swallowed hard once again and quickly looked back down as I felt my throat start spasming and the tears prickle the back of my eyes. My eyes ached and burned from all the tears that had flowed out of me for the past few days. Just when I thought I was done, the tears flowed all over again.

I turned my head slightly to see if I could see my mom while still keeping my head down. I spotted her shoes. She stood a couple rows behind me with her husband, Phil. She was there and yet I stood alone. I had felt that disconnect when she arrived at the house. I would have driven out to meet her at the airport but I only had my truck. She didn’t say much and I got the impression I had bothered her; that this was a burden. She didn’t say it, but the way she complained about the weather and then about today, made me feel she would have liked to be anywhere but here. I didn’t want to be here either but I couldn’t not be here.

She even insisted that she and Phil stay at a hotel instead. Not wanting to argue, I said fine. Since that happened, I barely strung more than a dozen words together for them; mostly single vowel words were the extent of my vocabulary. I shook my head out of my thoughts. Now wasn’t a time to think about her shortcomings.

Uniformed men stood before me and the flag was carefully folded. Still, I kept my head low. If I looked up, everybody would see my bloodshot eyes and the hollow look of death on my face. I didn’t want to see the pity in their eyes. I didn’t want to hear the words ‘I’m sorry’ leaving their mouths.

When I went to the grocery store the day after it happened and I got “that look”. It was similar to the look I got when word got around that the prick and I broke up after my birthday. I hated that look, I hated pity. This time though, it was too much and I ran out the grocery store empty handed; my groceries still on the conveyor belt on check-stand 5. I got more looks as I cried in the parking lot and tried not to scream out loud and curse them all to hell. When I got home, I did scream. I screamed out in sorrow and in anger. I screamed because I lost a parent. I screamed because my heart broke. I screamed because I punched my hand through the window in a fit of rage.

I felt like I died that night and well, in a sense I did too. I didn’t even tell him that I loved him. I didn’t even say goodbye; it was just a simple, preoccupied wave as he headed out the door. Why was I on the goddamn phone trying to get my housing situated as he left? I could have done it all online. I could have waited until the next day. I should have set my cell phone down for a quick minute to say goodbye. No, I was on the goddamn phone when he called me ‘Bells’ for the last time and walked out for his shift. I just didn’t think that was the last time I’d ever see my Daddy again.

The phone call in the middle of the night changed everything. Cops don’t call you in the middle of the night if it isn’t important. I actually missed the call as I nearly fell out of the bed reaching for the phone but quickly dialed back and a part of me wished I didn’t. The news brought a strangled cry from my mouth and as I went to cover my mouth, the phone dropped onto the floor, cracking the screen and breaking the phone. In the span it took for that semi to cross the median, my life as I
knew it, ended. Officers came to the house soon after to make sure I was alright since the call ended abruptly. They stayed for a while before saying goodnight and leaving their contact information in case I needed support.

I remembered how after they had left I sat in his favorite spot on the couch and cried. I must have fallen into a restless sleep sometime early that morning. When I woke, I hoped I was having a nightmare. I went outside and grabbed the newspaper and got the coffee started as I got ready for the day. When I sat down at the table, I saw it; through my blurry, tear filled vision, I saw the picture in the local paper; it was an image I'll never forget and yet at the same time, wanted to. His patrol car was completely mangled, crushed beyond recognition. There was no chance... none.

I felt a hand gently squeeze my shoulder as two officers walked towards me and I admonished myself for drifting off like that.

"Bella, pay attention," Renee's voice whispered from behind me. I tried not to roll my eyes but it was hard. I wish she showed some support for being here. Couldn’t she tell I needed her?

I looked up slowly as the polished shoes approached me. I still couldn't look at their faces but was now looking at the one pair of white gloves holding the folded flag and another set of gloves presenting me with his badge. My jaw ached from clenching it so hard to keep from screaming. Still, I tried to remain stoic.

I will not break down again. I can’t and I won’t. Not here.

"Ms. Swan, I'm sorry for your loss. He was my mentor and well respected by all of us here. He helped me become the Chief of police for Poulsbo," The faceless officer said as I reached out to receive his flag.

“Ms. Swan, he was an inspiration to us all. I’m sorry.” The other officer whispered harshly as he handed me the badge.

I nodded and tried graciously as possible to receive his honors. The weight of my sorrow had my knees nearly buckling as I hugged the folded cloth triangle against me. The shiny metal shield in the leather case dug into my hand. I held onto them tightly like a lifeline. I held onto both pieces so tightly that my bandaged arm started to ache. I rubbed my hand lightly over my injury and fought the gasp escaping my lips as my fingers touched where the stitches were.

The coffin was slowly being lowered and I shut my eyes. A part of me still hoped that when I woke up, this whole thing was nothing more than a damn dream. If Renee hadn’t insisted on cutting my nails, I think they would have broke skin at that moment; I was clenching my hands that tight.

My chest continued to ache as I tried to fight the painful convulsions that were starting to erupt. My breathing became labored as I tried to calm myself when all I wanted to do was scream and curse and cry until my throat was raw. I wanted to fall onto the ground and beat the earth. I wanted to punch something and break things again. Most of all, I wanted my daddy back.

The dam of tears broke when the bugler played taps. It was so slow, the notes echoed in the air. It felt so final. I sucked in a lungful of air when I realized I had been holding my breath. A quick glance at the crowd told me that there wasn’t a dry eye in the crowd. Even the officers that were there from all over the Puget Sound and neighboring British Columbia were teary eyed.

I wish I had known him more. ‘You never know what you have until it is gone,’ rang true. I really did. There were so many ‘if only’s’ that filled my brain the past few days. So many through the day that I wished I had appreciated my time with my daddy. I wish that I hadn’t fallen for that
copper haired mistake when I had moved here from Phoenix. If I hadn’t fallen for him or his bullshit, if he hadn’t broken my heart, if I had been a little bit wiser, maybe I would have gotten more time to spend with my Daddy. I wished I could have been a better daughter. I wish--

I mentally cursed myself as I tried to stop thinking about the ‘could have been’. It served no purpose and I really needed to stop but couldn’t. I kept thinking and wishing I had more time, but now it was too late. There was no way of going back into time and most importantly, it was causing me more mental anguish by thinking of what could never be.

Being a daughter of a peace officer, there was a strong support system that was triggered by the accident. A trauma specialist had come by the house as I lay bleeding after busting the window. I was surprised to see her but more surprised that I didn’t faint. She was the one who drove me to the hospital as I explained that I wasn’t trying to kill myself. I was just pissed and instead of being catatonic over this, I wanted to kick someone’s ass which was how my fist ended up through the window. I told Dr. Mathers what had happened while I was at the store and why I was so upset. Even though it had only been a few days ago, she would spent at least an hour making sure I was fine. She wasn’t really clinical about it either which helped me feel like I could open up to her about anything. Well, almost; there was one subject that I had to fabricate because it just wasn’t something I thought she’d understand. Nobody would. We met again yesterday and she tried to tell me not to dwell on the past. It wasn’t healthy and all it would do was eat me alive with those feelings.

**Aim! FIRE!**

I jumped at the sound of the rifles.

**Aim! FIRE!**

**Aim! FIRE!**

And with that, it was over. People started leaving the area as news cameras gathered. I hated all the publicity but being that he was a public figure, this came with the territory I guess. At least they were all respectful and I never felt as though I had been harassed at all.

We all started back to the cars. Had Renee not told me prior to the ceremony at the church, I wouldn’t have known that there was a wake of sorts after this. I didn’t want to go but knew it was important. I would have to mourn in private tonight.

“Ms. Swan, I’m sorry for your loss.”

“My condolences. He was well loved by the community.”

I walked by the sea of people back to where the cars were. I wanted to leave as soon as I could. I heard more words of sympathy as I walked a little faster to avoid the tears that threatened to fall
once again. Almost there, I could see the parking lot and spotted the car I was riding in.

“ We’re so sorry, Bella. He was our closest friend.”

It was the last statement that stopped me and looked up to see Billy Black’s tear streaked face and Harry Clearwater at his side. Harry had buried his face on his friend’s shoulder, his body wracked in pain and anguish.

It was startling to see Billy’s sunken, haunted eyes and know that they mirrored mine, right down to the color. I walked over to the two men and though I didn’t know them all that well, I knew they were both really close to Charlie.

“ We are both really sorry for your loss, Bella,” Billy said quietly. “He always talked about how proud he was of you and...”

“ Th-thank you , ” I cut in and quickly reached into my purse for my sunglasses as a tear fell to the ground. “I really appreciate it.” I quickly grabbed their hands and squeezed before running towards the parking lot.

“ Bella, can you go to the wake on your own? Your mother isn’t feeling well, I will try to make it there later if I can.” Phil asked as he caught up with me.

I bit my tongue in attempts to not tell Phil to take Renee and get the hell out of Forks, and tried to be pleasant. “It is fine. Go, I’ll be fine,” I said and I think I was able to give him something resembling a smile as I headed to the limo once again.

As we drove out of the cemetery, I thought about how I had once felt that my life had ended when I was abandoned out in the woods by Edward Cullen. At the time, I wasn’t able to imagine a pain more intense. I remembered how dejected I had been and how I barely ate as I went through my loss. I closed my eyes and shook my head at the memory as tears streamed down my face. That had been a fucking cakewalk compared to this. Oh, how little did I know! I now had do deal with pensions, retirement savings, the executions of wills and a million other little things that felt so overwhelming. And the house... what was I going to do with that? I was going to be leaving for college in a couple months, now with Charlie gone, what was left here for me? I leaned my head against the cool glass as I stared out the window.

Instead of having the wake at the house, the mayor decided to have it at his house since it was one of the largest homes in Forks. I had simply shaken my head wordlessly when I received the invitation from the mayor’s wife. The way she had emphasized the ‘largest house’ part...yeah, I didn’t need to be a mind reader to know what she was hinting at.

I cursed myself for thinking about them . This wasn’t the time or the place. Maybe later tonight when I was all alone once again, I would allow myself to think of the so-called family that abandoned me, but not now. Surely she should have seen it coming; Charlie, the accident, this.

Later Bella, not here.

I breathed a sigh of relief as the car stopped and the driver held open my door. I looked up into the sky and hoped, prayed really, for some strength as I walked toward the crowd and into another sea of faceless people.

Chapter End Notes
NOTES: So I’ll be adding this story a few chapters at a time just because it is a HUGE story. Eventually, I’ll get to real time here, bear with me. Thank you for your support.
~ sushi.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you AlexisDanaan for being an AWESOME beta! FLOVE YOU!!!! My pre-reader JaspersWoman thank you for your feedback! I really appreciate it. DarkNNerdy who is not just a pre-reader but she’s really helped me with developing this story. THANK YOU WIFY!!!!!!

Lastly, I need to give some props to JaspersBella for some early input in the story and of course I need to give credit to idreamofeddy for her interpretation of Peter.

The story still belongs to SM. That hasn't changed and I haven't perfected cloning myself to be her, unfortunately.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 1

April 2006

JPOV

One drop of blood was all it took and I knew. I couldn’t believe it and tried to deny it. Afterwards, I tried for weeks to fight it and not accept what it was, but I couldn’t. When it happened, everyone thought it was my hunger, even I did, but in reality, I was trying to go to her; to protect her. Of course, no amount of explaining could right the wrong that occurred; she wasn’t mine at the time and I didn’t dare try. I let them think that it was her blood I was after, it was the safest and easiest thing to do at the moment. The negative vibes I got from the family gave me the time to think about what’s going on with these emotions I was feeling for her. I was having a hard time adjusting to the idea that there was some sort of connection and didn’t want to have to explain to everybody. I let them pack everything into separate cars and head up to Alaska. I let them think that, once again, I wasn’t to be trusted.

As I finished my meal, I looked out into the mountain range as I tried to figure out my next move; this incident had bought me the time I needed if for nothing else, I was grateful for that. I closed my eyes and pictured that look on her face again. That look of embarrassment as she cut her finger inside a house of vampires. I recalled the feeling as I was being held back; she hadn’t been afraid, not at first, but then he had to push her out of the way and send her crashing into crystal bowls. Her blood spilled to the floor and the hunger from the family hit me like a fuckin’ ton of bricks and I lost control, not having fed much beforehand. Would I have hurt her? That pull in my chest that I was feeling said no, but would it have stopped me? I wasn’t sure. My mind said that I wouldn’t
hurt her at all, but I also had my doubts especially given that her blood sings to Edward. The amount of hunger coming off of him alone was enough to make me snap.

I sat against a rock as I continued to look out into the horizon and watched as a pair of bald eagles soared high up in the sky, swooping in the air as they played with each other; dodging around and darting into the trees. They looked carefree as the pair flew about and I wondered if they were mates. I sighed as that word crept into my thoughts again and this time it made me think of Forks. I enjoyed staying there this last time around. Well, that is, until the birthday incident and then we had to move away overnight. While the relocation was welcomed by Edward and Rose, it was met with some resistance from Esme and Emmett. Carlisle had been neutral; he always was in family situations like this, even if he had an opinion, he almost always let his son dictate and decide for him, which seemed to inflate his already overblown ego.

Alice was another enigma. From the very moment Isabella sliced her finger open, Alice was a different person. It wasn’t just her emotions, everybody seemed to notice the change in demeanor but they never brought it up; at least not when I was around. Even though we had been basically estranged for the past couple decades, we still played the role of being a couple. I did consider her a friend, but now, I wasn’t so sure. Thinking back once again to the paper cut incident I could remember the unmistakable sense of smugness comin’ off her after Isabella was taken home after being stitched up. I didn’t think anything of it in the midst of the situation, but now I could recall her utter joy as I was being held back.

Since we opened up our Alaska house once more, the pixie spent less and less time with the family as she traveled around to build up her ever growing collection of clothes. Right now, she was heading to Milan or Paris or one of those places to look at some sort of spring collection or some other fashion thing. I rolled my eyes at the idea but was glad I made that split second decision so many years ago to redirect some money into an account she wasn’t aware of. Given how the family had never keen on my past, I doubt they would have thought I’d ever set up a Whitlock account.

It had been months now since that incident but I hadn’t stopped thinking of her; my Isabella. I shook my head as the thought of calling her ‘mine’ slipped out of my reverie. How many times have I let that happen in the past few weeks? It was still hard to swallow, especially since I wasn’t sure how she’d feel about it all. I had to find her first and foremost. I, too, had been spending less and less time with the family since we had left in such a hurry. As far as everybody knew, the emotions comin’ off of Esme and Emmett were too much for me to deal with, they both didn’t want to leave. Then, with the added angst that poured out of Edward...well, even if it weren’t to have some quiet time to think about her, I would have needed to get out of here and away from Emoward. Nobody ever dared to follow me when I left the house. I made damn sure to throw all the feelings of guilt, remorse and distrust back at them. I kept their emotions at the surface as a means to block out my thoughts from the nosy brother and hopefully in turn, the pixie.

My phone buzzed indicating a text message and I reached into my jacket pocket to check. “Go to her Major, she’ll need you.” Simple and to the point.
I decided to give him a ring.

“Pete’s Bar and Grill,” he answered with a chuckle. “For today’s special we have mountain goats and grizzlies.”

“You crazy fucker,” I said and laughed. “What do you know?”

“I know lots of things, Major. What do you want to know?” He asked.

“Isabella,” I replied.

“Ah yes, I figured you might. I don’t have much, I just saw three images of her. I don’t know when this all happens nor do I know which order, but you’re familiar with that disclaimer. The first was of the two of you together and you both were givin’ each other googly eyes. The second was of her curled up in a ball; she was cryin’ and holdin’ onto a an old shirt. Not sure what that meant but it seemed she was hurtin’ bad.”

I nodded before asking, “And the third?”

“Yeah, y’all were talkin’ about being mates and all.”

“I kinda figured as much. That explains this tuggin’ in my chest,” I drawled. My accent never failed to come out strong whenever Peter and I started talking.

“It’ll only get worse if you don’t do anything about it so I suggest you go get your girl. Besides, Char and I would love to meet her.”

“You do realize she’s human, don’t you?”

“Duh, I’m not a fuckin’ idiot. Yes, we feed on humans but unless your mate is a deviant of society, I doubt we’d be tempted. Besides, we probably have more control than you do given we don’t deny ourselves our natural diet. There is no wagon to fall off of.”
“How about I come out there for a few days and regroup first?” I asked, trying to change the subject. “Besides, I haven’t seen the two of you in a while.”

“You sure you’d be allowed, Major? You know how that family feels about us, like we’ll embarrass them or somethin’. Or that we’re a bunch of fuckin’ hillbillies,” Peter bit out. The Cullens were a sore subject for him because of the way they always seemed to look down at him and his mate.

“Don’t worry about them. I’m sendin’ them all their guilt and shit every time I’m around them. I am sure they’ll welcome me leavin’ for a while,” I said with a chuckle. “We’ve got lots to catch up on.”

“That we do, bro. We’ve settled down a bit since last you visited. We’ve got a permanent place in Texas that you’ll enjoy. It’s close to your family land. We’ve been here for close to a decade now, though we still travel here and there. There’s lots of land in the property so no one sees our sparkly asses when we’re outside in the sun.”

“No visuals about your damn glittery ass,” I muttered. “Yeah, give me a day or two to get down there then.”

I hung up the phone and kicked the drained mountain goat carcass down into a ravine.

I shook my head and chuckled. Leave it to Peter to once again bring hope back into my life. I zipped up my jacket and ran down the mountain. When I got to the bottom, I pulled on my helmet and headed back to the house on my Ducati. As I neared their property, I made sure to unleash the negative feelings again. If this was going to work, I had to play the part.

When I got into the house, Edward glared at me as I passed by the couch.

“You wouldn’t feel that way if you could control yourself,” he bit out.

I wanted to kick his ass and tear his arms off but I held back. “Yeah, I know,” I growled angrily. “I disappointed everybody. Trust me, I know. Maybe it would be easier on everybody if I just go and do some soul searching.” I played it up and laid on even more guilt. While I was bein’ over emotional on the surface, I was actually laughing on the inside.
“Oh Jasper,” Esme cried out as she blurred into the room. “This can’t be easy for you but I don’t want you to go.”

“Esme, I think it is for the best.” I pulled her into a quick hug. “I know you’ve noticed that I’ve been spending less time here as of late. I have been too overwhelmed by everything; not only my guilt but everyone else’s as well,” I said softly. “It is the best decision for all of us,” I continued and sent a steady stream of guilt mixed with understanding to them.

Esme pulled me into another hug. “You take care of yourself, son.” Her eyes were shimmering with unshed tears.

I nodded and squeezed her hand. “I will.”

Edward came up to me just then, grabbed me by the shoulder and spun me around. I glared at him. “The fuck, Edward?”

“Jasper! Your language!” Esme exclaimed in shock.

“Sorry Esme,” I apologized to her. I hated that everybody was so damn uptight about language in this house. “I just need to pack a few things and I’ll be out.”

“Jasper, you’re forgetting something,” Edward muttered and held out his hand.


“The crest. Until you come back, you’re no longer a Cullen,” he replied with a smirk.

I ripped the leather cuff off my wrist and slapped it onto his open hand. Fuckin’ ass acting like the head of the family. I brushed past him and purposely knocked him off his balance as I headed upstairs and into the closet. I dug into the far corner where I found my boots that always made Alice cringe. I stuffed a duffel bag with my jeans and my t-shirts before pulling them on. I reached for my Stetson but noticed it was crushed beyond repair. I tossed it back up onto the shelf. No matter, I’d buy another one later.
As I left the closet, I took one more look at the room that Alice and I had shared. Since we came back, I noticed how more and more of my things were being packed away or moved around. I quickly grabbed a few mementos to take with me, things that were mine and irreplaceable. A framed shadowbox with the remnants of my Confederate uniform; it was the last few inches of the sleeve so it had a couple buttons, the grey material and the fancy gold embroidery. I softly traced the design on the glass before putting it into my bag. The next item I made sure to pack was my officers’ log book. There wasn’t much in there, maybe a few sketches and memories but it was the last few things I had of my human life. Nothin’ else in the room mattered.

I went back downstairs and noticed that both Edward and Esme were gone. I shrugged and headed for the door, zipping up my jacket as I walked out into the blustery April day. I put my helmet on once again, even though I didn’t really need it, because it was best not draw attention. I shrugged on a parka over my jacket, for appearances, before revving up the engine.

It took me a few days to get down to Texas. I “accidentally” left my parka at a rest stop gas station near the Alberta-Montana border. It was just me with my iPod and the ribbon of highway ahead of me. It helped me think as I crossed one state after another on my way south. All this talk of control, or rather, my lack of control caused me to think. I hadn’t had any problems during the multitude of times I stopped to fuel up. Humans were there and while I heard their heartbeats, I didn’t feel a need to massacre them or drain every single one. Edward always always made me feel like a damn deviant by making sure he constantly reminded me of my past slip-ups. It didn’t help that Alice didn’t always defend me either and because neither one of them fully trusted me, the rest of the family sort of followed suit. I couldn’t see myself draining a fucking town like the pixie had apparently saw me doing in many of her visions. I was beginning to realize that maybe I wasn’t that crazed vampire they always made me feel like. Maybe I really could control my bloodlust. But how could I test it before I found Isabella?

It was the middle of the night now and I was one of a few travelers on the road as I continued to make my way south. I was somewhere near Oklahoma and while I could have gotten a different vehicle and probably would have been at my final destination by now, I was enjoyin’ the freedom of being out on the open road.

At a gas station outside Oklahoma City, I called up Peter to get directions to his land and he rattled off some GPS coordinates which I dialed into my phone. It wasn’t until mid afternoon that I turned onto the narrow dirt road and followed the directions to a farmhouse building.

Just as I got off my bike, I was tackled by a laughing blonde blur.

“Welcome home, Jasper,” Char said as she pulled me into a hug.
“Thank you Char, this is impressive,” I said quietly and took off my helmet.

“The prodigal brother has arrived!” Peter roared and put me in some crazy wrestlin’ move.

“Fucker, a simple hello could have sufficed,” I gritted out as I picked myself off the floor. His antics had left a Jasper shaped crater on their front driveway but it didn’t seem to bother him.

“Now what fun would that be?” Peter said with a laugh. “Besides, you could probably use some fun.”

I gave him a one armed hug and slapped his back, hard, before I grabbed my duffel and followed them up to the front porch.

“Just drop your bag here, we want to show you something,” Char said with a grin.

The three of us walked out into a field that overlooked a valley below. It was peaceful out here with the warm breeze and the sunlight. I took my motorcycle jacket off and noticed, not for the first time, the way the sunlight played over my marred skin. It didn’t matter though, all three of us had them and I didn’t have to hide anymore. I sat down and looked out into the valley to the fields below.

“Notice the land down there?” Peter asked as he sat down next to me and pulled Char onto his lap.

I nodded, looking at the streams and brooks that criss-crossed the land below.

“Here,” Peter said and pulled out some papers.

I glanced over them before staring at Pete. “It’s mine? This is... Whitlock land?” I was stunned.

“Yep, we dug through old archives for ages and waited for this piece of land to come available and then land down below. The whole valley is officially yours. You can build a house and you and your girl could live there,” Peter mused.

“Now wait. She doesn’t even know yet,” I protested. “What if she doesn’t accept me? I am not
perfect like Edward.” I rolled my eyes at the name of that so-called brother. He often acted as if he thought of himself as perfect or better than others but I knew he wasn’t, that damn prick.

“Are you serious?” Char jumped off of Peter’s lap and was up in my face, fists on her hips. “You need to tell her and none of that perfect shit. Humans aren’t perfect so why should we be? Didn’t you say that ‘perfect Edward’ dumped her? That doesn’t sound like perfect to me. All that should matter is what y’all feel for each other. Nothing else is more important than that.”

Damn, I had forgotten how fiery Char got when she was pissed. I held up my hands and sent her a dose of calm.

“Bad choice of words, I know.” I shook my head before quietly asking them, “What if I lose control with her? I could hurt her.”

“Jasper,” Char knelt down in front of me and cupped my face with her hands. “I can’t say I know this from experience but there are ways to gain your control. I believe in you Jasper.”

“Me too bro,” Peter said as he slapped my back.

I could feel their confidence in me, it was real and not laced with sarcasm. Other than my emo moment minutes ago, there was no judgement. I was accepted and for the first time in a long while, I started to believe in myself.

Chapter End Notes

Slowly but surely, I’ll get this posted along with the other one. Thanks always for your support. ~ sushi
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I need to thank AlexisDanaan for beta'ing this bad boy. You rock hun and I love that you're so quick with it.

My pre-reader JaspersWoman – thanks for all the feedback as always.

DarkNNERdy – thanks wify for brainstorming with me on this chapter especially towards the end of the chapter. You really helped to paint that picture more vividly.

JaspersBella – thank you for reading this early on, when this was pretty much rambling thoughts. I appreciate that you took the time to read it.

I appreciate each and every one of you for your continued support.

My initials haven't changed to SM so that means I still don't own the story.

Chapter 2

April 2006

JPOV

“Here, take a sniff,” Char said as she held a piece of fabric to me.

I had been here for a week now and hunted three times on the local deer while Peter and Char helped me with my control. It started with a small drop of dried blood from one of their recent hunts. I wanted to see if I was nothing more than the blood thirsty, uncontrollable vampire that I was constantly made out to be. I needed to make sure I could keep my control since my mate was still human.

My mate.

I never would have thought those words would ever be associated with me. Would she want me? If she didn’t, would I be able to walk away? I guess I’d have to if she didn’t want this. Mates. It was a strange word, really. It was a state of being, not necessarily a romantic notion with love. Sure love could grow between couples, Peter and Char were a good example, but that came with time and commitment. I knew that once I saw her again we would have to talk about it, but I had a feeling
that it wasn’t something she’d accept as soon as she heard it. How could I expect her to accept it when I was struggling? As much as that feeling in my chest was pulling me back towards Washington, to Forks, I needed the time. I needed to make sure I wouldn’t hurt her unnecessarily.

Both Peter and Char thought that I needed to be exposed to human blood, to build a tolerance so to speak. Even if I chose to stick with the animal diet, which I was debating, they thought that I still needed the exposure given that Isabella was human especially after I shared some stories about her. My intentions were to go back to Forks to talk to her and if that led to more between us, well, that was something I needed to make sure I had a handle on. That was my motivation and determination to regain my control or better yet, understand the limits of it.

I was amazed that just by telling them these brief stories, I started to feel a fondness that Peter and Char had for Isabella. They hadn’t met her yet, Peter had only seen very brief glimpses of her through his snapshots, but both of them seemed to look forward to meeting her. I wished I had more to share with them because I felt their genuine interest and acceptance for her. It wasn’t that they accepted everybody either. There was always tension with my brother and sister when Alice was even mentioned. The three of them never got along. Sure in the beginning, Peter and Char tried, they were happy for me that I found happiness and a chance for peace but when I introduced her to the two people that rescued me from hell, the tension was immediately there. She didn’t like them and while she was polite, I didn’t like that she had a tendency to treat them as though they were lesser citizens than she was.

Seeing how Peter and Char were listening to stories about Isabella compared to how they were with Alice helped to solidify a decision I contemplated over during my trip down to Texas. As I rode down on the bike, I caught myself a few times reaching for the leather cuff that once adorned my wrist. I was free of their judgments now and no more unwarranted guilt trips. I needed more though. I needed to truly be free and Alice was another piece I needed to let go of. Within the first two days of arriving here, Jasper Hale divorced from Alice Cullen Hale. There was a monetary settlement and then records showing that he boarded a plane to the Caribbean but never arrived since the plane crashed into the Atlantic and there were no survivors. I burned all the Hale ID after I made damn sure my lawyer expedited my Whitlock paperwork here to Texas.

I shook my head from my thoughts as I looked at the piece of fabric in front of me. I grabbed it and before I even held it to my nose, I felt my eyes darken slightly. I looked at Char, her eyes were brighter which meant that she had just gotten back from a hunt. I slowly brought the strip of cloth closer to my face while Char watched intently. Peter’s footsteps were behind me as he walked out to the front porch of their house. I felt some concern from my brother and sister as I brought the fabric to my nose. My eyes darkened a little more and I felt a growl start to build as the scent of human blood filled me. The blood on the fabric was still wet. It had been so long and I yearned for it.

“How do you feel?” Peter asked as he sat down with his mate and wife of several decades.
“I want it, I won’t lie. But I don’t feel like I’d decimate a town for it, you know?” I admitted. “I haven’t gone huntin’ for a couple days now but I don’t want to run to town and drain everybody on sight either.”

“That is a good start,” Peter said.

“Y’all keep sayin’ that,” I said, slightly frustrated. For days now, that’s all they’d been saying. “You asked me to trust you in this test and I have, but what is the point?” I shook my head. “We know I still crave human blood, I think a part of me always will and I know that I don’t want to drain an entire town just because of a few drops either but we knew that already. And Peter, when I went with you to the hardware store the other day I didn’t have the need to devour each and every orange aproned human.”

Char gave me a small smile. Both of them were pleased after my admission, I could feel the pride they had for me.

“See, what does that tell you?” Peter asked. “Think about it.”

“What? That I am and will always be a starvin’ vampire?” I lashed out. I didn’t mean to, not really, the scent and the urge to taste was really wrecking havoc on me. I looked at my brother and sent my apologies to him.

“Here,” Peter said and tossed something in the air.

I caught it and looked at the blood bag before lookin’ at Peter.

“Are you fuckin’ crazy? I can’t drink human blood!” I yelled.

“And why not?” Peter asked, seemingly unfazed by my outburst.

“Because she’s human and if she hates me for all that I did to her with these eyes, imagine her reaction if she sees them crimson like yours?” I spat out, once again, doubt rearin’ its ugly head.

“Jasper, what if she accepted you for you, not for the color of your eyes?” Char asked.
I scoffed at the notion. “She barely knows me, other than the trip to Phoenix where I destroyed that fucker, James, I barely had a chance to know her, or better yet, for her to know me.”

“Did you ever feel her emotions?” Char asked.

I smiled. “Yeah, she’s full of them. Edward never heard her thoughts but I felt her emotions. She’s kind hearted, maybe too much so in that she doesn’t like to, or want to hurt people’s feelings so she ends up in awkward situations where I could feel she wants to tell someone to fuck off but is too nice to. This was why Alice was able to coerce her into that birthday party. She didn’t want to be there, she doesn’t like bein’ the center of attention. I think underneath that timid exterior, which I am guessin’ is due to her shyness, there is a little fire that runs through her veins,” I explained. “I’ve felt her get annoyed that she was always treated like a goddamn child whenever she visited. It bothered her most that Edward did that more often than not, but she was too apprehensive to say somethin’.”

I sighed as I looked away from Peter and Char and then to the bag of blood in my hands. The Cullens, especially Edward, didn’t trust me so I was never able to spend time with her but I found her to be a fascinating human. Despite my instincts to find her, claim her and make her mine, I also wanted to get to know her. I wanted to see the fire that I had felt on occasion. I also wanted her to get to know me as well.

I set the bag of O Negative down and stared at it. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t tempted. I know if I allowed myself to indulge though, I might ever look back. If I did, would I be able to keep to the same diet as my brother and sister and just hunt criminals and the less desired in society? What would she think? I sighed again and raked my hand through my hair.

Peter swiped the bag and headed down the porch steps. “C’mon Major,” he said and started down the pathway.

Char got up from her chair and gave me kiss on the cheek. “Have fun with your guy time,” she said and headed in the house.

I got up to follow Peter and shot him some curiosity as he headed towards the barn.

“You’ll see,” he replied as he started to whistle a tune and went inside through a side door.
I followed him inside and was surprised to see he had decorated this area to look like a saloon complete with the wooden bar table and bottles lining up along the shelf. Peter hopped over to the other side of the bar and threw on an apron before motioning me to sit on one of the stools. I didn’t feel any unusual feelings coming off him so I sat down and watched as he started playing with the glasses behind the bar.

I hissed when the scent of fresh blood wafted into the air. He had busted the blood bag and I watched as he brought a glass and set it on the hickory bar. The crimson liquid poured out of the opening of the bag and I felt my venom begin to pool. My eyes were dark; not quite black but I knew they were much darker than their usual gold. My body was tense as he sent the glass across the polished bar top like they did in western movies. I couldn’t help it, I reached out and caught the glass in my hand--just like the movies.

“Drink up, it’ll do you some good,” he said.

I looked at the liquid, it was begging me to drink it. I felt the rumbling begin deep within my chest as I sat there, swallowing hard. I looked up at my brother to find him leaning casually against the bar and watching me closely.

“I believe in you,” he said quietly.

“If I lose my shit?”

“I’ll help you.”

I nodded curtly and set the glass down on the bar and ran my finger down its side. I closed my eyes as my hand once again wrapped around the clear glass and slowly lifted it towards me. The blood was cool, and I could smell the slight chemical odor from the bag still lingering in the blood. But it didn’t matter. It was human blood and it was intoxicating. My elbow rested on the bar now as I brought the glass even closer. The crimson color was a beacon for me and I was mesmerized as I brought the glass slowly to my lips. I was breathing so hard that, had I been human, I would have been sweating bullets by now.

My lips touched the glass, the liquid still hadn’t quite reached my lips yet but I could still taste its scent. I begged to whatever deity that existed to give me strength. I was afraid that once my lips tasted this elixir I’d go on a rampage. Wasn’t that what the Cullens always thought I’d do? Even though I knew deep down that I was stronger than that, there was still a part of me that wondered if I’d fuck up.
I tilted the glass ever so slowly as the red liquid made its way towards my mouth. Almost there. I tilted my head back slightly as I felt the liquid touch my lips. Slightly salty, metallic and sweet at the same time. I could still taste the plastic from the bag but it didn’t matter, it was blood, human blood. My body screamed in joy as I swallowed my first sip. I tried to savor the taste, letting it coat my mouth when all I really wanted to do was gulp it down and then take my finger into the glass and get every last drop in me. I opened my eyes and noticed Peter watching me intently, still behind the bar with the apron on.

“Bartender, another,” I said as I slammed the glass down with a human’s strength.

I played along because I wasn’t sure if he was going to oblige so I was relieved when he grabbed the glass and refilled the contents.

We repeated this a few more times until the bag was empty. Even though it was just a little bit of human blood I felt just a little more calmer, things seemed a little bit more clearer. Even after draining a large animal like an elk or a snow leopard, I never had that feeling.

“How do you feel, Major?” Peter asked as he swished some glasses in water and dried them with a towel.

“Are you takin’ this bartender thing a little too far?” I asked, my eyes narrowing at him. There were times I wondered if I somehow fucked up on his change and dropped him on his head or something.

He shrugged and continued to look at me. “Well? How do you feel?”

“Better, not sated but I feel calmer,” I replied. I knew what he wanted to know so I took a deep breath and stared at the glass. “I didn’t feel the unnecessary need to kill a town or gorge myself until I was sloshin’ you know?”

“Do you feel the guilt or anything?”

I must have projected some of my fears out to Peter. Out of everybody I have known in my long life, he was probably the one that I could confide in because he would never judge me. He rescued me so many years ago and although we never talked in detail, I knew that he had at least one of his images of what I was feeling. Even as I made the uneasy decision to go against my nature and feed
on animals, he didn’t judge me one bit.

I sent him a dose of appreciation. Despite all the crazy ass things that came out of his mouth, he was always concerned about my well being. “No, but then again, this blood was taken voluntarily and there is no body attached to it. I don’t feel guilty, just apprehensive.”

“Would you want to go with us on a hunt one night?”

“Maybe,” I said with hesitation. As much as the idea of hunting humans thrilled me, I was not looking forward to those feelings of extreme guilt that would haunt me once again. I didn’t want to go through that because it nearly broke me the last time. I had to make damn sure I was ready for this diet before I sank my teeth into human flesh.

“When you’re ready, but anytime you want to mosey on over to the bar, you give me a holler,” he said with an exaggerated drawl.

“Thanks,” I said. “What’s with the bar theme, by the way?”

Peter pointed behind him to a sign that said ‘Pete’s Bar & Grill’. “We found the sign while drivin’ around one day out in Tulsa back in the early 70s. They were about to tear an old buildin’ down to make way for a strip mall. Well, I took one look at the sign and hickory bar inside the buildin’ and I had to have it,” he explained as he patted the bar top. “Char calls this my Mancave and I was free to decorate it anyway I wanted to. You remember how I said that bein’ in a bar was one of my last remainin’ human memories? Well, this is sort of my tribute to that.”

I chuckled. “Yeah, I remember you tellin’ me that. Mancave, huh?”

“Well, technically the whole barn is my Mancave since all my girls are here,” he said and nodded over towards the main section of the barn.

My brother was a car collector and from what he showed me the other day, his barn was quickly filling up with rare and exotic vehicles he’s collected over the years.

I looked back down at the empty glass, I really should go hunt, but after the sample of human blood, I didn’t want to hunt for deer or anything that had fur. Still, I knew I wasn’t ready for the alternative quite yet.
“If you want more, just ask,” he muttered and pulled out a couple more bags. “You want it in a glass or straight from the bag? Or better yet, shall I put a nipple on it for you?”

“Give me the fuckin’ bag,” I said as I was getting a little annoyed.

Three more bags later and I was feeling better. I helped Peter clean up the bar of all the blood bags or as he was calling them, my juice packs I had.

“Last call, Major,” Peter shouted and clanged a bell that hung over an old fashioned cash register.

“Do you have to do that?” I shouted back. “That was fuckin’ loud.”

“My bar, my rules,” he replied with a shrug.

“Fine,” I said exasperated. I smacked the bar and nodded before heading back out.

Instead of walking over to the house, I headed over to an ancient oak tree and climbed up to where the trunk forked. I sat there, using one branch as a backrest. I stared up into the inky sky and the twinkling stars and started to think. I thought of this crossroads of sorts that I have come to with my diet. I thought of my brother and sister and their trust and belief they had. Most of all, I thought of her and wondered what she was doing.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

A/N This was the original note that came with the story
My beta AlexisDanaan thank you so much for your work. I really, really appreciate it.
My pre-reader JaspersWoman – thanks for all the feedback as always.
DarkNNerdy – thank you for for pre-reading this and making sure I didn't have too much of the cheese factor going.
JaspersBella – thank you for reading this early on, when this was pretty much rambling thoughts. I appreciate that you took the time to read it.
SM still owns it and I'm not her.
So we're back at Forks and we've got a Bella POV to show what she's doing these days.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 3

APRIL

BPOV

“Dad?” I called out as I entered through the door. Charlie was sitting on the couch flipping through the channels on the TV.

“Hey, Bells! How was school today?” He asked looking up from his new favorite show about a guy who goes around and inspects houses. “Are you working tonight?”

I put my book bag down and shrugged off my jacket. “School was fine, Mike Newton got detention today during lunch for being Mike Newton.” I sat down and started to go through the letters that lay on the coffee table. “I’ve got a couple hours before the closing shift tonight. I’ll get dinner heated soon.”

Charlie chuckled. “What did that boy do this time?”
I was a little disappointed that I didn’t receive any mail today but I tried not to show it. “Oh, he tried to flirt with some cheerleaders but in doing so, ended up insulting him with his charm,” I explained and used air quotes for emphasis. “I think he was trying to reenact a movie or something,” I said and snickered. “You should have seen the look on his face when one of them threatened to kick his ass.”

Charlie laughed and shook his head. “Crazy kid. I’ve got the late shift tonight myself, most likely a double since it seems my deputy is out with the flu.”

“Stop by the shop tonight, we’re open until midnight and I’ll hook you up with some caffeine,” I said, getting up and starting towards the kitchen. I got the oven ready and threw the lasagna I had made the night before into the oven.

After my birthday and subsequent breakup from Edward Cullen, aka the Jerk, I quit Newton’s. It was a good thing too, I didn’t need to deal with Mike flirting with me constantly. Instead, I moped for a couple weeks and went through the motions of being alive. During that time, I thought about what bothered me the most about how I was dumped. The Jerk left me in the woods after he said his speech and he was the one that always reminded me how dangerous the woods were. Thank god Charlie had heard me when I began yelling once I realized I was alone. It pissed Charlie off that I was in the woods but I explained that we had broken up that day during school and I thought a walk in the woods would do me some good. It surprised me that my fib actually convinced him, seeing how my blush always seemed to give it away. I didn’t really want to explain to him the truth as the words the Jerk said really cut me to the core.

It wasn’t until October that things started to get better. I got a job at a new coffee shop that opened up. It was a fun and hip place to be; on Fridays and Saturdays they stayed open late and showcased musicians from the area. As soon as I learned to steam milk properly and the differences between a macchiato and a cappuccino, I started to come out of my shell. Charlie teased me that the aroma of coffee had woken me up from my slumber and in a way, it did. I became more comfortable interacting with folks and simply being me. My confidence grew and I actually started to feel better about myself. I even got back to running a couple times a week which was good for therapy in more ways than one.

I looked at the scar on my hand; not the one left from James but one I received a few months ago as I battled the steam wand on the espresso machine. I chuckled as I remembered how loudly I had sworn, naturally causing the entire cafe to stare, Charlie being one of them. After making sure I was alright, the two of us sat down and laughed about the incident. Since then I realized that Charlie was a pretty cool parent. He wasn’t a man of a lot of words but he genuinely cared.

As we got closer that fall, I started to regret my decision about my future school. I missed the sun and decided that I wanted to go somewhere in the sunbelt. Arizona was out of the question given my experience with James but I didn’t want to go to Florida where Renee was either. Her life with
Phil really didn’t feel like it included me. Leave it to Charlie though when I told him my decision. He started to tell me stories of when he was growing up and how his grandparents had a rental property out in Texas. He told me how he looked forward to summer as a teenager because it always meant fishing trips out along the Gulf of Mexico. I enjoyed listening to those stories because Charlie would get that faraway look on his face each and every time.

When I told him I wanted to study either criminology or forensics science he helped me research various schools and encouraged me to apply at Sam Houston State University; he was so happy that I wanted to do something that was related to what he did. I protested about the out of state tuition and he showed me an account he had opened up when I was a baby. There was enough money to cover my tuition and books especially after I was notified of some scholarships that I was eligible for. There was even enough to cover part of my housing as well and I would make the rest with what I was saving up from work.

The sound of the oven timer shook me out of my thoughts as I threw on my oven mitts and pulled the lasagna out to let it cool before serving.

I applied to all the major schools that specialized in criminal justice as long as they weren’t anywhere I’d run into the Jerk. I applied to Sam Houston, University of California, Irvine, University of Maryland, University of Nebraska, and Washington State University. I didn’t really want to stay in Washington but I figured it would be my fall back school or something. Sam Houston was definitely my first choice and if I couldn’t get in, I was still willing to move out there and attend a junior college before transferring in. Charlie even agreed to that as long as it meant I join him in a fishing trip out in Galveston when he came out to visit. Everyday for the past few days, I’d been hoping to get a letter and so far, nothing, not even a thin rejection letter.

“Dinner’s ready dad,” I called out as I set our plates down.

“Bells, you wouldn’t mind eating out here with your old man, would you?”

I shook my head and laughed silently. “No dad, it is opening day for the Mariners, right?” I laughed as his eyes widened that I knew. “I heard the talk yesterday at the coffee shop,” I said with a shrug.

Charlie chuckled, “Yep, if it weren’t for the double I’m pulling, I would have gone to Seattle to watch the game today.”

I sat down next to him and set our plates on the coffee table. “Hey, Dad, here.” I reached into my back pocket and pulled out a folded envelope. “Surprise, it’s for you,” I said with a smile as I
handed it to him.

“What’s this?” Charlie asked as he picked up the envelope.

“Just a little something I was able to get from all the crazy hours I worked during spring break,” I said and smiled as he slowly opened the envelope.

“Against the BoSox?” Charlie looked at me in shock. “These are some of the hardest tickets to get and you know, they’re right on the 3rd baseline! Bells, honey, thank you.” Charlie gave me an awkward one armed hug and I smiled as I returned it full force and and kissed him quickly on the cheek.

“You’re welcome dad, my boss actually has season tickets since she is from Seattle so when she offered them to me, thought you’d like to go. It is next Saturday night.”

“I’ll make damn sure. Thank you. You wanna go and do a father-daughter thing?” he asked.

“Yeah, I could do that, I’ll switch so I open that day and we can leave that afternoon?”

“Yep, I’ll pull a late shift Friday,” he said and smiled before his attention was diverted back to the game.

We sat in silence as we watched some of the game together. In between the fourth inning, I ran upstairs to grab my uniform. As I headed downstairs, Charlie looked up at smiled, “I can see the coffee shop is a great place for you, you are more excited about working your shifts there than you were at Newton’s.”

I laughed, “I don’t have to go though the pretense of enjoying the great outdoors and stuff. Plus I like coffee and the music and all.” I pulled my hair back up onto a ponytail as I grabbed our plates and took them into the kitchen

“Bells, I’ll get the dishes before my shift,” Charlie said, his eyes never leaving the TV.

“Sure thing, I’ve got to run.” I went over and kissed him on the cheek. “Don’t forget, come on over
tonight and I’ll hook you up.”

“None of that triple, venti, latte bullshit,” he said and chuckled. “I’ll see you tonight, kiddo.”

“Love you dad.”

I waved as I walked out the door. My truck made an awful rumbling sound as I started the motor and I was glad that I had gotten a cell phone for Christmas for emergencies. I sighed as I turned on the radio and headed to work. It had taken me a few weeks before I was able to actually look at the damn thing after that whole birthday party fiasco. It reminded me not only of that dumb party but of them. It proved to me that they, those Cullens, existed, despite what the Jerk had said. I contemplated taking a sledge hammer to it more than once. I even fumbled around the tool shed and found some heavy gloves and I probably would have wrenched it apart but decided not to when I realized how much fun it was to listen to music and sing loudly to the radio. I avoided listening to classical music for obvious reasons. Instead I started to listen to some alternative music and occasionally some country since I decided that I wanted to go to school in Texas.

I was humming to a Green Day song as I pulled into the parking lot and reached into the glove box to pull out my apron. I kept a few in there after the first month working at the cafe. The odor of spilled milk on my apron after a few hours nearly had me passing out one day. Now, I kept a couple clean ones and made sure I did laundry to replenish my stash.

“Bella!” My boss, Ashley, waved at me.

“Hey Ashley,” I responded and headed to the back to put away my stuff.

Ashley and her husband John had decided to get away from the hustle and bustle of Seattle living and moved out here to Forks. He was some sort of computer guru who was able to work from home most of the time. Having been a big part of the Seattle coffee and culture scene, she decided to open up a coffee shop out here that catered in espresso drinks and pastries. To give it that Seattle vibe, they had live bands perform on occasion and really tried to give the place an artsy Seattle feel but with a more softer down-to-earth Forks touch. I loved working there almost immediately even though I had spilled drinks and burned my arms, I really enjoyed what I was doing. Charlie was right, I did get excited about working at Java City Espresso.

I came back out and immediately calibrated the machines since there was a slight lull.

“Ash, thanks again for tickets, Charlie was so pleased,” I said as I cleaned everything and prepped my area for the night ahead.
"No problem, Bella, you worked your ass off during spring break, I mean you could have gone to Mexico or Vancouver like some of the other baristas but you chose to stay, it was the least I could do."

"Would it be alright if I opened next Saturday then?" I asked. "I thought it would be fun to spend a day with my dad."

"No problem, I’ll mark you down right now. Hey, you know who came by about an hour ago,“ she said with a sly grin.

I narrowed my eyes at her. "Who?"

"Don’t you play coy with me, you know I’m talking about Justin," she said in a loud whisper.

"Ash! I don’t like him!" I responded indignantly. Ashley was convinced that I needed an older man like Justin. He really wasn’t old, he was in his 20s and worked part time as an EMT for Forks. He was nice and could be good looking but my heart just wasn’t into the idea of dating anybody.

After I had gotten back to the real world, after the breakup, everybody seemed to try to get me into another relationship. Angela from class tried to convince me that what I needed was someone even hotter than him. Of course Jessica took that once step further and said I just needed to get laid or better yet, a booty call. She was, as Angela put it, pissed that Edward left before she had her chance with him. I pretty much ignored her from that point on, stupid cow.

Ashley tried to push most of the men who worked at the nearby hospital onto me saying I needed a real man who was able to accept me for who I was, quirks and all. I had given her an edited version of my so-called relationship, of course making Edward a human, when we first started working there. She thought he was nothing more than a controlling jerk and by that time, I was beginning to agree with the sentiment.

Even Charlie wanted to put his two cents in on the ‘let’s find a date for Bella Swan’ game. My own dad. He tried to set me up with his best friend Billy Black’s son, Jacob. He was nice, we went to see Blood Diamond over Christmas Break and realized there was just no chemistry. He’ll always be the kid I made mud pies with and that was it. We laughed about it over coffee later that evening as he explained how he had a crush on a gal from school but both his dad and mine were really laying on the guilt trip so he obliged.
My shift was pretty uneventful. Ashley left for a couple hours before coming back at ten to keep me company and help me close the shop up at midnight. Charlie arrived at around 11 and ordered a regular latte. It was a little quiet so I sat down next to him after wiping down the tables.

“So kiddo, did you talk to your boss about Saturday?” Charlie asked and I smiled. I could tell he was looking forward to spending a day with just the two of us and I was excited about it as well.

“I sure did, I’m opening though,” I replied.

“Good, it will be fun and no matter what, come rain or shine the game will go on,” he said enthusiastically.

“So long as there is good ballpark food,” I said and laughed. It was rare to see my dad so excited and even though I wasn’t a huge fan of the game, I was really looking forward to doing something a little different.

“Well, they have sushi, lemonade and some really good garlic fries,” Charlie mused and got a little dreamy look on his face.

I know realized where I got my love of ballpark food from. I could picture my dad eating the fries along with other ballpark foods but I just couldn’t picture him eating sushi.

“Sushi?” I asked.

“I don’t eat it, sometimes Billy or Harry will when they go with me,” he said and chuckled.

His radio squawking broke us out of our fun moment.

“Hey Bells, I’ve got to run. You be careful getting home,” he said and got out of the chair, taking his drink with him.

“Later dad,” I said and waved as I finished wiping off the counters and got the place ready to close
for the night.

Ninety minutes later, I was heading into the shower to get rid of the scent of espresso beans that seemed to have permeated my skin. I made sure the house was locked before climbing into bed. I allowed myself a couple minutes thinking of the Cullens each night before drifting to sleep. I did some deep cleansing breaths, something I had learned when Renee was in her vinyasa yoga phase and tried to empty my mind. Each time I’ve done it, the image in my brain was always the same. It was always that moment when I cut myself on that damn wrapping paper. Each and every time, I would look up into Jasper’s eyes and notice while they were dark, they weren’t as dark as the Jerk’s eyes and everybody else’s. Not even Carlisle’s.

I opened my eyes and looked out the window, once again whispering into the air what I’ve been saying for months now.

“It wasn’t your fault, Jasper.”

Chapter End Notes

Notes: Yep, Bella’s a barista. I thought that fit her more than working at a sporting good’s store. If you’ve never accidentally touched your arm on an espresso steam wand, don’t. That hurts like hell.

Hope you like it... we won’t catch up to real time just yet but we’re getting there.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

A/N This was my very first non-Jasper or Bella POV. I was nervous as hell posting it but as I recall, most people seemed to enjoy it.

My beta AlexisDanaan thank you so much for your work. I really, really appreciate it.

My pre-reader JaspersWoman – thanks for all the feedback as always.

DarkNNerdy – thank you for for pre-reading this and encouraging me.

JaspersBella – you read part of this early on and I appreciate your input.

My initials are still not SM so I cannot claim credit for the characters. I just like playing with them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4

April 2006

PPOV

The day was comin’ and I had seen it long ago. It was only a matter of time before my brother left the Cullens. Their way of life had helped him find a way to survive, but it was simply that, survival. The fact that he had to move town to town every few years and change his name from Hale to Cullen was bad enough but to attend high-school and graduate with humans...well, I knew in time it would get old for him. He was a soldier when he was changed and he spent nearly the first century after his change as one, too. I always thought that someone like him goin’ back to high school was a fuckin’ insult.

Nonetheless, I had a feelin’ he was getting to the point where he needed to find some sort of balance between Jasper Hale, the quiet Cullen and Major Whitlock, the commanding leader of the Southern Vampire Wars. Neither personality really described him but rather, they were just aspects of him. The Jasper that the Cullens knew was not him, it was too restricting. He would always retain some of those traits, but he was no longer their preppy clothes wearin’ teenager. Nor was he wholly defined by his Major persona; one of the most feared vampires around, destroyin’ towns and tearin’ up newborns. He was still there and I knew he would gladly come out and play if you pissed him off enough, but again, it wasn’t what defined him. I never had a image in my head of how my brother would be after he found himself, I just knew that the journey started when he was in Forks.

When he called a couple weeks ago to ask me what I knew of his Isabella, I knew it was all coming to a head and he would need our help. My brother was comin’ back and Char and I were goin’ to make damn sure he had that balance so he could reunite with his human mate. Well, not that she
knew they were... yet. I was glad to hear that he felt that pull with her. I knew this wasn’t easy for
him to accept and I knew he had internal debates about it regularly. Just knowing that he was
throwing back the negative emotions to his so-called family led me to believe he wasn’t about to
accept anything on face value anymore, especially from them. It was good to know that he finally
found his balls the pixie had kept hidden in her designer purse for so many decades.

That evenin’ after his phone call, as Char and I laid in the field of sweet clover and looked up at the
stars, I told her that Jasper was comin’ home. Yeah, I referred to him as Major on occasion but it
was both out of respect and well, I also liked to rile him up since he was always a little uptight
when he was with the Cullens.

Now here we were, a couple weeks later, and Char and I were once again layin’ out in the field.

“He’s still strugglin’ with himself and his diet decision,” I said as I pulled her close to me. “He
wants to do right but he’s also wary that he’ll lose control and himself in the process. He’s afraid
that if he goes back to his natural diet it will be like... before.”

Char looked at me with worry in her eyes. “Do you think it was wise to give him the blood bags
then? I don’t want to feel like we’re enablin’ him if he cannot handle it.”

I sighed and ran my fingers through my hair. “I think that family broke his confidence by never
trustin’ him and always givin’ him that self doubt. Hell, with his gift, could you imagine the
enormity of the guilt, not to mention his own?” I asked in a harsh whisper knowin’ that he was in
the bar thinkin’ things through. “You know that saying of how you are your own worst critic?
Multiply that to vampire sensory level and you have what you and I would feel. Now take that and
multiply that by that family and their convictions, and their lack of trust and well... you have
Jasper.” I started to get agitated about all the bullshit he had to endure and forced myself to take a
deep breath to try and calm my thoughts.

“Just because he came from a different way of life doesn’t mean he isn’t trust worthy,” she gritted
out. “I hate seein’ him struggle like this. Can’t we do anything to help?”

“He knows we believe in him and we trust him,” I said and kissed her hair. I stood up and pulled
her to her feet before we walked over towards the ledge overlooking the valley below. I pulled
Char to my lap as we looked down onto the inky blackness of Jasper’s lands below. “He’s bein’
careful because he isn’t sure if his girl will accept him for who he is since his supposed family
didn’t for decades. He has told me, that if he does go back to his natural diet, he wants to hunt our
way. As much as he wants to be done and go back to Washington, I’ve told him that he needs to
take the right amount of time to make the decision. That pull will still be there and as painful as it
is now, if he went back and wasn’t ready or had the control, it would destroy him.”

“We’ll be there for him however he chooses to feed,” she said as she wrapped her arms around me.
“The most important thing is that he feels and knows he’s got our support.”

I nodded. “I know, he’ll always have mine. Animal or human, he is and always will be more than
just my sire, he’s my brother.”

I heard the sound of the door to the bar bein’ opened and then the soft crunch of footsteps as Jasper
headed our direction.

“Hey guys,” Jasper said as he sat down next to us.

“How are you doin’?” Char asked as she took his hand and squeezed it affectionately.
“I’m still mullin’ it over,” he said and gave us a small smile. “I want to, but I don’t wanna fuck up, you know? I know it would help me with my control especially considerin’, you know, her.” He paused as he looked down over his land for a few seconds. “So when y’all feed, do you just go under a highway bridge or somethin’?”

“It depends if we’re just wantin’ to have a quick bite,” Char explained. “If that is our mood, then we’ll go into Houston to some of the seedier neighborhoods where a criminal or vagrant aren’t usually far behind. If we’re up for an evenin’ out, sometimes we’ll hang out at a bar and see who’ll drive home drunk or somethin’ or a combination of the two. We are discrete at all times and make sure we dispose of the bodies properly. You know, setting dumpsters on fire, sometimes we’ll have a bag of lime with me and we dump the body somewhere so it looked like it was a drug related killin’. The key is to make it look like it fit the scene. Usually no one’s the wiser given where we feed, and by no one, we mean humans.”

Jasper nodded and was deep in thought.

“You alright, Major?” I asked. I began to get hints of the strategist I once fought alongside with, as he was deep in thought about something.

“I’m just wonderin’ how their emotions would play,” he answered and looked up at me. “When do y’all feed next? Not sayin’ I’m joinin’ up yet, but I want to get a feel for the environment; see what emotions I’m facin’. I won’t interrupt while you both feed, I just want to survey the land and scout things out, if you will.”

I slapped him on the shoulder, “I could use a bite.” I gnashed my teeth together causin’ Char and Jasper to laugh. “Bars are closed now so we’d have to go into Houston. Get changed into some clothes you don’t mind gettin’ grimy if you’re wantin’ to recon. We’ll go to downtown, at this time of night, we’re sure to find trouble.”

Within five minutes, the three of us loaded into the truck and I drove us out towards the older parts of town.

“Do you remember any of this when you were human?” I asked my brother we turned into some of the older parts of Houston.

I watched him furrow his brow as he looked out the tinted glass as I stopped at a light. “Can’t say for certain, I think we only visited the actual city a few times back then since we were more country folk than town folk,” he said as we passed by more older buildings. “I think it looks like it could have been around back in my human days.”

I pulled over alongside a busy street that was near our area and handed him my keys. “Alright, here. Char’s got the other set with us.” I pointed down to the right. “A couple blocks down is teemin’ with scum. We park here because they’ll fuckin’ strip the truck within seconds if I park any closer. Text us if you need us but try to give us an hour.”

He rolled his eyes and flipped me off, “If I have the uncontrollable desire to fuckin’ tear into the whole fuckin’ city, I’ll text you beforehand,” he grumbled. “Fuck, sorry. You didn’t deserve that, I anticipated you to... sorry.” He shot us his apologies. He got out of the truck and headed off in the direction I pointed out, keepin’ hidden in the shadows.

“What the fuck did they do to you?” Char whispered rhetorically and shook her head as I helped her out. I could see she was sad that our brother seemed so broken. I took her hand and together, we ran down the street a couple blocks until we found what we were lookin’ for.
Our meals consisted of a couple men who were cookin’ up meth in an old, boarded up house. We pulled some of the boards off and climbed in. Those fuckers were so high from their drugs that they didn’t even flinch when we spun them around. They had to have seen our eyes darken and the rumblin’ coming from out chests, but there was no scent of fear as we both clamped down on their necks. The bitter taste of the meth tainted their blood slightly but it was warm and red. As my Char fed on her man, I moved closer so that I locked my eyes at her while we drank. This was how we normally fed, close together and our eyes never leavin’ each other. On special occasions, we would share a meal together and we enjoy those as well, but for the most part, this was our dinner.

“Mmm, meth,” Char said as she dropped the body and licked her lips.

“Yeah, do you think it’ll wreck our teeth?” I mused.

“You want to create a public service announcement for that then, sugar?” she said with a saucy wink as she turned on all the burners of the stove and reached behind stove to rip the hose off.

The room started to hiss as the odor of natural gas started to fill up. I looked at the various chemicals and poured a couple of the most volatile together. Once the natural gas was exposed to the chemicals, it would start a fireball that would easily blow this tenement building up.

“C’mon, let’s get the fuck out of here,” I yelled and grabbed her hand as we dove out the window. We ran down the street and were nearly back in the truck when the explosion occurred. The brilliant fireball lit up the night sky as we stood there and watched before getting into the vehicle.

Five minutes later, Jasper appeared and got into the truck when he saw we were already inside.

“Was that your doin’?” he asked as he shut the door.

“Yep, natural gas explosion from a home meth lab,” I replied and started the engine. “Well?”

I saw his smile from the rear view mirror.

“The range of emotions from the humans were different than what I was used to. They weren’t innocent random folk we used to pluck from town. The humans that I observed had vile emotions. One of them lusted after a child. Two of them were strung out on some sort of opiate. Speaking of which, the drugs are different than when I fed from them... similar but different at the same time.” He shook his head to clear his thoughts. “There was a boy breakin’ into a car and then over on the next block, I heard a man beat a woman and smelled her blood a half a block away.”

I nodded and tried not to sound too concerned. “How did that go?” I asked as I turned got onto the interstate.

“I felt my eyes darken and I pushed myself to walk by their house. I could practically taste the blood in the air and I won’t fuckin’ lie, my senses nearly went into overdrive. But you know what? I walked by and came back. It was temptin’ though. Those two blocks was like a box of vampire chocolate out there with all the different flavors of emotions and blood. Even what tainted the blood was different; booze, pills and other shit. Fuck, all I needed was the pretty bow.” He laughed darkly.

I looked in my mirror at him before I got onto the interstate. “Did it overwhelm you any?”

“It did, but it was mostly the urge to feed human blood. Their emotions didn’t bother me much,” he said and paused. “No, if I hunt humans like that and feel the emotions I felt, I don’t think I would have a problem. I wouldn’t feel bad ending their lives.”
“Jasper, you do need to feed on somethin’, your eyes are getting dark,” Char said as she turned to look at our brother.

“Yeah, I’ll bag a couple deer and then drink some more of the blood bags when we get back,” he said. “There is no comparison. You know even the bagged stuff with the plastic taste is better than the grass and dirt taste of deer.”

“So why don’t you make the switch?” I asked turning onto the interstate.

“I’m not ready quite yet,” he said and turned back to look out the window. “I’m still a little nervous about it. I don’t want to lose control. This...” he gestured out the window, “what I just did, helped though. Thank you.”

“No problem, Jasper,” I said and chuckled internally as I felt a dose of his shock at me from usin’ his given name. “We both believe in you, you know.”

“I know. It has helped... you both have helped me to not feel like I’m a degenerate,” he muttered.

“You’ve never been a goddamn degenerate, Jasper Whitlock. If I hear that out of your mouth one more time, I’m kickin’ your ass,” Char growled.

“Listen to my missus,” I said and glared at my brother. “You’re a fuckin’ vampire that has gone through hell and back. Just because you didn’t live the idyllic life like the Cullens, does not make you a fuckin’ degenerate. You’ve lived a fuckin’ life of war, you’ve seen and done more than any of them put together. Don’t you give us that bullshit that they spewed at you. You can’t seriously believe that.”

“It was so ingrained in me that it is sometimes hard to get past that,” he said and looked down. “They never truly trusted me. Sure I had thoughts about human blood, I had lived with that shit for so long, but like tonight, I never acted on it but it wasn’t good enough. I was always made to feel like I wasn’t good enough because I had stray thoughts.”

“They put too much trust into the mind reader instead of vetting out their own feelings,” I gritted out and gripped the steering wheel tighter. “That child needed an ass whoopin’ a long ass time ago, if you asked me. From what you’ve told me over the years, they never really took the time to actually get to know you, did they? If they did, they probably would have treated you differently. You were nothin’ more than a damn black sheep in their eyes.” I couldn’t help but let loose on a diatribe I had been holdin’ back for a while.

I felt shot of calm my brother sent me as I exited the interstate and headed back to the farmhouse. “Sorry if I spoke out of line, bro.”

“No, I understand your frustration. I’m comin’ to terms with things. Being away from that toxicity helps. I’m realizin’ it now. Hey, pull over, there are some deer here that I can grab. I’ll run back to the house after I’m done.”

I signaled and pulled to the side of the dirt road to let him out.

Just before he shut the door, I heard him smack the truck lightly. “Thanks. Both of you for believin’ in me. I’ll see y’all later.”

And we watched as he took off into the wooded area.
Hopefully you enjoyed Peter’s POV. He’s not super silly but more quirky or eccentric if you haven’t guessed yet. I know some people expect to see a crazy over the top Peter who "knows shit" but that was something that was created in fanfic. I have chosen to interpret Peter a different way. :)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Original AN

Thank you so much Alexis,Danaan for working on this chapter. You’ve been so quick in turning these around and I appreciate it.

JaspersWoman pre-read this chapter. Thank you bb for the feedback - sorry I made you cry.

DarkN Nerdy - thank you for working on this particular POV with me. Really appreciate it wify.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 5

April 2006

Charlie POV

“Did you have fun, Bells?” I asked as I drove north on the interstate towards Edmonds to catch the ferry to Kingston.

“Yeah, though that ball hurt my hand. It still tingles a little but I’ll be fine,” she said and laughed as she looked at her hand. “I always thought the glove would protect your hand from that.”

I laughed. “To a point. Ichiro hit that ball hard. You know, you looked like a pro when you caught that foul ball tonight.”

Bella shook her head and laughed. “Only you’d say that, dad. The reason why it looked so good was probably because I was able to avoid getting hit in the face.” She looked over at me as I exited the freeway. “Is this Ichiro guy really good because I couldn’t believe that man wanted to pay me that much for that foul ball I caught.”
I chuckled a little but I was also proud of her for making the effort to have fun even though I teased her during the game for wearing an Arizona Diamondbacks baseball cap. “Yeah, he’s their all-star and fan favorite. I’m glad you turned him down though, he probably would have put it up on an auction or something.”

“Well, I meant it when I told the man that the baseball was for you, dad. I couldn’t have planned it any better by catching the ball. I know I must have disrupted things when I wanted to move out from Phoenix and then I wasn’t the best daughter in the world. I just--”

“You just acted like a teenager,” I broke in. “Bells, you’ve done nothing wrong. You uprooted your life and had to fit into a new one, it happens. If I didn’t want you to move out here, I never would have suggested it. You’re a good kid and I’m damn proud of you.” It was rare for me to talk or express my feelings, preferring to keep a stoic attitude instead. What I said though about how proud I was of her, was true. She had been through so much even before the move out here that I wasn’t surprised she wanted to feel normal once again.

“Thanks for understanding, dad. I had a great time today.”

I smiled as I paid for the ferry and got in line. “I had a great time too, Bells. Thanks for the tickets.”

“You’re welcome dad,” she said before yawning. “Sorry, I think I must have eaten too much today, you’re right, those garlic fries were awesome.”

“Take a nap if you want, it will be a bit of a ride across the Sound. Besides, you looked a little green earlier.”

She winced at the mention of the ferry ride earlier this afternoon. “I felt better after going back in the car and drinking ice water.”

“I’ll get you some ice water and bring it back to the car. Just rest up since you opened the shop this morning.”

She reclined the seat back and shut her eyes before tilting her cap to cover much of her face.

I sat in line for a couple more minutes before the line started to move and I was directed to the upper deck of the ferry. As I parked the car, I looked over at my daughter and noticed she had
fallen asleep. I got out of the car quietly and went to the concession area to get her a bottle of water and then filled a cup full of ice for her.

As I waited in line to pay, I thought back to a few years ago, during the summer after her freshman year of high school. She was supposed to come out for a three-week long visit that summer. I had it all planned out with a weekend out in Vancouver Island to visit the museums and stuff. There were baseball games planned and other things. I had more time back then and was looking forward to her visit. Then I got the phone call about the auto accident and I ended up spending my summer down in Phoenix, mostly at the hospital while Bella recovered.

I sighed as I paid the cashier and walked back to the car once again, I got lost in my thoughts. I didn’t blame her for wanting a change of scenery after the car accident. I knew the tension between my daughter and my ex-wife were at an all-time high after that. I intervened during her sophomore year and asked Renee if Bella would like to live with me in Forks. It wasn’t hard to convince Bella, she welcomed the change since everybody at her school had heard about the incident and she hated being in the center of attention. Renee wasn’t hard to convince either since she things were getting serious with her and Phil.

I got to the car and peered in before getting inside. She was still asleep so I put the water bottle and the cup of ice on the beverage holder and got back outside and stood by the railing, staring into the Sound. While her first year here wasn’t what I had hoped for, given her crush on that Cullen boy, I understood where she was coming from. She wanted to feel normal and she wanted to be accepted. The only problem that I saw, was how she started to be less of herself and more of what that boy wanted her to be. It was subtle, but I saw how she was convinced to go to a dance when I knew she wasn’t up to it. She had just gotten out of the hospital for crying out loud. I also saw how he looked down at her because of her truck and I heard snippets to realize he was, on a couple occasions, attempting to buy her a car; but not just any car, a luxury one. As much as I hated to see her hurt when he dumped her, I was glad she was able to recover from that and the real Bells started to shine through. I swore after I found her wandering around in the woods like that, that if that boy ever showed up, I wouldn’t be afraid to point my shotgun on his ass. I’d do it too for what he did to my to my daughter.

I started to think about the good doctor and his wife. While they were great for the community, I wondered on several occasions, how they managed to find all those kids. I met each and every one of them at one time or another, mainly at local, community events. They all seemed like nice kids, maybe a little spoiled but they weren’t punks and were well mannered. I chuckled as I thought of Alice and her energetic personality; I had often seen the exasperation in Bella’s face whenever her friend came over to talk fashion. I wondered if they were all pushy like that. I could see the tall, blonde girl, Rose and her boyfriend being that way and maybe snotty with their fancy cars. Of course, that boy, Edward always seemed like an arrogant ass, but that was probably just me being the overprotective dad. The only one I thought that wasn’t as overbearing was that quiet kid, Jasper. He probably would have been the boy Bella would have felt more herself with but he was Alice’s boyfriend. I shook my head, oh well, I thought with a shrug, water under the bridge now. They all left soon after her birthday party and I guess I’d say good riddance.
I sighed as I stared at the churning of the water from the ferry boat. I couldn’t believe my Bells was growing up and after this summer, she was moving away once again, this time to college.

I turned to look at the car before looking back out to the night sky. I was shocked that she wanted to do something related to law enforcement. I was so proud of her and nearly choked with emotion when she told me back in November that she wasn’t sure if she wanted to get into criminology or forensic science. Then she asked for my help in researching the different universities narrowing her list to include Sam Houston, which would offer both. I was excited for her and for her future. I thought that working at the coffee shop did wonders for her confidence because while she was still soft spoken at times, she was less shy and more the Bella before her accident. While some things would never be normal for her, I was damn proud of her for making an effort to move on.

I laughed to myself when she told me she wanted to go to Texas. I had such fond memories there from the summers I spent there as a teenager. I told her she could go so long as I came out and we both go fishing on the Gulf. After today’s ride on the ferry though, I don’t think she would be able to handle it without losing her lunch overboard. Still, I’d visit her and go fishing, I am sure I could convince Henry and Billy to come along. We could rent a boat, drink beers and fish. Yep, I was hoping she’d get accepted to Sam Houston State too even though I’d miss her.

The phone buzzing in my pocket brought me out of my thoughts. I looked at the Caller ID and chuckled.

*Speaking of Billy…*

“Billy! What’s going on?”

“You lucky dog, I saw the game on TV. I can’t believe you got tickets.”

“Ha!” I taunted. “Bells caught a foul ball too. One of Ichiro’s.”

“You’re shitting me! She did? Way to go Bells!” Billy said and laughed.

“Yeah, some jerk tried to buy it off of her but she gave it to me instead,” I said proudly. “Hey, since you’re on the line, I meant to ask if the boys got any cars lately.”

“Funny you should ask, I visited the garage today and they filed lien paperwork on a couple cars.
There was a Mini Cooper, cute little car and then a 90s model Blazer.”

“I don’t think she’d want a Mini given what happened,” I said. “Tell me more about the Blazer.”

“Shit. Yeah sorry about bringing that up, I understand,” he said apologetically. “It is a black Blazer 4x4 and has a body lift on it. Really sweet, with big tires but not too tall.”

“Hmm, it will be safer for her than the red truck. How’s the engine?”

“It was at the garage for a new engine so the boys dropped a brand new one in there but the guy never paid for it. It looked pretty well taken care of.”

“Is it a K5 or the newer one that looks like a warped minivan?” I asked and hoped that it was the former.

“K5, why you want a minivan, Chief?” he taunted over the phone.

I snorted. “Yeah, can you imagine me in a damn minivan? I’d take the Mini Cooper over that any day. I want to see it first. How long before I can buy it if it is good? I want to get her something for graduation. How about poker night at the rez tomorrow night?” I suggested.

“I think the timing is perfect. Let me talk to Harry and get back to you. If not, we can always knock a few beers and watch the M’s play on TV. I’ll fire up the grill if you bring the steaks.”

“Sounds good. Let me know,” I said and hung up the phone. I looked back out to the sky was happy about getting Bella a newer car. I knew she liked her red truck but the tranny just sounded like crap and I just couldn’t stand the thought of my only daughter driving cross country, possibly to Texas, in that. At least with this, she’d feel safer and it would have four wheel drive for those icy winters.

I could see the lights from the Kingston ferry terminal straight ahead so I turned to walk back to the car just as Bella popped her head up and stretched.

“Enjoy your nap, Bells?” I said as I got into the car.
“Yeah, I needed that,” she replied and opened the bottle and guzzled half. “Thanks for the water. Are we almost there?” She looked out the window.

“Probably a few minutes. I saw the lights ahead so I got back in the car.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize I slept through the whole ride. Sorry dad,” she said sheepishly.

I reached over and tapped her ballcap lid. “It was nothing. Billy called and we chitchatted for a bit. Which reminds me, poker night tomorrow. I’m also bringing steaks to grill. You can join for dinner if you’d like.”

“Steak? Shit, I have an evening shift tomorrow. Are you off tomorrow? Maybe we can go on a run and then a late breakfast?”

I grinned at her suggestion. “Yeah, I guess I should if I’m going to be drinking beers later that day. Sure, that is a great idea.”

That was another thing about Bella that changed soon after what I teased her as her awakening. She was back to jogging which I knew that it was one of the things her physical therapist had wanted her to do after her accident. I even bought her one of those iPod things so she could go running and thought it was such a cool gadget that I ended up buying one myself and loaded it up with bluegrass and guitar rock.

“Great! Now, you’re not going to be singing to Steppenwolf while we run are you?” she said and made a face.

“Hey, I wasn’t singing that loud, was I?”

She looked at me and raised her eyebrows. “Dad, you were singing ‘Born to Be Wild’. You dad, the Chief of Police, remember?” she said and shuddered.

“It wasn’t that loud, was it?” I sputtered, feeling a little mortified.
She turned and looked at me before she doubled over in laughter. “No, it wasn’t bad, but the look on your face. Dad, nobody saw you, the only reason why I heard it was I was right next to you. But you were singing though.”

“You little stinker,” I said and chuckled as I turned onto U.S. Highway 101. “You should consider playing poker with your old man and the guys. I bet you’d clean house.”

She looked out the windshield before nodding. “Maybe, the next time you can have the game at the house instead of the rez.”

“Sure, that will work. Thanks again, Bells. I had a fun time. You know, maybe one day while you’re in Texas, we can go see the Astros in Houston.”

“Sounds like a plan, dad. I look forward to it.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for continuing to support. I know uploading it to catch up to real time has been slow. I’m getting there though. XOXO sushi
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

The fuck-awesome team of ladies that make this story pretty for y'all -
Alexis.Danaan – Thanks for beta'n this bad boy and having me add a few more things that just made the chapter all the better. JaspersWoman – Thank you for pre-reading this. Love the feedback you gave on this. DarkNNerdy – You're more than a pre-reader, you've helped me iron out some ideas in the middle of writing and I truly appreciate it. Thanks wify.

SM still owns the story. I just like to have my way with them.

Chapter 6

May 2006

JPOV

I tossed the empty blood bag into the trash and walked out of the barn, but not before walking over to the mirrored ‘Pete's Bar & Grill’ sign and looking at my eyes. They were no longer golden but an orange-red color from the human blood supplementing that I was doing. I shrugged at the feline-like eyes as I shut off the lights and headed straight for the old oak tree. It was nearly dusk and once again I climbed up and settled down on the fork of the trunk before staring out into the purple sky.

It had become almost commonplace to find me here, lost in thought as I contemplated my diet choice. Since that night I went with Peter and Char to the run down neighborhood I had gone with them to study more humans, this time at a rough biker bar on the way to Galveston. The humans there were different than the ones in the first neighborhood. I watched and observed as I toyed with the bottle of beer and shot of whiskey that I ordered to keep up with appearances.

I had made my decision on my diet but I wasn’t ready yet to act on it. As I specifically told my brother and sister, I would only go back to a human diet if I fed on deviants; the criminals and druggies that littered the world. I had to make sure when it came time to feed, I knew the differences and not make a mistake and feed on an innocent human. I learned the distinguishing scents of what tainted their blood before I made the commitment. I used my gift to hone in on certain emotions and ignoring others, like ripping away the layers of what was a normal drunken emotion and what were more nefarious ones. I studied and I stalked but I didn’t act on it, yet.
As crazy as it might have seemed to an average vampire, these were things I felt like I needed to understand especially given how I was created and how I was used as a war machine; a weapon for both humans and vampire alike. I brushed my hand against my neck feeling the rough flesh from the scars upon scars from the numerous bites and decapitations. I was ruthless back then; I didn’t give a shit about the state of the humans--men, women even children were not immune to my brutality. Blood was blood, I binged on it, bathed in it and sometimes even fucked in it.

I was wired to kill and forged for war but over the years in that camp, I didn’t realize that the emotions from my kills were in fact, killing me with each pull of blood and with each metallic screech of torn vampire flesh. The weight of it all took its toll on me and I started to break. I became despondent, an empty shell of a being. I never got to the point where I would have hurtled myself into a raging pyre but I had moments where I’d ponder how it would feel to be torn apart and burned. I was fuckin’ thankful that Peter and Char came back and got me out of that place soon after. I shuddered as I thought back to how those errant thoughts of being destroyed became more and more welcomed.

In my early days after escaping Maria’s army, I learned to be more discreet. Instead of just tearing up a throat and drinking like a man who just stepped out of the desert, I pulled my prey into darkened alleyways or abandoned buildings. I learned to slowly function by straddling the line between the vampire world and the human one. The difference was though, back then, I just nabbed and fed. Once again, the emotions from innocent humans began to take its toll and I was weighed down by my shame and guilt.

I guess one could say I was lucky to have been in Philadelphia when I was and was found by the pixie. She showed me a new way of life and even now, as a soft wind blew across the leaves of the oak tree that I was sitting in, I was thankful for having been given the opportunity to heal from the emotional turmoil I had been through. I just wished that they had understood me more; gotten to know who I was, and not based their opinions on a child’s interpretation or a vision of a supposed future.

Peter was absolutely right in that they never took that chance to understand me. Instead, I always felt a little fear and disgust as they saw my scars and if I looked intensely at a human or stared too long, I was dragged away or hissed at because once again, “Fuckin’ Jasper was going to ravage a human in plain sight”or “go savage and murder a damn town.” I shook my head as that attitude over the decades became more and more commonplace. It was uncomfortable, to say the least, always having to feel like I had to defend each and every one of my actions even when it was unwarranted. The decades of their distrust and guilt made me doubt myself. It made me feel as though I was nothing more than a monster, a deviant or a small child. I raked my fingers through my hair as I tried to calm myself from thinking of the Cullens. Yes, they gave me a new outlook on life and for that, I’ll always be fuckin’ grateful for them. That helped me heal from the pain and suffering I had been through but it wasn’t enough.
I knew deep down, that the way they viewed me didn’t necessarily equate to who I was. I knew it, but my confidence was shot and there were moments when I wasn’t sure if I could gain it back. That is, until I got here.

I have been here a month and my brother and sister have been very supportive. More than supportive. They told me not just by words but by their emotions that they accepted me. Me, Jasper Whitlock. It didn’t matter to them if I was an animal drinker or a human one, I was first and foremost their brother. I was family. If I fucked something up, I know they’ll tell me and we’d move on. I wasn’t looked at as a kid, I was an adult; all of us were and that was one of the biggest things I realized being out here.

I took a deep breath and jumped down from the tree. All that reflecting made me restless and I knew a bike ride would help calm me down and recenter my thoughts. I loved the feel of the open road and the way the bike tilted as I hugged the curves at high speed, it relaxed me and I needed to get my mind off of my present angst. I walked over to the garage and threw on my jacket and my helmet. I sent a quick text to Peter letting him know that I was going out for a bit and then started the engine, racing out towards a winding road.

I drove for a while, not really paying attention to where I was going. I just felt the wind whistling past and the feel of the pavement as I rode for miles. I was still trying to figure out the nuances of an impending diet change when I realized I had ridden my bike into a fairly large town. There were a few bars the next street over and it was a wild night from the sounds I could hear. I parked on a side street and shut off the engine before taking my helmet off. As I got off the bike, I briefly debated whether or not I was ready to survey humans on my own but in the end I had to believe in myself. I couldn’t rely on my brother and sister to babysit me, they had their own lives to enjoy. No way was I gonna be a damn burden to them. Besides, I needed to prove to myself that I was in control.

I walked past a couple bars before finally going into one that felt like the rowdiest, emotion-wise. When I got inside, I was not disappointed. The dim lights hid my funny colored eyes and my paler than normal skin from the humans. Since it was a cool spring night, I had a long sleeve tee on that hid my scars from view but as I discovered the last time I was at a bar, patrons usually didn’t pay much attention as they were often distracted by alcohol. I looked around to see a band playing, beers were flowing freely and people were having a great time. It was perfect to study and observe. I walked up to the bar and sat down on a stool. The bartender came up to me and I ordered a bourbon, neat. Once I had the glass in my hand, I turned away so I faced the crowd and started to take in the atmosphere. There were drunk girls makin’ out on the dance floor and they captured the attention of some college age boys who were wolf whistlin’ at them. Over by the stage, there were people singing along to a pretty good cover of Lynyrd Skynyrd’s ‘Freebird.’

The place was an assortment of emotions: happiness, euphoria, lust, camaraderie, fear, and raging anger...
Whoa, back up. What was that?

I scanned the room to zeroed-in on where the anger was coming from and over in a dark corner, nearly hidden by the band equipment, a man roughly grabbed a petite woman with one hand and then with his other, backhanded her in the face before spitting and cursing at her. I slowly got out of my seat and slapped a twenty onto the counter. I grabbed my drink, enjoying the vanilla and clove aroma and wishing I could actually drink it without feeling sick afterwards. I walked slowly towards the couple and felt the woman’s utter fear as the man grabbed her by the hair and dragged her outside, slapping her a couple more times before the back door shut.

Fuck, I wanted to do something about it, the man’s emotions were wild and sinister but it was her fear that shook me. The man was beyond pissed off but he was also pouring out a heavy dose of lust and possessiveness as he continued to smack his companion.

Come on Whitlock, believe in yourself.

I took one more sniff of my drink before I set the bourbon down on an empty table and headed out the front door. I walked at a human pace until I got to the end of the street and then ghosted around to the alley when I realized the coast was clear. The man had the woman against the wall and he was full of deadly intent; she was nothing more than his prey. I hid in the shadows as I slinked quietly towards my target. My eyes darkened as I continued to watch and observe the monster in front of me. His hand was around her throat and the other was pawing at her roughly, causing her shirt to rip. She was having a hard time breathing and was slowly losing consciousness. The sound of his taunts reached my ears; he was telling her how she was going to enjoy everything he was going to give to her. She had a few bruises on her face and what looked like a knot on her head. His lust spiked as her head lolled and I could see her eyes fluttering as she choked out a plea for him to let her go. I watched as he raised his hand back to strike her once more. The young woman fainted just as the man curled his fingers into a fist. I moved quickly and grabbed his hand, pulling back the fist and pinning it roughly onto the man’s back.

My quick movement startled him and he dropped the woman, letting her unconscious figure slump against the wall. I moved him away from her and pushed him hard against the wall causing the side of his face to bleed from the impact of the concrete façade. A growl built up in my chest as the man’s exposed blood wafted in the air. Spinning him around, I grabbed him by two fistfuls of his shirt as I pushed him hard against the wall again. The man’s eyes glazed over momentarily and fear started to pour out of his body as he realized he was in danger; the predator had become prey himself. My eyes were black by now and my growl was even louder as I took a step closer.

The man, even though he was frightened, he was still pissed off that I had interrupted his fun. His arm flexed as he went to grab something out of his jeans pocket but before he could reach it, I yanked his arm roughly hearing the pop as his arm dislocated. A growl of pain escaped his mouth before he clamped his jaw shut and his fear escalated. I grabbed a handful of his greasy hair and
jerked his head back exposing his carotid artery and causing the man to yelp out.

I ran my nose along his neck sniffing the freshly oxygenated blood that ran strong through that vessel.

*A-positive blood, one of my favorite flavors.*

The venom pooled in my mouth and without a second thought, I bit down.

*Oh fuck... bliss.*

My eyes rolled to the back of my head as the warm, rich, velvety liquid flooded my mouth and coated my throat. If I could have cried I would have; it was everything I craved for and remembered. There was no plastic taste from the blood bags but there was something in his blood; crack cocaine, but it didn’t matter, it was human blood from the tap and it was delicious. I continued to send my fear to the man, sweetening the elixir as I took in pull after pull. I drank greedily and squeezed his ribcage like a damn juice box. I wanted to make sure I got every last drop. I was breathing heavily when I finished, finally letting him drop to the ground.

I looked around to find a dumpster and carried the man over. I fished around for his ID and noted the name as I scattered his belongings about. The man also had a switchblade which I guess was what he had been trying to get when I pulled his arm away. I opened it and used the mirrored finish to check if I had spilled some of my dinner before using the knife to cut into his neck so that he looked like a mugging that had gone awry. I threw him unceremoniously into the dumpster and set it on fire before going back to the young woman. I took her purse and tossed it carelessly towards the dumpster so that it looked like a mugger did it in haste. I checked her pulse and it was faint. She didn’t seem to have a neck injury so I carefully lifted her up and carried her away from vicinity of the burning metal box and back towards the bar, avoiding the bright street light’s glare. When I got to a nearby bouncer, I sent him a dose of concern and he came running up to me as he saw the unconscious woman in my arms.

As I stood in the shadow of a building, I explained that I had found her unconscious near the alleyway but couldn’t find any identification with her. He noted the bruises and thought she might have been mugged. The bouncer thanked me and informed me that he was an EMT who only moonlighted at the bar on his nights off. He assured me that he would take care of her and made sure she was checked over.

I thanked him for his help and gave him a name and number of one of the bar patrons I had overheard earlier in the evening. I walked away and headed back to my bike. As I walked, I
thought back to the emotions to make damn sure I wasn’t subjecting myself to my own personal hell for my decision tonight. I saved a human’s life and it felt good. I didn’t feel guilty for feeding on that would-be rapist at all, nor did I feel like I was going to lose my control at any time and destroy the entire night club district. No, I felt in control tonight, even that demon that I kept hidden in the deep, dark recesses in my mind wasn’t out of control. He had praised me as I unlocked his cage the moment I stepped into the alleyway. He recognized what was to be our meal and although he didn’t come out of his cage door and let loose, I knew he was watching me as I took in our human meal and fed. Afterwards, it almost felt like he patted my shoulder as I dropped the man and created a crime scene for after. I was damn proud of myself for tonight. Being on the human diet would help with my control and would make my ability even stronger and that would only help me in the long run, especially once I was nearly ready to head back to Forks. I rubbed my chest, feeling that dull ache and knew I was closer to my goal.

Soon Isabella.

I checked out at my eyes on the bike mirror before I flipped down the helmet visor seeing more of the crimson in my eyes and smiled. As I started the motor and headed back to the farm, I breathed a sigh of relief that finally, Jasper Whitlock felt alive and free.
I raced down the road in an effort to get home and grab the mail. Well, race was relative given how Ol' Bessie, as Charlie had been calling her, was just chugging on what seemed to be its last wheels. I finally got it into the driveway and as I turned off the ignition, a black plume of smoke choked out of the exhaust. I sighed and hoped that it wasn't an ominous sign and got out of the truck. I walked hurriedly over to the mailbox and hesitated a moment before I opened it to grab the stack of mail. For the past week, all the letters that I received were the disappointing thin envelopes and they all began the same way, almost verbatim.

"Dear Ms. Swan... We regret to inform you... not accepted at this time... Good luck with your future endeavors..."

I tried to be confident and tried to think positive thoughts since the college of my choice hadn't written to me yet. I was worried that maybe I didn't apply to enough universities and maybe I should have expanded my horizons and applied to a whole slew of colleges. But this was a subject that meant something to me and captured my interest. Besides, I thought my essay was pretty damn good. I shut the mailbox and was getting ready to thumb through the letters as I walked towards the house.

Uh-oh, spoke too soon.

There, on top of the small stack of mail was a letter addressed to me from Sam Houston State University. Using my thumb and forefinger, I pinched the envelope to gauge it's thickness and it didn't feel like a thin, rejection envelope. My heart started to pound and my hands got sweaty as I ran into the house and slammed the door shut.

I took a deep breath and sat on the couch as I tried to calmly sort out the letters. I separated the bills and set them aside for my dad, placing them on the small end table, next to his favorite spot on the couch.

What the hell?

Amongst the stack of envelopes from universities I had applied to, was one I had clearly not applied to and never even crossed my mind, Princeton University. I glared at the envelope and thought it had to be a joke. Grabbing the nearby letter opener, I tore it open.

"Dear Ms. Swan... pleased to inform you... admittance to Princeton... full scholarship... Comparative Literature..."

My mind went blank for a minute as I stared at the words on the page. It didn't make sense to me. I hadn't applied to Princeton for anything, but especially not Comparative Literature. I never even considered an Ivy League school because that wasn't what I wanted. I looked inside the envelope expecting to see 'you've been punked' written inside but there was none. I looked at the letter again,
the words seemed to swim before my eyes as everything fell into place. There was only one reasonable explanation for this; the Jerk, also known as the cowardly Edward Cullen. I shook my head and continued to stare at the letter as I recalled how one day over the summer, while we were hanging out in his meadow, we talked about our love of books. We also talked about our future and how we could go to college together. I was so enamored by him and wanted so desperately to feel wanted and loved by that boy, that had he suggested going to Oxford or Cambridge, I probably would have jumped at the chance. Did he just assume that because I enjoyed books that I would automatically become a Comp Lit major? I admonished myself for having been dazzled by his charm.

"Unbelievable," I muttered, balling the letter in my fist as I set out to the back yard in a huff. "Un-fucking-believable! I was so stupid!"

By the time I got outside, I wanted to kick his ass. I was livid and muttering a litany of curses that would have made Charlie splutter and choke when I spotted the grill.

Perfect.

Dad had invited his buddies over for dinner tonight and I knew he was coming home soon to grill the steaks. With an evil smirk, I decided that instead of just burning the letter, I was going to ready the grill for him-multitask, if you will. I poured some charcoal into the grill and doused them in lighter fluid before grabbing the long lighter and setting the letter on fire before I dropped it into the coals.

I pictured that stupid 'know-it-all' smirk of his as the letter burned and curled up. I smiled at the gentle crackling as the paper started to resemble the briquettes that were just starting to catch the flames. I laughed as the last corner of the envelope showing the Princeton crest smoldered and turned to black before a small piece of ash floated up from the pyre.

Take that, asshole.

I stared at it for a few minutes, feeling a bit better, before going back inside to read the rest of the mail. By the time I sat back down, I had calmed down enough that I even let out a laugh for having the audacity to burn an acceptance letter to Princeton. If anybody found out, they'd surely label me crazy but for one, I never applied and never would have and secondly, I had no intentions of being a Comp Lit major at any time in my life. I shook my head, he only confirmed that he never really knew me very well. I was nothing more than an idealized image or someone he felt that he could mold into being the ideal girl.

"I thought you wanted me to forget you? That I was nothing more than a fucking distraction." I muttered out loud. I shook my head and decided to set those thoughts aside for later.

Deep breath, Bella. Calm.

I looked at the other envelopes, saving the Sam Houston one for last. One acceptance from the University of Nebraska and a rejection from the University of California, Irvine. My anger dissipated and was being replaced by a smile as I realized I was accepted somewhere. It wasn't my top choice but I was accepted somewhere nonetheless. My smile grew bigger when I also received a couple more small scholarships that would help with some of my tuition.

Not bad so far, Bella.

By the time I was down to the letter from Sam Houston my happiness was mixed with nerves. I fidgeted a little more, almost psyching myself out, as I stared at the letter and wished that I could
see its contents without opening it. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and counted to ten as I tried to calm down.

The moment had arrived and my hands shook slightly as I took the letter and opened it. At the sight of several sheets of paper my breath stuttered as my heart started to thump wildly in my chest. Could I be closer to achieving my dream? I wiped my sweaty palms on my jeans before I slowly unfolded the letter and read.

"Dear Ms. Swan... We are pleased to inform you... College of Criminal Justice..."

My jaw dropped for a second as the news caught up to me before my eyes devoured the letter again.

_Holy shit! No way! I did it! I got in!_

"Yes!" I screamed. "Woooooohoooo!" I shot out of my chair, jumping and kicking my legs in the air. I was so damn happy and I couldn't wait until Charlie got home. I read the letter yet again before setting it on top of his pile of bills and and ran upstairs to put on my worn out hoodie and did some mental cartwheels, back flips and fist pumps. I was sporting a goofy grin on my face as I ran back downstairs and grabbed my backpack and headed outside to finish up some homework before the house was filled with guests. I could enjoy the fresh air and mind the coals for Charlie at the same time.

_Texas. I'm going to Texas._

I couldn't help but giggle over the thought. I was looking forward to it. I'd have sunshine and warm days again. I could build up my flip flop collection like I did when I was in Phoenix. I'd be away from anything that would remind of the Jerk. I snorted as I looked at the grill again before tackling my homework.

"Bells!" Charlie yelled out just as I finished my take-home math quiz. He ran outside with the letter in his hand. "Really?"

I looked up, beaming because he had such a big grin on his own face. I nodded and laughed,

"Yeah, Sam Houston State University, dad!"

Charlie pulled me into a giant bear hug. "I'm so damn proud of you, honey," he said gruffly.

"Thanks dad, I'm damn proud too," I muttered as I hugged him back.

My dad and I were alike when we shared emotional moments together. It was often filled with a sense of awkwardness. I often wondered it was if it was because of Charlie's stoic attitude or the fact that we didn't see much of each other when I was growing up. In the past few months, we've become closer even when I'd give my dad a hug now and then, there was always a sense that it was foreign to him. Maybe it was a cop thing or maybe it was just a Charlie thing. Either way, I knew when he hugged me back or something that resembled affection, it was a huge feat for him to share.

He let go and gave me an awkward pat on the back and I smiled as I went back into the house to grab the steaks.

"Dad," I yelled from the kitchen, "Who is all coming tonight?"

"Billy and Harry are coming along and if Jacob isn't busy, he told Billy he might come along too," he replied. "Just grab all the steaks, if there is extra, I can take it to work tomorrow."
I grabbed the tray of steaks and went back outside. I was excited that I'll have some news to share with everybody tonight.

"Here dad, are you going to grill while I get the veggies ready and stuff?"

"Sure, let the Grillmaster do his thing," he said and chuckled as he put his grilling apron on.

I went back into the house and got some vegetables onto skewers to grill later.

Just as I was finishing up, I heard a roar of an engine followed by the sound of three doors slamming. The doorbell rang and I ran to open the door just as Charlie walked in with a couple steaks.

"Guys, go grab a beer, Jacob there are sodas in the fridge," Charlie said and did a one arm man-hug thing with both Harry and Billy. "I've got both your steaks on rare and the others are nearly done at medium rare."

I said hi to the guys before going outside to throw the skewers onto the grill giving the guys some bonding time.

"Hey Bells," Jacob said as he walked on over and chucked me on the shoulder playfully.

"Hey Jake, you're getting tall," I commented and grinned.

"Yeah, I had a bit of a spurt over the spring. Hey, I need a favor," he said quietly and looked behind him as to see if we were alone. "I've asked Lisa to the junior prom but I am not quite sure on the flower. Of course it is next week and I haven't done shit on the flowers. Can you help?"

I snorted. "Oh god, I thought for a second you were going to ask for dance lessons," I said with a mock look of horror. "Hmm, what are your colors you're wearing?"

"I think we're going with a black and white to make it easy," he replied.

"Well you can never go wrong with roses," I said and thought for a minute. "They have some that are a deep, dark red called Black Magic Roses. One of the gals in class had them on her corsage last year."

"I'll check that out, that sounds pretty cool and not too girly. Hey, are you going to your senior prom?"

I grimaced at him before I turned the skewers over. "Nah, I did the prom thing last year and I just don't really care to. With the crazy snowstorms this year and the school delays because of that, I'm more excited about graduating than prom," I said with a smile. "Besides, Ashley had booked a band from Seattle to play at Java City that night so it will be a happening place. I much prefer that over another dance."

"Yeah? What kind of music?"

"I think they are similar to Green Day so it will be fun."

"Damn, Lisa is more into the techno stuff. I don't think she'd go for that but I'll see if any the guys will want to go. It is the week after next right?" Jacob said.

"Yeah, cutting it really close," I replied and rolled my eyes. "See what I mean that graduation would be more fun for me? If you do come out, let me know early and I can save you a table. Say,
speaking of the guys, Ol' Bessie, as Charlie likes to call the truck is making an awful racket and then this afternoon, there was a plume of black smoke that spewed out of her exhaust when I shut off the engine."

"Your dad told me the truck was sounding bad," he said as he stared at the skewers. "I'll try to come by and take a look tomorrow afternoon?"

"Thanks, I appreciate that," I replied and grabbed the tongs. "Hey, can you grab that tray while I get these skewers and then we can grub."

"Yeah," he said and took a hold of the tray as I scooped up the skewers and we headed inside.

Dinner was fun as everybody congratulated me on my acceptance to Sam Houston with Charlie giving an impromptu speech. Afterwards, we all sat down and the elders, as Charlie called them, tried to teach Jacob and I how to play poker. Neither of us weren't that good but we had a fun time. At about midnight I had to say goodnight as I had a late-morning shift and after the steak dinner, I needed a quick run beforehand.

I got ready for bed and but I laid awake for a while thinking of the day's events. I was beyond thrilled that I was going to Texas. It just felt right that I was going there though I couldn't explain why. The look on Charlie's face was something I would never forget and I allowed myself a few moments to relive that. Of course picturing him with that big smile got me teary eyed. I had never seen him so damn happy and it made me feel good.

Today was a good day, despite the fact that someone tried to run my life after he basically dumped me like yesterday's trash out in the woods. I couldn't believe his nerve after all that. It felt damn good to burn that stupid letter; it was cathartic. Princeton as a Lit major, my ass. I huffed as I realized once again how wrong he was for me. In just these few months since the breakup, I discovered things about myself. I had depended way too much on him and tried to be someone he wanted me to be. I lost who I was while I was with him. It wasn't just him though, I let both him and Alice run my life. They chose what clothes I should be wearing and food I should be eating. Like they were experts in human food. And in the end, I was just abandoned. I rolled my eyes before I started to admonish myself that I only allowed a few minutes thinking of them. I exceeded that too much today and they didn't deserve that much time.

Once more I tried to calm myself and do those breathing exercises. That was probably the only recent good thing I got from Renee. Which reminded me that I hadn't told her the news yet. I got out of bed and fired up my laptop to send her a quick email that I been accepted to the school of my choice. I wasn't sure how she would react to things, she hadn't been completely responsive to my emails lately and figured the best thing was to just expect nothing. Hell, I'd be lucky to even get a smiley face from her. I knew that the accident had created a chasm between us and living away from her, I realized that while I felt like I was trying make an effort to move past it, she hadn't. That idea bothered me because it made me feel like she held me at fault somehow. She was the one driving the while talking on the phone, not me. Sighing heavily, I wondered if this was something that could ever be repaired as I shut down my laptop and crawled back to bed. Once again, I looked out the window and felt my eyelids get a little heavy.

I smiled as the sounds of the guys playing poker down below filtered upwards. They were trying to be quiet but I actually liked hearing the laughter coming from downstairs, it helped me relax especially knowing that my dad was having fun and would continue to do so when I moved away in a couple of months. As my eyes drifted shut and I was able to let go of the tension from the day, I pictured the blond vampire who once told me that I was worth it. Today, was one of the few days where I wholeheartedly agreed.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you as always to Alexis.Danaan for being the awesome beta that she is. She actually got a kick that I used a British English term in this chappie. To my awesome pre-readers JaspersWoman and DarkNerdy, thanks so much for the feedback. These ladies all rock hard.

I am not SM, nor do I play her on TV. I do like Jasper and Bella and like to have my way with them.

Chapter 8

JPOV

May 2006

It had been a few weeks since I made the conscientious decision to feed off a human for the first time ever. And by conscientious, I don’t mean the slip-ups I had before, this was a choice I made and was comfortable with. So far, I felt good about it and made sure I monitored myself closely for a few days after each feed to make sure I didn’t have some sort of delayed emotional reaction to drinking human blood. I hadn’t felt the guilt or any tell-tale signs that would indicate I was on that same path of destruction as I was before and it filled me with an overwhelming sense of relief.

For my second feed I made it almost as memorable. I went back to that neighborhood from a month ago and found the man that I had heard beating up a woman that first night. I had wanted to do something that night but I wasn’t ready back then. As luck had it, he was there, in the same house as he was before and once again, he was beating a woman. There was another male with him and together they beat her to death. I couldn’t save her but I sent them both her pain and agony from the broken bones from their punches and kicks. Almost as soon as the emotions hit them, they went from the malicious glee that I had felt to dropping to their knees and blubbing in pain as I emerged from the hallway to the bedroom they were in. They begged for mercy but I continued to send them the woman’s emotions as I drank their blood. I indulged that night and fed on the two humans before I set up a house explosion. I got creative with my crime scene and made it look like the house exploded as the men cooked their crack cocaine. I left the dead woman there because it just didn’t feel right to feed off of their victim like that and I was proud of myself that I was able to
turn it down. Good thing too, because as I left the scene just before the explosion, I realized that I had over eaten and actually felt weighed down as I ran towards my new Mustang Shelby.

I was learning my limits and that indulgent meal helped me realize one human was just enough and I actually didn’t have to feed as often as I did when I was on the animal diet. Where I probably fed every two or three days and sometimes more when the constant burn became too much, I was currently feeding every week or so and could probably stretch it a day or two more if I had a pint of bagged blood.

I also realized that my ability had changed with the re-introduction of human blood. I had first noticed it when I drank the bagged blood and started to supplement my animal diet. I felt that almost instantaneous clarity of emotions and was able to pinpoint specific ones in a crowded room. I discovered that I could send different emotions in low dosages to unsuspecting humans as I continued to observe and study them at bars even on my non-feeding nights. At the biker bar, I was able to send a low dose of lust to one tattooed man as he talked to an older guy who had Harley gear all over. I laughed to myself as they almost got in a fist fight when the man caressed Harley man’s ass. Another aspect I discovered from imbibing on human blood, I didn’t have a problem with being around large crowds as I used to and actually found myself integrating myself into the human world a lot easier when my senses weren’t dulled and the call for human blood wasn’t a factor. It was ironic, but it seemed to be the case.

Now that I had completely weaned off of my so-called vegetarianism, my eyes were once again a familiar shade of crimson. I had to admit, I always seemed to like them that way even though for a few decades, it was considered taboo and any shade other than gold was frowned upon.

I started to realize these were the little things that added up to the fact that I was becoming more comfortable with myself. I felt like my eyes were finally opened to who I was and I felt in control. No longer was I taking orders from a crazy bitch hell-bent on power. I wasn’t controlled by a family of vampires who tried desperately to appear human. I was me, Jasper Whitlock, and it felt good. The day I finally realized it I went with Peter to the nearest Ford dealership and bought the brand new Mustang Shelby as a means of commemorating the moment.

My confidence was coming back and I, as Peter had described it, finally pulled the Cullen stick out of my ass. I kicked him to return the favor for that remark which only resulted in him calling me that stupid name I hated, ‘Jazzy’. I ended up winning the ensuing little battle when I sent him a potent emotional combination that had him feeling pain and nausea, similar to a hungover from hell.

The sun was setting as I walked from the carport where I had just washed the car, over to the tree. It had become my typical evening ritual as I sat up there and stared out into the sky. I enjoyed the quiet time, it was something I wasn’t able to have much of while living with the Cullens. Nobody understood that I relished the peaceful silence and that it provided me with a break from the
barrage of emotions that sometimes seemed to flood and overwhelm me all fuckin’ day. If I sat up on the roof to stare at the stars, it would not be a surprise that I would get interrupted by someone wanting something. Sometimes it was Emmett who wanted the down time to play video games. Other times, it was Esme worrying about how I wasn’t spending time with the family. Then there was Alice, who would constantly talk about shopping and fashion and no matter how much I tried to ignore her, inevitably, I’d hear something inane such as the merits of wearing Manolos versus Choos. I shuddered because I knew what Manolos and Choos were, thanks to her.

If it wasn’t someone wanting to converse with me, it was a deluge of emotions that overloaded my brain. Rose often read gossip magazines and let the stories within irritate her, or she’d look at her life from a ‘glass half empty’ view and be upset that she didn’t have that ideal that she had dreamt of. When she vocalized her disappointment it would in turn would hurt Emmett and even though he never said anything to her about it, it bothered him that she’d say things and dismiss their bond so easily. It was a vicious cycle that replayed all the time over the decades I was there.

I shook my head and rubbed my temples as I recalled Edward’s emotions and how his alone never failed to exhaust me. His self loathing was probably the strongest emotion next to his arrogance. It was never-ending and always bouncing from one extreme to the other. I often wondered if it was because he was changed as an adolescent or if he was one of those privileged kids who got everything handed to him as a human. That was certainly how he was as a vampire.

Carlisle was the only one that seemed the most neutral but his consistent doting on Edward left me feeling as if I should be twitching from all the sugary emotions he gave off. He found no fault in his first son and neither did Esme but they had no issues finding flaws in the rest of us when compared to their ‘perfect son.’ Esme wasn’t immune to spoiling Edward, she did it all the damn time, giving in to his wants at every turn. Isabella was one of his whims that they allowed him to pursue. While I don’t regret it now, I was very much opposed to getting her involved in the beginning, it wasn’t safe for either of us, but especially for her. It didn’t matter what my opinion was, all that mattered was Edward wanted her and Esme and Carlisle conceded.

It wasn’t always bad being around them so these moments weren’t always filled with anger. It was, to be truthful, a little bittersweet. I reminded myself that they provided me with some years to heal from the emotional onslaught that tore into me. If it weren’t for them, I would never had gotten to meet someone that was never too far in my thoughts as well, that shy girl with those chocolate eyes. I wanted to go to her but I wasn’t quite there yet. Soon though, very soon. Every evening as I sat up in the tree, I did acknowledge that and every night, it seemed a little less of that anger and resentment that I harbored for them remained. Well, except for one person.

I still couldn’t figure out why Alice had those emotions the night of the birthday party. Why the feeling of smugness? I replayed the memory again to that night, there was something else, an underlying sense of anticipation was coming off of her as well but she seemed to keep that emotion more hidden. Why? The only thing I could think of was that she was hoping for a specific outcome. Did she really want me to attack her friend? It seemed that way, but I just couldn’t figure out why when she rattled on and on about how Bella was her best friend and all. That was the
piece that I just didn’t understand but maybe once I got back to Forks I could slowly retrace the night and maybe come up with a plausible theory.

In the time I had been here with my brother and sister the contrast to living with the Cullens was extreme, and it wasn’t just the eye color. Being out here with Peter and Char was like a fuckin’ vacation for my brain. Sure Peter and Char watched TV and sometimes we’d play some video games ourselves, but the difference was that they didn’t force what always felt like ‘mandatory family time’ on me. Right now, they were at home watching NASCAR on his big screen TV and every once in a while, I could hear him grumbling about one driver or another and it made me chuckle each and every time. There was always a constant current of love and other positive emotions that acted as a balm on my senses with Peter and Char. Those were emotions I didn’t mind and when things got lusty between the two of them, I made sure to go for a drive or something to give them privacy and give me some sanity.

“He’s up on the tree again,” Char said in a mock whisper back towards the house as she ran by and broke me out of my thoughts.

“I thought y’all were watching the race?”

“A bit of a rain delay so I wanted to stop by and see how you were doing. He’ll holler when it comes back on.”

I climbed down and sat on the ground as my sister sat down next to me.

“I’m going good,” I said quietly. “I fed last night so things are good.”

“We’re goin’ after the race.” She looked at me and then at the tree. “You hang out on that tree nearly every night, have you wondered why?”

“It is quiet up here and I like the view of the sky,” I said with a shrug. Then I felt some amusement coming off of Char so I looked at her and sent her a dose of curiosity.

“Oh sugar, you haven’t figured out why you’re always sittin’ up on that tree leaning on that particular trunk?”

I shook my head and she rested her hand on my shoulder. “You feel some comfort up there don’t
you?” I nodded and she gave me a warm smile. “You’re facin’ Forks. Look.” She pulled out a compass and showed me.

“I had no idea,” I said as I raked my hand through my hair. “I guess it makes sense. I just didn’t realize this bonding thing was so complex.” I sent her my appreciation for telling me that. I was glad it was Char that told me instead of Peter because I was never sure if he’d say something that was outrageous or not.

“It is and it isn’t,” she continued. “Isabella is human which adds a degree of complexity to it. That isn’t to say it cannot be achieved though. It just means communication and patience is important. Do you have any idea of when you’ll be ready to go see her?”

I sighed as I looked out to the sky once again. “Soon. I know, given the school schedule, she’s probably got finals coming and then graduation. I don’t want to show up now when she’s got other things on her mind,” I explained. “I think since I’ve been here this long, I might as well stay until after she graduates.”

Even though it sounded like I was stalling, I really wasn’t. I still wanted to become more acclimated around humans and being exposed to blood, I needed the extra time and then given the school schedule it just seemed most logical that I wait just a little bit more, even though it sometimes hurt to be so far.

“Have you checked on her or anything?” Char asked.

“What you mean contact the Cullens? No I haven’t,” I replied brusquely.

“No, not them,” she spat out. “I mean attorneys and stuff.”

“Sorry,” I muttered. “No and believe me, the thought had occurred to me. I just feel that it would be a violation, you know? It is almost as bad as having the pixie look.”

She made a face before replying. “Good point. I guess if she’s gets those visions, that would cause the mind-reader to learn about it and then all hell breaks loose.”

“Yeah, could you imagine them coming out here and Esme mothering you and all?”
“Oh fuck no!” she said as she shook her head adamantly.

“Oh Jasper, you’re with the bad human drinkers! Oh son, let me give you a hug,” I mimicked but exaggerated her voice into a crazy falsetto.

“Oh, Char, your language is so unladylike,” Char continued on and wrung her hands nervously in the exact same way Esme would do.

“Geeze, Peter, NASCAR again? Don’t you know they only make left hand turns?” Peter said using Emmett’s exact inflection on his words as he walked over towards us. “Please don’t tell me they’re comin’ out here,” Peter said and shuddered as he sat down with us.

“Nah, we were just pokin’ fun. I was talkin’ to your brother about whether or not he has sought out Isabella,” Char said and leaned against his shoulder.

“Race over?” I asked.

“No, fuckers called it on account of rain. Enough laps were completed so they called it,” he grumbled. “I was lookin’ forward to this night race too. Fuckin’ rain.”

The three of us sat there for a while as the sky darkened. Every so often, Peter and Char would throw out an impression of one of the Cullens or the Denali cousins that would have us laughing hard. It had been a long time since I had laughed like that as we poked fun at my former family. They also poked fun at me, or rather, the Jasper that died in the plane crash. I laughed along and with them realizing it was yet another way to let go of some of the hostility we had of them. Peter and Char would never admit it but I knew they were hurt by the way the Cullens looked down at them because of their violent history. Of course, that in turn was an affront on me since I sired Peter and Peter in turn sired Char.

“So, once your girl graduates, are y’all planning to go back to high school in the future?” Peter asked two hours later.

“If she chooses to be with me I don’t plan to and I hope she doesn’t either. It’s one thing to take college classes but I’m fuckin’ done with high school.”
I was too. I was probably a few years younger than Carlisle, sired many in my past and led battles but to them, I was looked at as a damn child. It didn’t bother me at first but over the years, that was just yet another reason that led me to leave them.

“I miss the days of college classes with the girls dressed in pretty skirts and sweaters,” Peter said and looked at Char. “You looked like such a naughty sorority girl walkin’ across campus carryin’ your books.”

I got up as the two started to get lost in their world.

“I’m goin’ for a bike ride,” I said and as I got up, I brushed the dirt off my jeans.

“No need... we’re goin’, c’mon woman, let’s grab some meals and then you can be the naughty coed and I can be the mean professor later on,” he said and wagged his eyebrows as he pulled Char over his shoulder and took off running.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

This is so far, the shortest chapter in the story. I needed it in order to get us to real time.

Thank you to my wonder beta, Alexis.Danaan who has really prettied up the story. She’s all sorts of awesome. My pre-reader Jaspers_Woman, sorry I made you cry with this chapter. Lastly, my fuckawesome wify, DarkNNerdy who has taken time to read excerpts from the story as well as finding Bella’s Chevy Blazer which I’ll be posting up once she receives it.

I am not SM nor do I play her on TV. I just love Jasper and Bella so I have my fun with them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 9

June 2006

Charlie POV

“Congratulations Bella!” I cheered and waved along with Billy, Jacob and his girlfriend as she walked towards us still wearing her cap and gown.

I had beamed with pride when Bella received her diploma up on stage earlier this afternoon. I think I even embarrassed her a little when I clapped and whistled loudly as she shook hands with the principal, Mr. Greene. She looked so happy and had worked really hard to graduate with honors, managing to finish in the top percentile of her class. As proud as I was of her, a part of me was having a hard time reconciling the fact that she was grown up and not really my little girl anymore. She had matured into a vibrant young woman who was leaving for college in a couple short months.

I couldn’t believe she was an adult. To me, it still felt like yesterday when she’d spend a couple weeks over the summer with me and we’d spend all day at the park. I smiled as I remembered her screaming laughter as she insisted that I push her higher and higher on the swings. There were a couple times when she was still in kindergarten when I’d take her fishing on the dock and she’d talk about how she wanted a kitten but her mom wouldn’t let her.
The sound of her laughter pulled away from memory lane. “Geeze, dad, you made me feel like I had paparazzi following me throughout the ceremony,” she teased as she approached us.

She had asked me to be in charge of taking pictures today and I might have gone a little overboard so I handed the camera to Jacob and asked him to take some shots of Bella and me.

“So long as you don’t sucker punch us, Bells,” Jacob said and we laughed as she punched him playfully on the shoulder.

I cleared my throat in an effort to keep from tearing up at the memories of my daughter when she was younger. “Sorry, Bells I got a little carried away,” I managed to say without getting overly emotional.

“How about you guys?” she said as she smiled and hugged Billy, Jacob, his girlfriend Lisa, and me. “I really appreciate it.”

I looked at my daughter and noted her happiness but I could also see that something was bugging her. She was hurt that Renee didn’t fly out to see her daughter graduate. When Bella received a card a couple days ago I knew that there was a possibility she wasn’t showing up. I even called Renee that day to see if she was arriving but she gave some excuse about not being able to come out at the time. There was something going on but I wasn’t sure what it was and it pissed me off that she’d dismiss our daughter like that. I knew Bella and her mother had a falling out after the car accident but I never thought it was this bad.

I knew that Renee was flighty, it was one of the reasons that led to the downfall of our relationship. That wasn’t to say I wasn’t at fault either. I wasn’t sure what to make of it but I was determined to make it up to Bella the best I could.

I had hoped that I could get Bella that Chevy Blazer for graduation but there was a delay in the paperwork. It had apparently been misplaced so it would be another couple of weeks before it was legally mine and I could pick the damn thing up. It couldn’t come sooner, either; Ol’ Bessie gave us a scare the other day when her engine started spluttering and a thick cloud of black smoke poured out of the exhaust. I knew she hated to depend on me to take her around town but we decided to keep her from driving her truck too much while Jacob and the boys put yet another band-aid on the damn thing. If it can hold up for just a couple more weeks, I would be able to give her a newer car as a going off to college gift.

We were greeted by a few of her fellow classmates as we stood around and mingled. Her boss, Ashley showed up to congratulate her before she headed to the shop. Mike Newton and his parents stopped by to say hello and introduce his girlfriend to us, which brought a sigh of relief to Bella. As
much as Bella didn’t enjoy being in the spotlight, I could tell she was really starting to enjoy herself now that the actual ceremony was over.

“I’m going to turn in the cap and gown and then we can go eat,” Bella said as she met up with Angela and together they walked over the student quad area.

We waited until she came back and smiled as she saw us.

“We’re going to the diner, right?” she asked.

“Yes,” I replied and we all walked over to our respective cars.

As I got into the car, I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out a card. “Here, kiddo.”

“Thanks dad,” she said and opened the card carefully. I watched as she read the card and then the saw the picture I had put in.

“What is this?” she asked.

“I was hoping that I’d get it in time for today but the paperwork won’t be ready for another couple weeks. That is going to be your new car.”

I smiled as she got a look of surprise before a sheen of tears welled up in her eyes. I pulled her into a hug. “Yep, I’m so damn proud of you, honey.”

“Thanks dad,” she said softly. “It is a beautiful SUV.”

“I’m glad you like it kiddo. I’ve test driven it and it runs nice. It’s got a brand new engine in it too. Plus air for the hot Texas summer and four wheel drive for icy winters.”

“That is perfect! I can’t wait to drive it around.” She beamed as she continued to look at the picture. “It’s not that that I didn’t love Ol’ Bessie either dad, if she wasn’t acting up like that, I would have loved to have kept it since it was my first car.”
“I know, Bells,” I was starting to get a little choked up so I quickly thought of a way to divert my attention. “Ready for some marionberry pie?”

“Oh!” Bella exclaimed. “Dad, we used to go there after dinner just for a slice of pie when I used to come out and visit.”

“Yep, you’d insist that you couldn’t eat it until it had one scoop of vanilla ice cream on top of the pie. If it was on the side or a different flavor, you’d give it to me instead.”

We laughed at the memory as we headed towards the diner where we all had a fun time. A few of Bella’s classmates were there with their families so the place became one big celebration even breaking into an impromptu singing of the Forks High School Alma Mater song. Sure enough when it came time for dessert, I wasn’t surprised to see that Bella ordered a slice of marionberry pie a la mode and specified that the ice cream had to be on top of the pie itself. Some things never changed.

After the celebration, she left with Jacob and Lisa to Java City where they were meeting up with a group of her school friends and some kids from the reservation. There was some band playing that they all wanted to see and I was happy that she decided to go there instead of a graduation party full of drunk teenagers. The last thing I needed was to worry about her driving home later that evening. I drove Billy back to the reservation and then ended up watching some action movies since I was on call that night.

The next morning, Renee called and talked to Bella for an hour. From what I could tell, Renee didn’t seem the least bit sorry for missing her own daughter’s graduation. From the one-sided conversation, it sounded like Renee wanted Bella to come out to Florida this summer but I could tell the idea agitated her. She actually told her mother that she had other plans and that was to spend time with me and then pack up for Texas before she hung up the phone. She didn’t talk about it but I could tell it bothered her.

A part of me expected that once school was out, Bella would sleep-in and lounge around the house since I remembered doing a lot of that the summer I graduated high school. Instead, she got herself into a routine and was out jogging in the mornings when she wasn’t opening at the store. She kept herself busy if she was at home. One afternoon, she started to clean out her closet. I came up and helped her box a few things so she could take them to the donation center. I noticed that she was getting rid of many clothes that seemed brand new. I asked her about them and she that they were given to her by Alice but there was no way she could return them since Alice was gone. She also explained that her former friend’s taste in clothes were too fancy for her and as I looked at a few that still had tags with names I could barely pronounce, I had to agree with her.
She was also doing research on housing out around the Sam Houston State so I started to help her out. For a week, she gave me a list of addresses of apartments she found and then I’d in turn run a search to see how safe the neighborhoods were when I got to work. She also applied for student housing and we had been waiting to hear back to see if she was on the list. During our research, I told her I was tempted to get her a gun but she said that she’d most likely hurt herself than an intruder or something. I knew I was being nothing more than a nervous dad but it didn’t help that I was also a cop and my only daughter was moving away for college.

When neither one of us were working and I wasn’t over at Billy’s watching a ball game, Bella and I watched movies. She even surprised me and ordered pizza instead of cooking dinner. One weekend, she insisted that we spend it watching all three Lord of the Rings movies. It was like we were both making up for some lost time we didn’t get to spend together and if I had to do it all over again, I probably would have insisted on being the sole custodian.

I really enjoyed spending the time with her and it helped me realize that I was going to miss her once she left and the house would once again be empty. Still I had another month and a half left before she was planning on driving to college. I already requested some time off and let her know I’d drive with her and then fly back to Washington once she got settled in. She was happy about that but she made me promise that I won’t start singing to Willie Nelson songs when it was my turn to drive.

I came downstairs after snapping my phone shut. “Hey kiddo, I have to get into the office early so I’ll be skipping dinner. I’ll pack it up for later,” I said as I grabbed my uniform from the closet.

“No worries dad, I’ll pack it up. You get ready,” she said and got up from the couch and started to put the grilled pork chops in a microwave container.

The phone rang as I buttoned up my uniform and I heard Bella answer it. As I walked back out, she was still on the phone and pointed to my dinner that she had packed up for me. It sounded like she was talking to the university about housing. I finished putting on my belt and grabbed my service pistol before heading back to the kitchen to grab my food.

I turned to Bella and smiled. “Bye Bells, I’m heading to work,” I said quietly since she was still on the phone and she looked up and waved at me.
So there you go. I wasn’t sure if I should have added a tissue warning or not because I didn’t explicitly mention anything that would seem to indicate the need. BUT knowing what you’ve read in the prologue, this was the last moment between Bella and her dad.

The idea of Bella as a little girl talking about her kitten came from the Trace Adkins song, “She Thinks We’re Just Fishin’ – give it a listen if you haven't already. If I had to use a song for this chapter, that would have been it.

I didn’t want to describe the accident in detail. Just re-read the prologue if you’ve forgotten. The next chapter will take place right after the funeral.

Thank you very much, I hope you enjoyed it.

sushi
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

My fucking awesome beta Alexis.Danaan who was able to beta this in vamp speed. JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy who took the time to pre-read this.

I checked my driver’s license and I am not SM. I do like playing with Jasper and Bella a lot though.

Warning – I don’t know if you’d need it but you might want to have some tissues handy – just in case. So without further ado, we’re now post funeral and have officially caught up.

Chapter 10

Bella POV

Real time post funeral -

Numb. I just wanted to feel numb. Ever since that phone call I got in the middle of the night, I just wanted to not feel a damn thing. I wanted to run and hide from the news or forget. I wanted to forget how guilty, sad and awful I felt. I was probably the worst daughter in the world for thinking that way. It was supposed to be a happy time for me, a beginning of my adulthood. I was supposed to be picking out things for my dorm or apartment, not burying my dad.

When I got home, after spending a few hours at the wake, I carefully placed his flag and badge up on the mantle and brushed my fingers across them. Next to it, I placed the baseball that I gave him a couple months past. That baseball game seemed so long ago. I looked around the house, it felt so different, so empty now.

My arm started to throb, reminding me that the the pain killers had long worn off. The pills helped me get through the funeral earlier though I think it left me a little out of sorts. I unwrapped the gauze bandage to check the damage and hoped I didn’t pop my stitches from earlier today. The gash was now healing and no longer the angry red from a few days ago. It wasn’t bleeding either so I just left it alone and made a point to go get them removed tomorrow. I looked at the window in the living room remembering how I had punched through it in a fit of rage. The window was replaced, the gash was healing and soon, all that would remain would be a faint scar. I knew it was more though, the physical scar would probably go away, fade just as my other various scars I’ve received over the years but the emotional scar of my father’s death was something that would never fade. I looked at the crescent mark on my wrist and realized that this was just like the bite
mark and would never disappear or fade.

I got up and climbed up the steps. It felt like the weight of the world fell on my shoulders. There was so much to do and yet at the same time, I didn’t want to do much of anything. I sought solace in the shower as I hoped it would wash away the pain but it didn’t do anything to stop the ache in my chest. When I got out of the shower, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My eyes were bloodshot and swollen from having cried so much the past few days. There were dark circles were under my eyes from the lack of sleep. I looked like I had aged a decade or two and I felt it.

I headed to my room and grabbed an old t-shirt and shorts to wear before going back downstairs. I forced myself to eat dinner not really tasting my food; it could have been cardboard for all I knew. I grabbed a glass of water and headed back to the couch and I tried not to look at the mantle. I reached for my glass and drank not really paying attention and ended up spilling water on my shirt. The cold water startled me and I as I looked down to try and blot out the excess water, I noticed the logo on the heather grey t-shirt, ‘Forks Police Department’.

The tears flooded my eyes once more and I curled up on the couch and cried for hours, my hand clutching over my heart and my knees drawn up so I could hug them tightly against me. I felt like I was falling apart at the seams, the last few day’s events kept replaying in my head and I couldn’t make it stop. More tears fell and the haunting sounds of the bagpipes were the last thing I remembered.

Filtered daylight hit my eyes when I woke up to a pounding in my head. No, it wasn’t pounding in my head, though all that crying did give me a headache. Someone was knocking at the door.

“Coming,” I rasped out not caring about my appearance as I grabbed my head and stumbled to the door.

“Bella, I’ve been knocking for several minutes,” Renee huffed as she walked into the house with Phil in tow.

“Come on in,” I whispered cynically and pushed the door closed so it made loud noise causing me to grab my head again. I was starting to get upset that she had to start in on me like this. What was her problem?

“I am going to make some coffee, want some?” I asked and headed into the kitchen. I really didn’t care if they wanted coffee or not, I planned to make myself a big pot of it and drink it all today as I tried to figure out what to do.
“We had breakfast earlier, but thanks,” Phil said as the two of them sat down on the couch.

“Bella, you’re not going to sell the house are you? Are you still planning to move to Texas? I think you need to move to Florida.” Renee said as I counted to ten in my head in an effort to calm down.

“Can we please not get into this now? I just got up and I am in need of coffee,” I said as I walked up the stairs and tried to make myself look half way decent, buying time until I got my daily dose of caffeine.

I threw my hair into a messy pony tail and didn’t even bother changing. I didn’t care what I looked like and frankly, my mother was pissing me off with her attitude.

By the time I got back downstairs, the coffee had brewed and I ignored them as I went back into the kitchen. I took a deep breath, inhaling the aroma before I took a few gulps and closed my eyes. I could practically feel the liquid enter my blood stream and course through my veins as I slowly started to wake up.

“Bella, did you hear me?” Renee continued.

“What Renee?” I growled out. “What is your problem? I just buried my father yesterday. He died less than a week ago. Why are you doing this?”

I couldn’t help but lash out at her. Much of the anger and hostility had been building up ever since that car accident. I knew she somehow saw me as the cause but I wasn’t the one arguing on the phone while driving. There was instant hostility between the two of us as soon as I woke up in the hospital bed. It wasn’t like I didn’t suffer. I was recovering all summer long and she was only a patient for a few days for a possible concussion. Ever since then, we no longer saw eye to eye completely again. And now here we were at some sort of precipice or so it seemed. I didn’t need this hostility. What I needed was support and it angered me that I didn’t think I’d get it from my own mother.

She stood up and glared at me. “Doing what? I flew out here. We flew out here when we got the news. We dropped everything and flew out here for you,” she sneered with her hands on her hips.

I then realized that was the problem. She saw me as a burden. I inconvenienced her and her new life.
“Look, I don’t want or need your hostility. If you want to stay and help me get this house ready to sell and stuff that is fine. Otherwise, get the hell away from me,” I gritted out.

“Isabella Marie! You apologize to me. I’m your mother!”

I stopped and took a few steps towards her until I was not quite an arm’s length away from her. “I don’t think you know the meaning of being a mother, Renee. Thank you for coming. Now leave.” I continued to glare at her and she looked at me for a brief moment.

“Fine, don’t come crying to us if you need our help again,” she said and stomped out of the house.

“You shouldn’t talk to her like that,” Phil said quietly. “She’s been going through some things. She cares even though you don’t think so.”

“She has a funny way of showing it,” I replied coldly. “Ever since she got here, she’s acted like she’s doing me a favor. No, I don’t need that in my life. I’m tired of being walked over, Phil. If I am going to have some semblance of a normal life, I need to do this. I’ll still email on occasion but I no longer expect her to reply back. It isn’t like she has been responsive for a while.”

“For whatever its worth, I am sorry about everything,” he said and looked as though he was going to reach out to give me a hug but hesitated and walked out the door instead. I listened to the murmurings of the two as he must have tried to calm her down. I rolled my eyes as I heard the word “ungrateful” and the phrase, “I gave her everything” from Renee. My arms were crossed as I stared out the window at them as he finally got her into the car and drove away.

I wasn’t entirely pleased that I managed to isolate myself further by severing my ties with Renee but I thought it was simply best given all that transpired. The fact that she acted like I ruined her plans really bothered me. I needed her support not her condescending attitude. If she was back to being my flighty mom, like it was when I first moved back to Forks, I would have accepted that and embraced it, but things changed once again after I was dumped by the Jerk. I mean, I went to Phoenix thinking she was in danger at one point, I just didn’t understand. Was I that bad of a person that people wanted to leave me?

The sound of the coffee machine sputtering brought my attention back. I looked at the clock and
realized I had some time to get the stitches removed before noontime. I knew Dr. Mathers was going to stop by soon to check in on me. I think she really thought I might have been trying to harm myself when I punched through that window. I appreciated that she helped take me to the hospital to get stitched up and all but I really didn’t want to hurt myself. I was angry and reacted badly after everybody telling me how sorry they were. It just brought back some bad memories that I wanted to forget.

I refilled my mug and headed back upstairs to change into something more decent. As I got out of my bedroom, I took a glance at Charlie’s bedroom and felt the heartache once more. I walked over and before I even got to the threshold, the scent of his aftershave flooded my senses causing tears to well up. I wasn’t ready to go inside just yet, I didn’t have the strength to. Instead, I quietly shut the door, resting my forehead against it after I heard the soft click of the door closing.

I heard the sound of the doorbell and went back downstairs hoping that it wasn’t Renee or Phil once again. I looked through the peephole and it wasn’t anybody I recognized.

“Who is it?” I called from behind the door.

“Bells? I’m Sam from the reservation. I work at the garage with Jake. I’ve got your car.”

I opened the door and the man looked at me and then the paperwork. “Um... hey. I just got the paperwork and Uncle Billy asked that I dropped it off.”

I could tell he was a little uncomfortable being here given how my dad often visited the reservation. So often in fact that I often heard he considered Billy his brother.

“Thanks, do I need to sign anywhere?” I asked and smiled, trying to be as sociable as possible when a part of me really just wanted to crawl into a blanket and hide from the world.

“Yep here,” he said and pointed to a couple lines. “Say, are you planning to sell the red truck?”

“It is probably near it’s last tire, Sam,” I replied as I tried to recall what Jacob had said about the truck. “I think the engine’s seizing?” I had remembered hearing that term thrown around when describing the truck and hoped that made sense.

Sam chuckled. “Yeah, Jake’s told me about it. I have a cousin at a nearby tribe who likes to
overhaul cars and turn them into hot rods.”

“Um, okay, sure, what do I need to do to sell it?” I asked not really understanding everything he just said.

Within a few minutes, I signed over Ol’ Bessie’s title and I was given a check for a thousand dollars for it. I thanked Sam and closed the door. The visit from a tribe member had me thinking about yesterday and I was suddenly compelled to fix something that bothered me about yesterday.

It took four rings before the gruff voice answered, “Hello?”

“Billy?” I squeaked out and cleared my voice before continuing. “Hi, it... it’s Bella.”

I heard a soft gasp before he continued. “Bells, how are you?” his voice softened from the initial greeting.

“I’m still holding on,” I replied honestly. “Look, about yesterday when I saw you and Harry. I am... I... I’m sorry if I was rude,” I stuttered. I felt bad because they were Charlie’s best friends and I was so torn up and slightly fogged up in the brain from the pain killers that I could barely talk to them, much less look at them.

“Hey, it is alright,” he said gently. “We understand that it wasn’t easy.”

“It wasn’t easy but I had no right to be rude like that. You two were dad’s best friends and deserved more. I barely acknowledged you and that wasn’t fair, so I need to apologize,” I said quietly and paused for a few seconds. “Thanks for getting Sam to deliver the Blazer by the way. I really appreciate it. I just wished he was here to see it too.” I took a deep breath. “Look, the other reason why I called was to see if you and Jacob would like to come over the day after tomorrow? Harry too if he’d like.” I shut my eyes and gathered my strength in order to say the last part. “I... I might need your help with settling his affairs.”

“Oh... is Renee being difficult?”

“Yes and no. Yes she was so I gave her a piece of my mind and no, she’s gone so I doubt she’d want to help me.”
“Sure, we can be there the day after tomorrow. Is noon alright? We’ve got some tribal business later that evening that we can’t get out of.”

“No that is fine and thank you,” I said and hung up.

I reached into the pantry and pulled out some crackers to nibble on. I wasn’t really hungry but I didn’t want to make myself sick over this.

After that, I took the keys and got into the Blazer. It was a strange feeling since I knew Charlie had gotten me the car but the fact that he wasn’t here when it was delivered, it didn’t feel as heart breaking, just a little surreal. It was a smooth ride as I headed over to the hospital to get the stitches taken out. I played with the stereo, picking my stations and was happy that it even had an adaptor for my iPod.

When I got to the hospital, I heard that the truck driver who ran into my dad was still in a medically induced coma and was not expected to ever recover fully. I shrugged when I got that news and ignored the condolences, opting to just tune them out. I didn’t care about the driver and his condition. I really didn’t because nothing was going to bring my dad back. I practically stormed out of the hospital afterwards and grabbed a coffee on the way back.

An hour later, Dr. Mathers came by and we talked for a few minutes. I wasn’t really in the mood to talk about the past history about Renee but I told her instead that her attitude just from this trip alone drove me to say some harsh things and that it ended with my mother walking out the door. This was the first time the doctor made things feel more clinical than before as she listened to me and asked about how I was feeling otherwise. The doctor suggested that I could continue with formal counseling here and she could even refer me to someone if I wanted to go to find someone after my move. I told her that I’d think about it and that maybe I just needed to get some sort of closure. She said it was a good idea but to do it when I was ready and not rely on an artificial time table.

I thanked her and reassured her that I was going to be fine. She said that she will check-in in a couple days but that she was always a phone call away. I wasn’t sure what to think of that and a part of me really wanted to tell her to just “fuck off”.

For the rest of the day, I just lounged around on the couch and flipped through the channels aimlessly, as I tried to get out of the dark mood I was in. It was the middle of the afternoon and the sun was shining bright. A beam of light hit the couch as I laid there and watched some home show. The sun’s rays must have hit at the right angle because I noticed the soft shimmer of my skin where the bite mark was. That brought my thoughts back to that family that abandoned me.
I wondered if some of my hostility stemmed from their abandonment and it had just been building up; festering inside of me. I thought back on some of the things I said to Renee and Phil this morning and thought maybe that was part of the reason for me dismissing her. I was almost willing to guess it was because I didn’t want to be abandoned again and cut her off of my life before she had her chance to do so herself. As I continued to stare at my wrist, I wondered if Alice saw what was happening. Maybe not the accident itself but it made me wonder if she still caught glimpses of me. It was just another thing that added to my foul mood and it finally tipped me over the edge.

“Get over it Bella,” I muttered to myself. “If she did, she would have said something, wouldn’t you think? She was your best friend or so she said.” Prior to my birthday party, I would have said yes that she would most likely peer into the future to see what happened to Bella Swan. Post birthday party, given the way she looked after that damn paper cut, I wasn’t so sure.

“God, stop thinking about them! You were nothing but a goddamn distraction. You weren’t any more important than a fucking porcelain doll!” I yelled out and was thankful that neighbors were far away enough they wouldn’t hear. “You’ve GOT to stop thinking about them. They left you and moved on. You were nothing to them. You need to move on too.” I beat up on the couch cushions and screamed loudly some more. Anybody who could have heard me would probably have run away as I raged on for another half hour; screaming and cursing while punching and kicking the couch. By the time I was done, I was sweating and panting hard and I felt some relief in letting go like that. I was smarter this time and didn’t leave cuts or bruises like my window incident.

That was my moment when I realized I did need to move on, not just physically but emotionally as well. What was supposed to be a happy and exciting moment in my life as I was planning to move off to college was now a bittersweet one. I was almost certain that as I left for Texas, I’d be saying goodbye to Forks for good. As I stared at the contents that sat on the mantle, I realized that what memories I had, I could take away with me. No, I had to say goodbye to Forks and move on.
Chapter 11

BPOV

I spent the rest of the day vegging out and it was actually good for me. It was the first time in nearly a week that I felt like I could just let my mind and body relax - I was able to let go of the emotions, the pressure of the funeral and all the sadness, even if it just for a little while. I needed it and relished the quiet time and even though I was still sad and hurting, I didn’t cry as much as I had before. Given what I had been through, I thought it was progress. That evening, I even felt a little hungry and ate, this time not tasting bland cardboard but actual pasta. After washing the lonely set of dishes, I flopped back onto the couch and started flipping through the channels. I found a show that caught my eye and couldn’t stop watching. It took place at a Miami tattoo shop and I just sat there and watched a marathon series of episodes.

I fell asleep on the couch once again but it felt like I had more rest than I had in a while.

When I woke up the next morning, I felt more refreshed than I had been in what seemed like ages. It had to be a sign. I felt a sense of inspiration as I powered up my laptop and did a search on tattooing, watching some clips on YouTube. I always wanted one but I had that whole ‘faint at the sight of blood’ thing wouldn’t have boded well if I went and got one. Things had changed and the gash on my arm was evident of that. I figured if I could deal with my arm bleeding profusely over a busted window, I should be able to handle getting a tattoo.
It had to be a sign.

That became my mantra that morning as I got ready after finding a studio in Port Angeles. “Let’s do this,” I muttered and grabbed my keys and headed out the door with a sense of determination.

I found a studio that didn’t scream, ‘sailor tattoos’ to me and walked inside. The man at the counter was really nice. He recognized me from the papers and quickly sketched out a design after I told him that I wanted a swan tribute for my dad and where I wanted it. It was a beautiful, abstract design that sort of had a rock and roll vibe that reminded me of some of Charlie’s favorite album covers.

“That is perfect,” I said with a smile and he led me to the back of the room where I got ready and hoped I won’t pass out.

A couple hours later, I was sitting up sipping on a Coke as he applied the dressing and handed me a sheet of paper on how to care for the tattoo. I was proud of myself that I didn’t faint though I did get a little dizzy as I hopped off the table. The artist had to hold onto me to steady my feet and asked me to sit down once again. He explained it was not unusual to feel that way afterwards especially if the blood sugar was low or if I was tense or stressed. I grimaced and rubbed my jaw knowing that I was clenching it pretty tight partway during the session and apologized to him, embarrassed that I nearly passed out. The man explained that once I got the soda in my system, I should be fine and proceeded to tell me how he passed out the first time he got a tattoo and that it was even smaller than the one I got. I felt better knowing I didn’t make an ass of myself and I thanked him for all his help. After I felt steadier, I got back in the Blazer and drove down the street.

I stopped by the nearest grocery store and gathered the necessary supplies and other things before grabbing a burger at a fast food place. I wasn’t quite ready to go home and decided to drive around a little bit more after filling my tank up.

I had an idea of where I wanted to go but I wasn’t sure if I could commit to going there. I kept telling myself I couldn’t push myself to go there today but instead made it a goal that I’d try to go there before I left. As I got back on the road to Forks, it felt like there was a little compass inside of me that guided me to my destination.

Driving there was almost surreal. I wasn’t sure if I even knew how to get here or what I’d find, but a part of me had been wanting to go there, I felt like I needed to be there. The urge was nearly as strong as my mantra this morning, I was scared and nervous but I felt ready and determined. At the same time, I was hesitant. When I got to there, I found a wide shoulder area and parked the car.
Was it too soon to come here?

What was it that I was hoping to find?

Before releasing the death grip on the steering wheel, I took a deep breath in an effort to calm myself. I looked around and shut off the engine before hopping out of the SUV. It was quiet here, I couldn’t hear cars on this stretch of the two-lane highway. Even the trees were quiet. The only sound was the my heart pounding as I walked over to the narrow part of the road. Over there, a section of the guardrail stood out over the rest of the metal barrier. It was new and shiny; having recently been replaced. Nearby, on the asphalt, there were brightly spray-painted markings around that area; lines, words and arrows painted onto the road. None of the symbols made sense to me but I knew what it meant. This was the spot. Here.

I shut my eyes again to gather my strength and then went back to the car to grab the bouquet of flowers I had bought earlier. It was a small arrangement and I clutched it tightly against me as I slowly crossed the highway to the opposite side of the road. There was already a small makeshift memorial here; candles and wilted flowers were piled against the guardrail along with some hand written notes.

I walked over and stood behind the guardrail so that I was no longer standing on the highway as I took in the scene. I sat down and looked at the memorial taking some time to read some notes. Some were quick, hand-scrawled words of peace while others were cards with scripture quotes. I put them back, not wanting to disturb the spot and added my own flowers to the mix.

“I’m sorry daddy,” I whispered as I reached over the guard rail and touched some of the spray painted lines on the road. “I wish... I wish I didn’t just wave to you that night. I miss you so much.” My breath hitched and I fought the tears that threatened to flow once again. In my head, I pictured the mangled patrol car that had been crushed; the one that was in the paper the next day and I couldn’t stop the scream that erupted from my mouth.

The sound of my anguishing cry rang around me. I screwed my eyes shut and turned to face away from the road. I brought my knees up and hugged them tightly before burying my head in between fighting the urge to cry some more.

How long I stayed like that I wasn’t sure. I ended up mentally apologizing over and over again to my dad and I kept telling him that I loved him. I was just lost in my emotions.

“Well... isn’t this a pleasant surprise.”
My body froze and I slowly looked up in the direction of the voice. The hairs on the back of my head stood on alert and I started to breathe harder.

*Fuck, vampire!*

It was the one that had been with James and that red-headed woman that day that seemed so long ago. Another baseball memory. I swallowed hard and took a breath.

“What do you want?” I asked harshly; my voice sounding more brave than I actually felt.

“Why, I was going to visit the Cullens but they weren’t around,” he began and then I watched as he sniffed the air. “Did they leave you, cherie?” he asked and a sickeningly sweet smile began to form on his face but the darkening of his eyes told another story.

I wanted to tell him that they abandoned me but I couldn’t. I had a feeling that was not going to bode well for me if I did. His eyes were darkening even more from their reddish amber hue and I quickly turned away just as his smile widened to reveal his teeth.

*Think Bella, do something!*

“It’s... it’s... Laurent, right?” I whispered, stumbling over my words but knowing he could hear me. I knew I couldn’t run, my experience with an obsessed, human drinking vampire was proof enough. I unconsciously rubbed the scar on my wrist as I tried to gather my wits. If I couldn’t run from them, I hoped that maybe I could appeal to his kindness.

“You remember, cherie,” he said and his lips curled in a slight sneer. His eyes were pitch black now. “So tell me, are you alone?” He moved closer.

Before I could open my mouth to respond, a loud roar echoed through the trees causing me to snap to attention and I jumped up. Birds flew out of the surrounding trees heading straight into the sky. Seeing my movement, Laurent crouched as though he was ready to spring at me.

*Fuck!*
My brain was telling me to run but my body was frozen in fear. I braced myself for the impending impact. A blur suddenly appeared out of my peripheral and knocked Laurent out of my way. It took a few seconds for me to process what just occurred and the only thing I could guess was that it was another vampire.

_Oh god, what if they’re both after me? Run, dammit!_

I remained frozen as I continued to watch the moving blur in front of me. My brain was once again screaming at me to move and I should have but I couldn’t. I was caught up in the whirling blurs of dark hair and blond; that was all I could see or thought I could see. I heard the growls and snarls from the combatants and they sounded scarier than caged animals at a zoo during feeding time.

The sound of metallic screeching broke me out of my immobile state and I quickly covered my ears from the noise, it was loud and high-pitched. When one screech ended, another seemed to begin. In a way I was glad that these two beings were too fast for my human vision. I couldn’t imagine what was going on out there. My brain wanted to kick my ass so I’d get the fuck out of here, drive off to safety but I couldn’t.

It made me wonder if I had a death wish.

The sounds of crashing trees now added to the macabre symphony of sounds sending a chill down my spine. I knew it was dangerous but instead of feeling absolute terror over the situation like earlier, it felt a little thrilling and exciting.

_Yep, I have a death wish. That could only explain what the hell is wrong with me._

I stood there and contemplated my dilemma wondering if I really needed to seek professional help. Would they lock me away for this? Would I be in one of those padded rooms? The noises continued and I got lost in my thoughts.

Silence.

I looked up and realized that everything was once again still. Several trees had been uprooted with broken trunks and branches scattered about. There were vampire parts everywhere on the ground in front of me. The blond vampire was gathering up the various pieces, tossing them into a pile. He was probably less than a half a football field away as I continued to stare at the ghastly scene in
front of me. My eyes went from the growing pile of vampire parts to the scattered pieces that was strewn all over, some of them were starting to twitch and slither on the ground much to my horror.

I desperately tried to squeeze my eyes shut when I saw Laurent’s head. His face was mangled with scratches and gauges all over. Oozing liquid poured out of his wounds. Laurent’s eyes darted around wildly in an effort to reunite with his missing pieces.

I shook my head and looked at the other vampire instead. He had blond hair that curled slightly and he was tall, lean and muscular. As he bent over to pick up parts, I could see his powerful leg muscles underneath his worn jeans. He had his sleeves of his black long sleeve t-shirt scrunched up to his elbows revealing his pale stone-like skin. He was still facing away from me, tossing piece after piece into the growing pile. I just continued to stare at him, dumbly.

I slowly moved my head around to see where the SUV was in relation to where I was. I kept my gaze at the man and walked slowly towards my car hoping not to draw attention before I turned and crossed the highway to my car. I was nearly there when I was suddenly spun around and was now facing him.

He was tall alright and at eye-level, all I saw was his muscular chest. It was heaving as if he was trying to catch his breath but I knew it wasn’t needed. My eyes slowly made their way upwards until I saw his face and my knees nearly buckled as I recognized who it was.

Jasper!

This wasn’t the same Jasper, though. He was dressed differently than the last time I remembered and I could see some red surrounding his darkened irises.

Oh god, red eyes on Jasper!

I suddenly felt dizzy as my world shattered again. Surely this meant that my luck had just run out after three supernatural beings, first James, then Laurent and now Jasper. Why me? The third time was not much of a charm for me as I stood there in front of someone who I once considered family. But I no longer had a family did I? This had to be my fate and I had to face the music. I couldn’t run from it anymore.

I wanted to stop the pain that was building up in my chest.
I shouldn’t have come here today, but that was too late to think about that now.

The pain from my chest got stronger as I stood, almost frozen. I was breathing hard and instinctively my hand clutched at my shirt as I tried to catch my breath. I was hurting from the pain of being here and of seeing him in front of me. But I wasn’t afraid anymore.

I looked up at the sky and then looked over at the guard railing. If I were to go, maybe it was best that I did it here, the same place Charlie died. I sank down on my knees and looked down as I whispered a prayer and hoped it would be painless. He once told me I was ‘worth it’ and I believed him. Maybe he’d show mercy and make it quick. A single tear ran down my cheek and fell to the ground as I tilted my head, exposing my neck and waited for the pain. I embraced death.

Chapter End Notes

Bella's Tattoo (you'll have to c&p it)
http://i18.photobucket.com/albums/b135/hockeybrat29/Fan%20Fic/BellasTat.jpg
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Originally, the previous chapter posted and there was the normal 1 week before this was ready to post so yeah, it was an evil cliffhanger, to say the least.

Thank you to my favorite Canadian, AlexisDanaan for beta’ing this bad boy. She just fucking rocks. JaspersWoman, thanks for pre-reading this, I LOVE your reactions. Finally, to DarkNNerdy, she’ll drop what she’s doing just to read an excerpt and give me feedback and make sure I’m not overloading on the cheese factor.

Last I checked, I’m not SM. If I was, I would have had Bella with Jasper from the get go. :)

Warning - some violence.

Chapter 12

JPOV

The three of us were laughing over some comedy show Peter had on his satellite radio when he pulled onto the property. We had spent the past few days down in Mexico on a hunting trip. Peter and Char hunted coyotes, the humans that smuggled people across the border and usually, they did it under deplorable conditions. While they spent their time running out in the desert in search of dinner, I hung out in cantinas and waited until I found a nice drug smuggler to feed from.

As soon as we got to the house, I went inside and got online to catch up on the news after having been away from the media for a few days. It was then that I saw a picture of Isabella and the headline accompanying the picture, ‘Small Town in Washington Mourns Beloved Police Chief’.

“Oh fuck,” I muttered and my brother and sister appeared immediately.

“What happened?” Char asked and I pointed to the article on the computer.

“Jasper, I am so fuckin’ sorry, I wish I had known,” Peter said quietly.
“We didn’t know. Don’t blame yourself, you know as well as I do, your gift doesn’t work like that.” I said and ran back upstairs to grab my bag and my clothes. “Shit, I could be blamed too, I should have left here earlier,” I muttered.

Peter huffed, “I know, you’re right. I just wish sometimes I’d get images that are more useful than who wins the Kentucky Derby.”

I patted him on his back. “You know we can’t go back in time. We can’t blame ourselves. I’m just gonna go now and see if she needs anything.”

“Jasper, go to your girl,” Char said quietly, moving to wrap her arms around Peter. “He knows the extent of his gift. He just wishes he could do more. We’ll be fine. Just make sure she is.”

I sent them my appreciation and ran to my bike and was on the highway in no time. When I was able to, I pushed the bike to its limits. During the day, I threw on my riding gloves and made sure not an inch of flesh was showing as I continued my journey to Washington. As I headed north, my mind kept picturing that image of Isabella looking so broken and sad, as she stood there in front of the wooden casket. I probably should have headed to Forks by foot but I needed the fresh air to clear my head from seeing that over and over in my head.

I reached the city limits of Bozeman, Montana just before dawn, the cooler mountain air was a pleasant change from the humidity in Texas. I kept passing billboards offering assistance to those addicted to crystal meth and figured this might be a good place to go for a quick meal before I got to Forks. I wasn’t quite hungry but I figured if there was any chance I’d be close to Isabella, I didn’t want to lose control. I found a drug dealer lurking in between a couple run down buildings and noted the distinct odor of the familiar chemicals. I grabbed him and drained the fucker quickly before dumping him in one of the buildings and set up an explosion.

By the time I got to the Cullens’ mansion, it was afternoon. I didn’t have time to reminisce as I left my bike on their driveway and ran. A vampire had been here recently and from the scent of it, it was no more than an hour old and it was familiar. I had find him and find out what he was doing here. The pull became stronger as I ran through the wooded area. The vampire scent became more pronounced as well as I ran about 25 yards parallel along a two lane highway.

When I caught up to him, I was still in the woods and I heard him talking to someone. My chest hurt bad now and I didn’t need my brother’s gift to realize the reason. Remembering how Edward always said she was a danger magnet, it wasn’t a complete surprise when I caught her familiar scent. It was her but her scent had changed just slightly, most likely due to her body maturing, there was more lavender than freesia and it was even more intoxicating.
“What do you want?” I heard her sweet voice trying to sound brave.

“Why, I was on my way to visit the Cullens but they weren’t around. Did they leave you, chérie?” he asked.

A growl built up in my chest as I felt Laurent’s deception and his growing hunger, hunger for my Isabella.

*MINE!*

“It is... Laurent, right?” she continued to ask and I felt her fear.

“You remember, chérie,” he said. “So tell me, are you alone?”

His footsteps moved and I knew he was after her. I roared out in fury shaking the trees and ran head-on at him. As I got near, I lowered my shoulder and used it to knock Laurent away from her.

I was fuckin’ furious at what could have happened. His hunger was strong and the look in his eyes said that his supposed change in diet when he was with the Denalis was not real. It explained why he was always conveniently gone each and every time we dropped by to visit. That also explained why I didn’t automatically place the scent right away either.

His fear brought a smile to my face as my demon got out of his cage. Laurent had wanted to lure Isabella to feed on her, I didn’t need my gift to feel the bloodlust that poured off his body. For that, he would pay. I bit down on his shoulder tearing a piece of flesh out and spat it onto the forest floor. I sent more fear to him, rendering him nearly immobile as I pummelled his face and tore pieces of it before raking my fingers down, ripping his flesh and cheekbones apart.

I felt her watching us or rather, trying to watch the scene before her. She was a little frightened but there was an undercurrent of fascination that was starting to build. I pushed that aside for now as I concentrated on the vampire that had just tried to attack what was mine.

The anger I thought I had let go out in Texas came back full force and I unleashed it on Laurent. All the anger - the rage I felt as I was led to believe I had no control, living under the constant scrutiny of the Cullens and whatever that went through Alice’s mind the day of the birthday party was used as I mutilated his body and tore out his limbs. I thought about the pain and hurt when I
realized Isabella was left to mourn on her own as I bit into him and injected him with my venom causing him to writhe and scream in pain. My demon enjoyed hearing those cries, he snarled and growled with approval. Finally, I channeled the pure rage that my mate was in danger and I had to save her as I ripped Laurent into smaller pieces and let them fly all over the the ground surrounding me.

By the time I was done, other than his head, Laurent was pretty much unrecognizable. It felt good to finally let go that anger for good. I slowly came back to my senses as my demon sauntered back into his cage. I could feel Isabella’s curiosity as I started to throw the body parts into a pile. I hadn’t turned around just yet. I knew my eyes were slowly receding from the blackness and I didn’t want to frighten her. I could still feel her emotions though, she was curious and slightly fascinated but I could feel that it disturbed her to realize that.

The pull on my chest was stronger and I started to feel pangs coming off of Isabella as well but her grief nearly brought me to my knees so I kept my back towards her as I tried to center myself and figure out where to go from here.

I lit my Zippo and started the fire deep in the pile and set the head on top. The fire would burn from within and and slowly smoulder his gaping wounds, causing even more pain before his venom caught fire. By the time it reached his head, many of his parts would be nothing but ash.

I heard her slowly turn from the scene and walk slowly away. I looked up and quickly blurred over to her just before she reached her Blazer. I had to see her, I needed to see her. As I got closer, I caught a scent of blood, her blood and my eyes darkened a little and I suppressed a growl. It wasn’t from hunger but blood meant she was hurt. I was already still breathing hard from my fight with Laurent but now I was also concerned as I started to feel her pain and smell her sweet blood. My instincts were telling me to check her and make sure she was alright but I had to fight through that because I knew she was human and she wouldn’t understand right away. Last thing I needed was to have her interpret my need to check her for injuries as hunger and not concern.

She stood in front of me staring at my chest for while before her eyes moved slowly upwards. To say she was shocked was an understatement when she saw me. Her legs nearly collapsed from under her and I wanted to reach out and hold her. But then I felt her despair on top of her already heavy emotions and it was my turn to buckle under from her pain and grief. I glanced around quickly noting the freshly repaired guard rail and the spray painted road. I understood now that she was hurting bad because this was the scene of her father’s accident.

“Dear god, please know that I’ll forgive Jasper. It was never his fault. Please let him show mercy on me,” she whispered softly as she fell to her knees.

I watched incredulously as I felt her resignation and with her eyes shut, she turned to the side and
exposed her neck to me. There was no fear coming off of her, it was as though she accepted her fate, the wrong one, I might add and I wanted to throttle her for thinking I was going to kill her. When I saw that single tear fall down her face and onto the ground, I had no choice but to change my course. I knew right then that I had to take my time with her. I couldn’t just blurt out that we were mates, she wouldn’t understand and she’s been through so much recently.

I walked over to her slowly and picked her up. I wasn’t super gentle like she was a puff of air but I wasn’t going to leave bruises on her as I gathered her in my arms as casually as I could.

I fought with myself to nuzzle close to her and breathe her in. I was close enough though that I could take a deep breath and smell her intoxicating floral scent, it calmed me down slightly. I wanted to enjoy her warmth against me but I still smelled fresh blood on her and hoped that once we got into the car, I could find out what was going on. I held her as close as I could without alarming her and reached her SUV.

“Keys Isabella?” I whispered to her, and hoped like hell that she wouldn’t panic.

I felt her reach into her pocket and pull them out as I walked us to her passenger side. I set her on the seat and belted her in before I got into the driver’s side. I made a few seating adjustments and started the motor. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see she was watching me as I headed back on the highway to her house. Some of her fear came back but it wasn’t an alarming amount as it was when she was face to face with Laurent. The trepidation and wariness coming from her though was much stronger.

“You’re hurt.” I said simply. I really didn’t know what to say given that we never spent time together and all of a sudden I showed up and battled a vampire in front of her. I was also a little nervous, last thing I wanted to do was throw her into a state of panic or something and then I’d have to use my gift to knock her out.

“No, I’m fine,” she stammered.


“No, I... I really am fine,” she said and was suddenly concerned. She looked down and bit her lip. “I just got a tattoo, I’m sorry.”
I looked at her. “Why are you apologizin’?” I asked. To say I was curious about her tattoo was an understatement. Surely this was the same Isabella Swan that fainted at the sight of blood, wasn’t it?

“The scent. It must bother you and remind you of dinner,” she said quietly, her eyes were on me as I continued to drive.

I chuckled at her words. “Darlin’ I won’t lie, your scent is alluring but that doesn’t mean I want to have you for dinner.” I quickly looked over at her and her breath hitched as she saw my eyes but still, her fear tamped down even further. “You aren’t exactly my choice for dinner.”

She was curious and continued to stare at me. “Oh? Um, what is your dinner then?” I felt embarrassment coming off of her as she blurted that out.

I decided to keep the conversation light as we headed towards the city limits. “Oh, you know, drug pushers, muggers, and all around bad guys,” I said as nonchalantly as I could. “Now, since you asked me something sort of personal, what kind of tattoo did you get?”

“It is on the back of my shoulder, sort of a memorial for Charl- my dad,” she whispered.

“I am sorry about your dad. He was a good man,” I said and turned into her drive. “I didn’t know him but I know he was well liked and respected by the community.”

I shut off the engine and handed her the keys.

She stared at them and worried her bottom lip. “Thank you, he was,” she whispered softly before taking a breath. I could feel her steeling herself as she spoke again. “Jasper, thank you for taking me home. Can I ask you something?”

“Sure, ask away,” I replied and felt sadness coming off of her as well as loneliness. She took a deep breath. “What are you doing here and why are you feeding off of humans? Will you be here for long? What was Laurent doing here. Are they here with you too?”

I laughed. “Well, that is more than askin’ something.” I didn’t want this moment to end and if she was curious about me, well, I’d be more than willing to tell her everything. I didn’t want to hide the notion that we were mates but I reasoned that she needed time to understand. “Would you like
She looked towards the house and thought for a minute. She was still wary but I could feel pangs of loneliness coming from her, stronger than before. She looked at me briefly and then back to the house, I could almost imagine her thinking if she should invite me in or not and if she’d be safe.

“Hey, if it is any consolation, I am not thirsty at all, I just fed earlier this morning,” I said quietly.

She looked away for a brief second and then looked as though she nodded to herself. “Okay, let’s talk there, I need to remove the dressing on my shoulder anyway.” She reached behind my seat and grabbed a shopping bag.

We both got out of the car and as much as I wanted to be the Southern man I was and open her door and all, I didn’t want to overwhelm her all at once. Now that I was here and we were talking, I didn’t want to fuck things up by being too overbearing like Edward was towards her.

When we got into the house, she excused herself to run upstairs to clean off her tattoo. There was some worry coming off of her as she must have been concerned about the blood. I sat down on the couch and waited. I had never been in this house before as I took in the surroundings, it was cozy and comfortable, not ostentatious. I saw the flag and badge over on the shelf along with some pictures of her as a child and a baseball. My dead heart broke knowing what she had to have gone through recently.

All of a sudden I heard her hiss out in pain. “Shit that hurts!”

I was upstairs in flash and saw that Isabella had taken her sweatshirt off and had a small tanktop on. The bandage had soaked through as it looked like she tried to reach for it. I tried not to stare at her body and kept my eyes above her neck.

Embarrassment rolled off, “Sorry, I... I just couldn’t reach it without pulling too hard and I think it is sticking to the tat.”

“May I?”

She looked at my eyes as if to gauge me and then nodded. She was still hesitant but she turned her back towards me and pulled her hair aside. I could feel a low but steady amount of trust coming
from her, it felt good and it made me hopeful. She continued to stare at me through the mirror.

I kept my movements slow as I reached for the bandage. I wanted to run my hands all over her creamy soft skin and taste her on my tongue but I couldn’t. Instead, I moved closer to her, relishing the warmth radiating from her body. I reminded myself to be patient. There was plenty of time in the world and being that she was still human, I had to be patient.

I moved my hands towards her shoulder and slowly started to peel off her the plastic bandage material careful to avoid touching her skin. “So how do you take care of a tattoo?” I asked having not had the experience of getting one back in my day.

“Humans didn’t have them during your time?” she asked curiously.

“No ma’am if there were, they might have had other connotations not like today, but we’ll talk about my history another day, if you’re interested,” I said with a wink and noticed a spike of curiosity coming off of her.

“You will?” she asked still looking at me in the mirror.

I nodded.

“Well, I am supposed to clean it with mild soap and put this ointment on for the next few days,” she explained and pointed to the items on the bathroom counter and then pointed to the instructions. “I guess I didn’t realize how difficult it would be to reach the spots though.” There was some embarrassment coming off of her as she admitted that.

“I could help if you’d like. That is, if you’re comfortable with me being near you like this.”

“I am but are you? I mean this is basically a wound and you said earlier, you could smell the blood,” she said quietly and I could feel her concern and maybe some fear.

“Let’s just say I have a lot more control than even I thought I had,” I said and threw her bandage into this trash can. “Now, don’t you normally faint at the sight of blood?”
“Oh that,” she said with a small smile. “I guess we can talk about that another day, if you’re interested,” she said as she threw the words I had said to her earlier back at me.

“Fair ‘nough,” I said with a nod and chuckled softly. “Turn your shoulder towards the sink. It is a beautiful design, I think he would have loved it.”

I felt her appreciation as she turned towards me, tears glistening in her eyes, “Thank you, I wanted something special.” She reached with her other hand towards the swan tattoo and grimaced when she realized she couldn’t reach the entire thing. “Shit, um, can you help me?”

I nodded and took the bottle of soap and put a little onto my hands and ever so gently, touched her shoulder with the pads of my fingertips. I heard her soft gasp as soon as I touched her and I felt a small spike of longing. I felt every raised line as I carefully washed the drying blood and ink off her shoulder. Her skin rivaled the finest silk and once again, I fought the urge to press my lips to it and taste her warm, sweet skin. I shut my eyes as I tried to focus at the task in hand. I didn’t want to frighten her and rush into things and I found myself wanting to get to know her and I really wanted to her to get to know me without any influences. I turned on faucet not really knowing how warm was too warm for her.

“I need to rinse your shoulder, is the water temperature, alright?” I asked and breathed in her scent when she turned slightly.

She tested the water with her finger and adjusted the temperature. “Here, you can use this cloth to rinse,” she said and handed me a worn soft cloth.

I carefully wiped her skin clear of the soap and patted her skin dry. The relief on her face mirrored what I was feeling inside.

I stepped back and watched as she grabbed the jar and turned towards the mirror as she started to spread the ointment onto her her skin. “I can’t get that spot, can you get that for me?” she asked.

I used my fingertips again to make sure her entire design was covered in the gooey substance.

She looked up at me with those beautiful chocolate brown eyes. “I need to eat something. You can stay if you’d like or come back later if the smell bothers you.”

I shrugged and headed downstairs. “I’m good, are you?”
“Surprisingly yes,” she admitted as she walked down the stairs and into the kitchen.

I sat down on the kitchen table and watched as she got some dinner ready. Esme had often cooked human food so I was sort of used to the unappetizing scent. Hanging out in bars also made me a little tolerable about the odor and so long as I didn’t have to ingest that shit or cook it myself, I was fine. She popped her food into the microwave and pushed the timer. While she was waiting for her dinner, she kept looking over at me as though I was going to either disappear or suddenly turn and attack her. There were so many questions I had of her just as I am sure she had of me.

When the buzzer sounded she reached in and grabbed her food using her elbow to shut the door. She set her food across from me and sat down.

I watched as she ate her food in silence, I could feel her curiosity growing as she looked up at me and my eyes a few times but we kept silent for the most part. I was busy looking at her and noticed the different changes from the last time I saw her. I noticed her scar on her arm from James and a jagged cut that was healing on the other, the impressions of stitches were still noticeable. There was also a burn scar on her other wrist. She had a small smattering of freckles across the bridge of her nose; almost invisible to the human eye. Her hair was a little shorter and layered now and I liked how it created waves down her back. She had matured a little more in the past few months. Her feminine curves were more noticeable and delectable. Her eyes though, she looked tired and I guessed it was partly because of the events that took place recently but they were still beautiful, she was beautiful.

When she got done I watched as she washed the dishes and grabbed a glass of water. She was cautious but I could also feel the beginnings of lust and longing as well.

What was she thinking?

She motioned me to follow her to the couch. She sat down on one end and I took a spot on the opposite end. I watched as she placed the glass on the table and then she looked at me and I felt some uncertainty coming from her.

I decided to start get the ball rolling. “Alright darlin’ ask away.”

The proverbial not-so-mysterious POV
Red eyes... smell of blood... brown eyes... kneeling on the ground... tilted head... fire... blackness...

I replayed the vision for the 205th time in my head. I recognized both sets of eyes anywhere, even though his were no longer gold, I knew whose they were. My original plan was thwarted months ago when I threw that party, I wanted a bloodbath that night and got none but I was successful in separating her from him.

I had to be patient and let things play out because my visions of opulence and high-end shopping sprees never wavered which meant my destiny was still there. I also knew that meant that sooner or later, they would meet up again. I fought hard to suppress the giggle as I sat at the cafe and pretended to sip coffee and replay 206 in my head.

*I couldn’t have scripted it better myself.*

I always knew he wasn’t for me but I played my part. I convinced the family of his lack of control, and they ate that right out of my hand. What I didn’t know was they had a bond until that moment but it didn’t matter, he reverted back to his diet and now was being offered sweet blood. How could he resist?

I clapped my hand over my mouth as the giggle escaped my lips. I couldn’t help it. As soon as he destroyed his mate, he would destroy himself. It was perfect.

*Now, onto the next phase.*

I had to once again play the part for their sake. Be the doting daughter and sister once again before I destroyed them.

I grimaced as that sharp pain pierced through my head again. They were coming more frequent now so it was good I was going back to the family. Maybe I’ll get some answers to why I was getting them.

I looked at my shopping bags stacked on the two chairs and reached into my Chanel purse. I pulled out my cell phone and dialed the number.
“Yes, I’d like to book a flight from Paris to Anchorage, please. First class for Alice Hale Cullen.”
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

In the last chapter, I wanted to show a little uncertainty from Jasper since he had never been “allowed” to be near Bella before because of his “control.” Now that he’s in Forks, he wasn’t sure how to act around her.

Thank you AlexisDanaan for making this look pretty to post. JaspersWoman for pre-reading and DarkNerdy for reading excerpts as I write them out and being there to bounce ideas off of. You ladies all rock and I love you HARD!!!

I am not SM nor do I play her in a movie either.

Chapter 13

BPOV

I couldn’t help but look up every so often to make sure Jasper wasn’t a figment of my imagination. Of course, if he was, I never would have pictured him with the non-preppy clothes and that drawl. I certainly wouldn’t have pictured him with red eyes. He must not have been my imagination then. I took another bite of my dinner as I continued to wonder if I was on the verge of some sort of breakdown because I wasn’t freaking out. Those red eyes should have had me screaming and running in the opposite direction. Instead, I felt like I was almost drawn to them.

*Shit, he sees me looking at him, look down!*

I finished my dinner and tried not to look up at him again. Instead, as I started to wash my dishes, I thought about how earlier, he helped clean my fresh tattoo - those very hands that had ripped apart a vampire were so gentle as he took care of me. It was probably one of the most sensual things I’ve experienced and a part of me sort of hoped he’d help me again.

*Wait, oh no, he probably felt what I just thought. Yikes!*

Something told me we’d have time to talk but where do I start? I wiped my hands dry and then grabbed a glass of water before waving my hand towards the living room. I sat down on one end and watched as he sat down on the other. I looked at him not really knowing how to begin this.
His eyes softened and a smile appeared on his face. It wasn’t a maniacal smile that was on Laurent’s face earlier today. No, this was a real smile, full of warmth and sincerity. “Alright darlin’ ask away.”

I thought for a moment and tried to figure out which questions I really wanted answers to and which could wait. “Are you here alone?” I asked quietly.

“Yeah, I left them a few months ago, Isabella. I got tired of them treating me like a child so I went and rediscovered myself, if you will,” he explained.

Normally, I hated my full name being used but the way my name rolled off his tongue, it sounded... nice.

“What caused it, if I may ask?”

“Well, for decades I was always treated like I was the weakest link, that I’d attack a town on a whim because I couldn’t control myself. I was nothing more than a bad seed and never trusted.”

I got pissed off at his comment. “That is bullshit! You are not a fucking weak link, Jasper Hale!” I exclaimed.

“Isabella, you’ve got quite a mouth on you,” he grinned, as if he approved, “and the name’s Whitlock now, or rather, it’s back to Whitlock - my human name. Hale died on a place crash soon after he divorced his wife Alice,” he said and laughed.

What?!

“Wait, divorced? Really? Whitlock, huh?” I blurted out. I was dumbfounded and it showed with my reaction. “Sorry, I guess you think my language is unbecoming too?” I challenged.

Yeah, I was truly convinced I had I couple screws loose by giving attitude to a vampire.
“I don’t care about your language. You can fuckin’ cuss all you want, it doesn’t bother me. I tend to drop the f-bomb myself on occasion. Does that bother you?” he asked with a quirk of his eyebrow.

“No, it doesn’t bother me at all,” I admitted and took a deep calming breath. “I guess you can say I sort of went through a bit of a rediscovery as well. Maybe not as elaborate as yours that involved a plane crash but I sort of found me again,” I joked. “Wait, so they didn’t trust you? I saw you at the party, you were the only whose eyes didn’t darken when I cut myself. You. Even Carlisle’s eyes got darker. I saw it. It wasn’t until the Jerk tossed me like a fucking rag doll, that you lost it but your ability did that to you, didn’t it? You felt it from everybody.”

I watched as he looked out the window quickly and sighed. “Yeah, I was fine up until you were thrown and sliced your arm, I’m sorry. For what it’s worth though, for months, I gave those feelings right back at them and then left. Of course, the Jerk, as you call him, had to put his two cents in and demanded that I give the Cullen crest back, that I was no longer family until I returned.”

“Really?” I replied in shock. I was also impressed with how he handled leaving them too. “That sanctimonious bastard. I suppose nobody intervened either?” I looked up at him and knew. “No, of course not,” I muttered. “Well, maybe not being a Cullen is a good thing don’t you think?”

Once again, he smiled and I found myself smiling along with him. “You know, I think you have a good point there, Isabella.”

“So... um... how long are you going to be here for?” I asked with trepidation. I found myself scared that he’d up and leave, just like everyone else.

“I am not sure,” he said. “Given the events today out on that highway, I need to make sure something like that doesn’t happen again. If Laurent came after you, there could be a chance that the redhead might as well. Do you have a cell phone?”

“Huh?” My brain had started to drift off when hinted that there could be another crazy vampire after me. “Oh... phone?” I walked over to my purse that I had left by the doorway and grabbed the phone. “It is for emergency, I don’t use it much.”

I watched as he pulled his phone out of his pocket and programmed the numbers. “Would you mind if I put you on my plan? The phone calls are free between us,” he explained.
“Sure, I guess. I don’t want to be any trouble though,” I countered.

“No trouble at all. I even programmed my number to your speed dial. Just press 1 if you need me.”

“So you’ll be near by?” I asked and hoped he said yes if he was able to tear apart Laurent. As crazy as I was feeling, I really didn’t want to become some blue plate special for a crazy vampire.

“Yes I will, after you sleep, I plan to run a perimeter around to make sure there aren’t other scents in the area.”

“Are you going to stay at their house?” I asked and a part of me hoped that he’d say no, after all, he saved my life today. What if crazy vampires came here, would I be safe if he was over there? The events of today and the past week had really done a number on me and my body was telling me I needed to sleep. I fought a yawn as I continued to look at him.

“I’d like to go back and check it out, make sure I’m not missing any clues,” he replied cryptically. “Would you like me to stay here?” he asked and I nodded almost immediately not really wanting to be alone.

“Hang on,” I got up and opened the front door and grabbed the spare key that was hidden under a fake rock and went back inside. “Here, that way you don’t have to climb windows and shit.” I said not wanting to relive memories of that Jerk.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” I said with a small smile. I felt my eyelids getting heavy as the toll of the day was finally catching up to me. “Hey, can you do me a favor and help me clean this again so I can sleep? I’d like to talk some more but I think the day has worn me out.” I hoped he would say yes.

“I sure can,” he said and I climbed the stairs.

At the top of the stairs I turned and looked at him as he was following me at human speed. We were now sort of eye to eye. “I just wanted to say, I am really grateful you were there today,” I said and hoped he could tell that I really was, not counting my breakdown at the end.
“I am glad I was there, Isabella,” he said and smiled.

He helped me clean my tattoo again and this time I couldn’t look at him. I actually had to look down onto the sink to keep from getting too distracted. The way his fingertips felt against my skin caused my heart to start pounding hard but I wasn’t afraid. His touches felt different compared to the Jerk. Jasper’s skin didn’t feel icy cold against me, it was warmer than ice and the trails of his fingertips left my skin feeling almost tingly, like tiny electric shocks against my skin. It felt good and I was a little disappointed when he stopped.

He waited out in the hallway as I got ready for bed and I was surprised he came in and tucked me in and whispered good night before going back downstairs.

I was asleep almost immediately and felt an inner peace that I hadn’t felt in a long time.

When I woke up the next morning, I felt almost like a new person and wondered if I had just had a crazy nightmare. Then I saw my black dress on the floor by the hamper and realized that everything I had gone through was not a dream. I yearned for some sort of normalcy in my life and when my eyes saw my running shoes, I knew that would help clear everything in my head.

I got up and changed into some running clothes and ran to the bathroom before heading down the stairs. I stopped right before I reached the bottom. There, sitting on the couch was Jasper with his Macbook.

“Hey... I mean, morning,” I said.

“Mornin’ Isabella. You sound surprised.”

I furrowed my brow but I was grateful he didn’t call me on the emotions but rather my tone of voice. “I guess I was,” I admitted. “A part of me was hoping it was a bad dream, not you but the rest, the past week and all.”

“Do you need help with your tattoo?”

“No, maybe later, I just smeared some of that goopy stuff on. Um, I’m going to head for a run, it sometimes helps me clear my head,” I explained and grabbed my keys.
“Hang on a sec.” I watched as he typed something up on his laptop. “Can you show me your running route? I just want to make sure I can be close by to prevent you from running into a surprise.”

I noticed that he emphasized the word surprise and I automatically knew what he was referring to. “Is that a possibility?” I walked over to him and was there was a map of Forks that he had pulled up.

“I didn’t smell any other scent when I ran a perimeter last night. I also sort of created my own territory using my own and want to make sure you’re within that but I don’t want to take any chances.”

I nodded and wondered where he learned all this from. I almost felt like he was part of the Secret Service or something as I traced a loop on the map in his computer. “Thank you for not just trying to follow me,” I whispered knowing damn well the jerk would have.

“You need your quiet time and I want to give you the opportunity to do that without me around,” he said with a shrug. “I’ll run ahead and if you run into trouble, just call my name. I’ll be there in a flash.”

“Thanks, I will,” I promised. I really hoped once I left this damn state, I could get away from those memories. “I’ll be back in less than an hour.”

With that I grabbed my iPod from my purse and headed out the door. Despite the fact that there was a chance that I had a vampire that might come after me and I had a Secret Service vampire making sure I was fine, the run did me some good. I did some sprints along the way and felt the burn on my legs that distracted me from the ache in my heart. My thoughts became more clear and I felt myself relax after I got to the coffee shop, my half-way point.

“Bella! How are you doing?” Ashley called from the counter and handed me an espresso shot.

“Fine, I think I’m ready to pick up some shifts again,” I said with a smile and sipped the bitter liquid.

“Okay, do you have any particular shifts in mind?”
“No, I want to be busy.”

“Okay, not tomorrow but the next day, come open. I’ll fill you in on a shift here and there as well,” she replied and downed the rest of the espresso. I thanked her before I headed back outside.

The caffeine helped my brain function again and I spent the next half mile going over some of the questions that still ran through my brain. Why was Jasper here? I found myself hoping he wasn’t going to go away soon. Maybe after I left for Texas he could leave. And that was another issue. Now that he was no longer a Cullen would he want to be friends?

_Now why would a vampire want to be friends. Didn’t he say they were easily distracted?_ 

The whole notion of being a distraction bothered me. Was Jasper a distraction for the Cullens too? I mean, they pretty much left him as much as he walked out on them. If they believed him and trusted him, surely this wouldn’t have happened right?

“Stupid Cullens,” I muttered as I turned up the volume and started my run once again. My thoughts came back to Jasper. His drawl, I really needed to ask him about that. Those were the eyes of a killer but judging by the way I caught him looking at me a few times they were anything but cold and menacing. I found myself wanting to know Jasper Whitlock as I sprinted down the road, counting the light posts until it was time to slow down. I didn’t know him all that well but really hoped that I had a chance before he left me too. Would he leave though? Maybe he could move to Texas with me, with that drawl of his, I bet he’d blend in more.

As I headed down the last quarter mile to the house, I slowed down to a walk, giving my body a chance to cool down. I decided that I needed to live for the moment. Losing Charlie taught me that. I needed to live life to the fullest. I was scared though, scared that it could lead to me getting hurt.

I felt refreshed and very sweaty when I got back in the house. I was breathing hard but had a small smile on my face. I went straight to the kitchen and set the coffee maker and smiled at Jasper who was looking at me from the couch.

“I’m going to jump in the shower in a bit,” I said as I stretched out some muscles.

“Good run?” he asked and I noticed he was staring at me intently as I stretched.
“Yeah, it was exactly what I needed.” I said and grinned. “I’ll call you up to help me later? I think I had missed a few spots earlier.”

He nodded and I ran up the stairs and showered. When I got out, I noticed a damp towel hanging next to mine. I was tempted to grab the towel and sniff but even I thought that was a little too weird.

Weird would be an understatement.

I got half way dressed before I called Jasper up to help me put that cream on my skin. Once again I got that tingly feeling and was disappointed that it ended too quickly. I finished getting dressed and headed downstairs grabbing a mug of coffee and then sitting down on the couch.

I watched as Jasper looked up from the laptop and sniffed the air. “I always loved the smell of coffee, even now,” he said quietly.

“You know, you can always come and hang out at the coffee shop in town. I work there now,” I said.

“Java City?” he asked and I nodded. “I saw that last night as I did my run. You work there?”

“Yep, since October,” I said and smiled. “I took some time off the past week but I’m working again the day after tomorrow.”

“Hmm, maybe I will stop by,” he said and smiled.

“Will that... will you be alright with all those emotions and all?” I asked. I really didn’t want him to feel uncomfortable.

“Their emotions won’t bother me now. I fed on my way here so that helps me control my gift,” he explained. “I like people watching, it helps me acclimate more.”
“I don’t know if you’d want to observe people in the morning, Jasper,” I teased. “Some can be real jerks before their morning caffeine. I can be one too if someone confronts me.” I muttered out the last part remembering Renee’s attitude.

“Duly noted,” he said with a wink. “If you show me how to use the machine, I’ll make sure you have plenty first thing.”

“You don’t have -”

“Nonsense,” he cut in. “You’re letting me stay here, it’s the least I could do. Don’t look at me to cook though,” he insisted.

It was then I noticed the clock on the wall.

“Okay, fine. Um, Jasper?”

“Isabella?”

“I really hate to do this but some of my dad’s friends are coming at noon and well, they know you as a Cullen and after the Jerk left me in the woods, well, they might not be keen on seeing you. You know, guilty by association and all. My dad threatened to take a shotgun if he ever ran into him and dad’s friends wanted to kick his ass,” I said apologetically. “You can hang out at my room, if you’d like,” I added quickly and hoped he wouldn’t just run off.

I heard a small growl from Jasper and my eyes got wide.

“He did what?!?” he asked and then took a deep breath and closed his eyes. I stared at him as he got up and paced around the couch a couple laps before sitting back down. I could see from the way his jaw muscles were clenching that he wasn’t happy learning that tidbit of information. “Alright, I’ll be upstairs but after this, we’re going to talk about the Jerk.”

I nodded. “I had a feeling we would need to,” I replied quietly.

I watched as he took his laptop and bag with him as he ran up the stairs. Then he ran out the door
and came back less than a minute later.

“Hid my bike around the back,” he explained as he climbed up the steps again.

“Oh,” I responded as I wondered what kind of bike he had. I doubt he meant a bicycle.

I went into the freezer and was glad that there was a frozen pound cake in there. I threw it into the oven to warm up and made sure there was enough coffee. I grimaced when I realized the fridge was practically empty then I remembered how I left all my groceries at the store that day. All I had were some frozen meals and pasta stuff in the pantry. It was probably just enough to get things in order and then get out of town.

A few minutes later, I heard a car pull up.

“Coming,” I announced upon hearing the knock on the door.

I greeted Billy and Jacob as they gave me hugs and sad smiles.

I got the pound cake and the carafe of coffee out, apologizing that I didn’t have much in terms of food.

“It’s okay, Bells,” Billy replied. “Jake, did you bring the rolls from the car?”

“Oops, sorry dad,” Jacob said sheepishly as he got up and headed outside.

“Sue, Harry’s wife, baked some cinnamon rolls. Harry’s not feeling well, losing Charlie and then going to the funeral like that was tough on his heart so he’s on bed rest for a few days.”

“Will he be okay?”

“Yeah, it happens with stress but he’ll be alright. He’s tough.”
Jacob came back with the rolls and I went to grab more plates.

“Billy, again, I am so sorry for my rudeness,” I apologized once again. “I had also taken painkillers for my arm and was just in a damn fog.” I knew Jasper was upstairs and would be able to listen. I figured this way, I didn’t have to repeat some things. “Then with everything I had gone through, by the time I saw the two of you standing there, I just wanted to leave and get away from all that.”

“Hey, we understand. You did nothing wrong, honey. So what is this about Renee?”

I launched into the details over what happened since they arrived and how she made me feel. “It was like she was doing me a favor by coming out here. I know that there was a lot of shit that happened before I moved here but I still genuinely cared about her and now, well I am convinced it isn’t completely reciprocated. I just didn’t need to feel like that, Billy. Nobody should feel like they’re a burden especially to their supposed parents,” I said and my eyes shot upstairs as I hoped Jasper heard those words.

Billy nodded and reached over to pat my arm gently. “So are you still planning to go to Sam Houston?” he asked.

I sat there and felt a wave of shock but I knew it wasn’t from me. I smiled when I realized it had come from Jasper. Was he pleased about the news? I stifled the urge to laugh as I imagined his facial expression right now and looked over at Billy and Jacob to see if they felt the same emotion. From the looks on their faces, it seemed he aimed it only at me. “Yeah, which is the other reason why I called. I need to get out of here soon, there are too many painful memories, you know? I am not sure if I’ll be ready to start school in the fall because I still have stuff up here to deal with,” I began and tapped my head. “I want to, but I also need the time to heal so I am hoping the change of scenery will help with that. With his pension and stuff now, I am able to do that and just slowly get settled in. Do you know anybody who’d be able to help me with his accounts and selling the house and stuff?”

“I wish I did, Bells,” Billy said apologetically. “I’m sorry, most of the legal folks at the reservation are just able to work there. I’ll ask around though. You have e-mail? Give it to Jake and we can keep in touch. I don’t get that computer mumbo jumbo.”

“Sure thing, oh thank you so much again for getting the Blazer delivered. I drove it to town yesterday and it's faster than the truck was.”

“It was the least we could do under the circumstances.” Jacob replied.
After that, we talked about Jacob and Lisa as Billy showed me the prom pictures of the two. I was glad that I invited them to come over. As we said goodbye a couple hours later, I made sure Jacob had my cell phone number as well as my email address.

I waved to them as they got into the car and left the driveway.

I shut the front door and said quietly, “Coast is clear, Jasper. I guess you have some questions for me?”
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

In case you were wondering, Jacob isn’t going to phase at any time. I figured the legends about the wolves protecting people against the ‘Cold Ones’ would just remain a Quileute tribal legend :). 

Thank you to Alexis.Danaan for making this chapter really pretty. My pre-reader JaspersWoman and my sounding board, DarkN Nerdy. These ladies rock and strut their stuff big time!

As always, I am not SM.

Now onto chapter 14 (which goes back just a little to get a glimpse of Jasper’s mind)-

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14

JPOV

As soon as Isabella fell asleep, I ran a perimeter around town, stopping periodically to wipe venom onto trees and other objects to create a boundary line. It wasn’t hard to get enough venom pooling in my mouth, all I had to do was remember the events earlier today with Laurent and his emotions and I was ready to spit fire if I could. By the time I was done, I had a created a space about 5 miles around, it wasn’t a huge boundary but it served its purpose, any vampire that would set foot in this area would get a nasty surprise including a few lost limbs.

I ran over to the mansion and made sure there wasn’t anything important I had left there months before and found my Macbook amongst a bunch of discarded and broken items that remained. It didn’t surprise me, seeing that Edward was the last one to lock up the place. I rolled my eyes as I caught his not-so-subtle hint.

Seeing the room where the party took place, I walked around it and closed my eyes, envisioning the night and tried to see if I missed any details. So far, I came up with nothing to clue me in on Alice’s strange behavior so I set that aside for the time being. As I left the mansion, I spotted Edward’s piano and gave it kick, causing it to crash onto the ground. I was glad that Isabella called him a Jerk because he was, and then some.

I took off to her house on the bike, parking it in the driveway and went back inside. I was touched
that she gave me a key to her house. I was chuckling internally when she talked about not wanting me to climb windows, knowing exactly who she was referring to, damn stalker.

I sat down on the couch and fired up the computer. I could tell she was asleep and even though there was still sadness, she was sleeping peacefully. I ran some checks to see if the computer had been tampered with before I started checking on my accounts. As I made sure all was in order, I thought back to the evening’s conversation. I was very pleased to see fire in Isabella’s eyes. I liked that she was more apt to speak her mind compared to before. I also liked that she tried to put me in my place too and knew right then I didn’t want to get on her bad side.

It was the most time I had spent with her and I really enjoyed it. I knew she did too and if I had to venture a guess, helping tend to her tattoo was something she enjoyed as much as I did.

It was early in the morning and I was on chat with Peter explaining what went on with Laurent. He said that he’d check around with some of his connections to see if he could hear any news that might be important. I was still on my computer when I felt her emotions get stronger and I knew she was awake.

When she came downstairs, I felt surprise coming off of her and asked about why she sounded that way when she greeted me. I knew from experience that she wasn’t always comfortable and was often exasperated when the pixie used her ability to boss her around which was the reason for my tactic. Sure enough, I felt her appreciation almost immediately.

She explained that she was going for a run to clear her head and I immediately thought of my tree out in Texas. I didn’t want to interfere with her down time but I also wanted to make sure she was safe. I asked her to show me her route to make sure it was within the boundaries I set up last night which it was. I could see that she liked that I gave her privacy but if she needed me, I’d be there. The last thing I wanted to do was make her feel stifled or like a child. After she ran out the door, I took off five minutes later, and got to the half-way point of her running path. From here, I could hear her and feel her emotions.

I could tell she was deep in thought about things as her emotions flitted from one thing to another, not strong enough to alert me of danger though. I decided to run a few laps around the area so I wouldn’t feel like I was invading her privacy. When I noticed her scent by the coffee shop, I knew that she was heading back so I went back to the house and jumped into the shower and wondered if she’d let me care for her tattoo once again.

A sweaty Isabella came into the house and I sat on the couch in a daze. She made a beeline to the coffee machine and then started stretching in the living room. I could see her legs were more toned than before and her scent was even more intoxicating when her body temperature was warmer. Her hair was wet from sweat and some of it clung to her neck. My mind drifted off into more
inappropriate thoughts of her as she stretched her muscles. I made some small talk with her, grateful I was able to talk and ogle at her before I savored the view of her running upstairs in those tight running pants. She said that she would call me when she was ready and I could help her put that stuff on her skin again and I had to suppress a smile until she got in the shower. I couldn’t wait and counted every second until the water shut off.

We talked a little more afterwards as she got her coffee and she told me her new job. I never really understood why she worked at Newton’s but I could see that this was a better fit. Her eyes had a sparkle too when she talked about working as a barista. She told me I should stop by and I was looking forward to it after I ordered some contacts if I showed up in the daytime. It surprised me that she was concerned about whether or not being around people would affect my emotions. It wasn’t that she thought I’d drain everybody in the store, she was genuinely concerned about my well-being.

Before noon, she explained that some friends of her dad’s were coming over and she wanted me to go into her room since they would associate me as a Cullen. I couldn’t help but growl when she mentioned the reason was because my former brother left her in the woods. I told her we’d have a talk about it later and I felt her agreement before she said it. I could have gone outside or the trees to give her privacy but I figured she had her reasons for having me there.

When they came in, I was able to distinguish the three people sitting down stairs by their emotions alone. I was proud of myself for having the opportunity to study humans the past few months and was more attuned to not just their emotions but I was able to get a better interpretation of them as well. It was like looking at a picture that was out of focus versus one that was not. Her father’s friend was sad and I could tell he was truly mourning someone he was close to. I could almost guess that their friendship was more, it was almost as though he lost a family member from his emotions. His son was sad too but for the most part, he seemed like an easy going person. I could feel he was fond of Isabella and I found myself feeling jealous at first but I was soon able to distinguish his feelings as those of a friend. Both of the visitors were fond of Isabella and genuinely cared about her and I was relieved that she wasn’t truly alone during her time of need.

As they continued to talk, I tried to tune out the voices the best that I could while I went online and ordered some contact lenses, deciding to go with a blue tint so my eyes would appear a violet rather than a weird brown color.

I heard her apologizing to them about her behavior the day of the funeral. She felt awful as she explained how she was on pain killers and treated her father’s best friends as though they were strangers. Why was she on pain killers? Was she alright? It concerned me that she was going through physical pain so I needed to ask her about that as well.

I tried to occupy my thoughts on other things as they continued their visit but I was impossible with her close proximity. I felt her hurt and anger as she talked about her mother and I couldn’t believe
what I was hearing. Isabella’s emotions when she talked about Renee held a deeper pain and I could almost feel as though whatever it was, must have happened a while ago.

“Nobody should feel like they’re a burden especially to their supposed parents,” she said adamantly and I felt her determination. I was certain that those words she just said was meant not just for her, but for me as well.

It was after that conversation that got a surprise. Her dad’s friend Billy asked if she was still going to follow her plans and to go to Texas. Sam Houston State University? Texas? I was shocked and projected a dose of it to her and felt her mirth in return. I never would have guessed but that was promising news for sure. To top it off, she wanted to leave soon. I wonder if she’d like to road trip together?

Too soon, Whitlock. Slow down!

Her guests were saying goodbye and there was some sadness all around. As soon as I heard the door shut, she called out, “Coast is clear, Jasper. I guess you have some questions for me?”

I slowly walked downstairs and saw that she was sitting down on the couch with her legs tucked underneath her. She was watching me as I walked to the couch and sat down two couch cushions away. She was a little apprehensive but the way she was squaring her shoulders, I could see she was trying to prepare herself for any questions I had.

I looked at her and didn’t want to make it like an interrogation so I looked at her and smiled. I also decided since she knew I didn’t know about tattoos, I’d use that as a way to start off the conversation. “Are the pain killers for your tattoo?”

I could feel her embarrassment as she looked at the window and then pulled her sleeve up to show me the cut. “I had just seen the picture of dad’s patrol car that morning in the paper and was sort of in a daze. I knew I had to get food so I went to the grocery store thinking it was just a simple errand. Well it wasn’t. Everybody was telling me how sorry they were and staring. I couldn’t get away from it and even left my food in the conveyor belt at the check stand because it became so overwhelming. When I got back here, I was so upset by it all that I screamed and punched the window. My fist went through one of the panes there,” she said quietly, pointing to the window that faced the front of the house. “I just sat there watching the blood run down my arm but I never passed out. A doctor happened to knock on the door to check in on me. I guess in tragedies like what happened to my dad, the police support group sends a doctor to make sure the family is able to handle the news. She saw that I was bleeding and well... I don’t think she’s convinced I was pissed and not really trying to hurt myself. I really wasn’t, I promise you.”
I nodded and held my hand out without thinking and she placed her arm on top of it. I took a look at the cut and noticed that her skin felt really nice against mine and it made my hand feel like there was a low wave of electricity running through us. Her soft gasp caused me to look up and let go of her arm slowly. I felt a sense of disappointment coming off of her when I stopped touching her. “I’m not a doctor but I think it healed nicely.”

“Thanks,” she said as she looked at her arm. “It’ll scar but it’s just another one to add to the collection.”

I was a little taken back by her nonchalant attitude over scars. “Scars don’t bother you?”

She looked at me and furrowed her brow. “I just accept them as being a part of who I am. I haven’t been known to be the most graceful person in the world so I have my fair share,” she said and shrugged before pointing to a burn mark on her other arm. “I got this one from my battle with the espresso machine’s steam wand. I shocked me at first when I accidentally bumped into it while cleaning the machine and then the pain from the burn was so bad that I said “fuck” pretty loudly at the cafe. Everybody heard me, including Charlie. I was so mortified that my dad heard me but we got a good laugh out of it.”

She was laughing by the end of it and I chuckled along with her. I liked what she had said about scars. It made me wonder if she’d accept mine.

“May I ask what the Jerk did to you?” I asked, trying hard to remain calm as it was my turn to steel myself from the scenarios that ran through my head. Why the fuck did he leave her out there in the woods?

Calm yourself, Whitlock. Give her a chance to explain and then contemplate burning his arrogant asshole.

I watched as the fire was captured in her eyes once again. “After the stupid birthday party, things were different between us when he drove me home. He was sort of quiet and withdrawn. That should have been a clue to me that something was up. After school the next day, he was here when I got home and wanted to talk. He took me into the woods and said you were all leaving. He said that I’d get over it because humans had minds like sieves. He also said that vampires were easily distracted. Then he said some other disparaging things before he ran out like the fucking coward he is,” she spat out. She got up and started to pace around, waving her arms around angrily. “Is that what I am, Jasper? A fucking distraction for your kind? If it is, I’ll have to kindly ask that you leave and fuck off.”
As harsh as her words were, I could feel the pain from saying it, especially the last part.

“I never have, nor will I, think of you as a distraction,” I said gruffly. “I told you once you’re worth it and I fuckin’ mean it, Isabella. I would never have said that if you were nothing more than a goddamn distraction, a meal or a fuckin’ pet. If you still want me to fuckin’ leave, I will but I won’t just run off like that.” I was pissed off at those words, not really at her but that she’d feel I’d up and leave her. I had a feeling that her recent losses played a big part in that.

“Good,” she replied using the same tone of voice as I did. “I’m glad we got that fucking cleared. I don’t know you very well but you saved me yesterday. That is twice you’ve killed your kind for me and don’t think I have forgotten that,” she said with conviction. Her features softened slightly and so did her anger. “I don’t want you to leave, we’re friends right?” I could feel her vulnerability as she continued to look at me.

“Yeah,” I began and nodded. “I would like to be friends,” I said quietly. I was taken aback by her wanting a friendship with me. “I’d like that a lot, Isabella.” I smiled and hoped she could feel the sincerity in my voice. I didn’t want her to think I was manipulating her so I had to stop myself from projecting any emotion out to her. The whole idea made me feel a little vulnerable; I had never been friends with a human before but for her, I wanted to be, and maybe even more. “You’re right, what he did was cowardly, and I have half the mind to find him and tear him apart for doing that to you. He always touted himself as bein’ a gentleman well, there is nothing gentle or manly about that.”

We stared at each other for a few minutes as I felt her anger dissipate and a small glimmer of hope started to thread itself around her. She sat down once again and cleared her throat. I felt longing coming from her and then a faint blush appeared. It was beautiful to see and almost immediately, the longing was replaced by embarrassment.

“Now where was I? Oh yeah, he left me in the woods after his constant warnings about how dangerous they were. Luckily Charlie found me as I yelled and cussed out a storm. I was furious that he just left me. I did get sad about it for a couple weeks afterwards and moped around. But I woke the hell up and started to work at Java City. I started to realize he wasn’t the perfect guy I thought he was.” She looked up and reached out to my arm and gave it a quick, friendly squeeze, I never regretted wearing a long sleeve shirt more at that point. “Look I’m sorry for my outburst, it wasn’t just the fact that he left, they all left me.” She looked down at her hands on her lap. “Only you came back,” her voice was so soft that I would have had a hard time hearing if I was human.

“I did and I wish I could have gotten back sooner. As soon as I heard the news, I came out here,” I explained. “So what about Texas?” I asked. “Congratulations by the way.”

“I’m glad you’re here, thank you for all you’ve done so far.” She sighed and looked out the
window for a brief moment. “I was supposed to start in the fall,” she said and I could once again feel the sadness surrounding her. “School of criminal justice, now I just don’t know if I can get past this, I mean Forks.”

“Hey, I can help you with that if you’d like. I am a good listener,” I said. “I hear that criminal justice is what Sam Houston is known for.”

“Yeah, I’m hoping to get things taken care of and then leave, you know a new start. What are your plans?” she asked and even without my gift I could see the glimmer of trust and hope in her eyes.

“I don’t know, would you want company to Texas?” I asked.

“Yes... but not if it is out of your way or if it interferes with your plans,” she said and began to nibble her bottom lip. I gazed at her mouth and more inappropriate thoughts came to my head.

“No, I have no plans at all,” I said and knew it was a slight fabrication on my part. I didn’t want her to feel overwhelmed that my plans were tied with hers. I thought it was too soon to blurt that out so I tried to appear as nonchalant about my future plans as possible. “My brother and sister Peter and Charlotte live out there and I’ve been staying with them. They are about 30 miles from Sam Houston.”

She smiled so big that it nearly lit up the room. “Really? So you wouldn’t mind driving with me? I mean, unless you weren’t going back right away.”

I smiled. “No, were you going to go by yourself? It’s a long drive and I could keep you company.”

“I’d like that. I had other plans but things sort of changed suddenly,” she mumbled. I knew what she meant so I didn’t say anything more about that.

“Hey, I heard you were asking your family friend about having someone take care of your dad’s things? Would you like me to help you with that?”

“I... I can’t really afford a lawyer,” she admitted.
“No, I mean I could work on it now that I have my laptop. It would cost you nothing,” I explained.

“You understand all that legalese?” she asked.

“Yeah, I was close to taking the bar exam too back in the 1960s but Alice saw something and discouraged me to finish.”

She rolled her eyes. “Of course she did. Well, I bet I can top that, the Jerk sent an application on my behalf to Princeton. Without my knowledge, of course. Imagine my surprise when I got accepted as a Comp and Lit major.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I burned the letter. The guy didn’t really know me at all. Oh well,” she said with a shrug and a wave of her hand. “So, your brother and sister are from Texas?”

I wasn’t quite ready to go into my history just yet. That stuff was just too emotional for me to open up to someone right off so I needed to give her an extremely edited version first. “I am originally and they’ve been there for a number of years now. I didn’t have an easy, cush life as the Cullens in my early days, my life was the complete opposite which is why I am not ready to open up completely about it,” I began and felt a strong wave of understanding coming from her.

“No, I understand completely,” she said and smiled reassuringly.

“Well, it was back in those darker days that I sired Peter and he in turn sired Charlotte, his wife. Together they managed to get me out of the hell I was in and then I eventually became a Cullen.”

“You’re really fond of them, I can see it when you mentioned their names,” she said quietly and I nodded.

“Their farm overlooks lands that once belonged to my family and when I arrived there a few months ago, they had surprised me by buying the land back using a fake corporation so it will stay Whitlock land forever.”
“Are they like you?” she asked and pointed to her eyes.

“Yes, I actually adapted their diet of criminals I didn’t want to feed on innocent humans.”

“So I’d be okay meeting them?” she asked.

I nodded and couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Yeah, if you want,” I replied. She wanted to meet my family. We were going to drive out to Texas together. I could almost picture my dead heart beating over the news. The sound of her stomach grumbling brought me out of my thoughts and I looked up.

“Yeah, I guess I’m a little hungry,” she said and was slightly mortified I heard that.

“Would you like to get something to eat at a restaurant?” I asked.

“Yes that’s fine especially since I don’t have much here food wise,” she said hesitantly. “Would you mind if we go to outside of Forks? I just don’t want to deal with the local gossip and all.”

“Good point, I don’t mind. Do you know what you’re in the mood for?”

“Not really, I can go look online.”

I pulled up a website for her, “Here, just look and let me know.”

I watched as she looked online a few minutes. “Oh there is an Asian food place in Port Angeles I’ve never been. I was actually looking for a good barbecue joint.”

I chuckled. “You do know that when you move to Texas, you’ll have tons of barbecue joints to choose from.”

“I have heard that from Charlie. I can’t wait. Hold on, how would you know?”
“I like to people watch and have heard their conversations at bars and stuff.”

“Jasper? How old are you?” she asked.

“Human years I’m 20 but I’ve got an ID that shows I’m 22. Vampire wise, I was turned in the 1860s.”

I watched as she mouthed out “wow” and then she looked at me. “I hope you’ll share with me your history one day, I’m fascinated to learn more. I hate to be rude but can we get me something to eat?”

*Hell yeah, she wanted to get to know me!*

“Yes ma’am,” I said and we got out of the house. “Do you want to drive or would you like me to?”

“If you don’t go breakneck speed, you can drive,” she said and tossed me the keys.

Dinner was pleasant and being farther away from a kitchen helped as we ‘shared’ a couple dishes. Luckily the place was dark enough that it didn’t draw attention to my eyes. We shared some small talk, mostly about Texas and the weather there. I could tell she was looking forward to warmer days. We got the rest of the dinner packed for the next day and then when the bill came, she insisted on paying since she was the only one who ate. I reluctantly agreed and told her that I’ll take her to a real barbecue place when we get to Texas and it would be my treat.

When we got back, she asked me to help her one more time with her tattoo and I jumped at the chance. I told her it felt like it was healing nicely based on the instruction sheet and that we could probably switch to the non-scented lotion soon.

The rest of the evening was spent watching her watch a DVD about people who were stranded on a tropical island after a plane crash. After each episode, ended, she muttered about how there were so many more questions than answers in the show. I will admit, I started to watch it as well and I was confused from it.

“Ashley, my boss, talked me into watching this,” she said after the second disk was complete. “Did that make sense to you? Smoke monsters and stuff? I just don’t get it.”
I shook my head, “I don’t get it either and I even tried to concentrate on the show to catch the
details.”

“Wow, if they can stump a vampire, this show’s gotta be something,” she said and laughed. “Hey,
what kind of bike do you have, by the way?”

“A black Ducati 999S,” I explained and could almost see her eyes glaze over.

“I’m sorry, I don’t speak motor stuff. Is it nice? Can we go on a ride?” she burst out excitedly.

“I think it is a nice bike. Yeah I suppose we could go on a ride.” I said and grinned over her
enthusiasm. The idea of her arms wrapped around me sounded really good.

“Tomorrow morning?” she asked excitedly.

I hesitated because I didn’t think she’d have the gear needed.

“What the hell? Were you just bullshitting me about the bike ride? Are you going to tell me how
dangerous it is now?” she growled out.

“Whoa,” I said and raised my hands up at her. “I hesitated because I wasn’t sure about whether or
not you had the gear. I can’t lend you mine if we’re going out in the daylight, I don’t think that
would help me any. Besides, this is a mandatory helmet state, you wouldn’t want me breaking the
law now, would you?”

“Shit, I didn’t it again, didn’t I?” she replied with a grimace. “I’m sorry, I keep biting your head
off.”

I could tell she felt awful so I offered another solution as a way to divert her anger. “Why
don’t we go and look for a jacket and helmet for you and we can also look at getting your windows
tinted. It will be a necessity for both of us when you’re in Texas. That heat can be brutal,” I
suggested.
“Yeah, I’d like that and maybe a bike ride later that day?”

“We can do that.”

She smiled at me before she let out a big yawn.

“I think I’ll go to bed. Good-night Jasper, I had fun today.”

Chapter End Notes

NOTES-
So a little more conversation and a friendship in the blooming stages... maybe even a road trip ahead?
You might have noticed Bella’s outbursts. I didn’t want to portray her as Zombella like in the books. I thought with her backstory (which we’ll eventually get to) and all she’s experienced, anger might work to her benefit more than being numb. Plus it is one of the stages of grief, right?

As always, thank you so much for reading. XOXO sushi
I watched her walk upstairs to bed and checked on her emotional climate before going back to my computer. She was fine and I could tell she still felt bad about lashing out at me like that. I shuddered as I thought how she was pretty fuckin’ scary when she got pissed off and that if she ever got along with Char, Peter and I would be in a helluva lot of trouble.

She fell asleep right away and I rang up Peter to let him know what was going on.

“Jasper, how’s your girl?” he asked after the first ring.

“She’s fine, still grievin’ over her dad,” I replied. I was still getting used to the fact that he’s been using my given name. When I had asked him about it during our hunting trip to Mexico, he explained that he was now seeing the real me and I no longer needed to be reminded of my past.

“I’m sure that takes time,” he said.

“Have you heard anything from your connections?” I asked.

“Not yet, I’ve got my feelers out though,” he said. “So what else is goin’ on?”

I explained how Isabella was different than when I knew her before and how she was prone to angry outbursts lately.

“Hmm, hang on... Char, I might need your input on this as well since you took those psychology classes back in college,” he muttered and a few seconds later she greeted me on the line. I listened as Peter explained some of the things I had told him to her.
“So she’s been lashin’ out at you?” Char asked.

“Yes, but she feels bad afterwards so I am certain it is part of the grievin’ process but not absolutely sure.” I was almost positive that was what it was but at the same time, I felt the need for some sort of validation that I wasn’t fucking anything up.

“It might be a part of it since you said she punched her arm through a window,” Char replied. “She could also be reactin’ because you were associated with the family and she is lettin’ some of that go.”

“I sort of see your point, she sort of mentioned how everybody left her and I was the only one who came back,” I replied. “What should I do?”

“If she’s got issues with people abandonin’ her, she could be actin’ that way to protect herself - to push them away before she gets hurt. Are you manipulating her emotions or anything?” she asked.

“No, I don’t want to. Even if I feel her emotions, I can see it in her expression or her tone of voice so I bring it up that way. I know she didn’t like gifts thrown at her face.”

“No, that’s good,” Char said. “Hopefully that will make her more comfortable so she could open up and also see that you’re not like them.”

“Yeah, I think you need to continue that train of thought,” Peter interjected. “From what you’ve told us, she was always treated like a child or less than an equal right by the Cullens, right?”

I thought for a moment. “Yeah, Esme mothered her, maybe sometimes a little too much. Rose envied her because she’s mortal but just ignored her and sometimes looked at her with disdain. Emmett saw her as his little baby sister and Carlisle treated her like a patient. You have heard how the other two treated her.”

“See, nobody really treated her with respect and an equal. Sound familiar?” Peter asked.

“Yeah,” I replied and rolled my eyes. “All too familiar.”
“Well there you go, Jasper,” Char replied. “Treat her like you would like to be treated. She might
still lash out and over time I think it will be more from her grief and less about vampires and the
Cullens. If you’re feelin’ her remorse, don’t take it to heart, it sounds like you’re getting close and
she trusts you to let loose like that. She’s been through a lot, but if you’re not feelin’ hate or
anything from her, she just needs to heal.”

“Thanks guys,” I replied. “Her anger is short lived and once she has her say, she moves on so I
guess that’s promisin’.”

“Yes it is. You know you can call us anytime. If I hear anything, I’ll text you.” And with that, the
call ended.

I did another run through my boundary early, at about 3 in the morning and didn’t find anything
unusual. I could definitely run the perimeter up until we left for Texas and hoped that there
wouldn’t be any surprises.

I still couldn’t believe that we’d be going to Texas together. It just felt right and I was looking
forward to getting to know her more.

I was beginning to realize that it wasn’t just a bond that had me here. It was the man in me that
enjoyed her company and found her attractive. She had a fiery attitude that I enjoyed and I found
her fascinating. I was never given a choice when it came to relationships and while this pull wasn’t
really a choice either, I knew I had a choice as to how I wanted to take it. I also hoped that once I
talked to her about it, she’d want the same thing. I thought back to my dark days with Maria, I
accepted things as they were because it was what I was trained to do and knew the price I’d pay if I
didn’t - many of my scars were proof of that. With Alice, I accepted things as they were based on
her visions of love, peace and an instant family. This would be the first time I’d be heading into a
possible relationship of sorts without any knowledge or be controlled in some fashion. It was all up
to me, if she would have me, that is. The unknown scared me, but it was exciting at the same time.
That vulnerability was unnerving because I wasn’t sure what the outcome would be but I couldn’t
keep from wanting to know her.

I had seen enough movies and read enough books in my time to realize this was a very human thing
to feel and for the first time in a long while, I could feel more of those human nuances that I
thought was buried long ago the moment venom hit my bloodstream. The irony wasn’t lost on me
as I went back to my computer and saw the faint reflection of my crimson eyes coming off the
screen. I had caught her looking at them a few times and each time, I could tell she was fascinated.
I could almost picture her staring into them intently as though she could look into my blackened
soul.

As the sun started to rise and the sky brightened, I found myself looking forward to today and a
possible bike ride with Isabella. I had to tamp down some of my more graphic images of us on the bike since some included her wearing close to nothing as her legs wrapped around me.

I went to the window and looked at the panes of glass, automatically spotting difference in the weather stripping around one pane in particular. I touched the glass and pressed on it gently, feeling the slight give and imagined how she must have been feeling when she punched through it in anguish. I leaned my head onto the window wishing I could have been here to help take some of that pain away from her.

“Morning Jasper,” she whispered from the middle of the stairway.

I was so lost in thought that I didn’t even pay attention to her stirring and walking down the steps.

“Morning Isabella, did you sleep well?”

“Yes I did, have you been doing your super mojo thing to let me sleep?” she asked, looking at me suspiciously.

“No, I haven’t. I would if you ever have trouble sleeping though. All you’d have to do is ask,” I replied.

“Thanks, what were you looking at? Is there a critter outside?”

I chuckled lightly. “No, I saw the difference in the window pane and knew that this was the piece they replaced. Then I got lost in my thoughts as I wished I had been here for you. I could have helped take away some of the heartache,” I said quietly.

She walked over to me and brushed her fingers lightly over my hand like a whisper. “The fact that you are here now means a lot. Thank you,” she said and cleared her throat. I looked at her and saw that she had a wonderful blush on her skin and I yearned to feel that warmth against me. “Come on, I’m supposed to show you how to tackle the coffee machine.”

We walked over to the kitchen and she proceeded to tell me how much to scoop out and how much water to pour. As the coffee brewed she ran back upstairs to grab a shower and told me that she’ll just do the lotion instead of that gooey stuff.
“I’ll call you when I’m ready,” she said.

A few minutes later, when we came back downstairs, she grabbed a mug from the kitchen cabinet and poured a cup of coffee.

“So are we still going to look for bike stuff today?” she asked and I could feel she was bracing herself for possible rejection.

I nodded. “Want to go down to Olympia? There are a few bike places and body shops that can do window tinting near each other so we can shop around.”

“Is it going to be really expensive? I don’t have a whole lot right now since his accounts take time to process over,” she admitted regretfully.

Knowing that she had issues in the past with money, I had to think fast. “How about we sort of split things. I get you the motorcycle gear as a graduation present and a thank you for letting me stay here, and you get the windows tinted,” I suggested.

“Yeah, I can do that. You’ll talk to the tinting guy right?”

“Yep, come on.”

“Sure, hey, is your bike still out back? I want to see it,” she said and gulped down her coffee.

“It is out on the driveway again,” I said and watched as she got a funny smile on her face and closed her eyes. “Are you alright?”

“Huh?” she asked as she opened her eyes. “Oh, if I drink coffee fast, it almost feels like it courses through my veins. I sometimes like the feel of that.”

“I guess I can sort of relate to that,” I said quietly.
“Really?” she asked.

“Yeah, I don’t mean to call up your emotions but that sense of euphoria you felt, I sometimes get that too as well as the coursing through my veins feel, especially of late.”

“Oh,” she said and seemed lost in thought. “I never thought of things that way. That is a good way of putting things into perspective,” she said quietly and walked out the door.

I followed her out, a part of me wishing that I knew what she was thinking. I could feel understanding and a small hint of hope along with her grief.

She practically ran to the bike and ran her fingers down its body, almost like a caress. “Oh, it’s gorgeous! It sort of looks like the bike from the Matrix sequel,” she squealed.

“Yeah, same brand but different model year,” I said with a chuckle. I watched as she straddled the bike and leaned over to reach the handlebars. That image was permanently etched into my brain and I was eternally grateful for that. I cleared my throat which caught her attention. “Let’s get a move on, it’s a bit of a drive but I think it is easier than going to Seattle.”

The drive was pleasant and I could tell she didn’t mind my driving even though I was going faster than the speed limit. She had plugged her iPod into the stereo and I was surprised by the songs we were listening to. There was a nice mix of guitar rock, alternative and country. I wasn’t a huge fan of earlier alternative, grunge stuff but the more recent stuff wasn’t bad.

When we got to Olympia, I dropped the Blazer off to get the windows tinted as dark as possible. I had my arm around Isabella and was explaining to the man that we were on our way to Texas to start school and we needed to get the windows tinted darker than what was allowed in Washington State. I used my charm and my drawl to get him to agree. I might have used my gift too. He promised it would be done in a couple hours and we thanked him and walked down the street.

“Thanks for playing along with that,” I said as we got out of earshot and slipped on my aviators. I really wanted to be close to her and used my story as an excuse to put my arm around her.

“Anytime, I liked your drawl,” she admitted and I could see her blushing and it made her more attractive the way she looked away and her eyes looked down with a slight smile on her lips.
“It tends to come out now and again,” I said and I placed my hand on the small of her back to guide her into a store as I opened the door for her.

“Thank you,” she said. I felt her appreciation as well as her excitement as we walked in.

For the first few minutes, I let her look around the store to see if there was something she liked. I could see she didn’t want some of the graphic racing jackets and was looking more towards a plain black one, like mine but with more padding. I told her that since we’d be moving to Texas, we might look into a fabric one since it would breathe easier in the heat. The sales lady said they might have some in the back in her size and went to check as we looked at helmets.

“I want something that isn’t too girlie but isn’t a guy’s looking helmet,” she said when I asked her what she’d like. She pointed to a white one with pink flowers and made a face. “Not like that. I want it to sort of match the jacket a little.”

I found one that was black with some silver flowers and held that up to her. “How about this?”

“Oh! I like that!” she said and pulled it over her head just as the sales lady came out with some nylon jackets for her to try on. I sat and watched as the shy timid girl I first met nearly a year ago was transformed into a street bike siren. Each jacket she tried on accentuated her body and I fought the temptation to run my hands all over her.

“Well?” she said and spun around in front of me and flipped up her visor.

I smiled at her. “Looks great, how do you like it?”

“I look good, I think minus the sneakers but you’re spending a lot on me already,” she said.

“Nonsense,” I replied and gave her a look that meant no more arguments. “Do you need boots?”

“I have some I got before I moved out here,” she replied. “They’re a pair of cowboy boots but I haven’t worn them out here since someone used to wrinkle her face every time she saw them.”

“I think she had an anti-cowboy boot fetish, Isabella,” I said and she laughed and agreed. I couldn’t
wait to see her all dressed up later.

We had the sales person put her items up at the front while I looked around in the men’s section for riding gloves.

“Would I need some gloves too?” she asked quietly.

I leaned close to her ear and whispered back, “It is for me if we ever ride in the sun.”

“Shit, I forgot about that, I’m inconveniencing you aren’t I?” she whispered back and was nervous about my reaction.

“Quit,” I whispered. “I don’t like hiding in the sun all the time and there’s a fuckton of it out in Texas so quit feeling guilty. Okay?”

She looked at me for a second and motioned me to lean down. She pulled my sunglasses up for a minute. We were in the back of the store and nobody was around us as she just looked into my eyes. I could feel she was looking for something and her gaze made me feel like she was looking into my soul. Once she was satisfied with what she saw, she put them back on my face.

“Okay.”

Our time shopping was fun and before we knew it, my phone rang to let me know the Blazer was done. I paid for the stuff and we headed back to pick up the SUV. She paid for the tinted windows and then we went across the street where she ordered a burger.

“You didn’t have to order that to-go,” I mentioned.

“I know, but I want to get back so we can ride the bike,” she said with a big grin and grabbed the bag and drink.

Her enthusiasm was contagious and I found myself just as excited as she was when we got back in her car and drove off. She ate her burger and sipped her drink as I got onto highway 101, once again faster than the speed limit.
“Isabella, I know in the past I had heard you mention how you hated the fast speeds but you don’t seem bothered by it now. I’m just curious,” I began.

She laughed as she put her soda back in the drink holder. “You’re going fast but it doesn’t feel like it is out of control. Now that I’ve got this car, it goes a little faster so I’m getting used to it too.” She looked up at me and smiled. “Besides, I feel like I can trust you,” she added quietly.

“I never meant to ask, what happened to the red truck?” I asked casually. Internally however, I was jarred by the fact that she trusted me and she said it out loud. They rarely, if ever, trusted me and even if they said it, it was never as strong as what I felt from her.

“Oh’ Bessie was dying most of the year,” she explained and there was some sadness coming off of her. “My dad and the boys at the reservation had been fixing her and said her engine was going to seize up soon but dad didn’t want to drop a new one, you know? She would have needed a complete overhaul so dad got me this as a graduation gift but it didn’t actually arrive until the day after the funeral. I ended up selling the truck to Sam who works at the garage with Billy’s son, Jake. He said he was going to fix it up for as a hot rod thingy or other.”

“You were doing good there with your car talk until the end,” I teased.

She giggled. “Thanks. I really have no idea what a seized up engine and all that other stuff meant. I just heard them talking about it. So why do you like riding a motorcycle?”

I explained how I liked the feel of the wind around me and the way the roads would feel as I rode around - the difference between asphalt and concrete, the bumps and curves on the road - it all helped me feel carefree, even for a short while. She understood when I explained how it sometimes helped to clear my head to get out and ride.

“Will you teach me?” she asked quietly.

“Yeah, I guess I could do that.” I started to picture the two of us riding our motorbikes around winding desert roads and I hoped that one day we could ride around like that.

It was mid-afternoon when we got back and I watched as she ran quickly up the stairs and slammed the door to her room. The rustling upstairs and the sounds of clothes being tossed around indicated that she was changing for the ride. I grabbed my jacket and riding gear and was standing at the
bottom of the stairs as she came back down.

I had to throw on my helmet since it had a dark tinted visor before we headed outside and slipped on the gloves since the sun decided to make an appearance.

“Am I alright?” I asked and pointed to the sky.

She looked up and then at me and nodded. “Nope, can’t see a sparkle anywhere,” she said quietly and zipped up her jacket.

I helped her get her helmet on and showed her how secure it needed to be for next time. I got on the bike first and then helped her get onto the back. Her body felt good pressed up against me as I started the motor and revved up the engine. I had let out a moan when her arms wrapped around my waist and we headed down the road. I was certain I heard her let out a soft moan too. I kept the speed at the limit to give her a chance to adjust to the sensation. She was excited, a little nervous and a low stream of lust was coming off of her. It was nice to know that we weren’t too far off in our feelings towards each other.

As I drove us around town, I thought that we’d need to have the talk about this bond of ours. I hadn’t wanted to bring it up yet given her recent loss but I knew it would have to happen soon. I didn’t want to hide stuff from her.

“Can we go a little faster?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I yelled so she could hear me. “Hold on tight.”

Her body pressed tighter against me as I upped the speed and found a quiet road to ride on. I heard her squeal with laughter as I took some corners faster than I did earlier. It was nice to hear her laughing and enjoying herself.

I had to end the ride early since it was starting to get a little too uncomfortable with her warm thighs against mine. My jeans felt way too tight. I didn’t want it to end but I had to and when I pulled back up to the driveway, I could feel she was a little disappointed that it ended early too.

“That was fun,” she said as I shut off the motor. She hopped off the bike really fast and nearly fell off so I grabbed a hold of her and got her steady on her feet. She laughed nervously as she took the
helmet off and I saw that her face was flushed with excitement and embarrassment. The lust that was flowing around her was still around as I undid my helmet strap and we headed to the house.

“Thanks for the ride,” she said as we got inside.

“Anytime, did you have fun?” I asked.

“Oh my god, that was so fun,” she said and smiled brightly. “I can see why you like the openness of it. I had fun being the passenger.” She blushed again before some of her enthusiasm was replaced by guilt and her smile faded. The sadness in her eyes returned.

“Hey,” I said quietly as I looked at her. “Are you alright, darlin’?”

“Yes,” she said automatically, she sat down on a step. “No, I feel bad that I had fun today.”

I sat down on the floor and looked at her. I wanted to pull her into my lap and soothe the heartache she was feeling but I wasn’t sure if we were there yet. “You’re allowed to laugh and smile. He would have wanted you to live, right?” I asked softly.

“Yes but I still feel awful about it.”

I held my arms out to her not knowing what to expect. I watched as she looked at me and then hugged me right back.

“Isabella, you’ll have days when you’ll feel bad about it. You’ll want to cry and get pissed off and maybe even throw shit. Let it out or talk about it. Whatever you do, don’t hold it in. Enjoy life in the meantime. While It is natural to feel some guilt, don’t let it consume you.”

“Thank you Jasper. The therapist said something similar. She also said that I shouldn’t rely on an artificial time table to heal, but if I’m leaving here soon, there is so much I need to do to get ready,” she explained and I could feel her rising panic.

“All you have to do is ask, I’d be happy to help with whatever you need.”
“Okay, I’ll try.”
It had been two days since we had our talk at the bottom of the stairs. Yesterday, I got up early to open Java City and much to my surprise, Jasper greeted me with a mug of freshly brewed coffee. It was perfect and although I didn’t spend time talking to him that morning, we did talk when I got back from work. We sat on the couch and he listened as I described the funeral. He never prodded me with questions, he just let me talk. I broke down and cried a few times while he listened. I explained that ever since that day, I haven’t been able to gather enough courage and strength to even go inside his room. Afterwards, I was emotionally drained but I felt like a small weight had lifted off my shoulders.

That evening, we sat on the couch together and watched Mr. & Mrs. Smith. I sort of got distracted by his proximity and wished a few times that we were playing the leading roles in that movie. Of course as soon as I thought that, I felt my face turn bright red and Jasper actually looked at me with a funny and knowing grin on his face. I told him it was because my tattoo was itching like crazy and while I wasn’t sure if my fib was believable, he didn’t say anything and just rested his hand on my shoulder as a way to soothe my skin. It would have worked if it didn’t make me crave his touches even more and I ended up completely frazzled by the time I went to bed.

I woke up with a huge desire to run in an effort to clear my head of the inappropriate thoughts of Jasper. It was clear that I was attracted to him and I caught myself wanting to get close or touch his skin without being too blatant. As I sprinted down a neighborhood block, I thought back about how I looked into his eyes at the motorcycle apparel shop the other day. I wasn’t sure what I’d find but he looked genuinely sincere when he tried to convince me that I wasn’t a burden to him.

Speaking of those eyes, even with his natural diet, I had to admit the crimson made him look even more handsome. I longed to just stare into them but I couldn’t without looking like a love sick school girl. I thought back to the other day when he stopped by the cafe with violet colored eyes. I knew right away he had contacts on and even though I knew why he was wearing them, I still couldn’t hide my disappointment that they weren’t the familiar red.

I ran past Java city and gave a wave through the window. Since I was working the closing shift that night, they knew not to expect me to come in if I went on a run.

The rest of the day I got all the financial stuff out for Jasper to look over while I cleaned house in
an effort to keep my mind off of Charlie. He was done in about an hour and then helped me clean as well. We didn’t say much and I was glad he didn’t ask why I didn’t talk to him about the finances afterwards. It was just a conversation I wasn’t quite ready to have yet.

When I got to the shop, Tim, the barista from the earlier shift told me that Ashley was sick with a really bad summer cold. There was a chance that I’d be closing on my own so I quickly sent a text message to Jasper letting him know since I never closed on my own and thought he could keep me company as I got everything done.

The phone rang and I answered it as I wiped down the counters. It was my boss and she sounded awful. She apologized profusely and I had to explain to her that my friend Jasper would be there to keep me company as I closed. She had met him already and thought he was nice, and not to mention handsome, so I was certain she wouldn’t have a problem with that.

“Ashley, it is a slow evening, I’ll be fine,” I said over the phone and began to stock the cups near the espresso machine.

“Are you sure? If you want, close early if it is slow, I’ll still pay you the full night,” Ashley choked out in between her coughing fit.

“Thanks Ash, I’ll let you know. Rest up, okay? Talk to you later,” I replied and hung up. “See you next time,” I called to the lone customer as he left the cafe with a wave of his hand.

My phone buzzed and I received my message from Jasper. ‘Alright, I’ll be there a little early to keep you company. Text me if you want me to be there earlier.’

I smiled at the message because I liked that even with his protectiveness, he didn’t crowd me and suffocate me. My routine stayed fairly normal which I liked a lot. I trusted him that he’d watch over me since he never gave me reason not to. It did occur to me that Jasper’s life could be endangered as well and I had to add that conversation to the list of things we needed to talk about.

Thank goodness it was a slow night because it did give me the opportunity to think some more about Jasper and what he was to me. I knew we were becoming good friends but sometimes I felt like we were more than that. I just wasn’t sure if he felt the same way or if he thought of me as a family member. That very idea made me shudder in horror since my thoughts of him weren’t exactly of the sibling kind. Was I trying to fill some void by hanging onto him? How did he feel about it? We hadn’t talked about these feelings of mine, I was sure he was able to feel them given his ability and I was glad he hadn’t called me out on it yet. That was another thing that I liked about him, he didn’t throw his ability at my face like Alice did. That always had a way of making
me feel inferior, as if being an imperfect human wasn’t enough.

I was drawn to him. There was no doubt about it. At first I was afraid it was because he was a vampire and I was trying to substitute him for the Jerk. After he hinted about his history and how he was so different than the Cullens, I realized it wasn’t that he was a replacement for Edward. He wasn’t anything like Edward or the Cullens. Shit, was I falling for him? In my very limited experience with boys, it has not been successful. Then again, Jasper wasn’t a boy, was he? The images of him in worn Levis and cowboy boots flashed in my head and I tried not to think about his t-shirts that accentuated his chest.

*Get a hold of yourself, Bella.*

I shook my head to clear my thoughts and went back to stocking up the cups and napkins.

A few hours passed and it was turning out to be a slow night for sure. I sent Jasper a text message letting him know it was slow and there was a good possibility that I’d close shop early. He replied saying that he’d be over after his perimeter run. In the meantime, I kept myself as busy as possible. I probably spent more time calibrating the machine and stocking up supplies than actually making beverages tonight. At about 10:00, Ashley called to check in and I told her that it was a slow night and I was contemplating closing. I had already done a lot of the closing cleaning duties. She agreed that it was a good idea and reminded me to just mark down on the time sheet that I closed. She would make sure I was paid for my full shift.

I was facing away from the front of the cafe as I grabbed the keys when the door opened. “I’m sorry we’re closing early tonight,” I said as I turned around and was face to face with a man pointing a handgun at me.

I swallowed hard and felt my heart thumping loudly as I stood there in fear.

“Open the till, bitch!” the man yelled, waving his gun towards the cash register.

I looked up and nodded, my mouth suddenly dry. My hands shook as I started to press the buttons to get the register open. I tried not to look at the man as I continued to take deep breaths in an effort to calm down while fighting the urge to cry. I was surprised that my brain seemed to be more alert than I was and registered that the man was familiar, he had been here before. He was here earlier when I was on the phone with Ashley. Dammit, he had been casing the cafe earlier.
Bella, calm down. Remember, you have a vampire body guard.

As the register opened, I reached into the till to grab the cash.

“Hurry the fuck up, bitch!” the robber yelled and grabbed my arm, pulling me hard into the counter.

I gasped and my eyes started watering up when my ribs hit the steel counter. I winced some more as he grabbed my hair and pulled my head closer to him. He butted the gun under my jaw as he gritted out, “Give me the fucking cash, now!”

I closed my eyes and nodded and was roughly pushed back. “Jasper, help,” I said in a whispered breath, so quiet that the robber wouldn’t have heard. If Jasper was nearby though, he would have heard me and most likely have felt my emotions. I heard a growl coming from outside the shop and calm washed over me.

Jasper!

The door burst open and in a flash, the man was suddenly jerked away from me. I let go of the breath I didn’t realize I had been holding when I saw that Jasper now had the robber’s arms pinned behind him.

“Isabella, are you alright?” he asked harshly but I could see his onyx eyes held concern.

I nodded. “Yes I am.” I was so relieved.

“Lock the front door, I’m takin’ him out back for a little chat. I’ll be back, you’re safe now,” he said softly and then he was gone.

I turned off the open sign and tried to lock the door but it took a couple efforts as my shaking hands kept dropping the damn keys. I could still feel the mild calm that Jasper was sending me and I was grateful that he did. I was still shaken as I counted out the till.

I was trying not to think what could have happened had Jasper not shown up. I fought back the
tears knowing it probably would not have ended well. I kept feeling the ghost of the cold steel barrel against my jaw. All that for what? I barely broke $50 tonight and the earlier shift had done their money drop before my shift began.

I was lost in my thoughts as I tied up the trash bags and headed out the back door to the alley where the dumpsters were. I didn’t realize until I opened the door that Jasper was out there, I guess it didn’t occur to me that he would have the man pinned against the far wall and was feeding on him but there he was across they alley from me. It was dimly lit but with the full moon above, I was able to see him; his head was buried against the man’s neck as he fed. I could hear a low, rumbling growl coming from him. I stood there completely mesmerized at the scene before me.

Something in the back of my mind was telling me that this was dangerous and I should not be there and run, but like before when he was tearing Laurent apart, I couldn’t.

The idea of him feeding on a human, drinking the man’s blood should have grossed me out or frightened the hell out of me, but it didn’t.

Instead, that funny feeling I had from my chest came back. That same one I had that day when Jasper saved me. I had thought it was the pain from seeing where my dad was killed but the same feeling was back; tonight, right now. It was stronger than before and there was no sadness this time. I felt like I was being pulled; it was like a compass and it was pointing straight at Jasper.

I shouldn’t have been standing there watching him but I couldn’t help it. He was my dark angel, my vampire bodyguard.

*Wait, where did that come from?*

I heard a loud growl as he let go of the body and it slumped onto the floor. He turned to face me, his eyes were still dark as he walked slowly towards me. I was breathing hard as I watched him. I was completely entranced. He looked like a vampire especially when he passed under the light and I saw that his lips were stained by the robber’s blood. He was dangerous, but he was also breathtakingly beautiful at the same time.

I couldn’t help but wonder what those lips would feel like against my own. I even shocked myself as the image of me licking those bloodstained lips appeared in my head.

*Whoa, that is... whoa!*
“Isabella,” he said quietly as I continued to watch him, the trash bags in my hand were forgotten. “This could have been a very dangerous thing, watchin’ a vampire feed.”

I nodded, not knowing what to say.

“We run on instinct when we feed, baby girl,” he said quietly as took a few more steps towards me. “I could have attacked you.”

I still couldn’t move and looked at him; stared at him as he got closer. The pull became stronger as he got near. His hands brushed against my face, caressing me and making me feel tingly all over.

“You didn’t though,” I said quietly. “I... I should have run but I couldn’t.” I added in a whisper.

His hands continued their journey down my arms. “Are you hurt, baby girl?” he asked as he glided his hands down my ribs. “I felt your panic first, then your pain before I heard you callin’ for me.”

“He pulled me hard into the counter and I might be bruised,” I replied matching his same calm, quiet tone and pointed with my chin to the side of my ribcage. He placed his hand over the spot, the cool touch soothing the ache.

“May I check to see if anything’s broken?”

I nodded and then bit my bottom lip as I felt his fingertips against my skin pressing gently at the impact, tracing along my ribs. I really liked when his skin touched mine.

“It doesn’t feel broken so you’re probably goin’ to have a bruise. Fuck, I was a half a mile down the road headin’ over here but didn’t equate that menacing voice to you bein’ in danger until I felt your panic. I raced over as soon as I did but still didn’t get there in time to keep you from gettin’ hurt,” he replied and I felt when he sent me his apology.

I looked up at him, his eyes were still black but they had softened even more. “You got here and you saved me. I got a bruise but it could have been worse,” I whispered, trying not to cry. “Thank you Jasper, you saved me once again.” My hands unclenched from fists and I jumped a little when the trash bags hit the ground. I wrapped my arms around Jasper holding him tightly against me.
I felt his arms lift and wrapped around me and he returned my hug. I felt his appreciation and something that gave me a warm fuzzy feeling but I wasn’t exactly sure what it was. It definitely felt good though.

“I need to get rid of the evidence,” he said and grabbed the trash bags from the ground. “Go back inside and set the alarm. I need to set up a crime scene. Wait in the car, I’ll be out in a few.”

I nodded as I numbly went back inside, grabbed my purse and set the alarm. I was calmer this time as I locked the front door and climbed into the front seat of the Blazer. I sat in the passenger seat knowing that I was safe.

What happened out there? I knew it was stupid to watch a vampire feed, I mean I felt the urge to run but I couldn’t. I was strangely fascinated and a little thrilled watching him. The sound of his voice as he softly admonished me, that Southern drawl that I now realized became more pronounced when he was upset or emotional. And then the way he called me ‘baby girl’, it just sounded so sensual just like when he called me by my full name.

What the hell was wrong with me?

Bella Swan, danger magnet extraordinaire.

My phone buzzed with a message from Jasper. ‘Drive down to the gas station, I’ll meet you there.’

I scooted over to the driver’s seat and took a deep breath before starting the engine. I had to tell myself that it was only a short drive; just down the block and I’ll be safe again. I gripped the steering wheel hard to keep my hands from shaking as I headed down the street. I pulled up to a parking spot at the side of the gas station and once again scooted back to wait for Jasper. A minute later, he opened the driver’s side door and got in.

“I made it look like an after hour break-in amongst other things,” he explained as he adjusted the seat and started the engine. I could hear the alarm from a distance and the approaching sirens. “I broke the front door so it looks like a forced entry and wrenched the till open. Your boss will probably call you in the morning with other details that I won’t elaborate. You need to be surprised when she calls.”

I felt almost instantaneously calmer now that he was in the car. I nodded at his words because I
wasn’t sure if I could speak at the moment and then turned so I could look at him. I could see his crimson eyes now, brilliant now that he had fed. His lips, while no longer bloodstained, were still really sexy and once again inappropriate thoughts ran through my head.

He smiled and turned his head towards me as we stopped at the red light. “Isabella, what’s got you in such a tizzy?” he asked and placed his hand once again on my ribcage. It felt so good.

My face got red at having been caught in a fantasy about the vampire sitting next to me. At the same time though, I was once again glad that he didn’t blatantly call me out on it.

“I was distracted,” I said simply which wasn’t a lie.

“Hmm,” he mused and his lips turned upwards in a small smile. He made the left turn once the light turned green.

“Can I ask you something about tonight?”

“You can ask me anything, baby girl,” he replied.

“Did you know I was there? In the alley?”

“I did,” he said as he continued driving. “I heard your heart beat and recognized your scent.”

“Was I in any danger from you because I knew I should run but I was... um... strangely fascinated by you feeding,” I blurted out and then shut my eyes as I waited for yelling or laughing to occur.

The car had stopped. I opened one eye and realized we were in front of the house. Jasper took his finger and lifted my chin so I could look at him. I slowly opened my other eye and looked at him once again. “I’ll never hurt you, Isabella. With other vampires, you can’t do that. Even if it was someone like my brother and sister. Baby girl, I meant it when I said that it was dangerous.”

“Then why am I able to watch you? Is it a connection that we have?” I asked and started to worry my bottom lip. There were so many questions that were forming in my adrenaline induced mind. Why was it that I felt safe around him? Why was I drawn to him like that?
“I think we need to take this conversation inside where we can sit and talk. Come on, get in the house and while you freshen up, I’ll brew you some tea. I think I can do that without burning the house down.”

I nodded and smiled that he knew my nightly routine. “Sounds great and thank you once again.”

“You don’t have to thank me, I am glad to keep you safe.”
Chapter 18

Chapter 17

JPOV

I watched as she headed up the stairs to shower when we got to her house. I went into the kitchen and started the kettle on the stove. The time it took to get the water boiling gave me a few moments to think back over what happened earlier tonight.

Knowing that she was going to be alone at the cafe, I ran to the coffee shop soon after running the usual perimeter to make sure there weren’t strange vampires nearby. She had asked me to come by and keep her company while she closed and I was more than willing to. I liked spending time with her and was looking forward to it, which surprised me given how I used to avoid humans. She wasn’t just any human though. I was falling for her and I could tell she was attracted to me.

By the time I had gotten into town and was about a few blocks away from Isabella, I felt her emotions. She was in trouble. She was in pain. I heard her near silent plea for me and it had me seeing red. There was another set of emotions there, another person, and they radiated desperation and a desire that reminded me of bloodlust. It occurred to me right there that the angry and violent voice I had heard was there with her. When I got close enough, I could see Isabella in there with a man who had a gun pointed at her. I felt awful that I didn’t equate those other emotions to her being in danger, I was preoccupied with the thought that vampires were the danger. It never occurred to me that a human could be a threat. I let out a growl and sent her a dose of calm so she’d know I was near. I quickly entered the cafe and grabbed the man and pinned his arms behind him before I made sure she was safe and out of danger. I dragged him out back with nothing short of vicious glee.

I let the man go as soon as I got into the alley and watched as he started to run. I pulled him back and slammed him against the wall. He was pissed off and wanted to fight so I pushed him again. He had endangered her and hurt her. For that he would fuckin’ pay. I played with him for a bit, letting him run away and then pulling him back. Each time, his fear escalated and sweetened the blood before I finally pulled his neck back and bit down.

I heard her heartbeat before I caught her scent from across the alley as I pulled more of the man’s blood into my mouth. I didn’t expect her to be out here and linger. I knew she saw me; I hadn’t taken him further down away from the lights. I had wanted him to realize my intentions as I pulled his neck back so I made sure he was able to see everything. As the man’s life was fading away, I could feel Isabella and she wasn’t frightened. If anything, I felt her fascination and a sense of awe from her as I took my last pull of the man before dropping his body onto the ground.
It was my demon that spoke to her first as he walked slowly towards her and quietly admonished her for staying there. He recognized her as his mate so I knew she was safe especially since we had just fed. I noticed how she liked the nickname he used for her so when he walked back to his cage, I continued to use it too. I needed to let her know I wouldn’t hurt her but I had to make sure she knew watching us feed like that was an exception. To watch a vampire feed was dangerous both as a human and a vampire unless there was a strong bond between them. I wasn’t pissed off at her, I was concerned and proud of her for being so brave, I could feel how frightened she was but she maintained her composure and didn’t try to play hero. When we hugged, I sent her my appreciation as well as my pride and affection. After making sure she was okay, I told her to lock up and get into the car as I set up the crime scene.

The whistle of the kettle broke me out of my thoughts and I grabbed a mug and got some tea brewing for her. I hope she liked it. I figured the herbal tea that she had in the cabinet would help her relax.

The shower upstairs ended and I continued to let the tea steep. I watched the steam rise and chuckled at the fact that I now knew the word ‘steep’ in reference to tea. I wasn’t sure how the conversation would go but I wanted to make sure I told her as much as I could tonight without confusing and overwhelming her. I also anticipated that she might have been given incorrect information from Edward so I needed to make sure I would be able to explain to her what was real and what wasn’t. I heard her open the door and head to her room before coming down. As she reached the bottom of the steps, I handed her the mug of tea.

“Sit where you’re comfortable, Isabella,” I said as I continued to monitor her emotions from the robbery attempt and the aftermath. She was nervous but there wasn’t anything in her heart beat or her breathing that indicated anything that would be harmful to her health.

I watched as she sat cross-legged on the couch, using the arm as a back rest. She looked at me and patted the spot in front of her so I sat down facing her and crossing my legs like she did.

“Thank you for the tea,” she said quietly after taking a sip. She looked at me and smiled brightly. “Just what I needed. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, I just remembered what you did when you brewed tea. I’m glad it turned out okay.”

“It was perfect.” She looked down at her cup and I felt her trying to gather her courage to speak. “So... so am I mistaken when I said that it seems we have a connection?” she asked shyly.
“No, you’re not mistaken,” I said and paused trying to figure out how to explain this to her.

“You aren’t going to give me a dumbed down version, are you?” she asked as she continued to look at me. Anger was trickling in as her eyes narrowed.

I held up my hands. “Baby girl, I won’t give you a dummed down version of this. It is all new to me as well, so I’m tryin’ to figure out how to actually explain it and have it make sense.” I held up my finger and paused again. “I’ll explain it and then if you have any questions, you feel free to ask. We can always talk about it later too, I won’t dismiss the subject once we’re done talking.”

“Alright, that seems fair enough,” she said and balanced her mug on her knee. “Shoot.”

“Right.” I took a deep breath. “You know that as vampires, we’re not quite human but we carry many human qualities. We have other qualities that are based purely on instinct and probably the closest thing I think would best describe it would be like in the animal kingdom.” I paused and looked at her as she took another sip of tea. “So one of these instinctual concepts is the idea of mates.”

I could tell she had questions right there. I didn’t need my gift to tell, it was written all over her face.

“Mates? But that is... the Jerk... I don’t understand,” she blurted out.

“I’ll get to that. Let me explain a little more and maybe it’ll help you with your questions?”

“Sorry, please go on,” she said sheepishly.

I smiled at her. “No apologies, okay? Now then, the idea of mates is purely based on instinct and it isn’t unusual for vampires recognize it and act on it almost immediately claiming the other as their own. Often times, vampires will recognize it and will use that as a component to build a relationship off of that, thereby incorporating both their human side as well as their more feral one. This tends to build a stronger relationship between the two. This idea of mates is absolute and probably the most steady thing a vampire could ever hold onto, other than their need for blood.”

She looked up slowly into my eyes. “And... and this what we have?” she asked quietly. “Did you
know all along? What about him?”

I took a deep breath and ran my fingers through my hair. “That night of your birthday party was when I recognized it, baby girl. I smelled the scent of your blood and I had an overwhelming desire to protect you.”

“Protect me?” she whispered and started to play with her fingers. “That is why your eyes weren’t so dark,” she concluded.

I took my finger and gently lifted her chin so I could look into her eyes again. “Yes. I was trying to protect you because I felt the hunger from six other vampires; one of them bein’ him. Then you were pushed and I didn’t have the control to fight the bloodlust afterwards.” I looked at her apologetically.

She touched my hand. “I’m sorry for all the trouble I caused,” she whispered.

“I’m not sorry and you shouldn’t be either, Isabella. You didn’t cause anything. I have a feeling some of this would occurred at some point if it didn’t happen during your birthday.”

She gasped. “What? Why?”

I ran my fingers through my hair again and sighed. “I’ve been replaying it in my head and the one thing that doesn’t make sense is why Alice would feel smug. I felt it.” I said.

“She hoped that something awful would happen, didn’t she?” she asked quietly as she held onto my hand.

“I don’t know and haven’t been able to figure it all out. My guess was she wanted you to be attacked.”

“It seems that way. Way to throw your then husband under the bus, bitch,” she muttered and then looked up at me. “Has she or they contacted you in any way since you left?”

“No, I pretty much left for Texas and they never bothered,” I explained. “I doesn’t matter since I
have little to no intention of being a part of their family again.”

“I’d be lying if I said I was sad to hear that,” she spat out and took a deep breath. “Okay, so you were saying about this bond?”

“I need to be honest with you, when I felt this bond, I tried to deny it. In fact, I tried to deny it for a while and it took a few months before I accepted the bond we have. Then I went to Texas to gain control of myself because I didn’t want a repeat of that birthday incident again.”

“You came back. That is the point,” she said softly and took a gulp of her tea. “That was why you changed your diet?”

“Partly, and that was a debate in and of itself as well,” I said quietly, I didn’t want to elaborate too much yet on that and figured we could talk more later on.

She stared over at her mug. “He once said mates were more like this instant love thing... like love at first sight, it isn’t true is it?”

“Love can be a component of a mated relationship but that isn’t the basis of being mates. I am not sure where he got those ideas, but love at first sight doesn’t exactly happen; not with humans and certainly not with vampires. That is stuff in sonnets and movies, not usually the reality. Between vampires, it is an inherent need to protect each other and a pull but that isn’t considered love. Like I said earlier, some will use it as a way to get to know each other and if they are successful, they will then have a relationship that is full of love that lasts forever. Humans and vampires will still need to forge that relationship for love to occur, it won’t happen at a drop of a hat.”

Her brows furrowed together as she took in all the information. “So, you and Alice didn’t have this?” Hints of her jealousy flowed and it honestly gave me some hope at something.

“No, we didn’t. We were friends for the most part but it never really became more than that,” I said and felt her relief. “She was, at one time, my best friend and our marriage resembled a human connection more than anything but like I said before, there isn’t anything between us anymore and if there was, it was gone after that party incident. Carlisle and Esme are examples of a strong bonded pair and the same goes for Peter and Char. You can see it when they interact.” I probably could have brought up Rose and Emmett but I didn’t think she could relate to Rosalie as well.

“Geeze, thanks for bringing up Carlisle and Esme. That just... they acted like the parents and
nobody needs to know that,” she said and made a face. “So with us? Where do we go from here?” she asked and looked into my eyes. I could tell she was tryin’ hard to restrain her emotions and not jump into anything until she heard everything. She was like a high tension wire ready to snap.

“Well it isn’t completely unheard of for this to form between a human and vampire though it is rare. I’ll give you a couple generic scenarios and keep in mind they are generic and not necessarily indicative of us right now. If we stay as we are, with you human, I would forever watch over you to make sure you were always protected.”

“Sort of like a guardian angel?” she cut in.

I chuckled and nodded. “Like your own personal vampire guardian angel, baby girl. I could never leave you, the pull for me is too great.”

“This pull feeling? What is it?”

“For me, it started as a dull ache and has steadily grown since being back here. When I was in Texas trying to gain control of my life, the pull felt like it tethered me back to Washington. In fact, Char will tell you that nearly every night, I’d be up in a tree and I was unknowingly facing Forks.”

“Really?” she asked. I could see she was astounded by what I had said. I nodded my head. “Would I feel something similar? I mean, there was this pull but I think both times it has happened was when I was in the face of danger.”

“I’m honestly not sure why, maybe it is when you run more on instinct? I don’t really know for sure,” I admitted.

“Okay, thanks for being honest. I’m glad you didn’t dismiss my question just because you didn’t know the answer. It does sound like it could be a possibility,” she said. “And the other scenario?”

“Well, we could get to know each other but if things get serious, that would mean I would want something from you at the end,” I said and looked at her pointedly.

She paused and thought about it before answering. “My human life?”
I nodded. “Your human life. If we get to the point where we have a real relationship, I’ll want to make you mine in all ways and one of them is for you to wear your mark on me. I’ll want forever with you, Isabella and the feeling could very well be mutual. Right now though, I am not forcin’ you to make any decisions. I want you to take your time in your decision. You set the pace.”

“What happens if you don’t end up liking or wanting me?” she asked. “Wait, mark on me, like when you had your Cullen crest?”

“Now why would that happen?” I said and took her hand into mine and smiled. “I told you that you were worth it, remember that? You would never be discarded, that bond is forever. And as far as the mark, it would be my teeth mark on you.”

I felt her breath hitch at the mention of that and did a quick scan to see if she was in distress. She wasn’t even frightened and there was a sense of lust coming off her as well. She cleared her throat before looking at me and smiled. “I remember those words and I held onto them too. It was because of that, that I couldn’t accept that you had wanted to attack me on my birthday. So in Phoenix? I spilled more blood but it didn’t affect you in anyway,” she mumbled and seemed unsure how to continue. I noticed she didn’t mention the marking process of being mates so I left it alone for now.

“Remember when I mentioned instincts earlier?” I said quietly not wanting to scare her off. “Well, I let my inner demon loose when I destroyed James. I was, probably what you could say, in the zone.” I left it there for now and didn’t bring it up that she saw a glimpse of him earlier tonight. I figured we could talk about that more another time. Last thing I wanted to do was overwhelm her with all the details of being a vampire especially if she decided not to become one.

“I guess I could sort of understand being in the zone. You also gave me some insight about being a vampire that I never thought of or knew about,” she said and I felt her appreciation for opening up to her.

“Well, if you ever want to know,” I began, “I’ve had plenty of experience with newborn vampires. I don’t want to get into that tonight though but I have promised you and I will open up to you.”

She nodded at me, “Jasper Whitlock, you’re my vampire dark angel. You’ve protected me for a while now and I can see that.”

I smiled at her nickname. I felt the honesty and sincerity comin’ from her and she squeezed my hand.
She reached over to grab her mug. “Thank you again, for tonight. That’s twice since you came back that you’ve saved me. Umm... are there any questions that I shouldn’t bring up?” She asked and there was a hint of defiance coming from her and I could tell she was lookin’ to make sure I wasn’t like her so called best friend and former boyfriend.

“Anything is fair game, baby girl. Some things might not be explained right away but I promise you they will be,” I vowed. “I won’t, in the best of my ability, try to bullshit you or hide shit from you.”

“Thank you,” she said and smiled. “I hated the bullshit too. I will try to be honest and open up to you as well.” She slowly got up and gave herself a little stretch before coming close to me. “To friendship?” she asked as she held her arms out slightly.

I got up from the couch and slowly pulled her against me for a hug. Her warmth enveloped me and once again I realized that it wasn’t a searing heat like most humans.

“Okay I do have one question before I hit the sack,” she mumbled. “Why aren’t you icy cold? I mean, your flesh is cold but not icy cold, like the others. I noticed it after Laurent when you helped me with the tattoo. I didn’t want to say anything because I wasn’t so sure of the outcome...” her words drifted off and I could tell she just didn’t know how to explain what was going on.

“I’m not sure,” I said and thought how it felt good knowing that we were thinking the same thing. “I noticed you weren’t searing hot to me. You’re hot but not burning hot.”

She started to snicker. “I’m hot?” she looked at me and cleared her throat feeling a little embarrassed. “Sorry, I was being silly, I think the day’s excitement has finally taken its toll.”

“Isabella?” I said as I place my hands lightly on her shoulders. “No ‘sorrys’. You be you. I could care less if you cuss like a fuckin’ sailor, shaved your head into a mohawk and dyed it fuchsia. So long as you’re happy and comfortable with yourself, is all that matters.”

She covered her mouth as she yawned before smiling back at me. “Well, I don’t curse like a sailor all the time. I don’t think mohawks or fuchsia works for me so don’t expect that,” she said and grinned. “I have the tattoo that I’m proud of... damn, I think I’m babbling... Jasper?”

“Isabella?”
“Thank you for sending me that calm feeling this evening. I know you don’t usually use your gift on me and I appreciate it. It makes you more real that way.”

“You’re welcome. I will try not to use it unless it is absolutely necessary. In the meantime, I can see you’re fighting your yawns, you probably need some rest given all that’s happened. Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Yeah today’s taken its toll and my ribs feel sore but I’ll be alright. Goodnight Jasper.”

“Sweet dreams, baby girl.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

AlexisDanaan has been AWESOME for beta’in this bad boy. Thanks bb, you’re my most favo”u”ritest Canadian.

JaspersWoman - she’s been a fantastic pre-reader. I always look forward to her reactions.

DarkNNerdy - she is my sounding board. She lets me bounce ideas off of her.

I am not SM - I just like to have fun with the characters.

Now, on with the story -

Chapter 18

BPOV

“Sweet dreams, baby girl.”

I ran up the stairs and into the bathroom to get ready for bed. Tonight’s events had been wild and my brain was still trying to process everything from the robbery to the talk Jasper and I had about this connection we have. It wasn’t just any connection, we were mates.

I got into bed and thought about everything Jasper had said; especially about a pull and how he couldn’t not be near and how he fought with his instincts before coming back here. My fingers grazed over my chest remembering those couple times I had felt something similar. Maybe that theory that I had to be running mainly on instinct was true because I normally wasn’t aware of it. I
was, however, aware that I liked being close to him and the feel of his touch, no matter how small, it warmed me. My head hit the pillow but my head swam with the other things we had talked about, especially how he was giving me a choice as to how I wanted to pursue this.

I could either walk away and lead a human life or to embrace the bond and build a relationship. A relationship he said would ultimately lead to my human demise. Could I walk away and go about with a life after knowing this? A year ago, I was ready to give it all up for the Jerk but maybe it was a good thing that he didn’t want to go through with it. I knew that, in the short time I’ve gotten to know Jasper Whitlock, he was a man of conviction and I didn’t think he’d take what we had lightly.

I guess if I really wanted to fight the already building attraction I had with that blond man downstairs, I could, but I didn’t want to. If anything, he’s been a friend, more than a friend and one that I had not so platonic thoughts about.

Could I walk away from that? Could I deny myself happiness? I don’t think it would be an easy feat, if at all. I was completely wrong in thinking he was a replacement for the Jerk, completely wrong. The only thing similar between the two was that they shared the same species.

Jasper was completely different. When he spoke, there was passion and emotion that I could see in his eyes, he never tried to mask it. His touches left me wanting more; more touches, more looks, just more of him. He wasn’t refined and proper, which I liked because I wasn’t either, and that alone made him more relateable. He didn’t candy coat things or treat me like a child and I truly appreciated that.

My eyelids were getting heavier and I had to stop thinking about the conversation especially since my thoughts were starting to make my head spin. Anymore and I felt like I would start to second guess myself. I pulled the heavy comforter up from the foot of the bed as the adrenaline finally left my system and I fought yawn after yawn. I shut my eyes and settled down to sleep.

*Cold metal pressed up against my jaw.*

I could still feel that gun against my skin even after I had brushed it away with my hands. The memory of it wouldn’t go away. My eyes shot open and I grabbed the comforter to wipe it off of me but it was still there. Nothing helped. I started to breathe heavier as I saw the robber and heard his words in my head.

What if that man had gotten trigger happy?
Oh god!

My heart raced and I was sweating. Or was I crying? I couldn’t make the thoughts stop. I couldn’t make that handgun go away.

My door shot open and Jasper’s silhouette appeared. He was growling and was crouched slightly as though he was ready to take on an attacker. He must have felt my distress. I could see him looking around as he stepped closer towards the bed.

“Isabella, are you alright?” he asked, his voice rough with emotion.

“N-no, n-not really,” I tried to explain and felt like I was on the verge of a panic attack. “I keep feeling the gun on my jaw. It won’t go away.” I was breathing even heavier now and it was making me a little dizzy, like I couldn’t get enough air into my lungs.

I was pulled into his arms as he brushed his hands down my back. He sat down on the bed. I felt calmer but I didn’t think he was using his gift; it wasn’t instantaneous like his influence usually was.

“Shhh, I’m here now,” he whispered, his breath blew softly against my face.

I nodded and tried to wipe that cold steel barrel off of me using his shirt.

“It is still there. I can’t make it go away,” I said, in a broken whisper.

“Where do you feel it?” he asked.

I brushed my fingers over to the spot. “Right here. I tried to wipe it away but it is still there.”

“Would you like me to help?”
I nodded and instantly felt his lips against my jaw. He was taking away that image and feeling, replacing it with more pleasant ones. Very pleasant ones. The coolness of his lips caused a whispered moan to escape from mine. They were surprisingly soft against my skin. His scent was so masculine, like leather warmed by the sun, freshly cut hay and something else like vanilla but more complex. It was intoxicating.

_Ooh, what was that?_

His lips parted and I felt his cool tongue drag along my jaw line. I was getting dizzy from the sensation. It felt so good and my whole body tingled from it. I bit my lower lip to hold in a moan or maybe a whimper, I wasn’t sure. My hands clutched his t-shirt tightly as my breath came faster.

“Is that better?” he murmured. I noticed his voice had taken on a husky tone and it caused my breathing to catch and another moan to escape.

“Yes,” I said breathlessly. It didn’t even sound like me.

His lips left my jaw and he placed a kiss against my temple. “Go to sleep, baby girl. I won’t do a run until you’ve settled into a nice slumber. I’ll be here.”

My eyelids got heavier and my body calmed down as he settled me back onto my bed and tucked me in. The last thing I remembered was one more kiss along my jaw and his weight lifting off my bed.

The next morning I woke up flushed and my comforter tangled around my legs. I stared at the ceiling a few minutes as I tried to catch my breath and replay the dream I had just woken up from.

*My legs were wrapped around Jasper’s body as he pinned me against the wall. He growled as he pulled me into a hard, passionate kiss. His hands roamed over me, tearing our clothes in the process. “I want you Isabella,” he whispered into my ear. Our naked bodies pressed up against each other. He trailed his lips and tongue along my neck and I felt his teeth graze the area just above my collarbone, sending waves of pleasure all over me.*

_Oh shit!_

I shut my eyes as I realized that there was a vampire downstairs who no doubt felt all that lust and
longing from me, not to mention any noises if I talked in my sleep. I was mortified and wished I could just snap my fingers and disappear into thin air. I tried but it didn’t work, I was still here.

I sighed and decided to get up and get ready for the day. I took my time in the bathroom, mainly because I was trying to buy my time before seeing Jasper but then I caught the faint aroma of coffee and the need for caffeine took over. I walked down the steps to face the music and was greeted by a steaming mug. Jasper smiled and winked at me. My face probably matched the red mug.

“Mornin’ baby girl, sleep well?”

“Yes,” I squeaked out. “I um, had nice dreams.” I walked over to the couch and sat down savoring my coffee.

“I heard.”

I put the mug down and buried my face in my hands. “Oh god, I’m so fucking mortified,” I mumbled.

“Hey,” he said softly as he brushed his fingers along my hands and he sat next to me. “If I could dream, I bet mine would be similar.”

“Really? But you... women... handsome...” I sputtered.

“Only one woman has accepted me for me,” he said. “I’m looking at her right now.”

Oh my god!

I grabbed my mug and gulped down half the contents as the words echoed in my head. My mind was spinning over everything.

“Is... isn’t this fast?” I whispered.
“I meant what I said, you set the pace.”

I nodded. “Thanks, I just...need some time.” I reached over and touched his hand just like he did with mine earlier. “I also want to get this whole Charlie and Forks thing behind me and start healing from the pain,” I admitted. “You being here has helped me, I just need to get other things done before I can move forward,” I said and looked up towards the stairs knowing that I had something big to tackle soon. I also knew that I needed to talk to him about my past, there were some things that crept up whenever I got into those dark moods that he had to know because he’d feel them.

I probably would have said more but the house phone rang and caused me to jump a little before I ran to grab it.

“Hello?”

“Bella? Hey, did you hear?” Ashley croaked out and then started to cough. I sat back down on the couch.

“No what happened?”

“There was a break-in last night at the shop! It must have happened soon after you left. The cops think he must have been on something and panicked after the alarm went off because he ran his car right into the kitchen of the burger joint next door causing a huge kitchen fire.”

My jaw dropped and my eyes grew big as I looked at Jasper. “N-no, oh shit! Really? Was anybody hurt? Oh my god, Ashley, what about Java City?” I blurted out and realized I had a little too much caffeine in a short amount of time.

“There is some damage on the shared wall with Burger Land, their place obviously sustained more damage but luckily nobody else was hurt. Oh Bella, if you didn’t close early... you could have been seriously harmed!” she cried out.

I continued looking at Jasper and he was avoiding my gaze but I could see a small smile playing on his lips as I continued the phone conversation.

“The burglar though, well, he was trapped in the fire, they’re going to ID him through his dental
records. I’ll need to get the door replaced as well as a new cash register so I’ll be heading to Seattle in the next day or two. I can’t open with the smoke and water damage right now so it will also give me time to recoup. There wasn’t much damage but enough to make it not pleasant being there for the moment. Once I get that going, I’ll need to find and train your replacement.”

I had given Ashley my notice the day I got back to work. She understood that I needed a new start and gave me some contacts of some shops near Sam Houston. I also received a glowing letter of recommendation from her as I left my shift that day.

“Okay, well I’m not leaving town yet, I’ll stop by before I do,” I promised.

“Please do and bring your handsome friend, too,” she said and laughed which caused her to go into another coughing spasm. “I’ll call or text you, I think we can open again by next weekend, at least, I hope we could. We better because I’ve got a band coming out.”

I looked at Jasper who was still trying to look nonchalant while he was on his laptop. His smile even bigger now that he could hear what Ashley said.

“I will. Maybe we’ll stop by that night to see the band. Take care, Ash,” I said and hung up the phone.

I turned to face Jasper. “What the hell did you do?” I asked, still in shock over what happened.

He looked up and tilted his head as if to see if I was angry at him. “I created a crime scene,” he said quietly.

“That was... wow,” I whisper shouted. “How the hell did you think of something so elaborate?” I was pretty impressed.

He shrugged. “I just figured since he was already drained, I needed to do something so I took him into his car and set it to ram into the burger place creating a grease fire that would destroy him. I made sure last night both places were plenty insured by hacking into some databases last night when you were asleep so Ashley and the owner of the burger place will be okay.

“But the fire could have gotten you,” I said and sat closer to him. “You could have gotten hurt.”
“I’m fine,” he said. “I made sure I wasn’t near the fire. It didn’t ignite until I left the building. Thank you for being concerned for me though,” he said quietly, staring into my eyes and then cleared his throat as though he was nervous. “Hey, how are your ribs?”

Without thinking, I pulled up my shirt to show him and saw his eyes darken slightly and I continued to stare. They didn’t frighten me, I was mesmerized by them though. His fingers reached out and caressed the area. He pulled me closer and had me lay my head on his lap as he rested his hand over my bruised side.

“Thanks,” I whispered and watched him on his laptop. “That feels good.”

“You’re welcome baby girl,” he said. “It is a little tender, I can feel that the skin is just slightly warmer than the rest of you but this should keep it from bruising too much.”

Even after all that caffeine, I felt my eyelids get heavier as I laid on my side with my head on his lap. It felt nice and I was comforted by his closeness. Before I knew it, I fell back asleep.

I woke up with my head on a pillow still on the couch. I was slightly groggy and disoriented.

“What happened?” I asked, my throat sounded froggy.

“You were asleep for about an hour,” Jasper replied as he came down the stairs. He must have been in the shower since his hair was slightly damp.

“I fell asleep even with the coffee?”

“Uh-huh,” he said and ran to the kitchen. I heard him reach for a glass and the water running. “You’ve been through a lot of shit the past week or so, your body was probably telling you to rest.” He appeared almost suddenly in front of me and handed me the glass.

“Thank you,” I replied and grabbed it, gulping down almost the entire glass before coming back up for air.
I looked around the house and then at Jasper. “Hey, can I ask you something?”

He smiled at me. “You know you can.”

“Will you help me get the house ready to sell? I guess we’ll need to get paint and stuff?”

“Yeah, I can do that. Are you sure you’re ready?” he asked and I could see the concern he had in his eyes.

“I couldn’t do this on my own. Just you being here has helped me tremendously,” I said. “I’d be a mess without you.” I looked at him and wrapped my arms around his shoulders. “Thank you, Jasper for showing up when you did.”

I felt his arms round me and his fingers combed through my hair. I breathed in his scent and I realized it made me feel centered. It wasn’t his gift, it was Jasper himself that made me feel this way.

“You’re welcome, I would do anything for you, Isabella. You don’t know how much it touches me that you trust me so much. I can feel it and I can see it. You make me believe I am a good man.”

I looked up and glared at him. “Jasper Whitlock, you are a good man and don’t let anybody tell you otherwise,” I gritted out. “You saved me twice from vampires and once from a human monster. Anybody who says you’re not a good man, well... I’ll either kick their ass or torch it.”

“Baby girl, with that look, I don’t doubt it one bit,” he said and pulled me close to him once again. “You can be pretty scary when you get pissed off. I don’t ever want to get on your bad side.” He looked at me and smiled once more. “Okay, let’s go to the hardware store and get some painting supplies and maybe some boxes?”

“Yeah, we’ll have to separate things into junk, donate and keep piles I suppose. We’ll need some boxes as well as those rubber tubs to pack for the move.”

We hadn’t talked about that and I wasn’t sure what would happen when we got there. I never followed up on the housing situation and realized just now, I wouldn’t have a place to live.
I tossed Jasper the keys and watched as he slipped on his mirrored sunglasses. We hopped in the Blazer and headed to town.

“Hey, what are your plans as far as living arrangements after we get to Texas?” I asked and was sort of hoping he’d want to stay close by at the very least.

“I’m open to suggestions. The university is not that far from Peter and Char’s farm. What would you like?”

*To have you live with me.*

“Um...” I began and bit my lip. “I don’t want to sound presumptuous but I’ve kind of grown fond of having my morning cup of coffee ready. Would... would you... would it bother you if youlivedwithme?” I think my face was now engulfed in flames.

“You’d like that?” he asked and smiled. “I wouldn’t be bothered at all.”

“I must insist that I buy my own food though,” I said and raised my eyebrow at him.

“That is fine, we can go over the do’s and don’ts beforehand,” he said and pulled into the parking lot. “Come on, let’s get some paint and stuff.”

*Meanwhile out in Alaska...*

*APOV*

I closed the door to my room when everybody went to hunt. It had been so hard to maintain my look of sadness when I relayed my vision to the family. Luckily, Edward saw my thoughts before everybody else heard the story and some attention was diverted when he fell into a sobbing mess. He was still enamored by her and kept saying over and over that the reason why he left her was because he loved her.

*Stupid child.*
Over a year ago, he saw an errant thought of mine when she first agreed to move to Forks. I imagined the possibility that she’d be with Edward since I saw her as a vampire. It was just a ‘what if’, nothing more, but he took that as an actual vision and ran with it, becoming obsessed with her. It didn’t occur to me that she would be his singer though. That just made things perfect.

When I came back from my European trip and told the family how I had seen Jasper kill her and then, after realizing that they were mates, turn and destroyed himself, the whole room began to sob. Edward cried her name over and over again, still convinced that they were true mates and that Jasper must have manipulated her in some fashion. My brother’s obsession with her just didn’t end with her blood.

Hmm, maybe I could use that to my advantage once again.

I walked over to my bathroom and checked my facial expressions. I had to paint the perfect picture of the daughter and sister who lost her first love and her best friend. I forced myself to cry and play the part so I didn’t attract Edward’s attention when all I really wanted to do was go back to Europe.

It was good that they were so emotionally distraught that I suggested they go on a hunt because a human was going to show up with deliveries. I hated that I had to send more than half my shopping via FedEx but with the new airline security issues these days, I couldn’t carry my steamer trunks.

I smiled as I went out to the balcony and stared out into the sky. I loved this time of year when day and night blended into one. I stood there and tried to figure out what my next move would be.

Ouch! That piercing pain was back and it brought me out of my thoughts and I knew I’d have to talk to my so-called father about it soon.

I felt my eyes cloud up and a vision of the family arriving in 5 minutes appeared.

Time to put on the show once again.
Chapter 19

BPOV

It was late in the evening when I got back home from the reservation. Jasper needed to feed and had gone over to Seattle where it was teeming with his meal preference and had just sent me a text saying he was on his way back. I responded back saying I had just gotten back myself. He hadn’t wanted us to be apart for too long and even suggested that I go to Seattle with him but I had things I needed to do and he reluctantly left on his bike. The past week we had been cleaning the house up and getting it ready for sale. A lot of things were boxed up and I ended up taking some of Charlie’s fishing gear down to Billy and Harry tonight where they cooked a huge spread of food as a going away celebration.

The house felt empty; much of the furniture had been donated. The faint odor of fresh paint still lingered in the air along with various household cleaners. We were set to get on the road in a matter of days. Java City had finally opened yesterday and a huge celebration was scheduled for tomorrow night. That was the last major thing on our list to hit and then we were Texas bound.

I climbed the stairs up to my room to grab a change of clothes and a shower. I looked over at Charlie’s room and was grateful that Jasper was there as a pillar of support this morning when I finally got the nerve to go inside and start packing some things. Charlie kept a bunch of framed pictures along his dresser, they were pictures of me whenever I came out here as a kid. The one that had me in tears was where he pushed me on the swing and we were both laughing. He must have gotten someone to take the picture of us because I was completely unaware of the camera. Jasper just held me when I started crying as I wrapped them up in put them in a box.

I switched on the light and went in. There were a couple boxes that still needed to go downstairs to the donation pile but the memories were packed away to take with us. The furniture we were
leaving to help stage the selling of the house was under a blue tarp since Jasper said he’d paint it once I was asleep. I walked around the room, the pain from my loss not as great now that most of the memories were safely tucked away. I saw my digital camera on the floor near where his dresser had sat. We both must have overlooked it earlier today since I had been sobbing. With all the goings on after graduation and the funeral and all, I didn’t even realize I had missed it, until now.

I knew the camera had some of my last pictures of my dad in it. I remembered he had kept the camera to show everybody at work, he was that proud of me when I graduated. I exhaled a breath that I didn’t realize I was holding and brought the camera close to me as walked out the room and shut off the lights.

I jumped in the shower and threw on some plaid shorts and an old t-shirt before going back to my room and grabbing the camera along with my laptop. I headed downstairs where I made a cup of tea and set everything up so I could look through the pictures.

I was cooling my tea as I sat on the floor when I heard the purr of Jasper’s bike pull into the drive way and less than a minute later, the door unlocked.

“How was dinner?” I said and smiled as I looked up. I could see his eyes were a more vibrant shade of red.

“It wasn’t bad but I got stuck in traffic,” he said as he put his helmet and jacket away. “Pictures?”

“Yeah, I found my camera in dad’s room and it has graduation pictures. Wanna see?” I asked.

“Sure, let me wash up and I’ll be back in a flash,” he replied.

He wasn’t joking either. In less than two minutes, he had hopped in the shower and changed to some flannel pajama bottoms and a thermal long sleeve shirt.

I sat back up on the couch and together we looked through the pictures. “So, druggie tonight or what?” I asked casually as we looked at photos from the ceremony where I was shaking the principal’s hand.

“Vagrant, he had been tossing bottles and trash over a freeway overpass before he met an unfortunate accident at a construction pit,” he said.
“You were a human drinker before the Cullens right?” I asked and he nodded. “How did you dispose the bodies then?”

I watched as he raked his fingers through his hair. “In the beginning of my life, I had no regard to hiding bodies and usually the town itself would burn in a raging inferno after we were through but then after that, they would be burned or met unfortunate accidents falling off things like buildings, street cars or busses.”

“I guess that makes more sense than animal attacks if they’re in a city,” I said and clicked on some pictures of my dad.

“Does that bother you?” he asked quietly.

“Honestly?” I asked as I looked at him. He nodded and looked back at me. “I thought it would given my past experience with human drinking vampires, but it is different with you. I think because you’re not feeding off of innocent humans but people who are a menace of society, it doesn’t,” I admitted. “You’ve proven time and time again that I am not in any danger around you. Besides, I think it fits you, your look now.” I wanted to tell him his eyes were gorgeous but I chickened out as I continued to look at the pictures.

I clicked over to the one Jacob had taken of Charlie giving me a one-arm hug. I bit my lip and felt sad knowing these were the last photos I had of him. Tears welled up in my eyes as I reached out and touched the image with my hands.

“Hey, you alright?” he asked and pulled me closer to him.

“Yeah,” I whispered. “He was so fucking happy and proud that day. It is just hard to believe that he’s gone.”

He just held me and rubbed my back as I cried for a few minutes and I felt calmer afterwards. I knew he wasn’t manipulating my emotions, I was still sad but I just felt more centered and I was able to go through the rest of the pictures before I needed some sort of diversion and thought a movie would be in order.

I ended up watching “The Ring” since it was filmed in Washington and I had never seen it. Big mistake because that movie scared the crap out of me. I screamed out loud a few times and
watched the movie through my fingers. Jasper was a good sport though and didn’t laugh at me... too much. He even admitted later, that he had seen the movie and that girl crawling out of the TV creeped him out a little bit the first time.

As I climbed up the stairs, I made sure to ask if Jasper could keep the nightmares away and he said he would while he painted my dad’s room.

I woke up early the next morning invigorated and ready for a nice jog. Jasper just waved his hand up as I ran down the stairs telling him I was going to be back. It was another cloudy day in the Pacific Northwest but it was warm as I did my usual routine. By the time I was done, I felt ready to tackle the day.

“Jasper? Could we go on a bike ride today seeing how it is overcast?” I asked breathlessly after I got back from running.

“Sure, baby girl,” he said with a smile. “Get ready and we can go, we can grab you a coffee on the way.”

“Okay, you think I could ride it on my own?” I asked quietly. He had been giving a few lessons and other than down to the coffee shop and back, I haven’t really had a chance to ride on my own.

He hesitated for a second and nodded. “Let us ride it to some less traveled roads where you won’t get too overwhelmed and then I’ll let you ride her? You don’t have a motorcycle license yet but we’ll get you one when we get to Texas.”

I grinned as I didn’t really expect that he’d let me and walked over to give him a hug. “Thank you, I really appreciate it.” I reached up to kiss him on the cheek enjoying the electric charge from our contact causing the now familiar slight but pleasant tingling sensation on my lips. “Give me a few and I’ll be ready,” I said as I headed up the stairs.

I quickly showered and pulled my hair back in a low pony tail so I could throw the helmet on and shrugged on my jacket. I was so excited I nearly skipped down the stairs causing him to look at me and laugh as he shook his head.

“What?” I asked, looking at him curiously.
“You and your excitement, baby girl. I enjoy being around it,” he said and the intensity of his eyes as he looked at me had me feeling slightly breathless. He came up to me and gently ran his fingertips along my face and I swallowed hard trying to suppress a whimper that almost escaped my lips.

He smiled at me but didn’t say a word as I grabbed the helmet on the table. We got outside and onto the bike as he made sure I was tightly holding onto him.

“Ready Isabella?” he asked and I held on tighter and nodded my head against his broad back.

He revved up the engine and went down the road to Java City and sat down as I gulped down my coffee before we took off towards Port Angeles. Instead of heading into town, we headed up to the Olympic National Forest. I clung onto him tighter as we climbed some mountain roads. I wasn’t scared, I really enjoyed feeling the open road and being close to him. Once past the ranger station, he brought the bike to a stop.

“Alright,” he said as he flipped my visor up. “I’ve taught you everything and this is a quiet road. I know you want to do this on your own, I can feel it but I you know I cannot be far away from you so I’m just going to run parallel along the trees as you go. Anytime you need anything, just call my name, okay?”

I nodded. “Thank you. I understand and I appreciate that you are letting me do this,” I said and I knew I didn’t really have to explain more than that. I reached my arms around him and enjoyed the feel of our embrace.

He pulled his helmet off and smiled as he removed his mirrored aviators. With his finger, he lifted my chin up so that we looked at each other. “Okay, remember, just call my name for anything,” he said, his beautiful crimson eyes full of warmth.

I saluted him and received a smack on my ass for that. I got back on the bike, turned on the motor and revved it up. I flipped my visor back down and gave Jasper a wave just as I took off. The feeling was just amazing and hard to describe. I let out a squeal of delight as I made my first turn feeling the bike angle towards the ground. I wasn’t going too fast but a steady pace and I was comfortable with that.

I looked around towards the trees on either side of the road and didn’t see Jasper and realized that even though he told me where he was going to be, he stayed hidden to give me the semblance of privacy as I continued on the open road. Given how overbearing things were when I dated the Jerk, I appreciated that Jasper would allow me to ride his bike on my own. I was especially grateful
since he explained how he had the overwhelming and instinctual desire to keep me protected, he
didn’t keep me from things. Where I probably would have been treated like I should be bubble-
wrapped if I was still with him, I was able to feel safe and protected without feeling constricted
with Jasper.

It was a beautiful, overcast day and I was glad Jasper and I were able to do this before we both left
for Texas. I had to think, as I continued to ride along the road, how much different I was now than
compared to a year ago. I had felt so lost being in a new town and all. Now though, this seemed
right. I didn’t feel any less of a person when I was around Jasper and he made every effort to treat
me as an equal. I knew what I had been feeling was getting stronger and I knew that he knew as
well. I appreciated that he didn’t push me on things or rush me. When he told me I basically had
the ball, he meant it.

The ride alone allowed me to think how I was falling hard for that crimson eyed vampire cowboy.
While the idea should have scared me, he proved to me time and time again that I wasn’t a meal
for him. I was more. It didn’t start the night after the robbery attempt. I knew these feelings began
the day he rescued me from Laurent and they’ve been growing stronger and were more than just
friendship type feelings. I noticed we touched more too, which I didn’t mind. It all seemed right.

I passed by a sign that indicated a rest area ahead and when I got near, I pulled over to a scenic
view and stopped the motor and got off the bike. “I’m just going use the restroom and take a look
at the view,” I said quietly knowing he’d hear me.

After I got done using the facilities, I sat down on a nearby picnic bench and looked out into the
Olympic National Forest. It was so vast, open and quiet. I closed my eyes and tried to remember
this moment knowing that I was leaving this state soon. I reached into my pocket and grabbed my
phone to take a picture of the view. Before I could do so, a set of hands wrapped around my arms
and Jasper rested his head lightly on my shoulder.

“Beautiful isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I responded enjoying his closeness and his scent. “I just love the peace and quiet here.”

“You’re going to enjoy the view of my lands from the ledge on Peter and Char’s farm,” he
whispered against my ear.

“I’d like that,” I said, my eyelids fluttering as his cool breath gently blew near my ear. “You sure
they’ll like me?”
It felt so good being with him right here. I put my hands over his as I leaned my head towards him. It wasn’t a human and vampire sitting here. We were just two people who really liked each other. A lot.

“Baby girl, they’ll adore you, I promise.” I felt the gentle touch of his lips against my temple. “You want me to take a picture of you out here?” he asked and I nodded. He took my phone out of my hands and snapped a couple pictures for me, including one of the two of us and I watched as he sent copies to his phone. “Now, you ready to ride some more?”

“Yeah,” I whispered and nodded enthusiastically. “Thank you. I have had a fun time so far,” I said and got back on the bike.

I watched as Jasper looked around to see if anybody was watching before he ghosted over towards the trees. I started up the motor again determined to ride up to Hurricane Ridge before I called him back to ride back down together.

The purring of the engine spurred me to go faster as I got back onto the road again. The wind had gotten crisper as I climbed higher in altitude. I was smiling and laughing as rode the twists and turns. I was close to the top according to the signs on the winding road. All of a sudden, I saw a squirrel darting across the road and I panicked, applying the brakes and felt the bike shudder and start to swerve. I tried to maintain control of the bike but my brain started replaying memories and I couldn’t stop it as my hands automatically left the handlebars and protected my face from the windshield I saw in my head. A scream of terror escaped my lips as I saw a sharp turn and some guardrails ahead of me.

“Mom, coyote!”

*The sound of her cell phone falling onto the floorboard.*

“Oh shit, Bella, hang on!”

“A car is coming!”

“I can’t control the car, I am sorry!”
As I saw the images in my mind, I tried to block them out as I fought to regain control of the situation. The bike violently tilted towards the ground and the memories tumbled out of my mind like dominoes; one after the other and I couldn’t stop them.

A ragged cursed scream followed by the sounds of screeching metal echoing around me as the green car slammed into the passenger side.

My screams of terror as glass shattered around me and I felt like my body was thrown about.

Eerily quiet except for the crunching sound of glass and then the sounds of muffled cries and voices.

A metallic scent flooded my nostrils and I realized I was bleeding, probably from multiple places on my battered body.

The excruciating pain that came from below my waist. I couldn’t move. I was pinned in the car and I was getting dizzy from the bloodloss - my head hurt and my vision was getting fuzzy.

A strangled cry left my lips as I fell further and further into the abyss of my mind. I could feel myself falling but I was no longer in control and it was another reminder of how I wasn’t normal. How I would never be normal.

My vision was getting spotty as I heard more screaming and the faint sounds of a siren.

Then the blackness that hit me.

Faint memories... machines beeping... the sound of my dad telling me he was here.

“She suffered a serious injury... internal bleeding... emergency hysterectomy... I’m sorry”

I was broken, I would never be the same.

The sounds of sobs... my dad crying as he sat on the bed next to me.
“I’m sorry, Bella.”

“Our apologies...”

“My condolences...”

The ‘I’m sorrys’ from the accident morphed and I was now reliving another, more recent, personal hell. Strangers, friends and family coming up to me and telling me how sorry they were for my loss. Everything swirled in my brain and clouded my vision.

I was crying or screaming or both. My body ached especially my chest. I was vaguely aware of a sliding sensation and I was moving closer towards the guard rail. My mind flashed spotty images of a blond man with warm crimson eyes smiling at me as he kept me safe. I needed him now.

I think the last thing I said either verbally or mentally was ‘Jasper’ before the blackness enveloped me.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

The last chapter was purposely vague because they were flashbacks, if you weren’t able to guess. When it originally posted, there was a week wait for this chapter.

Many, many thanks to my Canadian gals - AlexisDanaan and James Ramsey for working on this to make it make sense and pretty. JaspersWoman for pre-reading this chapter. DarkNNerdy for always being the consummate muse. She also found the quote for me.

I am not SM, I just like to have my way with her characters.

Chapter 20

“I like someone who is a little crazy but coming from a good place. I think scars are sexy because it means you made a mistake that led to a mess.” - Angelina Jolie

JPOV

I felt her panic and ran towards her at full speed. I watched as she brought her arms up as though she was protecting her face from something and her emotions went haywire. A fuckton of emotions hit me fear, panic, pain, shame and worthlessness were amongst the strongest. Through her visor, I could see her eyes were shut but her eyes under her lids twiched. Her heart was racing like crazy and all I could think was she was in guessed she was in distress.

She was falling off the bike and it was sliding. I pushed myself even faster as I saw the guard rail up ahead indicating a sharp turn. I didn’t think the bike had a chance and I didn’t care, her life was much more important than a stupid ride. I dove towards her, knocking the bike away from me and heard it crash onto the steel barrier. If she wasn’t going to be hurt, I would have rolled us away but the fact that my body wouldn’t absorb the impact given my speed and velocity, she would have been more injured. I had to use my legs and my momentum to propel us to the side of the road. I held her tight against me and made damn sure her head and neck were immobilized until I could check on her. My pace slowed and once I got to a grassy area away from prying eyes, I was able to stop and laid her gently on the ground.

Her eyes were still tightly shut and her vital signs seemed alright but I could tell she was caught in a nightmare within her mind. I undid the strap of her helmet and pulled it off her carefully to make
“Isabella,” I called out gently against her ear trying to wake her from her nightmare without causing additional trauma. I brushed my hands down her cheeks and noticed a sheen of sweat. I blew my breath across her face to see if she’d respond and I heard a tiny whimper from her. I did it again and her eyelids fluttered. “Isabella, come back baby girl,” I continued to whisper sounding much more calm than I actually felt, inside I was worried and fuckin’ scared. “Come back to me, baby girl.” I alternated between calling her name and blowing my breath across hoping that she’d recognize my scent and wake up. I wasn’t sure if that would work since that was more of a vampiric thing than a human one but I was willing to try it before I took off to a hospital.

Her hand twitched slightly and she let out another whimper.

“Please,” she said barely a whisper. “Help.”

I was relieved that she was responding and continued to slowly bring her back. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do had she not but I am sure it would have involved destruction and death. I pressed my lips against her temple and then her cheeks. I brushed my fingertips along her arms as I continued to whisper to her.

It took another 5 minutes and 24 seconds before her eyes fluttered open.

“Jasper,” she whispered and slowly brought her hand up to touch my face. “What happened?”

I sat up and pulled her onto my lap as I held her close. “I think you lost control of the bike and started to fall,” I whispered against her ear. ”Then you... your mind went somewhere and I couldn’t reach you with my ability.” I closed my eyes and took in a breath in an effort to calm my own emotions. “It scared me,” I admitted.

“Oh god,” she cried out. “It was a fucking squirrel that ran across the road. I... I lost control and oh shit, your bike!”

“Shh,” I whispered, “All that matters is you’re safe. That is all that matters Isabella. Are you injured?”

“But your bike! I fucked it up,” she cried out.
“You’re more important than the bike,” I said quietly but made it clear I didn’t want any arguments.

She moved her arms and legs to test them out. “Dammit, my leg throbs,” she bit out and winced.

I looked down and realized she had a cut on her leg. “Baby girl, you’ve got a nasty cut. Would you like me to check on it?”

“Yeah, am I bleeding? You didn’t smell it?” she whispered back and held her hands to her temple. “My head hurts too.”

“I guess I was more concerned about you wakin’ up than your blood,” I admitted as I looked carefully at her head and concentrated on that pain. “I think you’ve just got a headache from the trauma, the pain doesn’t seem that serious but I can draw some of that away until we get you some pain pills,” I said. I looked at her leg and saw her thigh, right above her kneecap, was bleeding. “May I?” I looked at her as I held her pant leg up.

She nodded and bit her bottom lip.

I tore her jeans so I could better assess her leg and tried not to notice how running had really made them shapely. “It’s about a four inch cut, probably from a sharp rock, Parts of it is pretty deep, but not the entire cut. Do you want me to take you to get stitches?”

“You can take care of it, can’t you?” she said and looked at me pointedly.

“Are you sure?” I asked and looked at her.

“I trust you and you’ve already fed,” she said and I could feel the honesty in her words.

I took a breath and looked at her. “My venom might sting a little, baby girl but it isn’t super concentrated right now so it won’t hurt too much.”
“No more than a needle, I hope,” she muttered. “It won’t change me, will it?”

I shook my head. “No, the venom is the strongest and most concentrated when I bite down,” I explained quickly.

“Oh okay,” she said and nodded. “I trust you.”

Never had someone put this much trust in me and I was moved. Obviously she was more than a human to me given our bond, but she had never not trusted me in the time I had known her and I wasn’t about to fuck that up. I looked at her wound and noticed it hadn’t stopped bleeding yet. I could see small grains of gravel and dirt embedded in the wound but I could spit that out easily as I cleaned and sealed it.

As soon as her blood flooded my senses, the urge to protect her was once again there and my mouth didn’t pool up with venom which was something I had never noticed until now. I started slow, dragging my tongue around the cut to clean off the blood. It was so sweet and pure and so Isabella. I turned around and spit the grit from her leg onto the ground and continued to clean off the blood and her cut.

I could feel her eyes on me as she watched. Her heart was pounding and I could feel her trust, it was strong but there was an undercurrent of lust that was beginning to build as I continued to lick her wound clean. A minute later I was done and all that remained was a scar on her leg that lightly shimmered in the sunlight. My demon was proud that we took care of our mate and I could feel she was proud too.

“Was that hard for you?” she asked with concern on her face.

“Surprisingly, it wasn’t. Did it sting at all?”

“Not really, it was... um... it was nice,” she replied and blushed. “Thank you for taking care of me.”

I reached out and touched her face, enjoying the feel of her flushed skin. “Are you going to be alright as I run us back to the house?” I asked.

“I think so. Can you not carry me like a backpack though? That way I can talk to you if I need to.”
I chuckled and then realized it might be a good thing in case she fell back into her nightmare.

“Alright, baby girl wrap your legs around me and hold on tight. I’ve got a hold of our helmets but let me know at anytime you need a rest.

She did what I asked and snuggled close her face against my neck as I took off into the woods. She felt so warm and every exhale of breath she took, I almost imagined her lips kissing my neck.

Having fed in this very national park for several years, I knew automatically how to get back to Forks from here and could do it with my eyes closed as I started off, focusing most of my attention to the woman in my arms. I tried not to think how good it felt with her legs wrapped around me.

“You doin’ alright?” I whispered loudly for her to hear about 5 minutes in.

“Yes,” she mumbled. “You run smoother, you don’t jar my body which I like,” she added.

By the time I got us back to the house, she had fallen asleep in my arms. Even when I had to stop and pull my helmet on before I got into town to avoid a sparkling surprise, she didn’t wake up.

I got her into the house and by the time I got her on the couch, she had woken up. I ran upstairs to grab a bottle of ibuprofen and headed back down, grabbing a glass of water for her.

“Here, open your hand,” I said as I handed her some pills and the glass of water.

“Thanks, that should help,” she said and gulped down pills and water. I could feel her appreciation flowing through her. “I’m going to get changed and I need to explain to you about what happened.”

She got up, still slightly wobbly but managed to steady herself without my help. I watched her move up the steps slowly, holding onto her head. She got her clothes and headed into the shower so I sat down on the couch and propped my head on my hands, my elbows on my knees. I was still shaken up by the fact that I was close to losing her today all because of a goddamn squirrel. I didn’t want to think what could have happened if I had not been there or couldn’t get there in time. Then to see her trapped in her nightmare like that, frightened me as I wondered what could have happened to cause that much trauma in her young life.
Her hands ran down my back and I almost felt calmer from her touch. Once again I realized I was so caught up in my thoughts that I didn’t pay attention to her coming back downstairs.

“Hey, are you okay?” she asked as she sat down next to me.

“Yeah, just shaken up over today,” I said and gave her a small smile. “How are you doing?”

“I’m feeling better. Thank you for bringing me back,” she said and wrapped her arms around me.

I pulled her close and set her on my lap and breathed in her scent, kissing her hair. I know this was probably too soon to be doing this but I needed to feel her close to me. I needed her scent. I felt her warm, soft lips pressed against my temple as I had done a few times for her. Her affection, trust, concern and determination swirled around her.

“I need to talk to you,” she whispered. “It has to do with what you saw today. I don’t get that way all the time but there have been a few times when something clicked in my head and I would fall into this abyss,” she began. She was apprehensive but at the same time she was determined.

“The summer after my freshmen year, Renee had sent me to camp outside of Sedona. Well, I somehow missed the bus back to Phoenix so she had to come out to pick me up. She wasn’t happy about it but she drove out regardless. On the way back, she was on her cell arguing with her boyfriend at the time, some guy Tim, he was before Phil. Well, she was on the phone when a coyote ran across the road and I screamed to let her know. She swerved and an oncoming car hit my side of the car. I don’t remember all of it, but there was glass that rained down on me and I remembered screaming and being in a lot of pain.”

I held her just a little closer to me and ran my fingers through her hair. I wanted to let her know I was here for her.

“The next thing I remember was waking up at the hospital and my dad was sitting on the chair next to the bed. I had a fractured pelvis and some other internal injuries, my spleen had ruptured as well. I was still groggy and drifting in and out of consciousness so the next thing I was able to remember was hearing the doctor talk to my parents.”

She was breathing harder now and her eyes were shut tightly as though she could shut out the pain. “I... I had heard him tell my folks that I had internal injuries and I had to... had to have an emergency hysterectomy. It was bad,” she whispered and looked up at me. “My dad, cried. I heard
him fucking crying.” Tears were streaming down her face now, her hands clenching onto my t-shirt in anguish.

I kissed her temple a few times and held her close to me. To have gone through so much at such a young age and to experience that much pain was hard to imagine but I could feel what she was going through now. “I’m here, baby girl,” I whispered softly and rubbed her back in small circles.

“So many people told me how sorry they were. I hated it, I don’t want pity and that was how I imagined everybody thinking when they saw me. Renee and I started to drift apart, I think she saw me as a burden because I was no longer the one to take care of her. She now had to step up as a mom; a grown up and I don’t think she liked it all that much. I spent the whole summer recovering but then when I went back to school, things just seemed worse between us. School was rough too, rumors started to spread about my injuries. I guess me having to get exams at a gynecologist equated to either I was a slut or pregnant.”

I growled at the cruelty of those words and wanted to tear those human children apart with my hands.

“Shh, it is okay now, I know the truth and that is all that matters,” she said and held my hand. “It wasn’t back then but the best thing was moving here, it gave me a chance for a new start and not have those vicious rumors around,” she continued and snorted. “Of course, how the hell was I to know that I’d meet a family of vampires.” She smiled at me wryly. “Leave it to me to fall for the very first boy who looked at me, not realizing he wasn’t the right person. He wanted a perfect human Bella or one he can mold into one and with me being so withdrawn from everything that happened in Arizona, I didn’t have the guts to say otherwise.” She was starting to get agitated. “Well, I am not perfect. I have scars from the injuries and I would never be able to lead the ideal, picture-perfect human life. I didn’t realize it at the time but him dumping me like that sort of helped me wake up and find myself again. I won’t want to change who I am again for empty promises, Jasper. I can’t.”

I looked at her and cupped her face with my hands. “Isabella, you’ve been through more than a typical human has had to endure in a short life. I wish I could take all that pain away for you, I really do. Instead know that I would never judge you for anything. As I said before, as long as you’re happy and comfortable with who you are, that is all that matters. One of the things I’ve learned is people will love you for you, and you shouldn’t have to change that for their sake. I wasn’t going to tell you my story yet but you’ve opened up to me with something very personal that you had to endure. I want to say that I’m sorry but I understand now how those words are so hard for you to hear,” I said to her and leaned my forehead against hers for a couple breaths before I kissed her forehead.

I was scared to tell her about my past but I owed it to her to give her the opportunity to run the opposite direction if she wanted. I couldn’t take that away from her. I took a deep breath and
described how I was in the Civil War, having lied about my age to join the cause. She listened and held onto my hand as I described how one night, I ran into three ethereal women who turned out to be vampires. As I began to tell her how I was brought into the undead life as a vicious killing machine, she turned and wrapped her arms around me and tried to soothe me the way I soothed her. I described how the killing of innocent humans and newborns started to eat at me and I started to fall into my own abyss before I was rescued. By the time I was done I felt raw and vulnerable. I closed my eyes and looked down, part of me expecting her to reject me or abhor me for my past.

“Jasper, what’s wrong? she asked as she ran her fingers through my hair.

“Isabella,” I whispered and looked up at her. “Didn’t you hear what I did? I killed for the mere sake of killin’. I let blood spill onto streets. I took women and sated myself on their flesh in all ways. Why aren’t you runnin’ away in horror?”

“Why? Because you aren’t him anymore,” she said with passion. “Sure you did some fucked up things in your past and you paid the price for it, didn’t you? You wanted someone to rip you apart and burn you just as you had done to countless others. I heard you loud and clear that you were created to be a monster. Well, you aren’t a fucking monster anymore because you recognized the difference and made a point to change. A monster would have continued to kill and destroy for the sake of killing. There would be no remorse, nothing. I understand now how hard it was for you to go to the Cullens and live their idyllic life and feel like you were always under their thumb. Guess what, Jasper? I’ll say it again, you’re not that fucking monster anymore. Look at where you are. Look at what you’ve done for me in the short time you’ve come back. THAT is why I am not running away in horror. If I have to tell you that you’re not a goddamn monster every day for the rest of my life, then I will until I get it through your fucking thick skull.” I gasped as she took her fingers and flicked me on my forehead to emphasize her point. “I meant it when I said that you’re a good man and if you say otherwise, I will find a way to torch your ass.”

I continued to look at her in awe as she just ripped me a new one. The fire and passion in her eyes softened. “Jasper, you and I both have fucked up, painful pasts but maybe together we can find a way to heal? I’m fucking scared to where this is heading because even though it is moving fast, I am finding that I like you more than just a friend. I’m bound to make mistakes or say the wrong things now and then but I’m willing to give this a chance, to give us a chance. It scares me because I feel so drawn to you but at the same time, it feels so fucking right. Just as you told me before, you’re fucking worth it.”

I wrapped my arms around her and held her close, afraid to let her go. She spoke with such conviction that I felt as though my undead heart had been reanimated. To say I was moved was an understatement. To realize she wanted to take that chance of something with me was more than I could ever have hoped for. I looked at her and smiled as I kissed her cheek. “I am bound to make mistakes too, baby girl, I am not gonna lie. The fact that you have accepted me for me has moved me in ways I never thought was possible. I will be the best man I can be, but I need to let you know I’m not a dozen red roses, cliché type of guy. I can be stubborn and I am liable to piss you off. You might even call me an asshole at times but I will do my fucking damnedest not to ever intentionally
hurt you.”

I wanted to say more but felt this wasn’t the time just yet. We had just, in our own way, declared that we meant more to each other than just friends. It just fit that this was happening as we both got ready to set off to Texas soon.

I lifted her chin so I could look into her eyes. There was a sheen of tears on them as she continued to look at me. I gently pressed my lips against hers but kept it chaste for now. There would be more as we continued to build our relationship, thereby strengthening our bond. I knew that now and could feel it down to my bones. I felt similar emotions coming from her as we just gazed into each other’s eyes for another half minute before her stomach broke the silence.

“I guess I am hungry,” she muttered wryly. “Hey, can we leave tonight?”

“Let’s get you something to eat and then finish our errands so we can leave?” I suggested and she nodded. “You still want to catch the band?”

“Yeah, it will be a nice, last hurrah type of thing. Can we go to the diner?” she asked and I nodded.

I finished loading up some boxes into her car so we could drop more stuff at the dump and the donation center and then we headed to town. We dropped the house key off at a realty office so they could put the house on the market the next day.

It was quiet when we got to the diner and Isabella explained that it was past the lunch hour. I smiled when she took a hold of my hand and we went inside. I watched as she ordered some food once again making sure it looked like we were sharing. She told me some fond memories of being here with her dad and although she was sad, I could see that her grief was less than when I first got back to town.

We ran our errands and as we headed back, she quickly pointed to a flower shop and asked that I pull over.

“Stay here, I’ll be right back,” she said and ran into the store. I could feel the pain coming off of her but also affection and love. Five minutes later, she came out with a bouquet of flowers and got in the car.
“Take me to the cemetery?” she asked and I touched her hand and nodded.

When we got there, she got out of the car and looked at me. “Come with me,” she said and held out her hand. Together we walked to where her father was buried. When we got there, I could smell her tears flowing as she kneeled down, her hand still in mine so I sat down next to her. Her other hand reached out and touched the gravestone.

“Daddy, I’m leaving tonight for Texas,” she whispered. “You’ll always be in my thoughts even though I’m not in Forks. I don’t know when I’ll come back here but please know I’ll always love you and there will never be a day where I won’t think about you. This is Jasper, he’s been a great friend and has helped me start healing. I wish you had an opportunity to meet him because I think you would have liked him. We’re both heading to Texas to start a new life together but you’ll never be far from my thoughts. I love you, Daddy.” I watched as she let go of my hand and placed a kiss on the gravestone before she looked at me. I opened my arms to her and she immediately went to me and let me hold her as she cried. Right there, I looked at the gravestone and vowed to Chief Swan that I’ll make sure to take care of her for as long as she wanted me; and would continue to do so long after that. We stayed in each other’s arms for a few more minutes before she nodded her head and I knew she was ready to get back to the house.

“Thank you, once again for everything.” she whispered as I pulled into the drive.

“Anytime, Isabella,” I promised. “Let’s load up the car so we can leave straight from Java City tonight if you want to.”

“Yeah that’s a good idea. I like that. I’ll pull out the clothes for tonight and then everything else will be ready. Do you need go get anything else from there?”

A few days ago, I had told her about how I had gone back to the house when I first came back and how I knocked the piano over. She was happy that I did that and said if I went back there, to give it a good kick for her as well. I did so and then some, as I turned much of it into matchstick sized pieces. I brought some of the boxes back to be donated since I knew she had no desire to visit that mansion at all. “Nope,” I replied. “I got all I need already.”

We worked together in loading up the Blazer and then headed to the cafe to listen to the band. Ashley greeted her with a knowing smile when she saw us holding hands. The band was good and the cafe was packed. It was a nice ending to a crazy ass day and I could tell she was feeling about the same thing. I was glad the lights had been dimmed so my eyes weren’t noticeable. A few people stopped by our table to say hi to her and she politely greeted them and introduced them to me. After the final encore, she went to hug Ashley, saying that she’ll keep in touch as we walked out and I helped her into the car. Together we hit the road.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my Canadian gals - AlexisDanaan and JamesRamsey for reading this through and making it all pretty. :) JaspersWoman for prereading and as always, DarkN Nerdy for being my muse.

As always, everything belongs to SM. I just like to play with the characters.

Are y’all ready for a road trip? Well here you go -

Chapter 21

BPOV

As soon as we got into the car, my eyelids got heavy.

“Can you wake me up when we hit the state line?” I asked as I shut my eyes. With the emotional maelstrom I had today, I just wanted to rest for a bit.

“Sure, I’ll nudge you,” Jasper replied as he pulled out of Java City.

That was practically the last thing I remembered, grateful that I wasn’t awake for the ferry ride across the Sound. Given the day I had, I probably would have gotten extra queasy and would be found with my head over the railing. I was also glad that the usual nightmares that often accompanied my flashbacks didn’t occur either.

Next thing I knew, I felt a nudge on my shoulder followed by a cool hand brushing along my arm. My eyelids opened to a black sky with occasional headlights passing us.

“State line is just five miles ahead,” he said and looked over with a smile. I looked at him for couple more breaths as I took in his smile that just seemed to radiate off of him. I turned back towards the window knowing I had to keep from thinking thoughts that would have me blushing as red as his eyes.
That thought was all it seemed I needed to wake up and realize that Jasper and I were really heading to Texas to start a new life. A life that held the promise of something that I had once thought was an unattainable goal: happiness.

Near the Washington border, Jasper slowed down his speed and as we crossed into Oregon, I let out a breath that I didn’t realize I held. Even though it was nothing more than a sign that said “Welcome to Oregon,” it felt like more to me. Just like I was given an opportunity a few years ago to get a fresh start from Arizona, I was now able to do the same; we both were.

“Do you want coffee at daybreak? We should hit Pendleton in a few hours,” he asked.

“Yeah, I can drive for a bit too. I know you don’t need to rest, but if you wanted a break from it, I don’t mind.”

“Okay, just rest up. We’ll play it by ear,” he said and my eyes closed once again.

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee flooded my senses and I was drooling when my eyelids fluttered open once again. Jasper was waving a cup of hot coffee under my nose.

“Interesting,” he murmured.

“Huh? What?” I asked and took hold of the cup just as he snapped the lid back on for me.

“Your reaction to that cup, it was very interesting the way you responded to the scent.” He was grinning.

“How so?” I asked still not fully aware of my surroundings but I found myself smiling back at him.

“The emotions weren’t quite as intense but they’re parallel to what I feel when I... um... hunt and just before I feed,” he said. “What that what you meant the other day when I talked about the euphoria?”

I took a couple gulps and waited for the caffeine to hit my system and jar me awake. “Sort of. I didn’t realize my reactions were so similar beforehand though. When you compared your emotions
that go with your new diet to my caffeine addiction, I guess I was able to understand why you would want to go back to your natural diet. I just saw it as me going from coffee from a can, to something that was whole roasted and more complex. Okay, that is probably not the best analogy, but I understood the need for it,” I babbled. I looked up and smiled at him after taking another gulp. “I don’t make a whole lot of sense in the morning. I just seemed to understand it more and didn’t feel like I could judge, you know?”

He winked at me and then slipped on his sunglasses. “I think I understand and thank you for not judging, I know you said it didn’t bother you when I asked the other night, but I am grateful for you not passing judgement. I am not saying that you ever did but I was stuck in that for a number of years so I truly appreciate it.”

I looked at him and gave him a small smile as I reached over and squeezed his hand. “Was it always that bad... with them, the Cullens?” I asked quietly. The very idea that they judged him or treated him badly for all those years because of his past angered me and saddened me at the same time.

“Hey,” he said quietly. “There is a park across the way. Want to stretch your legs out a bit and I can talk at the same time?”

“Yeah, that sounds great, I am getting a little uncomfortable sitting this whole time.”

We got to the park and it was still early enough that we weren’t disturbed as we walked around and I continued to sip my drink. We held hands as we talked and it felt nice. I also appreciated that he kept his steps with mine and didn’t complain that I was walking too slow and hoped he felt that.

“It wasn’t that they always judged me or distrusted me, though that was a big thing that led to me wanting to leave. The big part was I just didn’t feel like I belonged, truly belonged with them. They tried to make me a part of them by dressing me up and stuff but I never felt truly myself. Like you, they wanted to mold me into being something or someone that wasn’t really indicative of who I was. Take the nickname I was given.”

“You mean Jazzy or Jazz?” I asked and made a face.

He looked at my reaction and snorted. I bet he was rolling his eyes behind his shades too. “Yeah, I hated that,” he said. “The first time it was used, I said “No” but they kept it up or rather she kept it up and then Emmett ran with it.”
I nodded. “I never understood that nickname for you,” I said and smiled as he wrapped his arm around my shoulder and pulled me closer to him.

“I don’t either. I know for a while, Peter called me Major but he’s since stopped. It almost feels nice not to have one these days. I know you don’t like me talking about my gift but I felt your appreciation back then and you’re welcome.”

“No, it isn’t that I never liked it. I just thought Alice was just too over the top with it to the point where she’d throw it in everyone’s faces. I mean, I didn’t really need to know that a denim skirt and black sweater was something I had to wear because she saw it. It made her sound, at times, like a circus sideshow freak. I bet if he could have read my mind, he would have done the same thing. I get that some of your kind are gifted but to be constantly told my future was too much. I liked having some mystery in my life. I understand if I was in danger but it was overkill. I didn’t think you were like that. You seemed to respect that people wanted to keep some things private.”

He nodded and then lifted me up so I sat on top of the park bench and he sat next to me so our shoulders touched. We hunched over and talked quietly since there were some morning joggers that were running by and we would not get interrupted. “Emotions are a private thing and I don’t like to broadcast it out to everybody what someone is feeling. It feels like a violation of sorts, especially when others might hear.”

“No, that makes sense and thank you, I really appreciate that,” I said quietly as I finished off the rest of the drink. “I need to wash up at the restroom and then we can get going. Can I drive for a bit?”

We both got up and walked over towards the restrooms. “Yeah, we’re close to the Idaho border. We’re staying on I-84 for now so it will be pretty easy if you want to get a couple hours in. I get control of the music though.”

I laughed at his suggestion as I headed towards the ladies room. “Deal!”

I pulled out of the parking lot as soon as we got back in the car and headed on I-84 following the signs to Idaho. Jasper was fiddling with his iPod and soon the sound of country music filled the car.

“Who is this?” I asked.
“It is a guy from Georgia, Jason Aldean,” he explained.

I smiled. “I like it, it isn’t too twangy. So going back to what we were talking about, do you miss them or miss living with them?” I asked as I accelerated on the on-ramp into the interstate.

He turned his body towards me and leaned against the window. “I would have to say, it is bittersweet. Right now, I think most of my memories are still tainted and I don’t like that some of the emotional shit they sent me bothered me and might bother me for a while so no, right now I don’t miss them. I know I had said I’d never want to see them a few weeks ago, but a decade or several decades from now? I might have a different view.”

I laughed at his comment. “Well, I guess that answers the second part. Didn’t you enjoy going to school all the time?” I teased.

“Oh hell no, I’d rather eat human food,” he replied and shuddered. “Peter, Char and I talked about this very thing one night and we both agreed, college is one thing, taking some classes here and there but high school is a big negative.”

I nodded as I thought back at my sophomore year. “Yeah, I don’t think I could do high school again. That was just...” I didn’t finish and just shook my head. “So you knew how everybody felt about me? Did they... did they even care about me?” I had often wondered about that but was never sure. “Only if you’re comfortable in sharing, I don’t want you to feel like you’re breaking their confidence.”

“No, it isn’t that; do you really want to hear it? Some of them were quite blunt about things sometimes and then with the emotions I sometimes get associated with the words, well it might be a little brutal, baby girl.”

“Yeah, I do, but thank you for telling me the truth. Just give it to me, like a band-aid so at least I have a sense of closure from them.”

“Okay, well we’ll start with the parents. Carlisle thought of you as a patient more often than not. Would he have known about your car accident?”

“I don’t think so, the doctor was in some sort of class action malpractice suit a couple years ago that I didn’t have anything to do with but since I was a minor, my records were sealed. I don’t want them finding it if they ever look. It is none of their goddamn business!” I growled. I really didn’t
want them to pity me or something.

“I’ll talk to my lawyer and see if we can bury it so they’ll never link that information to you. Would you like that, Isabella?”

I nodded. “Yes please, I’ll pay you back for that,” I vowed.

“Nonsense,” he replied. “I’ve got lots of money to go around. Peter told me years ago to buy stock in a couple IPOs, Apple and Google plus a bunch of others but those two have been real good picks.”

I decided to ask him about Peter later. “Okay, I guess that is alright then,” I conceded reluctantly. “What about the rest of the family?”

“Esme thought of you as a daughter and Emmett truly thought of you as a little sister, but I think both of them thought of you as much younger than your age.”

“Yeah,” I huffed. “I got that impression too and I was so lost in this idea of an ideal image of the Cullens that I sort of lost myself. I look back now and think how stupid I was.”

His fingers brushed along my arm and then held my hand that was resting on the console. “Hey, you weren’t stupid, and I got lost in their ideal khaki pants and sweaters image too. Besides, if it weren’t for them, I might not have gotten to know you.”

I smiled and felt my cheeks heat up at his words. “True. We cannot change the past but please don’t wear khakis and sweaters again. I... um... I like your clothes now. You look good in them.”

“Thank you, it feels more like me. So do you want to hear more about the Cullens?”

“Sure,” I replied still holding his hand and enjoying the warm fuzzy feelings.

“Well, Rose for the most part didn’t care one way or another about you. She envies humans because they have a life she’s always yearned for. It isn’t just you though. She’ll read gossip magazines and complain about celebrities’ lives as well.”
“Wow, she’s really a piece of work. So because I was a human and in her mind, probably could lead a storybook life, she was a little envious of me? I got vibes she didn’t like me,” I murmured. “What a bitch.” I looked ahead as I knew there were two more people left that I was curious about. I bit my lip and steeled my resolve and took a deep breath. “What about the other two, Alice and Edward?” It was the first time in a while I let that name enter my thoughts and leave my lips. Where that name used to make me happy and give me butterflies and then later it caused me some heartache right after I was dumped, it surprised me that the name didn’t do anything for me. I was shocked.

“Hey, are you alright? You’ve got a look of shock there. I can drive if you’re feeling overwhelmed,” he said, concern evident in his voice.

“No, I am fine. I am just a little surprised that I’ve been calling him the Jerk for months now and this was the first time I spoke of his name and there was nothing. It was like I was saying an ordinary word like ‘dog’ or ‘watermelon’. It was just a word,” I said and smiled. “It doesn’t hurt or anything but I think I’ll call him Eddie instead. I know he hated that.”

“Yes he did,” he said and chuckled. “I am happy that you’re not feeling anything but your tune might change when we get to him. With Alice, I think she did like you because she could toy with you.”

“Hmm, interesting choice of words,” I said and exited the interstate. “We’re running low on fuel and plus I need a bathroom break.” We had been driving for a while now. I pulled into a huge gas station. “I’ll be right back. You can drive next if you want.”

I was back in ten minutes after buying a burger and a couple big bottles of water. Jasper was still filling up the tank when he saw me coming and walked to the door and held it open for me. Where it used to bother me with Eddie, I found it endearing with Jasper. Just seeing his smile when he received my silent thank you was breathtaking.

“You can control the iPod if you want,” he said a few minutes later when he got into the car. “Anytime you need a break for anything, just let me know, I can drive for hours and not have to worry about things so you need to let me know. Should I continue?”

I gulped down some water. “Yeah. As you said the word toy, I thought she made me feel like a dress up doll or something. I guess she was used to having her way though.”
“Yeah she did,” he muttered. “Controlling bitch.”

I giggled at his offhand remark. “Yeah, I am glad you saw that and did away with her antics.”

“Me too, baby girl, me too,” he said. “So with Eddie, this might be a little hurtful, I’ll forewarn you.” He put his hand on the console and I held onto it.

“I can handle it, Jasper. I have a feeling he wasn’t entirely truthful with his intentions or how he really and truly felt about me,” I replied.

“Sort of,” he began. “You see, he wasn’t entirely joking when he said he was in love with you. What he associated to just you, was your blood instead. In the vampire world, there is a rare thing called a ‘singer’. It is someone whose blood calls out to that vampire. It is rarer than a vampire finding his mate while they are still human. When a vampire finds their singer, it is beyond the normal bloodlust. It is as though your blood is crack to that particular vampire. Carlisle theorized that you were Eddie’s and that is why he was so enamored of you. What you saw was or rather, what he wanted you to see, wasn’t real love but he wanted to possess you.”

“He wasn’t going to change me was he? If he did then what if I am this singer?”

“I’ve never run into one and believe me, I’ve had my fair share of humans, but from what I understand, it doesn’t usually bode well. Even if he was successful in changing you, the fact that you’d no longer have what he wanted most probably wouldn’t have been a happy ending. Keep in mind that I only got these from emotions and from what I observed and then from speaking to you. It might have been speculative but I didn’t feel the same type of love that I’d see from Peter and Char or even a random human couple walking down the street.”

I found myself again thinking I was going to be sad and shocked but I wasn’t. “Thank you for being truthful, I once again expected to feel hurt by it but honestly, I’m not which is why you probably felt my surprise. I guess maybe deep down inside, I already knew but this just confirmed it. Well, maybe not the singer part but he did say I was like heroin once.” I squeezed his hand to assure him that I was good. “So your brother Peter, is he good at picking stocks?”

Jasper chuckled. “Not really, he’s got a gift where things just pop into his brain. I think at one time, he compared them to a camera where he’ll get an image or piece of trivia and it shows up.”

“So he’s not like Alice?”
“No way. I’ll warn you though, he hates being compared to her. His images show up and it can occur a minute from now to decades from now. They aren’t based on decisions because the glimpses he sees are so brief. It just happens and it cannot be controlled which means he could get an image now and then not get one for a couple years. It is completely random too. He’s gotten images on stocks, news events, things that happened to people he knows. It just is.” He pulled out his phone. “Here, I’m going to call him and you can talk to him if you’d like.”

I watched as he set the phone on speaker after he dialed and then set it on the drink holder.

“Peter, I’m on the road with Isabella,” Jasper said as soon as the phone picked up.

“Just about to call you. I got this funny feelin’ my ears were burnin’,” Peter drawled out.

I giggled just as Jasper gestured with a ‘see, I told you so’ look on his face.

“Hello,” I said, sounding a little nervous.

“Aww, don’t be nervous, little one, I won’t bite,” he said with a chuckle and we all started to laugh.

“So, we’re headed to Texas, can you or Char get us a realtor to work with? Isabella is startin’ school at Sam Houston,” Jasper said.

“Why don’t y’all stay at the house? We need to leave for a month, business calls,” Peter said.

“Oh? Is this about the redhead?” Jasper asked and seemed a little more alert.

“Possibly, we’re gonna meet up with our contacts and see what we come up. How long before y’all get here?” Peter asked.

“We’re gonna be in Salt Lake soon,” Jasper replied.
“We’re gettin’ the house outfitted with the appropriate plumbin’,” Peter replied. I felt my face turn a little red over that. “Little one, we never had that stuff fixed but we’ll get it workable for you. You’re gonna have to do your real cookin’ out at the Grill but we got one of those microwave things for inside the house.”

“Thank you Peter and please tell Charlotte the same,” I replied. “Grill?” I was confused and wondered if that was a word that had a different meaning in the South.

“Baby girl, Peter’s got his barn decked out like a bar and grill. It works, Peter?”

“Yep, its got a pizza oven and a huge fridge too. Hey, we’ve got to get to town now that there is a thunderstorm brewin’. We’ll be here for another day and then we’ll take the plane out.”

There was a rustle on the phone and then a feminine voice replied. “Sugar, please, call me Char. We both cannot wait to meet you but it’ll have to wait until after we get back. Now, you tell Jasper to make a stop at the grocery store before y’all get here. I didn’t want to guess at what you’d like to eat.”

I smiled by how easily they have made me feel welcomed and that they didn’t presume to know what I’d like. “I look forward to meeting you both as well,” I said and genuinely meant it.

“Alright, I’ll make sure we get some food before we get there,” Jasper replied and squeezed my hand. “We’ll see you both soon.”

After the call disconnected, I smiled at Jasper. “I like them. Did you get to see them often when you were with the Cullens?”

“No not as often as I would have liked. The Cullens, while they were polite, weren’t as hospitable towards them given their diet as well as the fact that we were also a part of the Vampire Wars. They didn’t like that I associated with them because I could relapse or something.”

I growled, even though it was not as powerful as the vampire who was holding my hand. “They didn’t trust you with them because you might relapse? Jasper you’re not a fucking idiot,” I spat out. “Just because the three of you didn’t have their ideal life doesn’t mean that your brother and sister were delinquents or something and peer pressure you into doing something you’re not really wanting to. That must have been hurtful.”
“It was and I allowed it to happen,” he replied and I could hear the sadness in his voice.

I threaded my fingers through his. “You tried to live their way for a a peaceful life, for you to recover from your trauma. You’re now able to hang out with Peter and Char all the time. It worked out for the best, right?”

He looked at our hands and smiled. “It sure has, baby girl,” he said. “Ms. Swan, we’re nearly at Salt Lake City. How would you like to stay the night and sleep on a bed?”

The idea of a nice bath and a comfy bed sounded heavenly. “Yes please but nothing too fancy?” I suggested.

“Alright, no Ritz-Carltons but I’ll get something decent,” he replied. “So Ms. Swan,” Jasper began and started to rub little circles on my hand with this thumb. “Would you like to accompany me on a date tonight?” he asked and brought my hand to his lips. That little kiss made my whole body feel warm and I wanted more.

I was momentarily speechless from the kiss. I nodded before my brain caught up with my mouth. “Why yes, Mr. Whitlock, I’d love to go on a date with you,” I replied. I think I sounded calm but I couldn’t separate the nerves from the excitement because it had all amassed to a giant ball in the pit of my stomach. I was going on a date with Jasper.
JPOV

I had to be honest with myself, if I was told I’d be on a roadtrip with Isabella Swan months ago, I would have scoffed at the idea. It would have been nothing but a joke. I had no real experience being confined in a vehicle with humans other than the field trips that I had to participate in while in high school and I tried my damnedest to get out of most of those. On the ones I couldn’t avoid, I just made sure I had the windows down, not caring if it pissed those humans off. Because of this, a small part of me still expected to be driving at full speed with the windows rolled down this trip just so I didn’t have to smell her delicious blood or hear her heart beating, even with all we’ve been through so far. Much to my surprise and relief, it was not the case at all. Her blood scent was there but I wasn’t tempted to drain her. It had only been a few hours since that motorcycle incident where I sealed her leg wound and I could still taste her on my tongue, sweet and so Isabella; it was something I never wanted to forget but I was by no means tempted to have more than what was given. I was once again thankful for my iron-clad memory because that was something I never wanted to forget.

So far, being on the road through a few states with Isabella was different than anything I had ever experienced so far. It was comforting to know that we didn’t have to fill every minute talking. She didn’t drive me crazy, constantly talking about things that didn’t interest me like my ex-wife used to - I really didn’t care about the history of Coco Chanel or the differences between Rococo and Baroque. I used to think Alice preferred to talk about absolutely everything and nothing just so I didn’t have a chance to listen to my music and enjoy the quiet. Isabella enjoyed listening to music just as much as I did and when we did talk, it was easy. I was a little surprised she wanted to know more about me, specifically, my life with the Cullens. It shocked me and comforted me at the same time to feel how hurt she was over how they treated me. I never expected that from her but at the same time, it felt damn good knowing that she was indignant over how I was always not considered trustworthy.

If I was surprised then, I was even more so when she wanted to know how they really felt about her. I knew that some things might be hurtful to hear but my brave girl wanted the truth and I told her. She appreciated the brutal honesty but at the same time, nothing seemed to shock her as I thought it would, I always thought she was pretty observant for a human and I wasn’t mistaken, especially when I talked about how Esme and Emmett thought of her more as a child than a young adult.

The only thing that really surprised her was when she found out about being Edward’s singer. I had to explain to her what that meant and felt her understanding. She understood that he was obsessed with her and it wasn’t necessarily due to loving her but a love of her blood. It was also the first
time that I heard her mention him by name since coming back and as much as I didn’t enjoy that name on her lips, I was pleased that she had gotten over calling Eddie, ‘the Jerk’. She explained that it was just a word for her and nothing more, and her emotions confirmed it, I knew it was a big step towards her healing.

The moments when she slept gave me a chance to realize that I was really enjoying her company and it wasn’t just because of our bond either. Her emotions of happiness and joy were more than pleasant to be around especially having been stuck with some negative emotions for a long time. She was excited about this next chapter in her life even though there was still some lingering sadness and grief. It was there but it wasn’t overwhelming and consuming her life like it had been a few weeks ago. I was looking forward to this next chapter as well because I wanted to know more about Isabella Swan.

Her affections and fondness were getting stronger and while it was still too soon to say more, we both have mutually we’ve gone beyond ‘like’. I knew I was falling for her and we were both physically attracted to each other. I promised her we’d go at her pace and I meant it. Right now though, I was enjoying the fact that we both seemed to have a need to touch each other. It had been nothing but chaste so far, holding her hand, brushing her arm with my fingertips. The only time it wasn’t was when I helped her erase her memory of that gun against her jaw by replacing it with something more pleasurable. It was a little selfish on my part that I kissed and nibbled her jaw; I needed it and so did my demon after I realized how close she was to being in harm’s way. Her sweet, warm skin and her intoxicating scent of lavender drove me wild and I had to run my tongue along her jaw line to capture more of that essence. Fuck, she tasted so damn good that I didn’t want it to end. Her breathless moans and the way she clenched her fists into my shirt spurred me on until I felt my jeans get much tighter and knew I’d be overstepping some boundaries if I didn’t stop. In my mind though, I relived that moment over and over again and a few times, I even spliced it with her lust filled cries of my name from that dream she had the next morning.

I would be lying if I said I didn’t want her in every way but I had a feeling she was untouched. I don’t think that prudish former brother of mine had done much with her; I remembered all too well the sexual tension radiating from her whenever she visited the house. No, I had to be a patient man with Isabella because she was fucking worth it. I looked over at her as she drove along the highway, her hand resting over mine on the console. She was innocent and sexy at the same time and she did it with no effort at all. I don’t even think she knew just how alluring she was. I longed to run my hands along her curves and taste every inch of her beautiful body. Isabella was real and when she was pissed off or upset, there was a fire in her eyes that had me mesmerized. It thrilled me to see she wasn’t as quiet and meek as she had been before. While I liked her impassioned outbursts, I also liked that she was also kind and caring. More importantly, the fact that she trusted me meant everything and I didn’t want to break that whatsoever.

I thought she might appreciate stopping for the night somewhere so she could get a good night’s sleep in a bed instead of the passenger seat. I used my phone to look online for places we could stop and thought maybe Salt Lake would be good place. Later when it was my time to drive, I suggested that we stop, I decided to ask her out on a date tonight. Even before she said yes, I felt her excitement and was instantly caught up with her happiness and the sparkle in her eyes.
I found a hotel that was within walking distance to a movie theater if she wanted to watch one tonight. I figured we could play by ear since I have never gone on a date before. I had a feeling she would want to stretch her legs out a bit and I knew the summer night and the fresh air would be pleasant for us if she wanted to wander around. I rang up the Hotel Monaco and booked a room for the night that offered a view of the mountain range nearby. The concierge also informed me that there were lots of restaurants within walking distance. I gave them my credit card number and within a half hour, we were at the Salt Lake City limits. It was late afternoon by the time we got to there and I was glad that they had a covered valet parking area since the sun kept peeking out from behind the clouds.

When we got up to the room, the first thing Isabella did was run to the bathroom while I tipped the bellhop. Once he left, I was able to take a look at the view. I heard Isabella squeal with laughter and a minute later, she came running out wearing what looked to be an oversized bathrobe in a giraffe pattern.

“Jasper! These robes are so fun!” she said laughing and I couldn’t help but laugh as well. Of course my dirty mind wished she was completely naked underneath that robe so that I could unwrap her like a present. “There is a leopard one that I thought was more fitting for you.” Her cheeks flushed with excitement and sudden shyness over what she just said.

I took off my jacket as I walked over to the closet and pulled out the leopard robe. I slipped it on causing her lust to spike and her blush to darken.

“Why the blush, darlin’?” I asked.

She was looking at me up and down before her eyes settled on mine and her cheeks reddened even more. “Umm, you… it’s just that… you’re so… leopard… how I picture you if you were an animal,” she mumbled and stumbled through her words. I looked at her quickly seeing how she was suddenly so shy over her admission and decided to sit in on the couch near the window so I didn’t make her feel too self-conscious while inwardly, I was doing backflips.

“Oh, the mountains are pretty!” she said as she noticed the view after staring at me for a good minute, grateful to have found a distraction. Her intoxicating excitement returned and I was enjoying every minute of it as she ran around exploring the room. “Whoa! That bed is huge!” I watched as she jumped into the middle of it. “This is so great, thank you for getting this room!” She looked at me and laughed. “I think all that restlessness from being in the car just made itself known.”

“You’re welcome, baby girl,” I replied and chuckled with her. “Just seeing how happy you are
makes it all the worthwhile. I was a little apprehensive that you would have thought it was over the top."

“Well, the decor is a little over the top, but the view, the robes and the big comfy bed is a nice treat. As long as it is a treat and not the norm, Jasper,” she said and narrowed her gaze at me.

“Yes, ma’am, treats only,” I said and drew an ‘X’ across my heart as I sent her my sincerity. “I am not one for a lot of fancy stuff and this pales in comparison to what I was used to spending so no worries here.” She sat up on the bed and patted a spot next to her so I walked over and sat down. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the moment as she leaned her body against me, and I wrapped my arm around her shoulder.

“What’s the plan for tonight?” she asked.

I breathed in her scent and kissed her hair before answering. “I picked this place because if you’re up to it, we could walk to dinner and then maybe a movie?”

“Yeah, that sounds nice, especially the walking part. So a casual date then?”

“Yeah, if you want something nicer, we could as well,” I said.

“Oh no, I like casual,” she said immediately and reached for my hand. “Is ‘The Da Vinci Code’ still playing? I’ve been wanting to see that.”

“Let me check,” I said and pulled it up on my phone. “We’re in luck, they’re showing it tonight at 8.”

“It will be dark enough, right? Let’s do that,” she said and I nodded in agreement. I felt her fingers run up my bare arms under the robe and her curiosity radiated off her. I had a feeling she felt some of my many scars from bites and dismemberment. “Jasper?” she whispered as she took one of my arms and pulled the sleeve up. She bent down and took a closer look at my arms and then she looked at her wrist. I heard her gasp out loud and I shut my eyes, bracing myself for possible negative reaction at the realization of what those marks were. “What happened?” she asked quietly and with concern.

“Remember how I told you about my scars? Well, these are from fighting and all,” I replied with a
whisper keeping my eyes shut.

“But there are so many,” she murmured as I felt her slip the robe off me. Even though I was still clothed, I felt so exposed at that moment. Her fingers continued to gently run up my arms and then my neck where I had a bulk of scars there. “Did they hurt?”

“Yeah, baby girl, I have been bitten and ripped apart many times during the wars. I have them especially on my upper body and legs. They hurt like a motherfucker each and every time,” I explained.

I had kept my eyes shut this whole time, scared to look into her eyes to see fear or pity. I fucking hated pity. Instead, I felt her lips pressed gently against some of my scars on my neck and a sense of her determination and affection enveloped me.

“If I could take the memory of that pain away from you, I would,” she whispered in my ear and nibbled and sucked on my skin. It was what I did to her when she kept feeling that man’s gun on her. She was trying to take away my bad memories and replace them with good ones. I felt her tongue trace some of them as she continued to heal me. At that moment, I could have sworn my blackened, dead heart skipped a beat. I think that was the moment I realized I was really falling in love with her.

“Oh, baby girl,” I whispered gruffly, trying to stifle a moan. “You don’t have to but I do like how good it feels.” I placed my hands on her hips and pulled her closer to me as she had moved to straddle my legs. She continued to kiss, suck and lick my skin, our lust swirling around us. I didn’t want it to end but then her stomach growled which put an end to the fun.

“Damn stupid stomach,” she muttered and sighed resting her forehead on my shoulder. Her heartbeat and breathing were running hard. “I guess I better stop since I’m getting hungry.” She was sad to end this but there was an underlying thread of rejection coming off her.

I lifted her chin so I could look into her eyes. “Hey, why are you feeling that way?” I asked.

“Well, usually this is the time when I’d be rejected,” she said, looking down and shrugged as she tried to act like it didn’t bother her.

“I am not going to reject you, Isabella,” I said sternly but gently at the same time. “I really enjoyed it but I promised to take you out on a date, so go get ready.” I moved closer and ran my tongue
along her jaw before I kissed her quickly on the lips and then swatted her ass earning a squeal from her as she got up to grab a shower. I didn’t notice the feel of rejection anymore just lust and anticipation. I would never want her to feel like I’ve rejected her at all, in any way. As I waited for my turn in the shower, I called the concierge to order a set of the bathrobes and asked if they could wrap them and put them in the trunk of the car as a surprise. After the call, I ran my hand along my neck where she kissed me and smiled. Those warm, soft velvety lips were no match for that tongue of hers. I moaned out and fell backwards onto the bed. My fingertips traced the path her tongue made along my skin causing my jeans to tighten. I definitely needed to relieve some tension in the shower but my mind began to imagine being in the shower with her, wet, warm and naked.

Fuck, those mental images weren’t helping me at all.

I was so relieved to hear the shower shut off and she stepped back into the room with her hair in a towel and she had on her robe tied tightly around her waist.

“Okay, give me a few minutes and I’ll be ready,” I said and kissed her quickly on the cheek before racing to the shower myself. The shower didn’t last too long, just enough to take care of my growing problem. I relieved myself and left a few impressions of my fingertips on the shower tiles. I emerged from the bathroom in my robe as I towel dried my hair. Her lust spiked seeing me and I looked up at her. She was blushing as she was putting on some mascara. I caught her staring at me and quirked my brow at her.

“What? You’re good looking, stop looking at me like that,” she snarked and stuck her tongue at my reflection before reaching into her bag and retrieved a pair of sneakers.

I smiled and winked at her as I grabbed my jeans and a button down shirt before running back into the bathroom to change. I left the shirt untucked and was buttoning up my sleeves when I walked back out. She looked at me and shook her head as she walked over. She undid the sleeve buttons and rolled them up a couple times, exposing my forearms.

“I like that better,” she said quietly and I sent her a dose of my appreciation. Inside, I was in awe of this woman in front of me that she accepted me, scars and all. There was no pity or disgust like I had to deal with before. Given her story, I didn’t think she would shun me for having scars, this just reinforced it for me.

A couple minutes later, we were in the elevator heading out to grab some dinner. We walked hand in hand down the street. “Let me know if there is anything you’d like to see or eat. This is your night, Isabella,” I said.
“Alright.”

Two blocks later, she found an Italian restaurant that had a menu posted on the door. She looked the dishes and then the window shaking her head whispering that it was too brightly lit inside for us. We continued walking before she found another place that was more like a pub and checked out the menu first. After she looked inside, she motioned that this was where she wanted to go. The lights were dimmer in here than the first place she looked at and I was happy that she took that into consideration so that we both were both comfortable. I held the door open for her and walked up to the hostess. She looked at the two of us and I felt her jealousy and envy.

“Hello, may I help you?” she greeted.

“We’d like a table for two,” I said and pulled Isabella closer to me and smiled as she put her arm around my waist. “A corner table, please.”

“Sure, right this way,” she replied and there was more envy and disappointment coming off her as we were led to a small round table in the corner. I sat next to her so we could appear to share our food as we held hands while she looked at the menu. Sure enough, when the waiter came to take our order, she explained that we were going to share a couple appetizers and then dessert.

“That hostess was sure eyeing you,” Isabella mentioned after the waiter left.

“She was jealous seeing the two of us together,” I replied and kissed her temple.

She ran her fingers through my hair and smiled before reaching for my hand again. We talked about little things while we waited for her food. I found out that she liked the color blue because it reminded her of warm, sunny days and I explained that I liked reddish-orange because that reminded me of the Texas sky during sunrise. We talked about our childhood pets, she always wanted a kitten when she was younger but her mom was allergic to them. Instead, she had a goldfish she named Fred I, Fred II and so on because they kept dying. I told her what I remembered of mine, that I had a dog named Rex and our family owned a half dozen horses for the farm but the horses were work horses not pets.

When the waiter arrived with dinner, I put some food on my plate knowing half way through I was going to switch our plates in vampire speed so it looked like I had eaten. This was something we’ve been doing ever since that night we went to that restaurant in Port Angeles. She appreciated that I made her feel less self-conscious about eating even though she knew that human food wasn’t the best smelling thing for me. Knowing that she appreciated my efforts, I continued to do it every time we went out to eat. I watched as the last plates were removed and a few minutes later, she had
some gooey dessert thing that was called a chocolate lava cake. I thought it smelled horrible but she must have enjoyed it given that look on her face as she took the first bite. She moaned her approval and for the first time in my existence I became very jealous of chocolate.

After dinner we continued to walk towards the Megaplex to catch the “DaVinci Code.” I got us the tickets and was sort of looking forward to the movie as well, having read the book a couple years prior. When we got in, I asked if she wanted anything from the concession stand and she pointed to a bag of popcorn and a soda. We sat down towards the back enjoying the stadium seating view. I was happy when she lifted the armrest between us and leaned against me as we waited for the movie to start.

The movie was pretty good, especially the company. About half way through the movie, I put my arm around her and she responded by scooting closer towards me so we were snuggling together towards the end of the movie.

“Thank you Jasper, this has been a beautiful date,” she whispered as the credits rolled.

“I had fun too, baby girl,” I replied as we got up and left the building. Once we got outside and started walking, I bent close to her ear and made a confession. “You know, I have never been on a date before, much less ask someone out on one.”

She smiled brightly as we walked back to the hotel. “Really? Well, you did good, Mr. Whitlock.” She put her arm around my waist as I pulled her closer to me, my arm lightly on her shoulder. I was happy as we walked back. For the first time, I felt complete with this beautiful woman next to me.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Thank you AlexisDanaan for making this look pretty - she’s on a mini-holiday and hadn’t given me the actual OK to post but I couldn’t help it. I wanted to share this with y’all so bad so mistakes are mine :). Pre-readers JamesRamsey and JaspersWoman thanks so much for looking over this. As always, thanks to my muse, DarkNNerdy.

This chapter was inspired by a song by Luke Bryan - I Don’t Want this Night to End. I’ll have to thank DarkNNerdy for telling me about his fine Georgia boy because I’m hooked. :)

As always, I am not SM nor will I ever be. I just like to play her stuff. And by stuff, I mean Jasper and Bella.

Chapter 23

BPOV

I was falling for Jasper Whitlock and a part of me probably knew it for a while now. It didn’t really fully hit me until we were at the hotel and goofing around, when I discovered the scars on his arms, just how much more I felt with him than anybody else. When he told me about how he got them and then feeling the scars on his neck, it just seemed natural to want to help ease that pain even though he had gotten them a lifetime ago. I remembered the pain from my one bite mark but he had so many and upon closer inspection, I could see the scars on top of scars. It felt nice to show that I cared for him but at the same time, I had to admit, it was the most intimate thing I had ever initiated and done in my life. His flesh made me tingle as I kissed and ran my tongue on him. The way he held me close to him while I straddled his lap, made me feel wanton, sexy and desired. I wasn’t sure how far we would have gone if my stomach hadn’t growled.

In the past I had always been stopped from pursuing anything further and it was, at times, like being thrown in ice cold water and then made to feel like I had done something morally wrong. It always felt one sided because he never seemed affected by the emotions that were surging through me. Part of me expected the same treatment from Jasper, but he didn’t make me feel that way at all. Yes, we stopped but wasn’t as though we were stopping altogether but just pausing for now so that we could begin our date.

I was looking forward to it, especially since he agreed to a casual date. The last thing I wanted was something too fancy that would make me feel uncomfortable. Walking down to a restaurant and then to the movies was a great idea, especially since I could hold hands with him. We stopped at a
couple eateries as I checked out the menu at the door and then looked at the restaurant itself to see if it was dark enough to draw the attention away from his mesmerizing crimson eyes. Luckily the pub was the perfect atmosphere for a casual dinner and the lighting was low enough for us.

During dinner we talked about little things, getting to know each other. Honestly though, it didn’t matter what we talked about, it was just the way he would tell a story that I enjoyed the most. Jasper would paint the picture so you could literally close your eyes and you were practically there, like the Texas sunrise in your head and feel the morning air. He just had that ability to do that each and every time.

After our dinner, we headed to the the movies where we ended up snuggling while watching the “DaVinci Code.” It was interesting and I was now tempted to get the book after watching it. As we walked back to the hotel, Jasper confessed that this was the first date he had ever asked anyone on. I was flattered that I was his first date ever and a part of me didn’t want it to end. I wanted to kiss him.

Should I kiss him? Or should I wait to have him kiss me?

My thoughts were filled with images of Jasper. My fingertips touched my lips as I remembered the way his stony flesh felt when I kissed him and how I felt the telltale ridges of scars as I ran my tongue along his neck. I wanted to do that again. I wanted to feel his lips on my own; I wanted them on my flesh. I wanted to hear that gruff voice of his as he as said my name or that nickname he gave me that just made my senses swirl. How far was this going, I had no idea. And as much as I wanted it all, a part of me was telling me I had the time to savor all of what Jasper had to offer.

“Isabella?” Jasper whispered as he blew his breath across my face.

“Huh? What?” I looked at him and then looked around. “Where... how did we get back to the room?”

Jasper chuckled. “Baby girl, we just got back, you were sort of day dreamin’ ever since we got out of the movies,” he said and brushed his fingers along my hair. “What was going through your mind?” he murmured as he led us to the couch. We sat down and looked at each other, our hands still touching.

I turned my body so I was facing him and looked into his eyes for a minute before glancing at our hands. “I was thinking about you... us,” I admitted in a whisper.
His finger lifted my chin back up and we stared into each other’s eyes again. That intense look was
overwhelming and I felt like I was drowning in his crimson depths. He was sinfully handsome,
even more so knowing he wasn’t perfect but flawed like me. He was real. He was my Jasper. My
breath grew heavy and I leaned closer to him.

I continued to stare into at him intensely as he slowly moved closer to me, fascinated by the way
his pupils were darkening from crimson towards black. I saw when his gaze dropped to my lips and
I glanced at his. I knew from the chaste kisses I had gotten, his lips were surprisingly soft and
yielded slightly against my skin. The cooler temperature of his body did nothing to tamp down the
heat coming from me.

His hand wrapped gently behind my neck as mine rested on his chest feeling him panting just about
as hard as I was. My bottom lip automatically sought refuge between my teeth we inched closer
together.

“Isabella,” he murmured gruffly, his thumb now rubbing my bottom lip, releasing it from its hold.
“You shouldn’t do that with your lip, baby girl. You tempt me each and every time you do.”

I gasped, not just from his words but the way he said them. My insides turned to goo and my
stomach tightened just as our lips touched. I moaned softly into his mouth as my hands found their
way up to his hair. It felt so soft as my fingers threaded into the strands and tugged. He pulled me
closer to him so I was straddled over his legs like earlier. His hands ran up and down my back
before settling on my hips as we continued to kiss. Suddenly, his mouth parted and I felt his tongue
licking my bottom lip and I gasped, instinctively pulling back.

I felt my face turn bright red as I was suddenly embarrassed not having gone this far with anybody
before. I could almost feel tears surfacing in panic.

“I’m sorry Jasper, I... I just never been kissed like that before,” my voice sounded so tiny at the
moment.

“Hey, would you like me to stop?” he asked quietly.

“No, I just... just don’t know...” I couldn’t even continue, I was so mortified.

“Just follow my lead but watch my teeth,” he whispered as his hand once again found its way
around my neck and he pulled me towards him.
As our lips touched again, the electricity had me buzzing. My hands found their way in his hair once more and this time when his mouth parted, mine did too and I hesitantly touched his tongue with mine. I moaned at the sensation and I instantly wanted more of the sensual caress. We continued in what seemed to be a timeless dance until I realized I needed to breathe and only then did our lips leave each other. He continued to kiss my neck and as I let out a breathy sigh.

I didn’t want it to end and my lips found their way back to his. It felt so damn good as one hand let go of his hair and I brought it down to his chest, running my nails up and down. He growled softly and I felt his hand wind around my hair pulling my head back slightly as he left open mouthed kisses down the column of my neck. It was probably dangerous but I didn’t care. It felt so good and my whimpers spurred him on. My hips rocked instinctively against him as he let go of my hair and pulled me even tighter against him, our lips finding each other once gain. He moaned into my mouth and that feeling in my stomach tightened even more.

More air was needed as I was now panting like a marathoner.

“Fuck, baby girl, you feel so good,” he growled and I swear, I nearly melted right there. He held onto me as we continued to kiss each other, both of us laying on the couch now. He leaned his head towards me so our foreheads touched and took a hold of my hand as he let me catch my breath. I could hear my heart thumping wildly, threatening to jump out of my body.

The passion of our kisses was intense and threatened to overwhelm me but I wanted it to, and the kisses themselves weren’t gentle; I wasn’t being treated like I was made out of spun glass. It felt so right to be in here in Jasper’s arms. My protector, my vampire angel... mine.

“Wow,” I breathed. I probably could have said more but that was the only word that could form in my addled brain at the moment.

“Wow is right,” he whispered.

I reached up and ran my fingers through his blond hair just as he pulled me into an embrace. I was glad that the pace slowed down because I wasn’t sure how far we’d go or were allowed to go. Hell, just tonight I had gone farther than I ever did with Eddie.

“Jasper?” I whispered as I ran my fingers along the open part of his shirt.
“Isabella?”

“Um... I gotta use the bathroom,” I said and ran into the next room. I shut the door and leaned against it as I took a couple deep breaths. I admonished myself for running off like a scaredy cat as I pushed myself off the door and headed to the sink so I could splash some cold water on my face. I caught my image in the mirror and noticed how my face was flushed, my hair tousled and lips swollen from kissing. I tried to straighten myself up and decided to change into shorts and a t-shirt instead. I washed off the makeup from my face and then slipped on my giraffe robe before heading back.

I was calmer as our eyes met and I motioned for him to follow me. He took my appearance and ran into the bathroom quickly. When he came back out he was wearing his robe but had taken his boots off and changed out of his jeans. He sat next to me on the bed and I turned to face him.

I grabbed his hands but I couldn’t look him in the eyes, it was hard enough telling him I had never been kissed like that before. I wasn’t sure if he’d deduce what I was about to say to him but I didn’t want it to be a surprise. “I... that is... I’ve never...” I closed my eyes and took a deep breath before I could continue. “You see, I’ve never been with anybody before.” By the time the last words left my mouth, I was practically whispering them. I could feel my whole face was flushed and I could picture myself red as a tomato.

“Hey,” he said as he cupped my face. I looked up so our eyes met once again. “We don’t have to do anything if that is what you’re saying. As long as you’re comfortable, Isabella. I promise.” He pulled me onto his lap as he leaned against the headboard.

“No, it isn’t that... just... I just don’t know what the rules are and I don’t want to feel the rejection again,” I said and grimaced at the painful memories.

“Isabella, I am not rejecting you, nor will I ever,” he said with some fire in his eyes. “Never doubt that I desire you, because I do. My desire for you is stronger than your blood.” He ran his nose along my neck and inhaled. “Not that I don’t desire your sweet blood as well but the man in me wants you more.”

His words were spoken with so much conviction. I was once again breathing hard as I stared at his face. “I desire you too,” I whispered back.

“I do have one request though, baby girl and that is we take our time. This is uncharted territory for me from here on out.”
I looked at him and trying to comprehend what he was trying to say. “I don’t know if I understand.”

He took a breath and pulled me closer to him as he kissed my hair. He sighed and raked his fingers through his blond curls before continuing. “Back in my more indulgent days, I was able to sate both my lusts at the same time,” he said and looked pointedly at me.

“Oh,” I said and then thought about what he said about both his lusts. “OH!” I exclaimed and my eyes grew wide as I realized he meant both his bloodlust and his sexual one. A mental picture came to mind of what I guessed he was talking about. “Yeah, I guess we need to stop, then?” I sighed and braced myself for the inevitable speech about the dangers.

Damn those fucking vampires and my hormones.

“No, I’m not saying no, I’m just sayin’ we need to go slow... explore,” he whispered huskily in my ear and grazed his teeth along my earlobe.

“Okay,” I whispered as I got lost in the sensation of his mouth and lips. I raked my fingernails down his chest, noticing that he had removed his button down and was wearing what looked like a black wife-beater shirt underneath his robe.

“Isabella,” he hissed out and pulled me closer to him. Once again we were kissing each other. Hands tangled in each other’s hair, the sounds of our moans and my whimpers each time I had to leave his lips and breathe. I didn’t want it to end as I felt his fingers running up and down my thighs.

“Fuck,” I panted out and rested my head on his shoulders. “I think we better stop for the night,” I said with some regret. As much as I wanted to continue, I had to make myself stop. Jasper was right, we had time to explore and I wanted to savor it because if it was anything like what we just did today, I was certain it would be enjoyable for the two of us.

I reluctantly peeled myself off of Jasper and moved to get under the covers, tossing the robe at the foot of the bed. “Will you hold me?” I asked.

“Isabella, what did I tell you about your lip?” he asked as he brushed his thumb along my mouth. I didn’t even realize I had been biting it.
“Not to bite it?”

“Not to bite it,” he whispered and lay next to me. “I’ll hold you all night if that is what you want.”

“Thank you,” I whispered back and turned towards him so I could tuck myself against his body. His arms pulled me close. “Goodnight, baby girl.”

“Goodnight, Jasper and thank you for tonight.”

Meanwhile... in the Land of the Midnight Sun...

“Alice, are you sure you didn’t see more?” Edward asked once again.

Ever since I came back and relayed the news, he had been asking the same thing every day and my answer never changed. “No, Edward. I told you everything,” I said quietly as we headed back from hunting.

He sighed. “I just wished I knew why she was out there and why he was there too,” he muttered just like he did yesterday and the day before that and a month ago. “I miss her so much.”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” I replied and wished that I had gone hunting on my own.

“Why would you want to hunt alone, Alice?” he asked.

I sighed. “I just sometimes want some privacy to mourn. It still hurts having lost a former husband and best friend. I mean Jazzy and I were together for so long,” I said and allowed the venom to fill my eyes.

I was getting good at this.

He pulled me into a tight hug. “Alright,” he whispered. “I’ll run back to the house to give you
some privacy. You know, if you ever need anybody to talk to, you can talk to me.” He smiled and them ran off towards the mansion.

Once I knew he was out of range for his gift, I sat down underneath a Douglas fir. All this sadness was driving me crazy. Everybody was so mopey over Bella and Jazz being gone, especially Edward. He was still convinced that they were mates and that Jazz must have used his gift on her to manipulate Bella into believing those two were more.

I was so tired of this. He had been a constant shadow so I haven’t even been able to talk to Carlisle about these weird pains in my head. Last thing I needed was more hovering from my brother.

_Hmm, I wonder if I could add some excitement to the household?_
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

I hope y’all enjoyed the last chapter from Bella’s POV. This chapter will give some insight as to what Jasper was thinking on their date night.

Thank you to my awesome team of ladies - AlexisDanaan who beta’d this bad boy. JamesRamsey and JaspersWoman who pre-read and pointed out some errors. LOL. Lastly, DarkNNerdy for always being my hooker muse.

Chapter 24

JPOV

I watched as she ran into the bathroom feeling embarrassed. Her face was flushed, her hair was disheveled from me running my fingers through it and her lips looked thoroughly kissed. If I thought she was beautiful before, she was fucking gorgeous now and I longed to picture her looking the same on top of me or underneath me and with a lot less clothing on. Kissing her was so sexy, hearing her moans and then knowing that she’d never been kissed like that before, my demon wanted to roar in pleasure.

I could hear her turning on the water. She was still embarrassed but also determined as I heard a soft rustle of clothing coming from the bathroom. A minute later she came back out and I saw she had taken her makeup off and she was in her giraffe robe. I didn’t want to assume anything so I stayed on the couch to watch her next move. She caught my gaze and motioned with her hand for me to come over to the bed with her. I quickly looked at her and then ran to grab some flannel pajama pants and I left my black wifebeater on as I slipped on my robe returning less than a minute later. I could feel she was nervous, determined and also embarrassed so I let her take the reins as I promised I would. It was a test of my patience but if she was untouched as I suspected, she needed to set the pace.

Isabella took my hands as I felt her steel herself before she said anything. “I... that is... I’ve never...” I watched as she tried to regain some calm on her own before telling me that she was still a virgin. She was barely whispering the end of the words and I watched as her face turned red after she made her confession.

Seeing that she was so upset and self conscious over revealing that to me, I decided not tell her how pleased I was to know that she had never had other lovers before, not that it would have mattered if
she did. I sought to reassure her that we didn’t need to do anything and tried to make her feel comfortable. I pulled her onto my lap and hoped like hell that the simple motion didn’t scare her even more. She admitted that she didn’t want to stop but didn’t know what the rules where and I could see and feel she was worried about rejection. Her emotions were going a little haywire from some bad memories, no doubt thanks to that so-called brother of mine.

That upset me that she thought I was rejecting her as well. I told her how much I desired her. It was true - that woman on my lap turned me on and drove me wild. My words affected her as well as she breathed harder as she looked at me before she admitted that she also desired me. The scent of her arousal filled the air and I had to think about being surrounded by human food in order to tamp down my own needs.

I had to explain to her, in an offhand kind of way, that this was sort of new for me from here on out. Yes, I have had sex with human women before, they just never lived to tell others when I was through with them. It took about a minute before she understood my meaning. I half expected her to run off after that but she was feeling anticipation and rejection.

“Yeah, I guess we need to stop, then?” she asked.

I realized right there that we both had issues about our own kinds of rejection and I felt some hope that maybe if we moved at this slowly, we could overcome our issues. I explained that I wasn’t rejecting her whatsoever but we needed to take our time. I lightly grazed my teeth on her earlobe as a silent promise that it would be pleasurable for both of us. She shivered slightly and got caught up with the sensations as our lips found each other once again.

I could feel her growing desire along and I had to mentally tell my demon to rein it in for now, she wasn’t ready yet. He reluctantly went to the far end of his cage and continued to let me take control of the situation.

The lust between us swirled like a growing tornado as we continued to kiss. Her hands found their way once again in my hair and even though my eyes were closed, I felt them roll into the back of my head as she tugged hard. I ran my fingers up and down her bare thighs feeling the slight raise of her skin where I sealed her cut from her motorcycle accident.

“Fuck,” she panted, resting her head on my shoulders. I wanted to growl out when that word slipped out of her mouth. Her hooded gaze and her panting for air made that expletive all the more sexy. “I think we better stop for the night.” I felt her reluctance, she didn’t want to stop but felt like she needed to. I also felt her willingness and eagerness - and I hoped it was for the possibilities that lay ahead.
I watched as she got under the covers and pulled her robe off, tossing it to the foot of the bed. “Will you hold me?” she asked and I felt the low rumbling of a growl as her bottom lip slipped between her teeth again.

I teasingly admonished her for biting her lip as I slipped into the covers to lay next to her. I pulled her close to me and felt her immediately relaxing. “Goodnight baby girl,” I whispered to her as I lightly kissed her hair.

“Goodnight Jasper and thank you for tonight,” she mumbled as she shut her eyes. I turned off the lights so she could sleep but thanks to my vision, I was still able to look at her for a while.

“It is over 1400 miles until we get to Peter and Char’s, did you want to get an early start or not? We can also make it in either one day, or break it down further,” I whispered against her ear.

“No, I think I can do a marathon drive if you do most of it,” she mumbled and I kissed her forehead. A few minutes later, I felt her body relax even further and her emotions were full of affection and adoration. “I like you a lot, Jasper Whitlock,” she whispered and from the movements of her eyes, she had fallen asleep. Her subconscious confession made me almost leap out with joy. No, she hadn’t said she loved me yet and just tonight I realized I was falling in love with her myself but that appeared to be the road we were heading down.

I shut my eyes and felt like I was drifting off in dreamland myself as I took in her peaceful and calm emotions as my own. At one point, sometime after midnight, she started moving against me, writhing and moaning. I could smell her heavy arousal and I heard my name called out in whispered cries. I threw my head back against the pillow knowing that my Isabella was having a sex dream and I was getting harder each time she panted. I didn’t want to, but I sent her a low stream of lethargy - just enough to slip into the shower and solve my dilemma. Minutes later and more finger imprints in the shower tiles, I slipped back into bed with her and held her tight, once again feeling like I was falling asleep too.
The alarm on my phone sounded at 4:30 and I gently woke Isabella up with kisses along her neck as I brushed my fingertips against her skin.

A small smile played on her face as she slowly started to wake up from her slumber. “Mmm, I like that,” she said, her eyes still closed. A minute later, I felt realization settle in and her eyes opened wide. “Oh shit,” she exclaimed and jumped out of bed, almost falling over as she scrambled to the bathroom. I could hear her groan out in embarrassment while she started the water for the shower. If I had to guess, she suddenly remembered her dream she had last night that had me scrambling for sanctuary of the shower.

I started to repack my bag and set some of Isabella’s things along hers so she can put them away. The door knocked with her breakfast five minutes later. I tipped the man and set the coffee and toast on the table by the couch and heard the water shut off. She emerged from the bathroom soon after, still clad in her robe.

“Jasper, if we’re going to be in Texas, what is the weather like?” she asked as she dug through her bag for some clothes.

I checked my phone. “Looks like it will be sunny and about 97 degrees today,” I replied and watched as she grinned happily.

“Oh I missed the sunshine!” she said and ran to grab a piece of toast before going on her tip toes and giving me a kiss on the cheek. “Thanks for getting me breakfast. I’ll make it quick,” she said as she went back into the bathroom to get dressed. I poured out a mug of coffee for her and knocked on the door.

“Baby girl, I’ve got your coffee,” I said through the door.

She opened it a little and grabbed the mug. I could see from the mirror reflection, she was only wearing a pair of black lacy boy shorts. As soon as she shut the door again, I sat down on the couch and stared at the ceiling but not really looking at that. The image of her ass cheeks peeking from the boy shorts was filed in my brain along with her smooth skin and her tattoo. I knew I would be replaying that over and over in my head for a while.

When she finally came back out, she had on a pair of shorts, sneakers and a hooded sweatshirt. Her hair was in a pony tail and she just had a little bit of mascara on. I watched as she threw some things into her bag and looked up at me with a smile.
“Okay, I’m ready.”

I grabbed our bags as she gulped down the rest of her coffee and poured another mug as we headed down to the lobby, hand in hand. I got the bill settled and they had our car waiting for us as we exited the hotel. After setting our bags in the back and helping Isabella into the car, we headed along some highways towards New Mexico. It was still dark enough where I could drive fairly undetected which was good because I got the Blazer doing about 100 mph as Isabella dozed off and on. It was a pretty quiet ride along the way. We stopped a couple times so she could take pictures, take breaks and fuel up. By the time we got to Albuquerque it was early afternoon so we stopped at a fast food drive thru for her before heading to the gas station where I fueled up, thankful for the warm overcast day as she got some supplies.

“Isabella?” I began when she returned with some water.

“Jasper?” She walked over to me and put her arm around my waist.

“Do you mind taking the controls?” I asked.

“No, is the sun going to be an issue?” she asked quietly with concern as she looked at me.

“It shouldn’t, the windows are dark and I can pull my ball cap low enough but I thought you’d like a turn.”

She smiled at me and gave me a quick peck on the lips. “Yes, I would,” she said excitedly as I walked over to the driver’s side door and opened it for her. I helped her up and then finished fueling up the SUV before I sat down on the passenger side.

“Okay, copilot, where do I go?” she asked as she finished adjusting the mirrors.

I pointed to the sign to the interstate that was down the street. “Take I-40 and head east, it will take you into Texas and towards Dallas.”

She nodded and started the motor. “I’ll drive until we get to the Texas border and you can take us to Peter and Char’s?”
“Yes, ma’am,” I said and pulled her over for a kiss. “If you need a break, just pull over to the nearest station and we’ll get you all taken care of.”

I set up the iPod, this time using hers and we listened to some Creedence and some Springsteen before she broke out of our silence over 2 hours later.

“Thank you for the hotel room by the way,” she said. “I should have said it earlier but didn’t.”

“It’s alright, felt your appreciation,” I replied. “Did you get enough sleep?”

“Yeah I did. Jasper, did I um... did I have another one of those dreams?” she asked and I turned to see her face flush a beautiful shade of red.

“Yes, you did,” I said and squeezed her hand gently.

“Did I talk?”

“You talked and got very excited,” I said as I watched her reaction and then the traffic ahead of us.

“Dammit,” she muttered. “You probably think I’m just a lust filled teenager.” She sighed and quickly gave me a sad smile.

I brushed my fingers along her cheek. “I think you’re an incredibly sexy and beautiful woman, Isabella. I can see already that you’re passionate and you give it your all when you feel.”

She gasped and I could see her eyes start to fill with tears. “That is the most beautiful thing anybody has ever said to me,” she whispered.

“I meant each and every word,” I replied as I ran my fingers through her pony tail.

“I know, you’re very honest with your words. That is one thing I really like about you.” She wiped some tears out of her eyes. “I don’t think I’ll be able to drive now since I’m getting all weepy again.”
“Hey, you don’t need to cry,” I replied.

“I’m not crying because I’m sad. I am happy, truly happy.” She used her signal and switched lanes so she could take the next exit. “I cry when I get sad, super pissed off or even happy and these are definitely happy tears.” She reached over and gave my thigh a squeeze. “I just need to use the restroom and then we’ll hit the road again. Can you drive?”

A few minutes later, we were back on the road. She moved as close as she could towards me and I was able to brush my hand along her legs earning a shiver of desire from her.

“Whoa,” she said as she looked at her leg. “The cut you helped me with, there is a faint shimmer to it.” She wasn’t angered by it, I felt a strong sense of pride coming from her as well as her affection.

I looked over at her and smiled as I took her hand and brought it to my lips for a kiss. “I was glad to help you, are you sure you’re not bothered by the fact that you’ll have a scar?”

She sighed in exasperation before looking at me. “Look, remember what I said about scars? I meant it, it is a part of who I am. You helped me by taking care of me, yes I have a scar but I would have as well had I gotten stitches. Besides, I wanted you to,” she added shyly as she stared out the side window. “Did I taste good?”

“Baby girl, your blood was like ambrosia, it was sweet and very Isabella. But rest assured, I don’t want to drain you of your blood,” I said gruffly. It was true, if I had my wish, I’d turn her in an instant but I would never drain her entirely of her blood, I just couldn’t.

I felt her slew of emotions coming from her, the predominant one being hope. She had a lot of questions but she was also hesitant. I don’t think she was ready to ask anything yet. I knew in due time, maybe once we got settled, we’d have time to talk about things more in detail and maybe in a less distracted environment. I waited to see if she was going to say or ask anything else but she was silent for the next hour until I was hit with a huge wave of concern. I looked over at her and she was nervous about something.

“Hey, you alright?”

She nodded. “I am, sort of. What kind of house are you thinking of getting?” she asked apprehensively.
“I’m not sure,” I replied. “I was hoping you could help me since we’d be there together.”

She smiled. “Really? I have a say in it?”

I looked at her incredulously. “Of course. Why wouldn’t you?”

“I don’t know, past history, I guess. I don’t want a huge mansion type house.”

“I don’t either but I do have some things I’d like in the house.”

“Oh? I think I have a couple things I’d like too.”

It was starting to get dark now so I was able to pick up some speed. We spent the next couple hours going through our wants for our house. We both wanted somewhere quiet and she was hoping for a place that had a jogging trail nearby. She blushed when she requested a bigger bed than what she had in Forks and I happily obliged. If that meant I could hold her in her sleep every so often, it was definitely on the list. She wanted a soaking tub and I wanted a large shower. I also wanted one room dedicated for a study and library which she was thrilled about. Isabella also said that while not mandatory, a view or a balcony would be nice. I told her more about the land that was once owned by my family and that maybe one day, I’d like to have a house built there. I felt more hope coming from her when I talked about it and that warmed me.

It was early evening when I hit the Texas border and we continued driving along the interstate. The ride was again silent except for the music playing and occasional small talk. She asked about my human life and I told her about how we had a large pecan tree in front of the house that I used to climb up and pretend I could see the world. I admitted that I didn’t remember a whole lot about my human life, they were just snippets like the tree or how we had farmland that we had to work on from sunup to sundown making sure our crops were tended. She asked about my eye color and I told her that they were once steel blue.

I took breaks every few hours as she dozed off and on. Each time she napped, she curled her body in the seat while one hand touched me. That simple gesture spurred the realization that she was starting to feel close to me and feel for me. In turn, that brought out emotions I thought I would never feel. The love I had for this woman, while still in the beginning stage, was stronger than anything I had ever felt before. What I thought was love with Alice, paled in comparison to what I was already feeling for Isabella. I reached over and touched her hand that was resting on the console. She automatically curled her fingers over mine and I felt the instant warmth of her and her
growing emotions for me just hug me like a blanket.

By the time I finally pulled into Peter and Char’s drive, it the middle of the night. Isabella was asleep so I carried her into the house and laid her on my bed before I brought in our stuff from the car. She was already under the covers when I was done getting everything out, her sweatshirt and shorts tossed carelessly on the floor. I pulled off my jeans and left my boxer briefs and t-shirt as I slipped into bed with her. I kissed her hair and held her tight while she slept.
Sunlight hit my eyes causing me to turn away from the window. I wasn’t sure where I was other than I was on a bed. The faint scent of coffee along with a stronger one of Jasper hit my nose and I smiled. His cool, soft lips pressed against my temple while his hands caressed my arms and my back, lingering a couple breaths longer on my tattoo.

“Good morning, baby girl,” he murmured. “I had to go into town to get you some coffee since we didn’t have any here. You were sound asleep when we got in early this morning so I didn’t get to a store. I remembered you said something about a grinder so I thought we could go shopping for other stuff today too if you’d like.”

“Morning Jasper, that sounds good,” I said and stretched my arms up. “Hey, can you show me around first?” I asked, wanting to stretch my legs a bit while we walked around. I looked for my shorts before Jasper got out of the bed and handed them to me.

“Thanks.” I pulled my shorts under the covers and put them on. I stared at Jasper who was wearing a pair of board shorts and a tight long sleeve shirt. My eyes drank in the sight, the way his shirt stretched over his chest accentuating his muscles. He looked like he had a swimmer’s body, lean but very well defined. I had never seen him in shorts before, mainly it was still pretty cool in Forks but I could see he had leg hair and I suddenly wondered how they would feel against my skin.

Before I knew it, he was right in front of me as he cupped my face and kissed me. “Ms. Swan, whatever was going through your mind right there?”

That kiss, even though it was short, left me a pile of goo. “You, I was thinking of how good you look,” I replied as I looked into his eyes. “I have never seen you in shorts.”

“Well, we’re nowhere anybody can see us so there is a lot more freedom to enjoy the warm sun,” he explained and smiled.
One more hug and kiss before he smacked my ass, telling me to get a move on. I quickly got ready and then went downstairs about 10 minutes later. The first thing we did was get a quick tour of the house as I sipped my coffee. Then we headed outside and it was already warm. I let the sun’s rays hit me for a bit before I put on my sunglasses. I looked over at Jasper and could see that his skin didn’t sparkle as much as it shimmered against the sun. I looked at him thinking he was more sexy and beautiful than I originally thought.

_Holy shit, he’s fucking hot._

“Isabella?” Jasper began with a tilt of the head and quirked eyebrow. “I never thought of myself as fucking hot before.”

If I could have turned redder than red, I would have. “I said that out loud?” I asked and watched as he nodded his head. “I guess it is a good thing you know I like you and I’m attracted to you then.” I tried to sound nonchalant as I walked over towards a weathered grey building, thinking that resembled a barn. Internally, I was a little mortified that my brain filter seemed to be on the fritz today.

“It doesn’t bother you that my skin doesn’t look the same as others?” he asked and I looked up at him. Although he stood there with an air of confidence, I could see in his eyes he was worried about my reaction. I could see he was vulnerable and I immediately wrapped my arms around him and held him close.

“No, it doesn’t bother me and I meant what I said. You’re sexy and gorgeous.” I reached up and pulled him closer to me so I could kiss him. I wasn’t sure if he could feel how I felt about him but I concentrated on all the feelings I got whenever I was near him or thought of him - safe, desired, adoration, pride, affection, sexy, friendship, hope, and happiness. I continued to hold and kiss Jasper as he held me even closer.

He gasped and set my cup on the ground and lifted me up so we were at eye level. My legs wrapped around his torso automatically to keep from falling even though I knew he wouldn’t have let me fall.

“That is what you feel for me?” he whispered as we kissed a little more and felt him reach down to grab my coffee.

I nodded, still staring into his eyes as I brushed my hands along his face. “I’m not ready to say the words yet but what I feel now for you is stronger than I’ve ever felt for anybody,” I admitted. That fact was what scared me, how much more intense this was with Jasper.
He handed me the coffee as we walked towards the grey building and I smiled that I guessed correctly. “I’m not ready either and these feelings are intense for me too. Nobody has ever felt that strong for me,” he spoke softly and kissed a trail from my ear down towards my collarbone. “You’re an amazing woman, Isabella Swan.”

When we got into the building, he switched on the lights and I turned my head to look. Sure enough this place, ‘Pete’s Bar and Grill’ according to the sign behind the bar, was designed to look like a saloon with a huge wooden bar and bottles of booze up on glass shelves. He set me down and together we explored the back where the kitchen was. I switched on the burners to make sure they worked and looked at the wood-burning pizza oven, that was probably a little too complicated for me to work but it looked nice. Jasper was reading the instructions since it was in Italian when I opened the fridge and noticed it was empty other than a large styrofoam container at the bottom. I squatted down and pulled it out, thinking it was empty but it wasn’t and it threw me off balance.

“Oof,” I grunted as my ass hit the ground. Jasper came over, calling my name as I stared at the box with the lid now on the floor. Inside were bags of blood. I continued to stare, expecting to pass out or scream at any minute.

“Isabella?” Jasper kneeled next to me and looked at me with concern. I was willing to bet he was thinking I was going to react the same way.

“It’s blood,” I replied as I continued to stare.

Yeah, way to state the obvious.

“I mean, I didn’t realize it was full when I pulled it out. I just didn’t know,” I muttered.

Jasper sat down and pulled me onto his lap as he explained how the supply was used when he was transitioning diets and how he could drink a bag of it in between hunts if he needed to extend by a day or two.

“It makes sense when you put it that way. I guess if circumstances has you delaying your feeding, this would help.” I looked at the bag and the shape of it and I grew curious. “So when you drink these, do you just tear the bag and pour it into a mug or something?”

He chuckled as he brushed his fingers along my hair. “Peter did pour it into a glass once and
played bartender. I suppose I could drink it out of a mug if they had them, but I just tore the valve open and drank.”

At the mental image of that, I started to laugh. “Do you know humans have something like that called ‘Capri Sun?’ Do you have to heat it up or drink it cold? Will you need a stock when we get our own place?” I rattled out my questions. “Sorry, I was just curious.”

“It is alright to be curious,” he said and smiled. “I have seen those Capri Sun packs which makes it really funny. I can drink it cold though it seems to enhance the taste of the anti-coagulant chemicals as well as the plastic from the bag but it works in a pinch and by far, better than deer.” He ran his fingers nervously through his hair. “Would it bother you if I kept a stash at our place?”

I thought it over and shook my head. “It actually doesn’t but I don’t know if I could watch you drinking from the bag.” I wondered if he’d like it if I got him a lidded coffee mug. “We can find an area in the fridge for you. It is your house too, Jasper so why would I deny you of your food if you’re accepting me of mine? Hell, you go to restaurants and put a plate of food in front of you so I can’t really complain.”

He pulled me into a hug. “Thank you, it means so much to me that you’re fine with this. A part of me thinks you’re still going to pull away and run when the time comes.”

“Well stop thinking that,” I huffed and got up to put away the bags into the cooler. “Come on, let’s hit the stores, I need to buy some food and sunscreen and a few small items. I guess I can keep the coffee in the house and just walk over here when I need to. It might be for a little while until we find a place, right?”

He got up and showed me the rest of the barn quickly before we got out to a wooden carport. He led me to his Mustang that he told me about during our trip out here and said he would be back in a couple minutes as he grabbed some jeans and a baseball cap.

“If we can find a boot shop, I need a new hat to keep the sun away from my face,” he said as he started the motor. “As far as moving into our own place, if we find something, I can make it move fast.”

Our trip into town was fun even though shopping wasn’t always my thing. The first thing we did after we stopped for some breakfast tacos was get Jasper a couple of hats. Immediately he felt better when he put on the black Stetson. If I thought he was hot before, he was downright sinful and a little more mysterious with a cowboy hat on.
I bought a couple pairs of flip-flops at a clothing store. Then we hit a home store so we could get a coffee grinder and machine as well as some dishes and utensils. I also added a some lidded tumblers for the two of us, he was more than surprised and happy when I told him they weren’t just for me but some were for him. Finally we hit the grocery store and found a few things to stock up on, including my sunscreen before we headed back. In all, we were probably gone for no more than three hours and got a lot accomplished. When we got back we unloaded the groceries into the fridge and headed back to the house.

He changed back to shorts and got on the computer so we could get an idea of houses. I looked around the room as he played with his laptop. I spotted a shadowbox that sat on the dresser. Inside was a piece of tattered grey cloth that looked like it might be heavy wool and there was some gold scroll embroidery at one edge. I traced it lightly with my finger and I looked up at the dresser mirror at Jasper who was looking at me. I looked back down on at the framed cloth and then back up before turning around. I had an idea what it was but I wasn’t absolutely sure.

I pointed to the frame. “It’s from you’re human days, right?”

“It was what was left of my uniform from that night,” he explained. “For a few months, it was the only clothing I was allowed. Over time and my strength, the fabric just couldn’t hold except for that one piece. In a brief moment of clarity, I managed to save that portion and hid it far from prying eyes.”

I gasped and caressed the glass once again. I started to feel emotional knowing he was able to save this piece of cloth for so long and given what he had told me about his life as a vampire soldier, I was willing to bet that it wasn’t an easy task. I carefully placed the frame back and walked over to Jasper and straight into his arms. “Was that the only thing you were able to save?” I whispered against his shoulder.

“I have my officers’ log but there wasn’t much written there other than war strategy but once I gained some of my control after my newborn stage, I sketched some things in there so I could remember. I’ll share it with you if you’d like.” He ran his fingers through my hair as he sent some affectionate feelings to me.

“I would,” I replied and added, “I bet you looked really handsome in your uniform.”

“I have a book in storage that shows a portrait taken of me. Because photographic plates were so expensive and not common, I only had one made to send to my family when I got my promotion. It isn’t like these days with digital film where the photo is immediate. I don’t remember all the details of it except it took what seemed like forever and I had to hold the pose like a damn statue,” he
explained as he sat me on his lap and brought up his computer. “It isn’t as clear as photos these
days but I’ll show you.”

“I can’t wait to see it,” I replied, turning my attention to his computer and noticing the picture of us
when we were up at Olympic National Park as his wallpaper.

We sat together and went through some ads that matched our criteria. I watched as he typed them
down quickly on a spreadsheet before explaining that he was going downstairs to grab the business
card that was on the fireplace mantle. In a flash he returned and he started compiling a list of
houses we wanted to see.

It took a couple hours, thanks to his vampire brain to come up with a list of houses categorized by
groups of about a half dozen. The top tier of houses had almost all of our criteria while the rest of
the levels had less. He was more than patient as I watched him create the spreadsheet and explain
everything he was doing. I was certain that had I had the capacity to absorb the data like he did, it
would have taken far less time.

Jasper picked up his phone and dialed up the number asking for Michelle, the realtor. “Yes
ma’am,” he drawled out and I smiled as he put his arm around my shoulder. “My girlfriend and I
are lookin’ to get a house in the Huntsville area,” he explained.

I had to admit, Jasper calling me his girlfriend had me grinning like crazy. It sounded so right and I
snuggled closer against him as he told the realtor he was sending her a list via email and we’d be
there tomorrow around noon.

“So who is this girlfriend you’re going to look at houses with?” I teased when he finished his call.

“Well, she’s a beautiful woman who is fiery and caring at the same time, and I’m crazy about her,”
he murmured and I felt my eyes well up with tears.

“She’s a lucky gal,” I whispered back as I held onto him tighter.

“I’d like to think I’m lucky to have found someone so accepting of me given my past.” He brushed
his lips softly against mine like a whisper but the look in his eyes held so much promise and maybe
even more than just affection.
I knew that there were things that he had mentioned that I purposely avoided bringing up, the idea of marking and having this mated bond were the main ones. Although it intrigued me, I wasn’t ready to hear about them since I wasn’t sure which road we were heading and I didn’t want to disappoint myself or get my hopes up if things weren’t going to work out. Now that we were on the verge of looking for a place to live together and we were a couple, I knew we would need to talk about these things and possibly prepare for the future. The idea scared me but thrilled me at the same time. I knew that with Jasper, if I chose to be with him forever, it wasn’t going to be an empty promise. A part of me was still skeptical about this whole idea of forever, that part of me, albeit smaller than a few weeks ago, still believed that at some point he’d grow bored with me or just leave.

“Hey baby girl, are you alright?” he lifted my chin with his finger and looked at me with concern.

I nodded. “I am trying to work through some things in my head. I am not just ready to talk to you about it yet but I will,” I promised.

“Thank you, you know you can talk to me anytime,” he whispered and rubbed my back, reassuring me that he was being genuine and sincere. “You can talk to me about anything at all.”

“I know,” I said and looked down, feeling bad that I had him concerned. “Soon, I just need to be able to articulate my thoughts.” I looked back up and smiled. “Let’s hang out downstairs while I grab a snack.” He nodded and I grabbed my laptop and together, we headed to the living room.

I set aside my self-doubt as I snacked on an orange. Jasper helped me get set up on Peter and Char’s wireless network and then I started to go through my emails while we sat on the couch.

I quickly sent an email to Jacob letting him know I made it to Texas. Next, I sent one to Ashley telling her the same thing. I deleted all the spam stuff and read up on some news about classes. School was going to start towards the end of August which was only around the corner. I was getting excited about college but I was also a little nervous as I started to add things into a schedule planner.

I scrolled through more emails from people at Forks High who were determined to ‘keep in touch’, but they were mostly bragging about going to Canada or Baja Mexico and drinking all day long. I deleted a bunch of those and was about to shut my email program off when I noticed I had some things in my junk folder. I opened it up and found one from Renee.

We’re Expecting!
Phil and Renee Dwyer are expecting a bundle of joy this December.

We’re sharing the news with all our friends.

“Son of a bitch,” I muttered. I couldn’t believe what I was reading and a part of me was hoping there was another email from them saying it was all a joke. There wasn’t. I quickly did the math and realized that was probably why she was like that when she flew out for the funeral. That was probably why she skipped my graduation too. It explained her attitude more. I looked at the email and shook my head still in disbelief, as Jasper’s arm wrapped around me - some calm and affection surrounded me and I knew he was hoping to make me feel better.

“Are you alright, Isabella?” Jasper asked as he set his crime novel on the table and pulled me onto his lap. I pointed to the email on my computer.

“She... she didn’t even have the decency to send it to me under a separate email,” I explained. “Look at the recipient list, I was part of a mass mailing. It hurts because I had been getting the vibe that she didn’t want to be around me anymore and this was why,” I said as I continued to stare at the announcement. “Granted I got bitchy with her after the funeral and dismissed her out of my life but still. I wasn’t even important enough to get a separate email about this.” I sighed. “Maybe I was just a bad daughter that didn’t deserve it.” I shut down my computer and got up.

“Isabella?” Jasper asked, looking at me with concern.

“I... I just need to get some air, I’ll be in the grill. If I get hungry I’ll fix myself a some food,” I said quietly and smiled though I didn’t feel all that happy at that very moment.

When I got to the barn, the anger started to hit me and I was trying to fight back tears. I sat on one of the stools and rested my chin on the wooden bar. I shut my eyes for a couple breaths as I tried to figure out the exact moment my relationship with my mother deteriorated. I knew it was after the accident. Was it because I was a burden? I remembered early on, I thought it was because that guy she was seeing, had dumped her. Then Phil came into the picture but her attitude towards me remained the same until I left to live with Charlie.

I looked up and saw the bottles on the shelves in front of me and climbed over the bar to grab a glass and a bottle of amber stuff, not paying attention to the label. I poured a glass and started to sip. It reminded me how some of my darker moments after the accident when the school year began that I snuck into Renee’s liquor cabinet and imbibed in some of her bottles. It wasn’t a regular occurrence, it was something I did a few times to see if I could numb myself from the rumors that were flying about me. I took another sip and finally looked at the bottle, realizing that I was drinking bourbon. I continued to dissect my estranged relationship with my mother and wondered if she was ashamed of me for having had to deal with the surgery and all. As much as I
hated that idea, it made the most sense as did the fact that I became a burden in her eyes.

How long I was sitting there, drinking down my sorrows, I haven’t a clue but by the time Jasper came into the bar, I was practically seeing double.

“Jaspurrr,” I slurred out. “You know you smell like bourbon?”

“Isabella, how much had you had to drink?” he asked warily.

“I dunno.” I looked at my glass and then the bottle. “About this much,” I replied and used my thumb and forefinger to indicate just how much of the liquid was gone.

“Come on, let’s get you back into the house,” he said quietly.

“Not ready,” I said, blinking profusely as I tried to focus on Jasper 1 and Jasper 2. “No... need this... didn’t do this while I... Forks. I jus’ dunno.” I stared into my glass, cradling it with both my hands. “I think my mom was ashamed of me to a for...for what I... what happened.” I got pissed off at that moment and took the glass and threw it against the wall. It shattered into tiny pieces but I was far enough that I didn’t get shards on me.

“Am I a burden, Jasper?” I asked as I rounded to him, the prickle of tears were starting to sting from behind my eyes. I hoped he would say that I wasn’t. I don’t know what I’d do if he said that I was. I shut my eyes, partly to not see the truth in case it wasn’t what I was hoping for and partly because the room was getting fuzzy and was moving.

“Baby girl, you’re not a burden,” he replied as he steadied me with his hands. “Get that out of your fuckin’ head. I would never think you’re a burden and I am cuttin’ you off for the night.” He growled low and pushed the bottle away from me.

Before I could say more, I was lifted up and in a span of a couple breaths, I was laying on the bed.

“Here,” Jasper said as he came back from the bathroom. “Hold out your hand, you need to take some ibuprofen beforehand and make sure you drink water. You might be in for a world of hurt in the morning so don’t say I didn’t warn you.”
I nodded and took the pills, guzzling a bottle of water before my eyelids got heavy. That was the last thing I remembered.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Thank you AlexisDanaan for betaing. She managed to catch a ton of repetitive language and make this look really pretty now. Thank you JamesRamsey and JaspersWoman for pre-reading this. As always DarkNNerdy for being my muse.

I am not SM - never was. I just like having fun with the characters.

Chapter 26

BPOV

When I woke up, my head was pounding and felt like someone had used it as a bowling ball. My mouth felt like I had a gym sock stuffed in it and the brightness of the sun had me burying my head in the pillow for just a few more minutes before I could fully open my eyes. I groaned painfully when I moved my body. When I tried to figure out what happened, I first thought I was coming down with something like the flu but then last night’s events emerged from my clouded brain.

“Oh fuck,” I muttered and sat straight up. The sudden movement caused my head to pound even harder and my stomach to lurch. I panicked as I tried desperately to kick the blankets off of me and ran straight to the bathroom.

I was not a pretty sight as I lay there on the bathroom floor, drenched in sweat and holding my stomach. I got up slowly and brushed my teeth hoping to get that nasty feel and taste out of my mouth. A soft knock came from the door as I was hit with concern that Jasper was sending me.

“I’m alright,” I croaked out. “I wasn’t earlier but I feel a little better now.” I got up slowly and inched towards the sink.

“I’ve made you some coffee baby girl,” he said.

“Come in,” I replied as I splashed some cool water on my face.
“Here,” he said and set the mug as well as a large glass of water on the counter. “I think these might help. The pain pills are in the medicine cabinet. I don’t know if you’d want to eat. I don’t remember much about being hung over and wanting food.”

“No, thanks, this will get me started.” I tried to smile as I opened the medicine cabinet.

“If you need me, I’ll be in the bedroom,” he said and gave me a quick peck on the cheek. “It is only six in the morning so if you wanted, you can go back to sleep.”

I nodded painfully and tried to get myself back to being human once again. If I didn’t feel so bad, I probably would have laughed at the irony of my words. I stripped off my clothes and got in the shower, letting the water rain down on me.

By the time I got out, I felt better, relatively speaking. I realized I didn’t have any clean clothes and had to walk out to the bedroom wrapped in a towel. I must have been beet red as I walked in and beelined to the dresser we were sharing. I could almost imagine Jasper’s eyes boring into me and it unnerved but excited me at the same time. If I hadn’t been so horribly hungover, I probably would have been more bold in my actions but all I wanted was to be comfortable at the moment. I grabbed some clothes and went back to the bathroom emerging a few minutes later fully dressed.

I sat down next to Jasper and he motioned with his hand for me to lay my head on his lap. His cooling hand helped to soothe my head and we just rested there while I drifted off to sleep again.

When I woke up, much of the queasiness was gone. I sat back up leaning against his broad shoulder as he handed me my coffee.

“Thanks, how long was I asleep?” I gulped down the lukewarm coffee.

“About three hours, do you feel better? I heated the coffee up when I felt you stirring but that was about a half hour ago.”

“No, it’s good, thank you. Sorry about last night,” I said grimacing. “I was just overwhelmed by the whole Renee thing. It shouldn’t have surprised me but in a way it did.” I shook my head remembering. “Oh shit, I trashed your brother’s bar! They’re gonna be pissed at me.”

“After you passed out, I cleaned it up - no more shards. It was a good thing you weren’t that close
to the impact, you hurled that glass pretty hard.”

“Thank you for cleaning my mess. I was hurt by the news and the way it was delivered.” I took a look at him and placed my hand over his. “It isn’t that I want that life because I have accepted that I can’t. I think it was one of the reasons why our relationship deteriorated. Not only did she have to care for me, but it constantly reminded her that I was flawed.” I reached over for the glass of water and gulped half of it down. “What made it weird was she asked me if I was going to Florida the day after graduation and again after the funeral. She got upset that I didn’t want to. Maybe she wanted me to play permanent babysitter?” I shrugged. “It was then that I dismissed her from my life.”

“Isabella, I know how it feels to be judged or made to feel judged so I understand you’re hurting. Whether it was real or not, it made you feel uncomfortable. A beautiful and strong woman said recently that nobody should feel like a burden to their parents and I am inclined to believe that.” He smiled as I realized he tossed back my exact words from a few weeks ago. “A real parent wouldn’t have made you feel like that. She should have talked to you and not ostracized you,” he growled out. “As far as her news, if she was used to seeing you as a caretaker, I think you might be right that she wanted you to be a babysitter for your half sibling.”

I shook my head. “Given the way she delivered the news, I don’t think I could think of them as a sibling. Hell, I have a hard time thinking of Renee as a parent,” I said sadly. “No, I don’t know how much I’ll continue to communicate with that woman. I probably won’t unless she initiates.” I looked down at the comforter and sighed. “Sadly, it... it is probably for the best.” I closed my eyes and moved even closer to Jasper, enjoying not just the quiet but his scent. “Hey,” I whispered, not wanting to disturb the silence. “Can you show me that ledge that overlooks your land?”

He looked down and smiled. “I sure can, let’s stop by the grill and get you some toast or something you can nibble on the way.”

I smiled and slowly got up and headed down the stairs, grabbing my sunglasses that were sitting on a small table in the hallway. As we passed by the couch, I saw Jasper reach over and grab a blanket, draping it over one arm. Once we got out the door, I winced as the sun hit me and immediately Jasper’s straw hat was plopped on my head. I looked at him and he grinned as he held out his hand and together we walked to the grill and heated up some toast. We then walked out towards a field and as we passed by a big tall tree, I stopped and looked up.

“Jasper, was this the tree?”

“Yeah, maybe if you’re feeling up to it later, I’ll carry you and show you where I sat. If you’re interested, that is.”
I nodded my head, grateful that it wasn’t pounding anymore. “I would, I know I probably won’t be able to see everything you can, but knowing that was your spot and you want to share it with me means a lot,” I replied and put my arm around his waist.

“You might want to hop on, baby girl, the terrain is a little rough with the tall grass and clover. It’s up to you though.”

“I’m still not all that steady from last night’s indulgence, I wouldn’t mind a ride over,” I said and he handed me the blanket to carry before he picked me up bridal style. Once we got to the ledge, he took us all the way to the edge before he set me down. He grabbed the blanket and laid it over the clover. I sat down and grabbed his hand pulling, him down so we were both on the blanket before I decided to lay on my stomach. He pointed to the land down below the ledge and it was vast. There were patches of wooded areas and running water. It was quiet and peaceful just like the ledge we were on.

“Can we go down there and explore?” I asked after a few minutes.

He nodded, “We will, I think the best thing would be to get a couple ATVs and spend a day down there, but not today. We should get going so we can drive by the campus before we meet with the realtor.”

“And maybe a drive through the town too? So I could get a feel of it?”

“Of course.”

We got up and I folded the blanket before we headed back to the house. I went upstairs to grab a skirt so I’d look a little more decent than the casual shorts I had on. We walked over to the Blazer and headed down to Huntsville.

On the way out of the farm, he reached over and handed me what looked like a binder. Inside were printouts of the houses we had listed along with some note paper and pens. I looked at him confused knowing he’d probably remember every detail of every house we’d see today.

“The binder is for you if you want to write things down about the houses we see,” he explained. “I’ll even write down my thoughts too while we’re with the realtor so she doesn’t think anything is unusual. It will help when we make a decision on the house too.”
I appreciated the fact that he was trying to make me comfortable as we searched for a house. “I’m excited,” I said as I looked at the listings. “We’re going to see nearly a dozen homes today?” I wondered if that was even possible.

“I figured we could put the top two tiers and see what we have. There might be some houses we’ll walk in and straight back out because it isn’t the right feel. Don’t feel bad if you feel that way. It is perfectly fine and I’ll just follow your lead.”

“But what if you get a bad vibe about a house, how would I know to look no further and walk out?”

“Would you like me to send you a flash of an emotion?”

I nodded. “Nothing like I felt this morning though, please.” I shuddered at the thought.

He chuckled. “I wouldn’t do that.” He paused for a minute. “Remember that night you were watching that show on DVD, the one about those people on that island?”

“Yes, that show intrigues me, confuses and frustrates me at the same time. Why?”

“How about if I sent you a quick flash of your emotions when you’re watching the show as a signal that I want to leave,” he suggested.

“Okay,” I replied. “It would be a secret language between us.” I looked over and smiled as I placed my hand over his. “How would it feel? Can you show me now?”

“I like that too,” he said and brought my hand up to his lips for a kiss. Just then, I felt the ‘Lost’ cocktail of emotions he sent me and made me flinch a little because I didn’t expect it. It lasted a few seconds before it was gone.

“Wow, I am glad you showed me now. I would have hated to feel that right in the middle of a house we’re looking at. I could have been unprepared for that.” I laughed at the thought. “Can we stop at that gas station? I’m still feeling a little blah.”
Jasper looked over and I could see the concern in his eyes again. He gently put his hand over my forehead to check my temperature. “I don’t feel a fever but you’re most likely dehydrated,” he said as he pulled over and parked. “While you fell back asleep, I checked on remedies and all. Let’s get you some sort of sports drink and crackers. If we need to cut this trip short we will, so you can rest up.” He leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. “Stay here, I’ll be back.”

A few minutes later, he came back into the car loaded with saltine crackers, water bottles and some different flavored sports drinks. We drove around the town and the campus before it was time to meet with Michelle.

The rest of the afternoon was spent looking at houses and I was glad Jasper had the binder so I could take notes. The first house was easy to remember. As soon as we walked in, I thought we were in an animal farm and I turned around and walked away. If I was able to smell that, I had no doubt that Jasper would have too. The second house was full of wallpaper, so much of it everywhere that my eyes started to cross. As soon as I saw wallpaper on the ceiling, I struck that off our list. I knew that there were things that we could fix up, well, Jasper could fix up; but still, the vibe was off. The next two houses were nice but they were too close to the neighbors compared to what we had seen.

It wasn’t until we got to the fifth house that we found something we both liked. It overlooked a lake and was surrounded by woods. It was cozy and even though it was bigger than my house in Forks, it was not a Cullen type mini mansion. As we went from room to room, I got more and more excited and I could feel some happiness coming from Jasper as well. That house became our top choice as we looked at others. Some we explored for a while and others we did a really quick glance before leaving. At the end of the day, we looked at a total of nearly ten houses, two of the ones that were on the list already had pending offers so we skipped them. We thanked Michelle for her patience and headed to a burger place across the street.

“So what did you think?” I asked as I spread the papers on the table. Jasper sat next to me so we could look at the notes we took and started to create piles of ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘maybe’.

He held up two flyers of similar houses. “If I had to choose between these two, I’d choose the one with the grove of trees out back. My top choice is still that fifth house.”

I nodded as I popped a few fries in my mouth. “That was, by far, my favorite. Nothing really came close to it. The house with the grove of trees came the closest, comparatively but that house was definitely tops on my list.”

“So what do you think, baby girl, should we put an offer in?”
“Really? But my dad’s finances aren’t finalized are they?” I asked, suddenly feeling foolish for looking at houses and realizing I might have been irresponsible.

He pulled me close against him and whispered in my ear. “I know you don’t like talking about money and having it flaunted around you. I can easily cover the costs until all the legal stuff is worked out.”

I sighed and closed my eyes. “I know you’re well off and I am glad you’re not all about designer stuff or fancy foreign cars. That shit made me uncomfortable since growing up, we were just comfortable and maybe on occasion, we had to tighten our belts a notch or two,” I whispered back. “I don’t feel like you’re flaunting it when I’m around you. I don’t want to feel like I’m mooching off you though. I know I said I’d be responsible for the food but I need to pay something.” I looked at him and hoped he understood.

He smiled and kissed my temple. “You can help pay for it. I’m offering cash so you’d just pay me back whenever you can. We’ll figure it out.”

“Okay. Don’t try to charm your way out of it either. I will pay you back,” I vowed.

“No ma’am, you’d probably call up my brother to kick my ass or something,” he replied and we both laughed as I nodded in agreement.

“And don’t you forget that.” I winked at him. “So we’re buying a house?”

“Yes, we sure are,” he said as we got up headed out the door.

When we got to the car, Jasper called Michelle and made a cash offer on the house that was just slightly below the list price. By the time we got back to Peter and Char’s, she had called back and said the owners accepted and since the house was move-in ready, we’d be able to close by the end of the week.

We got out of the car and he took me by the arms and spun me around as I laughed. I was excited that we found a place we both liked and we’d be able to move in soon. He carried me towards house but made a sharp turn towards the tree.
“Wrap your legs around me, baby girl,” he said. Once I did, he jumped and grabbed a branch, pulling us both up and rested on a tree trunk before holding me close to him.

“Nearly every night, I’d sit up here, right after the sun had set and I’d face this way and just think,” he began. He whispered against my ear, his lips softly grazing my skin as he spoke. “I contemplated my diet and if I could handle it. I also hoped like hell that if I got to see you again that you’d give me a chance to explain about your birthday and maybe, just maybe, we could be friends.”

“So you thought long and hard about going back to a natural diet?” I asked knowing how the Cullens had often hinted that he was so new to being a vegetarian. “I know you’ve mentioned it but I didn’t realize you put that much effort in making that decision.”

“Yeah, I weighed it over and over in my head knowing that once I’d commit to going back to natural that I would most likely never have golden eyes again. I wanted to make sure I could handle the emotions that I remembered were associated with my previous human meals - the fear from them and then the guilt I’d have from taking an innocent life. So I’d sit here and think. I also knew that the animal blood suppressed my ability over the years, as though it was more diluted. Just supplementing my diet with blood bags, I noticed a difference right away. There was a part of me that kept wondering if my diet change would scare you off, if I just fucked my life over by making such a decision but Char nearly kicked my ass telling me that if you truly liked me, you’d accept me for me.”

I reached over and held his hand. “Char sounds like a wise woman,” I replied and smiled. “Seriously though, I’m really impressed at how you thought things over. They always made it sound like you were sort of irrational and impulsive. I know it should bother me that your diet means killing my species but knowing you’re being selective makes me feel better, especially after that robbery attempt. I also think you are more relaxed than before, you seemed sort of stiff and uncomfortable back then. Now, you’re more relaxed and interact in the human world with more ease.”

He smiled and looked at our hands clasped together. “Thank you for understanding. I feel much more in control than before. I think being in a house full of other vampires who either craved a natural diet or were not happy with being a part of this non-human life, it made things more tense as well. It is much easier to be around you especially now that I’ve gotten to know more about Isabella Swan.”

I wrapped my arms around his and leaned closer to him. “You know, when we were looking over those listings at the burger place, I kept thinking how we had similar tastes and then a part of me wished that I had gotten to know you before.” I looked at him and smiled. “Not that I don’t like we’re getting to know each other now, I... I just wished my dad had a chance to meet you, you know?”
“No, I understand, but I am beyond happy for now. I mean, I am up here in my tree with my girl in my arms.”

I turned around so I was facing him and smiled as I leaned forward and kissed his lips. It started out as a small kiss but then my hands found their way to his hair and his started gliding up and down my back. Our kiss deepened when I moaned into his hair and moved around so I could be even closer. It occurred to me as I straddled him that I was in a skirt and it had hiked up mid thigh as he ran his hands up and held me by my hips, squeezing them slightly. My stomach tightened as he broke our kiss so I could breathe. His lips and tongue leaving a sinfully hot trail along my neck, causing my grip to tighten and a longing to grow even more. I was breathing hard and so was he as my thighs tightened their hold around him.

“Wait,” I whispered breathlessly. I looked at him and rested my head against his chin. “I can’t do this. I can’t hide how I feel anymore.”

“Isabella?” I could hear the concern in his voice as I took a deep breath.

“I’ve been trying to hold in how I feel about you but I can’t. It gets harder each and every day. It scares me how intensely I feel for you. You excite me and I want so much more but at the same time, I am fucking scared that I’ll drive you away. Maybe not now but one of these days, you might want to leave. I also know that you’re a man of conviction and the way we are heading, I know there are things we will need to talk about, things I have purposely avoided talking or asking about because I didn’t want to be privy to it yet. A part of me wants it all, right now, but I know I am not ready. I can’t even say the words yet but please know that you mean so fucking much to me.” I wasn’t sure if the flood of words that had just spewed out made any sense but I couldn’t hold it in any longer and I had to let him know.

My eyes were closed so I didn’t see him as he kissed my cheek but I felt the wetness from my tears. I didn’t even realize I was crying.

“Isabella,” he whispered against my skin. “A lot of your doubts have been mine as well. There are still moments when I think and believe I’ll say or do somethin’ and you’ll up and leave me. In the few weeks, I’ve grown to like you a helluva lot more than I’m willing to admit at times. What I feel for you pales in comparison to what I’ve experienced in my long life and the pull I have towards you, I could never be too far away. Even without the pull, you’ve entranced me and intrigued me - every little thing from the fire that burns in your eyes when you’re feeling passionate about something, to the way you care for me and make me feel as though my heart could start beating any moment. I want you to be comfortable talking to me if there are concerns you have.”
I nodded as I continued to gaze into his eyes. “I will, it is hard for me to open up but I’ll try.” I shifted slightly and then realized I needed to use the bathroom. “Can we go back into the house?” I whispered as I felt my cheeks heat up. “I need to freshen up a bit.” I hope he didn’t need me to elaborate on the fact that I needed to pee.

He looked at me and nodded as he held onto me and he ran us back to the house.
Chapter 28

APOV (Somewhere in British Columbia)

“I’m sorry, Miss, there isn’t anybody here who resembles that description,” the man at the front counter informed me.

I couldn’t understand why. I saw the vision in my head, she had to have been here. “Are you sure?” I asked and looked at him wide-eyed as I scanned the tiny hotel.

“I’m sure, I’m the owner of this establishment and I haven’t seen any auburn haired females passing by here or in town. Are you sure you’ve got the right place?”

I nodded. “Yes, I was told she’d be here at The Excelsior Hotel,” I replied.

The man looked at me strangely. “Um... that was the name of this place when my grandfather opened this place nearly a century ago. It has been renamed in his honor, ‘The Franklin Hotel.’ There are some photos in the lobby of the original building, we keep the original marquee sign in here as an art piece.”

I remained calm as I thanked him and watched as he headed to the back office. I had to get some fresh air and walked outside into the clean, crisp evening. I pulled my jacket closer against my face as I tried to figure out what went wrong with my vision. I clearly saw her in this town, her vibrant hair was not hard to miss. What I couldn’t understand was why I pictured the historical name for this place. It wasn’t the faded marquee sign either, it was brand new, freshly painted. I just didn’t understand.

A sharp pain shot through my head again and I rubbed it as I walked back to my car. I got in and headed back north towards Alaska. It was a good thing I attended the auction earlier today in Vancouver and won the Baroque writing table that was designed by Andre Charles Boulle. It was the perfect excuse, I thought. Everybody would think I’m slowly moving on by designing my room with new and unique pieces. The recent bout of decorating was also a good way to keep Edward out of my head as well as I continued to search my visions for Victoria.
JPOV

We had just gotten back from the tree and Isabella had run to upstairs to use the bathroom. I leaned against the couch and thought about how it was such an eventful day today and decided to brew her some tea.

We were getting a house together just the two of us and I was fuckin’ thrilled by the idea. As soon as the owners agreed to my cash offer, I spun my girl around and enjoyed her laughter. I probably would have twirled her around some more if she hadn’t woken up this morning feeling the effects from drinking. I shook my head as I pictured her slurring out her words last night and swaying as though the room was moving. Had she not have been so upset, it would have been a funny sight.

We started to talk about more serious matters tonight, money being one of them. She was still insisting that she contribute to the household. I understood her not wanting to feel like she was taking advantage of me so I just told her to pay me back whenever she was able to. I figured I could put that money back as a scholarship fund in honor of her dad. I better talk to her about that soon so she wouldn’t feel like I was hiding it from her. I had no doubt if I pissed her off, she’d find Peter and get him to kick my ass.

As the water heated up, I thought about what she said to me while we were up in my tree. The possibility of being with Isabella forever seemed one step closer after tonight. Up until that moment, I wasn’t sure if she would even consider it. Now knowing that she’s thought about it but wasn’t ready, I was ecstatic. I knew her abandonment issues were bound to surface so it was good to know that she knew she didn’t want to be turned right away. I knew from changing so many in my past that negative feelings like that could be magnified and had no doubt that even with a mated bond, it would linger and I didn’t want her to ever feel that way.

I heard her coming back down the stairs as I got the tea ready for her and walked over to the coffee table. When she saw me with a mug of tea held in my hand, she smiled brightly. She had changed from her outfit earlier to some flannel looking shorts and a baggy zip-up top.

“Thank you, I was just coming down to make some.” She took a sip. “Sorry for cutting it short out there on the tree,” she said with regret.

“Nonsense, if you had to tend to your needs, you don’t need to apologize,” I replied. “So what do you want to do tonight?”
“Can we get ideas on how to decorate and get furniture ideas?” she asked and I could see and feel her excitement.

I smiled and nodded. I was sort of curious what we’d end up with and hoped it wasn’t frilly or in various shades of white. We walked upstairs to our room and she laid on the bed as I brought our computers over. I went into the bathroom and changed back into shorts and a t-shirt before laying next to her. We spent the rest of the evening going through different websites to get ideas of how we wanted to decorate the house. I explained to her that I was excited about decorating even though I had never had the opportunity.

“When I was with the Cullens, that role was always Esme’s and nine times out of ten, she would go with Alice’s favorite colors.”

“Let me guess, pastels?”

I shuddered before nodding. “Pastels or really ornate furniture. For some reason, she liked that Baroque type stuff.”

She grimaced before leaning closer to me. “Don’t worry, I don’t want pastels at all. I like colors but not like what I had in Arizona.” She smiled but there was a small tinge of sadness coming from her. “Renee, at one point, painted each room a different shade with the trim contrasting with the room. It was like a damn rainbow exploded. I don’t want that,” she said and made a face. “As far as furniture, nothing too hoity toity and I think Baroque falls in that category. I like clean lines, nothing fancy but maybe a little modern?”

“Duly noted. So no pastels, indoor rainbow explosions and clean lines,” I said and leaned closer to her. “Is it strange that I like the color grey?”

She turned and looked into my eyes. “No, grey can be soothing, unless you’re out in Forks or a prison,” she replied and kissed my cheek. “Why?”

“I was always given a look and lots of exasperation when I suggested it be used. Esme once painted my library grey and yellow which caused an uproar in the house.”

“Huh? Were they offended by the colors or something?”
“I think they associated it to the Confederacy and therefore it would cause me to relive my past or something... you know, a trigger.” I said as I kissed her temple.

“Well did it?” she asked quietly as she ran her fingers through my hair. There wasn’t any concern or judgement from her part, just curiosity.

I sat up and held her tight against me, my back now resting on the headboard. “No, it didn’t at all. I liked the grey but the gold was a little much so I actually went to a nearby hardware store and bought a nice shade of blue that reminded me of the sky and painted over the yellow. Of course, that hurt Esme’s feelings. I wasn’t trying to, I knew she meant well but Alice and Eddie were on alert the whole time in case I had ‘an episode.’ It all happened during the first few years being with them so I was still trying my damnedest to not just change my diet but also work the stuff out of my head so I was often withdrawn.”

She turned slightly so she was now on my lap and wrapped her arms around me. She trailed kisses along my neck and I felt her trust and affection. “That must have been hard to deal with on top of the stuff that was in your head. I’m proud of you because you moved past it. I’m sure it wasn’t an easy task either especially given their stupid reasons for not trusting you. As for the decorating, I think we can work grey into our palette. I’m no decorator by any means but I sort of got addicted to watching those home decorating shows. I think if we use more muted colors that pair nicely with grey, we could come up with a nice scheme without it looking like a prison or a bunch of clowns lived there, don’t you think?”

I laughed and kissed her lips as I ran my hands down her back and up her sides. “I think that is a great idea we just need to find a good balance of grey and color. I’m looking forward to making this house a home.”

“Mmm, I am too,” she said, her voice a little more breathless than before. “I like this, us I mean.” She moved around on my lap so that her legs were over mine. “I feel like I am an equal which was something I never got before.” She ran her fingers up and down my chest, lightly scratching and it felt so good.

“I know what you’re saying, I’m feeling the same way myself. For as long as I can remember, I was controlled in one fashion or another in real or perceived relationships. Hell, if I had to admit it, even the last years of my human life, the military controlled me, in a sense. With you, I feel what should be a normal give and take - it seems right to be able to share ideas and thoughts without feeling like my ideas aren’t good enough. I suppose it must have been the same for you too.”

She nodded and rested her head against mine. “It always seemed to be that way and it made me feel
insignificant. I get that I am a human who isn’t able to utilize her senses like your kind. I get that but you don’t throw it in my face. You’ve taken the time to explain things to me, you walk with me at a human pace and not once have you complained. They are little things but it means so damn much to me.” She held me tightly, our bodies pressed against each other. “Would you ever want to go jogging with me? I don’t usually talk much when I run but dad and I used to...” She sighed not able to finish her thought. “You don’t have to, I just thought if you’d be interested in keeping me company.”

“I’d like that very much. I enjoy being around you, Isabella,” I whispered. “Once again, you’ve managed, by a simple action, to make me feel like my dead heart could beat again.”

She gasped and looked at me. A sheen of tears coated her eyes. “That is... oh Jasper.” She cupped my face and kissed me on the lips. It started as sweet and tender but then her hands started to wander their way down my back and under my shirt. I let mine do the same and moaned into her mouth when I realized she wasn’t wearing a bra - her top was baggy enough that it hid fact from me. As we continued to kiss, I unzipped her sweatshirt and tossed it aside so I could run my hands up and down her arms, grazing the swell of her breasts and then felt her nipples harden underneath the thin top she wore underneath.

She gave a sharp intake of breath at the sensation and I pulled back to look at her, silently asking if she wanted me to continue or not; hoping she wouldn’t have any objection. The look of need in her eyes, plus the lust that started to weave around us was enough as I ran my thumbs over her nipples again and felt them pebble even more from my touch. She let out a whimper and the scent of her arousal perfumed the air as she rocked her hips against me.

“Please... don’t stop,” she cried out breathlessly as I palmed her breasts, enjoying the soft, warm curves. Her nails raked down my back and I hissed at the sensation. My body was becoming hypersensitive to her touches and caused me to grow harder than I was. I held her close so her heat was against me and it was my turn to roll my hips against her. Isabella’s eyes squeezed shut as she arched her back, pressing her tits against my chest. I growled at the feel and dragged my finger down the neckline causing the tank-top to rip. I flung the torn material onto the floor just as her hands left my body and covered her torso.

I looked at her curiously as I felt the sudden vulnerability coming off her. “Baby girl?”

“My scars, I... nobody’s ever seen them. Well, other than doctors.”

I looked at her understanding as my hands slowly left hers and went to my shirt. The slow movement captured her curiosity and she watched as I slowly and purposefully took my shirt off in front of her, showing her all my scars that I knew she’d see in this light. I felt it when she realized what she was seeing and she was now warring with herself to fight her insecurities. She took one
breath and then another before her arms left her body and slowly, with her eyes on mine, reached out to touch my bare torso.

I let out a low growl when her warm hands touched me and caused her lust to spike. I pulled her even closer we both let out a sigh of relief as our bare flesh pressed against each other. Our kisses deepened as her tongue danced around mine. The noises coming from her mouth had me wanting more as I held her hips with one hand and with the other, squeezed one breast and then the other.

“Never doubt that you’re fuckin’ beautiful, Isabella,” I whispered as I kissed her jaw and neck. My hands ran along her skin touching the scars that were right around the waistline of her shorts. One in particular ran appeared to run down her hip and it felt jagged under my fingertips.

“It was from the accident,” she said quietly realizing where I my fingers were. “I was pinned in the car.” She pointed to a smaller scar on her body. “This was from my ruptured spleen. The worst scar is lower where they had to remove...”

“Shhh,” I said recognizing her distress as I held her tight against me. “I understand. You’re a brave woman.”

She looked up at me and ran her fingers through my hair. “You’re brave too,” she whispered as she her fingers traced some scars over my chest. She bent down and planted a few kisses along my body earning a groan from me. Her hips rocked against mine as we continued to kiss and touch. Our lust grew heavier as we continued. Our hips were grinding against each other in a steady rhythm until her breaths became heavier and I could feel she was wetter and even more aroused. I knew my eyes were pitch black when she looked deeply into them and they did nothing to tamp down her emotions. If anything, it just fueled her excitement.

“Don’t stop! Please!” she pleaded as her legs tightened around me. Her whimpers and moans of pleasure spurred me on. Her eyes rolled back and her legs started to tremble around me. I held her hips as I bent down and swirled my tongue around her nipple. She screamed out in pleasure and grabbed a hold of my hair. I didn’t think it was even possible to be even harder but I was.

The taste of her skin, the feel of her pebbled nipple in my mouth was nearly my undoing. I nearly ripped off our clothes and buried myself deep in her but I also knew I wasn’t ready yet and didn’t want to risk putting her in harm’s way or claiming her when she wasn’t quite ready and I wasn’t completely sure I could contain myself.

“Jasper!” she cried out in between whimpers and near incoherent curses. “Please!” She was close and I knew I wasn’t going to hold on for much longer. The wetness and her heat enhanced the
friction even with the our clothes. We continued to move together as I alternated from kissing her mouth to sucking on her tits.

“Yes! Fuck, Jasper!”

With a strangled cry, she arched her back hard, her head thrown back. I could feel her pussy throbbing as I continued to thrust.

“Fuck!” I roared out and felt as though my brain exploded. A kaleidoscope of colors flashed behind my eyes as I came hard. I pulled her close to me hearing her breathing hard and her emotions going crazy. She was feeling vulnerable at the moment but the feeling was fading as I held her and kissed her tenderly and affectionately while making sure I wasn’t holding onto her too tight to cause irreparable harm.

I moved us so we were lying on the bed, with her on top of me. I held her and ran my hands up and down her back as her breathing got back to normal.

“Are you okay, baby girl?” I asked once her heart stopped racing.

She nodded and held onto me a little closer and tighter. “It was... it was so intense,” she whispered softly. “Did you like that?” She looked into my eyes and I saw just some concern in them.

I had a feeling this was the reason for her emotions after - she wasn’t sure if I enjoyed myself, “It was amazing, just like you,” I replied and kissed her hair. “Did you?” I sent her my affections as I continued to soothe her.

“Oh my god, that was... we... WOW!” she breathed out. She smiled softly as her fingers drew random patterns on my skin. Her doubts were finally lessening and she was starting to relax more.

“Oh my god, that was... we... WOW!” she breathed out. She smiled softly as her fingers drew random patterns on my skin. Her doubts were finally lessening and she was starting to relax more.

“Wow is right, Isabella,” I smiled, feeling content even though this was probably something that should have embarrassed the hell out of me.

“Is that...” she began and blushed. “Is that how it feels?”
I pulled her closer so I could kiss her lips. “It would be much more pleasurable once we do but we still have more to explore. It will be just as intense, if not more.”

She nodded. “It was overwhelming and intense but it felt so good,” she said and yawned.

I rolled us so we were laying side by side. She tucked herself against me as I pulled the covers over us. I closed my eyes just as she was falling asleep. The scent of our activities hung in the air and I ran my hand down her back as I kissed her hair.

“I love you, Isabella,” I whispered in a tone I knew would be too low for her to hear.
I was washing my hair, thinking how it had only been a week ago that I woke up half naked on top of Jasper. The memory of what we had done had me blushing with embarrassment but he had quickly distracted me out of those thoughts and we had a replay of the night before. Since then, we’ve spent time touching, kissing and just enjoying each other. We hadn’t gone any further other than that, though I was now wearing cotton boyshorts to bed and nothing else, and just last night, Jasper held me as I slept wearing nothing more than some boxer briefs.

It wasn’t all about sex for us though. The past few days were filled with getting things for our house. We had taken time to look at paints, creating a palette to use once we moved in. I really thought our color scheme would be really pretty and definitely not sterile. We also ordered furniture to be delivered later today. Yesterday, we spent the day going to different home stores looking at towels and sheets. I smiled as I recalled the lesson I got on bedsheet and the merits of high thread count, Egyptian cotton and Pima cotton. I didn’t believe what he said until he actually had me touch the sheets and I had to hand it to him, he had a point.

As I finished up my shower I thought back to our first argument a few days back and laughed to myself. I wrapped the towel around me and and another around my hair as I got out of the bathroom.

“What was so amusing in there?” Jasper asked as I opened the door.

“I was thinking about our disagreement over the home inspection,” I said and smiled as I stood on my toes and kissed him. He lifted me up and we kissed for a few minutes before he set me back down.

“Hey, I was just saying we didn’t need a home inspection.”

“Yes but I was just trying to be careful, protect your investment if you will,” I replied with a shrug.
He put his arms around me and kissed my neck as I pulled on a skirt. “Our investment and yes and when I reminded you that I’m a vampire and could probably rebuild the entire house if need be, what was your response?”

I laughed. “I said that it was the whole principle of it. I know, it was silly, wasn’t it?”

“Yes it was but it wasn’t long lasting. You did have a point in having the inspection done so they wouldn’t get suspicious or start rumors for the neighbors.”

I grimaced at the idea. “Ugh, see? Another good point,” I teased as I pulled on a cute button down blouse.

“You look nice by the way,” he whispered as he finished getting ready.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” I said as he buttoned up his shirt and walked to the bed with his boots. I slipped on a pair of wedge sandals and headed back to the bathroom to put on some sunscreen and mascara.

A few more minutes, we headed out the door and walked to my car. I was nervous about closing on the house, not really knowing what to expect at this point. All I knew was I didn’t want to go to the title company dressed like a typical teenager.

The entire process was quick since it was done all in cash and Jasper had wired the money last night. It was a little surreal seeing both our names on the title as we signed a bunch of papers. I didn’t have time to decipher the language and decided to just rely on Jasper’s super vampire speed reading skills to understand what we were putting our signatures to. In less than an hour, we were done and given the keys.

I tried hard not to jump up and down but did let out a squeal of excitement as soon as he helped me into the Blazer.

As Jasper got into the car, he shook his head and laughed. “A little excited?” he teased, causing me to laugh even more before I turned to look at him noticing the slight purpling of his skin under his eyes.

I reached over and touched his cheekbone. “It’s been a while since you’ve fed. You should go
tonight,” I said, concerned that he was pushing himself too long in between feeds.

“I will, it isn’t bad burn wise since I grabbed a bag a couple nights ago.” He looked over and caressed my cheek. “I just didn’t want to leave you too long.”

“I know, but hey, do your thing tonight, I’ll stay up. Besides, I have a feeling I’ll want to organize and stuff.”

“Are you sure, baby girl?”

“Jasper, you need to tend to your needs, I don’t want you to neglect yourself on my account. Don’t you also need to do that perimeter thingy?”

We were now parked on the driveway of our new house. “Yeah, I guess I could do that as well, it’ll make me feel better even though there hasn’t been any dangers.” He sighed. “Alright, being that it is near the weekend, there’s bound to be an easy hunt for me tonight,” he said and I could still hear some reluctance in his voice.

We got out of the car and started to unload a few boxes. There weren’t a whole lot of things we had brought with us from Washington and what we did have, easily fit in my car. We unpacked what we had along with some of our new purchases and waited for our first set of deliveries.

“I have a surprise for you,” Jasper said as I was putting away some clothes.

“Didn’t you already surprise me with putting my name on the title?” I replied with a laugh.

“This isn’t as big but I think you’ll like it,” he said and pulled out a wrapped package from the Hotel Monaco in Salt Lake.

I carefully opened the package and laughed when I saw a giraffe pattern peeking from the tissue wrapping. “The robes!” I squealed out and pulled both robes out before running towards Jasper.

He caught me in his arms and kissed me hard. I was nearly breathless when the doorbell suddenly rang. “I’m glad you liked them, I thought you’d like that surprise.”
I nodded as he left in a blur down the stairs. I wasn’t able to see him from the second floor landing until he slowed down near the doorway. It was the appliance guys with our new washer and dryer and as Jasper showed them where they were going, another delivery truck pulled up with some furniture. Like clockwork, one delivery after another appeared and after a few hours, I was hungry but happy we had a house full of furniture.

“I’m going to get some food,” I said as I watched Jasper move the couches around. “Should I drop you off to get your car since you might need it tonight?”

“Sure, let me grab some jeans and my jacket as well. You sure you’ll be alright?”

I rolled my eyes and shook my head. “Yes worrywart, I’ll be fine. Look at all these boxes and deliveries, this will keep me occupied for a bit. You need to feed.”

“Yes ma’am” he said and rushed off, coming back a couple minutes later dressed for his upcoming activities.

We took off in my car, stopping at a fast food place for a burger. I figured on the way back from dropping Jasper off, I could grab some groceries and get settled while he was out.

I could tell Jasper was a little apprehensive in leaving me in a new house but I figured it would only be a few hours and I would be alright. The ride back to the farmhouse was relatively quiet as I munched on the food. When we got there, we packed up most of the food at the house, leaving just a few nonperishable items for whenever we came over to visit which I was sure we’d do. We hugged and kissed before he walked me back to my car and helped me in. We both pulled out of the carport and headed back towards Huntsville but as I made the turn to our house and the nearby grocery store, Jasper’s Mustang passed me with a honk on the horn.

I got to the local grocery store and ran in to grab some some food for the next few days. I was out of there in no time and sped out the parking lot. When I got home, I unpacked the groceries and went to put away my clothes in the dresser. I decided since I had some alone time, I would go online and and check on a few things.

A couple days ago, Jasper had sent me an email with links to some financial information. I opened it up and read the message one more time.
Isabella -

I know you aren’t comfortable about the subject of money so I thought I’d send you an email with the information so that you can review it in your own time. Please feel comfortable enough to talk to me afterwards if you have any questions or concerns with any of this.

The first thing is the house. It will be under both our names and if you’re still inclined to pay for your share, we can deduct it out of the sale of the house in Forks. My original plan was to create scholarship in honor of your father and surprise you with it but I thought better of the idea and let you decide whether to do pursue that or not.

The second thing I’d like to address is your father’s finances. During my research and while waiting for the accounts to be transferred to your name, I’ve discovered that your father had a sizable nest egg he was saving for you in addition to your college fund. I also discovered that the property that was owned by your great-grandparents was sold decades ago to a land developer. I have provided you with the links and passwords to those accounts so you can review that in your own time.

Finally, I know you’re probably worried about being a financial burden to me but please do not fret. I have provided you with a copy of one of my current account statements so you have a better understanding. This is one of my accounts and not meant to intimidate or make you feel insignificant in any way. I have been on this earth for a long time and have managed, through investment and gambling, to accumulate much of my wealth.

This is probably not the best way to communicate this news to you but I didn’t want you to feel like I was influencing your decisions or your thoughts so I thought giving you the information in this manner and have you look at it in your own time would be a better way.

Yours,

Jasper

I let go of the breath I was holding when I finished the email. When I saw it a few days ago, I couldn’t make it past the news about starting a scholarship fund without tears and have since read the email a few times but never opened the links or the attachment. I knew my stubbornness and my pride was why Jasper decided to email me this information. I took a deep breath and clicked on one of the links he provided to see just what he was talking about. While waiting for the page to load, I wondered if starting a scholarship fund in my dad’s honor was a good idea. I didn’t want it to go to just anybody and thought a scholarship to be given to college bound students from the local tribes would be more fitting.
I was more than surprised when I saw the accounts that would be transferring to me. My dad had a life insurance policy that was worth quite a bit of money and since he was a twenty plus year veteran of the police force, his pension was pretty robust as well. He also invested in some stocks and stuff which surprised me given the modest lifestyle he lived. I smiled fondly as I realized I probably got that from him. In all, even without the house, I had close to a quarter million dollars that would be transferred to my name and that was after taking taxes out. I was shocked at the amount but figured maybe I’d ask Jasper to help me invest some of it.

I looked at the time and realized it had just been an hour since Jasper went to hunt. I grabbed a pile of dirty clothes and threw them into the washer while I contemplated whether or not to look at the attachment that Jasper included in his message, the one that showed a glimpse of his fortune. I grabbed some boxes for the kitchen and started emptying them as I wondered if knowing he was well off, and I had no doubt he was, if that would affect how I felt about him.

“It shouldn’t matter if he had more money than the devil himself,” I admonished myself as I stacked the plates and put away the utensils.

Had Jasper been the type of person that flaunted his wealth, driving fancy cars and living in a mansion, I think it would be different. Instead, here I was in our house that was far from being a mansion while unpacking boxes. Other than convincing me to splurge on some nice things like sheets, it still came down to us being practical.

With determination, I walked back to the computer and clicked on the document, shutting my eyes as it loaded up. I peeked after I allowed enough time for it load - eight figures to the left of the decimal and this was just one of his accounts. If I had to be honest, I probably imagined his wealth to surpass the US National Debt. I reminded myself as I went back to get rid of more boxes that Jasper was pretty down to earth and this wouldn’t change him or the way I felt about him.

I was feeling uneasy and just thought it was being in a new house on my own. I looked at the clock again and realized it had been just two hours since he left. I threw the clothes and sheets into the dryer as I put away some more clothes. During the next couple hours, I kept myself as busy as possible. I unpacked more things, put the sheets on the bed and broke down the boxes before carrying them outside. I couldn’t relax no matter how hard I tried. I felt restless so I decided to jump into the shower. I thought about how Jasper showed me quick sketches of what he had planned for this room. He was going to knock down a wall and make this shower into a walk in shower with multiple faucet heads and a bench. The soaking tub would go in the corner and it was just a matter of finding the right one that I would like.

When I got out of the shower, I realized I hadn’t brought any clothes in here so I ran into the bedroom and slipped on some panties before looking for a shirt to wear, reaching for Jasper’s button down he wore earlier today. As I put it on, I felt a little less agitated which was strange since I hadn’t felt that way before. Was it because Jasper wasn’t here and his shirt calmed me? I took a
sniff at his shirt and recognized his scent bringing a small smile to my face.

I continued to straighten out our bedroom before heading downstairs as I tried to figure out why I felt so off tonight. A part of me thought it was because Jasper wasn’t close by but I hadn’t felt that way before and certainly not the last time he fed back in Seattle. It worried me as I straightened the couch cushions and started to put away the DVDs. I was starting school in a matter of weeks and if I was agitated after a few hours, how would I be after a full day of classes?

A roar of an engine shook me out of my thoughts and a few seconds later, the front door opened. Jasper came in looking bright eyed and I dropped what I was doing and ran towards him.

“Jasper,” I cried out, relieved that he was home. I ran straight into his arms as he lifted me off the ground and held me close to him.

“What’s got your emotions like that, baby girl?” he whispered as he ran his hands down my back.

“I’ve just felt out of sorts all night,” I admitted as I wrapped my arms around him as he walked us back up the stairs. “It was more than missing you, I felt really restless.” I took a deep breath. “Jasper, why do I smell heavy perfume?” I asked and wrinkled my nose.

“My meal tonight was a prostitute,” he said and grimaced.

I tried not to laugh seeing how disturbed he was. “Um, she didn’t try to put the moves on you I hope.”

He shuddered. “I got my ass pinched or rather, she attempted to pinch me. This one was disease ridden so it might be best if I wash up first.” He set me down and ran straight to the bathroom emerging clad in only a towel a couple minutes later. He got up to me smiled. “Is this better?”

I stood on the bed and nuzzled his neck, only smelling Jasper and soap. “Much,” I whispered and licked a trail of water that was running down his chest.

“Isabella, you’ll be the death of me,” he growled out and walked into the closet, coming back with a pair of shorts on. “So talk to me about tonight, are you feeling better?” He sat on the bed and pulled me onto his lap.
“I am now but I had to keep busy and did stuff around the house,” I replied and snuggled closer to him.

“I saw the boxes outside and you did laundry too. You didn’t overexert yourself did you?”

“No, I also read that email you sent. I like your idea of a scholarship in my dad’s name. I was thinking, is there a way we could have it so it gets awarded to one of the Washington State native tribes at least to start out and then maybe expand to other native tribes throughout the country? I’d like to offer the first one to Jacob if that is alright.”

“I’ll get in touch with an attorney I keep on retainer and he’ll work out the details. I think that is a wonderful idea. Were you alright about everything else?”

“Yeah, it was a little intimidating but I appreciate that you sent me the info first and then we talk about it later. I know I’m damn stubborn about money but yes, I did look at everything. Is a scholarship doable with what I have and would you be able to help me invest in some of it?”

He kissed me on the temple and brushed his fingers through my hair. “I’ll help you in any way you’d like. Are you are going to be fine with the scholarship? How much were you planning?”

“I hadn’t thought about it that far but I thought a scholarship that was worth up to $2000 would be nice, I’d break it down over a four year span so they’re not just given a one shot deal especially since some of these folks aren’t well off at all. I’d want to be for vocational type training as well, not just a four-year university.”

He kissed me on the lips. “That is a beautiful idea, Isabella, your father would have been damn proud of you.”

I smiled at that thought. “I think he would have been too but he would have made a fuss at the same time.” I took a deep breath. “I also saw the account statement.”

I could see the slight change in him as he looked at me. If I had to guess, he was probably nervous about my reaction. I nodded at him. “Yeah, it doesn’t change how I feel about you but I am sort of at a conundrum right now.”
“Is there something I can do to help?”

“Maybe and I’ll get to it in a bit. Why was I feeling this way tonight? Is it that connection we have? if it is, why didn’t I feel it last time when you fed?” I blurted out.

“I can only offer up more theories,” he said, I could see in his eyes that he truly wanted to offer me something substantial but couldn’t.

“Theories are better than me freaking out,” I said and laced my fingers through his, hoping that he felt my reassurance.

“Well, since the last time I fed, we’ve been more intimate; both emotionally and physically. I can only guess on it based on what I see when you sleep.”

“Oh? How so?” I asked.

“It is as though your body knows where I am. You’ll be asleep in the middle of the night and I’ll sometimes grab my laptop to Instant Message Peter or grab a blood bag to drink and as soon as I come back to bed, you’re more relaxed and no matter how you’re sleeping, within minutes, you are curled up against me.” He smiled as he sent me his affection. “It amazes me each and every time it happens at the same time, it humbles me because I had always thought feeling like this was something I never deserved especially given my violent beginning into the supernatural life.”

I held him and kissed him knowing that we both had moments like these, when our past feelings of unworthiness came back. I still had my moments when all I needed most was Jasper’s arms around me, reassuring me in his own way that everything will be alright. Now it was my turn to do the same for him.

“Shh, I’m here,” I whispered as I planted kisses all along his neck.

We held each other for a while not saying a word and just enjoying us.

“Thank you for being you,” he whispered, breaking the silence. “By the way, you look good in my shirt.” He nipped my ear lobe and dragged a finger down my sternum.
My body heated up instantly at his touch. “Your scent still lingered in it and it sort of made me feel a little more at ease, relatively speaking.”

“Well in that case, feel free to raid my share of the closet anytime,” he teased. “Did that ease your worries?”

“Sort of,” I said. “I’m nervous now. I don’t want to feel clingy and dependent but at the same time, I’ll have to figure out a way to go to school and work a few hours. I don’t know if I can go a whole day not being near you for that long and that scares me.”

“Get your computer and maybe I can help figure something out,” he said.

For the next hour, he helped me create a schedule that would allow me a few hours to work an opening shift, after that robbery attempt, there was no way I was going to close up or work nights. Then I could spend a few hours either at home or at a library studying before my classes that started in the afternoon.

“Would you like it if I took a couple classes that were scheduled in the evening?” he asked.

I nodded. “Yes, but it won’t take away whatever you’d be doing will it?”

“Nah, I’ll probably take a criminal justice course or two, if you’re alright with that. Then we can come back home together.”

I smiled at the idea. “I like that,” I admitted. “Wait, did being away from me bother you too?”

He nodded and kissed my hair, breathing in my scent. “That tugging sensation came back and while it didn’t hurt, it was a steady pull that reminded me you weren’t nearby. I also realized something too as I was coming home. I think I’m more in tune with your emotions which is why I knew you were distressed but not in danger and I didn’t break down the door looking for you when I got home.”

“So we’re more in tune with each other and I suppose things will build up more as we continue to grow in our relationship?”
He raked his fingers through his hair. “It is a little more complex than that,” he said softly as he grabbed my hand. “You remember when I told you about wearing my mark?” he asked quietly.

I nodded. “Yes, it is one of the things I tried hard not to ask more questions when you first mentioned it. I just thought I shouldn’t ask in case things didn’t turn out the way they did.”

“It is alright, do you mind if we talked about it now?”

I shook my head, “No, I’m sort of curious.”

“Well, it is a two way street thing, it isn’t just the male marking the female, the female will want to mark the male as well. During that bite, a little venom is injected into the other’s body -”

“Wait, you said that the venom hurts,” I cut in. I was worried about the idea of causing harm to someone you’re connected to.

“I obviously don’t have firsthand experience in it but if done while being intimate, it can enhance the sensations.”

I gasped as I tried to imagine it and thought it was sexy. “But... but how does that help with the feeling of being away?”

“Because your mate’s venom has been introduced into your body, it would help center you because a part of them is coursing through you.”

“Oh,” I replied and was lost in thought for a few seconds. “I guess that makes sense.” Knowing that my thoughts were becoming less innocent, I quickly changed the subject. “Hey, earlier you mentioned how you talk to Peter, has he heard anything?”

He shook his head. “No nothing. Peter and Char have quite a few contacts and some of them don’t check phones or technology for days or even weeks so it’s a slow process but they’re working all their angles.”

“So you created a perimeter tonight then?”
He pulled me closer to him, his arms around me as he kissed me. “I did,” he whispered near my ear. “It is bigger than the one I created in Forks, it intersects with Peter and Char’s perimeter so in a sense it is now a territory that the three of us will cover.”

“Is that safer? To have a larger piece of land to defend?”

He nodded. “It is because vampires can be really territorial and having a huge swath of land that is marked by three distinct scents is usually enough to keep the riff raff out. The Cullens didn’t do that as much, thereby relying on Alice or Eddie and their gifts.”

“Is that how James and his minions got through?” I asked and wound my fingers around his blond curls.

“They were a little different in that they didn’t care when it came right down to it. A part of me thinks they would have found some excuse to attack the Cullens or the town of Forks just for their own sport.”

“I obviously can’t assess them like you can but it wouldn’t surprise me. I mean both James and Laurent were just wild eyed. I wouldn’t past the red head if she acted the same way. Thank you Jasper, I know you are a fighter but you still run some risk in protecting me.”

I kissed him and sent him appreciation and relaxed more against him. His hands rubbed my back loosening up the muscles I hadn’t realized were sore from unpacking and moving things. I stifled a couple yawns as I lay on the bed and he continued to massage the soreness out. My eyes closed as I enjoyed the sensation and probably let out a couple moans as he continued, occasionally kissing my back.

I started to drift off thinking how good it felt, not just Jasper’s magic hands but being close to him and the fact that we were closer than ever. We were also at our house. I yawned one more time and smiled as I felt his lips on my skin. It was the last thing I remembered.
Chapter 30

As she drifted off to sleep, I stripped off my shorts and lay next to her in my boxer briefs. I could see the small smile on her face and could tell she was relaxed. I shut the lights and closed my eyes pretending to fall asleep myself as I held her.

A couple hours later, a strong dose of lust slammed into me as she started to writhe and breathe heavily. I could see a sheen of sweat had formed on her skin as she rocked her body against mine.

These sexy dreams of hers had been becoming more frequent and normally I would send her a little more lethargy just so I could control my own lust but I felt like I was on a constant losing battle with my willpower. I loved watching her in the throes of passion but at the same time, I wished I was really touching her instead of the phantom in her head. My eyes closed as I fought the urge to tear off her panties right then and there when her hands gripped my arms. I could smell her arousal and I could tell she was so fucking wet. My willpower was ebbing as she continued to grind against me. I wanted her so fucking bad.

“Jasper!” she cried out as her leg that was wrapped around my hip tightened.

I tried to remain as quiet as possible and started to think of things that could tamp down my desire - feeding on mountain goats and those inane human talk shows usually did the trick but not tonight. I saw her eyes open and she looked around, momentarily confused. She tried to act like nothing was wrong but her lust and need were still there and it fueled mine as I got lost in the sensation.

She turned her head towards mine and started to touch and kiss me. “Jasper,” she whispered, still breathless. “Please.” Her hands stopped right at the waistband of my shorts.

I looked into her eyes. “Are you sure, baby girl?” I asked as I switched on the nightstand lamp for her.

As her eyes adjusted to the soft, warm glow of the light, she looked at me and nodded. The
pleading look on her face never wavered. I kissed her lips, our tongues dancing as I roamed my hands over her body. I pulled her closer to me and quickly flipping us around so that she was straddling my lap. I growled when she ground her hips against me, her heat up against my cock. I didn’t want to stop and hoped like hell she didn’t either.

She was still moving against me when her hand slowly worked their way under my waistband and was slowly making its way downwards. I growled low as I dipped my fingers down hers, almost mimicking her movements. Her legs gripped my hips and I sat up so she could wrap them around me and I pulled her body closer.

“Please,” she pleaded again as she clutched at my hair with one hand and dipped her hand further down my shorts with the other. I hissed when her fingers grazed me before she stared into my eyes while wrapping her hand around me. I thrust my hips as the scent of her arousal grew heavier.

“Fuck,” I growled, feeling her warm hand around me. “Feels good.”

I moved my hand closer towards her center and I could feel she was excited but she was also apprehensive. I figured it was because this was all new for her and I looked at her, silently asking if she wanted me to continue.

Her darkened chocolate eyes stared into mine and I saw as she nodded hesitantly. I slowly moved my hand, feeling the scar on her from her injury. My mind recognized it for what it was, but I was more interested in feeling her silky skin. She was bare except for a small tuft of curls right before I reached her folds. Her arousal was stronger now but I saw just a small hint of fear and uncertainty in her eyes causing me to stop my journey.

“Wait, I don’t know...” she began, her already flushed face burned even redder with embarrassment. I watched as she tried valiantly to catch her breath. I held her as her concern became more apparent and rubbed small circles along her back.

“I don’t know if things are right... down there,” she said quietly.

I took a deep breath as I felt her self-esteem beginning to dwindle and her self-doubt rising. I understood that much of it was because of the accident and guessed that she wasn’t sure if her body was normal anymore. I also thought back at how she used to be rejected and tried to understand things from her point of view.
I gently hooked my finger under her chin so I could look into her eyes. “Isabella,” I whispered, “Your arousal drives me wild and I long to taste you straight from the source. Your pussy gets so wet that I want to drive into you and feel you tighten around me when you come. There is nothing wrong with you or your body. You react to me exquisitely and I want you so bad.” I twitched into her hand and thrust my hips, further emphasizing my desire for her.

Her eyelids grew heavy as she let out a moan. I slipped my hand further down, my fingers feeling her slick, bare folds and I growled. “Fuck, you’re so fuckin’ wet, Isabella.” I had to think fast, my resolve was wavering and I needed to make sure I could control my strength and not claim her right then. I also thought of the possibility of blood being a factor as I rubbed tiny circles around her clit. Her breathing was even harder and I could hear her heart thumping rapidly as her excitement built. “Wrap your legs around me, baby girl. Let’s go in the shower, it might make things more comfortable that way.”

She nodded as she brought her arms around me, holding onto me tight and I ran us into the bathroom, turning the shower to warm up. I kissed her as I slowly slid a finger inside and she cried out in pleasure as she rocked her hips at me. She was so warm, wet and tight. I slid my hand back out of her panties tasted her on my finger. “So good, better than blood,” I moaned as I ripped off her panties before ripping my own underwear off. I stepped into the tub as the shower began to steam around us.

“Please Jasper,” she pleaded as her hands grabbed my hair and pulled me into a kiss.

I pressed her against the shower wall as I lined my cock up to her entrance. She gasped as I ran the head along her slick folds before I slowly slid into her. There was no barrier, no doubt due to her injuries and follow up care she had to endure so I didn’t need to stop, and before long, I was finally sheathed within her. It felt like nothing I had ever experienced, not only was she tight and warm but the emotions that swirled around us was amazing. There was a sheen of tears in her eyes as she said, without words, just how much I meant to her - love, hope and adoration. I kissed her eyelids tenderly and sent her a steady dose of my own emotions that mirrored hers.

I gave her time for her body to adjust to my intrusion before she started writhing against me. I pulled out slowly, almost to my very tip before sliding back home again. She moaned, so loud and so full of passion that it almost sounded like a growl. We continued kissing and let our hands roam around each other’s body as I continued to thrust into her, picking up my speed just a little more.

I trailed my tongue along her skin, tasting her sweat mixed with water as I started to move her up and down. Her nipples pebbled when I sucked on them, earning a cursed growl from her. The steam from the shower enhanced her arousal but also kept me in focus of not biting her as she continued to moan and whimper.
“Fuck, Jasper!” she cried out as she ran her nails down my back. “More!”

The feeling caused the muscles on my back to twitch and I let a low growl out when her legs tightened around me. Her walls started to flutter causing me to swell up more inside of her. The friction was delicious and her low moans spurred me on. I thrust a little harder knowing she was about to come. I continued to kiss and lick her skin as she held onto my arms, her fingers would have dug into my flesh if I was still human.

My pitch black eyes focused on her as I continued. I could see she wanted to shut her eyes and enjoy the sensation but at the same time, she was fighting it to stare into my own. I grabbed a hold of her hair, as I felt her walls tighten even more and wrapped it around my fist. I wasn’t going to last long.

“Yes,” I growled out. “I can feel you’re close, baby girl.”

“Yes,” she panted and nodded. “More!”

I grabbed a hold of her hips and slammed into her, a couple degrees harder than I was. Her body arched back as she threw her head towards the shower wall and screamed out a litany of curses and my name in ecstasy. I roared out as her throbbing and squeezing had me exploding inside of her. I slammed my hand against the shower wall as I held her tight catching my unnecessary breath as I rested my forehead against hers. She was still panting and clinging to me as though I was a lifeline. I kissed her tenderly as I untangled her legs around me and slid her down my body so we could rinse off. I held onto her as soon as her feet touched the tub floor since I could tell she was a little wobbly. I wrapped us both in towels once I shut off the water and carried her back to our bed. Her emotions were still full of love and adoration but there was some curiosity coming off of her as we got under the covers. I ran my hands along her back as I continued to sent her a low, steady stream of my emotions to her.

She turned around facing me and placed her hand over where my heart used to beat. “Jasper,” she whispered. “Is it weird that at one point, at that point, I umm... I wanted you to taste my blood?” She furrowed her brows as she stared at my chest. I didn’t need my ability to realize she was uncomfortable admitting that so I kissed her on her lips and held her against me.

“Baby girl, I’m a vampire so it doesn’t sound weird at all. Did that idea bother you?”

“Sort of,” she said and quickly looked at my eyes before looking down again. “I’m not ready to give you my human life yet but at the same time, the idea of giving you a taste sort of excites me,” she admitted. “Maybe it can also center us a little too since I don’t have venom to bite you?”
I shut my eyes and wondered to myself how lucky I was and thanked the plethora of deities that ran through my mind. I opened my eyes once again and smiled. “I think we can try that and use my nail to nick your skin just a little. It excites me too and I don’t feel my mouth filling up with venom over the idea which is good.” I was pleased that my body didn’t react to the thought of her blood as though she was another meal. Still, I wanted to take this slow and not take too many reckless chances. “We’ll have to play it safe though maybe we can try it after the next time I feed so I would be less tempted to take more than offered.”

She smiled and then shivered a little. “That sounds good. I sort of tingle from you,” she muttered quietly and fought a yawn. “It doesn’t hurt or anything but I think your stuff has some venom.” Her face flushed and I fought the urge to sheath myself in her once again.

I could feel she was beyond tired and kissed her. “I never checked but that makes sense since venom courses my body. You’re exhausted, baby girl, get some sleep and we can talk more in the morning.”

She nodded and ran her hand down my back. “Alright, in the morning.” She yawned and shut her eyes. “This better not be a damn dream,” she blurted as she started to drift off.

“It isn’t, baby girl, I promise,” I whispered and kissed her forehead before reaching over to turn off the light. I shut my eyes and replayed tonight in my head, grateful that my vivid memory allowed me to recall every detail, scent, sound and feel. I also thought about our conversation and how she didn’t say ‘no’ or ‘never’ but ‘not yet’.

There was an inner peace coming from her while she slept and that in turn, allowed me to rest and drift off in pretend sleep. Sometime during her slumber, her legs became entangled with mine and while it wasn’t a surprise to me, I moaned realizing we were both still naked underneath the covers. Her warm skin and her curves pressed up against me felt so good.

Hours later, I heard her breathing change and her heart beating faster and I knew she was about to wake up. I untangled myself from her and quickly ran downstairs to start her coffee before coming back up to check on her. When the coffee was done brewing I poured out a mug and ran back up, sliding between the covers once again. I held her and kissed her shoulder and neck until her eyes opened.

“Morning, Jasper,” she whispered and there was a hint of fear and mortification coming from her. I was about to ask her until she ran her hands down my back as soon as she went past my waist, she smiled and smacked my ass playfully, breathing a sigh of relief. “I was so afraid it was all a dream.”
I chuckled as I kissed her nose. “I told you it wasn’t.” I pulled her into a kiss but she quickly squirmed out of my hands.

“Gotta pee,” she squeaked out and half stumbled-half ran into the bathroom. When I heard her finish brushing her teeth ten minutes later, I sat up on the bed and waited for her to come back out. She was still a little shy as her eyes avoided mine for the first few steps before her courage built back up and she looked at me with a smile. She got back to bed and grabbed her coffee, taking a gulp and sighing in pleasure.

“I enjoyed last night,” she said as she looked at me. “I mean, I really enjoyed it.” The backs of her fingers caressed my face and I closed my eyes and smiled as her emotions washed over me.

“I really enjoyed it too, I said and ran my hands down her back as I pulled her into an embrace. “What do you want to do today?”

She took another gulp before answering. “Not a whole lot. With school starting soon, I just want to relax. Can we stop at the coffee shop on campus? They sent me an email the other day and said they’d be able to fit me in the mornings since most of their staff were students.”

“Sure we can do that it is overcast but warm today. We might get some thunderstorms,” I replied. “I need to head into town to pick up any mail too, my attorney knows to forward things over every week.”

“Sounds good,” she said and finished her coffee. We had a little more fun in the shower before getting dressed and running our errands. Through the entire day, she radiated happiness and love. It was so pure and I found myself overwhelmed a few times at the degree of her emotions. I knew they were for me but it astounded me how strong they were. I used to think, before I knew her, that human emotions were either fleeting they didn’t feel as strong as vampires. I had been arrogant in my thoughts, thinking we were far superior in every way. Then, as I got to know her I realized that we, as different species, were more common than I had realized. Becoming her friend and now lover, I realized she had slowly given me back parts of my humanity and I couldn’t thank her enough.

“Yoohoo, anybody home?” Isabella’s teasing voice broke me out of my thoughts just as her hands waved in front of my eyes.

“Sorry, baby girl, I got to thinking about stuff,” I said and kissed her hair.
“I’ve been sitting here for five minutes waiting for you to start the engine,” she said. I was just about to apologize when I felt her mischief.

“Five minutes?” I asked and quirked my eyebrow.

She looked at me and laughed before leaning over and kissing my cheek. “Okay, maybe it wasn’t five minutes but it was longer than usual.” She stopped laughing and looked at me with concern. “Was everything alright?”

I nodded. “I was just thinking how you’ve opened my eyes to things that I never noticed or maybe it was more like I chose not to acknowledge. Isabella Swan, you’ve given me a part of my humanity back and for that, I cannot thank you enough.” I sent her my appreciation and my affections to her and watched as she concentrated on returning emotions back.

We ran our errands and headed to campus where she met her soon-to-be new boss. I grabbed a coffee drink and sat down as Beth gave Isabella a few tests on their espresso machine. She appeared to pass as I felt satisfaction and pride coming from her.

“She thinks I can handle the morning crowd,” she said beaming as she came over to me. She grabbed the drink on the table, pretending she was stealing it from me. I played along with her as she continued to practice our silent language and left the student center.

“You’re getting better at it,” I said as I started the engine.

“It takes concentration but I think I’m getting the hang of it. It’s weird, I like this between us but yet other abilities like mind reading and fortune telling just irritated me. Maybe it is because you don’t make it intrusive and annoying.”

I smiled at her. “I like the way you described that. It makes me feel closer to you,” I said as I pulled into the parking lot of the town’s post office.

After running a few more quick errands, we decided to stop at an outdoor furniture store so we could take a look at a table and chair set for our balcony. We found a set that looked like a couch that we both liked and decided to load it up in the Blazer before heading home. I was so happy we lived on top of a hill so nobody could see me carrying that couch with one hand while Isabella insisted on bringing the matching table. We decided to keep it downstairs under the patio for now. The warm Texas summer rain had started and I could see Isabella was curious about it so we sat
outside and enjoyed the cooler temperature as we snuggled on the couch.

I was sorting through our mail that was sent by my attorney when I came across one that was addressed to Charlie Swan. I showed it to Isabella and noticed her curiosity spiked especially when she saw the postmark date.

“This has to be a joke, right?” she said as she stared at the envelope.

I looked at it, flipping it over a few times when I noticed the scent. “It is from Esme,” I said confused as to why she’d send something addressed to Charlie that was postmarked nearly a week after the funeral.

“It doesn’t make sense,” she said. “Can you open it?”

She was curious but very cautious as I carefully opened the envelope and pulled out a sympathy card. There was nothing inside the card so I showed it to her.

_We are so sorry for your loss, Bella was like a daughter to us. Our thoughts are with you at this sad time._

It was signed the Cullens but I knew that writing came from Esme.

“What the fuck?” she muttered out loud. I had to admit, I was thinking the same thing. “I don’t understand, I’m supposed to be dead? Where did you say they were they when you left them?”

“I don’t understand either. They were in Alaska last I heard but it isn’t like they didn’t have access to technology.”

“So maybe they are relying on your ex and she somehow saw me dead, yet again?” she pondered and then shook her head. “But that wouldn’t make sense, the times when you should have hungered for my blood, you didn’t. Should we be worried?”

I looked at the card and then at Isabella. “Given what Eddie demanded from the family, that they keep away from you, I would have to say that they must truly believe this, whatever it was. Maybe it was when your arm was bleeding?”
She shrugged. “I guess it is a possibility but I promise you, I never did that to harm myself, I imagined I was punching other people when my fist went through the glass.”

“I know, I was just throwing it out there. I honestly don’t have any reason why they’d think that. When I destroyed Laurent out there, there was never a time, not once, that I thought about attacking you. I swear, Isabella.”

“No, I know and I trust you,” she said softly and touched my hand as she tried to send me her reassurance. “I don’t understand.” She looked at the card again. “Maybe it could be a good thing that they think I’m dead, right? That might lessen the chances of them swooping out here and interfering with us?”

I held her close just as the distant sound of thunder rumbled. “Maybe it is a good thing, I’m used to the peace and quiet now.” I ran my fingers through her hair just as lightning struck across the sky.

“Wow, that is... whoa so beautiful,” she said breathlessly as we continued to watch. “I’m used to it being just us too.” She took my hand in hers. “Besides, I am not a big fan of them right now. They’ve sort of got on my bad list when you told me how they treated you.”

I smiled at her and touched her lips to mine. “I’ve caught a glimpse of what could happen if someone got on that list and I for one would never want to be there.”

She laughed. “Good you know better than to piss me off,” she teased. “And I’m fine if they think I’m gone. So are these common in the summer?”

I could tell from her abrupt change in conversation that she was done talking about them. “They were fairly common when I was growing up. You had to be careful of the lightning and we’d always had to seek cover just in case but it was amazing to watch and sometimes you could even hear it zapping sometimes, even as a human,” I said as I got up and pulled her close. “There was one summer when we had these storms and in between the thunder and lightning we’d go out and play in the warm summer rain. I vaguely remember how I thought it helped cool the air. What I would have done for air conditioning back then.” I pulled her out into the confines of the patio and she laughed at the feel of the shower.

“It feels so warm, it’s so different than out in Forks when it would get so cold. It feels almost like the heavy rains during the Arizona monsoon season.”
I watched as she tilted her head back and let the rain fall on her. It was such a beautiful and carefree moment that I regretted interrupting. “Baby girl, lightning storm is about to start again,” I said and she nearly skipped back to the patio and into my arms.

“Can we stay out here for a little while longer?” she asked and I nodded and walked us back to the couch.

I held her against me as we lay there watching the storm. We talked about ideas to add to the place and she thought a grill would be nice because it would keep some of the cooking out of the house. I insisted that it wasn’t an issue but she said her dad had taught her how to grill and with the warm weather, it would be fun and she made me promise her that I wouldn’t go crazy and get her a huge grill, just a little one would be plenty. She began to relax against me and I thought she was falling asleep until she turned over to face me.

“Jasper,” she said as she started to kiss along my neck. “Thank you for everything. I know you can feel it but I have been scared to say the words. I’m not afraid anymore.” I felt her confidence as she looked at me straight in the eyes. “I love you, Jasper Whitlock.”

I could almost feel the ghostly beats of my heart at her words. I kissed her and sent her all my affections. “I should be the one saying thank you to you. You are one incredible woman, Isabella Swan and I admit, I’m crazy in love with you.”
Chapter 31

Thank you to AlexisDanaan and JamesRamsey for making this chapter pretty. JR helped point out some things to add, clarifying some past events. JaspersWoman helped to preread this bad boy and I LOVED her reaction. As always, DarkNNerdy helped me with some early research and stuff like that. These ladies ROCK!!!

I am not SM, if I was, I probably wouldn’t have had such a horrible front yard for over a month. With her income, I’d have hired a lawn dude right away and yeah he’d look like Jasper, LOL!

Chapter 30

BPOV

After waking up this morning, Jasper wanted me to hurry up and get in my running gear because he had a surprise for me. I was a little confused but got ready and then headed downstairs to grab my iPod. Just as I was rushing out the door, he came up behind me and covered my eyes with a blindfold. I was really confused now but trusted him as he lifted me into his arms and carried me outside.

“If you dump me in water, I’m going to kick your ass,” I mumbled and hoped he wasn’t going to anything crazy.

“I won’t, but if I ever do, you’ll have my permission to,” he teased as he continued walking.

I wasn’t sure where we were going and he wasn’t communicating me with through his emotions either. It didn’t take long before he stopped and then set me back on my feet.

“Okay, baby girl,” he said as he pulled the blindfold off me. “You can look now.”

I looked around and noticed a trail surrounded by trees. “This is pretty. Where are we?”
He smiled and pointed over to our left. “That is our house and this is your new jogging trail that I created for you.”

I smiled big. “Really? You did all this with the crushed rocks too?”

He nodded. “I’ve been working on it each morning you’ve been working this past week. The trail runs through our entire property and while that doesn’t sound like much, there is nearly 3 miles you can run on. It has twists and turns as well as some inclines for you, I managed to criss-cross it around but you will hardly notice, I hope. I even set some markers for you so you can space your sprints too.”

“Wow, that is amazing! Thank you, you really know how to take care of me,” I said as hugged him. “Can we run now?” I was excited to have my very own running trail and sent him my sincere gratitude.

He nodded and sent me his love back. “I love being able to do things that bring a smile to your face. Now stretch out so you can try it.”

I didn’t need him to send me his emotions to see he was excited as well. I stretched out my muscles and then set up my run play list. A minute later I was jogging along with Jasper right beside me. I knew he could run faster exponentially but he never seemed to complain whenever we went running together. The first time we went was about a week ago and as I was cooling down after, he admitted to me that he ogled me the first time he saw me stretching out.

There was never a need for conversation as soon as I put my headphones on. I knew he could hear the music that poured out of my headphones but the couple times we ran out in the street, he’d keep a pair on just for appearances. Now, as I rounded my first hairpin-like turn, he was just following along side and there was no need for pretense as he kept his pace with me. I was still trying to adjust to the climate out here, the warm, humid air had me struggling in no time and I sweated much, much more than before but I was improving each and every time.

I was a little nervous and anxious since tomorrow was my first day of classes so I found myself running just a little harder than normal. As I finished my third mile, I was completely out of breath and slowed my pace down so I could start cooling off. I followed Jasper back out towards a narrower trail that led to the house. It was always the same for us, we won’t talk until we got back home and one of us would start the coffee machine. I sat on the floor waiting for my magical elixir and stretched everything out as Jasper sat down next to me.
“Your endurance is improving,” he said quietly as I reached for his hands and he gently pulled me and helped me stretch out. I loved moments like this because he was my own personal trainer.

“I’m feeling like I am getting stronger,” I replied. I continued to stretch as he ran into the kitchen to grab my coffee. “Thanks,” I said as he handed me a mug a few seconds later. I took a sip and smiled. “You’ll teach me to box too, right?”

A couple days ago, he came back surprising me with a kick-boxing bag. He explained that with the possible stress of school and the moments when my temper got the best of me, I could let loose on the bag. It was something we had talked about during our trip out here and at first I thought he was joking about getting me one but I realized he had a point when I lashed out at him last night over nothing and then proceeded to cry because I felt awful for it.

“I sure will,” he replied and smiled.

“I am really sorry for last night,” I said quietly.

“I told you, it was fine,” he said. “I know you didn’t mean it when I offered to show you different tub designs. Isabella, I know you’re still hurting over all that has happened. I am just giving you an avenue to work that anger out so you won’t feel bad after.”

“I know and I do appreciate that you are. I just feel like such a bitch for calling you a control freak when all you did was show me some pictures of possible ideas. I mean, you didn’t even voice your opinion on any of the pictures and I went off on you like that. I knew you were just helping I just didn’t realize my anger would pop up like that. I think what you said about me having a delayed reaction over Esme’s condolence card had some merit.”

“Well, now you’ll have a way of letting that go in a more healthy way. Besides, I think you’ll look fuckin’ sexy as hell if you wore just a sports bra and tiny shorts,” he said and waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

I laughed at his expression. “You, my Jasper, are just one horny vampire.”

He pretended to pounce on me as I lay on my back and stretched my hamstrings. “Only for you, my dear sweet, sexy Isabella,” he growled and nuzzled my neck earning a squeal of laughter when his tongue licked my collarbone and neck.
I squirmed from under him and he took my hands and pinned them above my head as he continued to lick me mercilessly. I was shrieking and laughing so hard as I tried to get him to stop.

Our playfulness turned naughty when he nipped my earlobe and I moaned out loud. His eyes quickly turned to onyx and a low growl rumbled through his chest, the vibration did nothing to stop my desire for him. I rolled my hips against him and quicker than I could see, scraps of our clothes were strewn all over the living room as though they just exploded away from us. He continued to lick and nip my skin and I whimpered and writhed under him.

“Keep your hands where they are for now,” he said as his own hands caressed my skin.

The sensation was so good and I started moaning and calling his name. I felt him slide down my body as he continued to assault me with his mouth.

“Spread your legs, baby girl,” he whispered gruffly and I complied. His mouth and tongue licked my legs avoiding the one spot I wanted him the most. I whimpered some more and rocked my hips trying to get him to just touch me, right there.

“Now, open your eyes, I want you to watch,” he said and I propped my elbows on the floor so I could get a better view.

Oh holy hell!

He opened his mouth and his pale pink tongue swiped a taste of me. It was so sexy and I nearly lost it right there. It was so deliciously sinful to feel his tongue on me, licking and sucking. That low growl, vibrated against me and I swear, I think my eyes were permanently affixed to the back of my head. I never would have imagined this would feel so good, I was panting and getting dizzy from it all.

I was lost in the sea of lust and Jasper’s tongue when he inserted a couple fingers inside of me. I bucked my hips so hard.

“Fuck, so good,” I panted out. “Don’t stop, please!” The pressure continued to build and I felt like I was about to come hard. He must have felt the same thing because quicker than a flash, he was kissing my face, his cock fully inside of me.
“Jasper!” I gasped out as my back bowed off the floor.

I moaned into his mouth tasting myself on his tongue. He wasn’t overly gentle as he continued to thrust into me and it felt amazing. His growls didn’t stop either.

“Yes, fuck me Jasper,” I cried out.

The words that came out of my mouth must have had an affect on him because his movements became just a little harder. I cried out in pleasure as he sped up, probably near vampire speed now, at least, what I imagined to be vamp speed.

My back arched off the living room floor, bowed out as he continued to fuck me crazy. I think I lost all comprehension as I raked my nails down his back. My legs wrapped around his body tight. He was sending me over the edge and quickly.

I have no idea what I was saying now or if I was even making sense. All I knew was I was close. As soon as his fingers started to rub against my clit, I exploded - star burst patterns flashed behind my eyes. I heard the roar of my name from his mouth just as I turned to watch his head tossed back, the sinews on his neck strained as he came hard. The look on his face was so sexy and dangerous as he gnashed his teeth together after.

He held me close as we came back from orbit. I vaguely remembered being pulled into his arms as he walked us up the stairs. All I could remember was I was being blissfully in love with him as he took both of us in the shower and gently cleaned me off. My eyes drifted sleepily as he bundled me up in a towel and carried me to bed as I napped after that fantastic morning.

When my eyes opened later, sunlight had filled the room and I turned to snuggle with Jasper as he rubbed circles along my back. “Are you alright?” he asked, the look of concern on his face.

I nodded. “A little groggy but deliciously sore, why? How long did I sleep for?”

His hand lingered on one spot on the small of my back. “Over an hour. You’ve got a huge red mark here. I don’t know if it will turn black and blue but it looks painful.”

I reached back to touch the spot and then got up to look in the bathroom mirror. “It isn’t that bad, I’ve seen worse. It doesn’t hurt either,” I remarked as I returned, hoping that I could reassure him.
“You have? When?” he asked.

“Girls locker room during gym. Jessica had a huge rug burn on her back one day and that looked painful but from the look on her face, she didn’t seem to mind.” I said and smiled. I reached up to kiss his lips. “I enjoyed every moment of that.” I hoped he could see and feel that I wasn’t lying and most importantly, I didn’t want him to feel like this was too dangerous and we had to stop.

“Hey, what was that for?” he asked. “You’re apprehensive, nervous and a little worried.”

I nodded and leaned my head against his shoulder. “I don’t want you to change your mind about us and what we have now. I love feeling so close to you.”

“I love that too and have no intention of stopping so get that out of your head,” he said and looked at me sternly before smiling. “I was afraid that it would have turned you off when you found out about it.”

“Well, it didn’t turn me off at all. I liked it a lot.” I reached down and touched the few bruises on my hips. “I like them because I know how they got there and why.” My fingers wound around his hair. “I guess what you said makes sense though - I think it sort of shocked me the first time I saw the mark on Jessica but then some of the girl talk that went on...” I shook my head as I recalled some of the more memorable ones.

“Oh? What did you hear?” he asked, nuzzling against my neck.

“Well, Jessica and Lauren were usually not shy to impart their so-called wisdom when it came to sexual escapades. When word got around that I was dumped, Jessica suggested that I just get laid to forget him or find a booty call. Of course that prompted Lauren to open her big mouth and say, quite loudly, that a good fuck is all the world needs.”

He coughed as he tried to suppress his laughter. “Those two were something else, I can imagine they’re still like that.” He shook his head and chuckled. “I don’t know about the world but once in a while, it does feel good, wouldn’t you agree?”

I closed my eyes and smiled before kissing his neck and jaw. “I agree wholeheartedly.”
“So was it their influence that you... um. You’re bare.” he stumbled through his words and I imagined if he had been human still, he would blushing that very moment. As if to emphasize or clarify what he was referring to, his fingers brushed along my inner thighs before barely grazing my small patch of curls.

Now it was my turn to actually blush. “Oh that, not really,” I said and quickly looked away for a couple breaths. “It started after the accident. I sort of kept it up as a reminder of what happened. It was as though all of it represented a sick, morbid joke to me - I was just **that** messed up. Then later on, it sort of became habit and I continued; only I let a small patch grow out. After you all left, Lauren’s mom, who was a licenced nurse and had recently gotten training to become an aesthetician specializing in lasers, helped. Well, she sort of hooked us up if Angela and I helped Lauren graduate. It wasn’t that hard to do, underneath that bimbo attitude, she really did have a brain but hid behind her persona because she was more concerned about boys than her future. Once Angela and I talked to her and convinced her about college guys, her grades actually improved. Hell, we even went over to the Seattle for the day just so she could gawk and see what she’d be missing, I didn’t ogle but it did get me to look forward to life after high school.” I shook my head at the memories. “Let me tell you though, that laser stuff hurt but it was worth it since it didn’t take many sessions to get it to this level.”

“I like it. It wasn’t something that was done in my day but I must admit, I am a fan. Were you ever concerned about her telling Lauren about the scar?”

“I was at first but since she did it in a dermatologist office, she had to adhere to those confidentiality rules. She did give me the pity look and if I hadn’t been so committed to getting this done, I probably would have stopped or kicked her ass. I guess I do have my moments of vanity and it apparently supersedes my pride,” I grimaced turned my head.

“It is so fuckin’ sexy to see you like that,” he whispered huskily in my ear. “It felt good against my tongue too. I absolutely love it.”

I moaned as he pulled me into a hug. We held each other for a while just enjoying the silent language we were sending to each other. It made me, once again, grateful to be able to communicate with him like that. My stomach suddenly growled, reminding me that I hadn’t eaten after that vigorous morning. I reluctantly broke out of our embrace. We got up and pulled on some clothes before heading down to the kitchen. I stopped midstride as I saw the shreds of clothes all over the living room floor. “Wow, they did explode off of us,” I said quietly and started to laugh and had to hold onto Jasper because it was just so funny. “I bet it looked impressive when you did that especially how you got our shoes off without them ripping apart.”

He shrugged and acted nonchalant as we headed to the kitchen but he was sending me his amusement which had me laughing even harder.
I made a sandwich and sat down to eat. “I needed that laugh,” I said in between bites. “I am a little nervous about my first day of college tomorrow.”

“You’ll do fine,” he said. “We have that Intro to Criminal Justice class in the evening so that will be fun.”

“Yes, it sounds like an interesting class.”

Jasper got up and I watched as he grabbed a lidded mug and headed to the fridge. He looked over at me and held his mug up. “You sure you’re okay about this?”

I rolled my eyes. “Yes, I am fine. I just don’t think I can watch you drink out of the blood bag. Is that why you wait until I am asleep to feed?”

He nodded slowly. “I know what you said, I just didn’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“Jasper, this is our house. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable because you’re needing to feed. It’s why I got you the cups.”

I felt his appreciation and heard as he filled the kettle up and boiled the water. When it was done, I watched as he made a bath of the boiling water and set a bag in it to warm up. He grabbed it a minute later and poured the contents into his mug and drank. I watched as the slight purple skin under his eyes slowly faded. “I will go hunt in a couple days,” he explained as he sat down next to me.

“Are you sure? You can go tonight if you need to.”

“I’m good for now but I won’t hesitate if I need it. I’m planning to go to that bad area in Houston to find my dinner.”

“Ohay,” I replied. “Just promise me you won’t push yourself too hard. If you need to feed, go feed.”
“Yes ma’am, I promise,” he said and finished his drink.

Once the dishes were done, we went back to the living room where I helped him gather the scraps of cloth that was all over the place. We went into town and got a grill and charcoal for me and then spent the rest of the day just relaxing after he gave me some pointers on boxing without using the bag yet. I fell asleep late that night after packing my messenger bag a few times and making sure I had my laptop fully charged with the charger, notebooks, pens, and a printout of the campus map. Even though my classes didn’t start until 2pm, I couldn’t sleep until I had everything set up and ready to go.

I didn’t need to work the next morning, I had worked many hours the week before when the dorms opened and the faculty started to get things ready for the fall term. I was able to sleep-in a couple hours and when my eyes opened, I was greeted with a mug of coffee and a smiling Jasper.

“Thanks,” I said, my voice still rough with sleep.

I took my time getting ready. I was still nervous despite Jasper trying to reassure me it was nothing like being the new student at Forks High School. I was going to be one of hundreds, if not thousands of new students, freshmen in particular, who were also experiencing their first day of classes. He explained that if I wanted to, it was much easier to blend into the crowd as a college student than a high school one, especially a small town high school. After his pep talk, I took a deep breath and left for campus. The plan was, after my second class, I had an hour in between and I’d head back home and then together we’d go back and study before our class. The only times we’d take separate cars would be if he had to hunt after.

My first couple classes came and went with little fanfare. Jasper was correct in how the attention wasn’t entirely drawn to me although one guy, I think his name was Mark, said ‘hi’ to me in my math class. He remembered me as the barista from the other day. As soon as the class was over, I made a mad dash out the door and heading towards the Blazer. I left campus in no time and headed home. As soon as I got onto the driveway, I stopped the car and ran inside the house and into Jasper’s arms.

“You alright, baby girl?” he asked as he grabbed his book bag and left the house.

“Yeah, just missed you,” I said and smiled as he helped me into the SUV. “You’re right, I was able to blend in more. I met a guy in math class, I think his name is Mark. He recognized me from the coffee place.”

“Oh really?” he huffed out and I felt him send a small dose of jealousy to me.
I nodded as I sent him back my love. “Yeah, I think he was there with his significant other a few days ago. If my memory serves me correct, he’s really enamored with his boyfriend.”

Almost immediately, I felt his relief as we headed to campus. I looked over at him as he drove, taking in his outfit for his first day of class. “Plaid shirt and jeans?” I asked rhetorically.

“Yeah, does it look alright?” he asked. “Not that it matters, since we’re almost there already.”

“I like the casual look. The plaid adds a little grunge to your look. Besides, I have no problems with how you look now.” I said adamantly. “I like the Doc Martens too, very sexy.”

“Good, because I like this look. I had too many years of having been told what to wear and having to coordinate with others.” He shivered as he pulled into a parking space. “I like that you’re wearing skirts but I must say, your flip flop collection is growing baby girl. Should I plan an intervention for you?”

I laughed and pretended to smack his arm as he helped me out of the car and carried my bookbag along with his. “I’ll have you know, each pair is different. Besides, I heard from the other barista that I can pretty much wear them year round here.”

“So long as you wear them and show off your legs, I won’t complain,” he said and grinned as we checked out the campus library. We walked around various floors as the sun started to get lower into the horizon before we headed to our class.

We laughed as we walked to the building hand in hand. When we got to the auditorium style room, we realized we were the first of maybe a dozen students there. We found seats together towards the back where the light was dimmer so his eyes wouldn’t be too noticeable. The class filled up quickly and as the professor lectured, I realized I was right in choosing this as my major. I was intrigued by the field and all the associated careers that I could choose from. I took down the notes and watched as Jasper appeared to be taking notes as well. Knowing him though, he had probably already memorized the text book and could teach this class himself if he wanted. The hour flew by quickly and soon it was time to pack up and get back home - my first day of college completed.

As we were leaving, one of the girls who had been sitting in front of us, turned and smiled at Jasper completely ignoring me. “Hi, I’m Mindy, did you enjoy the class?”
I wanted to use Mindy as my kickboxing bag right there and Jasper felt it because I was suddenly bathed in a blanket of his love. He put his arm around me and pulled me close. “Hi, I’m Jasper and this is my girlfriend, Isabella. We both found the class interesting.” He turned to me and kissed my temple. “Darlin’ we should get back home so we can study before bed,” he said in a voice loud enough for Mindy to hear and I could see her face just do a complete drop.

“Mmm, sounds like a plan,” I cooed. “Nice meeting you Mindy.” I said as we headed out the door. As soon as we were out of earshot from her I started muttering. “Stupid bimbo, couldn’t she tell we’re together?” I seethed as he helped me into the car.

He got into his driver’s side and started the engine. “She did but I think she’s just one of those girls.”

“She made Lauren and Jessica look like nuns,” I huffed. “I wanted to kick her ass right there.”

“Easy baby girl, I don’t want to have to bail you out your first week of school,” he teased while continuing to send me his love as he drove us home.

“You’re right, I’ll just take a picture of her and put it on the bag so I have extra fodder.”

He laughed as he turned into our street. “You’re sexy when you’re jealous but don’t worry, she’s never going to catch my eye. It’s all you, Isabella,” he said as he kissed my hand. I sent him my love in return.

We pulled into the garage and got into the house and I pulled out some homework to start.

After finishing up my math assignment, I looked up at Jasper. He was back to wearing shorts and a battered Allman Brothers t-shirt.

“Jasper?”

“Isabella?”

I smiled because that seemed to be something we’ve done for a while whenever we started a
conversation. “I figured out what I kind of tub I want.”

He looked at me and raised his eyebrows. “Oh? Well show me and I could start ordering the parts. You’ve only got the two evening classes tomorrow right?”

I nodded. “Yeah, the honors Composition class and Criminology. Are you still wanting to see if you can add that class?”

He sat down next to me and held me. “Yep, I emailed the professor today and he’s letting me add it tomorrow.” He kissed my hair before he started to kiss my neck. “So what’s this about the tub?”

“Oh yeah,” I said breathlessly. “I’ve decided that the most important thing is that it’s a soaking tub and it has have room enough for two.”

He let out a low growl. “Mmm, I like that. I think I can find something that will fit that criteria. Come on, let’s get you to bed. I know you’ve got a long day at work tomorrow.” He pulled me over his shoulder and sped up to our room.

**Edward POV**

I played her lullaby on the piano. It seemed to be the only thing that soothed my sadness and keep me from hearing the thoughts of my family. The whole house seemed to still be in mourning over the loss of my Bella and Jasper, although I didn’t feel that bad for him.

It had been a few months since we got the news that Jasper had gone back to his natural diet and somehow, he found my Bella. It had to be the reason. Why would she be out in that abandoned field if it weren’t for his influence? He must have done something to frighten her to the point she dropped to her knees like that. It was awful to see but the worst was seeing the blackness. Why did he kill her and then kill himself? Did he really believe that they were mates?

*Impossible.*
I hated that not only did I hear about it, but I had the misfortune of seeing that vision in Alice’s mind. It was something that would haunt me forever.

I tried to show Alice I still cared though so I’d listen to her whenever she wanted to talk. Lately though, Alice seemed preoccupied and it wasn’t a surprise to see her take off on her own for a day or two. Carlisle explained that it was most likely her way of coping with her loss. I suppose he had a point.

Esme admitted to me just recently that she sent a condolence card to Chief Swan. At first I was angry at her for doing that because we weren’t supposed to make contact with them. I tore through my music collection and practically pulverized the CDs into a fine dust. I didn’t want them to contact her father but then I realized how much she missed her too. It wasn’t just me mourning for her but my family too. I sighed as I thought of her... my beautiful Bella... killed by my so-called brother.

I growled before taking a deep breath as I played her song again. I missed her. She was such a delicate soul and so kind. I hated that I left her like that but I had to be honest with myself and admit that she couldn’t handle being with a monster like me. She was just too gentle. I longed to see her sleeping again and smell her - her scent was so lovely and intoxicating. I thought leaving her would keep her safe from monsters but I guess I never thought Jasper would go back and lure her into his clutches.

I wanted to go to her and follow her lead but I was afraid to light a pyre out here and jump in. I thought about going to Volterra a few times and begging them to end my miserable life. I just haven’t gotten the nerve and plus, every single time I was about to make the plane reservation, Alice would stop me. She tried to reassure me that in time, the pain would go away.

Oh Bella, please forgive me.

I headed back to my room and gazed at the inky sky. I decided that for now, I’ll stay here but kept the Volterra option open in case things got worse.

NOTES:

Thank you for reading! XOXO - sushi.
“Alright baby girl, I hate to leave you like this after class, but I know I need to feed,” I whispered as I held Isabella against me.

“I’ll be fine,” she said. “I’m going straight home and then maybe workout on the heavy bag or something,” I could tell she was trying to be braver than she was feeling. “I know you need to feed so don’t worry about me,” she said as she rubbed circles on my back.

“I’ll try to get back quick,” I said and kissed her lips. “I love you, Isabella.”

“I love you, Jasper. Now go,” she said and smacked me on my ass.

I helped her into her car and then got into my Mustang, peeling out of the parking lot in an effort to get out to Houston and back as quickly as possible. I hated leaving her like that but I needed to feed before the burn became stronger. Right now it wasn’t much but I didn’t want to take any chances now that I was attending college courses.

As I headed towards the city, I thought back over the past few weeks and how fuckin’ lucky I was to have someone like Isabella. Other than keeping my strength at bay while we were together, the delineation between vampire and human had become fuzzy at times. We were becoming more in tune to each other and it was amazing to see and feel. Even though we both had our off days, we seemed to ‘get’ each other and the fact we were able to talk about things freely helped. We haven’t talked about her change yet but seeing how close we were getting, I had no doubt that we were heading in that direction.

The sounds of “Ramblin’ Man” broke the silence and smiled as I answered the phone.

“Hey bro, what’s goin’ on?” I greeted him.
“Not much, we’re thinking of heading back in a few days,” Peter replied. “How are things with you and your girl?”

I smiled. “We’re doing really well, any news?”

“Nope,” he replied. “If they hear anything, our contacts know how to contact us. You sound happier these days.”

“I am, thanks to my Isabella.”

“Aww, Jasper, that is great news,” Charlotte remarked. The background noises indicated they were in a car and I was able to make out the Spanish from the radio announcer and recognized the Castilian inflections rather than the ones that were more prevalent in Mexico.

“Thanks guys. You in Spain?”

“Yes, the missus and I thought we could enjoy our little island out here for a few days but now we’re heading back to the city,” he replied.

“Well have fun, I can’t wait for y’all to meet her. She’s one helluva woman.”

“Where you headin’?” Peter asked.

“Houston, gotta feed and then I’m heading back home. We’ve got a little place out in Huntsville now.”

“So what is her class schedule like? Will we get to meet her soon?” Char asked. I could tell from her voice that she was excited.

“She’s got classes 5 days a week, but Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays she only has evening classes. She works too and has permanent Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays off.”
“So if we leave tomorrow, maybe we can meet up on Monday night or Tuesday?” Peter asked.

“Sounds good, I’ll text her to make sure.”

A few minutes later she texted her response - ‘Let’s go early Tuesday if that’s alright. I can’t wait to meet them. I love you too.’

“She says Tuesday during the morning. We’ll meet at the farm,” I replied.

“That sounds good, we’ll see you then.” Peter said and hung up.

I was looking forward to seeing my brother and sister again - this time introducing my Isabella to them. I was certain they will all get along. I also had a feeling, given she was more down to earth than the pixie, they’ll likely fawn all over her. At least, I certainly hope so.

I got into Houston a few minutes later and found a parking spot. I reached behind me and grabbed some clothes from the back seat. I quickly changed from the clothes I wore to class to some black fatigue pants and a dark shirt. I locked up the Mustang and moved silently towards some of the broken down and graffiti riddled houses. I listened and continually sniffed around for possible meals when I heard screaming and the sound of a shotgun ringing through the night.

I followed the sound and was able to feel the fear, hatred and lust coming from the house in question as soon as I rounded the corner. By the time I snuck inside, I could see a slumped and beaten body lying on the floor, blood flowing onto the carpet from the gunshot wound on his chest. There were sounds of small children crying somewhere upstairs and a woman who was trying to console them. Fear was the main emotion from the children and the woman but she was also trying to be brave at the same time. The man who was holding the gun had lust flowing strong as he stared up to the ceiling - the look on his face was like he was contemplating his next victim or victims. A low growl escaped my lips as I realized the humans upstairs were still in danger.

From the darkened corridor, I quickly sent a low dose of calm upstairs and then blurred over to the main room, grabbing a hold of the man and tossing him out the back door that was swinging haphazardly from one broken hinge. When he got up, he started to run with a limp, blood leaking out from a leg wound and I quickly had him pinned against a tree. I jerked his neck back and bit down, draining him until there was probably less than a pint of blood in his body before tossing his broken body down the alley. The impact as he hit the ground caused some of his bones to shatter and the rest of his blood to pour into the ground.
I could now hear a woman upstairs in the house as she continued to console the babies telling them that they were safe now and that the police were coming to rescue them from the bad men. The distant sound of sirens began to get louder as I took the body and tossed it into an abandoned house across the way; the odor of crack cocaine vapors still lingering inside. The body was still holding the shotgun so I brought it to his head and forced his finger to pull the trigger. I knew enough blood had spilled from his cut skin that cops would be able to create a crime scene and would think the blood was lapped up by the stray and feral dogs that roamed the streets. I figured cops would be able to conclude he probably been beaten within an inch of his life based on the contusions and broken bones before he managed to crawl in here where he ended his miserable life by pulling the trigger.

I ran back to the house where the gunshot victim was slumped over. His breathing was very shallow and I knew the ambulance wouldn’t make it in time to save him. His neck was already broken and it looked like more than half his blood was on the floor. I quickly drained him of the rest of the blood before quickly running back to car and heading home. I was more than sated and relieved that I was able to take care of it so quickly. I couldn’t wait to see Isabella again. I checked my phone to make sure I didn’t miss any calls or messages from her and saw there weren’t any, which meant she was doing fine under the circumstances.

It took just under an hour as I sped back. As I headed up the road to our house, I could tell Isabella’s emotions were calmer than they had been last week. It made me wonder if our intimacy had played a part in keeping our anxiety more at ease when we were away from each other. When I pulled into the driveway and parked in the garage, I could hear music playing as well. I left my grimy clothes in the garage and changed back to the clothes I wore to class. When I got into the house, I stopped in the living room and saw the sight before my eyes. She was in a pair of boxers and a worn t-shirt painting the wall the soft, steel blue-grey color we had chosen. Her hair was in bandana and I could see paint on her legs and arms but she was rolling paint onto the walls, singing along with her iPod. She was happy but a little impatient and anxious, but it wasn’t the uneasy feeling that it had been the last time.

Not wanting to startle her, I sent her a small dose of love and slowly increased it until I felt her love being sent back.

“Jasper!” she said happily as she pulled the ear phones out. “I was hoping to surprise you by painting this accent wall.”

“Well I am surprised to see a gorgeous brunette in my house with paint on her,” I teased as she looked at her skin and grabbed a rag that was hanging on a ladder.

“I sort of got in a small battle with the roller at first,” she explained and laughed as she tried to clean some of the color off her arms and legs. “I did think ahead to cover my hair though.”
“You got some on your feet too, why aren’t you wearing shoes?” I asked.

She looked at me and smiled brighter. “Oh that, I tried but I kept feeling like I was going to trip over the tarp and stuff so I took them off. I hope it was okay that I stole some of your more worn clothes. I didn’t think you’d mind me wearing them. They still smell like you but more faint than your other clothes.”

I looked at her with the almost threadbare Rolling Stones t-shirt and shorts she was wearing. They were clothes I had in the storage unit up until a few days ago when I brought everything over to the house. The clothes were going to be donated but now I was glad I hadn’t done that right away.

“I’m fine, they were in storage for a while and I hadn’t remembered they were there but you look good in them, all covered in paint like that.”

“I’m almost done. How was dinner tonight?”

“It was alright, I think I found some kidnappers or robbers and fed off one. There must have been some sort of altercation between the two by the time I got there. After I was done, I realized the other had bled so much that he would have died regardless so I sort of had a little extra after.”

“Did the victims see you?”

“No, they were upstairs, there was a woman and two young children. They are safe, as I left, I knew emergency vehicles were on their way.” I replied.

“Good, you saved lives tonight,” she said and smiled as she refreshed her paint roller. “Your eyes are pretty when they’re bright like that. Do you need to change right away or can you help me finish this?”

I grabbed a brush and helped her finish up the wall, going just slightly faster than human speed. When we finished, I helped her pack the paint up as she muttered about how I was able to keep paint off me. I laughed at her and then pulled her into my arms running us up to our new shower.

I had finished it yesterday, completely doing away with the tub combination. I walked in and turned on the faucets before stripping both of us of our clothes.
“I’m going to clean you all up, my dirty girl,” I whispered huskily and walked us into the multi-sprays of water.

“Mmm, clean me up good, I’ve been really dirty,” she murmured against my skin.

I grabbed the soap and proceeded to do just that. “I just love feeling your silky skin,” I whispered against her ear and massaged out the knots in her arm. I caressed her skin, enjoying the view of her nipples hardening under my touch.

“I love feeling your touches, that is why I wanted you to continue taking care of my tattoo,” she said almost as though she was in a dreamlike trance.

“Why do you think I wanted to as well?” I replied.

She grabbed the liquid soap and poured some into her hands and then proceeded to run her hands up and down my body making sure I was clean as well. I leaned against the shower wall and enjoyed the feel of her touch. Her fingertips brushed along some of my scars and each time, I felt her love for me. I shut my eyes and moaned. When she was finished with the soap, I rinsed off and was about to move from my spot when she started to run her tongue along some of the scars she had traced earlier.

I felt her body slide down mine and opened my eyes to see her about to run her tongue along my thighs. It was so damn sexy to see her on her knees like that and I got even harder than I already was. I watched as she wrapped her hand around me and squeezed, earning a hiss out of me.

“Fuck, that feels good,” I ground out through clenched teeth.

I felt her wet tongue on the tip as she swirled around and caught the drop of pre-cum on her tongue. She looked up at me and opened her mouth letting the head slide in. Her slurping sounds sounded so good but I quickly felt myself losing control so I pulled her up.

“Damn, baby girl, that felt so fuckin’ good but I need you to stop,” I said as I kissed her mouth and pulled her against me. “You almost had me lose my control there and I don’t think that would be good.”
Her lust filled eyes stared into mine but I could feel her concern. “Are you sure it was alright?”

I nodded. “Yes, I was tempted to wrap my hands around your hair and have you fuck me with your mouth,” I said gruffly.

She whimpered at my words her arousal grew exponentially stronger.

I grabbed her hips and pulled her against me before I flipped us around so she was against wall. She got even more excited as I licked the droplets of water along her neck before I lifted her up, enjoying the feel of her legs around me. “Mmm, I love the way running has made your legs so toned.” I sat down on the stone bench and lifted her up slightly before lining my cock up against her entrance. She was already wet and I loved that it didn’t take much for her to be ready.

“Yes,” she moaned when my tip glided against her slick folds. I slowly lowered her onto me and we both hissed out in pleasure when I was completely inside her warm, tight pussy.

It was a nice slow build as we rocked against each other in the shower. The steam helped to hold our lust and love in like a blanket as we stared at each other. Our hands were continually touching and caressing each other. Our breaths mingled as our breathing became harder. The kisses were soft and sensual but started to build up when her legs started to clench a little harder.

Her whimpers became louder as our movements became harder and more frenzied. I could tell she was about to come hard. She frantically took a hold of my hand and sucked on my finger before dragging my digit along her neck.

“Please,” she pleaded, her movements more erratic.

I looked at her, there was so much need and love in her eyes and I felt her absolute trust as I dragged my finger down from her ear to her collarbone again.

“I love you,” I whispered as my nail pierced into her skin just above her collarbone and watched as the ruby drop grew to the size of my small fingernail. I looked at her one more time and she nodded. My lips touched her skin and I sucked ever so gently to grab just a small taste of her just as her pussy clenched tight around me.

“Yes!” she screamed out as she held me against her neck. I took just another small pull and her
tight walls and her blood on my tongue was too much. I held onto her hips and thrust once more before exploding inside her. I swiped her wound with my tongue as she continued to hold me, both of us coming down from our orgasmic high.

She looked at me and smiled as she pulled me into a heated kiss. We were still fully joined and the pleasure of what just happened, along with the love and lust surrounding us, had me lose my control just a bit and projected our lust back, spurring another orgasm from us both.

The water got a little colder so I rinsed us off and pulled the fluffy towels around us before carrying her to bed.

I checked her emotions to make sure she was alright and all I felt was love coming off of her. I got up quickly and filled her glass of water in case she needed it and she sat up to drink half of it down when I handed it to her.

“Are you alright?” she asked after reaching over and setting the glass down. She leaned against me and I pulled us down so we could snuggle under the covers.

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?” I looked at her and brushed my fingertip against the small mark on her neck.

“I feel good,” she responded. “It felt so good but you were alright weren’t you? I don’t want to goad you into doing something you’re not comfortable with.”

I chuckled as I kissed her nose. “I should be the one saying that. Baby girl, it felt fuckin’ awesome. You felt and tasted so good but I took two tiny sips, not even a small spoonful. It was enough to get us both off.”

“Mmm, it did. I loved it, it felt so intimate. I think I can understand what you said about marking. Speaking of which, do I have one?” She touched her neck and looked at me.

“It is a little puncture wound but it is sealed up. It’s maybe a couple millimeters bigger around than this mark right here,” I said and pointed to a scar on her elbow.

“Hmm, I got that when I had the chicken pox as a kid, this was much, much more pleasant though.”
“Right now though, since I sucked on your neck to draw more blood to the surface, you sort of have a bruise mark there.”

She giggled. “You gave me a hickey? I’ve never had one before.”

“You might also see just a faint glimmer but I see it clearly.” I nuzzled her neck and smiled when I felt her shiver in pleasure. “If you changed, you’d still have that tiny mark on you.”

She snuggled closer to me and yawned quietly. “So does marking happen only once then?”

“No, it happens more than that, normally. If one partner or both are in the face of danger our under some duress, the need to mark each other becomes great after we make sure the other is alright. Other times, it can happen during sex just like what happened with us. It is natural and I have heard some might prefer to be marked on the same spot all the time, others will want them in other places. Even though it might sound animalistic because some refer to it as ‘claiming’, as you gathered already, it can be pleasurable and sensual.”

“It feels good when you brush against that spot,” she remarked and looked at me with some confusion. “You’re rumbling but it is lower than a growl.”

“Oh? I hadn’t noticed I was,” I said.

She nodded. “It sounds almost like a low purring sound.”

I was surprised she felt that and I hadn’t been paying attention. “Hmm, I had heard that was common amongst mates but I didn’t realize it occurred when both aren’t vampires,” I replied. “I have also heard it is because our inner demons have claimed and therefore purr in satisfaction. Maybe your theory of blood fulfilled some of that tonight.”

“Maybe,” she replied. “So if I am changed and we’ve claimed or marked each other, I’d purr too?”

I nodded. “Yep, that is what I understand.”
“Wait, your demon? Were you in the zone?” she asked as she ran her fingers through my hair.

I pulled her leg up and ran my fingers along her thighs. “I used to keep my demon locked in my cage,” I began and pointed to my temple. “He ran the show when I was in the wars for the most part but even then it took its toll on both of us. After I lived with the Cullens, I tried to keep my demon locked up. It was safer, so I thought, especially given my violent past. I was told it was also uncivilized.”

“Sounds like a Cullen thing to say,” she muttered as she doodled along my skin with her fingers.

“That is most likely where their distrust stemmed from. After I left them I slowly started to allow him more freedom. He only seems to come out when I feed now even though I let his cage door open. Well, unless there is a danger around us.”

Her hand stopped moving and she looked at me. “So with Laurent and that night of the robbery? Your demon was there?”

I nodded. “He was the one that spoke to you first when you saw us in the alley the night of the robbery.” I looked at her and hoped she wasn’t pissed off. “Isabella, I withheld that from you that night because I wasn’t sure how much vampire stuff you could handle after that experience and you had just been a victim of a crime. I wasn’t sure how much more you’d be able to handle.”

I felt her understanding but she was also beginning to radiate some anger too. “So I’m sort of confused and I wish you hadn’t withheld that from me either but I also understand why. I am trying to understand all of this but it can be overwhelming to comprehend. I know you know that but please don’t hold back stuff like that or at least not for so long.”

“I will do my damnedest not to. I apologize, my Isabella.” I kissed her lips as I sent her my sincerity.

“So your demon knows me then?” she asked.

“He does and he won’t hurt you. He knows who you are to me, to us.”

“I... do all vampires have demons? I mean, what if I change and mine doesn’t like yours?”
I could feel her anxiety over it so I pulled her closer against me and ran my hands down her back. “It won’t happen; remember what I said about your body knowing me? It won’t change and will only get stronger. Our demons tend to run on instinct more than anything and if your instinct knows that I’m near, then if you were to become a vampire, yours would know.” I looked at her and smiled. “I hope that makes sense to you. You know we’re meeting my brother and sister next week. I hope you will feel comfortable in talking to Char about things if you want a female perspective.”

She looked up and smiled. “I can’t wait to meet them. I hope I get along with them so I can talk to her. You’ve done a good job in telling me a lot of things and I really appreciate how open you are,” she said and I smiled as her emotions said the same thing. “If we do get along, I would love to get a female perspective on things. Thank you, my Jasper.” She wrapped her hand around my neck and pulled me down for a kiss.

Our kiss lasted for a few minutes before she had to come back up for air. “I love you,” she said breathlessly. “I felt less agitated tonight, by the way. I missed you a lot but I didn’t get that uneasy feeling like last week. Of course I automatically came home, found your clothes and changed into them. Then I punched the heavy bag a little before deciding to paint the wall. That and maybe that low dose of venom that I’m exposed to, when we’re together, helps me because we’ve done much more than last time,” she said and yawned again.

I pulled her closer to me and pulled the covers closer to her.

“If the marks will be left if I am changed, would you... I mean could you replace this?” she asked and showed me her wrist where James bit her.

I kissed her hair and held her hand against my dead heart. “Not right away, I’m not ready for my teeth to pierce your skin yet but I could.” I took her wrist and kissed it before running my tongue over the scar. “I might have to bite twice to hide it completely given how wide the mark is. I’ll most likely have to do it during or after your change because that will be very painful otherwise. I’ll be happy to do it though.”

“Okay,” she said and smiled. “I would like that.” She yawned once again and snuggled closer to me, her leg moved higher along my thigh. She looked up at me and kissed me. “So in the shower tonight? With my mouth, are you sure it was alright?”

I sent her my love and reassurance. “It felt fuckin’ amazing,” I said and kissed her. “I just felt like I was losing my hold of the monster, which wouldn’t bode well because I was quickly losing control. I could have broken your jaw from that.”
Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped. “Really?”

I nodded. “My demon was there but even his control was starting to wane and that would most likely have meant that you would have gotten hurt. I was close to running purely on my animalistic needs right then. Even when my demon is in charge, I still am aware of things but I was going beyond that.” I looked at her and kissed her tenderly on her lips. “I can’t risk that right now and hurt you, but maybe we can slowly build up to it.”

She nuzzled her head against my chest. “So if we can’t when I am human, does that mean we can’t when I’m not?”

I shook my head and held her. “You’d be much more durable and would be able to handle it by then for sure.”

She smiled and kissed my lips and then my neck. “Alright, for now,” she said and raised her eyebrow at me for a brief second. “Good night, my Jasper. I love you.”

“And I love you, baby girl.”

Chapter End Notes

There you go. Remember this is AU so I’ve borrowed some aspects of vampirism that isn’t Twilight related. I hope y’all enjoyed it. See you next week. ~ sushi
“Babe, they ought to be here within the hour,” Peter whispered to me as we walked back from our favorite spot on the ledge. We had been out there since sunrise just enjoying the serenity of it all.

“Oh, you got one of those images?” I asked and laughed as I hopped on his back and he gave me a piggy-back ride back to the house.

“Yep, it was like I was in the back seat of her car. I’m assumin’ it’s hers since it was a Chevy. I was only able to see the logo and the time on the clock and that was it,” he grumbled.

When we got back to the house, we straightened the furniture we had left in disarray during our homecoming the night before.

“I hope she likes us,” I remarked with a sigh as I checked my dress for any lint, trying to hide my nervousness. The last time we met Jasper’s significant other, I was excited to meet someone who loved my brother and hoped, maybe selfishly, that someday, we’d be close enough to call each other sister. That wasn’t the case of course; and now she was the real deal - his mate.

Peter caught onto my nerves and quickly hugged me. “You heard our brother, she seems to be down to earth and she’s asked about us. I can say she seems to have thought about us more than the damn gnome he was married to.”

I giggled while trying too hard to plaster a serious look on my face. “Peter, don’t let your brother hear you say that. He feels bad enough to have been controlled by that damn fairy on crack.”

From a distance, we heard the sound of a car turning into our drive. We looked at each other and smiled before heading out to the front porch.
“Now remember, he might be very protective of her so let’s have them make the first move.”

“Yes dear,” I snarked and rolled my eyes. “You’ve only said that a few times since we last talked to him.”

Peter smiled and kissed my hair. “I guess I’m a little nervous myself.” I looked at him and smiled back, reaching for his hand as we saw the black vehicle appear with a cloud of dust trailing behind. Soon, we were able to hear the sounds of Muse playing fairly loudly.

“Well, she has better taste already,” I whispered. “Muse is a lot better than that bubble gum pop music we used to hear about.”

“Yep, I doubt we’ll be gettin’ phone calls from Jasper and hearin’ the Spice Girls in the background anymore,” Peter replied with a chuckle just as the SUV stopped and we saw them through the windshield. I moved closer to Peter and wrapped my arm around his waist. We continued to watch as Jasper got out and quickly ran to her door and opened it.

“He’s wearing shorts and a t-shirt,” I said in a shocked whisper. I tried to be as quiet as possible so Jasper wouldn’t be able to hear.

Peter nodded and grinned. We both looked at each other and were probably thinking the same thing - our brother had come a long way. We watched as they both smiled at each other. He reached in and held her by the waist and helped her down, letting her slide down along his body. They were both looking into each other’s eyes. They were so engrossed with each other that I momentarily thought they weren’t aware of us but I knew better. My brother was paying attention to her but was very aware of our actions.

Peter leaned down and whispered in my ear, “Her scent is slightly different than when she was here. It has spicier notes now like Jasper’s.”

I gave a slight nod. “She does, it is subtle but it is different and you can tell it is a vampire scent.”

Jasper and his girl walked over towards us, his arm around her waist. When he got about four car lengths away from us he stopped and looked at her. All the time he was watching her, he was sending us a low dose of caution. I knew that mean that he wanted us not to approach them but the other way around. I continued to send happiness to him and I knew Peter was also sending him
positive vibes as well.

We continued to watch the two of them approach us slowly. I could see she must have been unsure as she kept looking at Jasper periodically. When they got about a car length away, Jasper stopped.

“Isabella, this is my brother Peter Whitlock and his mate and wife Char,” he said quietly but we were able to hear perfectly clear. “Peter and Char, this is my Isabella, Isabella Swan.”

“Hi, you can call me Bella if you’d like,” she said softly before grabbing Jasper’s hand.

“Little one, it is nice to finally meet you. We’ve been looking forward to this for a while,” Peter said and we both smiled at her.

She looked up and smiled. “I’ve heard a few things about you too. I brought something -” she stopped and looked around. “Oh, I left it on the floorboard,” she mumbled. “Sorry, I’ll grab it later.” Bella took a step forward, her hand still in Jasper’s as they walked up to us. When she got near, she stuck her hand out, and we looked at it briefly before Peter took it and kissed her hand. I heard Jasper’s low growl and noticed he crouched just slightly, projecting his warning even stronger.

I watched as Peter ignored his brother’s warning and winked at Bella. “It’s nice meetin’ you, Ms. Swan,” he drawled out.

I rolled my eyes at him and hoped he didn’t cross the line and piss off Jasper. I could tell they were still new in their relationship and no doubt he was protective and probably a little bit possessive as well.

Bella smiled at Peter before looking over at me. “Thank you for letting me stay at your place. It was really generous of you... of both of you.”

“Well, you’re family now,” I replied and smiled. She was a little shy but I could see from her smile that she had a warm personality and I hoped to get an opportunity to spend time with her. “Did you want to hang out here on the porch or inside?”

“It is a nice day so far, can we stay out here?” Bella asked and we watched as Jasper pulled her towards a chair and then sat down with her on his lap.
Peter followed suit and took the other chair before pulling me onto his lap. I couldn’t help but continue to look at the couple in front of us. I had never seen my brother so affectionate with someone before and it was nice to see. She was just as enamored with him. It reminded me of how Peter and I started building our relationship once we were able to fully get away from the wars.

“So, how do you like Texas so far, Bella?” I asked.

Bella smiled. “I didn’t realize how much I missed the sun until I got here. The lightning storms are beautiful to see as well.” She kept looking up at us and smiling as she nuzzled with Jasper.

“Hey babe,” Peter whispered in my ear. “Go spend some time with her. I can hang out with Jasper for a bit.”

I gave his knee a quick squeeze and nodded. “So Bella, you said you had something for us?”

Bella nodded and slid off of Jasper’s lap. “I’ll be back,” she whispered.

“Take your time, baby girl,” Jasper murmured. “Peter and I are gonna be right back. I wanna show him the territory I’ve carved out but we’ll be back really soon. Call me if you need anything.”

I watched as they made lovey eyes at each other before she walked down the porch steps.

“C’mon bro, let’s go for a run,” Peter said and took off towards the east end of the property.

As soon as the guys left, I followed Bella over to her car. I was still unsure of how to act with her since I’d always kept my human interactions to a minimum when I wasn’t feeding. She looked up and smiled as she opened the passenger door and reached in to grab something before slamming the door shut again.

“I’m not exactly a green thumb but I haven’t killed a cactus so far,” she said with a laugh as she carried the terracotta bowl of various cacti and rocks over. “It is just a little thank you for letting me stay here. I saw it and wasn’t sure if you’d like it. These remind me of growing up in Phoenix and the pretty, bright flowers always make me smile.”
I was touched by her gift. "Thank you, sugar. I’m just starting to dabble with gardenin’, it wasn’t until a little over a decade ago that we decided to stop roaming around and set some roots, so to speak. We still do our fair share of travelin’ but we consider this our home base.”

I held the door open as we went inside the house and set the cactus garden in the living room where it received the most sunlight. I looked at her as she sat down.

“Hey, are you thirsty? Have you tried sweet tea before? I bought a small container since the commercial said it was like homemade and I wasn’t about to attempt to make it at first try.”

“I am a little bit thirsty but I haven’t tried sweet tea yet.”

“Oh honey, come on, let’s go to the barn and I’ll fix it up for you,” I smiled when she jumped back up and together we walked over to the grill. When we got there, I set a tall glass up with ice and then opened the container of tea for her. I watched as she took her first sip, closed her eyes and smiled.

“This is perfect for a warm day!” she exclaimed. “Thank you.”

I nodded. “I really should be thanking you.”

She looked up with confusion on her face. “Oh, why?”

“I’ve never seen Jasper so happy before and it is because of you.”

She smiled as she took another sip. “I love him.”

“It’s written on both your faces,” I replied. “Has he told you about his past?”

She nodded. “He did and I need to thank you for rescuing him. I’ll thank Peter too when he gets back.” She paused to look at her glass before looking at me. “I know he cares deeply for both you and Peter so could I talk to you? I mean, I know we don’t know each other really from Adam and
all, but I was just wondering...” she drifted off and stared at her glass again.

“I’d like that,” I said softly, and hoped I didn’t sound too eager at the idea.

“I’m trying to understand the whole mate thing and it is a lot to take in. Jasper has been really great and very patient with me in explaining things but my brain can only process a little at a time. I’m starting to understand more, like the need to mark our partner and all but I guess a part of me still cannot grasp the concept of forever. I mean I know what it means and all but the concept is hard to digest.” She took a deep breath. “I’m probably not making any sense. I am just scared that I go through this change and then and then this connection we have goes away. He assures me that it won’t but... it is just hard to grasp.”

I looked at her and tried to put myself in her shoes. I knew what Jasper had told us about her parents so I took that into consideration. I also knew that forever for us vampires was just that and not the same as the human version of ‘forever’.

I sat down next to her and faced her. “I’ll try to explain it and hope it makes some sense. Right now, you’re human but do you feel more than just love for Jasper?”

She nodded. “I’d get these feelings of unease when we’re apart. I think four hours has been the max before I practically climbed the walls. Since then, if he goes to feed, I change into something with his scent and that seems to help. I’ve felt a pull for him before too but that seemed to be when I’m in distress,” she explained and then suddenly blushed. “I... um well...” she pointed to the mark on her neck. “I wanted him to and it felt good... and right.”

I saw the shimmer of her mark and was pleasantly surprised that she already felt so deep for him that she wanted to be marked. I smiled and slowly reached over to touch her hand, hoping my coldness wouldn’t startle her. Bella looked up and grabbed my hand, giving it a friendly squeeze.

“I think you’re startin’ to understand some of it for sure,” I said. “Now the bond is absolute, it won’t change if you decide to be turned. I know right now the concept of forever is hard to grasp. This isn’t a knock against you, but humans in general have used that word so much that it loses its impact. Forever in vampire terms is different than say, forever in human marriage terms. All one has to do these days is see a celebrity talk about forever with their ‘soul mates’ and then years later, they divorce. It isn’t like that at all for us.”

“I think I understand that in theory. It is just hard to grasp, you know? I think that is why I don’t use that term ‘mate’ much and I call what we have a ‘connection’ because I can relate to that more,” she explained.
“I know and I am really happy that you felt comfortable enough to talk to me about it,” I replied. “When you become a vampire, that pull and the unease you feel becomes more magnified. If you’re separated for long, it can hurt because your body knows him already and it won’t forget even if you lost your memories or go through your newborn phase.”

“I haven’t really talked about wanting to be changed. I mean I want to, but I haven’t sat down and ironed out the details,” she admitted. “I know there is a lot I don’t understand about being a vampire but he’s been really good at explaining things and thank you for taking the time to talk to me too, Char.”

“Honey, you’re family,” I replied. “I’ve never seen my brother so comfortable like that. Did you know that today is the first time I’ve seen him in shorts? Even though Peter and I both have scars, he never felt comfortable in his own skin, so to speak. This was the first time that he really held himself up high and I can’t thank you enough,” I whispered toward the end.

She must have sensed that I was getting over emotional because she wrapped her arms around me for a hug.

“Jasper’s helped me with my emotional and physical scars just as much as I am trying to help him with his. Did you and Peter recognize each other as mates before you were turned?” she asked and then her eyes widened. “If it is too personal, you don’t need to tell me, I was just curious since you’re the only female vampire I know and I already feel comfortable with you.”

I tried to remain calm while inside, I was excited to have a female to talk to and someone I hope to really call sister one day. “I take it you know that Jasper is Peter’s sire and Peter’s mine?” She nodded and I smiled. “My change would most likely be different than what you’d be experiencin’. One thing that the vampire wars did to my Peter and my brother was it took away a lot of their humanity. I think it was the only way they could survive because had they had a conscience over some of the atrocities that took place, they would have been fodder for her.”

“Maria,” she hissed out and I nodded.

“I was changed sometime in the 1930s. While the nation was in the middle of the Depression, my family was already poor so it wasn’t a huge impact for us. I don’t remember much about my human life other than I lived in the South and had to leave school sometime in my early teens so I could work, doing odd jobs here and there. I remember being one of eight children but I don’t remember where I fell in line other than I wasn’t the oldest nor the youngest of them. One night, I woke up to screaming and when I opened the bedroom door, all I saw was blood. I don’t remember much after that, I can only assume that my siblings and parents were all devoured and somehow I
was spared. It could be that Peter tried to drain me but couldn’t and opted to change me instead. He
doesn’t remember much of those days because his demon protected my Peter by keepin’ him
hidden away.” I looked over at her to see if she was still following me.

“Jasper’s demon must have tried to do the same too?” she whispered and I noticed the sheen of
tears in her eyes.

“His did for the longest time but being an empath, my guess is that it ate at both of them.”

She nodded as a few tears fell from her eyes. “We talked about his demon for a little while a few
nights ago. He tried to explain it to me but you helped me understand it more.” She looked out the
window of the grill and I wasn’t sure if she knew she was doing it or not, but her fingers grazed the
area over her heart. “My poor Jasper, what you must have gone through,” she whispered softly and
I was almost certain for that moment, I had disappeared as her thoughts drifted to her mate. A blush
appeared on her face and she looked back. “Sorry, I drifted off in my own world there,” she said
and gave me a sad smile.

I patted her hand. “He’s come a long way and it is good to see him happy these days,” I replied and
took her hand in mine. I took a deep breath and continued with my story. “So the next thing I
remember was burnin’, it was like fire licked my entire body inside and out. Then I woke up and
was confused as I saw these red eyed beings all around me. There was a hard burn in my throat and
I couldn’t talk but Peter was there and just stared at me. It wasn’t until nearly a week later, when I
was given a human to feed on that I felt a pull towards Peter, but I didn’t know what it was - I just
felt like I needed to be near him. It wasn’t until after my third battle when things changed. I was
cornered by three male newborns and they weren’t friendly. I was attacked, bitten and nearly raped
when Peter destroyed them and saved me. It was then that the pull became stronger and we have
been together ever since. Now since I was still a newborn and was still technically controlled by
Maria, I was still constantly starved. It was her way of makin’ sure we were vicious enough to
fight. Well, Peter could see I was hurtin’ from lack of blood and he often hid a boda bag around
him and filled it with blood when he fed. He’d bring it to me and feed me whenever we were able
to sneak out. It wasn’t much but he risked his life to do that for me,” I said and gave a small smile.

“A boda bag?” she asked.

“Oh, that is one of those leather canteen things that y’all would put wine in. Where he got it, I have
no idea but he used it to help me.”

“That is sweet that he tried to take care of you as best as he was able to in the environment you
were all in,” she said softly.
I nodded. “From what I understand now, it is an instinctual part of being mated, to make sure I had blood was akin to protecting me in the most basic terms. Of course, when our feelings got involved and we started to care for each other, it became more about loving and caring than just protection. You would be changed under different circumstances and Jasper would do it out of love. From what I understand, you might not wake up knowing he’s your mate right away because you’re usually overcome by your senses and your thirst. Once that is sated, you’ll recognize him for sure.”

She smiled. “That is why he’s willing to go to restaurants with me and have a plate of food in front of him.” She looked at me and smiled as she must have sensed my confusion. “I usually get a dinner or a couple appetizers so we pretend to share. I hate looking like I’m the only one eating and this makes it less so. Would that explain why I was alright in him drinking from blood bags at home? Not straight from the bag but in an opaque, lidded cup.”

“It could be, you’re a really special woman, Bella, your instincts are telling you in their own way that you belong with Jasper, it seems. Your actions are close to being vampiric in nature and it is rare to see that.”

“But have you seen it? Have you met humans who are mated to vampires?” she asked.

“I have met one couple and she’s still human. We’ll talk about her another time or maybe one day we can get you and Jasper to meet them.”

“Maybe,” she said and there was an unmistakable look of apprehension there so I didn’t push it.

“So Jasper said you’re married?” she asked and I knew from Jasper’s chats with Peter that this was her way of dropping the subject because she wasn’t ready to continue the conversation.

I smiled. “He’s my best friend and even though being mates runs deeper than a piece of paper indicating you’re married, we were both human once and that was something we were both accustomed to in our time. Peter doesn’t remember much of his past except he was maybe in his mid 20s when he was changed and he has faint memories of being in a bar so that is why we have the grill here.”

She smiled and hugged me again. “Thank you for sharing your story, I have a better understanding now.”

I smiled. “Aww, honey. You feel free to talk to me anytime. You know, if there are memories you
want to hold dear, you can start telling Jasper. I have no doubt that he’ll want to be with you the entire time.”

The door opened and Jasper sauntered in. “My two favorite ladies,” he said and gave me a kiss on the cheek before pulling Bella into his arms and sitting on her chair, she seemed almost instantly relaxed as soon as he touched her. “So y’all having fun?”

I nodded just as Bella turned and smiled. “Char and I were girl talking,” she said. “She’s helped me understand things a little more from a woman’s perspective.”

“So where’s my other half?” I asked.

“He went into the house to grab somethin’ and said he’d be right over,” he said as the two of them held hands.

“My ears are burnin’!” Peter hollered as he walked into the grill holding a box with a ribbon tied around it. I watched as he set the box in front of Bella and then picked me up before setting me on his lap.

“Peter, she doesn’t like elaborate gifts,” Jasper warned in a tone we knew Bella wouldn’t be able to hear.

Bella looked up at my husband and narrowed her eyes. “What is this?”

“What?” he replied. Judging from his tone of voice, I knew he was trying to look innocent at Bella. “You just have to open and see.”

She eyed the box warily and tugged on the ribbon while Jasper was glaring at Peter no doubt ready to send him some sort of emotion if he felt the need.

When the ribbon was loosened, she lifted the lid and looked into the box and snorted.

“ Toilet paper?” she said aloud as she pulled streams of it out of the box.
“What? It said tissue paper on the package. Isn’t that the same?” Peter asked causing Bella to chuckle. I knew I should have insisted on buying the wrapping stuff. I looked over at Jasper and gave him an ‘it was all his idea’ look.

“No, the stuff for gift wrapping makes a crinkly sound. This is for the toilet or what Mindy uses to stuff her bra,” she mumbled causing Jasper to start laughing.

“Who is Mindy?” I asked as Jasper kissed Bella’s hair.

“Mindy is a delusional bitch in our Criminal Justice class who doesn’t get the hint that I’m with Jasper,” Bella growled. “It isn’t a secret that we live together but that dummy thinks she can steal him away.”

“Baby girl, only you,” Jasper said and I could see the love shining on both their eyes and it touched my dead heart.

When she finally got to the bottom of the box she looked and snickered.

“Rubber ducks?” she looked up at the two of us. “You got me two rubber ducks?”

Peter gestured like he wanted her to see the actual ducks.

“Jasper look!” she exclaimed as she pulled out the first one. “It’s Count Duckula!” She reached in and pulled out the second one. “A cowboy duckie?” she looked confused. Jasper looked at them and started to chuckle.

“Well, he ain’t got a mop of hair like your man, but he’s a Texas duck. I got a vision of a giant tub in your new digs and thought this was perfect.

“No, this is great, thank you,” she said and smiled. “I’m not always the best at accepting gifts, Jasper can tell you that first hand, but I genuinely like my duckies.” She looked up at Peter before she smiled at Jasper. “Peter, thank you so much for rescuing my Jasper all those years ago. I really appreciate it.”
My eyes shimmered with venom as she reached over and gave Peter an awkward hug since I was sitting on his lap and she was sitting on Jasper’s. When she sat back, my brother wrapped his arms around Bella and just held her. I watched the two of them as they seemed to drift into their own world. Their expressions on their faces changed and it occurred to me what was going on.

“You two are communicating through emotions?” I asked and the two looked up and nodded. I smiled at them realizing now for certain that they were mates. I had been hesitant about meeting her today but having talked to her and now seeing them together I was looking forward to getting to know her more and really hope we could be sisters.

We ended up spending the next few hours talking about her classes at Sam Houston and that led to Peter and me talking about our experience with college life. Even though we were, for the most part, considered nomadic for ages, we didn’t just wander aimlessly around. We tended to live a few months here and then travel to another place and live for a few months. I explained for Bella’s benefit that it wasn’t until we stumbled across this land that we finally decided to settle down and make a permanent home for ourselves.

The four of us left the grill at some point and ended up back up on the shaded porch as we continued to talk and hang out.

“Hey, it is a holiday next Monday, do you have to work?” Peter asked Bella as they were getting ready to head back for class.

“No, I’ve got Monday off since it’s Labor Day,” she replied.

“Well, come on over and we’ll have a pool party. You bring your food out here and we can have some fun.”

Bella looked around confused. “You don’t have a pool, are you buying those blow up ones?”

Peter looked at her and chuckled. “Nah, Jasper’s gonna help me dig up that area there,” he explained and pointed over towards the eastern part of the land. “It’ll take a few days since the concrete has to cure but it’ll be ready for Monday. Oh, and I we can sort of celebrate your birthday too at the same time.”

“Peter,” Jasper growled out.
“No, it’s fine,” Bella said quietly. “On one condition though.” I watched as she looked at my husband square in the eyes. “This pool party is mainly to that, to enjoy a day out in a pool. I don’t want a huge birthday cake or stupid shit like that. No. Big. Production. I don’t know how much Jasper’s told you about my last birthday but that wasn’t a whole lot of fun.”

“We heard pieces of it, little one,” Peter said. “We won’t do fancy stuff either. You bring your food and cook it in the grill or whatever. We might string some lights and have music streamin’ but nothin’ like an orchestra or anything. We’ll get you one of those cupcakes from the store if you tell us what flavor you like but that is all. Unless you want one of those bouncy houses.”

She laughed. “No, I can do without the bouncy house, but thank you.” She gave him a quick hug before giving me one. “I’ll see you both in a few days. Oh, and I like chocolate.”

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:
I was a little nervous about this chapter. A lot of you were looking forward to Peter and Char meeting Bella and I wasn’t sure if y’all had expectations of them. I wanted them to be just a little different and not the Over-the-top Peter that I had in Bound in Blood.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

I need to thank my wonderful team of ladies - AlexisDanaan and JamesRamsey for making damn sure everything looks beautiful and makes sense before you get to see it. JaspersWoman for prereading...sorry for nearly giving you a heart attack, bb. As always, thank you to my wonderful muse, DarkNNerdy - she’s always there for me, like Oprah - which makes me her Stedman.

That being said, I’m not SM and never plan to be. These are her characters, I just like to bend them at my will.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 33

JPOV

We got into the car and headed out of Peter and Char’s farm. I could feel the happiness in Isabella as I took her hand and kissed it.

“Did you have fun visiting with Char,” I asked.

“I did,” she replied. “She’s really nice and down to earth. I take it she helps to keep Peter grounded?”

I chuckled. “You might say that. He’s a little on the quirky side.”

“Just a little, but I can see he means well too,” she said quietly and I could feel some sadness coming off of her.

“Are you okay?”
She sighed and looked at me. “We talked about this mate connection and how she realized she was Peter’s. She brought up how his demon protected him by keeping him hidden. It had me thinking about you and how yours must have done the same thing to protect you. But it wasn’t enough, was it? Because of your gift, it was destroying both of you? Your demon tried to protect you the best way he could, right?” she burst out and tears streamed down her face.

I pulled over to the shoulder of the highway and pulled her to my lap. I kissed and held her, whispering my love and sending it to her as I tried to comfort her.

“Baby girl, I couldn’t say for sure, but that is most likely what happened. I had been there for so long and even with my memory, there were often chunks of time that I was completely lost and wondered what happened. It could be that those were my darkest of days but I was well protected, especially in the beginning by my demon. But you’re right; because of my gift, it started to hurt us both. Hey, but I’m here now, with you. I’m never going back to that again. Never,” I whispered to her and rubbed her back.

“I just kept thinking about what you must have gone through and then with what you feel, and it hurt knowing what you had to endure,” she whispered back and held onto my hand.

I held her for a while before she stopped crying and started to hiccup. I grabbed the water bottle from the console to hand to her as she attempted to calm herself back down. A couple minutes later she looked at me and ran her fingers through my hair.

“I guess we should head to class? Can we talk more tonight?” she asked and I could feel her love and trust wrapping themselves around me.

“We can,” I replied as I got back onto the highway once she was settled back in her seat. “You’ve got that quiz in English right? I was thinking of staying in the car until after you’re done and pretend I’m studying, the sun looks a little bright still today.”

“That sounds fine. If it clouds up again, come and wait for me outside my class and we can go to Criminology together,” she said and smiled. “Did you have a good visit with Peter while running the perimeter?”

“We did, that was when he brought up the idea of the pool. You’re alright with that, right? I was gonna suggest our place but with it overlooking the lake below, I thought there’d be a greater chance of being discovered.”
“I am fine with it, even with the idea of a little party. They weren’t pushy about it and I’ve never had a pool party to be honest, which means I’ll have to buy a bathing suit in the next few days.” She laughed nervously. “Can you make sure they don’t go overboard? Please?”

I nodded. “I can do that,” I said gruffly as I imagined her in a tiny bathing suit with the water running all over her sexy body. I let out a low growl causing her to turn and look at me, her face flushed as she ran her fingers down my arms.

“What are you thinking over there?” she whispered, breathing just a little heavier than earlier.

“You, in a skimpy bathing suit with beads of water running down your body,” I replied.

“That means you’d have water dripping from your body too,” she whispered huskily and then shook her head quickly. “We’d have to behave, it isn’t like we can do the nasty in their pool with them there,” she teased and I could almost feel a hint of disappointment coming from her.

“We could if they go out of town again,” I suggested and waggled my eyebrows at her.

“Perv,” she teased and play punched my arm just as I turned into the student parking lot.

“And you love it,” I taunted back at her as I maneuvered the Blazer into a parking space.

“I won’t deny it,” she retorted as she pulled her bag out from the back seat. “I love it a lot.” She reached over and pulled me into a kiss before opening the car door. “We do have our giant tub now,” she said and it was her turn to waggle her eyebrows at me.

“Yes we do,” I said. “Hey, good luck on your quiz,” I said as she shut the door and headed to her class.

For the next hour, I organized notes. I also thought back to this morning when I brought Isabella out to meet Peter and Char. During the ride out to the farm, we talked about keeping our secret language, as she liked to call it, open and if I noticed anything that would endanger her, I’d let her know right away. We also talked about how it was natural and instinctive for me to protect her, which was why I wanted her to be near me at first. She didn’t understand what that entailed at first so I explained how I needed her to be close and if I had to, I’d push her behind me. It was the way to protect her and she understood. We both hoped that wasn’t necessary but she agreed to be
cautious and let me take the lead.

It wasn’t until I felt the positive vibes coming from my brother and sister that I was able to relax more. Of course, my possessive side reared its head when Peter kissed my Isabella’s hand, but all I got was mischief and familial love for the two of us so I did my best to rein it in. I was a little reluctant leaving her with Char but I could tell she wanted to talk to my sister so Peter and I decided to check on the territory we had carved out.

We made small talk as we ran; he was more than happy to see that I was different - more confident and happier with Isabella. It was a good feeling given how it was before, with Alice. We didn’t notice anything unusual and headed back. When I got to the farm, I noticed their scent in the grill so I headed that way and was pleased to see Isabella and Char spending time with each other. It had warmed my dead heart seeing them together like that.

A gentle tapping at my window caused me to look up from my laptop. Isabella was outside laughing because once again, I had been lost in thought and she happened to catch me. The sun hid behind some trees allowing me to get out of the car and together we walked to our next class. Isabella wrapped her arm around me and told me the quiz was pretty easy and that she thought she did a pretty good job.

A couple hours later...

Isabella leaned back against as my fingers grazed lightly against her mark from a few days ago. She was blissfully happy and I was too as the steam from the tub started to fog up the mirror. The faint scent of our passion still hung into the air.

“I think this was a good choice for the tub,” she whispered as she pulled my arms around her.

I smiled and kissed her hair. “I think so too. There was plenty of room for us.”

She laughed lightly and entwined her fingers around mine. “Not really, I think you’ll have to carry me out, there is a lot of water on the floor. But I liked it all the same. This feels so good, us, like this.” She turned her body around so we faced each other.

“So what I wanted to talk to you about?” she began and took a breath, I moved her so she was at my side. “Thanks, this feels comfier.” She smiled and ran her fingers through my hair. “I’ve given this some thought and I know, without a doubt in my heart, that I want to be with you, Jasper.
Forever,” she whispered as she looked into my eyes. “I’m not saying right now though. I want to get things in order before you change me. Char suggested that I start talking to you about my memories so I won’t forget,” she said softly.

I could tell even without feeling her emotions that she was a little overwhelmed. I held her close to me as I sent my love to her. She closed her eyes momentarily and a couple tears flowed down her face. I kissed the drops away and held her.

“Isabella, I know it is overwhelming but I’ll help you in any way I can to make this more comfortable for you. You’ve made me happier than I ever thought was possible.”

“You’ve made me really happy too, Jasper. You’ve given me so much and I love you with all my heart. When you first told me about this connection we had, I wondered if it was possible to walk away; not saying I wanted to, but you gave me a choice and I got to know you and realized I couldn’t walk away. The more I got to know you and started feeling more than friendship for you, I realized just how special you are. I am so in love with you now that it would hurt for me to walk away. I just can’t. I’m not going to lie, I am scared, and that is why I need the time to get things in order.” Her hand touched my face and as I turned towards her, she kissed me softly. “I love you so damn much.”

More tears streamed down her face and I knew if I could cry at that moment, I’d be doing the same thing. We had both come from hurt and it seemed as we found each other, we found a way to mend that pain and move on. I had known that she was my mate but even I couldn’t imagine we’d be here, in our house, in our tub, talking about her wanting to be turned so we could be together. It wasn’t just the words, her emotions were so strong. Even before we had the talk of having this bond between us, I felt her trust in me and growing affections.

“I love you, baby girl,” I whispered. “You just let me know what I need to do and I can help prepare you. If you want Char and Peter to help as well, just ask.” I ran my fingers down her wet hair and gathered her into my arms once again. The water was starting to cool and I could tell, even from the summer heat, Isabella was getting a little chilled. I got up and wrapped her in a towel before getting our animal print robes on.

The night air was just starting to cool outside and I carried her to our balcony, nuzzling against her skin. I lay on the outdoor couch and she was partly sprawled on me as we sent each other our love and devotion. “It means a lot that you’d want to be with me forever, Isabella. I love you more than I’ve ever loved anyone before,” I murmured against her skin and sent my emotions to her.

A slight wind blew towards us as we just enjoyed the peacefulness. I ran my fingers down her hair letting the breeze dry it and she just hummed in satisfaction. Her own feelings of love wrapped around me and my entire being; demon and all, felt comforted by her.
Her body began to relax and I knew as soon as she fell asleep. I walked us back to the bedroom, leaving the doors open to let the night air cool the house. I took her robe off and laid her on the bed before I took mine off and lay next to her, enjoying the feel of her bare skin against mine. I closed my own eyes as I relaxed and took in her dream state as my own.

APOV

It has been a couple of weeks since I left Alaska in search of her. Every town I’ve stopped by after seeing her in my visions, she wasn’t there. I did catch a hint of her scent north of San Francisco an hour ago. I had only seen her that one time at the baseball field but I’d recognize that scent of gardenias and musk anywhere. It was faint which meant she had been here but I just didn’t know how long ago.

I stopped running when I was just south of Petaluma and decided to turn back around to get my car. As I was running through the nearby forest, I was hit with another vision of Victoria. She was near Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. I recognized the lake and the resort.

I hopped into the Audi A5 I rented and headed north. As I got onto the highway, my phone went off.

“Hello, Esme,” I greeted as soon as I pressed the button.

“Alice, are you alright? I’m so worried about you,” Esme whispered and I could hear the telltale signs of her crying the tearless sobs at the moment.

“I’m fine, I just needed some time alone,” I said and was happy I was able to actually sound sad. It had almost become second nature now. “It would be her birthday soon and I miss her.”

“I... I’m sorry sweetheart. I should have remembered how she was such a dear friend for you. If you need anything, please call home. Your father and I worry about you. With Rose and Emmett gone on some trip to the Himalayas and Edward mostly locked in his room for long bouts, I just feel like our happy family is no longer,” she said brokenly.

“We’ll be happy again. I want to be happy again,” I said softly. I knew I would, I had seen it; it was just a matter of time.
“Alright dear, just be safe,” Esme said and hung up.

I tossed the phone haphazardly onto the passenger seat as I headed towards the Oregon border. I couldn’t wait until it got darker, I’d be able to speed along the highway much easier. I really hoped she’d be here this time but I also knew, sooner or later, I’d be able to find her and see if she’d like to take part in my plan.

Chapter End Notes

A little more insight to the weirdo Pixie’s plan? What IS her motive? The answer will eventually be revealed...just not now. Trust me though, it will.

Hope y’all like it. ~sushi
...Jasper and I held each other’s hands as we looked into each other’s eyes. The sun had set just as the preacher pronounced us man and wife. He brushed his fingertips along my face, wiping away tears of happiness.

“I love you, Isabella Whitlock,” he whispered as he kissed me with passion.

“Isabella... baby girl... time to get up...”

I tried to open my eyes as I felt Jasper’s lips against my skin.

“Not yet, need sleep,” I mumbled and hoped I could go back to that dream again.

“We have guests coming soon,” he murmured against my neck.

I groaned and tried to get up only to reach for the pillow next to me and plop it on top of my head, shutting out the world.

I tried to drift back to sleep but then something cold plopped onto my naked back and I jumped out of bed screaming.

“Jasper Whitlock, what the fuck was that?” I screeched and glared at him as he sat on the bed laughing.

He held up a bottle of aloe vera gel and I growled before flipping him off and walking away into
the bathroom to get ready. I was grumbling about how he was being a stupid man as I got into the shower and tried to wake up.

The warm water helped bring me out of cranky, sleepy mood and I started to feel less bitchy as I finished up.

I was wrapping up the towel around me when Jasper knocked on the door before peeking his head in, holding a mug of coffee as a sort of peace offering.

I motioned with my head for him to come in and he set the mug on the counter as I walked into his arms.

“I was just so exhausted this morning,” I said against his chest as he walked us to the tub surround and sat down.

“I know, you’ve been studying like crazy. Are the hours at the coffee place too much?” he asked as he loosened up my towel.

“I shouldn’t have offered to work the extra hours on Monday and the extra shift yesterday,” I said as I turned around and brushed my hair to the front.

After the Labor Day pool party at Peter and Char’s, I had insisted that we go over this past weekend to play in their pool as well. I had a fun time hanging around with them and they made me feel like I was indeed a part of their family. It was my fault I was enjoying their company so much that I neglected to reapply sunscreen as often as I was supposed to. I didn’t think much of it given it was slightly overcast and as a result, I got badly sunburned.

The cooling aloe gel soothed my skin as Jasper rubbed it onto my back. “Sorry for squirting that stuff onto your back earlier. I didn’t realize you’d freak out like that.”

“No, I am sorry for snapping at you, you’re not a stupid man, either,” I replied as he grabbed the coffee and handed it to me. “Thanks.” I took a gulp. “I overreacted because I had a hard time getting up.” I looked at him and kissed his lips. “I was also enjoying my dream.”

“Oh, was it one of those dreams?” he asked and grinned.
“No, it was romantic,” I admitted as I playfully glared at him. I didn’t want to push my luck and actually tell him details of my dream since I wasn’t sure if that would ever become reality.

“A romantic dream?” he asked and sighed almost wistfully. “There are days I wish I could still drift off to dream. I love holding you at night because you’re so peaceful that I could close my eyes and relax. It is probably the closest to falling asleep as I can get.”

I sent him all my love and wrapped my arms around him.

He handed me the giraffe robe as he grabbed his and we walked over to our balcony. The late summer heat hadn’t hit yet so we spent the next hour enjoying the relative coolness before heading back inside to get ready.

Peter and Char were going to come over around noon, after they picked me up some barbecue from one of the local places. It was my birthday so the four of us were going to spend the afternoon before my class. It wasn’t something I had originally planned, I really wanted to spend it like any other day but after the fun time we had, I thought all of us could hang out, so long as it was low key.

We both got dressed before I finished the coffee. Just as I got downstairs, the door knocked and I grabbed it, letting Peter and Char in. Jasper flashed down and put his brother in a headlock while I hugged Char.

“That is a beautiful dress, Char,” I said as I looked at the light blue, eyelet dress she wore.

“Thank you, it’s vintage,” she replied with a smile and then whispered. “I love goin’ to thrift stores and looking for dresses and such.”

I smiled back at her as we headed to the patio. “I always wanted to try the vintage thing but always end up getting stuff that needs to be mended and I can’t sew for the life of me.”

“We should go one day,” she said. “I can spot the flaws.” She winked and smiled. “Peter used to think it was funny until he realized how much softer the material was after it has been worn.”
I looked at her and nodded, not quite understanding.

“Baby girl, our scars are more sensitive to harsh fabrics,” Jasper explained. “It’s probably, yet another in a long line of reasons, for not feeling entirely comfortable being a Cullen.”

“No, I understand now,” I said and looked at Jasper. “It is why you insisted on the higher quality sheets too, right?”

“Yeah and why my jeans all look beat to hell,” Jasper said and smiled.

Peter chuckled. “Yeah, I remember once buyin’ some brand new jeans at a store and had to try them on, I wanted to tear them off me after a couple minutes. I got home and ran them over a few times with the truck while the missus watched thinkin’ I had lost my mind.”

We all laughed at his story.

“Wait, is that why she always had brand new stuff with tags still on them? Because she didn’t have scars?” I asked and looked around. “You know, your ex?”

Jasper shrugged. “I never thought much of that but it could be since our skin is so hard the harshness of the fabrics wouldn’t bother her.”

I nodded. “It makes sense though I never understood why she’d do that and not want to wash stuff like underwear before putting them on. I always thought that was gross. I think even with vampire skin it would be nasty,” I replied, making a face and from the looks of the three vampires in front of me, I grossed them out as well.

“Um... little one, here you go,” Peter said with a grimace and handed me a bag that I knew, from the smell, was my food.

“Thanks, I’ll be back,” I said and took the bag into the kitchen, suppressing my laughter until I got into the house.

Just as I rounded the corner to head back to the patio, Jasper pulled me against him and started to
nuzzle my ear. I nearly dropped my plate of food if he hadn’t grabbed a hold of it for me.

“That was really naughty, baby girl. The three of us are very grossed out by that image now,” he whispered and ran his teeth lightly along my ear. “I ought to spank you for that.”

I bit back a moan as I held onto him before he grinned and kissed me on the nose. “We’ll continue that, later. Come on, let’s get back to your party.” I took his hand and we walked back to the patio together.

I spent the better part of the afternoon listening to the stories from Peter and Char’s travels. While they enjoyed living out in their farm in Texas, they still found joy traveling around the world. When they described their island outside Spain, I asked how they could afford an island, as I imagined something that resembled that TV show I had watched. They explained that it wasn’t a large island and it is technically owned by a Whitlock corporation - one of several that both Peter and Jasper use to buy property and vehicles. They also explained that there is a hut that they use for shelter but for the most part, it is just a very isolated piece of land. Jasper then whispered to me that he would take me there one day if I’d like but only after I was changed because it was just that primitive.

Before I got ready for class, Peter pulled a box and placed it onto the outdoor table. Then the three of them sang happy birthday to me. I hadn’t expected anything and hoped it wasn’t going to be more than what was on the table.

“Guys, what is this?” I asked as I continued to stare at the gift that was wrapped in plain white paper and adorned by a simple black ribbon.

“It’s just a gift, little one,” Peter explained and gestured with his hand for me to open it.

I glared at him and muttered under my breath, “You better not have spent money on me.”

I undid the ribbon on the box and took a couple breaths before opening it. Inside was something that was wrapped in tissue paper and I grinned.

“You got the right stuff this time,” I teased as I unwrapped the paper, revealing a card. I flipped it around and there was a picture of me on a Texas Driver’s License, only my name was Isabella Swan Whitlock and it showed I was 21.

“You got me a fake ID?” I screamed excitedly as Jasper took the card and flipped it over a couple
“Yep, that way, you can come with us to the bars. It might help the two of you if Jasper goes to feed nearby,” Peter explained.

I smiled but was still a little speechless over getting a fake ID.

“Looks good, Peter. Your doing?” Jasper asked loud enough for me to hear.

“Yeah, I even got the hologram to shine under black light and all,” Peter said with a grin.

“Thanks Peter, I never would have guessed a fake ID would be a gift I’d ever receive,” I said with a smile, finally finding my voice.

“Anytime, little one, I thought you’d like being Jasper’s missus while we go out so I used his last name,” he explained.

I smiled as I looked at it again and smiled remembering my dream this morning. I quickly looked over at Jasper and he quirked his brow at me and I shrugged not wanting to talk about it at the moment. I watched as Peter seemed to sit straight up before he whispered something into Char’s ear and I watched as she started to nod rapidly. I turned to look at Jasper who was staring at the two of them. I stood up and walked back inside, whispering quietly, “You better not be planning a party. I’ll have Jasper kick both your asses if you do.”

I ran upstairs to get changed for class before heading back to the patio. By the time I got down there, everything seemed alright and Peter and Char were actually getting up to leave.

“Happy birthday, little one,” Peter said as I hugged him goodbye. “Don’t worry, we promised you no party and we meant it.”

“Happy birthday, Bella,” Char whispered as she kissed me on the cheek.

“Thank you for coming over and for the gift,” I said as we all walked to the front door.
When they left, Jasper ran upstairs and was back down in a flash wearing jeans and a long sleeve shirt. We were heading into the garage and drove to campus. We got there early to study in the library before our classes began.

_A few hours later..._

By the time we left campus, I was a little hungry and couldn’t wait to get home to some barbecue. As soon as Jasper got the car into the garage, he looked at me.

“Count to twenty before coming into the house,” he mentioned.

I looked at him with confusion. “Huh?”

He looked at me and smiled. “Peter and Char got a few things set up so I could spend tonight celebrating my girl’s birthday. Don’t worry, they didn’t do anything over the top and I hope you like it. I just want to make sure it is set up so count to twenty and then come into the house.”

I sighed and nodded. I knew that Jasper wouldn’t steer me wrong and I was sort of curious what Peter and Char came up with for Jasper. I started to count slowly. By the time I got to twenty, I was already at the door to the house.

I walked into the house and noticed music coming from the back and as I walked towards the patio, I heard the beep coming from the microwave.

“I heated you up a plate of food, I hope it is alright,” he said as he wrapped his arm around my waist and we walked out to the back.

I gasped as we got back there. Globe lights were strung and there were citronella candles around us to keep mosquitoes from biting me. On the table was a covered plate and there were a couple gifts next to it.

“Here eat and then you can open your presents,” he said as he set the plate down.
“This is nice, they set this up?” I asked as I started to add more sauce to the meat.

“Yeah, Peter got a little vision of something and then Char sort of ran off with the idea. This was mostly her doing. I just made sure they didn’t overdo it and make you feel uncomfortable.”

“No, I like the lights, can we keep them up all the time? I like it better than the brighter lights. It feels more cozy this way.”

“Sure, I like them too,” he replied with a smile as I finished up my plate.

After taking my plate into the kitchen, he sat next to me and handed me a gift bag.

“This is from Char,” Jasper said as I found the card.

“I hope we can one day truly become sisters.

Happy birthday, Bella, and thank you for bringing happiness to my brother.

Love, Char”

Her words alone were a gift enough as I felt myself get a little emotional. Jasper sensed it and sat closer to me so I could lean on him.

I reached into the gift bag and felt clothing wrapped in more tissue paper. I pulled it out and inside was a camouflage tank top with the school logo emblazoned on the front. It was the kind that was similar to what Lara Croft would wear. I giggled and held it up to me as I looked at Jasper.

Before I could ask if he liked it, I could see his eyes darken slightly and he licked his lips. I raised my eyebrow at him and smiled. “Really? You would like?”

“Oh hell yeah, I think it will make you look even sexier than you are.”

I reached around his neck and pulled him down for a kiss. Before we could get too carried away, he started to nuzzle behind my ear.
“My gift is next,” he whispered softly.

I reached over to the small square box and undid the ribbon and the top of the box.

“Oh, it is beautiful!” I said quietly as looked at the necklace. It was a simple design, a stone that was shaped like a heart on a simple black cord. The rock was pale in color with speckles and splotches of red and black. “Help me?” I asked as I turned away and brushed my hair to the front.

“It is a jasper stone,” he explained as he helped me with the necklace and then stood up understanding the meaning of the necklace without further explanation. I looked at him and sent him all my emotions and watched as his face broke in a breathtaking smile. Then, I felt his emotions sent to me as he got up.

“May I have this dance?” He held his hand out to me and I placed mine on top of his and stood up.

One hand on low back and the other held one of my hands as I wrapped my other around his waist. He slowly moved us around the patio in time with the music. His voice softly sang along to the song.

*I can love you like that, I would make you my world
Move heaven and earth, if you were my girl
I will give you my heart, be all that you need
Show you you’re everything that’s precious to me
If you give me a chance, I can love you like that.*

By the time the song was over, I had tears running down my face.

“Isabella, don’t cry,” Jasper whispered as he kissed my tears away.

“I am just happy. You make me happy, Jasper,” I whispered. “I love you so much.”
“And I love you, baby girl.” He looked at me and smiled. “Did you enjoy your birthday? I think there might be something underneath the covered plate for you.”

We sat down again and he pulled the cover off the plate revealing a plate full of cupcakes, all different designs and most likely, flavors. I grabbed one and moaned in pleasure when I discovered it was chocolate.

“Thank you Jasper, this was one of the best birthdays I’ve ever had,” I said as I finished my second cupcake.

“You’re welcome, I wanted to sort of make up for the last one but keep it understated like you like.”

“You did good, Jasper, and there is no need for making it up to me. It all worked out for the best, don’t you think?” I brushed my hand along his neck and smiled. “Peter and Char did a great job decorating too,” I replied and quickly sent a text message to Char thanking the two of them.

We headed back inside and had some fun in the shower before laying in bed. We spent the rest of the evening talking. It had become a regular thing where we’d cuddle up and I’d tell Jasper stories of me and then he’d share what he’d remember of his childhood. Tonight I told him stories about birthdays I had when I was younger. He laughed as I described how I got pissed off once because I couldn’t get the tail pinned on the donkey and ended up pouting so much that I missed out on cake. Then there was another birthday when I snuck into the kitchen and took a couple slices of cake before trying to unsuccessfully hide the hole I created, with frosting.

He shared how he remembered one birthday, probably his 16th, coincided with a barn dance and how he snuck off with a bottle of whiskey. He told me how he and his older brother shared the bottle with a couple of their friends and then ended up passing out under some oak trees. It was about all he remembered as my eyelids got heavy and I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Here is the link to Jasper's gift to Bella - http://i18.photobucket.com/albums/b135/hockeybrat29/Fan%20Fic/Red_Bracciated_Jasper_Heart_

Oh, the song, if you didn’t figure out, was “I Can Love You Like That” by John
Michael Montgomery.
Chapter 36

APOV

For the past few weeks now, I spent my nights wandering around the area near Coeur d’Alene. I still couldn’t find her but I continued to wait.

I was near the resort when I suddenly saw a flash of red out of the corner of my eye. It was early morning and not quite light out so I ran to see if it was her. I went down alleyways and up fire escape ladders until I finally saw her feeding on a teenage boy she had pressed up against a concrete wall.

I watched in morbid fascination as she held him almost in a lover’s embrace until the boy’s heart ceased to beat. I jumped down from the roof of the building, landing gracefully as I walked slowly towards her.

“I’ve been looking for you for a while now,” I said quietly as I held my hands up to show her I meant no harm.

“You!” Victoria hissed. “What the hell do you want, yellow eye?”

“I have a proposition,” I began. I took a breath and explained that I understood her loss and that she had every right in avenging James’ death.

“I had... a friend go look for the girl,” Victoria mumbled afterwards. “I hadn’t heard back from him so I figured I’ll just wreck havoc out here. Now, are we done?”

“Not quite,” I said. “Look, I saw that Bella, the girl you referred to, is dead.”
“Well, then what? Are you here to gloat? Well, just fuck off. I’ve got to run.” She turned and started to walk away from me.

“Wait!” I said and went after her.

She led me down a couple streets until we were near the edge of the lake.

“What?” she growled out as she turned towards me. “What do you want? Just explain and then leave me alone.”

“I think I have a way where you can get your revenge but it will take some planning,” I said with a sly grin. “You can either come with me and we can talk more or just walk away. Your choice.”

With that, I turned and walked casually back to my suite at the resort. It wasn’t until I was halfway there that I heard and recognized her scent. She was following me back.

Brilliant. Now to just convince her of my plans.

JPOV

“Ouch! Jasper! Leg cramp!” Isabella gasped out as she gripped my arms.

I rolled off her and sat up against a tree before taking her in my arms and holding her against me. Her body was still flushed from our activities and her breathing was just starting to slow down.

“Is it your calf?” I asked and she nodded and whimpered against my neck as I started to massage her legs, feeling a knot on her left.

She sighed in relief after a few minutes and brought her hands to cradle my face as she kissed me.
“Thank you, it is much better now,” she said softly and I nuzzled her new mark I gave her just a few minutes ago.

“How is your neck? I think my nail pierced your skin a little harder than last time,” I asked as I blew my cool breath against it.

She shivered slightly at the sensation and looked up at me. I saw and felt her love as she smiled. “It doesn’t hurt at all. It made everything feel more intense than before.”

“It was,” I replied, recalling the perfect image of her body arched up as her keening cries of my name echoed into the air. I could still taste her drops of blood on my tongue which heightened my own release. I smiled as I stood up with her still in my arms. “Thank you baby girl for letting me have another taste of you,” I whispered and sent her all my love and affection.

“I wanted it as much as you,” she replied and returned her feelings to me. We kissed for a few minutes as her legs wrapped around me and our hands roamed over each other’s bodies.

“Come on, let’s clean up in the water before we get carried away again. Not that I’d mind,” I said, breaking out of our impromptu make out session and walked us over to the edge of the stream.

We spent the next hour or so playing in the water. Even though it was near mid-October, it was still warm and sunny. After drying off and putting our clothes back on, we walked back to the ATV that I had parked outside the grove of trees and continued riding around, showing her the land that I grew up on. I showed her where the house once stood and the barn. The buildings were long gone and all that remained were random weathered grey pieces of wood laying on the ground.

“Would you ever want to build a house here?” she asked.

“I didn’t at first but maybe after your change if you’d like, we could design a house here?”

“Yeah, I would like that. We wouldn’t have to worry about a kitchen either by then,” she replied and wrapped her arms around my waist as I turned the ATV around and headed towards the flattened rock where I had set the basket of food earlier.

“I’d like that too,” I replied. “Hungry?”
I felt her head nod. “Yeah, I sort of got worn out earlier,” she said and laughed as I grabbed the basket with one hand and steered the bike with the other, never slowing down at all.

I found another shaded area and spread a blanket out so we could have a picnic. I took a small thermos of blood out and drank while she ate her sandwich.

“Hey, have you thought more about that Halloween party on campus?” she asked after taking a couple gulps of sweet tea.

“Not really,” I replied and shuddered. “I don’t want anything cutesy, you know?”

She laughed. “No, I was thinking something cool. Maybe I can order some red lenses for me so you won’t have to hide your eyes. We can make it appear to be a part of our costumes.”

I watched as she scrunched her face up in deep thought. “Oh! How about demon pirates?”

“Pirates?” I chuckled. “I knew you were ogling that Depp actor when we watched that pirate movie.”

She shrugged as she put the trash back into the basket. “I just thought I could be your demon pirate wench.”

I looked up at her immediately and growled low. “Oh baby girl, I don’t think I would mind.” I let my eyes roam over her body as watched as she blushed and her breathing picked up.

“Will you be my demon pirate then?” she whispered huskily as she continued to look at me.

I nodded and she immediately bounded up to me and straddled my lap as we made out on our picnic blanket for a while.

“I love you, Jasper,” she said in between kisses.
“Mmm, I love you, Isabella,” I replied. “We need to stop though, I can feel Peter and Char up there on their land and unless you want them to see us butt naked, we’ll have to put this off for later.”

She sighed as she ran her fingernails down my back once more. “Alright, I’ll stop. For now.”

**Two weeks later...**

I was watching her as she continued to stare into the bathroom mirror at her red contacts. I knew she was curious about how she’d look with crimson eyes and I could feel the sense of excitement as she started to line her eyes with kohl.

She looked up at me and smiled. “How do the eyes look? Do they look real?”

I smiled. “I could tell because the red isn’t exactly the same shade as a vampire’s but it is close and it is incredibly sexy, baby girl. Not that you’re not when you’ve got your beautiful human eyes.” I winked at her and watched as her eyes roamed over my pirate costume as I tried to create a stubble effect using the make up spread on the bathroom counter.

“Are you going to wear a robe as part of your costume?” I teased her as she finished putting on her makeup.

“I have to get the makeup done first. I’ll get changed in the closet. No peeking.” she said and gave me a wicked smile before walking to the closet and shutting the door.

I heard rustle of clothing as I finished with the pirate beard and went back to the bedroom to put on some scuffed up pirate boots. By the time I finished, I heard her switch off the light and the door to the closet opened. I sat still watching as a high booted leg stepped out and then Isabella emerged lookin’ fucking sexy as hell with bedroom hair, heavy makeup, a barely there outfit and her crimson contacts. I growled and felt my eyes darken as I drank in the sight of her. She was all woman with just a hint of innocence as she nervously looked at me and bit her bottom lip. I was tempted to tease her about that and fuck her against the wall at the same time. I didn’t though, I knew she wanted to go to this party as part of her human experiences so I tamped down my lust and took a couple deep breaths in order for my eyes to go back to red.

“You look incredible, Isabella,” I whispered huskily against her ear as I circled around her. “So fuckin’ sexy.” I took my phone out of my back pocket and took a couple pictures of her before she grabbed it from me to snap pictures of me. I grinned at her as we walked downstairs and got her
camera out and snapped a couple shots of us before we headed to campus.

“So did you ever dress up for Halloween before this?” she asked as I pulled out of the driveway and headed towards campus.

I nodded and held her hand. “Yeah, but it was always something asinine that I was forced to wear - George and Martha Washington, JFK and Jackie O, Mickey and Minnie,” I replied, mumbling the last bit.

“Wait. Mickey and Minnie? As in Mouse?” she asked as she whipped her head around, looking at me as though I sprouted wings.

I nodded and made a face. “I had no say in it. Believe me, I would have vetoed that idea.”

“Wow,” she said and shuddered. “I am sorry you had to endure that.” She turned her head and I could see from the corner of my eye that she was shaking and her emotions were telling me that she was very amused by it.

“Isabella,” I growled out indignantly. “That wasn’t that funny. It was torture.”

She turned around with tears in her eyes. “I’m sorry Jasper... it... mouse ears...” she sputtered out in between her laughter.

I shook my head. Inwardly I was kicking myself for even mentioning it to her but I also had to admit, I really liked seeing her laugh like that. I guess, even at my expense.

Her hands brushed up my arm as she started to catch her breath. “I know I shouldn’t laugh but the mental image I have is just silly. I just don’t... why would she have thought it was a good costume?”

“I have no fuckin’ idea. I even plotted to send nasty emotions out but Eddie caught on and tattled. It was probably one of the most humiliating things I had to do in my long life but it made her happy and that was what I tried to remind myself while wearing a fucking tail and mouse ears,” I gritted out.
“This, what we have on is okay, right?”

“Oh hell yeah, it isn’t some wimpy costume and you’re not wanting to hide my eyes but rather incorporate it into the costume. I love it,” I said and kissed her hand.

We were near campus now and I knew the party was nearby.

“Now, I won’t tell you about the dangers of drinking and stuff, baby girl,” I said as I turned to the street where the fraternities were. “But I want you to be careful.”

“I will be,” she replied and sent me her trust and love.

I found a parking spot nearby. The music was already thumpin’ loudly as I got out of the car and helped Isabella out. Together we walked towards the house - it wasn’t hard to miss with the huge crowd gathered and I almost wondered if she was able to smell the liquor that was obviously flowing freely. I could tell already I was in for a long night with the drunken emotions everywhere. I was grateful for having hung out in rowdy bars to build up a bit of a tolerance for the emotions. It didn’t hurt that I had fed last night either.

When we arrived, the whole scene was just surreal to say the least. The women there were dressed scantily, obviously trying to get the attention of the frat boys. This was definitely different than the high scene that I had to endure. While it wasn’t the most ideal place to be, at least the human watching was interesting.

The first thing Isabella did was grab a red plastic cup filled with beer and I grabbed one as well for show. We walked around and I heard some people complimenting us for our outfits as well as mumblings from some of the females about how they wished they were Isabella.

After one large circle around the party, Isabella grabbed my hand and led me to a makeshift dance floor. She put her arms around my neck as I held her close against me and we swayed to some slow song that was playing. Ever since her birthday dance outside our patio, it had become almost a regular occurrence with us. She admitted she had always hated dancing until that moment and now it was like second nature to be dancing close to me. I didn’t mind at all and ran my fingers down her back and nuzzled against her neck. When the song ended, she gulped down her beer and grabbed mine that I was still holding.

We danced a couple more songs before the crowd’s heat got to Isabella and we stepped out to the
back patio for a few minutes, grabbing a couple more cups of beers between us on the way out. I watched as she climbed sat on one of the concrete ledges and I stepped between her legs and kissed her.

“Hello Jasper, I’m glad you made it,” a slightly slurred voice interrupted us causing Isabella to growl and mutter curses under her breath.

I turned around to see Mindy wearing a cowgirl outfit but with short shorts and leather chaps. I suppose she was trying to attract attention but it really didn’t do anything for me at all, especially when I had a sexy brunette who was currently sending daggers at her with her red contact lenses.

“Yes ma’am,” I replied. “Isabella and I decided to check out the party.” I turned back and kissed Isabella again as I squeezed her hips causing her to moan softly in my mouth.

“So Jasper, you wanna dance?” she continued even after I dismissed her and started paying attention to my girl.

Her words pissed Isabella off and she actually pushed me away so she could hop down from the ledge, setting her cups on the deck floor. I stepped aside but was just close enough to intervene if necessary.

“Okay, that’s enough,” Isabella seethed as she stepped closer to Mindy. “I have watched you try to get your hands on my Jasper since day one and you just don’t get it. He’s not interested in you.”

Mindy opened and closed her mouth like a fish out of water as Isabella glared at her. I noticed her hands starting to curl into fists. I wanted to send calm to her but I wasn’t sure how she’d take it so I stepped behind her and placed my hand possessively on her hips.

“Just stay away from him, you got that? Just go,” she said to the now mute cowgirl in front of us.

I felt the defeat coming from her as she blinked a couple times. I was almost certain she was going to leave us as she started to turn. Just then, she turned back and raised her hand to backhand Isabella. Since she was drunk, her actions were slowed and Isabella, who was not quite tipsy yet, caught the movement almost immediately and was able to duck to avoid the slap. I was so happy she had taken to boxing, I didn’t think her reaction would have been so quick had she not.
“Go away, crazy bitch,” Isabella growled and pushed her hard causing Mindy to lose balance and fall on her ass. We walked quickly back inside as she gulped down our beers and some guy immediately handed Isabella a plastic yellow cup with some sort of alcohol concoction in it. I noticed I didn’t get a cup and then I noticed some sort of chemical scent that should not have been in the drink. I quickly grabbed the drink from her hand just as she was about to take a gulp.

“What the hell, Jasper?” she said, still fired up from the incident outside.

I whispered low in her ear, “I think the drink is tainted. Spiked with something.” I took a sniff and it was faint but there was some sort of chemical in there that wasn’t supposed to be in there.

“What?” she said incredulously, a little louder over the voices and music. I could tell the beers were starting to hit her as she swayed a little. I pulled her close to me so she didn’t turn her ankle in those high heel boots she was wearing.

“I think the drink is spiked,” I repeated, a little louder this time and heard gasps and murmurings as word got around.

“What? Why? Why would someone want to do something like that?” Isabella asked in a slightly slurred whisper as she looked at me.

I shrugged and could only think the motive for adding something to drinks was for devious reasons.

“Wait, it is the guy who’s dressed up as Urkel,” a female voice cried out and immediately, a crowd began to search for this person.

I heard a someone calling on the phone and realized they were talking to the police.

“Come on, baby girl,” I said and took her hand so we could get out of the house. The last thing I needed was cops showing up and all hell breaking loose. The party had grown in size since we had spent a portion of it outside so getting to the front door with a slightly drunk Isabella was harder to do. I turned and pulled her into my arms just as she finished chugging another cup of beer.

I shook my head as she started squirming around indignantly.
“Jasper! Put me the hell down!” she hissed out as I hurried us out the front door. Once I got down to the driveway, I could hear the sirens coming in our direction and put her down to see if she could walk. I watched her as she stumbled a bit before standing upright.

“Want to tell me why you just dragged me off from a party?” she griped.

“Someone called the cops, baby girl, I need to get us out of here,” I said quietly and hoped she didn’t become an ornery drunk.

She hiccuped and nodded, understanding the situation. “Okay, we can leave then,” she said and took a couple steps before I felt her dizziness. “Whoa,” she said and stopped moving her legs but her body continued to sway slightly.

“I’ve got you,” I said and pulled her into my arms again, this time, more gently.

I walked us back to the car and set her in. Just as I turned onto another street, five patrol cars came whizzing by me causing Isabella to gasp.

“Wow, those are going to the party?” she asked still drunk but less angry now.

“Uh huh,” I replied. “It is why I wanted to get us out of here. I don’t know what they’d do about the guy who spiked the drinks but there was other shit going on that we didn’t see but I could smell.” I took a deep breath knowing she was going to ask. “I smelled cocaine and it was fresh but it must have been in one of the rooms.”

Her mouth formed an ‘O’ and her eyes widened in shock. “Shit, I... I didn’t realize.” Her brows furrowed as we headed up the street to our house. “I was a little out of control tonight, wasn’t I?

I nodded slowly. “Yeah, it was hot as hell when you told Mindy off though.”

She laughed at shook her head. “She was just out of control and it needed to be said. I didn’t hurt her, did I?”

I shook my head, “No, you hurt her pride for sure though.”
“I can live with that. She was pissing me off,” she admitted. “Jasper? I’m not a really good drunk, am I?”

I pulled the car into the garage and helped her out. “No, baby girl. You were better than last time but you get stubborn as hell. More so than when you’re sober,” I replied and winked at her as we headed into the house.

“You ready for bed yet or what?”

“I want to dance with you some more,” she said and walked outside.

I ran into the kitchen and grabbed a pitcher of water for her as music started to stream from the patio. We spent the next couple hours dancing as she slowly sobered up.

“Thanks. Jasper, for taking me to a college party. I know it must have been hard for you but I appreciate it,” she whispered against my ear as we headed back inside.

“You’re welcome, baby girl. I hope you had some fun before it got crazy.”

“Yes but I don’t think I want to do that again. I’d rather hang out in the bars with you.”

“Sounds good,” I said and kissed her as I carried her up to our room.

APOV

It didn’t take much to convince her to listen to me. All it took was a nice warm bath and then we sat by the roaring fireplace in my hotel room as I told her my vision. Right before dawn, Victoria took off saying we’d be in touch.

I sat there looking out the balcony as I waited for the phone to pick up.
“Alice? Where have you been?”

“Carlisle, I... I just needed some alone time to think,” I whispered quietly and hoped that I sounded broken enough to fool him. “I’m ready to come home now.”

“Alright. We’ve all been worried about you but understood that you needed some time to mourn. Just talk to us, we want to help. We all do.”

“I know,” I said softly. “I needed this and I’m ready to move forward.”

“Get back to us as soon as you can, your mother has been worried.”

“I will,” I replied and pressed the end button.

Now all I had to do was wait and see if Victoria would follow my plan.

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:
So, what’d y’all think? Well, other than Alice is cray-cray.

And yeah, don’t ask why I thought Mickey and Minnie were good Halloween costumes for vampires. I’ll just blame it on bourbon. :) Until next time... sushi
“So y’all drivin’ to Austin tonight?” Peter asked as he got up from the couch. “Have you taken her yet, Jasper?”

“Not yet, I wanted to wait until this Thanksgiving break so we could spend more than one night there,” Jasper replied as the four of us walked towards the front door.

I nodded and smiled. “I can’t wait, I’ve heard from a few people in my classes that it’s a cool town. I wish you could come out too.”

Char smiled fondly. “We’re heading to New Orleans for a week. It’s become our tradition, so to speak, to head there around that time of year. We’ll do a trip, just the four of us soon. Maybe Vegas?”

“Yeah, that sounds great! Jasper, can we go while I’m still human?”

He smiled at me and wrapped his arm around my waist. “We can go anytime you want, baby girl. I think Vegas will be lots of fun for all of us.”

I gave Peter and Char each a hug as they left and then I packed up my laptop before heading upstairs to change. The past few weeks since Halloween, I had been busting my ass on studying. I finally decided to quit working at the coffee shop earlier in the month because they kept giving me too many shifts. Plus, with Jasper’s help, we got the Charlie Swan Foundation underway and it was something I felt was more important than being a barista; so I happily submitted my resignation and became engrossed in, not only creating a scholarship program under my dad’s name, but a summer camp for younger kids as well. I knew an outdoor camp that included fishing would have been something that my dad would have fussed over but deep down, he would have loved.

I continued to keep in touch with Jake and Ashley back in Washington. When I told Jake my intentions for the scholarship, he first objected but then decided to use that towards taking some courses so he could be a certified auto mechanic. Ashley’s business was booming and she brought
in a partner. It seemed her husband had taken an overseas assignment so she would be shuffling back and forth from Washington and Hyderabad for the next few years so she wanted someone who could manage the day to day operations.

We had just received news last week that the house sold for slightly over the asking price. There was a small bidding war that broke out because the house and lot were in a prime location in town. I was happy for the amount sold but sad at the same time. I just hoped the family that was moving in would have a happy life in Forks.

All the work I was doing, in addition to my studies definitely kept me busy so there was no repeat of a drunken Bella incident after Halloween. A couple good things did come from that party. The guy who was serving the spiked drinks not only got his ass kicked by some of the women there, but he was also arrested and lost his full ride scholarship to the university. Mindy also left us alone after that incident. It seemed she found herself a knight in shining armor - literally that night and we became nothing but distant memories to her.

“You ready?” Jasper said from the door as I grabbed my bag for our trip. He took it from me and grabbed his own bag as we headed down the stairs. I couldn’t wait to go on our little road trip out to Austin. It was probably good that there was an exam in our Intro to Criminal Justice class. I knew Jasper would finish fairly quickly and since he had taken to tutoring me, I was confident I wouldn’t be too far behind him either.

My first class seemed to drag but there was quiet time which allowed me to go over my notes once more before the exam. When we got into our Criminal Justice class, we both started on our test immediately. Sure enough, within twenty minutes, Jasper was done and turned in his booklet. I looked up as he left and he signalled that he’d wait for me outside. I got a quick flash of his love for me as he stepped out the door and I went back to the test. Ten minutes later, I grabbed my bag and handed in my exam to the professor, wishing him a Happy Thanksgiving. I walked out the door and walked straight into Jasper’s arms.

“Those last questions threw me a little but then I realized they were trick questions,” I muttered against his chest. “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

“Yes ma’am,” Jasper replied and we walked arm in arm out to his car. As soon as we hit the highway, I fell asleep after telling Jasper to wake me up once we got near Austin’s city limits.

“Baby girl, we’re almost here,” Jasper said quietly as he shook my shoulder.

“Hmm,” I mumbled sleepily and rubbed my eyes. “So where are we staying again?”
“We’re staying at the Driskill in downtown, it is a historic hotel. It isn’t too far from running and from the capitol building so we can do a lot of walking if you want.”

“It isn’t a super fancy place, is it?”

“I got a room with a small balcony and it offered views of downtown; but no, baby girl, it isn’t super fancy. It won’t be as over the top as the other hotel we stayed at.”

“Okay. I trust your judgement,” I said and laced my fingers with his.

I sat up in the car as the lights from the downtown skyline appeared in front of us. It took some crazy maneuvering since traffic seemed busy even late at night.

“Is there an accident?” I asked as I tried to look at the cars ahead of us to figure out the traffic.

“No, from what Peter had told me, there are bars and clubs nearby and that is where everybody seems to be going now. I’ll get us there.”

When we finally got to the hotel, Jasper pulled into the valet area and helped me out of the car before grabbing his bags. He tossed the keys to the Mustang at the hotel employee before we headed inside. He checked us into a small suite and was given directions to the elevator. Once the doors closed, he pulled me into his arms and we kissed passionately, basking in the love that I was sending him and he was returning. Once the doors opened, Jasper laughed and tossed me over his shoulder as he used his vampire speed to get us to our room causing me to shriek in laughter.

“So Ms. Swan, what would you like to do?” Jasper asked as he set me down and kissed me thoroughly as he opened the door to our room.

“Mmm, I...” I began and sighed when his teeth gently grazed along my jaw. “I... can we check out some clubs since tomorrow will be a holiday?” I looked into his eyes before kissing his neck. “We can continue this later,” I whispered against his skin.

“Alright, baby girl. Let’s get changed and we can check out some of the clubs. You got your ID on you? Leave your real one here.”
I took my fake ID and some lip gloss out of my purse so I could carry in my jeans pocket and then changed to a dressier top. I went into my bag and grabbed my high heeled boots I got for Halloween and pulled them on just as Jasper finished buttoning up a shirt, leaving his forearms exposed like I liked. We put on our jackets and headed out the hotel.

Together we walked down to Sixth Street where people were all flocking from different directions. We wandered around until we found a club that sounded like they had a really good band playing inside. The bouncer checked our IDs and then let us in without any problem. Once we got to the bar, Jasper ordered a couple bourbons for us and we people watched while enjoying the band.

I took a sip of the bourbon and then placed an order for some chicken wings since I was getting hungry. Jasper and I found a table that gave us a good view of the crowd and still enjoy the music.

“Do you know you sort of smell like this?” I said quietly when the waitress left after bringing me my food.

“Like wings?” Jasper asked and chuckled.

“No, like this,” I replied and tapped my glass.

“Yeah, you mentioned it a couple months ago.”

“I did?” I thought back quickly to that night where I got completely trashed. “I don’t remember much of that night.” I winced at the memories I did remember.

“Yeah,” Jasper replied and pulled my chair closer to him. “I would have been flattered that night had you been more sober. When I was a soldier, that was one of my favorite drinks. Like coffee, it is one of the few scents I find comfort in now. I remember trying it as a young vampire and the aroma of it was much more pleasant than the taste.” He shuddered slightly. “Are you alright drinking it? You don’t have to if you want something not as strong. I tend to order it automatically.” He gave me a sheepish smile.

“No, it’s alright. I’m sipping and not downing it like water,” I said and smiled before licking my fingers coated with hot sauce.
Jasper looked at my food and took a sniff. “That smells like it is hot. We didn’t have stuff like that when I was human. I think our food must have been bland compared to these days.”

“Does the smell bother you?” I asked quietly in between bites. “I don’t think I’ve ever had these with you. And you’re right, they are a bit spicy but it is really tasty.” I grabbed the glass of water in front of me and took a couple big gulps. “I don’t eat a lot of spicy foods but every once in a while, I need to eat something that just burns.”

“The smell doesn’t bother me any more than other foods.” He looked at me and furrowed his brow. “I can hear your heart beating slightly faster and your skin is a little more flushed from it. You sure you’re alright?”

I nodded and cleared my throat. “Yeah, it is hot and makes my eyes water but it is good.” I took another gulp of water and used the wet wipes on my hands since I was done eating. “Can we dance?”

Jasper got up and held his hand out to me and then led me to the dance floor. We got lost in each other’s arms as we danced to the music. We were probably on the third song when someone came up and broke us from our little bubble.

“Excuse me, may I cut in?” A fairly tall guy asked. I guess, if I had been interested, he was handsome but I couldn’t even tell you how exactly he looked if I was asked. Hell, even as a police chief’s daughter, I wouldn’t have been able to identify this guy from a lineup.

I put my hand on Jasper’s chest and sent him my love. I looked at the man and took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry but all my dances are with my husband,” I said and looked at Jasper with a big smile.

“Oh...” the man replied and I could see he was disappointed. “I understand. Sorry to interrupt.”

I heard him walk away but I really wasn’t paying attention. Just calling Jasper my husband had my mind going and I started to wonder if that could actually be our future. Jasper continued to look at me with so much love in his eyes that I got completely lost once again in our bubble.

“Are you okay, baby girl?” Jasper whispered and gently ran the back of his fingers down my cheek.
I nodded and realized I was probably sending emotions he didn’t understand right away. “Yes, I was just thinking,” I admitted and mentally added, “and hoping” to the end of the sentence. “I love you so much, Jasper,” I whispered as I brought my lips to his.

We kissed as we danced before he started to nuzzle my neck, allowing me to breathe. “And I absolutely adore you, baby girl,” he responded as he led us back to our table. “You ready to go?”

I nodded as we shrugged on our jackets and walked back to the hotel. We had our arms wrapped around each other and it brought me back to when we had our first date and how I was so engrossed with the idea of kissing him that I got lost in a daze.

I snickered slightly at the memory and felt Jasper’s curiosity. I looked up at him and smiled. “I was just remembering our first date and our first kiss.”

“Mmm, that was a really nice night,” he replied and stopped suddenly to twirl me and then dipped me into a passionate kiss in the middle of the sidewalk. When he lifted me back upright, I grinned and slyly ran my hand down his jeans, smacking his ass before running ahead of him. I laughed because I knew he could easily catch me and given I was in high heel boots, I purposely ran slower than usual.

In a couple human speed strides he caught up to me and spun me around as we laughed as he carried me, piggy-back style, across the street. By the time we got to the hotel, I felt flushed from laughing and goofing off with Jasper. It was fun to see him so carefree. It made me love him even more as he asked the front desk to place an order for a bottle of bourbon to be delivered to our room and then he grabbed me and carried me over his shoulder towards the elevator.

When we got to the room, I knew that it wouldn’t be long before room service would come knocking so I decided to check out the balcony. The bars were still open and I could see people walking and some staggering from one building to another. I leaned back as I heard his footsteps and saw he was behind me.

“Did you have fun tonight?” he asked as he kissed the back of my neck.

“Very much. Did you?”

“Mmm,” he responded just as the door knocked.
He sped back inside and took care of room service as I continued to people watch from the balcony.

The clinking of glasses had me turning around and I saw Jasper open the bottle and poured out a couple glasses for us.

I sat down on the lounge furniture and took the glass, raising it up before taking a sip. “What’s the occasion?”

“No occasion, just enjoying the time with you,” he said and swirled the amber liquid around before sniffing. “Isabella?”

I looked up and smiled. “Jasper?”

“Earlier when that man wanted to dance with you. You turned him down and I felt a lot of emotions goin’ through you. It got me thinking if...” he took a breath and ran his hands through his hair. “Would you ever consider marriage? I know you said you’d want forever with me and all but ever since you got your fake ID, it had me thinking.”

I could tell he was a little nervous and I set my drink down on the glass table. “I once hated the idea of marriage given what I saw with my parents and some of the kids at school. In my mind, marriage was nothing permanent, but I sort of have a different perspective now.” I stared at my glass as I tried to put my thoughts and feelings into words. “My dad and I got to be really close after you all left and I could see that even though I was in his life, it wasn’t enough. As much as I loved my dad and he will always be in my heart, I didn’t want to feel like I should lock my own heart away so I wouldn’t hurt. If there was someone out there, I thought to myself, maybe it was worth pursuing, no matter how long it lasted.” I took a sip and turned to face him. “Then I got to know you and we grew close, much closer than I ever was with anybody before and while I didn’t think about it often, it was something that popped into my head. It wasn’t until I first talked to Char, I asked her about marriage and she explained that she married her best friend. Seeing how they are together, even though I’m not a vampire... well... I would want something like that. I would want to marry someone I consider my best friend.”

I reached over and held Jasper’s hand. “What are your views on it?”

“As a man who was born and raised in the 19th century, I was brought up to believe that marriage was very important, which was why I married her in the first place. I really thought the whole idea
of opposites attract had some merit but it wasn’t something that I could honestly say was an equal give and take. For decades it was like that, we’d drift further and further apart for one reason or another and it wasn’t until I realized the bond you and I have that I needed to finally sever that tie. It never occurred to me while I was back in Texas that I’d be having such a conversation. I wasn’t sure we’d ever get this far. To say it was ‘wishful thinking’ was not an exaggeration but after I came back to Forks, things changed. You and I... we have something that is real and strong. I could feel it before we even left and at first it scared me because I wasn’t sure how much closer we’d become. I was hopeful but the reality of it all surpassed what I could ever imagine. I am not asking now, but I think my sister has a good point. I’d want to one day marry my best friend too.”

I was overcome with emotion even though I knew it wasn’t a proposal. I felt the prickle of tears from behind my eyes and immediately, I was on Jasper’s lap as he held me. We didn’t need words at that moment as we embraced each other. I was certain that my love for him was swirling around just as his for me was. He got up and grabbed the bottle along with the glasses with one hand and held onto me with the other as he walked us to the bath. He set me onto the vanity counter as he got the large tub ready, placing our drinks on the side of the tub.

As the hot water poured out, steaming up the room, he walked over took me into his arms. I reached over and unbuttoned his shirt as he slowly removed my top. We didn’t say a thing, still locked in our silent conversation. I could see the need in his eyes as they turned darker until they were the smoldering onyx that I was familiar with. By the time the tub was filled with hot water, our clothes were strewn on the floor as he picked me up and stepped into the tub. The cooler body of his helped tamp down the heat for me as my flesh touched the water.

Once I was in the tub, it was as though our passion was unleashed. Our lips locked and our limbs became entangled. There were no words just gasps and moans as I lowered myself onto him. I tossed my head and I felt his lips on the column of my throat just as his hands grasped onto my hips and set a slow, almost leisurely pace. It didn’t matter that with each thrust, I could faintly hear the water splashing onto the tile floor - all that mattered was the man in front of me with the sexy black eyes that I loved, and the growls of pleasure escaped his lips in between kisses.

“Jasper,” I whispered breathlessly, finally breaking the silence.

I could feel him moving a little faster as I held onto him and rocked my hips.

“You feel so fuckin’ good,” he growled out through his clenched teeth. “Hold on tight, baby girl.”

In an instant he had me up against the bathroom wall as he set slightly faster pace.
“Oh yes, Jasper!” I cried out just as he shot his hand behind my head so I wouldn’t hit the tiles behind me.

I knew what was building up between us as he slowed down the pace but kept the intensity up. His forehead rested on mine and his grip on my hips tightened slightly. I ran my nails down his chest causing him to hiss out in pleasure. My arms wrapped themselves around his neck and my eyes closed as my world exploded with a scream of pleasure just as he roared out my name.

Before my breathing slowed, we were back in the tub again and I reached over and took a sip of the bourbon straight from the bottle. We kissed and held each other for a little while until my skin became wrinkly once again.

“Let’s get you out of the tub,” Jasper said as he got up and walked me over to the vanity. “Here, baby girl, put the robe on, I think I’m gonna have to use the towels to mop up the mess we made. We got water everywhere,” he grinned.

I looked at the bathroom floor and laughed at the puddles, thankful that it wasn’t our bathroom. He carried me to our bed. We snuggled under the blankets for a while as he brushed his fingers through my hair.

“I’m going to need to grab a meal,” he said quietly and I looked up at him, seeing the faint purple bruises under his eyes. I reached up and touched them.

“Do you know where to go? Will you be gone for long?”

He shook his head. “Peter said there are vagrants nearby, just down the street from where we were and some of them are just strung out on shit. He’s never found it hard to find a meal here. I should be gone for maybe an hour. Do you want me to get housekeeping in here?”

I sat up and nodded. “Sure, can I wear your shirt?”

He smiled and kissed me. “You never have to ask, I love seein’ you in my clothes.” He ran back into the bathroom and retrieved his shirt. “It didn’t get wet like your stuff did. I’ll have them send our things to the laundry if you’d like. I’ll be back soon, baby girl.”

I smiled and sent him my love. “I know. Hurry back to me.”
“Always,” he replied and sent me his love and changed into, what I now knew were his hunting clothes. Once more kiss and then he headed out the door.

I threw on his shirt and then pulled the robe back on. I laughed as I saw that he left the bottle where I was safely able to reach it without having to go into the bathroom and run the risk of slipping on the floor. I poured out a small glass and grabbed a bottle of water from the minibar as I turned on the TV. I saw the pay-per-view menu and decided to order the Pirates of the Caribbean just as the door knocked followed by a lady calling out “housekeeping.”

I let her in and started the movie. It didn’t take her long to clean the mess up and as I was getting ready to tip her, she explained that my husband had already given her a tip to clean the mess. She congratulated me on my honeymoon and said we were a lovely couple. I grinned and thanked her before closing the door and hopping onto the bed to watch my movie.

It was the scene where the undead pirates were about ready to attack the British ship when Jasper walked in. He took a quick look at the TV and chuckled as he walked over and kissed me on the cheek.

“Let me run a quick shower and then I’ll join you in bed,” he said quietly and I nodded. I heard him running the shower and in less than a minute later, he came in with a towel wrapped around his torso as he towel dried his hair with another towel.

“I see they came to clean and left a bunch of towels for us,” he murmured as he sat behind me and tossed my shirt off and onto a nearby chair. He unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off of me as I grabbed the blanket and covered us both up. We watched the rest of the movie together and when the credits started to roll, he quickly shut the TV and we held onto each other.

“Did your hunt go well?”

“Yeah, it didn’t take long at all; luckily there was a rainstorm a couple days ago so there was a flooded area in a nearby abandoned house. I just tossed him there. From the various scents, I gathered it was a place where druggies frequented so they will most likely see him as a junkie. He had some needle marks on his skin.”

“Do the drugs or diseases affect you in any way?” I asked.

“It adds a different dimension to the blood but it doesn’t affect me. Like I wouldn’t get addicted to
cocaine just because I was hunting crack addicts. Same goes with diseases. I’m immune to it all but I still prefer to wash off after my meal.”

“Hmm, I understand about wanting to feel clean after that. So feeding on druggies or someone who was sick, it doesn’t make it less appetizing than animal blood?”

“No, even bagged blood is better than animal,” he explained. “Take your coffee for example. You must have had some before that was just awful but looked similar to a good cup of coffee, right?” I nodded. “Well, you can tell once you taste it that it isn’t good but if you’re in a situation where you really need that caffeine, it’ll do in a pinch.”

“So their diet was so you could just get by all this time? That makes sense - you were just surviving instead of living, so to speak.” I looked up at him as I reached for his hand. “Does it make you uncomfortable that I ask you these questions? I am just curious about things.”

“No, you can always ask and I’m more than happy to talk about it with you. You should know that by now,” he said and nipped my nose playfully.

“It’s just... I’m trying to get a better perspective of things,” I explained and yawned. “Oh sorry,” I said.

“No sorries, you’re tired.” He reached over and switched off the light. “Toast and coffee for breakfast right?”

“Yeah and wake up at 8,” I said and closed my eyes. “Can we walk around in the morning?”

“Of course, now get some sleep baby girl. I love you.”

“I love you, Jasper,” I whispered as he wrapped me up in his arms and his love.
My eyes opened as the sky lightened and I carefully untangled myself from Isabella to catch a glimpse of the dawn. It had been decades since I’ve been here, the last time was during one of the rare trips out to visit Peter and Char. I slipped on the flannel pajama pants and a dark Henley shirt before opening the door to the balcony. From here, I climbed onto the roof top and took in the view of the downtown Austin area. Facing north, I saw the state capitol building with its dome. I couldn’t wait to show her the grounds; I had been there once as a soldier, soon after earning my Major rank. I quickly checked to see if I could feel her emotions from up here and I was able to tell she was still asleep.

I sat down on the roof and watched the sky get lighter and pinker as I thought of our conversation from last night. It was a good thing that I finally swallowed my pride and asked her how she felt about marriage. I had gotten hints of her emotions whenever she looked at her Isabella Whitlock ID and that was what started it all. It was joy and hope along with so much love that it humbled me and made me feel almost human again. I smiled at how she turned that man down last night and told him she only wanted to dance with her husband. I didn’t want to put her on the spot right there so I waited until we had some private time to talk. I smiled as I replayed that conversation all over again. I ran back to the balcony and sat down as though it would make the memory more powerful. I knew, right there, I wanted to marry her and thought maybe if we put a Whitlock trip together out to Vegas, we’d be able to do just that.

I walked into the room and kissed her as I sent my love to her before grabbing my phone and heading back to the balcony.

It only took a couple rings before Char’s phone was answered.

“Hey, Jasper.”

“Hey, am I interrupting you two?”
“No, good timing, we just got done with our shower and we’re headed out to roam the early morning streets. How’s Bella and Austin?”

“Good, we’re gonna walk around downtown today. Hey, y’all still interested in a Vegas trip?”

“You know we love that town. When?”

I thought for a moment and was about to answer when I heard movement on the other end.

“Bro, Vegas you say? How ’bout we all go there after Christmas?”

“Sounds good, I’ll talk to Isabella when she wakes up. We’ll have to get rooms soon, right?”

“Leave that to me. I’ve got connections that will come in handy. Just give me the word and I’ll set us all up. Oh, if you’re goin’ to walk around, I saw you at some store on South Congress. You might want to check it out.”

“Alright Pete. Y’all have fun.”

I went back inside and quietly ordered some room service to be delivered at 8 before slipping off the clothes, climbing into bed again and holding my woman as she slept.

I started to plant kisses along her warm skin to wake her up. I heard her hums of pleasure and could feel her breathing pick up as she woke.

“Time to get up, baby girl,” I whispered as I trailed my tongue down her neck.

“Jasper,” she sighed and smiled as she slowly released her emotions to me.

“Mornin’, beautiful,” I said as she opened her eyes.
“You are beautiful,” she said groggily and sat up to stretch.

“Breakfast will be here soon for you, why don’t you get ready and I’ll take care of it for you.”

I leered at her as she got out of bed, her skin still flushed from sleep and she walked to the bathroom.

“Pervy vampire,” she muttered softly as she started to brush her teeth and I laughed just as the door knocked.

I quickly pulled on my flannel pants and shirt before grabbing the door and tipping the wait staff. I took the tray and fixed her coffee for her before knocking on the bathroom door.

After she got her needs taken care of, she opened the door and grabbed the mug, kissing me as she walked out.

“So, walking around today?” she asked after taking a couple large gulps.

“Sure. I wanted to show you the capitol building, or at least, the grounds before we wander around today.”

“That sounds good. I’m glad I brought a larger purse so I could pack a sweatshirt in case it gets cold.”

After grabbing some toast and finishing the pot of coffee, we both got ready and headed out the door. The first thing we did was head north on Congress Avenue toward the Texas State Capitol. We walked close together and I could see she was excited to see the domed building ahead of us. When we got there, one of the first things we did was stop and took a look at the monument commemorating the Confederate Soldiers. I held her against me as she looked at it knowing it was something that I was a part of in my human life and it was also part of the reason that life ended as well. I felt her pride and a sense of sadness as she gazed at the statue in front of us.

“You alright, baby girl?”
Her hands wrapped around mine and held me closer. “Yeah,” she whispered. “I mean it is surreal now seeing this statue and when you showed me your picture in that book. You were there. This monument is a part of you and will always be a part of you.”

I recalled how she was so hesitant to even touch the picture from that Civil War history book I had in my collection and how she held onto me and admitted she was sad yet grateful at the same time. Now standing here, her emotions were the same but stronger. I spotted a bench nearby and steered us over before I held her close against me.

“Let it all go, Isabella,” I said and kissed her hair. “I’m here now.”

She looked up at me and wiped some tears away. “I know.” She looked at me and smiled softly. “And that is why I am sad and happy at the same time. I’m sad because of what you felt you had to fight for back then and then to have your life end so tragically. I’m happy because you’re here now but you had to go through so much to get here.” She brushed her fingers along my face and touched my lips. “If you weren’t here now, I don’t know how I’d be. I know this... us, we defy logic given you’re not supposed to exist. That is why my emotions are so scattered about this. I’m so proud of you for all you did, human and vampire, you’re a survivor and you’ve been through the darkest pits of hell.”

“I know, it is strange to think about too. I’ll come across some names of people I fought side by side with and yet I’m here in a different era and they’re just a name written on a book or on a monument. I still cannot grasp the idea of being an older vampire, say for a millennia, and seeing so much more of the world and the changes in that time. It sometimes boggles my mind when I think of all the stuff I saw with my own eyes. Know this, Isabella, if I knew that going through hell would lead me to you, I’d do it again in a heartbeat.”

I brushed my lips against hers and held her as we sent each other our love and security. It took us a few minutes to compose ourselves before we walked around some more. We were on the north side of the grounds when we found a black granite obelisk indicating another memorial. We walked somberly over and I heard the quiet gasp from Isabella when she realized that it was for fallen law enforcement officers. She let go of my hand and walked over to the wall of names and touched the etchings reverently. I could feel her sadness and walked quietly over to her and held her.

“I didn’t tell you but I got an email the other day. They want to add Dad’s name to the memorial in Olympia. I wasn’t sure until I saw this and now, I think I’d want that.” She turned around and looked at me. “He deserves to be honored like these men and women.” She took a shaky breath. “They’re proposing that it be done next summer, near the anniversary of his accident. I’d like to be there for that, if that’s alright and then after... well I think I’d be ready.”
I nodded. “We can do that. You just give me the details and we’ll do it,” I vowed. I wanted to talk more about her being ready but right now, given her emotions and this very moment, I knew it wasn’t the right time.

“Thank you,” she said and wrapped her arms around me. “Can we go now and check out maybe some less emotional sites?”

“Yes ma’am, come on.”

We walked for blocks along downtown and then headed on the South Congress bridge. I pointed down to the running trails below us and said if she wanted to run this weekend, just let to let me know. Both our moods were a lot lighter as we wandered around the area known as SoCo. I watched as she ate food from a trailer, which apparently was an ‘in’ thing right now and given her smile, she must have enjoyed it. We walked around some more and walked into a couple stores. I must have been in the one Peter saw in his mind because I spotted something sitting on a velvet display case as soon as I entered the door. I was never more grateful for vampire vision right there because Isabella was right next to me.

“Baby girl, maybe we can find something for Peter? I know since he doesn’t remember his human days much, they celebrate his non-birthday first weekend of December.”

“Sure, anything in particular?” she said with a smile.

“You sort of know him by now. I’m sure he’ll like anything you pick out,” I said and kissed her lips. “I’ll look around this part of the store you look around there.” I pointed to the front half of the store while I took the back half.

She gave me a devious grin and then set out on her mission. I chuckled quietly and headed to towards the back to the jewelry cases. When I asked about the item, the sales lady explained the details and I knew right then it was something that I wanted to buy. I gave her all the information I knew and then handed over my credit card as she got things ready.

I grabbed a nearby item, not really looking at it until it was on the counter when I felt Isabella’s emotions and realized from her scent that she was nearby. She was radiating mischief as I quickly fished the smaller package and shoved it in my pocket. I turned around just as she stuck a petrified snake in my face. I automatically tossed my head back when I realized it was a stuffed rattlesnake, posed to strike with an open jaw and sharp teeth.
“Um, a snake?”

“Isn’t it gruesome?” she said and laughed. “I jumped when I rounded the corner and saw it. I almost screamed but managed to contain myself.”

I could see she was excited about finding this for my brother. He was definitely an odd one so maybe he’d like it. I shrugged.

“Okay, you want to get that for him?”

“Yeah, what did you find?” she asked and tried to look in the bag.

“I got him a stuffed armadillo,” I deadpanned as she paid for the snake. I watched as she doubled over and clutched her stomach as she laughed at our gifts.

“We apparently had the same idea in mind,” she said as she wiped tears of laughter out of her eyes. She held my hand as we walked out the door. “Hey Jasper, I never asked... when is your birthday?”

I ran my fingers through my hair and looked at her. “I honestly don’t remember and I don’t have any records of when I was born other than the year. I recall that the weather was pleasant but that doesn’t mean much out here in Texas. It could have been winter for all I know.”

“Well, you need an unbirthday too. How about New Year’s Eve? It is coming up soon.”

“I guess we can,” I said and chuckled nervously. “It has been a long time since anybody ever asked and wanted to celebrate.”

“Well no more,” she said and sent me all her love. “We will now celebrate your day on New Year’s Eve.”

“Yes ma’am,” I replied and pulled her into an embrace. “I love you, Isabella Swan.”

“And I love you, my Jasper Whitlock. So, what about Char? When does she celebrate?”
“She tends to celebrate around Independence Day. She loves the fireworks so she picked that day.”

“I like that. I will still want mine to be my birthday,” she said quietly as we passed by a group of people.

The rest of the day was spent exploring around the downtown Austin area. When I asked if she wanted a big Thanksgiving dinner that night, she said she just wanted something quiet, just the two of us maybe on the balcony of our room. It wasn’t until the late afternoon when we arrived back to the hotel and just before joining Isabella in the shower, I ordered her a Thanksgiving meal from room service.

We lingered in the shower as usual and then got dressed afterwards. I finished first and was able to get the door when her dinner arrived. By the time she got dressed, I had set up the table near the balcony. It had gotten chillier since the sun had set and I knew that it would be too cool for her to enjoy her meal outside. I sat down next to her as she looked at the table.

“Wow, this is quite the spread,” she said as she poured some sort of sauce all over her food. “You know, I have to say that I’m thankful for you. If you had never showed back up when you did or we became close, I think I’d still be wallowing in sadness or worse.” She shuddered at the thought, most likely from what happened out there alongside the highway that fateful day.

I smiled and touched her hand. “I’m thankful that you took that chance with me and here we are. With your help, I found that sense of peace and comfort I had long sought. I’ll forever be thankful for you.” I pulled her hand to my lips and kissed her knuckles earning a slight blush from her.

When she finished her meal, we sat on the bed and watched some movies.

“Hey, I was thinking maybe we can spend some time in Vegas after Christmas?” I asked when the credits rolled for the first movie.

“Hey, we can celebrate your birthday there!” she said and turned towards me excitedly. “Will Peter and Char be there too? Can we gamble? I’m not good at playing poker but I want to experience it all.”

I chuckled and pulled her onto my lap. “I don’t know. You don’t seem that thrilled about the idea,” I said with a straight face.
She looked at me and shook her head. “Yeah, I don’t think we should go. It would be really boring in Vegas.” She looked up and pouted. I could feel her amusement and noticed the corners of her mouth turning up slightly as she fought her laughter.

“Silly girl,” I whispered and kissed her hair. “I actually talked to Peter and Char today to see if they’d be interested. If you’re serious, let me know and they said they’d get us some rooms for the trip.”

“Really? Vegas? I’d love that!” she squealed out and wrapped her arms around me. “I’ve always wanted to go and with the fake ID I can now do it as a human and have some fun.” She turned back around and pulled my arms so they were around her as the next movie began.

“Hey, another thing I want to do... can we come back here in the spring?”

“We can, any reason?”

“I want to do a race. It’s in March and it is supposed to be a big race, a 10K.”

“Sure,” I said. “Would you want to stay here again?”

“Yeah, that would be good,” she replied. “I’d like that.”

Half way through the second movie, she fell asleep in my arms and I carefully took her clothes off and laid next to her as I drifted off in my thoughts.

The rest of the weekend came pretty quick. We went on a long run together and she really enjoyed the running trail along the water. We visited the campus of the University of Texas and just spent time together, enjoying each other’s company.

“Hey, can we go home today?” Isabella asked. We were out on the balcony after her run and was just enjoying the fresh air and the views.
“Sure baby girl, you okay?”

“Yeah, I just want to hang out at our own place for the rest of the weekend if that is alright.”


In less than an hour, we were packed and checking out of the hotel. I had paid for the entire weekend but it didn’t matter that I was losing a night. I was more than happy to be back home myself and not have to worry about hotel cleaning people and things like that.

“Thanks for the wonderful weekend, Jasper,” she said as I got back onto the interstate. “I really liked being in Austin. I just wanted more quiet time with you before classes started again and it got crazy until finals were over.”

“You’re very welcome, Isabella. I’m glad you enjoyed our little trip,” I said and held her hand. She fell asleep for an hour as I drove us back home. The quiet time gave me a chance to reflect on the past couple days. I also sent a text message to Peter and Char letting them know about Vegas as well as Isabella’s idea for my unbirthday celebration.

*Sounds great, bro. And yes, we know. Nothing too over the top.*

She was stirring when I left the highway and headed home.

“We home yet?” she rasped out as she grabbed a bottle of water.

“Nearly there, baby girl. Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah, I guess that run tired me out.”

“So I sent a text to Peter and Char and they’re in for the Vegas trip. He assures me that he won’t get us anything over the top.”

“Okay, so is it a road trip?”
“How would you like it if we took our private plane?”

“How would you like it if we took our private plane?”

“Really? You can fly?”

“All three of us have licenses to fly so you’re in good hands,” I said and smiled at her flash of surprise and awe.

“How would you like it if we took our private plane?”

“Can I... is that something I can do once I’m turned?”

“Maybe not right away but once your senses are adjusted, you can,” I replied.

“What is it like, by the way, being a newborn?” she asked quietly.

I pulled into the garage and shut the door. “Come on, let’s get out of the car and comfy so I can explain it.”

“Alright. Let me freshen up first,” she said and ran to our room.

A few minutes later, I had the fireplace going and finished brewing her some tea. I handed her the mug when she came in and we sat down.

“So are you ready?” I asked and she nodded leaning against me as I pulled the blanket over her. “As a newborn, your senses are heightened beyond what you’re used to as a human. It is overwhelming and it isn’t just your senses but your emotions as well. At times, you’ll feel out of control because your mind still, in a sense, remembers the limitations of being human but your body is getting used to the newness. You remember my story about my earlier days?”

She nodded and placed her hand over mine as I felt her love, almost instantly I got a sense of calmness from it.

“I had to take advantage of that instability. It was the key to her evil plan,” I whispered gruffly, biting back a growl at the memory. “It wouldn’t be that way with you, I promise you that. Yes,
you’d have moments where you’d feel overwhelmed by everything around you but you wouldn’t be exploited at all.”

“I believe you, Jasper,” she whispered and sat on my lap. “I trust you and you’ll take care of me, right?”

“Yes, I will... always,” I said and kissed her lips. “We, as vampires, tend to call it a phase - being a newborn. It normally runs about a year but every vampire is different in their development. We won’t know for certain if you would run longer or shorter than that. I have heard that the more stable the environment, the less volatile your senses can be. You might still have moments when things get the best of you but it would never be anything like what the three of us ever experienced.”

“And the memories are suppressed during the change, right?”

“It can be but you’ve shared with me a lot of your own memories so I’ll help you remember.”

“I know and thank you. The change itself is painful, isn’t it?” she asked and looked at her wrist.

I sighed. “It is and if there was any way I could keep you from feeling that I would, but there isn’t.”

“I guess it is a small price to pay to be with someone forever,” she mumbled.

I could feel apprehension coming from her so I held her close to me. “I’ll be there the entire time if you’d like. You won’t be alone during your change,” I vowed.

“Thank you. I am... I’m just a little scared. Okay, more than a little scared. What if I don’t remember you or something even worse? I don’t want to hurt you.” She looked at me and I saw the sheen of tears in her eyes. I kissed her temple and sent her my love.

“You might not right away because you’d be on sensory overload, to say the least. It is almost expected. You and your body might not recognize me because one of the main feelings you get when you are awaken is hunger. It will be a hunger that you’ll never have felt before and it will consume you. Isabella, the fact that you’re wanting to be a vampire and be with me forever is a huge thing. If it means your raw instincts are running wild for a short while before things
stabilize... well try to look at it in the whole picture and maybe not in that very moment.”

“I think I understand,” she whispered. “Thank you for talking to me about this. There is still a lot to discuss, I know but it helps.” She looked at the fireplace for a moment before moving closer to me and laid her head on my lap.

We spent the rest of the night with her telling me more stories of her childhood. Some were happy, like going to Disneyland and spending time with her dad. She talked about how she flew by herself once when she was much younger and because she had eaten so much candy before, she got sick on the plane. We laughed over some of her memories and I held her on some others. By the time she drifted off to sleep, the fire had died down so I carried her to our room and stripped us of our clothes. I pulled the fluffy comforter over us as I kissed her and wrapped my arms around my girl.
As soon as the Thanksgiving break was over, school seemed to turn absolutely hectic and I found myself cramming information into my brain night after night. I was fortunate that Jasper helped tutor me but I was tired and cranky from all the studying. At the same time, I was proud of myself that I was nearly done with my first college semester and had signed up for another heavy workload for the spring knowing that my future would be changing, in more ways than one, most likely in the summertime.

I wanted all the exams to be over so I could relax and plan for Jasper’s birthday celebration in Vegas. I did allow myself a small break last weekend as we celebrated Peter’s nonbirthday. I snickered as I recalled that look on his face when he saw our gifts and I hoped it was something I’d be able to remember for a long, long time.

“Are you thinking of his expression again?” Jasper whispered as he kissed my temple.

“Yeah,” I replied and snorted. “That look was absolutely hilarious, I didn’t expect him to shudder like that over the stuffed rattlesnake. I guess he did have a huge fear of them as a human.” I pushed the book away from me and stretched. “How long have I been studying?”

“A good three hours. I refilled your water bottle but you should get up and stretch a little.”

“Good idea,” I said and got up from the desk. “Want to walk the trail with me?”

“Sure, grab a jacket, it is cold for you.”

We walked a lap around our trail as my brain felt like it was relaxing from the countless formulas
and other important pieces of data that had been drilled into it. The crisp air helped me think more clearly and relax at the same time. The touch of Jasper’s hand in mine centered me as we rounded the last corner and headed back to the house.

“You seem more relaxed now. I take it that helped?”

I nodded. “I needed that, thank you. It is times like this that I almost wish I could have a brain like yours to understand everything with such little effort.”

“Soon baby girl, soon,” he whispered and steered me up the stairs. “I’ll make you some coffee and get the fireplace going in the study. Are you hungry?”

“I’m actually starving, come to think of it,” I said, pausing in the middle of the stairway before turning back around. “I’ll grab the pizza box.”

I practically ran to the kitchen and grabbed the box from the fridge. I didn’t even bother to stop for a plate and just grabbed the roll of paper towels as I reached in the box and grabbed a slice. I practically moaned out as I took a bite causing Jasper to look at me with a raised brow.

“People really eat pizza like that?”

I nodded as I took another bite. “Yeah, it is a great breakfast but I had to fight for pieces with dad.” I smiled fondly at some of the memories. “I take it they didn’t have pizza back when you were growing up?”

“No, something like that would have been too exotic back in my human days,” he explained as he brought the coffee maker up the stairs.

We settled down on the couch as he set the machine on the desk and started to brew a pot for me. I watched as he then got the fireplace ready. The rest of the evening, was spent studying with Jasper once again tutoring me. During breaks, he massaged my neck to make sure I wasn’t too tense and stressed.

“Jasper, I can barely keep my eyes open,” I whined several hours later. “What time is it?”
“Three in the morning. What time is your final?”

“One in the afternoon and then we have our last class at four.”

“Let’s get you to bed, I can help you in the morning if you’d want. Come on, baby girl,” he said as he carried me to our room.

“Thanks Jasper... love you,” I mumbled as my eyes drifted closed.

The scent of coffee hit my nose and I snuggled closer against Jasper as my brain slowly became more aware of my surroundings.

“I’m not on the couch,” I muttered as I felt the comforter around me.

“No, I carried you to bed earlier this morning,” he replied as he held the mug of coffee closer to me.

“What time is it? Do I have time to study a little more? I gotta pee,” I babbled as I scrambled out of bed.

When I came back out a few minutes later, I jumped back into the warm covers and reached for the mug of coffee.

“Mmm, that hit the spot.” I sighed as the fog in my brain lifted a little more.

“To answer your questions, it is 10 in the morning and if you wanted to study, you can. I think you’ll do fine, baby girl. In your sleep, you kept dreaming of formulas and stuff.”

“I wish I had the same confidence you do,” I said as I stared into the cup.
“Finish your coffee, I’ll grab your study things and we can study in here.”

We spent the next couple hours studying before it was time to get dressed and head to campus. Being that it was a cool, drizzly day, Jasper was able to come with me to my first class and offered to hang outside the classroom while I took my exam.

“You’ll do fine,” he whispered and kissed me. “You’ll kick ass, I know you will.”

I sent him my appreciation and opened the door to class. I sat down and waited to receive my test paper and was pleasantly surprised that a lot of the information was stuff that I remembered studying. I took a deep breath and worked on the exam. I was done with time to review my answers before turning it in. I didn’t just feel confident but I was also relieved that this was over and it was my most difficult class. I practically sped out the door and into the waiting arms of Jasper, breathing a huge sigh of relief.

“How did you do?”

“I am sure I did alright. I recognized right away some of the equations were things I had studied for so those came easy and I worked on those first. All in all, I think I passed,” I said quietly as we headed down the corridor.

“Good, I’m really proud of you,” he said and smiled. “After this next class, you will have finished your first college semester.”

I smiled back. “I know. To think, when we saw each other again, I was having doubts even being here. Thank you Jasper, thank you for everything.”

He used his gift to send me his appreciation as he wrapped an arm around my shoulder and together we walked towards our last class. As soon as we got into the class, we were handed our test papers and immediately started on the exam. As usual, Jasper was one of the first ones to finish. I was about half way done with my exam when I saw him head out the door out of the corner of my eye and felt him send me his love. I knew he was waiting for me outside so I continued working through my essay. When I was done, I looked up at the clock and noticed I still had time so I took a deep breath and went over my answers to make sure I was able to respond to all the questions. I was done and had a smile on my face as I got up and turned in my exam. As soon as I got outside the classroom, I jumped into Jasper’s arms laughing that it was all over - my first college semester was now behind me and I was able to relax.
“I am so relieved, thank you so much for helping me, Jasper.” I kissed his lips as he walked across the width of the corridor and pressed me up against the wall.

“You’re very welcome, Isabella,” he murmured against my lips. “Now I think you need to relax in the tub tonight. You deserve it after busting your fine ass these past couple weeks studying.”

“Sounds very nice, Mr. Whitlock. Will you be joining me?” I whispered as I kissed along his jaw.

“Mmm, yes ma’am,” he replied and jogged down towards the exit. As soon as we got outside, I knew he wanted to run us both in vampire speed but didn’t want to get caught so he continued to jog over to his car and helped me in.

He managed to make his tires squeal as we headed back home.

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“That’s the spot, right there,” I moaned as Jasper found the knot on my shoulder. I leaned against him as he used his finger to ease that tension while his other arm wrapped itself around my waist so wouldn’t slide down the tub again. “You can press just a little harder on it.”

“Like this?”

I nodded and drew up my knees so I could rest my head on them. “I didn’t realize I was so tense.”

I felt Jasper’s lips on the base of my neck as he massaged out the various knots on my back and shoulders. Before I knew it, the water in the tub started to feel cooler and I was immediately swept up into Jasper’s arms and wrapped in a towel.

The fireplace in our bedroom was already going as we lay on the bed snuggled underneath the comforter and blankets. With Jasper’s cooler body temperature, all the bed coverings helped keep me warm in the winter and we’ve taken to build a nice fire each and every night as well.

“Christmas is coming, do you want anything?” I asked as I moved closer rested my head on his shoulder.
“I’ve got everything right here,” he replied and gently squeezed his hand on my hip. “Baby girl, I’ve been meaning to ask you, I can see your bruises from where I grab onto you. I don’t feel any discomfort coming from you. You’d tell me, right?”

I looked up and saw the worry in his eyes so I reached over and took his hand in mine. “I’d tell you but it doesn’t hurt, honest.” I brought his hand to my lips and kissed his knuckles. “I don’t mind them, really. I sort of like them. They make me smile because I’ll start to think about how I got them in the first place.” I looked up and smiled at him. “I love you Jasper, so damn much.”

“And I love you, Isabella,” he murmured. “So what would you like for Christmas?”

I thought about it and then looked around our room and then at Jasper. “Nothing really. I think I have everything I would ever want here,” I said quietly as I sent him all my emotions. “Can... can we just get a tree still?”

“I suppose we could. Want to, tomorrow?”

Within seconds, I was blanketed with his love. I snuggled even closer and smiled. “Yes, that sounds great. That is all I really need, besides, we’re going to Vegas after Christmas and that will be a fun trip as it is.”

“Well, is there anything you’d like to do in particular?”

“Hmmm.” I thought for a moment. “I definitely want to gamble and not just slots. Can we go to one of those fancy night clubs we see in movies? I don’t usually want to get dressed up and all but that might be fun out there.”

He looked at me and smiled. “I’d like that. I would love to see you all dressed up, showing your sexy legs and all.” As if to emphasize, he reached over and brought my leg over his torso so I was half laying on him. “You’re so fuckin’ sexy.”

“So are you,” I whispered against his jaw.

As soon as our lips touched, his hands wound its way through my hair and as I reached and pulled
on his. He exposed his neck to me, his eyes have lidded in pleasure as I ran my tongue along the column of his throat before lightly biting down on his neck.

He growled and quickly flipped us over so he hovered over me and slowly pushed into me. I arched my back and gasped at the sensation as we our bodies moved slowly. Our eyes barely left each other and he used his ability to blanket us with our love. The only noises were our breaths as they matched each other.

It was breathtaking and so beautiful, I didn’t want it to end but did at the same time as the pressure continued to build up between us. I could barely utter words, just gasps and moans as he continued his agonizingly slow and intense pace.

By the time we were both on the edge of the precipice, my fingers were clawing his back. I think I begged him to speed up but I wasn’t sure if words actually left my mouth. All I knew was the closeness I felt with him as we shattered in each other’s arms. I didn’t realize I had shed tears until Jasper’s thumbs wiped them away. We held onto each other some more as I caught my breath.

We spent the rest of the night in each other’s arms. I told him about the holidays I was able to spend with Charlie. It was a rarity as I got older that my parents would be in the same room, let alone the same city with each other. I told him that as a kid, I somehow knew that things didn’t feel right but I didn’t understand what it was. As I got older, most of my Christmases were spent with my mom but a few times before I moved to Forks, she went on vacations with her boyfriends so I was sent to spend time with my dad. It was one of those trips that I had my very first white Christmas.

Jasper shared some images he’s remembered of his Christmases as a boy. There weren’t many memories but he remembered wooden toy soldiers under the tree and how they went into the woods to find a tree to bring home. It didn’t matter how many human memories he was able to retain during his change, it was how vividly he was able to describe the few memories he had. I snuggled closer to him as he described a snowfall he remembered in his childhood. I laced my fingers in his as I listened to his voice slowly lulling me to sleep.

APOV

I have been back with the family for over a month now and I was still trying to play my role as a heart broken widow. I wasn’t sure what was going on with Victoria. In fact, I wasn’t sure of my visions anymore. I haven’t told anybody and have been avoiding hanging around too much with Edward. I’ve had to keep up with my supposed ‘grief’ in hopes that he accepted the fact that I was preoccupied with my mourning and not ask about why I wasn’t using my gift.
Lately, whenever I got what should be a vision, it would come out fuzzy or out of focus. It was like a radio station full of static or a TV channel that wasn’t fully tuned back before the days of cable.

Today was the day though. Esme and Edward had some sort of school event that required a parent to attend. Rose and Emmett were still travelling and were scheduled to come back before Christmas.

I knocked on the door even though I knew he was aware I was here.

“Come in,” Carlisle said.

“Carlisle, I need to talk to you but I am not sure if you can keep this from everybody,” I began and sat down on the couch.

“I can keep our conversation away from my son, if that is your concern. What is wrong?”

“I’m not sure. I mean it could be nothing but I’ve been getting some pains in my head.”

“Oh?” he replied and raced over to sit on the chair across from me. “Explain these pains?”

“They are sharp and just seems to come and go. I haven’t noticed a pattern though.”

“How long have you had them?”

I thought carefully. I didn’t want him to be alarmed that it had taken me so long to come to him. “Around the time I saw the vision of Jasper,” I said quietly and stared at the oak table that separated us. “Could that be a reason for the pain?”

“I’m not sure. Let me look at my research. Are there other things I should be aware of?”

Oh shit. I didn’t want to talk about my gift being on the fritz yet. I shook my head. “No, but then
again, I have been sort of preoccupied,” I said and grimaced.

“Alright. If anything changes, please talk to me,” he replied.

“Thank you Carlisle,” I whispered and pulled him into a hug before I left. “Don’t worry, I will.”

As I left his office, I breathed a sigh of relief that I was finally able to talk to him. I wasn’t sure the type of research he was talking about but with his giant tomes that lined his office, I was certain he’d find something.

_Hopefully soon too._

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:
Alright - So Alice finally (sort of) talked to Carlisle.

And YAY for Bella completing her first semester of college. :) Thank you as always for your support. I really appreciate it. XOXO sushi.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 39

JPOV

It was now a couple days away from Christmas and after a couple trips to local stores and tree farms, we finally found a tree we both liked last night. I hated having to pretend I couldn’t lift it on my own and watched as a couple college age boys tried to hoist it up onto the roof rack of the Blazer. I stood there watching their faces turn beet red as they tried to lift that damn thing up. Meanwhile, Isabella wasn’t helping by trying to look serious but internally, she was radiating amusement over the whole situation. I swear, had I not been sated of my thirst or not gone back to my natural diet, I was almost certain the boys would have ended up as my very own Christmas meal. I even told her that as we headed home and which resulted in her laughing so hard she had tears streaming down her face.

When we got back home, we decorated the tree together and it was there that I decided what I wanted to give her for Christmas. When she fell asleep that night, I brought out my laptop and did an online search and rented the necessary equipment, paying extra for expedited delivery.

It had been a rough night for her. She had decided to check her email before bed and received news that she now had a half-brother name Jaime. She was hurt because once again, it was a mass email and not something personal between family. She didn’t get crazy drunk like last time but instead, quickly ran into the closet emerging in workout gear. She didn’t object when I followed her and watched as she started punching and kicking the heavy bag until she was practically dripping in sweat. She was still pissed off but calm when she cooled down and then got ready for bed. We didn’t say anything. She held me and drifted off to sleep, radiating in love and appreciation.

I looked over at her as she slept and kissed her cheek before putting the laptop away. I pulled Isabella close to me and shut my eyes as I thought about how we got to this point and the future - our future. My lips touched her skin as I recalled much of my past life and how, in a matter of a few short months, my life changed for the better. She was right when she mentioned a few months ago how I used to be versus how I was now. It wasn’t just being with her or just being away from the Cullens and the animal diet. It was more - it was the peace I now had in my life. It was the acceptance from a beautiful woman who was sleeping in my arms - her love and her desire to be with me. I smiled as I thought of how we moved slowly from a friendship to what we had now. It felt natural and un rushed as we got to know each other and became each other’s best friends.
Now knowing she wanted to be with me forever because she loved me just that much was at times, overwhelming. This was one of those moments as I realized the personal hell and atrocities I had dealt with in my early days helped me be here today. Had I not been turned or survived the battles, I would never have met Isabella or realized I could actually have happiness in my life. It finally dawned on me that I was one lucky son-of-a-bitch - my girl had said so before, but the words finally resonated deep within. I slowly pulled myself out of my angst as I ran my fingertips down her spine, enjoying the feel of her soft, warm skin.

Someday soon, most likely before the next summer was over, I was going to give her eternal life. I couldn’t wait and at the same time, I wished she wouldn’t have to endure the pain of the change. All this time, with our intimacies and the occasional tasting of her blood, I hadn’t had the urge to bite and inject venom, in fact, venom never pooled in my mouth around her. A part of me wondered if my body and my mind would be ready for it when the time came. It wasn’t about my lack of control, if anything I was a little worried about my complete control.

I reached over to the nightstand and grabbed my phone. I quickly sent a text to Peter asking about our accommodations in Vegas. He knew we wanted privacy but at the same time, we didn’t want anything too over the top. I had to explain to Isabella that Vegas hotels will be extravagant and after some griping, she finally relented to a suite, so long as it wasn’t the penthouse or something.

‘High-roller type suite at Caesars. Is that alright?’

I looked at Isabella and chuckled to myself knowing how the high-roller suites were. They would be more opulent than the hotel we stayed on our way out here. I knew she’d think it was too much for just the two of us, but it would be private.

‘Give us one with a view of the Strip. She’ll like that. Where y’all stayin’?’

‘Char wants to check out the Wynn, so we’ve got a suite there. What time are we taking off the day after Christmas?’

‘You are in Colorado right now? How about mid-afternoon?’

‘Yeah, we’re tearin’ up the slopes in Aspen. We’re flying out first thing the morning after Christmas and get the jet refueled for Vegas after so the timing works.’

I laughed quietly as I read his message. It was only a few decades ago that Peter and Char
discovered skiing and they’ve made it a point to hit all the black diamond runs as much as possible. I imagined them all bundled up in parkas so they wouldn’t draw attention and smiled as I realized as funny as it was, those two really enjoyed racing down mountains come winter time. I was happy for them for having fun and finding something they liked to do together. ‘Merry Christmas, bro.’

‘You too and the missus says hi.’

‘Isabella is sleeping so she’ll probably text y’all later.’

I put the phone away and pulled the comforter over us relishing in her warmth.

The pale winter sun shined through the window and I knew she’d be waking up soon. I quickly brewed some coffee and poured it into a thermos so we could lounge in bed and enjoy a lazy morning. I grabbed the bag of doughnuts that she picked out the day before and ran upstairs setting them down on her nightstand and crawled back into bed with her. I kissed her bare back before holding her against me feeling her breathing and heartbeat change as she slowly woke up.

Normally I’d greet her at this point with more kisses but I was curious what she’d do if I was still in my slumber, so to speak. Instead, I ignored her as she rolled over and wrapped her legs around mine. We were so close together that I could almost feel the whisper of her lashes as her eyes opened. She was confused and was about to say something but instead, scrambled out of bed and ran into the bathroom.

She was still radiating her emotions as she got her needs taken care of. I kept a straight face as confusion and curiosity hit me. She opened the door and I could hear her tiptoeing back to bed. When I didn’t react, I caught a sense of mischievousness and decided I needed to play along.

“Jasper,” she whispered softly as she climbed carefully back to bed.

I rolled over so I was laying on my stomach now.

Her warm fingers dragged down my back and she pressed up against me still whispering my name. When I didn’t give her the response she wanted, I heard her snort out before she straddled my thighs and licked down my spine. I had to think of things to distract me after that move - it felt incredible and I was instantly hard. I was curious what she would do next so I kept as still and quiet as possible.
She lowered her body down to me and I could feel her tits against my back. I fought with myself from making a sound as her arms draped over mine almost pinning me down onto the bed as she nuzzled my neck. She was aroused and trying to undo me with both her emotions and her body. I felt the low rumble build in my chest and felt her breathing change when the vibrations hit her. Lust slammed into me as she clenched her thighs tighter around my own. My name escaped her lips in a whispered moan and I was done for.

Quicker than she could react, I flipped around and caught her hips pulling her down onto me as we moaned in pleasure. We started to move slowly at first, our breaths mingling. Sounds of our pleasure were broken by gasps leaving her lips as I held onto her hips to help guide our movements. We took our time, enjoying each other and as always, our love wrapped around us.

It didn’t take long until her body started to glisten with sweat and I could tell she was close. I ran my tongue along her collarbone, tasting her skin and earning whimpers of pleasure. Her arms reached over to the headboard and I watched as she held on tightly. She was now crying my name as I moved just a little harder, enough to bring us both over the edge. She tossed her head back and let out a scream as her walls gripped me. My own unneeded breath caught as I came hard. I caught Isabella as she fell towards me so she wouldn’t hurt herself as she collided with my body. We laid there for a while as her body calmed down and her heartbeat slowed.

“Morning Jasper,” she whispered into my lips before rolling over and fixing a mug of coffee.

“Morning, baby girl,” I replied as I admired her bare skin that was still flushed from minutes ago.

“What were you doing, earlier on? Were you pretending to be asleep?”

I nodded. “It started out that way. I was curious how it would feel to be woken up I guess, and when you grew curious and mischievous, I had to continue to play along. I wanted to know what you had in store,” I replied and smiled at her.

“Hmm, you’re lucky I wasn’t about to take a marker and write all over you.” She giggled and sat closer to me and took a bite of her doughnut.

“I would have let you after you used your tongue on my spine,” I murmured as I ran my fingers through her hair. “I was pretty much putty in your hands after that.”

A beautiful, bright smile lit her face. “Really? I was able to seduce you?”
I pulled her closer to me. “Hell yes, I told you before, Isabella, you’re a beautiful and sexy woman. Your touches alone can drive me wild but add the fact that I am able to feel your emotions, well, you practically undo me.”

I grabbed her mug for her as she got settled, happiness and love radiating from her. “Hey, I text messaged Peter earlier today.”

“Oh? What did he have to say?” she asked before taking another bite of her doughnut.

“He got us a room at Caesar’s Palace and…” I took a deep breath before continuing. “And it is a suite.”

She stiffened just slightly and nodded, taking a gulp of her coffee. “I’m glad you warned me about Vegas and how extravagant things can be. It isn’t one of those super fancy suites, is it?”

“No baby girl,” I whispered. “It won’t be like the fancy rooms in those Oceans movies we watched. This would be similar to a typical high roller suite but I asked Peter to get us one with a view of the Strip. He didn’t make it seem like it was any problem.”

“Alright. I guess when in Vegas, right?” She turned towards me and grimaced slightly. “Can we compromise and not rent a super fancy car when we’re there? Oh are Peter and Char at the same hotel?”

“Would you want a sports car while we are there? Peter and Char are staying at a fancier place, the Wynn.”

She thought for a minute. “How about... how about a Cherry red Mustang with racing stripes?”

I nodded enthusiastically because it was perfect for Vegas. “I’ll see if I can rent a Shelby like the one I have. Usually they are very limited in production but if I can’t, we’ll just rent a regular Mustang for us.” I could tell from the slight glaze in her eyes I had lost her in my car talk so I chuckled and kissed her temple.

“Great!” she said and grinned. “I’ll take your word on the Shelby thingy being a special order. I
know you won’t get us a wimpy car. And the Wynn, that is the one with the museum that we read about right? Yeah, I would have feel really out of place there.”

“Yes, which is why I thought Caesars’s was just enough of the classic Vegas feel with some opulence but not completely over the top like the newer places. Besides, if you were uncomfortable, I would have been too.”

Her hand reached up to run her fingers through my hair. “Will it be difficult? Being in Vegas with your gift?”

I took her hand kissed it before placing it on my chest. “No, it isn’t as bad now as it before, a busy city with so many emotions running wild... I wouldn’t have been able to handle it on animal blood. Even hunting every day and gorging myself wouldn’t have worked. That or I’d have to be restrained.” I sighed knowing exactly how I would have been sat - every damn movement would have been scrutinized and anticipated. I shook my head out of those bad thoughts. “Now though, I am more in control and crowds won’t bother me even with my gift, I’ll be fine.”

“You’d tell me if you’re ever overwhelmed, right? I just don’t want you to feel uncomfortable.” She looked at me with those beautiful eyes and while I felt her concern, there was absolute trust coming from her.

“I promise, I’d tell you. So, what do you want to do today?”

“We didn’t do a whole lot on Christmas Eve. I know Dad had this crazy love for that movie ‘A Christmas Story’ and would watch the marathon on TV. As a kid Renee didn’t have a whole lot of traditions. She tried to make some but they would never stick.”

I laughed at the image. “Yeah I think Emmett had that movie on one year and I was done by the second go around. Your dad really watched it over and over like that?”

“Yeah. I watched it once and then had to leave the room when it started all over again. As much as I hated that movie, seeing him laugh and be so carefree was great.”

She turned away slightly and I could tell she was feeling a little sad.

“Hey, I know that damn movie will be on. We can watch bits and pieces together if you’d like.”
“Thanks, maybe later tonight? I don’t want to sit through hours of the same movie,” she said and wrinkled her nose. “Let’s finish watching the ‘Lord of the Rings’ first.”

We got cleaned up and dressed before heading downstairs to continue watching the trilogy. She snacked on popcorn during the movie and I sipped on some blood as we snuggled under a blanket. In between the first and second movie, we switched over to that movie marathon and laughed at some parts while groaning at others. When the ‘Twin Towers’ was finished, she heated up some pasta she had kept in the freezer and I quickly ran to the door as the delivery truck arrived with her present. I was done before her food finished cooking and hoped that she was none the wiser.

Her plate of food was hot so I grabbed it for her and brought it to the couch as we took a break from Hobbits. She had a bottle of beer with her so I reached over to pop the cap off.

“Thank you for getting me the beer, Jasper. And for watching parts of this movie with me.” She turned and smiled softly. “You know? I just realized from my meal, that this is, in a sense, a tradition. This was Charlie’s favorite meal and thing to do.” I hugged her as she continued to eat her dinner. “I’m really glad that you’re here though, Jasper. In a roundabout sort of way, it is as though you’re here with my dad tonight and that means a lot.”

She took a swig of her beer and set it down. “Hmm, it isn’t bad. This is better than that stuff from the Halloween party.”

I smiled and pretended to tip a cowboy hat. “That’s because you’re drinkin’ an authentic Texas beer, ma’am,” I drawled out earning chuckles from her.

“Well, y’all do a great job brewin’ beer,” she replied with a soft drawl of her own before laughing. “Hey, I haven’t sent messages to Peter and Char, thanking them. Hang on.” She got up and raced upstairs to grab her phone and came back a few minutes later.

I pulled the blanket over us once more after she took her dishes to the kitchen. She quickly sent a message to Char and Peter, thanking them for getting us the suite and then wished them a Merry Christmas. We spent the rest of the evening watching the final movie.

“Merry Christmas, Isabella,” I whispered as I shut off the TV a couple hours later.

“Merry Christmas, Jasper,” she said softly, her lips almost touching mine.
I could see from her drooping eyelids she was sleepy so I took her in my arms and we headed back upstairs. It didn’t take long before she fell asleep and I raced downstairs to set up the machines for her surprise tomorrow. I connected them to hoses and switched them on, listening to the hum of the motors and then headed back upstairs. I knew from the bedroom, I could keep an eye on them throughout the night.

I only had to move them about a half dozen times while Isabella slept. It never took too long for me to check on them and I was back in bed in no time. Of course, I never bothered to put on any clothes and was more than happy that combined with my speed and the fact we were the highest house on the hill, nobody was any wiser.

A couple hours after dawn, I felt her slowly waking up so I turned off the machines and stowed them at the side of the house, stopping back in the kitchen to brew her a thermos of coffee.

“Wake up, baby girl,” I whispered about an hour later and noticed her smile as she breathed in deep. By now I knew she liked the combination of scents - coffee and me.

“Morning Jasper, Merry Christmas,” she said as she turned around.

“Merry Christmas to you too. I have a surprise for you, look out our window.” I motioned with my head towards our balcony.

“Huh?” she said and looked outside. “Whoa, is... is that snow?” she jumped out of bed, nearly sloshing her beverage out the sides of the mug. “Jasper, it snowed outside!” she exclaimed before confusion hit. “Wait, it doesn’t look like the rest of the hill got any.”

“I rented some snow machines and had them running overnight. I thought we could have fun today with our own white Christmas,” I explained.

“Oh! No, this is great!” she spun around, her face full of joy. “Come on, let’s get ready, I want to enjoy our own snow day!”

We got ready and even though I didn’t feel the cold air, I still put on a jacket as we headed outside. We built snow people, made forts and had a snowball fight, only taking breaks so she could eat or take care of her needs. It was fun and she confided to me that it was one of the best Christmas surprises she has ever had. I agreed even though she thought it would be funny to try and ambush
me and rub snow on my head. Of course seeing how happy she was, I let her.

It was getting a little darker so I brought out the machines again so we could have a snowy evening. We turned on our outdoor string lights, making the snow sparkle.

“Isabella, I am sorry, I should have gotten you something nice for dinner,” I said when she came back out with her pasta meal.

“No, it is fine. This is one of my favorite foods,” she replied.

“But...”

“Jasper, I’m not complaining, this has been an amazing day,” she softly chided. I walked over to the patio and switched on the gas heater so she’d be more comfortable before sitting down next to her.

“It has been a great day,” I said. “Would you want something like this every Christmas? Where ever we are in the world?”

“Oh! Like our very own tradition?” she asked in between bites. “I’d like that. Would you want to buy your... I mean our own snow making machines?”

“Yes,” I said. “The machines aren’t that expensive to buy and seeing how we’d be living a good long life, we’d get our money’s worth.”

She stuck her tongue at me. “Hey now, I’m getting better with the idea of having money,” she pouted.

I undid her pigtails and ran my fingers through her hair. “Yes ma’am, you are.”

When she was done, I offered to take her dishes back inside and quickly switched some music so it streamed out into the backyard.
I blurred back outside and positioned the snow machines so it looked like it was gently falling over the uncovered portion of our patio. I returned to where she was sitting and bowed in front of her. “Ms. Swan, would you do me the honor and dance with me?”

She placed her hand in mine and smiled. “Why yes, Mr. Whitlock. I’d be delighted.”

We danced slowly as I took her hand in mine and placed it over my heart. As the ballads played, we turned slowly to the beat of the music. Towards the end of the third song, I spun her around and when she faced me again, I was on my knee.

“Jasper?” she whispered.

“Isabella, you are my best friend and someone I trust wholeheartedly. I know we’ve only dated for a short time now but you are my world. You’ve made me feel more human that I have felt in decades; a lifetime. You’re everything to me. I know you want forever but would you like have forever with me as my wife... my partner in every way?”

Her eyes welled up with tears. “Oh Jasper...” I watched as she kneeled in front of me and slowly took my face in her hands. “Yes,” she whispered softly, her tears now falling down and I had to gently wipe them off her cheeks. She brought her lips to mine and kissed me with all the love she had for me. If I was human, I would have been crying with her too. As it was, I felt the almost foreign prickle behind my eyes as venom slightly clouded my vision.

“Yes, I would love to marry you,” she replied again after breaking out of our kiss.

We held each other for a song before I pulled her to her feet and reached into my pocket. I took her left hand in mine and kissed her finger before slowly slipping her ring onto it.

“Baby girl, I love you so much,” I murmured.

She gasped as she saw the ring and smiled. “It is beautiful. I love you Jasper - so much. You’re my best friend and my world too.”
Chapter End Notes

The song they are dancing to - Lost in the Moment by Big and Rich

Her ring can be found here -
http://i18.photobucket.com/albums/b135/hockeybrat29/Fan%20Fic/civilwar_1.jpg
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Thank you to the wonderful team of women - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy who made sure this chapter looked pretty.

I’m not SM, I just like to play with her characters.

ONWARD

Chapter 40

JPOV

“Isabella, you don’t need to panic about the clothes. If we need to buy stuff to go dancing, we can get it there,” I said and tried not to laugh at the exasperation coming off of her. She was stressed out about going to Las Vegas, excited but stressed nonetheless.

“I know. I just don’t want to look too young since you’re keeping my real ID with you. I don’t want to get caught gambling and stuff.”

“Just act like you belong there. If you act or look suspicious, they’ll be more apt to pay attention.”

“Well if that is the case, then I’ll sic one of you on them,” she replied innocently.

I shook my head and chuckled. “Why Ms. Swan, that is an outrageous thing for you to say,” I teased.

She laughed. “I guess it was. I’m so used to being around you nowadays.” She snorted out before running into the bathroom and pulling open a drawer. A few seconds later, she came back to our bedroom with a box of contact lenses.
I looked at them assuming they were for me and then burst out laughing. “You’re bringing your crimson eyes, baby girl?”

“Yeah, I’m the odd one out, so I thought I’d fit in and say we’re doing this as part of our New Year’s fun. It would work, right?”

I thought for a moment how a set of red contacts would fare in a busy city and couldn’t think anything odd about it, given it was Las Vegas. “I think it would. Who knows, we might all start a trend.”

“Perfect!” she exclaimed and zipped up her bag. “Okay I’m ready now.”

I grabbed our bags and we headed downstairs and out the door. We got to the airport and greeted Peter and Char who were inside one of the hangers as the plane was getting refueled.

“They’re almost done,” Peter said as we greeted them.

Minutes later, we climbed aboard and I stowed our bags in the closet as Peter and the pilot ran the final checks. Normally one of us would be flying the plane but since it had been a while since we hung out, we hired a pilot so we could all catch up without having to fuss over flying.

Isabella buckled herself in as soon as we started to taxi and I felt slight nervousness coming from her so I held onto her hand as we took off.

“Bella, what is that on your hand?” Char asked with a big grin on her face. She moved over so she sat next to her and stared.

“Jasper proposed last night,” Isabella said excitedly. “It was a wonderful day too. We spent it playing out in the snow and then as we danced last night, he spun me around and then got down on one knee.”

Char sighed and gestured for Peter to come over to the couch she was sitting on. “Yes... go on,” she replied.
“Then he proposed,” Isabella looked at me and smiled before kissing me on the lips. “Later when we came into the house and I was able to take a good look at the ring, he explained the significance. He found this ring when we were in Austin, at an antique place. The ring was from the Civil War and while we don’t know the actual history behind the ring, knowing it came from his time makes it so special.”

My brother and sister hugged and congratulated us as the pilot got the plane to cruising altitude. Char and Isabella decided to sit together and watch a chick flick on her laptop so I decided to talk to Peter about my concerns in changing my girl.

“My gift isn’t sayin’ one thing or another about it,” Peter replied. “I think your inner demon will know once you’re ready and you’ll start the venom. Both of you recognize her as your mate so I don’t think you’ll drain her.”

“Fuck, I hope not. How fucked would that be?” I muttered rhetorically in a tone low enough that Isabella wouldn’t hear. It wasn’t that I was trying to keep this from her; I didn’t want her to worry about it just yet.

Peter tilted his head and looked at me. “You’re really concerned, aren’t you?”

I nodded.

“Look, there isn’t anything to worry about. Your instincts will kick in automatically when the time comes, trust me,” he continued.

“Brother, this isn’t just anybody,” I replied and ran my fingers through my hair. “This is Isabella. My Isabella. I only have one chance at this and I cannot mess this up.” I was frustrated and sent him some of that so he’d understand.

He raised his hands up in the air. “Alright. I get it. I can still help you though. I know some vampires that have knowledge in this.”

“Oh? Do I know them?” I asked. If there was firsthand knowledge available, I was eager to learn about this.

“You have heard of them,” he answered with a nervous chuckle.
I was automatically suspicious. “What are you not telling me, brother?”

“The Volturi, they would know.”

I growled low and stared at him knowing he deflected my answer on purpose. Knowing we were at cruising altitude and Isabella was still human, I reined in my anger. “Why would I go to the Volturi? I’m sure they see me as public enemy given my past.”

“They won’t, Jasper. I know them.”

“And how do you know them?” I asked through clenched teeth. I was trying really hard not to rip the arm rests off the captain’s chair I was in.

“Char and I freelance for them,” he said, his eyes were focused intently on a spot on the floor of the plane.

“What?” I growled out and punched his face.

“Jasper!” Isabella exclaimed hearing the noise. “What’s going on? We’re on a fucking plane!”

I pulled her towards the back of the plane and positioned her behind me. I crouched low staring at my brother and sister as I held her close behind me. “Stay behind me, baby girl. It seems my brother and sister have been withholding news from me, from us.”

“Now Jasper, please... things aren’t what they seem,” Char said as I sent fear to them. It wasn’t enough to have them crashing onto the floor of the plane and take us down, it was just enough so they knew I was being serious.

“Alright, explain yourselves,” I demanded.

I listened as they explained how years ago, they ended up going to Volterra to offer their services. Being that they had been nomadic part of their lives, the Volturi were more than happy to work
with them. Peter explained how since they knew a lot of different vampires throughout the world,
this was a way the leaders could make sure things were peaceful and there wasn’t any lawlessness.
Given what I had heard of the Volturi from the days of the wars and then with the Cullens, I had
doubts about their story but everything they said, I could tell they were being honest about. I was
conflicted but I was also concerned about my woman who was currently clutching onto my shirt
confused about what was going on.

I released my emotional hold on them and started walk carefully towards them with Isabella still
close behind me, my arm holding her against my body. I looked down at my brother and sister who
were now sitting on the floor.

“Do you understand my concerns about your alliances with the Volturi? Not only do I have what
surely amounts to war crimes, my mate is still human and I have heard their laws about keeping
our existence a secret.”

“Wait, the Volturi?” Isabella whispered from behind me. “They work for them?”

I turned around and looked at her. “You know of them?”

She wrinkled her forehead. “Just what Eddie said. That they have those laws and are the rulers of
your world.” She suddenly gasped. “Shit, are we in trouble? Oh god, Jasper, I’ve put you in
jeopardy!” she cried out.

I pulled her into my arms and held her. “I won’t let anybody hurt you, baby girl. I will kill anybody
who tries,” I vowed.

“I know, Jasper. But maybe we should hear what they have to say,” she said quietly and ran her
fingers through my hair.”

I knew she was right so I stared at the two sitting on the floor. “Well?”

Peter sighed. “Look, I understand your concerns but hear me... hear us out. We also took part in the
Southern Wars and they’ve accepted us. I’m sure if you go there they’d accept you as well.”

I looked at them incredulously. “You want me to go to Volterra? I suppose I just waltz right in
there on my own. Well, what about Isabella? Should I bring her along too so they think I’m giving
them an offering?” I felt her stiffen at my words and I immediately ran my hand to her hip and gave her a loving squeeze. “Why the fuck haven’t you ever told me that? You’ve been allied with them for that long and I’m just finding out now?”

“We couldn’t tell you when you were with them...the Cullens,” Char replied. “We should have told you when you left them but it wasn’t something we wanted to bring up just out of the blue.”

I quickly recalled the moments we spent when I arrived in Texas and knew they were right. There never really was a good time to talk about things and I most likely would have reacted much worse than I was now.

“What do you mean you couldn’t tell me when I was with them?” I eyed the two of them as I tried to grasp the meaning of the words.

“They aren’t completely trusted by the Volturi,” Peter said softly, looking straight at me.

I had been walking closer toward them until he uttered those words, stopping me completely. I held onto Isabella so she wouldn’t crash into me but she heard his words too causing her to be curious. The Cullens weren’t trusted and in a sense, I could understand that given how they tried to act like ideal humans but it never failed to draw attention.

“Look, I know this is hard for you to take in... both of you, but hear us out, okay?” Peter continued. “We’re not spies or anything. We, for the most part, just make sure there aren’t any insurgent groups or personal wars that will disrupt the way of life for us all. The Cullens, while not completely considered insurgent, are more scrutinized because of their air of superiority and how they play human the way they do.”

I sighed and sat down on the floor pulling Isabella into my lap. “But Carlisle stayed with them for a while,” I began.

“Yes and that is the reason why they feel the way they do about the Cullens,” Char cut in. “We don’t know what happened during his stay but they must have got some vibe from him that threw them off.”

“Hmm, from the little Carlisle’s talked of them, I always thought it was a mutual respect sort of thing. That he was treated almost like a peer,” I replied.
“Maybe it is sort of like keep friends close and enemies closer? Sort of like what we learned in Criminology class?” Isabella asked as she held onto my hand. “I am just guessing.”

“In a sense, yes little one,” Peter replied. “They aren’t under surveillance or anything at this point but they try to make it a point to isolate them by other means.”

“Other means?” I asked.

“While we don’t know the details, we were just given hints that the leaders gave information or factoids that had been carefully constructed over the years,” Peter explained cryptically. “Like Char said, we don’t know the exact reasons but that is what we’ve heard.”

I ran my fingers through my hair again. “Alright, but that still leaves the question of Isabella. I will not go there if her life is jeopardized. I’ll take my chances and pass if that is the case.”

Isabella took both my hands and held onto them trying to send me her love and calm. I leaned forward to breathe in her scent feeling my stress level drop slightly.

“Bella, remember how I told you about the vampire I knew that had a human mate as well,” Char asked and I saw Isabella’s head nod. “Well, he’s from Volterra. One of the kings to be exact... Marcus.”

I gasped. “But I thought his mate died centuries ago.”

“That is the story they have created. His mate is currently human,” Peter explained. “But honestly, I am saying too much and these are their reasons and stories to tell. It might do you some good, brother if you do consider a trip out there.”

“But we can’t be away from each other that far,” Isabella cried out. “It would hurt us both.” Her fingers dug into my hands and if she were a vampire, I’d have gouges from them by now.

I held her tighter against me and kissed her neck knowing it would calm her.

“You could take her with you,” Char suggested.
“She’s human in a vampire city,” I gritted out. “If anything happens to her and I unleash my fury, I’m as good as gone.”

“Jasper, surely you realize her blood scent is no longer that of a typical human?” Peter said softly. “I don’t mean any offense, little one, but your scent, while lovely, is now mixed with vampire and not just any vampire, Jasper’s. As such, you’re not as attractive as a meal anymore.”

I nodded as I breathed in her scent. I had known since we’ve been intimate that her scent was often blended with mine. The few times I’ve tasted her blood, I had also noticed it wasn’t like my meals but I just thought it was my mind knowing that she was my mate.

Isabella snorted. “Um, no offense taken. So I don’t smell entirely human anymore? I’m not going through a prolonged change, am I?”

“Bella, I don’t think so but that is something you can certainly ask if you both were to go to Volterra,” my sister replied.

Shit, I hadn’t thought of that and bowed my head feeling defeated. It looked like in order to get the answers we needed, we had to go to Italy. I hated the idea of going to meet with these leaders given how it had been practically ingrained in me that they were bad. I hated that I was scared for Isabella’s safety, let alone mine when we got there. Despite all that, the idea of not knowing what would happen when it came time to change her scared me.

I spun Isabella around so she faced me. “Baby girl, we might have to go to Italy before your change. I don’t want to do this but we both have questions that it seems they might be able to answer for us.” I leaned my forehead towards hers so we were touching.

“You have questions too?” Isabella whispered.

I looked over quickly at my brother and sister who were now sitting together watching a movie in order to give us the illusion of privacy before looking back at Isabella. I nodded. “I have been concerned that I won’t be able to get enough venom to change you, baby girl,” I confessed. “It was that conversation that started this whole unravelling just now.”

“I don’t understand,” she replied.
I explained how I had not felt venom pooling when I was near her, even when tasting her blood or when she exposed her neck to me. I told her how concerned I was that my control was too controlled and when the time came to change her, I wouldn’t be able to. I also told her what Peter said to me about how my instincts would kick in when the time was right.

“We’ll go, we have to know. We’ll have that forever, Jasper. We just have to believe that. Maybe we go during Spring Break?”

I nodded, knowing that she wanted to get one year of college under her belt as a human. “We can but let’s not set the plans in motion just yet. That is a few months away and right now, we’re heading to Vegas. Let’s try to make the most of this trip and when we get back, we can talk more.”

“No, I agree. It scares me but it almost feels like we have to do this,” she said softly. She reached up and brushed her hand along the side of my face. “We’ll do this together, yeah?”

“Together,” I promised. I looked over at Peter and Char again. “I know y’all heard that. If, and I do mean if, we decide to go, her blood is on your hands if anything happens to her,” I vowed.

“If anything happens to her, I’ll hand you both our lighters,” Char replied.

Isabella wrapped her arms around me and started to kiss my neck. “Everything will be alright Jasper. I won’t leave you at all. I know you’ll protect me.”

She was putting on a brave front but she was worried. Hell, we all were, save for the pilot. I held onto Isabella and stood up, before walking to the nearest leather chair.

“Alright, there is no sense in getting worked up about this shit now. We’re nearly in Vegas. Let’s just have some fun and we’ll all, and I mean all, tackle this when we get back.” I sent a gentle wave of calm to everybody and peered out the window. I nudged Isabella and pointed. “It’s the Colorado River down there.”

A series of chimes signaled that the pilot was about to address us. “Ladies and gentlemen, we’re about 30 minutes from Las Vegas’ McCarron airport. The local time here is 4 in the afternoon and it is 55 degrees outside and overcast. It will be a cool 40 degrees tonight but clear.”

“So how do you like the private plane, little one?” Peter asked as he put away his laptop.
“It’s nice, I like that it doesn’t smell funny like commercial planes. I bet if I am bothered by the smell, it would drive you all crazy,” she replied with a shudder. She looked up at me and smiled. “Is it bad that I like flying in our own jet? I mean, it seems crazy because this is something that screams of a lifestyle I am not comfortable with but even with our situation earlier, I’ve enjoyed this a lot.”

I brought her hand up to my lips. “Nothing wrong with just a little indulgence. It isn’t like we take the jet to New York City every weekend or Paris for dinner.”

Isabella shook her head at me and rolled her eyes. “I guess, you sort of have a point there. Okay, you win this one, mister.”

There was a slight change in cabin pressure and I set Isabella in the chair next to me and reached over to buckle her in before holding her hand once again. I knew she’d be nervous about landing so I kept rubbing circles with the pad of my thumb over her hand. Her eyes closed and she started to take a couple deep breaths as the jet made a banked turn.

“Jasper,” she whispered and I understood what she needed. I sent her some calm and watched as her shoulders relaxed and her other hand stopped gripping onto the armrest so tight.

The ground got closer and closer and had to send her another wave of calm when a small whimper escaped her lips as she saw the view from the window across the aisle.

“Close your eyes or just look at me, baby girl,” I murmured against her ear. She turned and stared at me, mimicking my breathing until the wheels touched down.

“Oh dear god,” she breathed out and gave a nervous laugh. “I hope when I am a vampire I won’t have this crazy fear.” She clutched her hand over her heart and I saw her take calming breaths to slow things down as she sent me her appreciation.

“You alright now?”

“Yeah, ever since the car accident, anytime there is a jarring motion like turbulence or something, I get a little skittish. I’m fine. When I moved out from Phoenix, I had to get a Valium from the doctor to calm myself.”
“I’m here for you, always.”

The plane rolled into a hangar and the chimes rang through the cabin once again.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Las Vegas. Whitlocks, it was a pleasure flying on your plane. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to get back to my family by flying y’all out,” the captain announced. “Happy New Year.”

I looked at Peter and he grinned. “Because of the east coast snow storms, a lot of planes were stuck. He was a commercial pilot who was trying to get home to his family when he got stuck but managed to inch his way to Texas. When we landed from Colorado, they asked if we’d be interested and we obliged thinkin’ it would give us all a chance to hang out as well.” He shrugged like it was no big deal but I sent him some of our appreciation seeing how touched Isabella was over the story.

I grabbed our bags and the four of us walked off the plane and into the hangar. I immediately spotted our candy apple red Mustang GT with white racing stripes parked next to a classic muscle car.

I gasped. “Is that a 1967 Shelby GT500?”

“Yeah, fully restored, I have wanted one of these for a while.”

I was impressed as we walked near it. Hell, even Isabella was in awe of that car.

“Wow, that is pretty. Is it like that car from that movie about the stolen cars?”

“Gone in 60 Seconds?” Peter asked and Isabella nodded. “Pretty much but I wouldn’t name her Eleanor. You like fast cars, little one?”

Isabella laughed as she touched the classic Shelby’s racing stripes. “No, it was a movie dad rented when Jacob and Billy came over one night. I just liked the pretty cars.” She turned and saw our rental and grinned. “Hey handsome, care to give me a ride?”
“It would be my pleasure,” I purred as I led her to the front seat and helped her in. I put our bags in the trunk and looked over at my siblings. “Call us if y’all want to do something tonight. We might just walk around and check out the sites after her dinner.”

“Will do,” Char replied and I squealed out of the building as we waved goodbye.

“Let’s check out Vegas, baby girl.”
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 41

BPOV

The wheels squealed from the smooth concrete of the airplane hangar and in no time, we were on the Las Vegas Strip. It was starting to get busy with cars, causing traffic to slow so it was perfect to look around and I did just that while Jasper told me about some of the classic hotels that had long been demolished for the new supersized resorts. It was just like what we saw when we watched those Ocean’s movies that he teased me about and one of the hotels that still stands is Caesars’s Palace. It was getting dark so many of the hotels were starting to light up. There were so many colors and things to see that it felt like my head was on a swivel. If it weren’t the hotels and their giant marquee signs, it was the people walking around on the sidewalks. It was wild but I was excited.

I looked over at Jasper when we stopped at the light. He had a big grin on his face as he turned towards me. I knew he was feeling my excitement; we didn’t need the words as he reached over and held my hand.

As we inched our way to our hotel and the sky got darker and darker, a thought passed through my mind.

“Jasper, will the lights wreck havoc on your skin?” I asked with concern.

“No, it won’t, it is just sunlight that does, so it is good,” he replied and I breathed a sigh of relief.

“Good, that would have sucked if you couldn’t come out here in the day or the night,” I replied, once again excited about the trip.

“Believe me, the first time I was here, I was worried. I stayed in the casino most of the time playing poker but then in the middle of night, I noticed how people were more intoxicated and their judgment was less sharp so I felt like it was safe to go out. I remember leaving the confines of the hotel and going through the revolving doors just to see if I’d light up like my own Vegas marquee
sign. I was so fucking relieved that there was no sparkle whatsoever that I tried to come out here as often as I could, which wasn’t often.”

“They didn’t go with you to Vegas?” I asked, trying to be casual as possible.

“No, I think Rose and Emmett might have been here on their own but I never took her with me and this was never considered a family place,” I said and chuckled. “I don’t think an egotistical mind reader could handle the lecherous thoughts coming from everywhere and all she would want to do is shop.”

It was my turn to chuckle, I could only imagine the emotions that being multiplied by a hundredfold and then trying to imagine them translated into thoughts. I’ve seen enough college type movies get an idea of what went through people’s minds. “You have a point. I guess she probably looked like a minor no matter what kind of clothes she wore,” I muttered causing Jasper to laugh.

“You are definitely an upgrade, my Isabella,” he murmured and kissed my ringed finger. “I am just sorry for having been bamboozled by her for so long.”

“What is it that you always say? No sorries, Jasper. We’re together now and we’re going to be married one day and be together for eternity. That is what’s important,” I admonished him while sending him my love at the same time. “Hey, can we go to the end of the Strip and then turn back around? I want to see things from the car before we walk around later tonight.”

“Yes ma’am, I can do that.”

We drove along the road and he pointed out our hotel up ahead.

“The Eiffel Tower, Jasper!” I squealed and pointed.

“It is a pretty good replica and I’ve read you can even take tours.”

A few minutes later, he pointed to a huge hotel up ahead on my side.
“That is where Peter and Char are staying,” he explained.

My jaw must have unhinged itself as I stared at the resort building and the giant marquee that seemed more like a tv than a sign. Even as we passed it, my head turned and watched it get smaller as we moved further and further away.

We must have reached the end of the Strip when he got to an intersection and signalled to turn around. There weren’t many of the big hotels around after we passed the Stratosphere. As we drove back towards our hotel, I laughed as I watched the people around us. There were so many people dressed in anything from torn jeans to glitter tops and other various clubwear. I even pointed as we passed by a bride and groom, posing in front of one of the resorts and reached over to honk the horn at them along with a bunch of other cars.

Just as I pulled my hand back, Jasper took it in his and kissed it. His emotions washed over me and I smiled giving him all my love.

It didn’t take long before we turned into our hotel and once again my jaw dropped.

“Wow, this is beautiful,” I whispered in awe. “We are staying here?”

Jasper grinned. “Yep, we sure are. Is it acceptable, Ms. Swan?”

I nodded, completely speechless as he pulled the car up the valet line. The hotel employee opened my door and I quickly got out, ignoring his hand as I looked around.

Jasper, popped open the trunk and put his cowboy hat on before he got our bags out and carried them while one hand was on the small of my back. I was pretty much numb as we entered the hotel lobby. It was so ornate and screamed of indulgence. I couldn’t imagine how one of those newer hotels that were supposed to be even more opulent was supposed to be. I was in awe as I took in the giant Ancient Roman-style statues. Jasper led us to the registration line and as soon as he gave our reservation number. I shook my head out of my daze and watched as we got checked in.

“I’m sorry sir, the regular high-roller suites are booked. We comped a few of our VIPs earlier today but we can get you a something else. Please give me a minute,” the hotel agent said when she looked at our reservation.
“Thank you, ma’am,” Jasper drawled out. “My fiancee and I were hopin’ to get something with a view of the Strip since it is our first time here.” He reached over to me and pulled me closer to him just as I reached up and kissed his cheek.

“You two make a really sweet couple,” the lady continued as she searched her database. “Oh, here we go. It is probably a little more than what I ought to give you but since I’m the manager on duty, I’ll make an exception. This is a beautiful suite that will give you views of the south end of the Strip... so you should see the Paris casino, Bellagio and further down, the Luxor hotel.”

Jasper and I looked at each other and smiled as we thanked her when she handed us the keycards. She directed us to our elevator and reminded us that we needed to put a keycard in so we could access our floor.

“Are you alright that we got what sounds like a fancier room?” Jasper asked as we stood in the elevator.

“I am,” I said. “I mean it is Vegas and all. I am actually curious and excited at the same time. I mean... Jasper, we’re in Vegas!”

“Yes we are, so what do you want to do tonight, baby girl?”

“Let’s walk around since we were cooped up on the plane. Maybe grab a bite and maybe later tonight we can go to the nightclub here. Look.” I held up some VIP passes that was tucked inside our welcome packet. “We can get into Pure for free because of our privileges. Well, maybe we should look for something club worthy to wear first.”

“Anything you like, Isabella.”

The elevator slowed before coming to a complete stop at our floor. We walked out and followed the signs that led to our room and Jasper moved aside and gestured, indicating he wanted me to open the door. The door unlocked with a soft whirr and a click before Jasper grabbed the handle to open the door.

Saying that the room was spacious and huge was an understatement. There were high ceilings and windows along the far wall that were already drawn open to show the neon landscape of Las Vegas. We walked hand in hand and checked out the room. It was definitely much more room than we needed for the few days we were here, and I almost guessed it was about as big one of our
floors in our house.

I gasped when we walked into the bathroom. There was a beautiful step-in shower and a separate giant tub. When we walked through the doorway to the bedroom, I froze. It was so posh that I was almost afraid to touch anything, but I couldn’t help it. I let go of Jasper’s hand and jumped onto the bed watching all the pillows tumble onto the floor. Jasper chuckled as I jumped on the bed a couple times before bouncing off and helped him put our clothes away. We were both in jeans and looked casual enough to roam around as I made sure my fake ID and stuff were in my purse before we headed out the door.

“Wait, I forgot something, I’ll be right back,” I said and sped off to the bathroom. A few minutes later I was refreshed and had my contacts on so at the very least, it wouldn’t draw attention to Jasper.

“I love the look,” he whispered as he pulled me into his arms for a kiss and then flung his hat back into the room. “Since you’re doing your eyes like that, I won’t need to hide mine.”

We started out walking towards the Paris Hotel. Jasper was telling me along the way of his travels to Europe and the differences in the Eiffel Tower here compared to the real one.

“We’ll go one of these days, baby girl and we can climb up as high as we can and take in the views of Paris,” he explained as we walked through the resort.

“I’d like that, a lot!” I replied just as my stomach rumbled.

“Let me know if you see a place you want to eat and we’ll take a stop.”

I realized as we walked past a dueling piano bar that the noise was louder and louder. Bells were clanging everywhere as we stepped into the casino floor. We didn’t check out the casino at our own hotel earlier on so I was amazed everything - the noise, all the people it was overwhelming and I couldn’t imagine coming out here as a vampire and seeing all of this, especially being a young vampire.

“You alright?”

I nodded. “I think so, it is just so much to see,” I said. I knew even with the noises around us, he
would be able to hear me perfectly fine. “I was just imagining how it would be as... you know.” I looked up and him and he nodded and pulled me so my back was flush against his chest.

“It isn’t easy which is why I’ll probably go feed sometime during our trip here,” he whispered in my ear as we watched a table play craps. “We wouldn’t be able to do this in your first year for sure. If you’re already feeling overloaded sensory wise, imagine that multiplied a minimum of tenfold and that would be a normal vampire.”

“And you?”

“Probably about fifty-fold, maybe more.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize that you’re that powerful,” I admitted and turned my body around to face him. “I knew you were given your history, but to put that into this perspective is... wow. And you’re still in control of yourself?” I realized what I had just said and felt my face flush. “No, I didn’t mean it like that. It is just amazing... you are amazing.”

“I knew what you meant, I always feel your trust and what you feel for me,” he said and winked. “To answer your question, I am.” He kissed my cheek and ran his fingertips down my neck sending shivers down my body. I looked up at him and he held me a little closer. “Come on, let’s go look around some more so you don’t get overwhelmed by everything.”

We wandered out that casino and onto the street where there were even more people wandering around along with people trying to hand out leaflets to the passing crowd. They were everywhere and were trying to shove them into people’s hands as they walked by. As we stopped at a light to cross, Jasper pulled me against him again.

“They are for escort services and stuff like that. The seedier side of the town, if you will.”

I nodded and then sent him my appreciation for explaining, thinking how glad I was I didn’t actually grab them earlier. After a while, we decided to turn back around and head towards the Wynn since there seemed to be more hotels with shopping areas built into the resort.

In one casino, we walked by a huge line thinking it was something important only to find it was for the buffet. I took a peek to see people just piling up their plates with so much food and I actually shuddered in disgust. I quickly explained to Jasper that I did not want to eat at a buffet at all and we settled on a little pub at the Venetian. The food was great and afterwards, we checked out the
Jasper wanted to wear something comfortable yet stylish but not too showy. We found a men’s store and spent some time looking for some clothes for going out. I had never shopped for a guy before so it was fun and felt so natural as he settled for a pair of dark wash jeans that were slightly tighter than his normal pair and also a little lower waist. The great thing about them was it had a vintage feel and when he tried them on, he said that they wouldn’t irritate his skin.

“You brought some of your stretchy t-shirts, right?” I asked as we sorted through the clothes rack.

“Yeah, I did. Why?”

“Well, why don’t you wear one of those underneath and have a dress shirt that is partially unbuttoned to show the T?”

“I can do that, would this work?” he asked as he held up a deep blue button-down.

“Try it with the jeans,” I said and smiled.

When he came out a few minutes later, I was nearly drooling as he emerged from the dressing room with his new, sexy jeans, his black t-shirt peeking under the sapphire shirt. The sleeves were folded up to his forearms and he wore his black cowboy boots.

“Mr. Whitlock, you are one sexy man,” I murmured and grabbed a solid black button down and a grey one that were similarly styled as the blue. He also grabbed a pair of black jeans as well and paid for the purchases.

“Let’s get you something sexy to wear, Ms. Swan,” he said and wrapped his arm around my waist.

As we walked around, I spotted a pretty dress on a mannequin and pointed it to Jasper. It was a white strapless eyelet dress with a striped tie around the waist. When we went inside, I found my size and then grabbed some tops to go with my skinny jeans and went to try things on. The white dress was first and I fell in love with it right away. It was simple and cute but also managed to show quite a bit of leg and some cleavage too. I popped out of the dressing room to show Jasper and saw his eyes darken immediately. He nodded at the dress and I knew I had to have it. I found the same dress in black and grabbed that as well as we headed to the cashier.
“Jasper, you didn’t have to buy that,” I said as we walked out.

“It is our money now,” he explained and smiled when I made a face at him.

“Alright,” I conceded as we started to make our way towards the hotel. “I will try not to be so weird about money. It will take some getting used to.”

“I know, we have all the time in the world. Wait,” Jasper said and stopped. He pointed at a black lacy dress in a shop window. “Try it on?”

I looked up and saw the adoration in his eyes and smiled back. “I guess so... sure, why not?”

We went in and the saleslady found my size along with a pair of platform peeptoe pumps to go with the outfit. I put the outfit on and went back out to see Jasper nodding again at me but feeling his excitement. I found another pair of shoes that would match my outfits and we were officially done. As we neared our hotel, his phone rang and we stopped.

“Here baby girl, it’s Char. I’ll reorganize the bags because some of the things will need to be laundered beforehand if you want to take the call.”

I grabbed the phone. “Hey Char.”

“Bella, what are y’all doing tonight? Are you wanting to gamble or go dancing?”

“I was originally all for dancing tonight but Jasper just brought up a good point. We just bought some clothes and they’ll need to be washed before we wear them so maybe gambling tonight and then dancing tomorrow?”

“I like that plan too and Peter’s nodding in agreement. We just got some new clothes ourselves and they’re already sent out. So do you want to gamble here or our hotel or somewhere in between?”

I looked over at Jasper and shrugged, not knowing how to answer.
“Wait, Peter’s got something, hang on...” Char said over the phone before hearing Peter’s muffled voice. I guess she must have had her hand over the receiver.

“He says the Mirage is a good place to meet up for tonight,” she said a few minutes later.

“Alright, we’ll be there in about...” I looked up at Jasper and he held a couple fingers up. “In about 2 hours.”

“Alright, see y’all later,” Char replied and hung up.

I was still trying to understand the phone call as I handed it back to Jasper.

“His gift appeared,” he said as we started to walk again.

“Does he do that blank face thing?” I whispered as we passed by a crowd of people.

He shook his head and when we got closer, he leaned towards my ear. “No, it is a split second thing. Your eyes wouldn’t catch the movement but his pupils dilate and retract in a millisecond but enhanced vision will see it.”

We finally wove our way to the hotel and Jasper dropped off a couple bags of our clothes to the concierge and they promised our stuff will be ready in the morning. We headed back to our room so I could take a breather before we hit the casino.

“Jasper, I don’t really know how to gamble,” I said trying not to sound whiny.

He sat down next to me on the bed and turned on the TV finding some crazy channel that had tutorials on how to gamble. “The best thing is to just observe and unless you’re playing in the poker rooms, your dealer can help guide you. Also, between the three of us, we’ll be able to give you advice as well.”

I didn’t want to watch the program but I was drawn to it and it reminded me of that crazy Vegas
movie that my dad and I watched one night. “Jasper, they don’t have silly games like ‘rock, paper, scissors’ do they?”

For a brief moment, Jasper looked at me as though I had grown another head and then burst out laughing. “Isabella, they won’t have games like that ‘Vegas Vacation’ movie. And for the record, we’re not going to see Wayne Newton either.”

It was my turn to laugh. “No?” I sighed and pouted, trying to perfect my poker face.

“No ma’am but if you want to see a show, I’ll bring some of the magazines in here so you can take a look. Just let me know what catches your eye.”

I flipped through different articles when the tutorial started to explain Baccarat. That game seemed just too complicated and after having seen some James Bond movies, I was convinced it was too fancy a game for me. I didn’t really see a show that interested me. Instead, I was drawn to an ad in a Las Vegas guide book.

“Jasper, did you know that nearby is a pirate-themed casino?”

“Treasure Island? Yeah it is north of us.”

“Jasper, check this out!” I said excitedly, not able to keep a serious face.

He was in our room in a flash and looked at what I was pointing at.

“Really, baby girl?” he said with a huge smile. “Here?”

I nodded. “Yes Jasper, will you marry me aboard a pirate ship?”

“I love that idea and yes, I would love to marry you in Vegas, Isabella Swan,” he said in a gruff pirate voice.
In Alaska...

Alice POV

As soon as Edward and Esme left to go on their hunt, I ran up to Carlisle’s study to see if he had found anything with these head pains I’ve been getting.

“Come on in,” he said softly as soon as I reached his door.

I opened the door and saw him sitting on the edge of his desk, waiting for me. I sat down on the chair in front of him.

“I haven’t found anything yet but I’m still looking. If you were a human, I’d suggest an MRI but those machines won’t be able to diagnose our kind.”

I nodded solemnly.

“I will keep looking though. In the meantime, I’ll continue to keep this quiet if you still want.”

I nodded. “Yes, the others... I just don’t want them to worry,” I said quietly and trying to look preoccupied so he wouldn’t question me about my visions or lack thereof. Over the past weeks, it seemed that my visions were getting fuzzy as though they weren’t as strong as before. Luckily, with Rose and Emmett back, nobody was any wiser.

He looked at me as though trying to see into my mind before nodding at me, dismissing me from his office. I quickly walked back down and took an undead breath as I tried to collect myself.

_Maybe if I continue to look occupied, I can get away with not having my gift as active as it used to be._

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I did research on Vegas weddings. Did you know you could get a Twilight
themed wedding? Yep - amazing what you learn in Google. I decided this was a lot more fun than, say, an Elvis wedding or something.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Olympic Opening Ceremony night and ISHO update! YAY! Welcome AO3 and ADF who are now current in this story as well :).

Thank you very much to the lovely group of women who have helped to make this story pretty - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy. I really appreciate it.

I don’t own the story. They belong to SM. I have 2 beautiful kittens who own me.

ONWARD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 42

JPOV

She asked me to marry her... here in Vegas. On a pirate ship.

My mind was still buzzing over that as I spun her around after I said yes in a pirate voice. I never saw us getting married in a church or something grand, much less traditional. I didn’t expect us to get married in Vegas either but it sounded fun and different, plus she was so excited about it. How could I say no to her?

She was going to be my wife. My beautiful Isabella who was so happy that she had tears shimmering around her red contact lenses - lenses she wore so I wouldn’t be the only one that stood out.

“I love you so much, Isabella,” I murmured when she emerged from the bathroom.

“And I love you, Jasper.”

She had freshened up and put on some smoky makeup for our night out at the casino. She changed
her top to something that wrapped around the side, emphasizing her chest. I quickly ran to her and dragged my finger down her sternum, appreciating view.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” I growled out.

“You’re not so bad yourself, mister,” she said and undid a couple buttons of my shirt before she rolled up my sleeves. I could have done it myself but it felt so much nicer that she helped me get ready.

A few minutes later we left our room and headed towards the Mirage. It was a cool night and Isabella brought her black leather jacket with her. It was similar to her motorcycle one only this was more for style than safety.

“Jasper, I was just thinking, you haven’t gotten a replacement bike yet.”

I kissed her hair and smiled. “I was just thinking how your jacket looks like your moto one. If I got one, would you want to still ride with me?”

She nodded. “I would. I’d prefer to wait until later to ride by myself. That incident in Washington scared the hell out of me but I know you’ll keep me safe.”

“Well, when we get home, maybe you can help me find one.”

She squeezed my hand and sent me her appreciation. “I’d like that.”

When we got to the hotel, I found Peter and Char’s sent and walked towards them. I knew Isabella was curious how I found them so quickly when we got close and they turned to wave at us. She looked up at me and I pointed to my nose, earning a nod of understanding from her.

I was still a little miffed about the antics earlier on the plane but I wasn’t as pissed off. I knew they had reasons for keeping things quiet about their association with the Volturi. I wasn’t going to hold a grudge because they were the closest to siblings I had and I knew, deep down, that ultimately, they wouldn’t steer me wrong.
Since the three of us gambled before and have played nearly every casino game, we wanted to make sure Isabella was going to enjoy her time, so the first thing the four of us did was walk around the casino floor until she found something she was interested in. It didn’t take long as we rounded a corner to where the craps tables were. Most of the tables were full and everybody was having a fun time cheering and encouraging everybody.

“Oh! Let’s play that!” she said and walked slightly faster, almost pulling me along the way.

Of course when the four of us got to a table, she was a little lost but the three of us patiently taught her the game and it was her turn to roll the dice, the dealers were also helping her. Being that none of us were ever able to actually drink, it never occurred to us to tell her about the free drinks when she was playing so when the cocktail waitress showed up, Isabella was fishing in her purse for some cash.

“Baby girl, since you’re gambling, the drinks are on the house,” I whispered.

“Really?” she whispered back and I nodded. She ended up ordering some drink called a cosmo while I ordered a bourbon. Peter and Char ordered the same as us and shrugged when I looked at them.

It was a fun table and soon, a small pile of winnings were in front of my woman as we continued to play. She was being careful with her money at first and then as she got into a good roll, she started to bet just a little more.

“Hey baby girl, Peter and I are going to go to the poker room,” I said a couple hours later. She was up a couple hundred and I gave her a few of my chips along with some cash as I pointed to the room to the right of her. “Char will keep you company but if you need anything, come on over.”

“Alright, I love you and good luck.”

So we let the girls play as we headed in. It had been a while since we played here in Vegas and I sort of missed the days when poker wasn’t a game you’d find on a cable sports channel. Back in the 60s the poker rooms were dark and smoky and often times, just all men. As we stepped into the room, gone were those days and replaced with a more diverse crowd. I let Peter walk around until he got a good vibe about a table. It wasn’t really his gift helping him, that brother of mine always seemed to have a knack for finding just the right group of people to play with.
We sat down and started to play. I quickly settled into a bit of a groove and as the cocktail waitress arrived, we both ordered bourbons knowing we could carefully spill it onto the floor as the night wore on.

“We’re getting married on this trip.” I said to Peter about half way through our fifth hand. As usual, we kept our conversations at vampire speed just so we would appear more stoic to the other players.

“No shit? Y’all havin’ an impersonator marry you or a drive through chapel?” he asked with a chuckle.

“Actually, neither. She wants to get married on the pirate boat and I guess this is me asking you if you’d like to be the best man.”

“Well, it wasn’t really a question but if you were to ask, I’d say yes.”

*Smart ass.*

Just for that, I managed to bluff him using my gift and I ended up taking the pot in that round.

A couple more hours later and the door opened revealing Isabella’s scent. I quickly looked up and sent her my love, smiling when she immediately looked my way and walked over. She put her arms around me and smiled.

“They called it beginner’s luck! I won almost a thousand dollars in craps!” she exclaimed and kissed me on the cheek. “Oh, am I bothering you?”

“No baby girl, you’re fine. Here, pull up a seat next to me if you’d like.” There were a couple empty seats between me and a human, just as there were a couple chairs next to Peter. She watched me play for a while before I noticed her nodding off a little. I looked at my phone and realized it was already two in the morning and given our time difference, I knew she was exhausted. I finished my hand and gently shook her awake. She gave Peter and Char a hug before we both left to head back to the hotel.

The cool desert air seemed to send a jolt to her and she managed to stay awake as we walked back to the hotel. In fact, fresh air was almost like a shot of caffeine in her system as she talked about
how she asked Char to be her bridesmaid and how well she did in craps.

I hugged her closer to me, enjoying her enthusiasm as we neared our hotel.

“How did you do, Jasper? I didn’t want to ask while you were playing with the whole bluffing thing but I saw your pile of chips.”

“I didn’t do so bad, half the time Peter and I were battling it out at the end but I managed to win a couple thousand. I asked Peter to be my best man so we just have to figure out the day,” I said. “Oh, that reminds me.” I pulled out a card for a comp meal for being a big winner.

“Oh, I got one too but to their buffet. I don’t want to eat there. What should we do?” she asked.

“Well, hey... look at the couple out there,” I pointed to a couple wandering around near the main fountains at Caesars.

“They’re still in their wedding clothes!” she exclaimed and smiled knowing exactly what I was thinking.

We walked over and congratulated the couple as she handed them her card giving them a free meal, courtesy of the Mirage. They thanked us and we walked towards the hotel entrance. All of a sudden, she hopped on my back and I carried her the rest of the way in. By the time we got to our room, she had fallen asleep so I quickly got her to bed and gently washed her face of the makeup. She woke up just long enough to shuffle to the bathroom to finish getting ready and then crawled back to bed taking off the rest of her clothes. I took off mine and got into bed next to her, holding her against me while she slept.

I let her sleep in the next morning, only ordering room service when I heard her breathing change just slightly. About a half hour later, I brought in her coffee and toast, drew the drapes open and got back into bed as I slowly kissed her skin, enjoying her soft sleepy moans as she slowly started to wake up.

“Mmm, morning Jasper,” she murmured and rubbed her eyes. She turned her head to look at the window. “It is overcast? Can we check out Treasure Island this morning?”

I smiled and brushed her hair aside to nuzzle the back of her neck. “We can do that.” A sudden
thought came to my mind. “Isabella? We’re not dressing up like pirates, are we?”

She looked at me and laughed. “No silly. I want to wear that white dress I got yesterday. So a little on the casual side, is that alright?”

I wrapped my arms around her. “Very much so. You don’t mind if I wear a pair of those jeans do you? By the way, they dropped off our clothes when breakfast came. I’ll go put them in the closet.”

She shook her head and blushed as she licked her lips. “No, I don’t mind at all.”

We took our time getting ready, enjoying the walk in shower before heading out of the hotel. Before we headed to our destination, Isabella wanted to ride up to the replica of the Eiffel Tower to get a view of Vegas and snap some pictures. We were the only ones in line so we were able to enjoy the fantastic views together. We got our pictures taken and then decided she wanted to take a gondola ride after we checked out the Treasure Island.

When we first met the wedding coordinator, we were met with a resounding no until I pulled out some cash and ‘accidentally’ dropped my room key and my comp card for my Mirage meal. It was then they must have realized we weren’t just a couple of poor college students but there was some money behind our name. We received prompt service after that and were able to book our wedding for New Years Eve at ten. Of course that meant a premium rate but the look on Isabella’s face when she heard the date and time was so full of joy that I would have paid double the price they asked just for that. When asked about flowers, she looked at them and requested magnolias. It was hard to find this time of year unless it was grown elsewhere or indoors but they reassured us that they would have a small bouquet of them for our ceremony. We both thanked the coordinator for her time and left there feeling as though we both hit a huge jackpot.

We both quickly sent text messages to Peter and Char before heading over to the Venetian since I knew she wanted a gondola ride. The rest of the day we played tourist and slowly made our way over to the Wynn. When we got there, we checked out their museum and met up with Peter and Char down at the casino floor. The four of us found a craps table that wasn’t too occupied and ended up spending a few hours, with each of us leaving a few hundred dollars richer. Isabella was getting a little hungry so we made plans to meet back up later at our hotel to go dancing.

“Can we see what’s available here?” she asked as we left the casino.

“Sure we can do that. Anything in particular?” We got to the main lobby area and asked for menus of the restaurants here and she declined almost all of them while whispering loud enough for the
concierge to hear how she was allergic to seafood. I knew it wasn’t anything she wanted to try so we headed back outside.

“Let’s just head back to the hotel and order room service.”

“Are you sure baby girl?”

“Yeah, I want a steak but the whole food sharing ploy doesn’t work as efficiently,” she explained. “Besides, I like having quiet time with you.”

I smiled and kissed her hand as we walked back to the hotel.

When we got back, she waved to the view all the room we had. “See, this would be nice to sit and just enjoy each other’s company.”

I set my iPod on so soft music filled the room. “Would you like me to order?”

“Sure, let me freshen up. Caesar salad, grilled ribeye rare and fresh fruit for dessert, please,” she called from the bathroom. “Oh, and if they have green beans I’d want that if they are sauteed.”

I placed her order and then moved some pieces around so we could dance before dinner. As soon as she walked in, I was behind her and pulled her close to me as we walked over to the bank of windows. We just stood there, my arms around her and her’s holding onto mine for a few minutes before either one of us spoke.

“Dance with me, my soon to be husband?”

“Always,” I whispered and spun her around so we were now facing each other.

We slow danced for a few songs before room service arrived. They set up our meal, even bringing an extra plate since they knew there were two of us.

She sat down and started to eat. “Jasper? You must have amazing control because I am human and
my senses are overwhelmed out in the casino. How do you do it? Is it your gift that helps?"

“My gift does help a little by drawing your emotions to me. I tend to focus on those primarily. I have also been around for a while and with my natural diet, I am less apt to be thrown off from all the crazy emotions out here. This city is different in that there is a constant barrage of different emotions coming from all over the place but I’m able to manage.”

“Is the club atmosphere going to make things worse?”

I shook my head. “No, I’m good, I am gonna ask Peter to go with me on a hunt either tomorrow or the day after and you can hang out with Char for a bit.”

She put her hand on my arm. “Okay, you know it isn’t that I don’t trust you. I just don’t want to see you in any discomfort.”

“I know. Like I said last night, you never give the vibe that you don’t trust me,” I replied and patted her hand. “I know you to be a very caring and loving woman. I am not in any discomfort though; I’m stronger now than before.”

“Alright,” she said and smiled before attacking some fruit on her plate. After a couple bites she pushed her plate away. “I can’t eat anymore.” She got up and took her plate with her. “I’ll put this in the fridge for later.”

We sat on the couch for a good hour after she put her food away. For the most part, she relaxed as I rubbed her shoulders and then after it got dark, we got ready for our night at the club. I watched as she got her hair curled up and started to apply some dark eye makeup before putting on her crimson lenses. I smiled as she was almost instantly transformed into a sexy siren and immediately came up behind her and brushed aside her hair, exposing her neck. I licked a trail up her neck as I inhaled her scent. Her breathing grew heavier just as her eyelids started to flutter. A soft moan left her lips and I knew I had to stop before things got carried away. I planted a chaste kiss near her earlobe and was about to turn and leave when she reached up and pulled me down for a kiss.

Together we walked out the room and down to the club immediately spotting Peter and Char waiting for us. Since we had special passes, we walked straight up to the bouncer and were led to a VIP area so we had our own table. When we sat down, I asked Isabella what she’d like to drink and she smiled and said bourbon so I ordered the table a bottle.
The music was loud and shook the floor and it didn’t take long until Peter and Char hit the dance floor and we followed after Isabella took a couple sips. Throughout the night, we danced and Isabella drank. She even convinced us all to take a shot with her at one point. It was like drinking dirt except we didn’t have to expel it from our bodies later so the three of us obliged.

“I’m getting married in a couple days!” she shouted out with a slight slur towards the end of the night. We were met with a round of applause and even the DJ got wind of it and asked if we’d like a special song. I let our waitress know and she relayed to the DJ that I wanted the song I proposed to Isabella.

They cleared the dance floor for us as I took her hand and walked her to the center of the room. Her eyes were glassy but she was smiling and radiating her joy. We stood together, my hand on the small of her back, hers around my waist and my other hand holding her’s close to my heart. We moved to the beat of the music as the neon lights faded away and we were once again in our backyard with the snow machines blowing. It was just the two of us right then and I felt the tears of happiness rolling down her beautiful face as tilted my head and kissed them away.

The song was nearing to an end and I kissed her on her lips. “I love you so much and I can’t wait to marry you.”

“I love you Jasper and I’ll love you forever.”

Chapter End Notes

A little fluffy but they’re enjoying themselves which is always nice.

Thank you all for your support. XOXO ~ sushi
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

Can you believe it’s August already? I sure can’t. In fact, today is my 2 year anniversary at work.

As always, I want to thank AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy for helping me with the story. Whether it’s making sure it fits the POV, research or making the chapter look nice, they all deserve the gold medal for their hard efforts.

Not SM, not even an Olympian. Enjoy~

Chapter 43

BPOV

The next couple days were about the same. The four of us gambled while I took advantage of the free alcohol and then we’d all hit a nightclub for a couple hours in my attempt to sober up before Jasper and I went back to our room. It was, as Peter teased, my rock star, party lifestyle. It was fun to let loose like that but every morning that I woke up, I wondered how people actually functioned like this on a long term basis.

This morning, I woke up feeling slightly hungover - again. I was very happy that Jasper knew I needed coffee and aspirin and it was the first thing he handed me after planting kisses along my neck. He didn’t need to say anything, his emotions were everything I needed as I slowly got myself ready for the day. Today wasn’t just any day though, it was day before our wedding.

“What time is it?” I asked after taking a shower and finally feeling a little more normal.

“It is close to noon. We didn’t get back until 3 last night. You were pretty much passed out when we got back here.”

“Wow, I guess you do lose the sense of time in Vegas,” I mumbled as I got back into bed and snuggled close to Jasper. “Yeah, I’ve been pretty much drunk for a few nights in a row now. I guess it is sort of a human experience, right? Sort of a rite of passage?”
“I guess so given that experience at that Halloween party and here in Vegas. Though you haven’t engaged in debauchery and I’m happy that you haven’t,” he said and ran his fingers through my hair. “Here, have some juice.”

I grabbed the glass and gulped down half of it without taking a break. “Oh, that is good juice. No, I won’t be flashing cameras and stuff. I’ll be tipsy but not a star of ‘Girls Gone Wild’.” I shook my head and grimaced. “I bet my blood is well pickled now,” I added sarcastically.

He laughed at my statement. “We can taste a little of the alcohol in the blood but it doesn’t necessarily pickle you. Even someone who has been drinking a while, it doesn’t. Maybe their other organs though, but not their blood, silly girl.”

“Well that’s good to know.” I looked at him as serious as I could be before breaking into a smile. “Speaking of which, are you going to hunt tonight?”

He looked over at me and refilled my coffee mug. “Yeah, Peter and I will go and most likely I’ll be the only one feeding. He prefers to go feeding with Char but it will be like a bachelor party thing.”

I took a sip of my juice. “So how does that work? Do you often go feed with the two of them?”

“Not really. Vampires, when they feed, can become a little territorial.”

I remembered months ago with the robber and how I inadvertently watched him feed. “That is why you warned me about the dangers right?”

He nodded. “It is easy to get caught up with the blood and give into the animalistic side,” he said and held my hand. “I can feed in close proximity to Peter because I sired him but I couldn’t feed too close to him if Char’s around. He’ll feel more protective of her because of the bond they have.”

“So you’d feel more protective of me even though you’ve known Peter for longer once I’m like you? Does that work with just humans or animals too?”

“I would. Our connection will be much stronger even compared to the bond with Peter. I’ll definitely be close by and feel very protective of you.” I kissed my hair. “As far as the differences
in diet, the urges were a little more tamped down but similar for the most part. It wasn’t unusual to go as a family but we still kept away from each other. I wouldn’t, for example, be close to Emmett or Esme when feeding.”

“So when it comes time for me to feed, you’ll always be with me?” I asked and reached for his hand.

“Yeah. In your first year or so especially. You’d be feeding more often than I would so I’d act as a guard to make sure you’re alright when you’re feeding.” He took my hand to his lips. “I’ll make sure you’re taken care of, baby girl.”

“I know you will, Jasper. You sure I don’t make you uncomfortable asking these questions?”

“No it doesn’t. I’d rather you ask so you’d have a knowledge than not. I love that you trust me enough to ask those types of questions.” He looked up at me and smiled. “Are you contemplating your diet choice for when you turn?”

I hadn’t told Jasper that I have been doing a lot of thinking about it, but I have, which was why I often asked him these questions. I knew at some point, he’d figure it out.

“Yeah, I know given what you’ve told me, being on human blood will lessen the bloodlust especially in the beginning. If I chose to feed that way, would you make sure I wouldn’t feed on innocent humans?”

“I’ll help you any way you want,” he vowed and looked me straight in the eye. “Even if you change your mind and go the animal route, I’d help you.”

I contemplated whether or not to ask the question I had in my head for the longest time. Knowing that he would be honest with his answer, I decided it wouldn’t hurt to ask.

“So when you fed on animals, I often wondered how you managed to bite through that fur? Did you get that in your teeth? How did you get that out, floss?” I blurted out my questions as quickly as possible.

Jasper’s eyes went wide, looking like he was in a little shock over my questions before he shook it off and started to chuckle. “Sounds like you’ve thought about it a lot, baby girl. And yeah, it
wasn’t the most pleasant feel to get a mouth full of fur and then afterwards sometimes you can still taste that musky taste for a while. I tended not to get a lot of it stuck in my teeth, unless I was on a rampage but it on occasion, it did happen and usually, a mouthful of venom would dissolve it or I’d rinse that shit off in a river and spit out the water.”

I made a face at the thought of sticking a furry neck into my mouth and shuddered causing Jasper to laugh harder.

“That sounds so gross to bite into fur but I guess if you’re in need of blood, you have to do what is needed,” I murmured. “I umm... thought about it when I was with him though I never felt like I’d be able to ask.” I rolled my eyes at the thought of asking that same question to any of the Cullens. “I bet they would have given me some sort of song and dance that it wasn’t appropriate for me to learn these things.”

“You’re something else, Isabella.” Jasper pulled me onto his lap. “You’re probably right though, they probably would have given you some reply that wouldn’t have satisfied your curiosity. As I mentioned before, some of them, namely Rose and Edward felt this was a damned life and they wouldn’t have answered your questions at all. They saw themselves as abominations which is why they tried so hard to live as humans.”

I shook my head but I understood what Jasper meant. I hadn’t been around that family for as long as Jasper but I did see hints of what he was talking about.

“Well, I for one, am glad that you aren’t like that and you’ve helped ease my concerns.”

I took my time getting ready knowing that Jasper and I would be apart later this evening. After we finally left the room, we walked around our hotel and did a little gambling, minus the free alcohol this time. It was early evening and I was trying my hand at the slot machine when he received a text. He showed me the message and we cashed out so we could meet Peter and Char by the elevators. The plan was to hang out with Char and spend some quiet time together and then later, maybe do some more gambling.

We met them and the four of us took the elevator up to our floor. Peter had brought a change of clothes for later so Jasper changed into what he called his hunting clothes and they kissed us goodbye and headed into the Vegas night.

As soon as they left, I showed Char my dress for tomorrow night.
“Oh, Bella! It is a beautiful dress,” she exclaimed.

“Thanks, Jasper caught a glimpse of it when I tried it on and I could tell he liked it too.”

She looked at me and tilted her head. “You aren’t following that tradition about the bride not showin’ the dress to her groom?”

I shook my head. “No, it wasn’t intended to be a wedding dress, I just bought it our first night here and well…” I looked at her and shrugged. “I don’t think our marriage is really traditional.”

“You have a point but I wanted to give you a little something as part of your traditional, something old, something new. That is, if you don’t mind.”

I looked at her and nodded as I reached over and put my hand in hers. “No, I don’t mind at all.”

“This was something Peter gave me on our wedding day.”

She reached into her handbag and pulled out a threadbare, light blue, lace handkerchief. “I carried this along with a small handful of bluebonnets. I didn’t need it but it was something from my human days that I guess he kept over the years. To this day, we’re not sure why he kept it but I we both figured it was because of the bond we had even though he wasn’t aware of it at the time.”

“Oh, Char, it is beautiful! Thank you so much!” I whispered and felt the telltale signs of my tears about to fall. We hugged each other as I sobbed lightly on her shoulder. “I’m honored that you’re letting me borrow this.”

“You’re so welcome. I am so happy that we’re actually going to be sisters,” she replied and I saw the glossy sheen of her own venom tears in her eyes.

“You know, if the guys were here, they’d think we’re being silly,” I said. “Seriously though. I am really happy we all get along. I was nervous meeting the two of you at first.”

“We were nervous about you too, but that is all water under the bridge. So, show me Jasper’s wedding band.”
“Oh shit!” I exclaimed. “I completely forgot! I am such a bad fiancée.” I clutched my shirt and tried to catch my breath as a pang shot through me. I figured it must have been the sudden rise in stress added to the fact that Jasper wasn’t around that caused it. “I cannot believe I completely forgot about that.”

“Hey, as your matron of honor, we have time. Grab your purse and let’s go down to the Forum Shops and find your groom a ring.”

“Alright,” I said and ran back to freshen up before changing into one of Jasper’s tight t-shirts and then grabbing my purse. After putting the room card into my back pocket, I checked to make sure I had either enough cash or my credit card to get a nice ring.

We headed down the elevator and made a beeline to the hotel shops. It was a surreal experience because I knew it was dark outside but the shops were all under a covered area, painted to look like a sunny day. The ‘sky’ was a soft blue with fluffy clouds painted on and for a brief moment, I actually thought it was the real sky. It didn’t take long to find a couple jewelry shops and with Char’s help, I was hopeful we’d find something for Jasper.

“Char, do you know Jasper’s ring size?” I asked we stopped in front of a jewelry shop. as I looked over the display case.

“Yeah, when she had that fancy ceremony, Peter was going to be the best man and all so we went and picked up his ring but she decided that he wasn’t appropriate enough to stand next to Jasper and had Emmett stand up instead.”

My jaw dropped at the story. “Seriously? He wasn’t appropriate enough?”

I watched as she touched a noticeable scar on her arm. “It was bad enough that she made Peter feel that way but her own husband... I was appalled. But, years later, his ring got involved in an unfortunate accident,” she whispered and then gave me a knowing wink.

“How?”

“Oh, he came out to visit and of course somehow ended up wrestling with Peter. During the melee, Peter happened to tear his finger off and then mangled the ring when it slipped off. Jasper never replaced it after that. But as it turned out, she never wore hers either after the first few years.”
“That is just... wow,” I replied and rolled my eyes. “Don’t worry, I am more than thrilled both of you are standing up for us.” I reached over and squeezed her hand. “Come on, hopefully we’ll find something in one of these stores.”

We walked in and headed to the men’s jewelry section. I wanted something simple and classic that would compliment my own ring but keep it fairly simple at the same time. I wasn’t able to find anything in the first shop so we went to another jewelers, a few stores down.

“Hello, I’m Gail. May I help you?” the sales lady asked.

“I’m looking for something for my fiancé. We’re getting married tomorrow and I want it to sort of compliment my ring without it being matchy,” I explained and showed her my hand.

“Oh that is a lovely ring. It looks antique?”

I nodded. “It is, 1800s.”

“Oh an heirloom!” she replied and I just nodded. “Well, we have a fine selection of rings that should work. Does he have any hobbies? The reason I am asking is it has become very popular to have tungsten carbide for men’s rings. Not only is it lightweight, it is very hard to break so if he works with his hands or is very active, he can wear that no problem.”

“Well, he hunts,” I blurted out.

“Perfect,” she added and showed me a couple trays.

By this time, Char was next to me and together we looked.

“Hunts, Bella? I nearly fell laughing at that comment,” she whispered. “He’s a size 10 if that helps.”

“Well, I had to say something,” I replied and shrugged at her with a smile. “Gail, my future sister
here says he’s a size 10.”

“You’re in luck, that happens to be a popular size and we keep that regularly stocked. We are running low on sizes on the smaller tray though,” Gail explained.

I took my time to look and actually pulled five out that caught my eye. Each one, I put on my hand to look.

“I’ll take this one,” I said after going through a second round of inspection.

“This is a beautiful ring. It is actually titanium I’ll clean it and put it in a box for you. Would you like anything engraved? We have a laser engraver that will do it in a few minutes.”

“Yes, tomorrow’s date and the word ‘forever’,” I replied and the two of us were led over to a waiting area.

“Bella, that was a good choice,” Char said with a smile.

“It fits him. The detail in the middle is rough looking but it is just a piece of the bigger picture. That is how I see him,” I explained. “It is also simple but unique at the same time.”

“I can see that now,” she replied and placed her hand in mine. “You both are so lucky to have found each other.”

I smiled and felt my cheeks redden at the compliment.

A few minutes later, Gail came over to show me the ring and I handed her my credit card so she could process the sale.

“Here, Char, since you’re in charge of the ring,” I said as we headed out the door.

“I’ll do that. What do you want to do now?” she asked.
I quickly looked at my phone and then pointed to the signs. “Blackjack?”

“Sure. Let’s go,” she replied and led the way.

A few hours later, we were once again back at the craps table. I had decided that Blackjack wasn’t fun and neither was roulette so we headed back to my now favorite game. I had just rolled the dice when a strong set of arms wrapped themselves around me and a tension suddenly eased as the scent of Jasper washed over me.

I turned around once I threw the dice again and kissed him as I ran my fingers through his slightly damp hair. His eyes were bright, just like my contacts and he also seemed more relaxed against me.

“Hey you two, we’re going to grab late night dinner. We’ll see you tomorrow,” Char said as she leaned over towards me.

“Thanks, Char, for everything,” I said and gave them both a hug.

“Did you have fun, baby girl?” Jasper asked as he stood where Char was and set his money out to play.

“Yeah, we did some girl bonding and then gambled,” I replied and then threw my hands in the air since I had just rolled a seven. “Dammit, I crapped out again.”

He put his hand underneath the t-shirt I was wearing so it now rested on my bare skin. I sighed at his touch and looked up at him, lost in a brief moment as we just stared at each other.

The sound of someone’s throat clearing jarred me out of my thoughts as a set of dice were placed in front of Jasper.

“Sorry, we’re gettin’ married tomorrow and just got caught up in the moment,” he drawled out as he took the dice and rolled.
The whole table cheered for us and it seemed to liven everybody up. It didn’t hurt that Jasper was able to roll for a while, earning big money for everybody. When he finally rolled a seven, the table cheered him on again and someone on the opposite end actually toasted us.

We didn’t stay long, I started to get a little hungry and just as I was about to say something to Jasper, my stomach growled. He looked at me knowingly and we cashed out to find a small cafe. As it turned out, the lines were really busy and I didn’t have the patience to wait so we opted to call in a room service order on our way back to the room.

We didn’t say much as we got into the elevator. All that mattered was the man I had my arm wrapped around. I knew he could feel the love I had for him because he was returning his own emotions to me. When we got into the room, I decided to jump into the shower and by the time I was out, I could hear Jasper thanking room service so I decided to just throw on some underwear and his t-shirt.

We sat on the big couch as he switched on some music.

“So how was your hunt?” I asked as I twirled the spaghetti onto my fork.

“It was alright. It was nice to have some company but he opted not to feed. He wanted to wait until later tonight since he knew Char needed to hunt.”

“I had fun hanging out with her tonight,” I replied. “Oh, let me show you what she’s letting me borrow.”

I ran to my purse and grabbed the pressed handkerchief before running back to the main room. “Here.”

I sat down and watched as Jasper touched the delicate fabric with his fingertips. “I remember the day she got married and carried it. She didn’t have a maid of honor or anything like that. I was the one who actually married them. It was about a year after they rescued me and while I was still going through some emotional trauma from the whole ordeal, I remembered the happiness radiating from those two that day. It was what kept me going for the next couple years until I was in that diner.”

“She said that Peter kept it that whole time. The two of them don’t know how or why he did but they are grateful for it.”
“Yeah, we were really living in dark days back then. I am not sure either but I am glad she shared that story with you.”

“I am too, I like them and I like that we don’t have to live together to be a family, you know?”

“I do, Isabella. I understand completely.”

I finished my meal and snuggled closer to him. “Jasper? If there is one thing I wish, that would be to have my dad here tomorrow. I wish he could walk me down the aisle, you know?”

He lifted me up so I was now on his lap. “I know. Do you have something of his you can carry with you tomorrow night? Maybe it will help.”

I nodded. “I have a picture of him in my wallet, he’s in fishing gear with his buddies. I’ll tuck it with my flowers. I didn’t think about that. Though I think if he was still around, he probably would have given you a very hard time if you had gone to ask for his blessing.”

He chuckled lightly against my ear. “I am sure he would have and I think I would have been a little nervous asking him for your hand. I never had to do that at all.”

“I think he would have liked to see you squirm a little, but honestly? I would like to think that he would have genuinely liked you. He would have seen how happy you’ve made me, not just occasionally happy, but overall, you’ve made me feel whole and he would have seen that. I can’t wait to marry you tomorrow.” I touched his face with my fingertips and enjoyed the sight of him leaning towards my touch, with his eyes closed and a smile on his face.

“Actually, it will be later today. It is after midnight.”

“Well then. Happy birthday too, my soon-to-be husband.”
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay. I’ve been watching the Olympics every night and got caught. It’s crazy how much TV I’ve watched over the past couple weeks.

As always, I have to give credit to my wonder team of ladies - JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy have all worked on making this story look good and makes sense from day one.

Without further ado...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 44

Alice POV

Just as I latched myself onto the caribou’s neck, I was wracked with a vision that nearly had me losing my meal.

Nighttime aboard a pirate boat full of humans laughing and cheering.

After several weeks without a clear vision, I finally got one and it was so confusing. I just didn’t understand the meaning of this vision. It seemed so random. I shook my head from my thoughts as I took pull, after near-frantic pull, from the struggling reindeer - as though I could make that vision go away like this animal’s life. In about a minute, I was sucking on air so I pushed the carcass off of me and wiped my mouth on the sleeve of my dress.

Damn, that was vintage Emilio Pucci too.

I was glad that Edward wasn’t around when I saw that, not that he would have understood the vision, but he would have most likely asked a lot of questions. Questions that I didn’t know how to answer or knew where to even begin.

All I knew was I had to keep this one quiet. As I considered the fuzzier images I had gotten most
recently, I decided that they made more sense than this one. Maybe my fuzzy vision was from losing them?

Yeah right, but they didn’t have to know I wasn’t really mourning them, right? Maybe I can use that as the reason so my brother won’t bother me.

JPOV

I untangled myself from Isabella’s body as I threw on the hotel robe. We had stayed up into the late hours celebrating my birthday and she was exhausted by the time she fell asleep. I had instructed the hotel staff to just leave her breakfast outside the door today since we had left our torn clothing strewn all over the main room.

As I brought the tray into our room, I saw her bare leg sticking out of the sheets and my thoughts drifted to how she wrapped them around me just hours before as she cried out my name. I was sure everybody on our floor heard it, but I could care less and knew she didn’t at the time, either.

I brushed her hair away from her face and kissed her cheek. A small bruise was beginning to show up on her collarbone from where I tasted her blood on our final round of passion. I smiled as I felt my demon look at her with pride. We haven’t marked her in the traditional sense yet but our eyes could see the tell-tale glimmers from where we’ve tasted her along her neck and collarbone. I shifted the sheets a little, and saw the mark on her inner thigh where earlier this morning, I tasted her and her blood at the same time. For now, I was sated that she was marked in some way by me and I have loved each and every single time she offered me a taste. She loved it as much as I did, especially as it caused her to spiral into orbit. She was mine, just as I was hers. One day soon, her neck would finally be adorned with my bite mark on her and I wondered if she’d do the same with me. As much as I hated being bitten since it always brought back such negative emotions, I’d give almost anything to be marked by my Isabella.

“Jasper,” she whispered sleepily and turned herself towards me.

I crawled back under the covers, relishing the warmth from her body. I loved the moments like these where I held her and felt her slowly waking up. I knew she enjoyed these moments too when her eyes opened and immediately they seemed to focus on me.

I felt her lips pressed up against my chest and she took a big inhale before looking at me.
“Morning,” she rasped out, her voice husky from sleep.

“Mornin’, beautiful,” I replied and brought her chin up so I could kiss her lips.

“It is a big day today,” she said as her arms wrapped around me. “You don’t mind having our wedding on your birthday celebration, do you?”

“No, baby girl. I think since I don’t truly remember my actual birthday, the fact that today is our wedding day makes it even more special. Did you get enough sleep?”

She sat up and stretched. “I think so, I’m a little sore though,” she answered and giggled. “We were pretty vigorous weren’t we?”

“Yes, it was pretty passionate.” I kissed her newest mark and ran my tongue over it, feeling the slightly raised skin while I brushed my fingertips against the bruised skin on her leg.

Her eyes rolled slightly in the back of her head and a soft moan escaped her lips. “Mmm... I need to get freshened up.” She got up and took a gulp of coffee before staggering towards the bathroom. I chuckled as I heard her mutter something about having “jelly legs” just as she shut the door.

I refilled her cup and set her toast near her end of the bed just as she came back out. She got back into bed and sat on my lap as she grabbed her plate and took a bite. I immediately felt her appreciation as I gently massaged her back with my fingertips.

“You’re better than going to the spa,” she said in between bites. “Much sexier too.” She turned her head and waggled her eyebrows.

I pulled her into a kiss. “You are definitely one helluva woman, Ms. Swan.”

“You know, later tonight, you won’t be calling me that anymore.”

“No ma’am, you’ll be Isabella Whitlock by tonight. You excited?”
“Extremely excited about the ceremony.” She laughed. “I never thought I’d be excited about a wedding in my life. But this without most of the traditions and having it on a pirate boat here in Vegas is just different. It is unconventional but it is us.” She took my hand and laced her fingers with mine. “Mrs. Jasper Whitlock... Isabella Whitlock... Bella Whitlock,” she mused. “I like the sound of that.”

“I do too, baby girl.” I kissed her hair as she finished up her meal.

We decided to spend the afternoon doing some sightseeing after our shower together. She had laughed on our way out the door and she saw the result of our lust during the late night. She insisted that we clean up some of the mess so the maids wouldn’t, as she put it, think we were crazy sex fiends. I quickly gathered the torn clothing and scraps of lace, throwing them into the tiny trash cans around the room before grabbing the key card and walking out the door with her in my arm.

The population on the Strip had grown given it was New Year’s Eve. It took us a while to get over to the south end of the strip. She wanted to see Mandalay Bay and the New York, New York hotel. We took pictures along the way. An older couple offered to take our picture while we were inside the Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay.

“Even though I’m a predator, if I saw a Great White, I’d probably swim the other way,” I confessed after the couple left and we were once again alone in the aquarium.

“Really? Why?”

“They have all those rows of teeth. I don’t know, it probably makes about as much sense as Peter and his fear of rattlers.”

She wrapped her arms around me. “Don’t worry, Jasper,” she whispered and winked at me. “I’ll protect you right now from the bad old sharks.”

I laughed and kissed her hair as we walked out. “You’re something else, woman. Don’t ever change.”

She said nothing but snuggled closer to my side.
By the time we got back to the hotel, it was early evening and the eatery we passed by was relatively empty so she decided to have her meal there.

“Few more hours of being single, you’re not going to change your mind are you?” she asked with a serious look on her face.

I looked at her for a moment and then felt the mischievousness coming from her.

“You caught me, I was going to leave you at the altar,” I deadpanned.

“You do and we’ll have them make you walk the plank,” Peter said and smiled, slapping me on the back.

My brother and sister sat down next to us and I looked at them with confusion. “How did y’all know we were here?”

“Bella texted us earlier and we just followed your scents to this place,” Char said with a shrug.

“Bathroom break, I thought we could all meet here and then get to Treasure Island and get ready there,” Isabella confessed.

“Happy birthday, bro,” Peter said and slapped me on the back. “Here, I got this just for you.” He put a gift bag on the table.

I looked at him suspiciously as amusement radiated off of him and reached into the bag. Inside was a jar containing what looked like a baby shark submerged in a liquid. For a second I thought it was real until I noticed the rows of teeth on the damn thing and a tiny stamp of the company logo hidden in the tail fin. It was gruesome and I knew he was getting me back for that damn gift of his earlier in the month.

“Gross!” Isabella exclaimed as she stared at the jar after I set it on the table. “Oh... no way! It’s fake!” She started to laugh hard when she realized it was a toy. “Oh god, I thought I was going to scream thinking it was real.”
“Well, if I could have found a real one, I would have,” Peter responded with disappointment. “Damn humans and their careless hunting. It would have been perfect too.”

Char rolled her eyes and shook her head at the statement while Isabella finished her dinner.

“Well, I guess it is the thought that counts,” I muttered and punched his arm. It wasn’t hard enough to sound like a thunderclap but I knew it did sting him when he rubbed it ruefully and didn’t say a word, but humor was still radiating off of him. I looked quickly and could almost guess he really thought he had gotten me on that gift so I just let him.

“We should all get goin’,” Char said. “The street is damn crowded already so it’ll take longer than usual to get there unless y’all want to share a car.”

“That is a good idea. Baby girl, you alright with that? We can’t be too choosy if we do,” I asked, knowing we’d probably end up with a Town Car or a limo.

“I’m fine, I still need to run upstairs to grab the dress and stuff. Can you call them and have them meet us, Jasper?”

“Yes sir, can I help you?”

“I certainly hope so,” I said and thickened up my drawl for effect. “My fiancee and I are heading to
Treasure Island to get married and we’re hoping to get a car to take us there.”

“You’re a guest here, correct?”

I gave him my suite number and nearly snorted when he started to scramble to get me a car.

“You’re in luck, Mr. Whitlock. I can get you a limo to take your party over there. It shouldn’t be more than a 15 minute wait.”

I shook his hand quickly. “Thank you, that will give us time to grab our essentials. I really appreciate it.”

Peter and I ended up waiting for Char and Isabella at the elevators and quickly grabbed the bags when they stepped off. I wrapped my arm around Isabella’s waist and we walked outside to wait for our car. As soon as it arrived, the concierge came running out and opened the car doors, congratulating us on our wedding. I thanked him again and tipped him for his prompt service knowing he went out of his way to get this car quickly for us.

What normally should have been a short drive to Treasure Island, took nearly a half hour because of the traffic jam. We did manage to get there and the women were shuffled over to get ready while Peter and I headed the opposite direction.

I wouldn’t say I was nervous as I finished buttoning my grey button-down shirt. I was definitely excited about the ceremony, it felt like another step of us being closer. I decided to leave the sleeves buttoned up this time, just to look somewhat more formal even though I was wearing a pair of dark wash jeans. I shrugged on a black dress blazer and put my Stetson on before looking over at Peter who was dressed similarly but with a light colored hat.

“You got the ring, right?”

“Yep, I got it,” he replied and patted his front pocket. “You ready?”

I nodded and took a deep breath before heading out the door.
“You two deserve all the happiness in the world. I mean it,” my brother said as we headed over to the wedding coordinator. I gave him a one-arm man hug and sent him my appreciation.

In a few minutes, the two of us were aboard the ship and the coordinator pulled Peter aside for last minute instruction. I stood there and waited when John Michael Montgomery’s ‘I Can Love You Like That’ started to play. It took a few minutes before Char was on the ship followed by Isabella.

“Wow.” I whispered to the air as I saw my bride stare straight at me, radiating absolute joy and love as she walked towards the ship. She clutched a small bundle of magnolias and even from the distance, I could see she used Char’s handkerchief to wrap around the stems. When she got closer, I could see the sheen of tears coating her beautiful eyes with the crimson contacts. I smiled when she neared the boat and sent her my love and pride. She was absolutely gorgeous, her dress showed off her long toned legs and her beautiful skin that was adorned with my marks. Her simple white cotton dress was a perfect blend of sexiness and innocence.

Right before she reached the ramp, she looked up at the sky and blew a kiss.

“I love you, Daddy. I wish you were here today,” she whispered before stepping on board the pirate ship.

The justice of the peace conducted the ceremony in a pirate voice which was a lot of fun. I hadn’t realized we would draw a crowd but there were tourists watching us get married on board the boat and I could hear them cheering us on.

“Isabella Swan, you have words to say to Jasper Whitlock, what say ye?” the pirate asked, prompting all of us to laugh before we faced each other.

“Jasper, when I saw you again, I was broken and felt so lost. You helped me heal through the pain and quickly became my best friend. You accepted me for who I am which is one of the reasons why I started to fall in love with you. Jasper, you’re still my best friend, but now you’re also my lover and after today, my husband. I love you so much and I’m so happy to be standing here today. I can’t wait to start forever with you.”

I brushed the stray tears off her face and looked at the pirate.

“Jasper Whitlock, you have words for Isabella Swan. What say ye?”
“Isabella, I never imagined life could be so full of happiness until I got to know you. I always thought I didn’t deserve it, but you showed me otherwise. You showed me what love really feels like and for that, I’ll always be grateful. I love you so much that I’d go through Hell and back if it means seeing your smile or hearing you tell me how much you love me. Isabella, thank you for being my best friend and I look forward to forever with you as well.”

The pirate justice of the peace cleared his throat, his eyes glassy as I must have projected some of my emotions out to everybody. Isabella and I were still holding hands when he asked for the rings and I turned to look at Peter who shrugged at me.

A slight commotion from up above had the two of us looking up at the crow’s nest. Another pirate had repelled down from a rope and gruffly said he had stolen the rings from our witnesses. I chuckled internally and could tell Isabella was too as the man spoke his scripted lines. A fake struggle ensued with the first pirate and our rings were rescued.

“Now then,” the justice of the peace continued as the other pirate was suddenly made to walk the plank.

I took the delicate ring from him and slowly slipped it onto Isabella’s finger as I repeated the vows he spoke. Then it was Isabella’s turn to repeat her vows as she took the ring and slipped it onto my finger. I could tell she was nervous as she bit her lip. She let out a sigh of relief when it fit perfectly.

The cool metal on my hand felt momentarily foreign to me but quickly dissipated when I realized what it meant. It suddenly felt right and I noticed quickly how nicely it complemented with her rings.

“Arrh, by the power vested in me in the state of Nevada, Clark County and the pirate code, I now pronounce you married. You can kiss your wench.”

I cupped her face and kissed her lips gently and almost chastely as the crowd hooted and hollered around us. The cannons blasted as our love swirled around us. The kiss was brief but not short of passion and love. When we finally let go, we looked over at our brother and sister and saw the venom tears in their eyes.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the PA system announced. “Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Whitlock!”
We waved to the crowd before hugging Peter and Char. I held onto my wife’s hand as we left the boat and headed back inside the casino. She was slightly chilled by the evening air so I shrugged off my coat and draped it around her shoulders.

“So my beautiful bride, what do you want to do?” I murmured against her ear and waggled my eyebrows when she turned towards me.

“We heard there is going to be lots of fireworks to ring in the New Year. Can we go watch?” she asked excitedly.

“Sure, Mrs. Whitlock, let’s go find a place to view the show.”

The four of us walked around the Strip but nearly every piece of land was occupied by humans waiting for the fireworks display. I was about to give up when I got an idea in my head.

“Peter, Char, y’all want to join us or go back. It’s up to you.”

“We’ll stay with you two until after the fireworks and then we’ll head on the road. We’re taking the Shelby back so we’ll roadtrip our way back to Texas.”

“Oh you’re leaving tonight?” Isabella said and went over to hug Char and Peter. “I’m glad you’re staying until the fireworks show at least.”

“We wouldn’t have missed this for the world, Bella,” Char replied. “We’re both so happy for you and Jasper.”

“Come on, let’s get a move on,” I said and spun Isabella into my arms. “You want something to drink to celebrate?”

“Yeah, I think we still have a bottle of booze from the other night,” she said and waved to some cars who honked at us.

The walk back to our hotel was long only because of the crowds but we got there and into our room in no time. I put her bouquet of flowers on the table before grabbing Isabella’s leather jacket and
the bottle of booze. I shut the door and motioned everybody to follow me.

“Grab onto me, Mrs. Whitlock,” I said as I lifted her up, her legs automatically wrapped themselves around my torso. “Come on.”

I ran to the nearest stairwell and ran up the stairs to the roof access. It was quiet up here but we had entire view of the Las Vegas Strip in front of us. Cars were still moving at a snail’s pace on the road and throngs of people were walking around.

“Did you just sneak us all up to the rooftop?” Isabella asked as I set her down. She grabbed the bottle of whiskey and took a drink.

“Yep, this way you get the best view, no crowds and it is our own private celebration.”

“I love it!” she exclaimed. “Of course, you should all take a drink with me.”

I groaned but grabbed the bottle and took a sip, grimacing at the taste. I passed it to Char and Peter who took smaller sips before handing it back to my wife.

*My beautiful, sexy wife.*

Her soft, whiskey flavored lips met mine, pulling me back to the hotel rooftop.

“Where did you go, Jasper?” she whispered.

I looked at her and grinned. “I was just thinking of how I think of you as my wife now. Then it got me thinking of our wedding.”

“I like the sound of being your wife. You’re my husband now, you know.”

“Hey you two, come on, it sounds like the show’s about to start. Y’all can play kissy face after,” Peter cut in, breaking us out of our bubble.
“Come on, my husband, let’s ring in 2007 in style,” she replied. I picked her up and carried her close to the edge of the building before sitting on the rooftop.

Within five minutes, the firework show started. It was spectacular and even though I had been around for a while, I was still amazed by the show. My brother and sister were laying on the rooftop, enjoying the show. Isabella was in awe - clapping, cheering and taking a couple sips from the bottle. As we neared the countdown, the firework display became louder and brighter. Many of the marquees were counting down and we joined the crowd chanting the numbers. When it was officially 2007, the sky was filled with color and smoke from the pyrotechnics as the four of us sang ‘Auld Lang Syne’.

“Happy New Year, Jasper,” she said and kissed me on the lips. Once again we were caught up in our own bubble for a few minutes before I heard Char clearing her throat.

“We’re gonna head out on the road now,” she said and smiled. “Peter’s itchin’ to take the Shelby out and open her up. We figured at this hour, we can take some of the lesser travelled roads and test her out. Cops will be all along the interstates tonight giving us a freer rein.”

The two of us said goodbye to Peter and Char and they promised to let us know when they were back in town.

“Would you like to dance, Mrs. Whitlock,” I whispered as I grabbed the bottle from her hand and set it on the floor.

“Yes, Mr. Whitlock, I’d love to dance with you,” she replied and tried to stand up.

I held her steady as I popped up and then pulled her against me as we moved to the music that was playing loudly from somewhere down below.

“You looked so beautiful tonight, Isabella,” I whispered as we slowly moved in time, the music all but forgotten.

“I meant everything I said up there,” she replied. “You’re my best friend and I am so grateful you came back to me.” She kissed me and then laughed. “Though I really didn’t expect the pirate voice thing. I almost broke out laughing especially when that one pirate said he stole the rings from Peter and Char. If he only knew.”
I laughed and shook my head. “If only... wouldn’t that have been a sight to see?”

“Could you imagine if one of you just reached over and...” she began and then proceeded to bite my neck.

I nearly became undone right there. “Fuck, baby girl!” I growled and pulled her into a passionate kiss.

“Back... bed... now...” she moaned when I started to lick her neck, coming into contact with some of the marks I’ve made on her. She threw back her head and hiked her leg up around my hip.

“Yes, ma’am,” I groaned out and lifted her up. We were back down and in our bedroom in less than a minute.

It took her a moment to get her bearings and when she did, I watched as she shrugged out of her jacket before she perched her leg up on a footstool and slowly undid the buckles on her shoes. Her eyes were riveted to mine and lust swirled around us like a cyclone. She repeated her movements with the other leg and then she slowly walked up to me, almost stalking me. I licked my lips at the sight of her but kept still when she was finally able to drag her fingernails down my shirt.

I hissed out in pleasure as she fumbled with the buttons and then slowly took my shirt off. She caressed my skin and my eyes automatically shut, enjoying the sensations from her physical touch and the emotional cocktail she was sending me. I reached around her back and started to pull the zipper down her dress as she started to kiss my chest. It didn’t take long for the rest of our clothes to scatter on the floor and we were lost in our own world. When our lips parted so I could lick and nibble on her neck, she reached around and smacked my ass as hard as she could without hurting herself.

“My naughty minx,” I growled low as I nipped her earlobe.

I carried her onto our bed and tossed her playfully into the middle before jumping next to her and pretended to pounce on her body. She shrieked out in laughter before grabbing my hair and licking my neck. Our playtime turned naughty once again as I sat up and held her above me. We both moaned when she slid down on me.

More love, passion and lust blanketed us as we moved, our eyes never leaving each other’s. My
unneeded breath matched hers as we got into a steady rhythm. We kissed and licked each other’s flesh as we worked ourselves closer and closer to the edge. Her breathy moans of my name were mixed with curses as I grasped her hips and moved her harder knowing it was how she liked it. I whispered her name against her skin as I felt her walls tighten around me.

“So close... please, Jasper, harder!” she gasped.

“Fuck, baby girl, you’re the death of me,” I gritted out just as she exploded around me. Her spasms caused me to come hard and I growled out her name before holding her close and falling into the bed.

“Wow, I just had wild sex with a married man,” she said and laughed, still slightly tipsy from drinking earlier.

“Well, I believe, you’re married too, ma’am,” I teased and ran my fingers down her back.

“Shhh, I won’t tell if you don’t,” she replied and winked. She sat up and looked into my eyes. “Jasper...” she cupped my head and kissed me passionately. “I love you so much. I am so happy to be your wife.”

I saw the tell-tale tears in her eyes and wrapped her in my arms. “And I am thrilled to be your husband, Isabella. So we only have a few more hours left here, want to gamble more?”

“No, as cheesy as this probably sounds, I already hit the jackpot when I married you,” she said and then blushed. “Wow, that sounded bad in my head but even worse saying it!”

I laughed as I got out of bed with her in my arms. “It was pretty corny, baby girl. Come on, let’s get cleaned up so you can get some shut eye. I can’t wait to get home.”

“Our home. That sounds great to me.”

Chapter End Notes
Jasper’s wedding band

Bella’s dress
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

I’m back! Sorry for the extended delay. I needed to get this story up to date on FFn and it took a while. I didn’t realize just how far this story’s gone.

Many, many thanks for the wonderful group of ladies - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy.

Now, here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 45

BPOV

Jasper woke me up early in the morning so we could head to the airport. He promised me that if I needed to, I could sleep on the plane while he flew us back home. As tired as I was, I was excited about being back in our house with Jasper, my husband.

I smiled immediately when I opened my eyes and saw his crimson eyes looking at me with a mug of coffee in his hand. I took a big gulp and then stretched my arms before kissing his lips.

“Morning, Jasper,” I said and yawned. “Do we still need to pack?”

He shook his head. “Nope, I got all of it ready while you slept last night. How long will it take to get ready?”

“It shouldn’t take me long, an hour at the most,” I replied. “I’ll just throw on some jeans and stuff.”

“An hour is good; I’m calling the airport so they can get the plane ready.”

About forty-five minutes, I was finishing up my toast as Jasper walked around the room just to make sure we didn’t leave anything. He decided to tip the cleaning staff with some cash and the
comped meal cards he got from gambling. A bellhop arrived a minute later and took our bags as Jasper handed me the bouquet from our wedding the night before. We walked arm in arm to the hotel lobby where he settled our bill and then we were on our way to the airport.

When we got there, we were greeted and then directed to our hangar. It didn’t take long to get our bags on board and I got settled in. Jasper came up a few minutes later after finishing the checks with mechanic.

“You can sit up front with me if you’d like, Isabella.”

I decided to take his offer and he directed me to the seat to his right. I cinched down on the safety belt as he sat down and started flipping switches and turning knobs. He put on his headset and started to talk to the air traffic tower though I knew he was able to hear them perfectly. The engines fired up and started to whirr loudly inside the hangar before he pushed on what must have been the throttle and eased the jet outside. I sat and watched him as he steered it towards our designated runway. Before we reached it, he had pulled down a headset for me if I wanted to hear what was going on. I was curious so I slipped it on and listened to him communicate with the tower in ‘airplane speak’.

Being distracted like that helped, he made a sharp turn onto the runway and got the engines revved up faster. Instead of watching the plane move down the runway with ever increasing speed, I concentrated on the headset and Jasper’s movements. The plane took off smoothly and I was impressed when he got it to cruising altitude.

“Wow, that was smooth!” I said when he flipped the mic away from his face. “That was better than any of the plane rides I’ve ever been on.”

He grinned and undid his safety belt. “Even though our skin is stony, it tends to be more sensitive so I am able to be more precise with my movements and can sense the changes in the controls.”

“I guess that makes sense. It is probably why Carlisle was a good surgeon, right?” I took off my headset and hung it above me.

“Yeah, I think if we all chose to integrate into the human world, there would be things that would run smoother than they are right now. Transporting goods and medicine are good examples. It is all a theory though.”
“That would be an interesting outcome if humans and vampires lived together in relative peace. Who knows? Stranger things have happened in the world.” I looked around the cockpit and peeked out the window. “Umm, so is it safe for me to undo my belt?” I asked nervously.

He reached over and unsnapped it before pulling me onto his lap. I immediately relaxed when he hooked his iPod and music was piped into the plane.

“I had a blast in Vegas but I am looking forward to being back in our house and in our bed.” I chuckled. “If we stayed any longer, I think I would have had to go into detox.”

He chuckled as he ran his fingers through my hair. “Silly girl. While I had fun in Vegas, I am happy to be heading back home too.”

“Vegas is definitely something else, I am glad to have had the experience of drinking, dancing and gambling. Hell, I even won almost $1000 and got married.”

“I think my winnings paid for half our trip but it was much more than gambling this time. You made it much more special.”

I smiled at him and kissed his lips. “Am I distracting you from flying?”

“Nope, I can multitask easily. Besides, I like your company.”

“Good. I was about to say, our trip didn’t start out all that great with that airplane incident.”

He sighed and rested his forehead on mine. “I’m sorry, baby girl, that you had to see that. I felt overprotective when he mentioned the Volturi because it was just always ingrained on me that they were bad. That, and I want to make sure nothing bad ever happens to you.”

“I know, and had you never told me about pulling me behind you like that, I would have probably made things worse. I knew you were only trying to keep me safe at that point so I didn’t push anything.”

“Do you want to talk about it now?”
“Sort of, I mean I only know of them from what Eddie had told me. He said that the Volturi were the leaders of your kind, like a royal family. We talked about them the night of that stupid birthday.” I looked up at his eyes and ran my fingertips along his jawline, making sure he could feel my love and trust. “I... I remember he said something about them... something about not wanting to irritate them unless you wanted to die. Are they really that way? After what Peter said about them, I am inclined to think they might have built the stories up just to intimidate those who truly oppose them.”

“Yeah that thought crossed my mind too. I hope that is the case and if we do decide to go, that it won’t be a bad experience. I am scared not for me, but for you. I’d lose my shit if anything bad happened to you.”

I planted a kiss on his chest where his heart once beat. “I am nervous about the possibility of going there too. It scares me that if word somehow got around that I’m still human, you’d get into trouble, so that part of me feels like we sort of have an obligation to let your leaders know that I’ll be changed this year. The idea of being there with other vampires who might not care whether or not my blood doesn’t smell like a typical human, frightens me. Finally, I am a little intimidated that there might be some female vampire out there that might try to take you away from me,” I admitted.

He took my ringed hand and kissed it before placing it over his heart. “I see your point of disclosing our situation and it makes sense. If that red-headed nomad didn’t exist I’d have scoffed at the idea, but she’s seen you with the Cullens and lured Laurent to come out to Forks to check on you. Surely she’d suspect something if he doesn’t show up.”

I shuddered at the memory and he ran his hand down my back.

“For the second point you made, that is my biggest fear. Some of the things I was told when I was in the Southern Wars, was the Volturi were unjust and because they were the leaders, they served as judge and jury right there. Your scent has taken some of my own scent so unless they are completely rogue, they should leave you alone, in theory, and that is the problem. On paper it doesn’t look bad, but who knows what the reality is. I don’t want them to see you as my weakness and exploit that but it might be a chance we need to take if we go there.”

I felt his lips against my temple. “And your last point, you needn’t worry. Baby girl, you’re the only one for me. Nobody will catch my eye but you. That is my vow to you, Isabella Whitlock.”

“Sorry about that, I should know better about my last point, but I just picture these beautiful women after you and I wouldn’t be able to fight them.”
“Oh, baby girl, you forget... I’d be able to tell if you’re feeling intimidated or scared. If that does happen, you can be sure I’ll unleash some bad vibes that will make them think twice.” He tapped my nose. “Now, enough of that talk. You want to go online and check if our grades have come in?”

“Sure,” I said and got up to grab my laptop from the closet.

I returned a few minutes later with the computer in my hand and he got it hooked into the plane’s Wi-Fi. I logged on my school account and when the grades showed up a few minutes later, I squealed with glee.

“Jasper! I got nearly all straight A’s!” I showed him my grades, my only B was my math class which was not my strong point.

“I’m proud of you, baby girl,” he whispered and wrapped his arm around me while he adjusted some settings on the plane. “We’re heading into some turbulence so you can either hang onto me or sit down if you’d like.”

I decided to hold onto him as the plane bucked around for a couple minutes. He was sending me waves of calm as I held onto his shirt tightly until it finally stopped.

“You’re good now,” he said. “I tried to get around it by flying above the storm but still caught a little bit of the air change.”

I took a deep breath and let go of his shirt. “I’m good now. It could have been worse?”

“Yeah, it could have been if I hadn’t reacted as quickly as I did. Hey, pull up my grades now that there are clearer skies.”

He gave me his information and I nearly rolled my eyes when he had a 4.0.

“You got A’s on both your classes,” I said and he laughed.
“Isabella, you got A’s on the two classes we had together as well.”

“Yeah, I guess you have a point there. Have you ever failed a class?”

He nodded and looked ahead for a moment. “It was in the 1950s and I had to go to school for the first time in ages. Keep in mind when I was a soldier, the human world pretty much ceased to exist in terms of academics so being back in school was a huge change. The emotions from teenagers was often overwhelming for me. It was hard to concentrate when angst levels were high and then the hormones... god, it was horrible. Needless to say, I nearly failed an English class because several cheerleaders were in it along with some members of the football team.”

I laughed before kissing his jawline. “That must have been awful. I couldn’t imagine hearing it and feeling it all that at the same time. I mean, I survived high school going just once. You went a few times.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” he said with a grimace. “I’m so fucking thrilled you won’t want that. I mean I get trying not to draw attention, but that is why Peter and Char move to different areas every now and then. They don’t feel the need to fully integrate with the human world like the Cullens but are still able to maintain their anonymity.”

I snorted. “Not to mention their pride.”

He laughed and agreed before setting me back down on my seat. “Get some sleep if you want. We’re a couple hours away.”

I nodded and shut my eyes.

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“Iabella, we’re nearly there so buckle up,” he whispered as he shook me gently.

I got up to stretch and then sat back down, snapping the belt back around me. Jasper set his mic back down slightly and I put my headset on to listen in. After adjusting controls and levers, he held onto my hand as his calm wrapped around me. I kept my eyes closed as I felt the change in altitude and air pressure.
“Almost there, baby girl, just keep holding my hand,” he said softly and I nodded.

He eased the plane down and we bounced when the tires finally hit the runway. I breathed deeply to keep myself calm and squeezed Jasper’s hand until he was able to slow the plane down.

“Whew, I am glad we’re on terra firma now,” I said with a shaky laugh and unbuckled the safety belt. Once we got inside the hangar and the plane stopped, we walked out and grabbed our things. A couple of workers helped us load our stuff into the Blazer and we were finally headed home. I was still clutching my wedding bouquet but had taken Char’s handkerchief off of it so I could wash it before returning it to her.

I shut my eyes and dozed as we headed home. When he shook me awake, we were already inside the garage.

“I put our bags inside already but there is one tradition I’ve always wanted to do,” he said and pulled me into his arms.

“Oh?” I replied, still a little sleepy.

He nodded and carried me bridal style through the door.

“Welcome home, Mrs. Whitlock,” he replied before kissing me.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be posted next week. Thank you, as always, for your continued support

XOXO ~ sushi
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the alerts/favorites/reviews! I really, really appreciate it. :D

As I update my iPhone, here is the next one...

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 46

BPOV

When we came back from our Vegas trip, we spent a couple of days just relaxing. Well, I did the relaxing. Then we were back in school mode. I was pleased to see that the classes I had registered for were all available and most of my schedule was late in the afternoon. Like last semester, Jasper enrolled in a couple of the evening classes so we had time together.

I knew that this was most likely my last semester as a human so I wanted to make the most of it. I told Jasper one night that I hoped, once I was done with my newborn phase, I would be able to complete my degree, even if it was just to say I did. He didn’t think it would be a problem and mentioned how he’d support me in that decision.

Even with a heavy school schedule, we still managed to have some fun. When Peter and Char came back from their road trip a few weeks later, we all celebrated by going out to some honky tonk bar in Houston. It was a bit of a surreal experience because the bar was in a seedy neighborhood and with Jasper’s ability, he was able to pinpoint some sort of nefarious crime taking place. When he excused himself, I had a feeling this meant he was also going for a quick hunt. He came back about forty minutes later, his eyes were definitely brighter and the bruise-like color under his eyes was gone.
It wasn’t until later that night, on our way home, that he explained how he just felt heavy anger mixed with fear from two heartbeats. When he went outside, he could hear a man arguing with someone. Before he could take action, a gun was pulled and the man was shot in the head. He managed to partially drain the shooter and allowed his blood to spill onto the ground after making sure there was no venom remaining. The gunshot victim was drained of the rest of his blood and then he just set the bodies up so it looked like an argument gone wrong. It occurred to me that night, I had always asked him about his hunts. I was a little embarrassed at first when I thought I was being rude and after a couple stumbling attempts at an apology, he said that he wasn’t bothered by my questions because he has never felt like I was judging him. He also reassured me that I wasn’t being rude and he has only felt curiosity coming from me. After, I admitted that I was fascinated by the way he hid the bodies and that I was proud of him for exercising such control in not feeding on innocent humans.

He, in turn, asked how I was feeling, knowing he was feeding close by. I explained that it was a strange experience to know that he had most likely gone to feed while I was nearby but at the same time, it kept us from feeling out of sorts like when he normally went on his own. I was glad Peter and Char were there because they made sure I was alright and kept me company. He promised that it won’t be a regular occurrence but something we could do now and then, if I was alright with the idea.

Jasper helped invest some of my money in stocks thanks to Peter and his vision when the guys watched the Superbowl. We were at our house and Peter suddenly piped in that I needed to invest in Google and Apple stocks. He saw that one day, years from now, both stocks would hit over $600 a share. We also made sure Jasper’s attorney helped us with the Charlie Swan Foundation so that this coming summer, there would be a summer camp for some of the Washington kids from the different reservations. I was more than pleased that things were falling into place and we could continue to offer scholarships in years to come.

It wasn’t until mid-February that we were able to look at a replacement bike for Jasper and we were both looking forward to the shopping adventure.

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The truck we borrowed from Peter came to a stop and the engine shut off. I shook my head realizing I had drifted away to my own little world as Jasper drove us to a motorcycle dealership.

“Day dreaming, Mrs. Whitlock?” he teased.

I laughed. “Yeah, I guess I sort of drifted off and started to think about our life so far. It has seemed so natural to go from being just friends to more. I guess looking for a bike kinda brought back memories of the first time I rode with you.”
He looked at me and ran his fingertips along my cheeks, most likely because I was blushing. “You were so close against me that a part of me wanted to ravage you but I knew it wasn’t the right time.”

I closed my eyes briefly at the memory. “I think it would have scared me a little, so I guess I’m glad we took our time. Come on, let’s go find you a bike.”

His hands brushed against my collar bone causing me to shiver. “It was well worth the wait. I never thought this... us... would be so fulfilling. I’ve said it before, you’re an amazing woman, Isabella Whitlock.” He gave me a devious grin before kissing me. “Let’s have some fun today.”

We walked into the showroom and almost immediately, we were greeted by a sales person. Jasper and the guy started talking motors and stuff so I just wandered off to look at the bikes. I didn’t know anything about the specifications but started to browse around.

His arms wrapped around my waist a few minutes later. “Sorry baby girl, I was trying to test him on his knowledge. Did you see anything you like?”

“Did he pass?” I teased before pointing to the bike in front of me. “BMW makes bikes too? I never would have guessed.”

“They do and funny you should point to one. The guy gave me some good insight on the BMW bikes and he’s actually getting a couple over here from their storage lot a couple blocks down.”

“Oh, cool,” I replied.

“Here, hop on behind me,” he said and got on one of the bikes. “This isn’t the model I’d be looking at but it gives us an idea of the feel.”

I got behind him and held on as he leaned on the bike and played with some of the controls. We did the same thing on another bike until Steve, the salesman, arrived with some of the bikes he brought over.

We went outside and I was immediately drawn to the sound of the engine on the black motorcycle.
“Baby girl, I’m taking this model for a test spin. I’ll be back,” he said as he pulled the borrowed helmet on.

I watched as he straddled the bike and licked my lips at the sight. He turned to me and lifted his visor, giving me a knowing wink before taking off. I went back inside and asked Steve about the model Jasper was riding and the colors offered. He gave me a brochure and I sat down to look. There was a greyish silver available and I immediately thought that was the perfect color for Jasper, if he liked that bike. The sound of a purring engine revving up caught my attention and I looked up to see Jasper stepping off the bike. He took his helmet off and I saw a big grin on his face. I couldn’t help but return it as I walked over to him.

“Did you like it?”

“Oh hell yeah, that is one smooth bike. Want a ride around the block? They can get you a helmet...come with me.”

I looked at his face and couldn’t resist. “Yeah, I do.”

A few minutes later, after grabbing my jacket from the truck, I was behind Jasper with my arms wrapped around his waist as he started the engine. We went around the block and I laughed at the feel of the open air again. I knew I couldn’t do this on my own after that dumb accident, but with Jasper, I knew I was safe and allowed myself to enjoy it. He steered us back into the lot and shut off the engine.

“I think you should get the greyish color one,” I said as I pulled out the brochure from my jacket.

“I like that color too, let’s see if they can order one for us,” he replied as we headed back inside.

“Yes. It will look just like the one with the blue stripe on the cover of that booklet but in that clean finish,” Steve said when Jasper asked about the bike. “We have a couple in our auxilliary lot, I can get it prepped for you if you’d like.”

Jasper looked at me and smiled. “Should we get this baby girl?”
I smiled. “Yeah we should.” I looked over at Steve. “Can we take it home today?”

“Sure, I’ll get y’all started on the paperwork and they’ll bring it over once they’re ready.”

We spent the next hour getting our paperwork in order. Since the bike would be under both our names, I smiled when it was my turn to sign ‘Isabella Swan Whitlock’ on the documents. The bike was still not ready when we finished the paperwork and the check was signed over, so Jasper took me across the street to get some food. When we got back, it was there waiting for us and a couple folks helped load the bike onto the truck bed, strapping it down. We thanked Steve and headed back home.

“Isabella? I’ve been meaning to bring this up since it is mid-February now. We’ve got Spring Break coming up soon. You still want to go?” Jasper asked once we got onto the interstate.

I looked at him and put my hand on his that was resting on the console and sighed. “Yeah. All those things we talked about on our flight back from Vegas still stands. Maybe we have Peter and Char go with us too? You know, moral support?”

“I think so. They could act as a bridge if need be since they are familiar with both the Volturi and with us.”

“Well, we pretty much decided that it will be this summer when I go through the change and I don’t think I’ll change my mind. I just want to go back to Washington for that ceremony and maybe visit Dad one more as a human,” I murmured. “That should placate them, right? If there was a date?”

“It wouldn’t hurt, I’d imagine... I mean it would show the intent,” he said and brushed his hand over his hair. “I hate to ask this, but if anything were to happen to you, what are your wishes? I never wanted to get into his conversation but there is that off chance that is eating me alive.”

I squeezed his hand. “No, I understand. I would rather we have this talk now instead on the plane where there is no privacy, or worse, if we are facing danger.” I looked at him and gave him a small smile. “I want forever with you, Jasper. I want your venom to change me. Obviously, I want to wait until after the summer, but if something happens that is beyond our control, then please save me.”

He took my hand and kissed my wedding ring before his lips touched my palm. “Thank you. I don’t know how I’d be if I lost you.”
“I think the feeling’s mutual, so you need to be careful too, Jasper.”

He nodded. “I know, I need to make damn sure I don’t lose control of my emotions no matter what happens. I can’t fucking go caveman on their turf.”

“No, you can’t. I’ll have Peter kick your sparkly ass if you do,” I chided. “We’ll take the private jet, right?”

“Yeah, I know you would. I am sure Char would want a chance too. We can take the jet, I believe we can fly from Texas over to the United Kingdom and refuel before heading to Italy. Should we get the plans made then?”

“Might as well. I need to start studying for midterm finals. We should ask Peter and Char to make sure it doesn’t interfere with any plans of theirs.”

He quickly dialed up the phone and set it on speaker phone.

“Yo,” Peter answered after the first ring.

“Hey, do you and Char have plans a couple weeks from now? It’ll be Spring Break?”

“Nothing, are we going to Florida or South Padre Island for some fun?” he asked with a chuckle.

I snorted. “No, we are planning to go to Europe,” I cut in.

“Yeah?” Peter responded. “We have no plans. We’ll go and vouch for the two of you.”

Jasper smiled and I saw his shoulders relax a little. “Thanks bro, that means a lot to both of us.”

“Anytime. The missus says hi. Oh, didja get a bike?”
“Yeah, a BMW K1200S.”

Peter whistled. “Sweet bike. We rented a couple BMW bikes while in Germany a few years back and managed to have some fun on the Nürburgring track. So, you want us to meet y’all at your house so we can switch back cars?”

Jasper chuckled. “Yeah, see you both in a few.”

After he hung up the phone, Jasper shook his head. “I think he’s wanting to see the bike,” he explained.

“My motorheadpire brother-in-law,” I muttered and then laughed.

We were back home a half hour later and Jasper parked the truck in the driveway. He helped me out and then I stood there as he jumped lightly into the truck bed and undid the nylon straps. He easily picked up the bike and ran it over to the garage, parking it on his side.

I was so impressed by his show of strength that I laughed and clapped.

He quickly ran up to me and pulled me into a kiss.

“I knew you were strong, but you impress me with just how strong you are,” I whispered against his lips. “I guess from all movies and all, I thought it would mean being clumsy and oafish.”

He looked at me and put his hand over his heart. “You wound me, baby girl. I have plenty of control as you well know,” he said and gave me a leering grin. “Besides, you’ll just be as strong soon. Maybe even a little stronger in your newborn phase.”

“Oh really?” I said as we sat on the truck bed.

“Yeah, your new body in a sense will still be absorbing all your human blood and tissue. During the change your flesh may solidify, but it is as though the conversion process gives you this extra
burst of energy and strength.”

“But you said my thirst would also be stronger,” I said and looked at him in confusion.

“I am not sure why that is,” he admitted. “My guess is maybe it is for survival. If you can imagine being changed in conditions that aren’t optimal, the need to feed is there but the body won’t weaken if blood isn’t readily available.”

I thought for a moment and laced my hand in his. “Sort of like in the animal kingdom, right?”

“Sort of. I don’t know if that is the real reason but that is a theory I came up with given my experiences,” he replied.

The roar of an engine came up the hill and I knew Peter and Char were here. Soon, I saw the car with my vampire siblings waving at us as I hopped off the tailgate and watched as they parked the car in the garage.

When they got out of the car, we hugged them while Jasper and Peter talked motor. I motioned Char to come inside the house and let the guys do their thing.

“So Peter said you’re making plans to go to Italy in a few weeks,” Char said as we headed out to the patio. Even though it was an overcast day, it was still pleasant and I no longer needed to wear a jacket.

“Yes, we talked about things and hope you can be there,” I replied. I didn’t want to go into too much detail on what we talked about. I figured, if that time came, they’d know and if not, it was just something between me and Jasper.

“I heard some of the telephone conversation and we’ll be there for sure,” she said. “So how is your semester going so far? That Mindy girl still bothering you?”

I snorted. “No, remember Jasper poking fun of me when he talked about the drunken Halloween night? She found that guy who was dressed up as a knight. Well, they are still together and now when she sees me, she sort of sidesteps away from me. Jasper said it was because she’s intimidated by me.”
We laughed over that and then I just talked about my classes and the bike we got. The sliding door opened and both Jasper and Peter came out a few minutes later. The four of us started to plan out our trip, including finding a place to stay for us. Peter and Char explained that when they’re at Volterra, they normally stay at the castle if it is a short visit but for extended visits, they rent a villa. They said they would contact a property management company over there to find something for me and Jasper that was close but still gave us some privacy. As usual, we both wanted to make sure it wasn’t overly fancy but also realized we’d most likely end up with a luxury car as a rental. We compromised on the car as Jasper wanted to drive a sporty Audi when we were there, but were adamant about the accommodations.

It was evening when Peter and Char left so they could head down to Houston for a night out and a feed. I went back into the house and heated up a dinner and then the two of us settled down for a movie before I spent a couple hours studying before bed. Jasper helped with me with our Fundamentals of Criminal Law class. I appreciated the way he was able to explain some of the legal terms that were hard for me to grasp.

“Baby girl, let’s get you to bed, your eyelids are getting heavy and if tomorrow is overcast, maybe we can go for a bike ride for a few hours.”

“That sounds fun,” I slurred sleepily as I felt him pick me up and head towards our room.

Edward POV

I quickly walked over to the closed door knowing he could tell I was there.

Come in, Edward.

I walked in and nodded to Carlisle before shutting the door behind me.

“I wanted to talk to you while we were alone. I’m concerned about Alice,” I blurted out.

“Why, what’s going on?”
“I saw a glimpse of one vision of hers and it didn’t make sense,” I replied. “She was picturing pirates, humans. I don’t get it.”

“Are you sure it isn’t that pirate movie?”

“What?” I was about to say no but thought for a moment. “I... I’m not sure. Why would she have a vision about that?”

“Edward... son I am not sure but your sister has gone through a traumatic experience of late. I am not saying that this is why she’s gotten this strange vision but seeing her best friend and husband die in the most violent of ways, must not be a pleasant thing. Have you talked to her?”

I shook my head. “No, I didn’t.”

“Then what is the concern? She isn’t doing anything to put herself or our family in danger. Talk to her if what she sees bothers you,” he chided.

You know I still love you as a son. But don’t be surprised if she doesn’t fully open up. Loss of loved ones can affect people in different ways. Give her some space.

“I understand.” I looked up and smiled before leaving the room and running outside.

I took a deep breath, breathing in the scents of fir trees and the various wildlife nearby. I ran off to the north looking for a meal while trying to get some space away from the house. It was probably not the smartest thing to do, going to Carlisle like that and he had a point, it was a vision that didn’t appear to put any of us in danger. I just couldn’t tell him that I was getting the impression Alice was trying to avoid me. I didn’t think this was a fabrication like she tended to do when she was hiding something. I just missed the way she was before, but I guess seeing what she saw really did affect her. Right there, I resolved to be more patient and maybe she’ll come out of her mourning phase soon.

I caught the scent of a male Canadian Lynx and felt my venom start to pool. I ran swiftly, following him and spotted it drinking some water. I snuck around until he was within my reach and then pounced. The struggle was short as I latched onto his neck and drained him quickly until he gave one last shudder and died. After I was done, I dug a hole and buried my kill before wiping my hands on my khaki pants. I felt better now and kept reminding myself as I jogged back to the house to be patient with Alice. I just wanted the old Alice back.
NOTES:


Next chapter will be in the next week or so. :)

Thank you!
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

It’s Wednesday so it means it is time for an update. :)

Thank you to the amazing women who have helped me with this story - JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, JaspersWoman and DarkN Nerdy have all worked hard making sure the story makes sense, has the right voice, is grammatically correct and just plains look pretty for y’all.

Edited to add disclaimer - I don't own it - it all belongs to SM. I do own a house (a whole year this coming Sunday) and my 2 kittens own me.

Are you ready for Bella and Jasper?

Onward -

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 47

JPOV

“Baby girl, what kind of food do you want on board the plane?” I asked as she zipped up her case.

“Huh? I can have anything?”

“Yeah we’ve got a fridge which will have some blood packs just in case and a microwave that I added for you.”

“Oh, how about we pick up some enchiladas from the Mexican place the campus? They can make me some of those breakfast tacos that I like too. Um, will there be a coffee maker?”

“We can do that. Do you need snacks? I’ve got a machine so you can get your coffee. We want you to be comfortable.”
She looked up and smiled. “But what about you guys? Being in such close quarters with the smell of food, wouldn’t that bother the three of you?”

“It would but believe me, if we flew commercial, the smell of that human stuff they feed people is much, much worse,” I replied. “The blood packs will help if our senses get overwhelmed and I have some tumblers too if they’re needed.”

She sent me her appreciation before coming over and wrapping her arms around me. “I just don’t want to cause extra stress in an already stressful trip.”

“You’d stress me out if you didn’t take care of yourself,” I said softly and kissed her lips. “We will be alright, all three of us have flown commercial before so this is easy. Are you done packing?”

She nodded. “Yeah, I have that pencil skirt Char helped me find the other day and some more business looking stuff. I didn’t think shorts would be appropriate for a meeting with leaders of the vampire world.” She paused and looked around. “Should I bring my contacts?”

“I think you’ll be fine. Are you ready?”

She nodded but I could tell she was nervous. I took her hand in mine and together, we walked down the stairs to where my case was waiting. I was able to grab both bags with one arm and we walked into the garage where I loaded up the Mustang. I rang up the restaurant and placed an order for her meals and asked her again if she wanted anything.

“The fruit stand near the restaurant will be open, I’ll see what they have when we get there.”

As we got onto the street, I sent her my love and she in turn, sent hers so by the time we were at the bottom of our hill, our love swirled around us and I could hear from her heart and see from her body language that she had relaxed somewhat.

“So I spoke to Peter and Char, they agreed to take the bulk of the flying so we could have our time together,” I said when we got onto the interstate.

“That would be great. You can help me sleep if I get too edgy,” she replied and laughed nervously. “Wait, did you pack my passport?”
“Yes ma’am.” I patted my jacket pocket and smiled. “I didn’t get the name changed on it but I have a copy of our wedding certificate so it matches your new ID.”

She smiled brightly and mouthed her thanks.

We picked up her food and then headed to the airport. When we got there, we were directed to the hangar. Peter and Char weren’t there yet so after making sure we had the right paperwork to leave the country, I grabbed the cooler of blood as she carried her restaurant food and fruit, following me into the plane. We put our stuff into the small fridge and then brought the bags inside to the closet. A few minutes later, our siblings arrived and Peter ran the final checks with the mechanics.

We were taxiing down the runway twenty minutes later and I had to send Isabella some calm when the plane sped up. Once we got to cruising altitude, she relaxed and I hooked up her laptop so we could watch a movie together. Peter and Char had left the cockpit door open so they took turns coming out and making small talk with us. They understood that Isabella and I were nervous about the trip and I appreciated that they weren’t overbearing in their presence. I knew if I was still living that other life, I wouldn’t have gotten any peace and they wouldn’t have respected my need for quiet, downtime.

A couple of hours later, we were near the Atlantic Ocean. I kissed Isabella’s hair, breathing in her scent before pulling her against me on the couch. She had slipped off her shoes and had gotten a blanket out, draping it over us as we continued to watch movies.

“I’m going to nibble on some food. You good?”

I watched as she slid off the couch and headed toward the galley.

“You’d fix me a bag of blood?” I asked looking at her.

She shrugged. “You would probably have had to supervise but I would have.”

“Thank you, baby girl. I’m good for now though.”

She came back a few minutes later with her Mexican food and a beer that apparently Peter brought
on-board for her.

I pulled her against me so her back was against my chest. “It meant a lot to me that you offered to heat up blood for me, baby girl,” I whispered against her ear. “It wouldn’t bother you any?”

She wiped her mouth on a napkin. “No, I mean I would have to hold my breath a little to pour the blood into your tumbler, but it wouldn’t bother me if you were in need of it.”

I got the movie playing again as she enjoyed the rest of her dinner. After she was done, I stopped the movie so she could freshen up and change into comfier clothes. Her eyelids were getting heavy so I switched the action film to a lighter movie so she could relax a little before falling asleep.

“How far are we, guys?” I asked just as Isabella stepped out of the lavatory.

“We have a good six hours before we are in the United Kingdom and we refuel. Since we aren’t technically entering the country and we’re just transiting through, we won’t need to show paperwork,” Char explained to us.

“Thank you Peter and Char,” Isabella said softly and climbed back onto the couch with me. “I’m going to grab some shut eye. If they aren’t going to come on board, maybe I can sneak a little more sleep when we land.”

I rubbed her back helping her relax once she got comfortable. She actually rolled over and rolled her eyes before lifting the hem of her shirt up and without words, telling me she wanted my skin to be touching hers. Almost instantly, she moved closer to me and I could almost see the smile on her face as she fell asleep. I kept one hand on the small of her back and the other touching her hair as I closed my eyes and took in her calm as my own.

About an hour later, I felt some curiosity so I opened my eyes and noticed Peter standing by the door of the cockpit. I motioned him over.

“I sometimes miss sleeping,” he whispered as he sat down across from me. “She’s got a smile on her face.”

I kissed her hair and smiled at my brother. “She tends to when I hold her while she’s sleeping.”
“True mates, indeed,” he murmured and looked towards the cockpit with a wistful expression. “You know, I hated being a vampire at first and it took a while to come to terms with it once we lived a peaceful life. See the two of you and knowing what I have with Char... well it makes that hellish life we lived worth it, you know?”

“Aww baby, I love you too,” Char said softly from the front of the aircraft.

I nodded. “I have thought the same thing. I hated this life for the longest time. Then being with them helped me to seek the peace I needed but honestly, I wasn’t living or enjoying life. It wasn’t until we saw each other again that I realized just how fucking lucky I am to have found her... for us to find each other.”

“And soon you both have forever,” he said rhetorically. “I’m really happy for the two of you, Jasper. You might be my maker, but over the years and especially now more so, you’ve been a brother to me. Well, to both me and Char. I am really sorry I never confided all of this Volturi shit with you, and then to bring it up on a plane... I apologize for that.” He looked down and regret flowed out of him.

I held my hand up. “Yeah I was fucking pissed, but I understand where you’re coming from.” I sat up a little and looked at Peter. “Since you brought it up, I need to talk to you.”

“Okay,” he replied. “Shoot.”

“Look, I’m just going to say this once. We won’t speak of it after this,” I said harshly but quiet enough not to awaken my sleeping wife.

Peter nodded in agreement so I took a deep breath. “If something happens and I am not able to get to her in time, she wants to be saved and I’m asking both you or Char to do it. She prefers my venom running in her but if I am not able to...” I brushed my hand through my hair. “And if something happens to me, respect her wishes, will you?” I looked at him and noticed the momentary look of devastation in his eyes before he brushed it off.

“Yeah, we will, bro, but don’t think that way. If she knew, she’d kick your ass,” he chided.

I chuckled softly. “Yeah, she would. It is just peace of mind. I am confident we’ll be fine but just in the off chance, you know?”
“Fair ‘nuff, Jasper,” Char replied. “I will respect your wishes on your contingency plan and we won’t mention it anymore.”

“Thank you,” I murmured as Peter got up and headed back to the cockpit. I shut my eyes again and pretended to sleep, all the while hoping what I just asked of my brother and sister, was never needed.

A couple hours later, the plane started to slowly descend. I monitored Isabella to see if she would sleep through the landing, ready to send her some calm in case she needed it. She rolled over once when the air pressure changed and then grumbled incoherently when the wheels touched down. She quickly settled down to sleep, but woke up just as we were taxiing for our next flight. I had brewed her some coffee while the plane was refueling and had a travel mug waiting.

“Where are we?” she asked groggily and rubbed her eyes.

“We’re on our way to Italy now, baby girl,” I said and handed her the coffee.

“Mmm,” she croaked out and gulped down probably half of it before coming back up for air. She got up and grabbed some clothes before heading into the lavatory to change.

The plan was, once we landed, we’d head over to Volterra and request a meeting with the leaders. As much as I wanted to avoid it, I knew we couldn’t and thought the sooner we got it done, the better. When she emerged, she was dressed in a button down blouse and a tweed skirt. I growled and kissed her when she came back from heating up a breakfast taco.

“You look really sexy, Isabella.”

“Huh? I wanted to look professional not sexy,” she muttered and furrowed her brow.

I chuckled. “You do, I just like seeing your legs. You are planning to wear shoes right?”

She rolled her eyes before poking my arm. “Yes, silly vampire. I just didn’t want to wear boots around right now.”
I glared at her in mock anger. “Woman, I am not silly,” I growled out and nipped at her collarbone causing her to laugh as she play struggled against me.

We carried on like this for a few more minutes before settling down and finally finishing our action movie from the night before.

“Knock, knock,” Peter said as he stood by the door after I put the computer away. I nodded to him and he nodded back. “Did you sleep well, little one?”

“Morning, Peter,” Isabella replied and smiled. “I slept like a log, thank you. Are we nearly there?”

“Yeah, Char’s already on the horn with air traffic control so I thought I’d brief you two on what to expect.” He sat down across from us, just as he did when Isabella was sleeping. “So we’ll have at least one car meet us from Volterra, usually when it is the two of us coming, they just send one SUV and Demetri is usually the driver. He is a powerful tracker when needed but also serves as Gianna’s personal body guard when she’s in town. She’s Marcus’ mate.”

“She’s still human then?” Isabella asked as she grabbed my hand.

“Yeah though her change is coming. Sometime in the next year or so,” he explained. “Since he’s trusted to guard Gianna, you can guess his control is impeccable so it will give you both a little peace of mind.”

“Thanks, bro,” I replied and gently squeezed Isabella’s hand. Regardless of what he said, I was still going to have her close by me and maybe even a little behind me when we met him. As if she was on the same wavelength as I was, I felt a huge jolt of trust from her and she looked at me before mouthing out her love.

I put on a fresh pair of jeans and shirt just as the plane started its descent. When I came back out from changing, she had put her boots on and was strapped into one of the chairs, her hands held onto the armrests so hard, her knuckles were nearly white. I kneeled down in front of her and immediately sent her calm, putting my hands on top of her own. I blew my breath onto her, causing her eyes to pop open. She nodded in understanding as she concentrated her gaze on mine as I breathed while she mimicked my movements. Five deep breaths later, her hands loosened their hold and I sat down next to her, keeping one hand on hers.
When we finally landed, she let out a sigh of relief. “I really hope once I’m changed, I won’t have this phobia,” she said and grimaced.

“I don’t think it would be this pronounced but you might still have twinges of fear,” I confided and heard the slight change in the engine. “Baby girl, we’re about to stop, just stay with me.”

“Don’t worry, I will,” she said reassuringly.

Once the plane came to a complete stop, our paperwork was cleared. Char had come onto the galley and stowed the blood in a hidden compartment during the taxiing. It happened so fast that I had to explain to Isabella what was going on. The four of us laughed when she said that we could always have a career in bootlegging alcohol if we ever wanted to.

When we were given the okay to exit the aircraft, we walked down the stairs and I spotted a dark, tinted SUV with a driver in sunglasses. Isabella noticed the car along with the vampire and immediately stood behind me so I could protect her. She was curious and wary but at the same time, she was radiating trust. I placed my hand on her hip as I stared at the man who had gotten out of the vehicle and started to approach us. After nodding to Peter and Char, he looked over at us and while he didn’t give off any threatening vibe, the fact that he lingered a second too long on Isabella caused me to crouch slightly and let out a low growl of warning. His hands automatically went up and he stopped walking.

“I am Demetri of the Volturi. I understand you’re Peter’s brother and sister-in-law, I’m here to take the four of you to the castle.”

I stood up a little after making sure he wasn’t feeling bloodlust or anything threatening and nodded in acknowledgement. No doubt either Peter or Char had informed him prior to us leaving the plane.

“Jasper Whitlock and my wife Isabella,” I replied, my eyes never leaving his as we walked closer to the car. I helped Isabella into the back row of the car so we’d be as far away as possible from him.

The car ride was long but I was happy he drove fast. Isabella sat close to me and held onto my hand as I put my arm around her shoulder. She was still nervous and sent her emotions to me while I returned with my pride and love for her. We spent the ride breathing in each other’s scent, occasionally looking out the windows. I could tell she was interested in the passing landscape but the high speed and the anticipation of our meeting distracted her.
It was a good half hour before the car came to a stop and we made our way out of the car after my brother and sister exited.

“Mr. and Mrs. Whitlock,” Demetri began, “the three of us will inform Aro of your visit. I’ll escort the two of you to the throne room.”

I nodded curtly as we followed him into the castle. A human woman greeted our party in Italian and I once again, simply nodded. With each step, I could feel my nerves as well as my Isabella’s. She held onto my hand so tight that if I was a human, I think her nails would have dug into my skin.

We walked down a couple corridors before stopping in front of some ornately carved double doors. “We’ll be back shortly, you can wait inside here, would your wife like refreshments?”

I looked over at Isabella and she looked up and shook her head.

“We’re good,” I replied and the two of us stepped inside.

Chapter End Notes

Well, what did you think? I ended the chapter here otherwise the next “natural break” I saw would have been a cliffhanger. I mean, a really evil one. So this was the better choice.

Thank you, as always for your continued support. I really appreciate it.

XOXO
sushi
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the continued support. I really, really appreciate it and love hearing from you.

Thank you to the wonderful women who helped make this chapter readable and pretty - JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, JaspersWoman and DarkNnerdy. You all rock and I LURVE YOU!!

I am not SM. I just like to play with her characters.

Are you ready for Jasper and Bella to meet the Volturi? Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 48

JPOV

We walked into the throne room and Isabella held my hand tightly as I looked around to make sure we were safe.

“We’re the only ones here, baby girl,” I murmured in her ear.

She breathed a sigh of relief. “Oh god, that was unnerving, to say the least. The car ride, this place...everything,” she whispered back and shuddered. I sent her some calm as we waited for the arrival of the three kings.

“I’m proud of you,” I said. “You were nervous but you trusted me to keep you safe.”

“I was. Not only seeing other vampires but meeting royalty, of your kind.” She laughed nervously.

“They’ll soon be yours too,” I replied, kissing her temple.
“All the more reason to be nervous... Jasper?” she began, dropping her voice low. “That Demetri guy, he did he mean well? He didn’t... you know, have any ill will?”

“I didn’t feel anything that would indicate it, but we will both be cautious all the same.”

We walked around the room as we waited for the grand arrival. It was ornate with light colored walls and a domed ceiling. There was light coming in from outside, but the windows were somehow treated so that my skin didn’t sparkle. In front of the room, there were three thrones that appeared to have been carved in granite and inlaid in ivory and jewels. When we passed by them, Isabella’s breath hitched and her nerves once again shot up so I hugged her and kissed her temple. When we got to the other side of the room, we actually separated to look at the paintings that adorned the walls.

A side door opened from behind us and I turned around. One of the brothers, who I recognized from Carlisle’s painting, appeared with someone who appeared to be a Volturi guard based on the telltale hood over their head. Isabella wasn’t aware we were no longer alone, her ears not hearing their near silent approach. I felt the exact moment he recognized me and then fear before blinding pain ripped through my body. It was like I was on fire. Screams were heard and I wasn’t sure if they were coming from me as I fell to my knees.

“Jasper!” Isabella yelled out and I could see her running over.

I wanted to tell her to stop where she was, that this type of pain would kill her but I couldn’t talk. I gritted my teeth to keep from screaming out once again as another surge of pain shot through me.

“Stop, please stop! You’re hurting him!” I saw tears streaming down her face as she kneeled and wrapped her arms around me. All of a sudden, the pain stopped and I was able to take notice of my surroundings once again. I held onto my wife and ran my hands down her back in an effort to comfort her.

“Cease!” a voice demanded from across the room followed by many footsteps running into the room. “Jane, stop now, I command you. Caius, Major Whitlock and his bride are here on their own volition. They are our guests, why on earth did you have Jane attack?”

“Jasper, my Jasper,” she cried out as she ran her hands to make sure I was alright. I gently wiped the tears off her face and sent her my love and gratitude as I stood up and pulled her close and slightly behind me.
The king who yelled at Caius, who I assumed to be Aro, was talking to him and touching his hand. Another king had arrived and was staring at the two of us with interest. Peter, Char, Demetri and a couple other guards were also in the room. The guard, Jane, was being held by another who was whispering to her. Aro looked over and started to walk towards us at a pace slightly faster than human.

“Major Whitlock, Mrs. Whitlock, I do apologize for what happened, Caius saw you, recognized who you were and thought we were immediately in danger. You see, we just got word that she might have a spy and we’ve been on edge.”

I tilted my head towards him not knowing who the ‘she’ he was referring to but I had a vague idea.

“I’m sorry for giving the orders to have Jane use her ability on you,” Caius said and I could feel his sincere apology. “I overreacted.”

“I guess we could start the meeting,” the other king, Marcus, said as he sat down on his throne.

In no time, the kings assembled in front of the room with the guards lined up on either side of the raised platform. I walked slowly to the middle of the room with Isabella close to my side. She was still nervous, but she was also a little pissed over what happened earlier.

Aro stood up and cleared his throat when we stood in front of them. “Good afternoon Major and Mrs. Whitlock. Again I apologize for the incident earlier. I am Aro, to my right is my brother Caius and to my left is Marcus.”

I bowed my head briefly and from the corner of my eye, I saw Isabella doing the same, her hand still in mine. “Your majesties,” I said.

Aro stepped off the dais and made his way to me. I fought back a growl, but was more than pleased when Isabella automatically stepped behind me.

“I mean no harm, it is my gift, I can read your mind, if you will, by a touch of your hand,” he explained.
Isabella stiffened against me at his words and her nerves nearly tripled. If I had to venture a guess, the mention of mind reading threw her off.

I didn’t detect ulterior motives so I held out my hand, knowing that my exposed wrist held scars that made every Volturi nervous. Aro placed his hand over mine, as though in a handshake, and was confused.

“I...I see you’ve lived a long life but things are really fuzzy,” he said, his brows furrowed in deep thought. “Mrs. Whitlock, may I?”

I knew that the request was more of a demand so I stepped to the side, but kept my hand on the small of Isabella’s back. I watched as she looked at me first and with my slight nod, she brought her shaking hand up. Aro brushed his hand underneath hers and more confusion radiated off of him before he thanked us.

“Marcus,” he called out. “What do you see between them?”

Marcus stood up and smiled. “They are mates. I see a strong bond between them, it is probably as strong as mine is with Gianna.”

I immediately sent him both our appreciation and saw his eyes react when the emotions hit him. He nodded slightly and sat back down.

“Mrs. Whitlock, are you able to feel your mate’s emotions?” Aro asked as he continued to look at us.

“Yes, I can and he can feel mine,” she replied.

“I’m not able to read you and Major Whitlock’s thoughts, they are fuzzy,” he admitted.

“Your majesty, I don’t use the title Major anymore. It is Jasper,” I said and felt Isabella’s hand squeezing mine. “And this is Isabella.”

“You can call me Bella,” she whispered out. “Is everything alright?”
“Yes, I believe so,” Aro replied and went quickly over to his brothers.

I heard the word ‘Renata’ and ‘shield’ as he whispered frantically at what was happening. I kept a close monitor on the emotional climate and didn’t notice anything that would put the two of us in danger but they were definitely curious. I heard a gasp from one of the guards as they must have heard the discussion. The young guard, Jane, stepped forward and looked at Aro.

“There was a moment when I was ordered to send pain to Mr. Whitlock, he was hurting until she touched him. I think your theory of her being a shield might have merit.”

I was contemplating the idea of her being a shield and I could tell Isabella had questions too.

“Let me try something, brother,” Caius cut in as he stood up. He didn’t step off the dais but looked at the two of us. “Mr. Whitlock, you said you are able to feel her emotions, but is it all the time or just by touch?”

“No your majesty, it is all the time,” I explained and had a feeling I knew what was coming.

“Just for a few minutes, baby girl,” I whispered, at this point not caring who heard. She nodded and I slowly slid my hand off of hers, but remained close to her.

Aro touched my hand once again and smiled. “It is clearer now, thank you. Things are still a little fuzzy, but I can see you have concerns and also contemplated coming out here to protect your mate. We have no intention of harming either of you and we might be able to help answer your questions or concerns. Mrs. Whitlock I mean, Isabella, from your mate’s memories, I can see you once had a suitor from the Cullen family?”

Low growls and mumbling filled the air at the mention of that name and Aro actually had to raise his hands to silence the group before looking at Isabella again.

She nodded. “Ye...yes,” she stuttered. “He broke up with me though, saying it would never work and I’d soon forget him,” she blurted out. “I believed him to a point, but that was until I saw Jasper again and he proved time and time again that I was never really meant to be with Eddie.”
“I know you both probably want to decompress. How about we meet again tomorrow so you can get settled. It will be less formal this time. We can even meet in the conservatory. Your brother and sister know the way.” He smiled and ghosted back to the platform. “Enjoy your evening, young Whitlocks and we shall see you tomorrow.”

I could hear Marcus agreeing with his brother that the conservatory was the perfect place to meet.

Everybody left in less than 10 seconds, except for Peter and Char.

“Shit bro, we didn’t expect Caius to freak out like that,” Peter explained sending waves of apologies to me.

“They are a little on edge,” Char added.

“It is Maria, isn’t it?” I asked as we headed down the corridor.

“Maria?” Isabella gasped. “That... she... are we in danger?”

“No, little one, I think she’s got her sights on royalty which is why Caius freaked out when he saw you.”

“Makes sense,” I replied. “I’ll want to know more about what they know though.”

As we made our way to the main room where Rosa was, I noticed Jane standing by the desk waiting for us.

I paused when I saw her and heard a sharp inhale coming from Isabella as she recognized the young guard. I quickly sent her some calm and wrapped my arm around her waist.

“Signore Whitlock, I wish to apologize,” Jane said softly and looked at me and then looked at Isabella. “I was just doing what I was told.”

“It is Jasper, and I understand. I was a soldier and had to listen to my superiors as well,” I replied.
and tried not to sound harsh. “I don’t like that my wife could have been harmed though.”

“Signore... Jasper, I didn’t mean to. I apologize, Signora Whitlock. I am grateful my gift didn’t harm you,” she whispered and curtseyed before running back into the castle.

“I have a feeling she’s not used to apologizing,” I whispered against Isabella’s ear as we waved goodbye to Rosa. “She meant it though, that you weren’t harmed.”

“Our cars are waiting for us outside. Our luggage and stuff has been separated and in the trunk. Little one, the house you’re renting is within walking distance to some eateries. Obviously I couldn’t tell you how they are, but Rosa here helped me with the inquiries and she said the food is divine.”

“Thank you, Peter,” she said and smiled. “Rosa, thank you... um, grazie.”

“Oh, Signora Whitlock, it is my pleasure. There is a small cafe across from your house that can deliver if you’d like. They have great wine as well. Have a good evening, buonasera.”

When we got outside, there two Audi R8s sitting there; a black one and a silver one.

“Nice ride,” Isabella whispered as she ran a finger down the hood of the silver car.

“Here,” Peter said as he tossed me the keys. “Looks like your girl is diggin’ the silver bird. I thought so and put the coordinates to your house on the navigation system.”

“Thanks, where y’all heading?” I asked.

“Oh we’re gonna go on a road trip just to see how this girl feels,” he said with a leering grin causing Char to smack his arm and laugh.

“We’ll call before coming over tomorrow. I think it be best if we all show up together,” Char said and hugged us before stepping into the car. “Blood is in the cooler so make sure you store it asap.”
I nodded and waved to them before walking Isabella into the car. I felt a small wave of happiness coming from somewhere behind me and looked to find a human woman standing on a balcony, smiling at the two of us and waving when she realized she was spotted. I figured she must be Gianna, the mate to the king, so I gave her a quick nod before getting into the car.

It didn’t take long before we got to the house and I handed Isabella the house keys once I pulled the car into the designated spot. I helped her out of her car and then popped the trunk to grab our cases, grateful that we didn’t pack much because there wasn’t a whole lot of room. I handed her the ice chest as I carried our bags to the door and up the flight of stairs.

It was a modest house but it was private and had a nice balcony off the main bedroom. One of the surprises was a very roomy shower that was similar to the one at our house and even Isabella commented on it when we explored.

“Let me fix you something, Jasper,” she said when we made our way back to the kitchen.

I nodded and sat down as she started to boil a pot of water and then placing a bag into it. She was fishing around for a lidded tumbler and I noticed her hands were still shaky.

“You alright, baby girl?” I asked when she twisted off the lid and grabbed the blood bag by the valve and snipped it off with some kitchen shears.

She nodded as she poured the blood into the cup and then screwed the lid on before handing it to me. Just as she had seen me do several times, I watched as she put the empty bag into the sink and poured the hot water over it, washing most of the blood off. She put the rest of the supply into the fridge before turning around to face me.

“Come on, let’s sit down,” she said, sounding exhausted.

I followed her taking a couple huge sips and sighing as we sat down on the couch. She started to rub her hands over me like she did earlier.

“Are you sure you’re alright, Jasper?” she asked and I could smell the saltiness of tears that were falling on her face.

I set my cup on the table and pulled her onto my lap. “Baby girl, I am fine, that shit hurt though,” I
said gruffly as I pulled her skirt up higher so she could wrap her legs around me.

“I was so scared when you started to scream. You... you looked like you were in so much pain.”

“Fuck, I wanted to tell you to keep away from me, but it hurt so much that I couldn’t talk. I am so fucking glad you didn’t feel it. If anything happened to you...” I couldn’t even finish my thought.

She started to unbutton my shirt and I nuzzled against her neck when I felt her warm hands over my flesh. “...I just need to be sure,” she whispered. “I love you so much.”

“I love you, Isabella. Are you alright?”

She nodded. “I’m just a little shaky and the blood bag, while it didn’t make me woozy, I felt a little weird pouring that into a cup.” She took a deep breath. “I’ll be okay.”

I grabbed the cup and carried her, still wrapped around me, over to the bedroom where we undressed to get a little more comfortable. She took her time running her hands over me and kissing my body. I growled and purred at the sensation.

“So, what they said... about me being a shield, is that really possible?”

“Anything is possible, but you somehow shielded me from Jane’s gift. Thank you, baby girl,” I whispered against her lips earning a moan from her and a slight roll of her hips.

“I never realized,” she said breathlessly as she dragged her nails down my chest. “Did they feel bad for doing that to you? Because I wanted to tear them apart and burn them, at first.”

I growled as I imagined my sexy woman doing just that and smelled her arousal. She looked at me before gently biting my lower lip as she lifted her body up from my lap. The head of my cock felt her wetness and I teased her a little, earning a gasp before nodding at her. She slowly sank down onto me, her eyes fluttering at the sensation. I could tell mine had gone dark as coal as I was fully sheathed within her.

We moved slowly, our hands touching and caressing, her nails biting into my flesh and her bites
causing me to shiver. We didn’t need to say anything as proof that our love grew over what we experienced today, I projected my emotions to her and took hers in so it swirled around us like a blanket. When she was nearing that precipice, her moans became louder and curses slipped from her mouth. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head as she leaned her head back, exposing herself to me. I knew what she wanted and she knew that I needed it as well. I ran my finger along her collarbone before running my tongue and feeling the spots where I had pierced her skin before.

I couldn’t stop myself this time from dragging my teeth along her skin. There was no pool of venom but it opened a wound bigger than before. I gently sucked and tasted her as her walls tightened around me. It was nothing but blood, and was grateful I hadn’t done anything rash to cause her to be changed prematurely.

“Jasper!” she cried out as I took in one more small pull before sealing the mark leaving her with a bruise and another, more permanent mark on her body.

The tightening sensation and her ecstasy had me thrusting a couple times before I came hard, nearly seeing spots before my eyes; the intensity causing her to have another orgasm. I laid down onto the bed, bringing her close against me as she caught her breath. A smile graced her lips as she looked into my eyes and kissed me. She reached over and handed me the cup, letting me finish the blood before placing it back on the night stand.

“It felt different,” she said, two minutes later. “You used your teeth this time, but it didn’t hurt.” She rubbed her wrist, no doubt remembering that incident from what seemed like ages ago.

“I didn’t bite down. Did it scare you?”

“No, it didn’t scare me but if you didn’t bite, how did you get the blood? Can you see teeth marks now?” She touched the spot just above the collarbone.

“I ran my teeth along your skin and it cut open. The wound is bigger than the other marks and you can sort of see a tooth indentation but because I dragged my teeth, it is a little distorted.”

“I think we both needed that tonight given all that happened,” she mused. “I think I’m started to think more in terms of being a vampire than human. Well, compared to when you first came back to Forks.”

“Yeah, your body seems to know. It is like you were made to become a vampire. Today, with you
automatically moving behind me at signs of danger, that is a part of being with a vampire.”

“And when I was making sure you were alright?” she asked.

I nodded and heard the soft grumble of her stomach.

“Hey, you want to order some food?”

“Yeah, is there a menu? We can get it delivered, she said, right?”

“I think I saw something down in the kitchen, hang on.”

I quickly ran over and grabbed the menu and jumped back into bed in seconds. “I can translate for you if you’d like, seeing as it is in Italian.”

“Do you speak it fluently?” she asked.

I shook my head. “I understand it well enough to get by, but that is about it.”

After perusing the menu, she settled for some pasta dish, a dessert and a bottle of wine. I rang up the order and was told it would be fifteen minutes before it was ready to be delivered. We stayed in bed just enjoying each other’s company when the buzzer rang and I quickly threw on a pair of sweats.

“Take your time, Isabella,” I said as I watched her scrambling for clothes.

I managed to hook up her laptop to the TV and we watched a movie until it got late in the evening. The toll of the day and the near empty bottle of wine had put her to sleep, so I carried her into the room and stripped off our clothes before getting into bed.

When I was certain she had fallen asleep, I allowed myself to think about what happened earlier and how I could have lost her. If I had been incapacitated still, would I have been able to make it to her or be allowed to change her? Granted her motorcycle accident was scary, but this downright
frightened me. I was in a room full of other vampires and I could have lost her for good. I kissed her neck, enjoying the feel of her warm, soft skin against me. I tried to think of the positive that came out of that incident. I didn’t feel threatened by any of the Volturi; not the kings or the guards and that made me a little hopeful. They wanted to meet with us again in the morning but in a less formal atmosphere. Surely that meant something positive, right?

For the rest of the night, I held onto Isabella while she slept. I was grateful as hell that she could have a gift and that helped save me.

Chapter End Notes

NOTES
Hope you liked that chapter. So the part when Jane used her gift on Jasper? Yeah that was where I was going to end the previous chapter. That was the original plan but it didn’t flow as nicely.
Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the alerts, favorites and reviews. I really enjoy reading all of the reviews so thank you!

JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, JaspersWoman and DarkN Nerdy have worked hard in making this story look pretty so props to them.

SM owns this and my two kittens own me.

Remember - this story is AU so I’ve taken some “factoids” (courtesy of Twilight Lexicon) and changed some things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 49

BPOV

I woke up to the usual scent of Jasper and coffee, and for a brief moment, I thought we were back at our house, in our bed. The sounds coming from outside were different though and it took me a few seconds before I realized we weren’t in Texas, we were in Italy. That, of course, meant the incident where Jasper fell screaming in pain was real. I slowly turned towards the cooler body next to me and smiled when I looked into the crimson eyes I was now so familiar with. I tilted my head to place a kiss on his lips before getting out of bed to take care of my needs.

When I came out of the bathroom, I grabbed my mug of coffee and climbed back into bed, sitting in between Jasper’s legs and resting my back against his chest.

“You and coffee are my two favorite scents in the morning,” I said after taking another gulp.

“Why, thank you, ma’am. It is good that I’ve taken top billing now,” he teased and wrapped his arm around my waist.

“Smart ass, vampire husband of mine,” I retorted before rubbing my head against his shoulder.
I sipped my coffee in silence, enjoying the feel of Jasper against me while also trying to wrap myself around the idea that I had a gift.

“So a shield protects then?” I said once I was halfway done with my drink.

“It would appear so. It could also be the reason why you were silent to Eddie,” he replied.

I nearly spit my coffee when he said that. “What?” I exclaimed. “I mean all this time, I thought I was sort of defective and...” I shook my head. “Wow. It was because I was... or am, a shield. Then why is it you’re able to feel me? Is it like our bond where we are closer?”

He reached over and handed me another mug of coffee. “Here, I also grabbed some sort of pastry from across the street for you this morning. It has chocolate and the lady said it was one of their specialties.”

I reached into the paper bag and took out something that resembled a croissant. I took a bite and nodded. “This is delicious!”

“So to answer your question, I am not sure. Perhaps they can help us today. Speaking of which, we should probably get ready soon.”

We had some fun in the shower and actually missed the call from Peter. They were on their way and were about forty minutes away when they left the voicemail. I decided to throw on a simple knit dress but when I looked in the mirror, I realized it showed a lot of skin around my neckline and thought it wouldn’t be appropriate, especially since it showed the bruise on my collarbone from last night.

“No, leave it on,” Jasper whispered as I fumbled for the side zipper. “It shows off the marks on your neck. I want them to see it, it could help protect you.” I nodded and held up the heart necklace for him to put on me. Normally I probably would have teased him for being possessive, but given we were outnumbered, I figured he had a point and kept quiet.

When I was dressed, I sat down to put on my less dressy boots as Jasper finished buttoning up his shirt. He had a black t-shirt underneath his dark blue button-down and a pair of jeans he had bought in Vegas. I wanted him to leave his forearms exposed and must have projected my disappointment when he buttoned up his wrists.
“The scars might seem too threatening to them if I leave my arms exposed, baby girl. They’ll see enough on my neck,” he explained.

“I guess you have a point. I just like seeing your arms,” I said and reached up to kiss his lips.

The buzzer rang and we headed out to the main room as Jasper blurred down the steps to let Peter and Char in. We greeted each other and then Peter began to talk about his car and how he raced it along some winding roads. I could see from the spark in Jasper’s eyes that he wanted to as well. I couldn’t blame him. I sat down on the couch next to Char as we watched the guys go on with their guy talk. I looked at her at one point and nearly started to laugh as she motioned towards Peter and rolled her eyes.

“Enough woman,” Peter barked out before kissing her. “I know, you get bored when I go on about cars. I’m just trying to get Jasper to race me.”

I looked up at Jasper and he smiled before sitting down next to me. “Race?” I asked as I placed the now empty mug on the table.

“Not a huge one, just on the road towards Volterra. Well, if you’re game, that is,” Jasper replied.

I shook my head and sighed. “What’s at stake other than bragging rights?”

“Five hundred Euros,” Peter quipped. “We haven’t raced like this in ages, remember, Jasper?”

I watched as he slowly smiled and then laughed. “Yeah, we had ‘57 T-Birds and were in the middle of some desert stretch of road so Char got out of your car and just like right out of some 1950s greaser movie, she waved her scarf down, motioning us to race,” he explained.

Char giggled and nodded. “Yeah, just like out of those movies. Only, I was able to run to the finish line and declare the winner.”

I laughed as I pictured the race in my head. “Alright. Let’s do this, but can we wait until after our meeting at Volterra? That way, we can sort of let loose a bit.”
“Alright, little one, you’ve got a good point,” Peter replied. “You game, bro?”

“Hell yeah, after the meeting, we race. Got an alternate course?” Jasper replied.

“Yes, let me think on that since it will most likely be daytime still. You want to head over there now?”

I nodded. “Yeah I think my nerves will get the best of me if we wait longer.”

The four of us left our rental and headed to our cars. We followed Peter and Char to Volterra.

“I’m a little nervous,” I admitted as we turned onto a busier road.

“I am a little as well because I don’t know what to expect,” he replied and held onto my hand. “Honestly though, they seemed accepting and I didn’t get any vibes that they want to do us any harm. Just stay with me, alright?”

“You have no worries there,” I muttered. “I’m sticking to you like glue.”

When we got to the vampire castle, we parked next to Peter and Char. It was nice to see Jasper get out of the car and blur to my side, not having to hide the fact that he was a vampire here in this city. He wrapped his arm around my waist and the four of us entered the castle, greeting Rosa. I thanked her for her help in finding us the house and told her the coffee and food across the street was wonderful.

As Peter and Char led the two of us down some corridors, I held onto Jasper’s hand tightly. I couldn’t tell how many turns we made, each hallway looked similar to the other. If I had the time, I would have stopped and lingered over the paintings but we weren’t here for fun and games.

“We’re almost there,” Peter said as we made yet another left turn.

He opened a set of stone doors and the scent of flowers wafted over us. The four of us walked inside and saw brightly colored blooms all over. The ceiling was glass, but like inside the throne room, the glass was somehow treated because Jasper, Char and Peter weren’t affected from the
“Come in, welcome,” the king, Marcus, announced from under large gazebo. He waved the four of us over and we all sat down at a table near his.

I sat next to Jasper and almost immediately, a pitcher of ice water with sliced lemons appeared before me. I poured a glass and took a gulp as the other kings appeared. The four of us stood to bow to them.

“No need,” Aro said. “This is an informal meeting. No pomp and circumstance are needed today.”

I was a little surprised by the way they were treating us. I was certain, given what I had heard about them that they were rigid beings that were incapable of being informal and putting us at ease. I imagined them to be haughty and maybe even more arrogant than the Cullens put together. Jasper sensed my emotions and rested his hand on my thigh, instantly relaxing me.

“Now then, the reason why I decided we should meet out here is to have a frank discussion. The three of us want you to feel free to ask us anything,” Aro continued.

Jasper nodded. “To be honest, I didn’t expect to be welcomed like this. Not just because of my past affiliations, but my current relationship with Isabella.” He brushed his hair back and I knew automatically that he was a little nervous.

“We are very aware of your history, Jasper Whitlock,” Caius began. “When your brother and sister came to us decades ago, we... well Aro, saw part of your history and while it was disturbing given what you experienced as part of her army, we also understand the reasons you were brought into existence. We also see how you saved them, eventually going to the Cullens after.”

“As far as your relationship with Isabella,” Marcus cut in. “We know you’re concerned about the rule of keeping humans from knowing of our existence. But as you know, I too have a human mate and I can also see the bond you two share. It is beautiful and strong. You’re turning soon, aren’t you Ms. Isabella?”

I nodded. “I...I am this summer,” I stammered out. “There are some loose ends I want to tie up before my change.”
“Wonderful! I wish you both absolute happiness,” he said and smiled. I couldn’t help but smile back.

“Now, I know you both have questions but before you begin, I wanted to share a little something with you,” Aro said. “I know you were associated with the Cullens for a number of decades, young Jasper, and have no doubt heard stories of us?”

From the corner of my eye, I saw Jasper nod.

“Well, the three of us are here to help separate the fact from fiction,” Aro continued.

“What is it that you’d want in return?” Jasper replied.

“Spoken like a strategist. I like that,” Caius said and smiled. “We might need your assistance at a later time but that is not a conversation for today.” He looked at us and smiled. “Now then, the three of us have been rulers for a long time. We originally lived in Greece but migrated to Ancient Rome where eventually we founded Volterra. Marcus is probably the oldest but the three of us were changed within a couple decades of each other.”

“We call ourselves brothers because our maker turned the three of us,” Marcus said. “Ah... the Ancient world was a grand place where we could feed freely and not worry. They would only blame it on their angry gods and goddesses and it was accepted without any argument. Life was so much simpler back then.”

I leaned my head on Jasper’s shoulder before he put his arm around me and pulled me close.

“By the time the first Caesar had died, we had already established ourselves as rulers and had found our mates. Well... all of us except for Marcus. We ended up arranging for him to marry my sister who was also changed around our time. It was hoped that it would bond us all closer together since my mate, Sulpiicia is sister to Caius’ mate, Athenodora. Little did we know that my sister would betray us later on,” Aro said with a growl at the end.

I watched as Jasper raised his hand. “I’m sorry, but Carlisle said...”

Aro nodded with a chuckle breaking Jasper’s thought. “Ah yes, we sort of fabricated some stories when Carlisle came to Volterra which we will get to shortly. What my sister did was organize
some werewolves together and try to overthrow us. My own sister associating with those children of the moon,” he spat out.

“Werewolves? Like changing at a full moon and stuff like that?” I blurted out.

I looked at Jasper with confusion not realizing that there were such things as werewolves and he shrugged back at me and shook his head. “I never knew those things really existed, baby girl,” he whispered in my ear.

“We sort of destroyed them to extinction,” Caius explained, obviously hearing Jasper. “And that led to Didyme’s demise as well.”

Marcus looked at us and sighed. “I was fond of her at one point and she made a fine queen but I always knew that she wasn’t fully bonded with me. I can spot them, you know... bonds. It is my ability, if you will. Like my brothers and their mates, I can see the two distinct mate bonds between the two Whitlock couples. There are also other bonds between you as well forming almost a web... the four of you are truly like a family.”

He got up and paced around the table as all of us looked at him. “We always kept that part quiet; the werewolves and such. We wanted to make it appear like her death was due some tragic circumstance. We didn’t want to appear weak and able to be duped by lowly creatures or those who wanted to overthrow us. Besides, if I played the role of a broken down man, I could easily observe the goings on around our castle easier and see if there were others who wanted us destroyed. Vampires tended to ease up a bit as they saw me because they felt bad. In all truth though, I had done that because I was, what humans would now call ‘depressed’. I envied my brothers for having such happiness and long yearned for the same but for so long, it never came until one day I met Gianna.”

I watched as his facial expression softened and there was a familiar look in his eyes. I could tell he was a man who was deeply in love. I leaned against Jasper again and sent my love for him, smiling when he returned his. I looked up and smiled as his crimson eyes held the same intense look and I knew it was because of me.

Caius got up and patted his brother’s shoulder. “Brother, we are all happy you found your mate after all these years. No need to be like this anymore.” He looked over at our table and nodded as though he appreciated what he saw. “It was around the late 1600s when Carlisle made his way to Italy and found us. At first, we were fascinated by him because he fed on animals and had different eyes as a result. It didn’t take long though to realize he was a little too judgemental and tried to exert his influence on us.”
Aro nodded but remained sitting. “We thought at first that he’d make a great addition and be a co-leader like us but his convictions were too strong.”

Jasper chuckled wryly and nodded. “He’s definitely has that, for sure.”

I looked at him and squeezed his hand knowing it was probably a bittersweet feeling when he talked about the man who was at one point, sort of a father figure.

“That he was,” Aro continued and I could almost see some affection he had for Carlisle. “I wanted him to be like a brother to us but when he wouldn’t accept our lifestyle, well... we decided to fabricate some stories for his benefit and this was within the first few days of meeting him. It was as though he expected us to be evil so...well, we made ourselves appear that way to him.” He shook his head at the memories. “One of the first things he did was disapprove of our consumption of human blood and while it was not bad, in of itself, he had the audacity to lecture us about the merits of feeding on animals. We actually weren’t deviants when it came to feeding the entire castle. When the Black Plague hit centuries before, we took advantage of that. Most of our blood intake during the Renaissance was from the sick, elderly and poor. He thought it was atrocious regardless so we decided to have a little fun and gather some innocent humans to feed from in front of him.”

I fought the gasp that was threatening to leave my mouth but I knew Jasper was able to tell I was slightly shocked. He immediately ran his fingers up and down my arm and the slight shock quickly dissipated. Had it not been the fact that my family were human drinking vampires, I probably would have fainted from hearing that.

“It shut him up quick,” Caius remarked. “Over the years we just continued with that lie for his benefit. It obviously worked because our so-called feeding style is talked of in many different parts of the world. They even use our own Heidi as part of the story now. They think she’s the one that gathers these tourists so we can have our meals, but it is another fabricated story on our part.” He looked towards some doors leading to the castle. “She’s actually here and would like to say hello.”

At the mention of her name, a blonde vampire appeared behind the kings before blurring in front of us.

“Hello, I’m Heidi, welcome to Volterra,” she said and held out her hand. I noticed as Jasper shook her hand that she had a faint tattoo on her arm.

I gasped as I got a better look at her arm as she shook my hand. “You... you’re a Holocaust survivor?”
She looked back at the kings and stepped back slightly. “Sort of, only I didn’t survive... not as a human. I don’t want to take up too much of your time but I’ll be more than happy to share my story with you, if you’re interested. I just wanted to greet you both after talking to Peter and Charlotte.”

With that, she was gone.

“It is because of Heidi that our feeding style evolved to what it is now. I won’t elaborate too much but it is very similar to Peter and Charlotte Whitlock and if I’m not mistaken, yours as well, Jasper?” Caius asked.

I nodded in understanding and saw that Jasper was as well.

“We have been quite elaborate in our stories, even compelling Eleazar to rehash them, to use a more modern day term, to the Cullens and other vampires when he left us,” he continued.

“Compel?” I asked, not understanding the term.

“Oh, it is a gift that Chelsea has that nobody is aware of. We tell vampires that she’s able to create or destroy bonds with us but the reality is, she’s able to manipulate thoughts and ideas into people’s head, both human and vampire. It is quite fascinating really... thanks to her gift, the folklore of vampire is what they are today.”

“You mean with the garlic, stakes and holy water?”

Marcus laughed. “The garlic was my favorite given the fact that we live here in Italy and all the dishes have some sort of garlic requirement. But yes, we’ve been able to heavily influence the myth of vampires by sending these subconscious messages to humans.”

I smiled because honestly, they were not what I expected. They were leaders and obviously embraced being vampires but at the same time, they weren’t the ruthless beings I was led to believe. I wasn’t sure if I fully trusted them yet and thought talking to Jasper later on when we had alone time was important.

“Speaking of garlic, this is one of Gianna’s favorite dishes and I had them make an extra-large
A man appeared wearing a chef’s hat and given the way he appeared from nowhere, I knew he was a vampire. He set a covered tray of food on our table and took the lid off before doing the same to the table where the kings sat. I was able to see what appeared to be a bow before he sped back into the castle.

“My brothers will come back shortly,” Marcus explained. “Perhaps your brother and sister would like to take a break from this as well? I’m bringing Gianna down to join us in a minute.”

I looked at Jasper and knew that we both had more specific questions to ask this particular king and his mate. I nodded to him and he kissed my temple before looking at Peter and Char. From the buzzing sounds, I realized they were talking in vampire speed before the two of them got up and left.

“Eat, mangia!” Marcus exclaimed. “I’ll be back.”

The aroma of garlic and fresh basil caused my stomach to growl. I didn’t realize I was that hungry until now. Jasper let go of my hand so I could eat.

Before taking a bite, I leaned over to him and whispered in his ear. “Everything seem legit?”

He looked at me and nodded. “They’ve been quite sincere so far, I’m less wary and will continue to keep a close feel of their emotions until I hear what their intentions are with me. They mean no harm towards us though, but I’ve been on alert all the same.”

I took a bite and moaned at how wonderful the food was, blushing when I noticed Jasper looking at me with a knowing grin on his face. Before I could say anything, Marcus appeared again, this time walking at human speed and on his arm was a beautiful, raven-haired woman. Jasper and I got up and walked slowly over towards them, his body slightly ahead of me and I knew he was doing this as a way of protecting me. We stopped when we were halfway to the other table and bowed at the couple in front of us.

“Nonsense, this is informal, Gianna, this is Mr. Jasper Whitlock and his wife, Isabella. This is my Gianna.”
She looked at us, immediately looking at Jasper’s eyes and nodded before she looked at me and smiled. I remained close to Jasper as she took a step forward and reached her hand out. I mimicked her and as our hands touched, she actually pulled me closer and hugged me.

“Wellcome to Volterra. It is so nice to meet you. Charlotte has told me about the two of you,” she said and shook Jasper’s hand.

“Thank you, we’re both glad that we made the trip out here.”

“Come, sit with us if you’d like. I am sure our men would be relieved not having to breathe in all the garlic,” she said and pulled me towards her table.

I looked at Jasper and he winked at me as he went back to our table, grabbing my food and glass of water. By the time I got there, he had brought everything over and sat next to me with Gianna and Marcus across from us.

“So how did you two meet?” she asked as she speared some pasta and veggies into her fork.

I looked at Jasper since I had a mouth full of food and nodded towards them. He looked at me and explained to the royal couple how we had met before the incident and then how we met up again after he realized our connection. I couldn’t help but smile at the way he told them our story. I had nearly finished my meal when he got to our Vegas trip and our wedding.

“Oh that is beautiful!” she said as she used her napkin to dab tears from her eyes. “We married last fall, it was a quiet ceremony but we’re waiting to have the royal coronation until after I’ve changed. We’re planning this fall on our anniversary.”

The two of us were finished with our meals and she described how she applied to work at Volterra.

“Sure I heard of the legends, but I was always fascinated by this walled city nonetheless. I knew I had to earn a living and decided to see if they could use some help here. As soon as I stepped into the main area, where Rosa sits today, I was greeted by Aro. He shook my hand and knew immediately why I was here. He explained that the domestic matters of the castle were handled by his sister-in-law Athenodora but she was out. He suggested that I come back in the morning and meet with her.”
“That is Caius’ wife...um, mate right?” I asked.

“Yes, and you’re also correct. All the queens here are married to their mates so we use the terms interchangeably. So I came back in the morning and she was there along with Marcus, who was on his way out of the castle. I thought he was very handsome and was not able to concentrate when I met with Dora.”

“And I wasn’t able to stop staring at the bond that linked us,” Marcus cut in. “I knew however that she wasn’t familiar with vampires, so I took it slow and wooed her as a gentleman would. It didn’t take long and a year later, we were married. It was just a quiet ceremony right here in the conservatory.”

I looked around and smiled. “It is a beautiful place for a ceremony with the flowers and all.”

“The blooms that day were just amazing. This is why I insist on having lunch here as often as I can and Marcus will arrange his schedule to spend it with me.”

The two of them seemed momentarily lost in each other so I snuggled up to Jasper, enjoying the feel of his arms around me.

“Now, I understand you have some questions about a vampire and human relationship? Maybe I can help you with your concerns,” Marcus said after kissing Gianna on the temple.

I looked at Jasper knowing his concern was probably the most immediate and listened as he explained the lack of venom that formed in his mouth when he’s around me even when he’s tasted my blood. He was concerned that when it came time for my change, he wouldn’t be able to get enough venom in my body to get the change started. He talked about the conversation he had with Peter and how his brother said his body would realize what’s going on at that point and instincts would take over, however, he didn’t want to rely on that. There was too much at risk. He has been so concerned that he’s even considered asking Peter to be there just in case his venom was needed.

“Your brother has a point and it is true that our bodies will know once the time comes, which is a good thing you’ve both planned for this change. I have actually pierced Gianna’s skin with my teeth and there wasn’t any venom that caused her any pain. But like you, I also have concerns so what I’m doing is filling glass vials of full of my venom that can be introduced to Gianna’s body if needed. It would mean having to shoot the venom directly into her heart but we both discussed this and will use that as the last resort.”
“Jasper,” I began, “I’d want that too. If at all possible, I’d want only your venom running through me. If you do have to shoot a bunch of venom into my heart, can you maybe have me unconscious or something?”

“Yeah, baby girl, I’ll make sure you’re comfortable if I have to inject venom that way.” He kissed my hair and I could hear him breathing in my scent. “So would any type of glass vial work?”

“We’ve got some here we can get for you. They are laboratory grade so there is less chance of it disintegrating under the venom’s properties.”

I breathed a sigh of relief and took a gulp of water. “Well, my concern is related to venom but I guess it is the lessor concentrate kind,” I explained as vaguely as I could hoping they didn’t ask for more specific details.

Gianna and Marcus must have noticed my blush because I saw him whispering to Gianna and then he moved away from the table motioning Jasper to follow him. I knew that they could both hear our conversation but I appreciated the fact that they allowed us a brief moment to discuss this.

“So I take it you and your husband have a normal marital relationship?” Gianna asked.

“As normal as a human can with a vampire, I suppose,” I replied with a laugh.

She laughed along with me and nodded. “Yes, we do too, but you need not be concerned. It causes some tingling but we didn’t see anything that indicates I’m going through a prolonged change. Marcus did a lot of research in the beginning but found it was harmless. We did notice I don’t get sick as often though, but that is about it. I am still human but amongst vampires, my scent is infused with Marcus’ so I don’t appear to be a meal to a rogue one.”

“That is good to know. Do you think it will make our change any easier?” I looked at both Jasper and Marcus this time letting them know they could come back and join us.

“No, the change will be painful, regardless,” Marcus remarked as he came back and pulled Gianna into his arms. “The rest of the group will be back shortly. If you’d like to freshen up, Gianna can escort you to the washrooms, if you’d like.”

I thanked Marcus and followed Gianna into the castle. She explained that we were going into her
and Marcus’ wing of the castle. She directed me to a bathroom. She led me back to the main doors of the conservatory and then excused herself since she was learning some courtly traditions from the other queens.

Jasper waited at the other side of the doors and together, we went back towards our table. The other kings, Peter and Char had not arrived yet so we took the time to thank Marcus for answering our questions.

“You’re both very welcome. We’ve heard great things from your brother and sister, Jasper, which is why we’ve chosen to share some of our secrets with you both. I hope you’ll return the favor and keep them to yourselves,” he replied and winked. “We like to continue keeping that air of mysteriousness with others.”

We both nodded and then sat down as we waited for the rest of the kings to show up.

Chapter End Notes

Do you like the less evil Volturi? I didn’t want them to be looked at as power mongers but they do like that reputation. :)

There might be a slight delay in the next chapter - but I’m hoping it won’t be more than a week. Thank you! ~ sushi
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the extra week break in between posting. RL sometimes doesn’t always run like clockwork. I am glad the overall reaction to my version of the Volturi was well received.

Thank you to the wonderful women who have worked hard in making this story look pretty for y’all - JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy. They’ve been reading this for well over a year now so once in a while, a break is needed.

As always, I don’t own it, I just like to play with the characters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 50

JPOV

The meeting in the conservatory had been interesting so far. I didn’t expect the kings to take the time and talk to us like they did. It was a little surreal and because of that, I kept a close monitor of their emotions the whole time. As far as I was concerned, if there was any danger, I needed to, first and foremost, protect Isabella.

As we sat there listening to the kings earlier, before the break, I thought that their backstory was interesting. I knew they had been around for a long time but I didn’t realize how much they must have seen; their very eyes have seen the evolution of man from the Ancient world to the 21st century. My mind almost drifted off thinking of all the possibilities until they mentioned werewolves. The story and the outcome was a little surprising but I guess we, ourselves, were mythical creatures so it shouldn’t have been that much of a shock that other ones existed as well. Or, in this case, they existed at one time.

I was afraid that some of the things they mentioned, namely the way they duped Carlisle, would shock Isabella. I was ready to send a stream of calm to her, but could hear her heartbeat slow when I touched her and I was relieved. I thought it was almost comical that they created such elaborate stories just to play on Carlisle and how those stories had spread to other vampires over the years. Even though I thought some of the myths and legends they created for themselves were crazy, I could see why they wanted to keep the reality closely guarded. In all, the three kings didn’t seem to
be the same ruthless beings that I thought them to be.

As I waited for Isabella to return from taking care of her needs, I was relieved that we had decided to make the trip after all. The answers I received helped lessen the anxiety I’ve had over changing Isabella. The alternative, having my venom injected into her, wasn’t ideal but would work if my instincts somehow failed when the time came. I immediately thought that I’d go ahead soon and fill a few vials up just as insurance in case something were to happen.

As the two of us sat down to wait for the others to arrive, I couldn’t help but notice a small hint of trust that radiated off of Isabella. It wasn’t the same, strong trust she had with me so I guessed that it might have been for Marcus and maybe even for the other Volturi leaders. I could see that Marcus was indeed fond of her and there was no ill will from the others towards her. I was still a little on edge though, being here in Volterra was a little unnerving, but I wasn’t as agitated as I was when we first saw the guard, Demetri, at the airport.

Within a few minutes, Peter and Char arrived and sat down next to us. Aro and Caius also arrived and sat next to Marcus. The three of them conferred in vampire speed and I was only able to catch some phrases that sounded very close to Latin. If I had to venture a guess, they were using an ancient language from their human time.

“Marcus tells us you had a good discussion with him and Gianna?” Aro asked with a smile.

Isabella and I both nodded.

“Yes, thank you again for taking the time to answer our questions,” she replied.

“The three of us want to extend your welcome. You have an open invitation to Volterra. Have you thought about maybe working with us, the same way as your brother and sister?” Caius asked.

I had a feeling this was the case. Honestly though from what Carlisle said of them, I expected it to sound more like a command that we be a part of their guard because of the gifts we both possessed.

“May I speak frankly?” I asked.

“Of course, that is why we’re here,” Caius answered.
I explained my concerns based on Carlisle’s interpretation of the Volturi and when I was done, Aro stood up.

“I understand why you’d be concerned. That isn’t the case at all. We do not, as Carlisle put it, collect guards because of their gifts. He probably assumed that given what we said about Chelsea’s fake gift and how we would manipulate others into false loyalty. All our guards are here of their own free will and as such, they can leave at any time.” He looked up onto the roof of the conservatory. “Maybe it is our fault for creating such falsehoods and now we’re dealing with what is real and what is fiction. The guards don’t leave because they have a good life here. If they choose to leave, we still take care of them because they will always be a part of our family.”

“My brother’s right, we don’t force them here and during your stay, please feel free to converse with the guards. They will tell you and with your gift, Jasper, you’ll be able to tell if they’re not speaking the truth,” Marcus explained.

“I appreciate the gesture,” I replied. “You’ve been quite generous in your hospitality. Isabella and I won’t make a decision yet because the two of us will take the time to discuss our future and how the Volturi will play into it.”

“I believe my brothers will agree with my sentiments when I say that there is no rush,” Caius said. “So tell me, Isabella, what are you studying? I understand that you’re at a university in Texas?”

Isabella nodded as she cleared her throat. “Y-yes, I am a freshman at Sam Houston State University, College of Criminal Justice. Before getting to know Jasper, I had wanted a career related to law enforcement. Not actually as a peace officer, but either in forensics science or criminology.” She looked at the men and smiled. “At least, that was the intent until I met Jasper. I hope to finish my degree one day.”

I was filled with pride when she spoke to them. She wasn’t frightened and composed herself despite the twinges of nervousness coming from her.

Aro stood up and looked at Isabella with a smile. I could tell he had a fondness for her and so did the other two kings. If it weren’t for the fact that their emotions were familial, I would probably have landed myself in a dungeon for being overly possessive and protective of my woman.

“If you consider working with us in some capacity, we do have connections to the finest universities the world has to offer. Many of my guards have gone to them - Oxford, the Sorbonne,
in the early part of last century, Felix studied at the Bauhaus...” he drifted off a split second as though he was lost in past memories. “There is no obligation, but I think my brothers and I are hopeful you’ll consider.”

Isabella nodded just as I was about to say something. “Why us?” she blurted out. “I mean no disrespect since you’ve been so sincere, but I don’t understand why you’re being so kind and honest to us.”

I groaned inwardly as the words left her mouth, hoping that she didn’t set the kings off in any way. At the same time, her outburst was exactly what I was thinking so I couldn’t be more proud of her at that point.

Marcus chuckled before clearing his throat. “I do appreciate your candor, it isn’t often that we see that amongst what you might call ‘our subjects’,” he replied. “So often when we meet folks, they run around trying to give us answers they think we’d like to hear. Maybe it is our reputation that precedes us, causing us to appear larger than life. Whatever the case is, it gets to be mundane. As for your question, well, the three of us have wanted to meet your husband for a long time now especially since he’s no longer allied with Maria. We understand the circumstances for the vampire wars back in those days. We have seen countless wars, both humans and vampires alike to understand and admire your survival.”

“When your brother and sister arrived months ago we learned about you, Isabella,” Aro broke in almost seamlessly adding to Marcus’ train of thought. “I mean, we knew of you and your connection to Jasper and we also knew that you are human. I know Marcus and Gianna were rather excited to learn of your connection with each other. It isn’t often that vampires find their mates while they are still human but when it happens, it is a wonderful thing. We didn’t want to push for a visit but we were hoping to meet you both.”

“We also wanted to see if we could solicit Jasper’s help,” Caius said earning some cold stares from his brothers. “I know we weren’t going to mention this today but in the spirit of being honest, I need to make sure you both are aware of it.”

Isabella looked at all three brothers and then at me before returning her gaze at them. “You need his help? This is the reason for the pain thing yesterday right? Whatever this Maria situation is, you want him to help you,” she replied, all but growling out that woman’s name.

Caius nodded. “Yes, she’s planning something, but we don’t know what. All we know is she’s got her sights on us and we’d need some guidance.”
I stood up and pulled Isabella against me as Caius’ confirmation caused her anxiety to spike. “Let’s table this conversation for another day, gentlemen. My wife is a little upset over your revelation and I think we need some time to decompress from that bombshell.”

“Yes, yes of course,” Aro replied. “We can discuss this tomorrow perhaps? Before you go, know that whatever decision you come up with regards to our growing problem, we will make sure you’re both safe here in Volterra. That being said, we’ve gotten word that there is a spy here, but we are almost certain they aren’t in the castle. It may be one of the merchants or someone similar. Please heed our advice and do not travel alone. The bigger the crowd, the better; and if you’re going to experience the nightlife, I am sure some of the guards would be willing to accompany you as well.”

“Thank you for your hospitality, we will come back tomorrow.” I looked at Isabella gauging her emotions to make sure she was in agreement.

“We’ll be back in the morning,” she whispered, her eyes barely leaving mine.

The kings agreed and we said our goodbyes. Marcus even asked Isabella what her favorite dishes were so he could have something prepared for both her and Gianna. We then followed Peter and Char as they led us through the maze of corridors and back out to the lobby area.

“We’re going on a private track to race, by the way,” Peter said as we waved to Rosa. “That is, if you’re still wantin’ to race.”

“I could use the distraction,” Isabella said. “It is a safe course for humans to be on, right?”

“Yes, little one, it is just like a Formula 1 race course but it isn’t being used at the moment. Demetri and his fellow guard, Felix, have built this track because of their love for racing and hope to lure the Formula 1 people to use the track for a race or even practice grounds. It isn’t far from here but it is safe.”

I led Isabella into the car and told Peter I’d follow him.

“Oh, Felix will be there and will man the lights, our women can stay in the car with us,” Peter said loud enough for Isabella to hear. I could see her rolling her eyes at the statement but she couldn’t hide her amusement.
“Felix?” I asked. “He knows we’re coming?”

“Yeah, Demetri and I talked to him while you were talking to Marcus and Gianna. He’s cool with us coming over. He’s been racing some Alfa Romeos around today to make sure they’re up to par for the Kings. C’mon, bro, quit stalling and let’s go!”

I got into the car and started the engine, hearing the immediate sigh of relief from Isabella.

“You alright, baby girl?” I asked as I followed Peter’s tail lights.

“Yeah,” she said and grimaced. “That last part... I’m sorry for the outburst like that, I didn’t want to ask about their intentions with you, but my curiosity got the best of me, and well, maybe even my patience. I had to know.”

I took her hand and brought it up to my lips. “Nonsense, I was thinking the same thing and when you said it, I just hoped you didn’t piss them off, but the three of them are genuinely fond of you.”

“Fond of me?” she asked. “Like I was food?”

I laughed at the expression on her face. “No, baby girl, like you’re family... not quite like a parent, but still a family member...maybe like you were their niece or something. There is no bloodlust coming from them when you’re around them. They honestly don’t see you as a meal at all.”

“Like a real family from what they said earlier?” she said, almost wistful.

I nodded, understanding where she was coming from. “Yeah, I won’t know for sure until after meeting some of their other guards.”

“Wouldn’t that be something?” she replied. “I mean, Carlisle had this image of the Volturi being these power mongers and he’s even instilled his beliefs in the rest of his family. The irony is, when the going got too tough, they abandoned their so-called family without a second thought. Now if what the Volturi said is true and they do take care of their family, then well, the joke’s still on the Cullens right?”
“Yeah, I see your point,” I said and laughed. “Who would have thought that I’d ever have a civil conversation, let alone be in Volterra. First she planted falsehoods about them so our forced loyalty was for her and not anybody else. Then the Cullens being played by the Volturi further led me to think I’d be doused in kerosene and set on fire at first sight.”

“Well, I’m glad that didn’t happen and they actually said they had wanted to meet you. I’m a little nervous about this whole Maria thing though,” she said and squeezed my hand. “I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“I won’t let it, but I am curious what they want. They mentioned guidance so we’ll have to see. I think we’re almost there. Look.” I pointed out the windshield at the course that was ahead.

“You’re not going to crash like those races we have watched with Peter and Char, are you?” she said warily as I turned onto the track.

“No baby girl, we will be fine, I’ll keep you safe,” I whispered to her ear as I turned stopped the car.

Felix greeted the four of us and then showed us the course layout. Isabella was a little intimidated by his stature and stayed close to me. He was probably bigger than Emmett and had a very serious look on his face when he greeted us. If Felix had noticed, he was unaffected by it and was polite nonetheless. He even offered to get us all fire suits and helmets to add to the effect but I had a feeling he wanted to make sure Isabella was comfortable. She smiled and shook her head, thanking him for the offer. He shrugged before pointing to the stand where he would be before speeding off.

We got back into the cars once again and instead of switching the lights on, he dropped a flag and the two of us sped off. We were neck and neck for the first couple turns and as the tires squealed, so did Isabella. She wasn’t scared though, she was laughing and clapping her hands like a little kid as she cheered us on.

“Shit, Jasper, they’re gaining on us! Oh! Hairpin turn!” she exclaimed, grabbing onto the door handle. “Faster, Jasper, go!”

I laughed as she continued her outbursts. We were ahead of my brother and sister by a couple feet and they were inching faster. I maneuvered the turns smoothly and knew that we were on the last part of the course and that Felix had promised to film the finish in case it was close.

“Go! Come on, we’re almost there!” she yelled as she kept a close eye on the other Audi.
When we did cross, it was a photo finish with Peter’s car getting that last minute surge of speed. I stopped the car and helped Isabella out as she laughed and hugged Char. The five of us went back to the media area and watched as Felix pulled the film up and we watched the last part of the race on a big screen.

“Double or nothing, that we won,” Peter exclaimed just before the cars entered the final turn.

“Sure, why not,” I said and shook his hand. I looked over at Isabella and she rolled her eyes at the two of us while she ran her hand up and down my back.

As it turned out, we lost by a couple inches much to the delight of Peter who ended up doing some crazy victory dance in front of us. I didn’t know if watching that was amusing or Char’s look of mortification, but we all had a good laugh over it even though I was down a thousand Euro from the bet.

I had to admit, as we spent time away from the castle with this other Volturi guard, that my views of them were wavering more. They weren’t the enemy I was always ingrained to believe. While it was still too soon to call them allies or even friends, a part of me felt as though things could actually end up that way. There was no ill feelings towards me and most importantly, I didn’t feel as though Isabella was in any sort of danger from bloodlust.

“How long will you be visiting Volterra?” Felix asked, breaking my train of thought.

“Until Friday, those two have classes,” Peter replied and pointed to us.

“University? What are you studying?” Felix looked at the two of us and smiled.

“Sam Houston State and we’ve been taking Criminal Justice classes together,” Isabella explained as she moved slightly closer to me. She was still wary of Felix but less so now that he was more engaged.

“We should all go somewhere and have a night out,” Felix suggested. “A few of us guards own a nightclub that is an hour away from the castle. It is very popular and we get our fair share of regulars and tourists alike.” He looked over at Isabella. “Signora Whitlock, you will be perfectly safe. I assure you and your husband that no harm will come to you.”
“Thank you, Felix,” Isabella replied before turning to look at me with an expectant look on her face. “And please, you don’t need to be so formal.”

“Sure, I think a night on the town will be fun,” I said, my eyes never leaving Isabella’s.

“Eccelente! I’ll tell Chelsea, Renata, Demetri, Jane and Alec. You’ve met my Heidi already and everybody has been waiting to meet the two of you in a less royal environment.”

I sent him a quick dose of my appreciation and watched his reaction. He was shocked at first but then grinned and nodded as we all shook his hand and then headed back to our cars.

“What’s the plan for tonight?” Char asked.

“I need to get some food,” Isabella said. “What do you want to do?”

“Follow us, there is a town next to where y’all are staying and we can find something there for your dinner. Afterwards, in their town square area, they have live music and dancin’. Mind you, it isn’t fancy, usually local folk music but Peter and I have gone and danced a few times during our visits out here before.”

I could tell just from the elevated heartbeat that my woman was excited so I nodded and agreed to follow my siblings once again.

When we got to the town, we parked and Isabella and I went off to find a place for her to eat. There was a small restaurant that looked popular and from some of the passing conversations I caught, it sounded as though it was the place to go for a good meal. We were seated near the open patio and after helping her translate the menu, I leaned back and took in the atmosphere.

Her food came and she must have been hungry since it didn’t take her long to finish. We stayed there for a little while longer until music could be heard coming from outside. We found Peter and Char as strings of light started to brighten up the street. The four of us found space by the town’s fountain and we started to dance.

As soon as our hands touched and my arm was around her waist, the world disappeared around us.
We could have been in our own backyard for that matter. There was no Volturi or impending talks about my maker. It was just the two of us as we laughed and twirled, letting our love wrap around us. We danced for what felt like hours and a couple times, we even switched off so I danced with Char and Isabella danced with Peter. When the final song was played and the band left, the four of us went back to our rental cars and sped off. By the time we reached the house, Isabella had dozed off. She didn’t wake until I had gotten us inside the house and was starting to take her clothes off.

“Night, Jasper,” she mumbled as she climbed into bed. “I love you.”

“Love you too, baby girl,” I whispered as her breath against my neck slowed and she fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Some serious stuff mixed with fun stuff. Did you enjoy it?

On a different note, anybody watching Arrow? OMG, I’m hooked. Such a fun tv show to watch! :) Until next time, sushi.
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all your kind words. Sorry for the delay in posting - this week has been crazy with Halloween and of course, the nasty weather in the East Coast.

Here is the next chapter. As always, I don’t own the story. I just borrowed the characters and put them in my own little world.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 51

BPOV

To say I wasn’t enjoying my visit at Volterra would have been an outright lie. I was nervous as hell when we first arrived, but now after having spent some time with the royalty of the vampire world, I really started to feel a sort of kinship with them. They were different than Carlisle and Esme in that the kings never came out acting like replacement parents and I was glad they weren’t. If anything, they reminded me of the way Jake and his tribe were; all one close knit family unit. At first, a part of me was skeptical and I kept asking Jasper about their emotions but he reassured me a few times that he didn’t feel any animosity or ill-will from them.

It isn’t just the kings who have welcomed us. I met Renata yesterday and spent some time talking to her about her shield. She explained that her gift allows her to almost instantly throw a shield over the kings and the queens should there be any danger. From early on, they tested her ability and found out she is able to create an invisible force field that is capable of protecting not just the royalty, but a vast majority of the guards as well. I was awed by just how powerful she was and her role as protector. We also spent time talking about my potential ability and from what she gathered after Aro had spoken to her, she thought mine was triggered somehow by Jasper.

We went to find him on the castle grounds and found him in one of the libraries they had. Thanks to their vampire brains, they were able to theorize that my shield is associated with the trust that I have with Jasper. It had been the emotion that carried since the day he saved me from Laurent.

I was skeptical about it but then we tested the theory by asking Aro to touch my hand once again. Unlike the first time he tried, this time, he was able to see some of my childhood and brief glimpses of my time out in Forks. Armed with the new knowledge, Aro and Renata concluded that as my
bond with Jasper grew, it has just been a natural extension, of sorts to expand my shield over him even though he wasn’t in any type of danger. They also figured that since my relationship with the kings was growing, and I was starting to trust them, my shield somehow allowed him to catch glimpses of memories.

“Am I ever going to be able to control this shield thingy, Jasper?” I asked as we got ready for our night on the town.

“You will, but most likely it’ll happen after your change. Hey, given our discussion today with Renata and Aro, would you want to be changed out here instead of Texas?”

I thought for a moment as I reached behind me to zip up my dress but Jasper had beaten me to it. “Would it be less stressful on you, on having to deal with a newly turned vampire?” I asked as I turned around to face him.

“I wouldn’t say it would be more or less stressful, but I am beginning to think that us being here would allow you more breadth of vampire knowledge, if you will, than if it was just me, Peter and Char. I am not trying to influence your decision one way or another, but think about it - and you don’t have to make your decision now,” he said as he pressed his lips against my temple. “Whatever you decide is fine with me, okay?”

I nodded. “I’ll think about it and we can discuss it like we do with other things,” I vowed. “How do I look?” I twirled around showing him the strapless black dress.

“Sexy,” he growled. “That is the one that you got in Vegas, similar to the one you wore on our wedding, isn’t it?”

I smiled and nodded thinking back to that night as I linked my fingers with his. “Yep, is it too much to go dancing in?”

“Hell no,” he replied emphatically as I helped him fold the sleeves on his button-down. “You look stunning, baby girl.”

I smiled, feeling the heat rise on my cheeks. “I’m glad you’re letting me roll your sleeves up tonight. I love it when you’re dressy but casual at the same time like this.” I ran my hands down the back of his jeans. “And your jeans look really good on you.”
We kissed for a few minutes but broke it off before things got too much. We headed out towards the living room area and headed out towards Volterra. Since there were so many of us going, Demetri thought it would be wise to just take some of the vehicles they had and carpool. I nearly laughed at first, that these vampires would be concerned about the environment. But then I realized that they were, and soon I would be, on this earth for a while. We were all citizens of the earth and therefore had to do our part.

The caravan of vehicles headed towards the club. Jasper and I were riding with Felix and Heidi while Peter and Char were in an SUV that included the twins, Alec and Jane amongst others.

“Bella, I noticed earlier you had a tattoo on your shoulder,” Heidi said as she turned around.

I smiled. “I got it during the summer, it was a tribute to my dad.”

“It’s a beautiful design. You know you’ll still see it after your change. It will be fainter but as you know, it will still be visible to human eyes.”

I nodded and paused as I gathered my thoughts. “I figured after seeing yours, but I wasn’t sure how... how to ask you about it given the reason you got it.” I quickly grabbed Jasper’s hand and squeezed, hoping like hell I didn’t just insult her or make her feel uncomfortable.

“It is alright, I don’t mind talking about it. I was in the beginning after my change, but as years and decades went by, the pain of the atrocities and the knowledge of how so many people were destroyed is almost like a bad dream. I still support foundations and museums dedicated to the Holocaust, anonymously, of course.” She looked at Felix and placed her hand on his shoulder. I watched as he reached over and put his over hers. “My last human memory is being escorted to some sort of rudimentary laboratory and being strapped onto a gurney. I remember being blindfolded and then there was the sound of torn clothing, mine. I must have blacked out or been drugged... I am not sure, but then I felt this blinding pain and when I woke up, I remember being in some sort of cell and Felix peeking into the wrought iron that I was caged in.”

“Even to this day, we aren’t sure how she was changed, but it is possible that a vampire was dressed as a Nazi or something and changed her before bringing her here. We were all aware of the war and had heard of the experiments.” He paused for a moment and I saw him brush his fingertips along her hand. “All of us welcomed her into the Volturi and accepted her without judgement.”

“It was hard though,” she cut in. “I hated the numbers that were forever on my flesh. I scrubbed and poured acid over it in hopes it would fade away. The worst feeling was knowing that I was a vampire and those numbers were forever etched onto my flesh... literally forever. If it weren’t for
every single person in Volterra supporting me and making me feel welcome, I would have
demanded to be burned. It took a few years before I could look at my arm and realize I did survive
in my own way. There was some good that came of it as well. The Volturi changed its stance on
hunting humans after learning of the tortures humans did to each other. Sure, we didn’t and still
don’t stop the rumors of us feeding on innocent humans; but the reality is, we don’t. I’m actually in
charge of gathering meals but it isn’t the way the stories go. I don’t lure tourists into the castle.”
She laughed and winked at me. “That rumor is one of my favorites. No, I make sure criminals who
are scheduled to be executed, those that are dying and so forth are either transported here or their
blood is drained and then the liquid is shipped to us.”

“Y’all drink mostly out of bags?” Jasper asked and both Felix and Heidi nodded.

“It isn’t what you find from blood banks usually. We’ve been researching blood and how to
preserve its flavor for close to a century now. It hasn’t been easy but we finally found a balance
between flavor and viscosity so that it feels the most fresh. It isn’t something a human can use
though once we’ve put our additives into it,” Felix explained. “If you’d like, we have some you can
try when we get to the club, you’ll immediately taste the difference.”

“As much as we drink from bagged blood, we still like to hunt once in a while so we’ll go to war
torn places in the world or show up after a major disaster and feed off those who are already
dying,” Heidi interjected.

“You’d think running a castle with so many vampires that we’d deplete the human population but
most of the Volturi are centuries old. As such, their need to feed becomes less frequent. The kings,
for example are able to sustain themselves with one human a month, supplemented by a few pints
of blood each week.”

I looked at Jasper as he nodded in understanding.

“Hey, are the kings going tonight?” I asked.

“No, Aro and Caius tend to indulge their other halves by going to more cultured events like
symphonies and theater productions. Marcus and Gianna have gone out with us more than the
others, but tonight they went to Verona to watch Aida at the famous Arena there. It is both Sulpicia
and Athendora’s favorite opera especially when performed at the Arena di Verona so they go
whenever possible,” Heidi answered. “We’re almost here.”

We parked in front of the club and all of us bypassed the long line as we walked right in. The club
was starting to fill up, but the music was already loud with colorful spot lights waving in different
directions. Felix and Heidi led us to the second floor where it was more of a balcony with a full view of the dance floor below. The speakers must have been pointed away from this area because I could tell immediately that it was quieter and easier to hold a conversation.

“This is our area and then we just go down the stairs to dance,” Jane explained to me. I could tell she was trying to be friendly so I smiled.

“Do you and your brother come here often?” I asked.

“Not as often as the others. Alec is more reserved than I am and tends to spend his time at the laboratory instead.”

“That is because I am interested in science,” he huffed as he walked by us and grabbed a seat on one of the lounge chairs.

“Not really. What he isn’t saying is he likes to draw and spends his time doing that,” she whispered to me as she pointed to another sitting area at the opposite end of the lounge. I grabbed Jasper’s hand along the way and he walked with us over to a velvet couch. “What Alec doesn’t like to admit is he likes to draw comics - like the action stuff.”

“What’s wrong with that?” I asked and shrugged as I sat down next to Jasper.

“Nothing and that is what we all tell him but he thinks, because we’re centuries old, that art or drawing is supposed to be like Da Vinci or Michelangelo.”

“You know, from what I hear from some of the folks at school, the comic culture is a big deal. Some of them go to conventions and have a really fun time. It isn’t my thing but lots of people seem to enjoy it.”

“So he hides his love of drawing comics by burying himself in a lab?” Jasper asked. I was glad he came into the conversation because it was a little awkward and I wasn’t sure just how to interact with her.

“Sort of, I mean, I am there a few hours a week but he would rather obsess over research rather than enjoy his hobby. It is a good thing he doesn’t sleep.” She paused in thought. “What is that saying... oh yes, ‘burning the candle at both ends’. That is what he’d be doing.”
“What kind of lab is this, by the way?” I was really curious what vampires could be studying and relieved to divert the conversation.

“Mostly dealing with DNA, both human and vampires,” she replied. “Over the years, Alec has sort of taken it upon himself to do various studies and then with Chelsea’s help, a human scientist will be given some of the research work. Take that cocktail that helps AIDS patients. He came up with it and then we used Chelsea to help a few World Health Organization scientists come up with the formula to help humans.”

“Wow, that was through the help of vampires?” I blurted out. “But why? I mean, it’s cool you’re doing this research to help humans, but why are you doing it?”

“Because we can,” Alec answered from behind me. “Sister, you really have a big mouth.” He glared at her and shook his head before sitting down across from me and Jasper. “I like the research and obviously cannot take the credit for discovering human cures. I usually see how long it takes for a human to discover a lot of these things on their own, or rather, see how close they get before needing our help.”

There seemed to be an awkward silence between the siblings so I looked at Jasper who squeezed my hand lightly. I really wanted to tell Alec not to be ashamed of drawing comic books, but it wasn’t my place and I didn’t need a gift to see the tension between the twins.

“Mrs. Whitlock, care to dance,” he asked smoothly as he kissed the palm of my hand.

I smiled and let him lead me down the stairs to where Felix and Heidi were, along with Demetri and Renata. I knew from talking to Renata the other day that she was best friends and occasional lovers with Demetri, but they didn’t share the same connection I had with Jasper.

“They’re bickering up there, aren’t they?” Heidi whispered as we all danced together.

I nodded as the rest of them laughed. “They do this often, I take it?”

All of them nodded and rolled their eyes causing me and Jasper to laugh as he twirled me around.
“Where are Peter and Char?”

“They’re at the bar, baby girl,” Jasper replied and gestured with his chin.

I looked over and saw the two of them at the bar watching a big screen. “Car races?”

“Technically, they’re watching the practices but you know them, they love their NASCAR.”

I laughed knowing just how much. “They are going to dance right? I mean, it is just a practice thing, it won’t last for hours, will it?”

Jasper chuckled. “He heard you and asked me to reassure you that they’ll be dancing in no time.”

All of us, except for Jane and Alec, spent the next couple hours dancing. Being that I was the only human in the group, I had to take a couple breaks to catch my breath. Demetri made sure there were refreshments waiting for me at one of the tables upstairs.

“Jasper, it looks like they left you a bag of blood,” I said as we sat down once again.

I watched as he grabbed it with one hand and with his other, he brought my legs up to his lap and started massaging them. If I could purr, I would have done so right there. He brought the opaque bag up to his mouth and pulled the valve open. If it weren’t for the large letter ‘V’ on the bag, it would have looked similar to the ones at a hospital so I knew this was one of those bags Heidi and Felix was talking about earlier.

Jasper took a sip and I watched as his eyes closed for a moment and a small smile emerged. His shoulders seemed a little more relaxed. After a couple sips, he took a deep breath and sighed.

“Is it like the stuff you brought with you?” I asked out of curiosity. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that both Jane and Alec seemed fascinated by our conversation.

“Nah, it is just like they described it, like fresh blood without the anticoagulant taste that I usually get. Whatever they do, it actually makes the blood taste richer,” he explained before taking a few more sips.
“The enhanced richness of the blood helps us curb our need to feed as often. It actually feels like we’ve had more when it has only been a liter’s worth,” Jane said as she slowly approached us. “You don’t feel uncomfortable talking about blood and watching him feed?” she asked.

I shook my head. “I used to be squeamish about blood but things sort of changed. Jasper has never hidden the fact he’s a vampire from the moment he came back for me.” I looked at him and smiled. “No, I am not uncomfortable. This is sort of the first time I’ve seen him drink from a bag but it isn’t bothering me at all. I like that they aren’t clear bags because that would have made me a little woozy, but I’m good.”

She smiled and Jasper gestured to pull up a chair. “Why were you shocked at our interactions, if I may ask? I thought Marcus and his Gianna had a similar relationship,” he asked as he set the bag down.

“They do, but we don’t consider them peers because he is one of our leaders.” She looked down at the table and shifted, in what seemed to be, discomfort. “It is something I noticed with you two and wanted to ask. Forgive me for intruding.”

Jasper looked at me as if to gauge whether or not I was upset for being interrupted and when he realized I wasn’t, he gave me a smile to which I gave a wink back. “You’re not intruding at all, we’re just resting a bit from all that dancing.”

I giggled at his comment and the fact that his finger found a sensitive spot on my ankle. “No, you’re not intruding, we don’t mind the company,” I said in between gasps as he continued to run his finger along that spot. “Jasper!” I squeaked out before pulling my legs off his lap. I stood up quickly to smooth out the skirt of my dress before sitting down on Jasper’s lap. By this time, Heidi and Felix arrived and were watching us from one of the couches.

“What?” I asked as I took another sip of some cocktail they brought up to me. It was a little strange to be suddenly thrust into the center of attention and that was exactly how it felt as everybody looked over at us.

Jasper must have sensed my unease at the attention so he grabbed the now empty bag and held it up. “Good stuff, y’all were right.”

“We researched forever it seemed until we got it right,” Renata replied and smiled. “Bella, are we wearing you out?”
“A little,” I said and smiled. “Even with the running and stuff I do, dancing with all of you... well, I can’t keep up.”

“Oh? You are a runner?” Heidi asked.

“Not a long distance runner, but I am going to be running a 10 kilometer race a week from now.”

“That is great! I have faint memories of being on a swim team while in my last years of school. I don’t remember much except for the swim costumes we had to wear.” She looked down at her sequined dress. “So much different than the fashion today.”

Renata put her arm around Heidi and gave her a small hug. “Be grateful you didn’t have to wear those heavily brocaded robes and gowns like I had to,” she said and grimaced before looking up at me. “You should have seen me during the Renaissance before my change. It used to take me hours to get ready with the petticoats and stays...I was starving by the time I was able to show myself in the common areas of the house.” She shook her head and laughed. “I, for one, am glad I don’t have to do that anymore. I had an authentic dress made in the style of my human days during a celebration we had here and even with my vampire skills, I found it hard to maneuver and do my normal routine wearing that.”

“Did you have to bring up that celebration?” Jane said almost whining. “I hated that we had to wear clothes from our time. I looked like such a child in mine.”

There was what appeared to be another awkward silence after Jane’s outburst. “Since we’re leaving the day after tomorrow, anybody care to tell me about this whole consultant thing the Kings mentioned?” Jasper asked and could almost imagine most of the Volturi guards here were relieved that he diverted the conversation.

“Caius hasn’t mentioned it?” Peter asked as he pulled up a chair next to us.

Jasper shook his head. “He has been nervous every time I bring it up, so no. All I know is that it has to do with Maria.”

Demetri shook his head. “I wanted to mention it and suggested the guards talk to you first but our leaders weren’t comfortable about it. The basic story is Maria’s after more power and this time, her target is Volterra. There are rumors that she’s infiltrated the city with a spy or spies, but we know
for certain it isn’t in the castle itself. What we want to know are her weaknesses which was the whole intent behind asking you, Jasper.”

“We’re not forcing you to be involved, but we just want to know what you know of her,” Felix added.

“I had a feeling that was the case,” Jasper replied. “A part of me would want more but at the same time, I know I can’t just go off on a whim and try to destroy my maker. I’ve got too much at stake now.” He held onto my hand.

I understood his predicament and a part of me wanted to hold him safe while another part of me wanted him to find her and tear her apart.

“Jasper,” I whispered against his ear. “I know you want to be involved and I’ll support you in your decision, but can we talk about it first?”

He nodded and kissed my temple. “I’ll help out. As to the degree of my assistance, well, Isabella and I will need to talk about it first before I make any further commitments.”

“Sure, we can respect that,” Renata said. “I’ll let the Kings know. You two are going to do a little sightseeing tomorrow, correct?”

I nodded. “Just a small road trip before we leave. I have a feeling we’ll be back though.” All of a sudden, I yawned even though I tried to fight it off.

“Baby girl, you tired?”

“A little bit,” I replied.

“Come on, let’s get you back then,” Felix said. “We’ll drop you off, but everybody else can stay if they want.”

I said my goodbyes to the Volturi guards and exchanged email addresses and phone numbers before we headed downstairs to the car.
“Jane wasn’t making you uncomfortable, was she?” Heidi asked as soon as we left the club parking lot.

“No, not really,” I said and furrowed my brow. “She just had a different way about her. Well, her and her brother, but I shouldn’t be talking about them like that.” I silently admonished myself for being so rude.

“It’s alright, we’ve known them for ages now and they’ve always been this way. They’re both a little socially awkward and have never really outgrown that,” Felix said and chuckled when Heidi smacked his arm. “We love them as family but think they were changed a little too young to fully adjust and interact with us, since we are a little older when we were changed.”

“We do try to include them as much as possible, but as you gathered, Alec would rather be at the laboratory or drawing and Jane...” She paused and then smiled. “Jane tries to be more sociable than her brother but I think she has a tendency to try too hard to be liked and doesn’t realize that we do like her for her.”

“I think I know that feeling a little too well,” I said as I leaned my head on Jasper’s shoulder. “I was in her shoes up until...” I thought back and sat up all of a sudden. “Holy shit! It has been over a year since I’ve been that way. It feels longer than that. Wow, time flies.” I shook my head and then rested my head on Jasper once again. “I can relate to her, maybe that is why she’s been wanting to talk to me?”

“It could be. You got her email, right?” she asked and I nodded. “Good, while she might not have the ability to actually change, maybe just having someone who can relate to her might help. That is, unless you don’t want to.”

“No, it is alright. I don’t mind talking to her,” I admitted.

“Well, Jasper and Bella, we’re here,” Felix announced and pulled the car right next to our rental. “All of us hope you enjoyed your stay here at Volterra. Please come back and visit soon.”

We got out of the car and waved to them as they pulled out of the castle lot before we got into our car and headed back to the house.

Chapter End Notes
In case you’re wondering, in this story, Renata will have the super shield that Bella had in Breaking Dawn. Bella’s won’t be as strong as the Volturi Guard’s.

If you were also wondering about the twins - Jane and Alec, I wanted them to be a little socially awkward. In this story, they are probably a little older than they were in the books (maybe 15 or 16 ish).

I hope you liked my little tweeks. :)

Sushi
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the delay - RL just sort of took over - that and November seems extra, extra fast. That being said, I hope all you US fans had a wonderful Thanksgiving :). For the rest of the year, the posting schedule will be loosy-goosy just because the holiday season is upon us. I will have chapters though and I’m still writing ahead of what’s being posted. These characters aren’t mine - I just like to bend them at my will. Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 52

JPOV

It was our last day in Italy before we had to go back home. We had talked about what we wanted to do and in the end, we both decided to drive along the coast and have a mini road trip. I made sure there were water bottles as Isabella got ready and then we grabbed some cut meats and cheese from the cafe across the street. When they asked where we were headed, they told us to stop by a bakery in one of the towns because they had some really good bread.

I helped her into the car and put the food in the ice chest before heading towards the coast. I set the GPS system to give us a feel for the Italian countryside.

“I like them,” Isabella said as soon as we were on a winding road. “The Volturi, not just the kings but the guards, they were really nice even with Alec and Jane being so awkward. In fact, because they were socially awkward, made me realize nobody was perfect there and they never pretended to be. I hope you got the same vibe I did.”

I nodded and reached for her hand. “I like them too. They seemed very genuine and I was happy to see them treating you like an equal. I was afraid of that in the beginning but I am glad to have been proven wrong. They really like you, baby girl.”
“What about you? Did they like you or were they mostly scared of you still?”

“They were a little scared at first, but as we got to know each other, it was quickly replaced. There are still hints of fear like last night when the scars on my arms were visible. It is more instinctual than anything but they’re warming up.”

Isabella turned towards me all of a sudden and held onto my hand a little tighter. “If they weren’t so nice, I wouldn’t feel conflicted in where to have my change.”

“Like I said before, we don’t have to make a decision right now. We’ve got time to talk about it and weigh the pros and cons.”

She nodded and smiled before reclining her seat just a little and enjoyed the ride. When we got near the Mediterranean, I rolled down the windows a little letting the scent of the salty water fill my senses.

“Hmm, having lived in Arizona most of my life, I never really got to be near a body of water until I moved to Forks,” she mused. “Not counting a swimming pool, of course. The Strait of Juan de Fuca is pretty cold, even in the summer, but here, I imagine it to be warmer. It even gives off that vibe right now.”

“I never really enjoyed being in the water all that much,” I admitted. “You know, the scars were not always welcomed until recently.” I noticed her sudden scowl at my confession. “Hey, it is alright. I mean, it sucked, but things are better now. Much better.”

“You’re right. I can’t go back and change the past or kick some ass. I want to though.” She took a deep breath and shook her head slightly as I chuckled. “Okay, enough of that, I don’t want to ruin our fun with thoughts of them. Can we stop somewhere with a view of the sea?”

“Sure, there looks to be a turn-off in soon. It just so happens to be the town they told us about with the bakery.”

We managed to find a place to park and then walked over to buy some bread. After, we brought the basket of food with us to the beach. I was glad that it was overcast today and that I thought ahead to bring a blanket because I saw the moment of panic she had when we found a spot and she realized it was nothing but sand. Once she had a place to sit, I watched as she assembled a sandwich with some meat and cheese from the restaurant.
“Oh, this is so good,” she moaned after taking a bite. I reached in and grabbed the small bottle of wine for her and some blood for me stored in a wine bottle. It was something I had gotten from Felix the other night and thought it was handy since we were out here in public. We both drank straight from our bottles and just enjoyed the quiet beach.

Once she was finished, she moved so she sat in between my legs and wrapped my arms around her.

“If the colors around us are so vibrant with my eyes now, what will it be like when I’m like you?”

I thought for a moment for a way to explain what I saw. “It is hard to explain but you know when you’re on your computer and you go into the settings to adjust colors of pictures and stuff?” She nodded. “Well, you have that spectrum chart and you adjust things accordingly. I sort of see things like that so I can see the gradation of colors that might otherwise be imperceptible to your eyes. It isn’t to say that it is necessarily brighter and garish. What I see are the subtle changes and slight textures.”

“So it doesn’t hurt your eyes? I always imagined it to be just too colorful and stuff... like when we were in Vegas with all the neon or your sensitive hearing.”

“Nah, not really but wearing sunglasses helps soften the colors just a little bit. Plus, it hides the color so as not to draw attention, even with the cat-like gold eyes it was different.”

“So I guess I’d be wearing sunglasses for awhile if I’m out in public then. I also need to learn to control my strength and stuff too, won’t I?”

“Yep, you’ll have to learn how to touch human stuff to make sure it doesn’t break or rip in your hands. You’ll have help though, don’t worry. I’ll make sure you become accustomed to interacting in the human world again.”

She sighed and pulled my arms tighter around her. “I don’t want to necessarily pretend to be human like the Cullens but I don’t want to be a recluse either, you know?”

“I know. We’d interact less than we do now, especially while you’re still a young vampire. I wouldn’t want to be a recluse and I’m glad you don’t either because interacting with humans, even on a limited basis, can be important in helping you blend in the crowd.”
“I get that. Just enough to look and act the part but not necessarily pretend to be one, right?”

I nodded and watched as a cruise ship sailed out from a nearby port.

“I can’t believe school is going to start back up in a few days.” She gasped. “Shit, I guess I should have been jogging the past week while I was here. I’ve got that race next weekend.”

“Baby girl, just do your best but don’t hurt yourself over it.”

She rubbed her head slightly against me before turning and planting a kiss near my shoulder. “I won’t. In case I haven’t said it or shown it, thank you for taking us on this trip. I know it was intimidating as hell but I’m glad we came out here. It has to be one of the best Spring Breaks I’ve ever had.” She started to laugh. “Oh, who am I kidding. It was the best Spring Break because it was the first time I’ve ever gone to a foreign country. Canada doesn’t count since it was just a couple hours north of Forks and Mexico doesn’t count either. They actually stamped my passport here.”

I laughed and kissed her hair as we enjoyed the warm spring weather and the sound of the waves rolling in. I could feel the rays of sunlight starting to peek through the clouds about an hour later and nudged her as she had fallen asleep.

“Come on,” I whispered, enjoying the feel of her warm skin near mine. “Sun’s trying to make an appearance.”

“Oh!” She scrambled up and gathered up the bottles and trash. “Let’s go before we draw attention.”

We made it to the car and stowed our stuff in the small trunk. I helped her in before we started off on the road again.

“Isabella,” I began as I maneuvered the winding roads. “I just wanted to thank you for convincing me to come out here and talk to the kings. It isn’t just being at Volterra either. This drive here? I never would have gotten to do this. It would have had to be Milan or Paris.” I stopped and grimaced.
“Fashion places, right?” she asked. “What about Rome and the ancient stuff? Anybody would have been interested in that?”

I shrugged. “Maybe Carlisle, but he’d end up doing whatever Esme would want to do, which normally mean visiting villas and stuff for architectural designs or going to museums on their own. Because he worked so often at hospitals, if he went on vacation, it would be to spend time doting after her.”

“I could see that. I’ll bet you didn’t get your way with what you wanted to do. Hell, I know back then, I didn’t,” she huffed. “Let’s change the subject. What are Peter and Char doing today?”

“I think they’re both going to that race track and testing some of vehicles. I heard them telling Felix as we were leaving last night.”

“Hmm, it is nice that they have fun things that they both like to do together. I guess we’ll find that niche too once I’m turned?”

“Yeah, I think we’ll both have a desire to explore the world. I often wondered about sneaking into the Sphinx—”


I laughed as I got immediately intoxicated with her enthusiasm. “Definitely on all except the sharks.” I shuddered at the thought. “If we climbed a mountain, there is a slight chance you’ll want to feed and that means animal.”

She made a slight face. “You’d have to as well then? I wouldn’t be the only one, right?”

“No, if we were to climb a huge mountain the thinner air could trigger your thirst more and if we didn’t have blood bags, we’d have to make due with a mountain goat or something, but no, you wouldn’t be the only one. I’d endure it with you too.”

“Would it automatically turn your eyes gold, if you drank animal for a brief period?”
“No, one or two critters about the size of a deer or mountain goat aren’t going to change your eyes any. It usually takes several animals, over a period of time, say a week to a month depending on how often you eat. It is gradual too, you won’t go from red to gold like that.” I instantly felt a sense of relief as she looked out the window with a blush on her cheeks.

“I thought the color change would start almost immediately. That is good to know.” She looked over at me and smiled. “You know, all this time we’ve been together, you never really treated me like I was some sort of pretty dolly that was just displayed on a shelf. Yes, I realize I am not as strong as you are, but you don’t coddle me or treat me like I am made of glass. I like that.” She looked out her side of the window and I could tell she wanted to say more so I continued to drive hoping she’d be able to talk once she gathered her thoughts. “Will you treat me any different when I’m like you? I mean, you won’t stop calling me baby girl and stuff, will you?”

There was anxiety coming from her and I knew this was something she was going to fret over if I didn’t say anything. “I’ll always treat you the way you want to be treated. Nothing has to change if you don’t want it to.” I brought her hand up to my lips and kissed her palm. “I promise you, Isabella. You might want my touches to be a little harder and you might want my teeth biting your flesh, but that doesn’t mean I won’t ever caress you again, or kiss you, or love you.”

Her relief was immediate. “It was probably silly for me to think otherwise.”

“Yes, it was,” I softly chided. “But I understand your concerns all the same. It is going to be a big change for both of us. I love you, baby girl, and that won’t ever change. We might get pissed off and frustrated at each other when you’re a vampire, but know that I’ll always love and adore you. I won’t ever hide those emotions from you either.”

She sniffled as she continued to stare out the window. From the corner of my eye I saw her wipe her face and I knew she was crying. I reached over and held her hand as I continued to drive along the narrow road before coming to an area I could pull off to the side. As soon as I shut off the engine, I undid her seat belt and pulled her onto my lap which wasn’t easy to do in the small car.

She clung onto my shirt as tears fell onto my shoulder. “Jasper, I...I don’t know why I’m crying so hard all of a sudden.” She took a couple deep breaths. “It wasn’t just the prospect of turning that has me so emotional today. I know it won’t be easy, but I am not backing down from that. I guess it just occurred to me that we sort of became part of a new family and I don’t know... I guess I was sort of emotional at leaving for home tomorrow too.”

“The kings adore you like you were a relative or something and I see how you interact with the others. It is like a family because I feel like I’m a part of it too. I’m not just thrown in the
background because of my lack of control or some crazy bullshit story.” I kissed her hair and lifted her chin up to me. “How about this, let’s seriously consider coming back here and you being changed in Italy. It isn’t a final decision and we can talk as much as we need to but for now, between you and me, let’s think about it.”

She nodded and started to hiccup from her crying so I reached over to grab her a bottle of water. “That is a good idea, I’d like that and yeah, once we get back into a groove, I’d like to spend time talking about it and what it would mean for the two of us if we relocated. Whatever we do, Texas is our home, right?”

I grinned and nipped gently at her nose. “Hell yeah, it will always be our home - the day after tomorrow, next week, two years from now, a decade later or even a century later, Texas can always be home for us.” I felt an almost instantaneous sense of love and excitement from her. “You ready to get back on the road before it gets too dark to enjoy the view?”

“Yeah, I’m better now. Let’s enjoy the countryside before we go back home. Jasper? Whatever we decide on, can you change me without an audience? I mean... I...” Her words drifted as she tried to put her words into thoughts. From the slight blush on her skin, I had a feeling what she was asking. At least, in my mind, I thought I knew.

“Sorry about that,” she finally responded and took a deep breath. “Can it just be the two of us, alone? I just want it to be about us and share it with only you.”

“It shouldn’t be a problem and what I can do is have someone or a group of folks on standby just in case things don’t go as planned. You know, the venom thing.”

“Oh yeah, that makes sense but how you change me will just be you and me or at least, the intention is to be just you and me,” she explained.

“As intimate as you and I want it to be, baby girl.”

“Alright, I’m on board with that.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you to JamesRamsey for betaing this chapter and JaspersWoman & DarkNNerdy for prereading.

In case you’re wondering, no, I don’t picture the movie actors for the kings. As with Bound in Blood, I picture Ralph Fiennes as Aro, Gerard Butler as Marcus and for Caius, I’ve been picturing Joseph Morgan - you might know him better as Klaus from The Vampire Diaries. :)

No recs to give out but, I did check out the new James Bond movie, Skyfall. OMG, if you’re a fan and haven’t seen it, check it out.

Until next time!

XOXO sushi
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

I know, finally right? Real life got in the way, as usual. I’ve got a couple more I’ll post between now and the New Year. My goal is to finish this story for 2013. :) Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 53

BPOV

“Jasper, will there be time to study this weekend?” I asked, while zipping up my overnight bag and began to pack my running stuff in a separate one.

“Yes, I’ve got that stuff in the car already,” he said as he leaned against the door frame. “Is this bag ready to go?”

I nodded when he pointed to my overnight bag. “I’m nearly ready, just wanted to get my running stuff separated since it will be sweaty and probably stinky afterwards.”

He chuckled and grabbed the bags once I was done. Together, we walked out of our house and into the garage. Within minutes we were heading down the road, on our way to Austin.

“You alright, baby girl?” Jasper asked as his fingers laced with mine.

“I’m good. I just can’t believe it was just last week that we were heading back from our Italy trip. As much as I was sad to leave, I’m glad we did. I needed to decompress before school started up again. It almost feels like my schedule is running on vamp speed,” I grumbled. “Well, maybe not quite that fast, but it hasn’t been slow.”

“Is it too much? Should we turn back around?”
“No!” I gasped out. “I mean, it isn’t overwhelming but knowing I’m going to be turned soon, things feel like they’re moving faster. I don’t want to push things back if I don’t have to.”

“Alright, I am not trying to rush you either.” He kissed my hand. “Speaking of which, I filled up one of the vials with venom last night.”

“Oh,” I replied and turned towards him. “During your feed?”

“Yeah, I was glad I thought ahead and brought it along too. I never really saw my venom in glass before, it was kinda freaky.”

“How... where is it?”

“Here.” I watched as he reached down into the map pocket of his door and pulled out a rolled up rag. I reached for it and peeled back the fabric to reveal the glass.

“Oh, it is sort of iridescent and translucent. Hmm, a part of me thought it would look bright green or something.”

Jasper’s head snapped quickly in my direction, surprise painted on his face. “Bright green? I’m not a lizard, Isabella,” he grumbled and made a face.

I laughed at his expression. “It had been a while since I thought of it, to be honest. I think it was after Phoenix that I imagined it to be that color.” I looked at the vial and then at the scar on my wrist.

“Since some sci-fi films show poison as being green and if you associate it with the Phoenix incident, I guess I could see why you imagined it being that color. I never realized it was iridescent before.”

“So how many more vials will you fill up?”
“Probably a couple more just to be safe. I want to have at least one with me at all times now just in case something happens. Not that I’m anticipating it, but it makes me feel a little better.”

I reached over and patted his thigh. “No, I’m glad you’re thinking ahead. I know I’m safe with you.”

The next hour or so, I started to work on a couple assignments. It wasn’t until he nudged me to look at the Austin skyline that I put my stuff away and leaned back in the seat to enjoy the rest of the ride. Unlike our drive over Thanksgiving, this was daylight and it was nice to see the city get closer and closer. We made a slight detour to pick up my race packet before we got to the Driskill Hotel and checked in, ending up with the same room as our last trip.

It didn’t take us long to get settled in and once again, I opened up my laptop and worked on my Criminal Law report.

“You know, if I wasn’t going to turn, I’d probably go into Forensic Science,” I mentioned when Jasper sat down next to me.

“Yeah? That is a big change from when I first met you, Mrs. Whitlock,” he teased.

“I know, right? Bella Swan, the girl who nearly fainted during blood typing.” I laughed thinking back to that memory and shook my head. “We’ve both come a long way from back then. It’s almost like another lifetime for me.” I looked up and smiled at him as I laced my fingers with his. “My memories during my change, I don’t want them censored. I want them all, the good, bad, ugly... the whole gamut.”

“Alright, I am not really keen on you remembering how you were in love with my former brother,” he said and growled.

“I know, Jasper, but I wasn’t the strong person I am when you saw me again. Besides, he dumped me and I fell madly in love with you.” I reached over and ran my fingers through his hair and enjoyed the sigh of pleasure that escaped his lips. “Besides, I married your sexy ass.”

“You have a point there,” he said and kissed my wedding band. “I won’t let it bother me as much. Thank you for reminding me. You almost done with your homework for tonight?”
“Yep, I have a bunch of stuff you can look over tonight when I am asleep. Wanna walk around?”

“Sounds like a plan,” he replied and pulled me off the couch. “You might need a jacket since it feels cool.”

I nodded and grabbed my leather jacket that sort of matched his and together we walked out of the hotel. Like last time, we headed onto Sixth Street and found a Tex-Mex place that sounded good. We had a table by the window so we could people watch.

“Hmm, I guess I never realized how many tattoo places there are here,” he murmured as he played with some of the tortilla chips.

I looked out the window and nodded. “I definitely wouldn’t have had a problem finding a place if I had waited to get it done out here.”

“How did you find a studio to get your design?”

“I looked up places in Port Angeles and since a few were in the relative vicinity, I just figured I’d go in and see which one had a good vibe. Of course, it sort of helped that I had watched a marathon of some tattoo reality show the night before. From what I saw, talking to the artist was a key thing.” I looked out the window again. “I want another one. This weekend.”

“You do? Really?”

“Yeah, after what Heidi said, I’d like one that is simple. Our initials on my hip. Does it sound hokey?”

I saw his eyes light up at the idea. “No,” he replied and grinned. “I don’t think it is hokey at all. You got a pen?”

I nodded and fished into my purse. I watched as he took the pen and started drawing on the drink napkin and within minutes he showed me a drawing. It was a ‘J’ and a ‘B’ intertwined in a way that it was artsy and really cool looking.

“This is beautiful,” I said. “I love it.”
“Really? I used your shoulder tattoo as the inspiration.”

“I want to use it and then maybe add some sort of background to it. I’d want to get it done after the race though. Would you be able to go with me or would that be too much to ask?”

“I’m good and if it gets to be too much, I’ll step out. Should we go and visit some of the shops then?”

“Sure,” I replied as he dropped some bills onto the table and we headed outside.

Three tattoo studios later, I met an artist who seemed really cool and liked the initial design Jasper had come up with. He took the napkin and added a few swirls before showing it to us.

“That is awesome, if you end up using blues, I’d want it to sort of match the color on my shoulder, if possible,” I said and watched as Jasper nodded in agreement. He looked relatively calm but he was feeding me his excitement and it spurred me on.

“Sure thing, we can definitely do that. Did you want it done today?” Tom, the artist asked.

“Not today, but Sunday afternoon? I’ve got the race in the morning but later in the afternoon before we head back would be great,” I replied.

“I’m free any time after 2.”

“How about 2:30 so we can get the car packed and stuff before walking over here?” Jasper suggested.

“Yeah. Will that work for you, Tom?”

“Sure, I’ll see you Sunday. You sure you don’t want one too?” He asked Jasper.
“Nah, I’ll pass this time, I’m a little squeamish with needles,” he replied and actually looked embarrassed for the tattoo guy in front of us.

“No problem, but if your wife gets this one, don’t be surprised if you find yourself wanting one or two.”

“If I do, I’ll know where to go,” Jasper replied as we headed out the door.

Once we were outside, I couldn’t hold back my giggles anymore and Jasper, knowing his little fib was the reason, picked me up and threw me over his shoulder. I was carried by my caveman husband for nearly half a block despite my shrieks of laughter and ineffective protests. He finally let me down and I pulled him into a heated kiss before we walked together, back to the hotel.

“I’ve requested a late checkout tomorrow,” he mentioned as we waited for the crosswalk to turn for us. “That way, after the race, you’ll be able to relax and shower before we head to the tattoo place. We should have time to get you something to eat beforehand too.”

“Good plan, you’ll be there at the finish line for me tomorrow?”

“Silly girl, why wouldn’t I be?” The hotel staff opened the doors for us and we stepped inside. “I’ll be there when you start the race and when you finish. In fact, you might not see me the whole time but I’ll be close enough if you need my help, not that I anticipate any danger.”

I pressed the elevator button to our floor. “There hasn’t been anything, has there? Ever since we left Forks?”

He shook his head and when the elevator door opened, he held it open to let me out. We walked silently down the corridor and didn’t continue the conversation until the door to our room was shut. “Nothing, but I am still looking. I even talked to some of the Volturi guards when we were there. They knew Victoria from Peter when we were both in Forks, but they haven’t heard anything unusual either.”

“I guess that is good. I mean, it isn’t like we’ve been living in seclusion all this time.” I went to the bathroom and changed into some more comfortable clothes before joining Jasper in bed. “You know, it just occurred to me, if my change will be in Italy, we’ll need to find a place to stay.”
He put his arm around me and pulled me against his body. “I thought the same thing.”

“I don’t think the house in that village would be a wise choice, maybe something along the countryside?”

“I was thinking the same thing. It would give you the space to run around and slowly assimilate back into the world.”

I reached over and grabbed his hand. “You’re not going to believe this, but what if I said I wanted one of those places with lots of land?”

“You mean like a villa?” he asked and playfully put his hand on my forehead. “Are you feelin’ alright, baby girl?”

I stuck my tongue out at him. “Maybe something more modest.” I thought for a moment. “You know, how about the ones we saw that looked like a farmhouse and the fields?”

“You mean a vineyard? Hmm, I think we could find something. Would you be comfortable with a large piece of property?”

“I think so. I mean I won’t need to worry about much of the comforts like a kitchen or toilet you know? Well, only for the short time I’m human. Should we email our friends out there to help us look? Should we wait?” I blurted out, excited that our plan was coming along.

“Let me get your laptop,” he said and in a flash he was back. “I’ll need it for later when you’re asleep.”

“Thank you for checking my homework when I go to sleep. I’m glad you offered to help me and I took you up on it.” I propped up some pillows before sitting back up. “I’m also glad you’re not just correcting my mistakes, but you’re showing me the reasons why.” I leaned over and kissed him, running my fingers through his hair.

We decided to send messages to Heidi and Felix asking for them to help us find some places. Within minutes, we were in a chat with them and with Demetri who said Renata was in the room as well. They were all excited about our decision to come out there and also understood that the actual change was going to be private. We spent time talking about what we were looking for and in the
end, they knew the perfect place for us.

Before we knew it, Aro had joined in the conversation since he owned some land which bordered a farmhouse that was on the market. He was more than ecstatic we were going to relocate to Italy for a while and confirmed the house was indeed for sale. He sent us pictures with the promise of more to come.

As we ended the chat session, a new one started up with Jane and Alec. It seemed the news of our upcoming arrival had a lot of folks excited. The twins were happy in their own way and both were looking forward to hanging out with us. By the time we were done with chatting, it was near midnight and I got up to get ready for bed.

“Why are Jane and Alec excited to see us?” I asked as I brushed my teeth.

“I am not quite sure, but they were both drawn to us while we were there. They all were. My best guess is we didn’t treat them like they were kids. If they were turned today, I think there would be questions to the ethics of it because of their age. Since they were changed before the Middle Ages, they were considered adults back then. You saw how they were the youngest there in appearance, I think it is more difficult and awkward for them to interact with other folks. Also, because of my gift, I can sense their emotions and while they are professional, there are times, much like when we were at the nightclub, it reminded me of high school.”

“I can see that. They just want to fit in and while they could intellectually, it is sometimes hard because of their appearance and adolescence, right?” He nodded as I stripped off my clothes and climbed into bed. “Can you wake me up at 6?”

“Yep, anything for breakfast?” he asked as he settled pulled me against him.

“No, probably not until we get back. Night, Jasper. I love you.”

“Night, baby girl.”

“Isabella,” Jasper whispered against my ear.
“Mmmph,” I mumbled and turned so I was on my back. “It’s race day, isn’t it?” I took a couple deep breaths before opening my eyes.

“Here,” he said and handed me a glass of water. I gulped it down and then got up to get ready for the race.

We left the hotel about a half hour later. We decided to walk since the starting line wasn’t that far away and it was strange seeing Congress Avenue completely blocked from traffic. I kept doing my deep breathing as nerves started to settle in when I saw the large crowd looming ahead. I had known it was a huge race, but seeing the crowd of people just cemented it for me.

“You’ll do fine, baby girl,” he whispered and handed me my headphones. “I’ll be close by if you need me, otherwise, I’ll see you at the finish line.”

I held onto him as I stretched before hugging him to go join the race. The crowd felt even bigger when I was in the middle of it and when I turned to look behind me, my eyes bugged out at seeing people spanning across the whole bridge. Finally, the horn started and the crowd slowly moved towards the starting line, slowly at first and then moving into a faster walk until I was through and the race began.

It was cool to run up towards the state capitol building but I realized I had to keep my eyes alert so I didn’t run into people. I saw to the left of me, a couple people collide because they weren’t paying attention. As I wove my way through the crowd, I kept reminding myself to keep a steady pace.

One mile down and then another, I was feeling good about this as I grabbed a cup of water at one of the stations. There were people cheering along streets and holding up signs. A couple times I was almost certain I had seen a glimpse of Jasper before he was gone. I wasn’t even surprised if it was him. I was heading to my fourth mile when I finally walked a little to catch my breath and then I was running again, but at a slower pace.

By the time I reached my fifth mile, I wanted to be done. I was walking a little more but never actually stopping.

“Come on, Bella,” I breathed out to myself as I jogged over to another water station. “Almost there.”
I followed the crowd, going over one more bridge and I saw a gathering there. I was close and knew Jasper was near. Whatever energy I had left, I used it and ran towards the finish line. There were loud cheers but my only goal was ahead of me. I moved my legs faster and felt the sweat run down my face. I was breathing even louder now as I pushed myself just a little faster, not slowing down until I was across. I slowed down enough to scan the crowds until I found my blond vampire husband, wearing a hoodie to hide from the sun and sporting a huge smile on his face.

“You did it, Isabella,” he said and whisked me into his arms. “I’m so fucking proud of you.”

I was still breathing hard and only managed to nod.

“Here, drink this,” he said as he grabbed a sports drink from a volunteer. “Let’s get you some fruit.”

He let go of me and we walked towards the snack area where I grabbed a banana and looked for a place to stretch my tired muscles. As always, he helped me stretch out and then pulled me up to my feet.

“Want to get back to the hotel and wash up? I’ll order you some breakfast and stuff.”

“Sounds great, yeah let’s go.”

I was surprised I was still able to walk after all that, and we made it back to the hotel in no time. He even ordered breakfast before we got to the elevators so it would arrive faster. I was soaking in the tub when I heard the knock on the front door.

“Coffee?” Jasper called out before bringing a small tray into the bathroom.

Before I knew it, I was leaning against Jasper’s chest with a mug of coffee in my hand. He was slowly massaging my leg muscles. I moaned after taking a gulp, enjoying my drink and also the way he was working on the knots in my legs. Even after drinking nearly the whole pot, I found my eyelids growing heavier and drifted off for a few minutes.

When my eyes opened again, I was in bed, on my stomach with Jasper working on my hamstrings.
“There are some pastries to your right,” he murmured as I felt his lips on the base of my spine.

“Thanks, how long was I out?” I asked as I grabbed what I hoped to be a chocolate croissant and poured some coffee and water.

“Just a couple hours, you feeling better now?”

I nodded and turned around so I could face Jasper.

“We need to pack and stuff, and then my appointment?” I nearly hopped out of bed but Jasper held onto my legs and pushed me back down.

“We’ve got plenty of time. Relax and eat, your breathing was a little labored in the tub, but the sleep helped.”

It was a good thing this wasn’t our actual bed because having breakfast while laying on my stomach was not easy. After spilling some coffee onto the duvet for the second time, Jasper let go of my legs, clearly having felt my frustration. I got out of bed and gave him a kiss before getting ready for the rest of the day.

It didn’t take us long to get everything packed and checked out. Since the weather was nice I wanted to walk to a couple food trailers that were nearby before heading to the tattoo studio.

“Did you look at my homework?” I asked as we headed down Congress Avenue once again.

“Yep, just a couple missing commas here and there was all it needed,” he replied. “What about the other stuff, are you ready for classes tomorrow?”

I nodded. “I have most of the morning to study so I’m good.”

I found a truck that served burgers. Judging from the crowd, it must have been good so I went up and placed an order. As we sat and waited for my food, Jasper was running his finger along my
hip, right where my tattoo would be.

I looked over at him and smiled before leaning in for a kiss. “You’re about excited about this as I am,” I teased as my lips grazed his.

“Will you let me clean it for you like before?”

I grinned wrapped my arms around his neck. “That, Mr. Whitlock, is a definite yes.”

Our moment was broken as my name was called, letting me know my order was up. It didn’t take long for me to finish my burger as we people watched. Once done, we headed back up to Sixth Street and waited at the studio for our turn.

Chapter End Notes

Just wanted to say thank you to JamesRamsey for beta’ing this bad boy and DarkNnerdy for helping me on some parts. JaspersWoman, who so graciously preread much of the story so far has stepped back so I have a pre-reader role that needs filling - someone who can catch initial errors would be great before it goes to beta. Hit me up and let me know if you’re interested.

So back to the chapter - Did you enjoy the weekend with Jasper and Bella? I’ve participated in the Cap 10K for 2 years now and yeah, it is crazy crowded. This year, I think I was weaving left and right while running straight ahead so I wouldn’t get run over or run people over. :)

Oh, I have a nonstory related item – any of you need an invite to Archive of Our Own (it is another place to post stories). I’ve got 4 more invites available.

Thanks as always! – sushi.
Chapter 55

JPOV

It had been a weekend of firsts for me. I had never watched humans run a race before and found it so interesting that I blurred around the course from a safe distance, just to catch a glimpse of Isabella now and again. I was so damn proud of her as she crossed the finish line. I knew from our late night conversations that this was important to her, something she could only do as a human.

Now I was here in a tattoo studio with her while we waited to be called in. If I had even walked by one of these places a year ago, I wasn’t sure if anybody inside would remain alive. I was glad I fed before our trip and chuckled inwardly as I breathed in the faint scent of blood mixed with the pigments used. There was no crazed bloodlust, not even that slight tingle as my venom glands were activated. The vampire part of me was calm but the man, well I was excited to see that design on my woman’s body.

“Are you going to be alright?” Isabella whispered. She was a little worried and nervous but also excited.

“I am, like I said. If it gets too much, I’ll excuse myself, I promise. What’s got you worried, baby girl?”

“I just didn’t want to pressure you into coming here. You know blood and all. I mean, this isn’t a
normal hangout place, right?”

I shook my head. “No, ma’am. I don’t think business would be booming if this became a hangout for us.” I gave her a knowing wink as she tried to stifle her laughter.

“Oh, you’re early!” Tom, the tattoo artist exclaimed as he entered the lobby area. “Give me a few minutes to set up and I’ll bring you both in.”

I could hear the sound of things being shuffled around and the scent of some sort of cleaning solution being applied. Five minutes later, he came back and ushered us into a small room, big enough for a couple chairs and a table in the middle. There were bottles of ink in different colors and I watched as he got everything set up.

Isabella didn’t need to take her clothes off for her tattoo and for that I was grateful, not that I was going to be insanely jealous. She unzipped her jeans and pulled them low, exposing her scarred hip. As he positioned the stencil, I watched as she instructed him to place it over a faint, jagged line. It occurred to me right then that she must have wanted that part of her life preserved in some fashion. While it wasn’t the high point of her younger years, it showed how much she was a fighter and a survivor. I sent her my love and my respect and she returned it soon after.

“Okay, ready?” Tom asked after he cleaned the area and put the stencil onto her skin once again, this time marking her with a less permanent version of the design. “It shouldn’t take too long. The stencil is just the initials and then I’ll add the swirls of blue, freehand.”

She took a deep breath and reached for my hand, all the while keeping her eyes on me. When the machine was turned on, I was a little surprised by how loud and obnoxious the sound was. I had heard it in movies and on TV but this was the first time hearing it in person. Isabella gripped my hand just a little tighter as he dragged the needle down to form the outline of the ‘J’. Droplets of her blood beaded up on the skin, mixed with the ink he was using. I took a small breath, not completely trusting myself and didn’t feel a damn thing, but I was still not going to take any crazy chances.

It was fascinating to watch as the needle pierced her skin and it rose slightly from the ink being injected. I kept monitoring Isabella’s emotions to make sure things were alright. All I felt from her was love, trust and a little concern. I looked at her eyes and could tell, almost immediately that it was concern over my well-being. Even now, the fact she wanted to make sure I was comfortable and not in distress was still not something I was used to, but was no longer shocked by like early on in our relationship. It would still take time to get completely used to, since I had spent decades where everybody was concerned whether or not I’d lose my shit.
“Are you doing alright?” Tom asked as he wiped down the area.

“Yeah, it is all good,” Isabella replied.

“How about you, Jasper?” Tom asked.

“I’m doing alright,” I said and shuffled around and fidgeted a little to play up some nerves.

He chuckled. “I’ve seen guys bigger than you, faint at the sight of the needle. This ain’t for everybody, that’s for sure.”

After he fiddled with his machine, he went back to work on the design, I watched as the skin started to get shaded, adding dimension to the initials. There was yet another break and we watched as he switched needles and added some more color. By the time he was done, there was just a hint of a heart surrounding the initials but was done in an abstract way so it didn’t look like a sailor tattoo. He wrapped up the design and gave Isabella a sheet of instructions along with a soda bottle.

“Here, this will bring your sugar levels up.”

She took a few gulps. “What is this stuff?” she asked and looked at the bottle. “This isn’t the Dr. Pepper I have had before.”

“Nope, this isn’t just any Dr. Pepper, this is Dublin Dr. Pepper. Bottled right here in Texas. They still make it with pure cane sugar which makes a huge difference. You should be able to find it at your local grocery store.”

“I’ve heard of this stuff but had no idea. I’ll look for it next time,” she exclaimed as she straightened her clothing and hopped off the table.

From what she had told me of her first tattoo, I expected her to be a little woozy but she seemed fine and grabbed my hand as we walked back out to the lobby. I handed him a small wad of cash, including a tip for his work and we both thanked him as we headed out.
“Come back soon!” he said and waved.

“I’ll tell my friends to come to you,” she said and waved back.

We were back at the hotel in no time and were on our way home.

“Jasper, we’ll need to stop at a drugstore for that ointment stuff. I threw it out when we moved out here,” she said as I got onto the highway.

“We can do that. How are you feeling right now?”

“Just a little tired, nothing unusual. It was a nice trip this weekend.”

“Yep, I’m glad to have experienced it. I was thinking as we were waiting for Tom, this was a weekend of firsts for me. First time seeing humans race like that and the tattoo thing. I even saw the guy who won the race, I passed by him early on and saw the police cycle escorting the group, just like they do on TV.”

She grabbed my hand. “Thank you for this weekend, I am glad you did alright in the studio.”

“That noise was a bit loud and seeing your blood mix with the inks was sort different, but I think I was more fascinated by the process than anything,” I admitted.

“That machine was actually quieter than the one where I got tattooed in Port Angeles. It was less jarring, too. I guess though with your hearing it was a different experience.”

I nodded, “I couldn’t imagine a louder machine than that.”

She snoozed for about an hour on the way back with her hand still in mine. The traffic was really light and I was able to go a little faster on the highway.

My phone beeped indicating a text message about an hour away from our house. I reached over and saw it was from Peter.
‘Heard y’all are getting property in Italy. Should we do the same?’

I decided to talk to him instead and dialed his number.

“Hey, yeah we talked to Volterra first before talkin’ to you,” I said as soon as he answered the phone.

“It’s all good. I was chattin’ with them at the same time and they mentioned it. I didn’t want to IM you knowing you were busy. How was the weekend?”

“Good, she ran her race and we spent time enjoying downtown Austin. How was yours?”

“Great! We decided to head south to Mexico to feed. You know those drug wars are gettin’ a bit scary but it makes for disposing bodies easier,” he rambled and out of the corner of my eye, I saw Isabella stretching as she slowly woke up.

“I’m gonna put you on speaker, that alright?” I put the phone on the cup holder and reached back to grab a bottle of water for Isabella.

“Little one, how did you do on your race?”

She gulped down about a quarter of the bottle before she replied. “Hi, Peter, I didn’t do too bad, I was ready to be done by about the 5 mile mark.”

“I saw, in the paper, they were anticipating over twenty thousand people running,” he replied.

“No shit?! I knew the crowd was huge but...wow, that is a lot of people.” She was more awake now and after seeing the sign to Huntsville, I could feel her happiness. “So where did you and Char end up going?”

“We went into Mexico and caught some drug runners,” he replied and we both heard Char yell out her greeting, mostly for Isabella’s sake.
“Hey, Char!” she answered back. “You’re back in the States then?”

“Yeah, we got back this morning and we’re just relaxing right now. So back to my text, do you want us to be in Italy when you’re there? If you do, Aro said he’d lend us his villa that is near that farmhouse.”

I looked over at Isabella and nodded. “Peter, we both want you two to be there.”

“Alright, we’ll arrange for it. Just let us know when,” he replied. “Talk to you later.”

“How did they know, Jasper?” Isabella asked as soon as we ended the call. “Was it one of his visions?”

“No, he was actually chatting with them at the same time we were on, but didn’t want to interrupt us. Are you really alright with them coming to Italy with us?”

“Yeah, I mean they’re our family,” she replied. “The Volturi are too, but I don’t know them as well and don’t feel like I have a sibling connection with them.”

I reached over and gave her hand a squeeze. “I just wanted to make sure. Hey, we’re nearing the drug store now.”

After getting the tattoo aftercare supplies and grabbing some of that soda she liked, we headed straight home. By the time our bags were unloaded and our dirty clothes thrown into the washing machine, she was ready to get her bandage off.

“Come on, Jasper, help me with this,” she said as she grabbed my hand.

We both knew she was able to access the tattoo this time but I felt lust coming off of her as she led me to the bathroom and switched on the shower.

“I can’t soak in the tub for a while as it heals so you’ll have to take care of me,” she said as she
started to pull my shirt off.

“Yes ma’am, with pleasure,” I replied as I started to remove hers.

Once we were both in there, I got on my knees and slowly peeled the bandage off, revealing her design. “The day you asked me to help you with your shoulder one, I wanted to run my tongue on your skin so bad.” I grabbed the soap and started to wash her body, being more gentle on her new design. I felt the raised skin and watched as the excess ink and drying blood was washed down the drain.”

“Show me what you would have done,” she whispered as she ran her fingers through my hair.

I wrapped an arm around her hip and then started to lick and kiss her skin. Even though it was washed and clean, there was still a faint taste of her blood on her hip. She moaned as I continued to trace along the design, earning a whimper and a moan from her. The rest of her body followed as it reacted to my touch. The scent of her arousal flooded my senses so I let my fingers caress her tattoo as I started to lick her inner thighs, touching one of the spots I had marked her with, when we celebrated my birthday.

I licked and tasted her as she moaned and pleaded for me to give her more. I stood up had her face the tiled seat, placing her hands on it for support before slipping into her. One hand was holding onto her hip while I wrapped her hair around my other. The sounds she was making along with the emotions we were both sharing soon had us in a near frenzy.

“Jasper, I’m close,” she gasped out. “Need to see your face.”

I slowed down my pace and shifted positions so I was sitting on that ledge and she was on top of me. Our arms were wrapped around each other as our lips almost mirrored our movements. We were both closer to the edge now as she held onto my shoulders in a grip that would have had me whimpering if I was human.

The frantic feeling was back as we both neared the precipice. My growls matched her cries of pleasure as she spiraled first and then I followed. As her breathing returned to normal, she looked at me and smiled.

“You can take care of my tattoo, anytime,” she said saucily.
I laughed and smacked her ass. “It would be my pleasure,” I purred. “Come on, let’s get the stuff on it and relax.”

APOV

It had been weeks, months since I saw her and gave her the plan and haven’t heard back. I was trying to go about being my normal self here so I wouldn’t draw attention but I was growing impatient.

“What are you impatient about, Alice?” Edward asked as he entered the clearing where I was.

“Oh, the usual, fall fashions and stuff,” I said and planted a smile on my face. “It is just with summer coming, most of the stuff, we can’t really wear you know? That is why the fall and winter fashions are so exciting for me.”

He chuckled and nodded. “I was worried about you, you know. You have been so quiet lately. I even talked to Carlisle.”

“Oh,” I broke in. “What did he say?”

“Well, he pretty much reminded me that people had different ways of mourning and I needed to give you time. Just knowing you’re excited about fashion though, it gives me hope that you’re going to be back to how things were before.”

“I’m trying, Edward. I never had to deal with loss like this,” I admitted. “You know I don’t have any recollection of my childhood, so I never knew about my parents or if I had any siblings. This really hurt,” I said softly and let the venom tears show through once again.

He reached over and gave me a hug. “Just know that we all love you and we’re here for you, okay? I’m going to head over towards Canada and should be back by tomorrow. Esme and Carlisle know that I’m hunting.”

With that, he sped off.
As soon as I knew he’d be gone, I looked at my phone again and saw that there was an email. It was from an unknown sender.

*My wingman is still MIA. Still interested though. I’ll be in touch.*

I sighed as I read the message. I guess she had been searching for Laurent all this time. I was a little relieved she was still interested in my plan but at the same time, I was frustrated that nothing has changed. I could only hope she’ll give up on Laurent and decide to find another partner in crime. I would have but that would have meant changing my diet and while it was appealing, I couldn’t hide it from the family.

All I could do was hope she’d get her act together soon.

Chapter End Notes

I’ll probably post one more before the end of the year maybe 2 - it will depend on how crazy I’m driving myself in my December home project to paint my doors. LOL, I started a couple days ago and I’m already pooped.

It is my goal to click ‘complete’ for this story in 2013.

Have a warm and happy Holiday Season. Stay safe! XOXO sushi
I sat out in the patio studying. That seemed to have been the pattern the past couple months after our Spring Break fun and then the trip to Austin. My school load was heavy and I was also working hard with Jasper in creating a summer camp in honor of my dad. Despite my busy schedule though, we did manage to have some fun during the weekends.

One weekend, we went on a motorcycle road trip with Peter and Char. There was really no agenda on where to go, just as long as we got back so I could do some studying before my class on Monday. I packed snacks and my passport, just in case and it was a smart idea because we ended up in Mexico where my vampire family took turns feeding while we all hung out at a cantina near our hotel. It was there I decided tequila and I were not friends, but mortal enemies.

There were only a few weeks left of my first year of college and final exams were just around the corner. Even though I knew next year was up in the air academically, I still wanted good grades. Jasper continued to help me with my school work and honestly, there were moments when I didn’t think I could have gotten the grades without him.

“Isabella? I got the paperwork for us to sign.”

“Are you sure we won’t need an Italian attorney to look at the papers? Are they legit?” I asked as he sat down with a manila envelope in one hand and a bag from a burger joint in the other.
“Baby girl, the Volturi helped with the sale so they made sure we got a good deal.”

“Alright. So we own a farmhouse too now?”

“Yes ma’am, under the Whitlock Corporation umbrella. Oh, speaking of which, I’ve asked my attorney to draw up papers so the Charlie Swan Foundation will also be a part of the Corporation. That way, we can be sure it will be running for a long time without worries.” He looked over at me. “You’re good with that, right?”

“I am.” I smiled at him and planted a kiss on his lips. “I’m getting better with this whole money thing. I mean we own a farmhouse that is way bigger than our house right now. So do you put everything in the company name so nobody questions it because of your, and my soon to be, immortality?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Otherwise, we have to go through the motion of transferring estates and shit like that. It was actually something Peter picked up on years ago, and after I began to move some of my own accounts to my own name, he told me this was an easier way. I ended up creating the corporation soon after.”

I put away my study stuff and watched as he opened the envelope and pulled the contract out. I looked over and realized it was all in Italian but luckily, it looked like Aro had included a letter to us explaining the terms.

“It looks like all is in order,” he replied after I was done reading.

It took us a few minutes to sign everything and then Jasper put it in an envelope to send back to Italy.

“Looks like we got us a farmhouse, Mrs. Whitlock.”

“Looks like it, Mr. Whitlock,” I teased. “I’m so glad we didn’t get a real working vineyard. I don’t know anything about making wine.”

“Neither do I, baby girl. The history of it is cool though. I learned a little more last night when you
were sleeping.”

“Oh? What did you learn?” I asked as I unwrapped my cheeseburger.

Ever since we became interested in the farmhouse, Jasper and I perused history books in his collection and the ones at school just to see if we could find out about our potential property and the nearby village. We learned it had been a successful vineyard at one time, thanks to the influence of the Medici family. It wasn’t until sometime in the 1900s that it stopped producing wine and then after the Second World War, it was pretty much abandoned.

“It started as some sort of disease on the vines themselves which killed them. Now keep in mind what I found was mostly legend, but it was said the vines caused the wine that had been bottled the season before to be cursed.”

I nearly spit my soda out at the news. “What? That is silly. I am not a gardener or a farmer by any means, but to me, it sounds like the grapes must have been infected the year before.”

“That is my guess as well but the villagers had a different, more superstitious version. I also learned the owner at the time was a notorious gambler and had put his inventory of wine as collateral, not realizing the wine was tainted. People got sick, he fell into rough times and ended up dying out there where his grapevines once stood. It is said that the field’s haunted which is why nothing is planted there anymore.”

“We bought a haunted farmhouse?” I blurted out, maybe a little louder than I should have. “Is it really haunted? Are there such things as ghosts?” I would have scoffed at the idea years ago, but having a vampire family and then recently finding out about werewolves, I wasn’t sure anymore.

“No, I talked to Aro about it and he said he actually started the rumor of it being haunted. He didn’t realize the news spread so fast and the neighbors actually destroyed the original farmhouse. The next owner had a new one built and tried to farm on the land but nothing grew. He must have lost interest and ended up abandoning the place soon after the war. That seemed to support the crazy idea that it was haunted. Aro assures me everything is fine. He just didn’t want rowdy folks living too close and getting too nosy.”

“Hmm, it sounds like he must have seen that plan when he came in contact with the human or something. I think he could also have messed with the plantings too, just to amuse himself.” I snickered. “He’s like that crazy uncle you see in movies.”
He chuckled. “I think you might be right. He was more than happy we were interested in the land and confided that he was hoping one of the guards would buy it but they’ve been investing in businesses lately and the farmhouse just wasn’t something that interested them.”

“Well, I liked it and from the pictures he sent us, it was really nice inside. I mean there was plenty of room with those high ceilings to have our books and maybe collect more. The stone fireplaces everywhere. Can we get a nice tub and shower like we have here?”

“Oh don’t worry, Isabella. We’ll definitely have that. It is mandatory seeing how we both love being in the water,” he replied with a rakish smile.

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Can we get it done before we arrive? And the kitchen is pretty primitive right? We’d still need a fridge to store blood so can we get that and maybe a microwave for me for before my change?”

“Yep,” he said and pulled out a piece of paper from his back pocket. “I started making a list of things we’d need done before we arrive. We still need to plan the trip back to Washington first.”

I sighed and tried to act nonchalant as I looked at the paper. “It’s probably weird, but I’m a little nervous about going back.”

I continued to stare at his list, noting he had taken into account my human needs, even if it was going to be for a short time before my change. Jasper lifted my chin up to look at him.

“I could tell, but why are you nervous?”

I shrugged. “That’s just it, I am not sure. I mean we’re going to attend the ceremony where the state honors my dad. I’d like to go to Forks one more time and see the house and the cemetery. I mean, it won’t be just sad stuff, Ashley and Jake know we’re heading up and stuff. I’m just nervous.”

I leaned on Jasper and he pulled me closer to him. “Seems to me, you might not be nervous about Forks. Are you worried about me, baby girl?”

“I think so. I mean Jacob might know you as a Cullen and I don’t want him treating you wrong and what if we run into those kids from school?”
“Hey, you’re not that timid girl from back then, remember? You’re a vibrant woman who can beat the shit out of a heavy bag and not think twice about it. I’ll be with you the whole time. As far as me being a Cullen, I can just tell them I came of age, found my real family and chose to take on my birth name.”

I relaxed and smiled knowing he was right and his story wasn’t an outright lie. I shouldn’t be nervous or feel intimidated. I had my own life with Jasper and was happier than ever. “We’re going to do this together, right?” I opened the laptop and brought up a blank browser screen.

“Together.”

We spent an hour planning our trip, deciding to take the plane out to Washington and flying into King County airport instead of the normal, busy SeaTac one. It would be less crowded and easier to get onto the interstate. The plan was we’d spend a night in Seattle, that way Jasper had a chance to feed. Then we’d take the plane over to Port Angeles where we would stay for a few days since most of the hotels were booked in Forks.

“So, do you have any ideas on a car for us?” he asked as he let Peter and Char know we were using the plane that week.

“Since we’re staying in Seattle for just one night, can we get something sporty and then for the remaining part of the trip, when we’re in the Peninsula, we can get a truck or something less showy.”

Jasper and I looked up car rentals and settled on an Audi A5 and then a Chevy Silverado truck for the rest of the stay.

“You know, I never really opened up and talked before I met you,” I said as I brought my homework back out. “Thank you for putting up with my stubbornness.”

“You’re not that bad, except when you’re pissed off drunk,” he teased and tapped me on the nose. “Seriously though, there is no need to thank me, baby girl. I’m happy you were comfortable enough to start opening up to me. Don’t ever forget, we’re a team.”

I kissed his cheek and then started to study until it was time for us to leave for class.
Carlisle POV

For the past few months, I’ve been trying to figure out the source of my daughter’s head pains she had told me about. It wasn’t easy since I had to limit my research when Edward wasn’t around. As much as I was tempted to bring a book or two into work, I didn’t want to attract too much attention. My tomes were old and if a human saw them, they would wonder why I was carrying around ‘ancient’ books.

Despite my worry about her health, she seemed to be in good spirits. The Christmas holiday gave her an opportunity to shower us all with new clothes, her favorite hobby. It seemed that, while slow, she was on the mend from her loss.

It also helped that Rose and Emmett came back to visit, even for a short while. They were set to leave in a few days, saying they wanted to go out to Africa and take on the wildlife there. As much as I wanted them to stay, I knew they were restless and wanted to avoid the lingering melancholy in the house.

It wasn’t just Alice who was sad, Esme was as well, having lost her children in what seems to be... I don’t even know. Was it really a manipulation as Edward insisted and continues to insist? Was it just the wrong place and wrong time? I tended to think it was the latter given how Bella was, as Rose liked to point out, a danger magnet. It had to be. Edward said he loved her and he still goes around the house playing her lullaby.

I cleared my head as I heard the sounds of Edward’s car driving up the steep road to the house. I mustn’t let him think I was this worried about him or about Alice.

Finding my current patient’s medical chart that I brought home, I opened it and began to study. It was a young man who was brought in for seizures. His MRI came back negative so now I was looking at his history to see why. I didn’t really need to, having spotted a potential conflict of medication but with Edward coming into the house I needed to distract my thoughts.

*Hi son, good day at school today?*

“Hi, Carlisle, it wasn’t bad,” he replied from the bottom floor. “You must have had a busy day if you’re bringing home work.”
“Yes, I was stuck in the ER, thanks to a lumberyard accident,” this time, I replied with words instead of my thoughts and went back to perusing the file. All the while I was using another part of my mind, that I had learned to hide from him, to continue theorizing why Alice was experiencing this pain.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you readers and to my wonderful team of women who’ve made this story look good - JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, DarkNNerdy and LetsJustDance.

See you in 2013!
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

Hope y’all had a good New Years. Thank you for all the alerts and faves! I also love hearing what you’re thinking in the reviews so thank you! :D

Some of you are still wondering about the Cullens (including Alice) and if they still believe Jasper and Bella are dead. Yes, they do. They have taken Alice’s vision as gold and never bothered to check the media - you know, clean break and all. That is all I’ll say because more will be revealed.

I’m not SM but I do enjoy playing with her characters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 56

JPOV

As soon as I was done with my final, I turned in my paper and while walking out nonchalantly, I sent Isabella my love. Her own was returned as soon as I opened the door and waited for her in the corridor.

We were scheduled to leave for Washington in a few days and although she was nervous about it, I knew a part of her was also looking forward to the trip as well. If anything, it had been warm lately and I knew the cooler temperatures of the Pacific Northwest were going to be a nice break for us.

I sat on the tiled floor and quickly sent a note to Peter. My brother and sister were excited that we were coming to the end of the school year and wanted to throw a small celebration, mainly for Isabella. She knew they were going to be at our house tonight and was actually excited the four of us to just have a relaxing evening under the stars.

It didn’t take long before I recognized excitement coming from Isabella. Even with a room full of other students, I was positive it was hers and sure enough, a minute later, her scent was growing stronger from the doorway.
“I think I did really well,” she whispered as the door shut behind her.

“I’m proud of you, baby girl,” I replied and sat up.

She walked straight towards me and wrapped her arms around my neck. “You helped me so I should also be thanking you. Come on, let’s head home and see what Peter and Char have in store for us.”

About fifteen minutes later, we arrived back at the house and quickly ran upstairs to put away the school stuff. We also changed into shorts and I helped Isabella spray on some bug repellant before we headed back downstairs to the patio. Our globe lights were on and my siblings were sitting on the picnic table waiting for us. Music filled the air and they even lit up the citronella candles scattered around so my woman could be comfortable. We all greeted each other and sat down.

“Little one, congratulations on completing your first year of college,” Peter said as he uncovered her food dish with a flourish.

“Oh, you got me barbecue!” she exclaimed and almost immediately grabbed some food. “Thanks guys, did you fix yourselves some tumblers?”

“Yes, we had one before y’all got here,” Char replied as she handed me my drink. “Congratulations are in order for you too, Jasper.”

Isabella looked up at the three of us. “Jasper? What’s the news?” she asked with excitement.

I cleared my throat and gave a quick glare at my siblings. “This is the first school year I had taken classes without being told what I should be taking,” I said.

“Seriously? You had to be told what you could and couldn’t study?” she nearly growled out.

“Yeah,” I replied. “Most of it stemmed from the notion I was unstable so because of that, I wasn’t allowed to take classes that required biology or any type of laboratory science for that matter. The likelihood of accidents was greater and well, you know, it was better to be safe than sorry.”
“Their lack of faith in you is just stupid! So were you ‘encouraged’ to study certain subjects?” she asked and used air quotes to emphasize her sarcasm.

I chuckled at her expression along with my siblings. “You remember me telling you about law school? Well, after I was discouraged to take the bar due that future vision of me slipping up, my academic decisions were reined in even further. The subjects with a safe outcome were mostly courses in language arts and history. So this was the first time I got to take classes in a subject that intrigued me and it was because of you.”

“At first I thought you took them just so we could be close but I could tell it was a subject that interested you.”

“We’re proud of the two of you and I’ve got something,” Peter said as he looked at Isabella.

“You didn’t have to,” she replied warily.

“Nonsense, and it will be fun!”

Excitement rolled off my brother as he reached under his side of the bench and pulled out a piñata that looked sort of like a cartoon character.

“You got me a Smurf piñata?” Isabella exclaimed and laughed. “I never would have guessed. So, where is the bat for me to hit it?”

Char brought out an aluminum bat just as Peter hung the thing off one of the exposed beams on our patio. I walked over with Isabella just as a blindfold was tied around her head. I spun her around a couple times and watched as she took a swing with the bat that would have made a baseball player proud. The weapon made contact and actually stuck momentarily to the cardboard Smurf.

The four of us laughed as she demanded another turn so I spun her around again. She screamed when she heard the bat make contact and quickly took off her blindfold and looked up.

“Umm, where’s the candy?” she asked.
Peter looked up and was momentarily speechless. “Doesn’t it come with it already inside?”

Isabella laughed and went over to hug my brother. “No, there is a compartment on most of these that you stuff with candy. Thank you for that, it was fun and I’m going to hold you to a bag of sweets in the future. The near future, since I’ll be changing soon.”

“Deal. Let’s party!”

The four of us danced until the early morning when Isabella was almost dead on her feet. I carried her to our room after we said goodbye to Peter and Char. She shuffled to the bathroom to get ready and then crawled into bed and into my arms.

As always, I closed my eyes and allowed her peace and love wash over me. I cherished each of these moments as I knew her human days were nearing an end. Given my gift and my memory, I knew I could always recreate this feeling whenever I needed to let my brain relax and I had a feeling if she needed and wanted it, I could let her re-live it as well. I looked over at her and kissed her temple as I sent her my love and watched as a small smile formed on her lips.

I held her like that until the faint colors of morning appeared in the sky. I lifted my head just enough to watch as the purples became pinks and gold before I noticed her breathing and heartbeat changing. I quickly got out of bed and brewed her a pot of coffee and fished around the fridge for something for her breakfast. There was still some pizza left from the other day so I took the whole box and ran it up to the nightstand. When I came back down, her coffee was done so I grabbed a mug and headed back to wake my woman up.

We spent the morning lazing in bed as she drank her coffee and munched on food.

“I guess we’ll need to pack some clothes soon,” she said as she put the cardboard box back on the nightstand and stretched her arms.

“Yeah, I think it is cooler out there than here, for sure.”

She laughed. “If it weren’t for your cooler body, I think I’d be sweltering at night. Does the weather ever play a factor for you? I mean, do temperatures ever affect you?”

“Not really, unless we were exposed the the extremes like Antarctica or Death Valley. As long as
we dress according to the weather, we’re good and usually no one is the wiser.”

“Must be nice not to sweat or get sunburns,” she muttered as she got out of bed and headed to the bathroom.

“Soon you’ll be able to experience it,” I said loud enough for her to hear.

She came out of the bathroom with a toothbrush in her mouth. “Point taken.”

I laughed as she tried to keep the toothpaste in her mouth as she spun around and ran back to the sink.

When she came back out, she stuck her tongue at me before pulling me down for a kiss. “Come on sexy husband of mine, take me on the bike, just the two of us.”

“Yes, ma’am.” I nuzzled her neck and nipped her earlobe before we both got dressed.

It was another ride where there was no agenda other than occasional stops for her. At one point, as she came out of the gas station, I sensed her determination.

“Are you still able to control the bike if you needed to, if say...I wanted to steer?”

I nodded and was pleased she wanted to do this. “You know it, baby girl.”

She hopped on the bike and leaned forward just as I got on behind her and wrapped my arms around her. The two of us strapped our helmets and I donned my riding gloves just as she started the motor.

“I can do this,” she mumbled and took a deep breath before steering us out of the gas station and onto the open road.

We started out slower than I would have but I didn’t mind. I had my hands around my woman and was damn proud of her for wanting to face her fear. As minutes went by and miles under the tires,
she sped up just a little over the posted limit. The road changed course and started to wind around and at first I felt her anxiety and then after taking another deep breath, she steered us going about 5 miles over the speed limit before opening up the speed to near 70 at times.

An hour later, she pulled over to what appeared to be an old diner and shut off the motor.

“I think I’m good now,” she said and smiled as she turned around and held me tight. “I love you so damn much. Thank you.”

“You alright? It looks like this place is famous for its pecan pie. Wanna go try it, baby girl? I remember it was one of my favorite desserts while growing up.”

“Yeah, let’s. My legs are a little wobbly right now, mostly from nerves.”

We sat down in a corner booth and she placed an order for a slice of pie and two forks. When it arrived, I took a sniff and smiled as I got fuzzy images of my mama baking in our small kitchen. I looked up when I felt Isabella’s confusion and then explained my faded memory. She reached over and grabbed my hand as she sent me her adoration and love.

“Oh this is good,” she moaned after taking her first bite.

I sat back as she ate. The scent of molasses, while not as appetizing as I remembered it to be, was still pleasant. Before long she was done and gulped down her water before heading to the restrooms near the back.

“Can you drive us back? I won’t be long.”

I dropped some bills onto the table and we walked out the door.

A couple hours later we arrived back home. Isabella grabbed my hand and ran to the kitchen.

“I want to try something,” she explained as she poured some water into a glass. “I need your help though.”
I nodded and followed her up the stairs and watched as she grabbed my laptop from our library and headed to our balcony. I sat next to her, still not sure what she was up to when she handed me the computer.

“Remember when you talked about your land and how we could build a house after my change?” She took a breath after I nodded. “Well, if I wanted your help in designing something now, can we do the same thing after my change?”

I nodded slowly in confusion not really knowing how to reply.

“What I mean is, I want to see for myself how much I’ve changed now and later,” she explained.

“You mean, we design something now on paper and then compare it later?”

“Yeah, it isn’t a huge task for you, is it? I am just curious how different my mindset will be later. I thought this would be something we could test out in drawings and ideas. I wouldn’t want you to build one right now.”

“I could do that,” I replied, now understanding her idea more. “Hang on, let me grab a couple things.”

I ran out to the study to grab a sketchbook and some pencils. I didn’t draw a whole lot but had one that was in that storage unit. I returned in a few seconds and pulled Isabella up against me as the warm summer sun started to set.

“You want to do it here or downstairs where I can get those candles lit for you?”

“Damn, I forgot about those stupid mosquitos,” she muttered. “Let’s just hang out on the bed then.”

Within minutes, we moved everything back inside. From our bed, we could still see the sun setting and it kept the bugs away from Isabella’s skin. I opened up my laptop again as she flipped through my drawings.
“You’ve had this a while, haven’t you?”

“I think it was one of the first things I got as I lived my so-called life as a civilian and a nomad. I don’t sketch much as you can see, but I kept it stored away. It was something I never shared with anybody.”

“Oh,” she said and quickly began to close the book. “I’m so--”

“Nonsense,” I interrupted and placed my hand over hers, halting her actions. “If I didn’t want to share it with you, I wouldn’t have brought it out tonight.” To prove it to her, I set my laptop to my side and brought her to sit between my legs as I showed her some of the drawings.

“I really like this picture here,” she said as she pointed to a street corner from back in the late 1940s. “The cars are beautiful with those rounded fenders and stuff. You should draw more.”

I smiled as I took in her joy. “For years, I never had the desire to draw. I mean, in a household full of others who liked to tout their talents, this was mediocre compared to them. This picture here was from Portland.”

“Well, I think you’re pretty damn good. So you’re going to sketch out ideas for our dream house? Or rather, version one of our dream house?”

“Yeah. Start throwing out ideas,” I replied and sent her some appreciation on my drawing abilities.

For the next hour, she started to describe the house she had in mind for us. I didn’t have to influence her choices because, just as I have found over the past months, our tastes were pretty similar. She wanted something that was a little rustic, almost a log cabin feel because, as she explained, the land was a little wild and she wanted to preserve that vibe. One of the things she really wanted to indulge in was a wall of windows that faced the creek we played in. She added that the most important rooms, like our bedroom would have views of the back. There was a blush on her cheeks when she explained how she wanted to double the size of our current bathroom and maybe have a custom size tub made for the two of us.

I continued to draw and take notes so I could bring her idea to life. Towards the end, she had me pull up the pictures on my computer and showed me the swath of land that jutted off a ravine.
“Can we build it here so even though it looks like a one story house, we can have some rooms downstairs? Would that work?”

“I think it can work,” I replied and looked at the ravine. “I’m only guessing the depth of that small gorge based on the photo, but it could work. We’d have to reinforce it a little more but we can probably put a couple rooms down there.”

“Yes, that sounds great!” she exclaimed and started rattling off ideas again. “So being vampires won’t make that idea too crazy?”

I shook my head. “We can live just about anywhere. I’d want to make sure the structure is thoroughly reinforced in case we happen to get a little too rambunctious.” I wagged my brow causing her to laugh.

“That is good to know. I think it would be nice to have our private area there, plus it faces away from your brother and sister, giving us a little more privacy.”

“I’d like that, good planning.”

Since the inside of the house will most likely never be seen by humans, she wanted just a fridge big enough for our blood bags and maybe something like an electric kettle for the water. And those, she explained, could be stored under the stairs or something. Other than that, the space that would normally be dedicated to the kitchen could be repurposed into a library area for the two of us.

“So what do you think?” she asked as I handed her the drawing.

“I like the idea a lot, baby girl. You have really put some thought into this.”

“I have and now we see if I will still like these ideas after my change,” she replied nervously.

“You’re concerned about that, aren’t you?”

She nodded and rubbed her cheek against my shoulder. “I understand I’ll be a little less me at first
but I am concerned that who I really am will disappear. If it weren’t for the fact that I changed when I first moved to Forks, I wouldn’t be as concerned.”

I finally understood her reason for this and understood completely. “Hey,” I began and lifted her chin up so her eyes met mine. “Remember that I love you, Isabella. You will be thoroughly loved, just like you are now. Yes, there might be some things about you that change. You might discover that the scent of coffee will make you want to retch. Maybe it won’t. You might discover that you prefer one blood type over another, but then again, it might not happen. No matter what changes and what remains the same for you, I will love you. Peter and Char love you as a sister. The kings look at you as one of their relatives and the Volturi guards consider you as a friend. We will all continue to love and care for you, Isabella Whitlock.”

There was a sheen in her eyes as she wrapped her arms around me and buried her head at the crook of my neck.

“Thank you for saying that,” she mumbled against my skin, a few tears falling from her face. She pulled away from me, wiped the tears away and smiled shyly. “I needed reassurance.”

“I meant it,” I chided her as I brought her lips to mine. “If I need to tell you every day, I will. Come on, let’s relax in the tub. We can pack tomorrow and get ready for our trip.”

Chapter End Notes

A few things - the farmhouse pic is here
http://i18.photobucket.com/albums/b135/hockeybrat29/Fan%20Fic/112910_zpsdec42c5.jpg

Thank you JamesRamsey, AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNnerdy for making this chapter pretty. You are all rockstars. :)

Hope you’re all still enjoying it and don’t be shy, review! :)
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

BOO! Yes, I know this has been slow in updating. RL and all, you know.

Just to clarify from the last chapter - the house planning was for a future Whitlock house (the one that is near Peter and Char). Bella thought it was a cool idea to plan a ‘vampire’ house now and then revisit the idea later, after her change - to see how her ideas have changed. I know it must have been confusing since they now own a house in the Italian countryside too. :) 

I don’t own it - I’m not SM. I just like playing with her characters.

Onward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 57

JPOV

I got Isabella up early in the morning as we headed to our trip to Washington. It was just the two of us going and even though I had to get there early to do the pre-flight checks, she stayed asleep most of the time.

“Where are we?” she asked as she finally woke up, stretching her arms.

“I’m just about to taxi out towards the runway, baby girl,” I replied as I revved up the engines. “There is coffee already in the galley.”

“Thanks,” she replied and sent me her appreciation. I could hear her get her morning routine in gear and hoped I got everything she needed. She was happy and a little nervous as she sang quietly as she left the lavatory and grabbed some coffee.

In five minutes, she was sitting next to me with her headset on and the safety belt cinched around her waist.
“Thanks for getting everything this morning. You wore me out last night, otherwise I would have helped you,” she said and chuckled.

I smiled at her remembering her cries of passion and how her thighs gripped my torso. I took a deep breath to calm myself. “I think I got everything you’ll need but if I didn’t, let me know and we can get it.”

“I will and thank you for last night. I feel a little more relaxed now,” she replied. “As far as stuff I’ll need, we can assess it when we get into Seattle.”

I maneuvered the plane in line on the runway as we waited our turn to take off. I took a hold of her hand and brought it to my lips. Her skin was so warm and silky smooth against my lips and as I, once again, recalled the passion from last night, I softly groaned and ran my tongue against her skin.

Her voice hitched slightly as she watched me. “Oh god,” she whispered breathlessly. “I love you so much, Jasper.” She swallowed as her breathing became heavier.

“Isabella,” I growled out and momentarily shut my eyes. “You’re the death of me, baby girl.”

She giggled at my response but still continued to send me her desire and love. “Hey, we’re about to take off,” she said after looking at the queue of airplanes ahead of us. “Oh, and I’m not going to apologize for riling you up. You do that to me all the time,” she said and winked at me.

I chuckled as I got everything set, steering us closer and closer to take off. Out of all the times I had ever flown anywhere, I realized that traveling with Isabella had always been a pleasant experience. It was never a drama production and just added to the reasons I was grateful for having a woman in my life like her.

It didn’t take long until we were the next plane to take off. As I communicated with the tower, I could see Isabella taking a deep breath to steel herself as we took off into the skies.

“Hey, can I ask you a question?” she asked as I leveled the plane to cruising altitude.

“Baby girl, you know you can.”
She ran her hands through her hair and took a deep breath. I had a feeling it was in efforts to calm to her fluttering heart.

“So far, my exposure has only been to a few types of vampires, the Cullens...” she began and I could feel the disdain as she practically spat out the name, “...those vicious nomads, the Volturi and, of course, our family. What is the general view on humans? Is it more like the nomads or what? I mean, how wary should I be?”

I took a deep breath before hanging up with the air traffic tower at our airport. “I always think it is better to be more cautious. As far as the general point of view and based on my past experience, humans are usually seen as no more than meals to a typical vampire.” As I spoke, I undid her belt and pulled her onto my lap, hoping my candor didn’t freak her the fuck out.

“So, for the most part, we’re just regarded as food?” she asked and I slowly nodded. “So then the Cullens...” She took a deep breath before continuing. “They sort of deviated from the norm even though they still treated me like shit?”

I kissed her hair after her blunt assessment of my former family. “In a nutshell, as you humans say. Yeah, I think so.”

“So then the Volturi treating me as an equal is an even bigger exception?”

I nodded, not sure where she was going with her train of thought.

“Is it bad that I want to be associated with them? Not a part of the guard or anything, but maybe like Peter and Char, if we need to?”

“I don’t know if I want to work for them as much as my siblings,” I said as I ran my fingers through her hair. “I don’t want to be a full-time part of any organization given my past.”

“No, I respect that,” she replied and looked at my eyes. “I don’t want to either, but I’m thinking more a familial alliance. I don’t want surrogate parents but if you say they’re like uncles, I’d like that sort of bond. It doesn’t bother you to have more family-type alliances, does it?”
“No, I don’t think they expect us to become permanent guard members; however, like you, I like the idea of having more family.”

We didn’t say anything for a while, just relishing in the emotions that swirled around us. I kissed her lips and growled softly when her fingers raked through my hair. I knew we had a brief conversation about the Volturi not too long ago and I knew we’d most likely talk about this a few more times before we even set foot in Italy - it was her way of processing things and something I have grown to accept.

“Let me freshen up,” she replied a half hour later and stood up to walk back to the galley. “Do you want a blood bag?”

“I’m good, baby girl,” I replied as she walked away, the gentle sway of her hips in that skirt of hers had me growling low.

I was one lucky motherfucker.

She returned in no time with a coffee mug and quickly sat down on my lap. Curiosity was radiating out of her as she set her drink down.

“Jasper,” she began.

“Yeah?”

“I am changing soon and well, maybe it is this trip to Washington or something...but it had me thinking of things I always wanted to do.”

I reached under the top she was wearing and started to rub her bare flesh in hopes that it calmed her nerves down, much as it did with me. Sure enough a few breaths later, she was more relaxed.

“Thanks for that.” She took a deep breath. “Have you ever done anything illegal?”

I looked her and blinked, even though I knew I didn’t need to. “Uh...”
“I mean, not feeding related or anything,” she blurted out.

I was still confused and sent her a flash of my emotions until she realized I wasn’t following her train of thought.

“Oh,” she exclaimed. “Let me see if I can explain.”

I watched as she slid off my lap and started to pace up and down the aisle of the aircraft. She mumbled about things but they were so garbled that even with my enhanced hearing, I couldn’t understand her. Finally she must have come up to some decision a few minutes later and sat back down on my lap.

“I want to do something crazy during this trip.”

“Okay,” I replied slowly.

“It is sad because what I really want to do is something that would break laws and if Charlie were here, he’d kick my ass,” she grumbled.

I continued to rub circles on her back in hopes it would get her to further explain.

“I’m not talking about robbing a bank or getting into a crazy car chase. I know having a fake ID is not exactly legal, but I want something a little more thrilling, to add to my non-existent bucket list.”

I looked at her, finally understanding her train of thought. I thought for a moment. “Nothing that would mean I’d be bailing you out, right?”

“No, because you’ll be my accomplice,” she replied matter-of-factly.

I thought quickly of things I could do, given my vampire abilities, which would still be thrilling for her to experience without harming others, or herself. A couple minutes later I came up with an idea and grinned.
“You want it to be a surprise?”

“You thought of something? Yeah, a surprise would work. I trust you,” she said and the excitement pushed her anxiety aside.

“We’ll need to do some quick shopping and get you some dark clothing too.”

“Really? I could do that. I won’t need to smear that paint stuff on my face will I?”

“Nah, you’ll be good. Hey, if you look below, we’re passing over the Sierra Nevada and you should be able to see Lake Tahoe.”

“You mean that body of water below us? That’s it?”

“Yes,” I replied as I adjusted the course due to some weather near Oregon. “Hang on, baby girl, I’m going to get us out of a storm. It might get a little bumpy.”

She sat down quickly and cinched the harness tighter. Her eyes closed and she gripped the armrests as I continued to fly over a storm cell. There were a couple bumps before everything smoothed out and I felt her relief before she even breathed it out.

“That wasn’t as bad as I anticipated. You were really smooth with the controls.”

“One day, we’ll teach you and you can be ‘smooth’ as well.” I sent her some calm and smiled when I felt her relax a little more.

“I’d like that. I hope my nerves won’t get as rattled once I’m turned.”

“You should feel more controlled,” I replied. “Just from my experience, I don’t think you’ll have those flashbacks from the accident like before.”

“Oh, thank god,” she muttered. “That alone would be great. The first year after it happened, I had them all the time and would wake up screaming in terror. Other than the damn squirrel and the
motorcycle, it’s been much better lately, almost like you’re keeping the nightmares and memories away.”

“I haven’t done anything but hold you at night,” I said as I reached for her hand. “If that keeps your bad dreams away, you can be sure I’ll continue.” I looked out onto the horizon and pointed. “See that peak ahead of us? That’s Mount St. Helens.”

“The volcano?” she exclaimed and sat up a little higher. “How close will we get to it? I wonder if it is still smoking like it did back in December.”

“We’ll skirt close enough you should see the peak. Go grab your camera, baby girl.”

I laughed as she hopped out of her seat and ran to the closet. I continued to steer towards the mountain and watched as she went from one side of the plane to the other, catching a glimpse of the scenery below.

It didn’t take long before we were on our descent into Seattle. After a smooth landing, I taxied the plane and quickly called the car agency to make sure our car was waiting for us. Since we were going to be back tomorrow afternoon, I didn’t need to clear all our personal stuff and just grabbed our bags before leading us into the terminal. Once we were outside, we waited a few minutes for the car to arrive as Isabella quickly fished through her bag for something warmer to wear.

“I should have changed on the plane,” she muttered as she found a cardigan and slipped in on. “Much better, I have forgotten it is chillier here than in Texas.”

“There’s our car,” I murmured. “We’ll go get you some warmer clothes for tonight.”

“You mean something warmer and stealthy, right? Maybe an outfit that is similar to what you wear when you go hunting?”

“Sure, there is an Army-Navy surplus store nearby.” I almost cringed as the words slipped out my mouth. Even though I knew Isabella wasn’t as pretentious as my former family, nor was she one for fancy labels, I was still a little nervous. I attributed it to being out in this area again.

“Sure, that sounds fine,” she replied and shrugged. “I mean, I won’t be wearing them the whole night, right? Because brand new clothes are scratchy before they’re washed.”
“Nah, couple hours or so, tops.”

When we got there, I helped with what she called her ninja clothes and were out in no time. We stopped at a coffee shop on the way back to the car and then headed to the hotel. As we neared Pioneer Square, I smiled as she caught on to where we were staying.

“We’re staying at a Hotel Monaco!” she exclaimed, excitedly. “Jasper, will they have animal robes for us?”

“Yeah, I asked when I booked the hotel.”

I checked us in and noticed she wasn’t bothered that our room was located on a private floor. The hotel employee gave us instructions on how to access them in the elevator and wished us a wonderful stay.

“So you weren’t surprised by the room?” I asked as the elevator door closed.

“No, I didn’t think you’d get a room at the Fairmont or something. My old boss, Ashley worked there before starting her own business. She used to tell me about all the celebrities that stayed there.”

Our room was nice and after she freshened up and changed to jeans, we headed back out to walk around Pioneer Square. I gave her a quick history of the area, describing to her how the city was once located much lower than the current city of today.

“How do you know this?”

I steered us into a small square and pointed. “They have tours of the underground city. It was a field trip I had to go to a couple years before you arrived.”

“That sounds cool but look, the sign says they’re sold out,” she said and then looked around before reaching up to my ear. “Maybe one day you can sneak us in and give me a personal tour.”
“Yes ma’am, I can do that. I’ve snuck down there a few times myself,” I replied and kissed her.

We spent the rest of the day near the waterfront. The sun was virtually nonexistent so I just hid my eyes with some sunglasses as we walked around and people-watched. When she got hungry, we headed to a nearby pub. After the sun set and the air started to cool, we headed back to the hotel and relaxed.

“Baby girl, it is midnight. Come on, let’s get you ready,” I whispered after realizing she had fallen asleep half-way through the movie we were watching.

She mumbled something incoherently before sitting up. “Coffee?”

“Here.” I was so glad I ordered a carafe for her.

We got changed and I watched as she twisted her hair in a braid down her back before stuffing her beanie in a pocket.

“Hop on my back, baby girl, I need to sneak us down so we don’t draw attention.”

She got on and wrapped her legs tight around my torso. I took a moment to enjoy the feel of her warm body wrapped around me, holding me tightly. I stepped out into the hallway and went to the fire exit door, avoiding the elevator. As soon as I got us into the stairwell, I sped up the stairs to the roof. Using my speed, I was able to climb down the building in a matter of minutes, making sure Isabella was comfortable the whole time. Once I got down to the street, I ran us to the Space Needle, hopping over fences before climbing up the tower.

It was no more than a twenty minute run and as I sat us down so we faced the Puget Sound, I noticed her eyes were shut.

“Open your eyes, beautiful.”

“Where,” she gasped and harshly whispered. “We’re on top of the Space Needle?”

“Yep and I believe this is considered trespassing. Is this an acceptable illegal activity, Mrs.
“Whitlock?”

“This is awesome!” she exclaimed as she tried to contain her excitement. “Oh shit. We are high up. You’re not going to climb up that pole are you?”

“I’ve got you, don’t worry. I won’t take us up there until you’re ready to climb it with me.”

“So we can do similar stuff when I’m changed? This is what you meant by the Eiffel Tower right?”

I put my arm around her shoulder, pulling her closer to me. “Eiffel Tower, CN Tower in Toronto, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur…this will be cake for you once you’re aware of your strength and stuff.”

“Do you love it, Jasper? I mean, do you love being a vampire?” She looked into my eyes and smiled. “From what I see, it seems like you do.”

I kissed her gently and looked out into the black water. “Not always as you can no doubt guess. It took me a long time to come to the point where I can say that I love what I am. Peter, Char, and of course, you helped me. Now, I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”

The sound of a scream broke our moment as I crouched towards the edge and scanned the area. Over to the right, 500 yards from where we were, a knife wielding man had cornered a young bedraggled woman.

“What’s going on?” Isabella asked and I explained to her the situation. “Do you need to feed? Can you help her?”

I nodded slowly. “I didn’t plan on feeding this trip and if I did, I’d leave you up here on your own.”

“Go, Jasper. I won’t move. Save the girl. Go!”

I didn’t argue back and scurried down the tower, heading towards the scene of the potential crime. As I got closer, there was a strong sense of fear as well as the sounds of whimpering followed by a maniacal laughter.
“Shut up!” the man growled and the sound of one body striking another was heard.

I was closer now and saw she was cowering and covering her body as tears fell onto the ground. I leapt quickly and attacked as I sent a strong wave of lethargy to the girl so she slumped over in a slumber. For the man, I sent the fear from the girl to him before attacking. It didn’t take me long to begin draining the man who reeked of booze. As soon as my venom was out of his body, I stopped and then quickly ran up to the monorail platform where I dropped the body so it landed in a sickening crunch.

I went back to the girl and picked her up, carrying her to the monorail platform. I could hear the train heading this way from approximately a mile away. I laid her down gently on a bench before using the emergency phone and making an anonymous tip about the unconscious girl.

Once I was done, I raced back to the top of the Needle and found Isabella trying to creep closer and closer to the edge in the direction I had headed. Not wanting to startle her, I slowly sent her love and increased it when she stopped moving and called out my name.

“Let’s get back to the hotel and we can talk while we relax in the tub,” she said once I gathered her in my arms. “Thank you for indulging in my crazy idea tonight.”

“It was fun, baby girl. I was pleased that you have an adventurous streak. I had never shared this with anyone before.”
Chapter End Notes

Thank you to my wonderful team of ladies - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkN Nerdy. I couldn’t have made this without your support and support from you readers. :) I love hearing from you!

XO - sushi
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

Happy Friday!

I was planning on posting this yesterday but The Vampire Diaries sucked me in - BIGTIME.

Thank you for all the reviews and alerts - I truly appreciate it.

Thank you to the wonderful team of ladies - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy. Without them, this story would have so many repetitive words and probably wouldn’t feel as smooth of a story as it is.

I’m not SM - nor will I ever be. I just like playing with her characters.

Onward~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 58

BPOV

When Jasper left to save the young woman, I sat there for a while, looking in the direction he left. Even though I knew being human meant that I shouldn’t have been interested in what was going on, I was and wished I had some binoculars at that moment. I imagined Jasper growling like he did the night of the robbery and didn’t realize I had inched closer towards him until I saw the anchors where they strung lights in the shape of a Christmas tree over the holidays.

I sat there, still looking in the direction and wondered what was going on. I wasn’t sure how long I was there, it was so quiet and still time seemed to have slowed. It wasn’t until I felt love steadily increasing that I knew Jasper was back.

Soon after, I was wrapped around his back again as he sped us through downtown Seattle, towards our hotel. The cool night air whistled by and I had to shut my eyes to keep them from watering. It wasn’t long until we were back in the hotel, in what looked like one of the stairwells.
“Let me go out first to make sure the coast is clear,” Jasper whispered against my ear and pulled off my beanie before winking at me.

I stayed behind him with my hand in his until he tugged gently to let me know we were fine. We walked down the corridor as nonchalant as possible and were in our room in no time. As soon as the door closed behind us, I let go of the breath I was holding.

“Wow, that was fun,” I said and followed Jasper into the bathroom where he got the tub ready for us.

“I’m glad you enjoyed that. I tried to keep my running smooth so you’d be comfortable.”

“The wind was a little harsh and made my eyes water a little, but other than that, it wasn’t jarring at all. You’ve got a smooth stride, Jasper.”

The heat from the water started to steam up the room and I walked over to Jasper and wrapped my arms around him.

“I’m so happy you’re here with me for this. It means a lot. I honestly don’t know if I could be back here without you.”

He rubbed his hands on my back, soothing me. “Me too, it makes me grateful that I came back when I did.”

Once the tub was filled, we stripped out of our clothes and I waited for Jasper to get into the tub first so I wouldn’t be scalded. We sat facing each other at first as I asked him about his feed. I was impressed that he was able to stop once venom was out of the body and dispose the body in a way that it wouldn’t arouse a lot of suspicion.

“What about the girl?”

“The girl? Well, I put her to sleep with lethargy and once I took care of the man, I used an emergency phone to get her help. I also slipped some bills in her jacket pocket. Her blood didn’t smell healthy so hopefully she can use the money for some medical help.”
“You can detect that?”

He nodded as he pulled me so my back rested against his chest. “I couldn’t tell exactly why she wasn’t well. The blood has a distinct scent when it is healthy versus when it is tainted with drugs or plagued by disease. Another clue was her heart, it sounded like it was working harder because the blood was more sluggish. I am more adept in determining the drugs but not the diseases.”

“Well, I’m glad you helped her all the same, or at least, gave her a chance to seek help. It’s funny but a part of me wished I was able to watch, like with binoculars but…” I shrugged.

“Soon enough and we can have meals together.”

“I just thought if I watched you, I could learn or something.”

“Your instincts will kick in once you’re awake. There’s no need to worry, okay? But if it does concern you once you’re changed, I’ll teach you.”

I nodded, feeling Jasper against me in the warm tub and my eyelids started to get heavy. I was really trying to fight my sleep but nodded a couple times before Jasper chuckled and pulled us out of the tub. He wrapped us in towels before carrying me to bed. I wasn’t aware of anything else once my head hit the pillow.

I started to wake as soon as I heard some dishware followed by a door shutting. I rubbed my eyes and turned over to my stomach, letting my hair cover my face before I heard Jasper’s chuckle and the very familiar scent of coffee.

He brushed my hair aside and planted kisses on my neck.

“They had some pastries on the menu. I am not sure if you’ll like them though,” he said, almost nervously.

I reached over for the mug of coffee and sat up to take a sip. “I was wondering about the sound of dishes clinking around. Where are they?”
When I saw the croissants on the nightstand, I licked my lips. “Oh that looks good. Let me... bathroom,” I mumbled as I scrambled out of bed. Minutes later, I emerged from the bathroom and jumped back into bed, laughing as Jasper held my coffee so it wouldn’t spatter.

“So what time do we have to get back on the plane? Is it really easier to fly to Port Angeles instead of coming back to Seattle?”

“I put us down for a 1PM departure,” he said as he handed me a linen napkin. “It isn’t always easier, but I thought since it will likely be an emotional trip, it would be easier to leave out of P.A.”

“Yeah, you have a point there. Thanks for thinking of me. I guess a part of me isn’t looking forward to it but I feel like I need to be out here one more time before I am turned.”

“I love you, Isabella. Just remember that I’m here for you, not just for this trip. Even though you’ll be a vampire, we can make periodic trips to visit your dad. We might have to be stealthy but we’ll find a way.”

“I love you, Jasper and I know. Thank you, it means a lot to me and I will talk to you if things get overwhelming. So what did you find in terms of a hotel for us? I never asked, I was more excited about the truck.”

He chuckled. “It is the Olympic Lodge. It sounded like it would be comfortable for a couple nights, plus it’s quiet. I tried to see if they had a big tub or even a shower for us but they didn’t.”

I frowned at the thought and then snorted when I realized I was upset. “I think you’ve spoiled me, Mr. Whitlock. I enjoy our tub and shower times entirely too much.”

“Me too, baby girl, me too.”

We spent the rest of the morning repacking our clothes. Jasper was actually surprised that I decided to pack up the ninja clothes. I explained to him that I could use them as hunting clothes of my own when it came time. Besides, I hated to throw them away.

After checking out of the hotel, we headed back to King County airport in our sporty rental car. Luckily we had left early because there was some traffic on the interstate. By the time we arrived,
there was less than thirty minutes before we were scheduled to take off.

I watched as Jasper conducted a quick check before he guided me to sit next to him. I buckled myself in and grabbed the headset above me as I watched Jasper get the plane out of the hangar. As he taxied out onto the tarmac, I watched him as he controlled the aircraft and communicated with the tower. I was so impressed at how he’d make small, smooth changes that I knew from previous airplane trips would have felt more abrupt if he was human.

“Will I be able to learn to make such precise movements too? I mean, not just flying, but in normal interaction with human things.”

“With practice you’ll be able to. Not at first you won’t, but in time you will. Don’t be surprised if you get frustrated though, it is bound to happen since movement is second nature but all of a sudden, you’re going to have to be conscientious of your actions and such because of your increased strength.”

“This whole new re-learning thing sounds like a pain in the ass but I know it is needed. I am trying to remind myself of the whole ‘grand scheme of things’ and not get caught up on the details.”

“Don’t worry, we will help as much as you want us to. We’ve all been through it.”

It was a quick flight and before I knew it, we were descending. Jasper pointed down to Olympic National Park as we made a wide turn, getting ready to land. I smiled and reached out to hold onto his hand as the memories came back to me; both the good ones and the bad.

I sat back and took deep breaths as we got lower and lower to the ground. The landing was, as usual, smooth and I smiled at Jasper as he steered the plane into the hangar. Once again as soon as he shut off the engines, we grabbed our bags and headed out to find our rental.

It didn’t take long for us to spot the dark blue pick-up he rented for us. It was a little taller than trucks I’ve been in, so Jasper had to lift me up after stowing our bags. By the time we got to the hotel and checked into our room, I was starting to feel hungry. I mentioned it to Jasper when we got into the room and decided to change into slightly warmer clothes before heading out once again to get me some food.

I wanted to go back to that restaurant we went to nearly a year ago. As we waited for my food, we talked about things we needed, or rather, I needed to attend to.
“So tomorrow is the ceremony in Olympia? We should do something to get your mind off of it. Even for a couple hours,” Jasper remarked. “Wanna go see a movie?”

“Sure, what’s playing?”

“Let me check,” he said as he checked his phone. “That movie ‘300’ is playing - that’s the one about Sparta.”

“That Transformers movie isn’t out yet?”

“No, it looks like it will hit theaters next month, around the Fourth of July weekend.”

He handed me his phone and I looked at the choices.

“Yeah, let’s watch ‘300’. I’d rather watch it than ‘Knocked Up’.”

Watching a movie that was based on a comic book was definitely what I needed. Of course I didn’t know that it was a comic until after when we got back to the hotel and looked it up.

“Hey Jasper, you wanna go hit the pool? It is supposed to be heated and now that the sun’s down, would you want to?”

“Only if it isn’t crowded,” he replied as he looked out the window. “Nope, it is empty. Did you pack your suit?”

“Yeah and I packed those long sleeve swim shirts too. I actually had them in the bag since our Vegas trip but since we never hit the pool, well...” I shrugged. “Come on, let’s go have some fun.”

We both changed and grabbed a couple towels before heading downstairs, stopping at the front desk to order more towels. We were still the only ones there as we swam around and splashed each other. I got dunked a couple times as I shrieked and laughed while he chased me around.
“Got you,” he growled and started to run his fingers up my ribcage.

“No!” I screeched. “I’m ticklish!”

He lifted me out of the pool and caught me in his arms. I wrapped mine around his neck and kissed him, earning a soft moan to escape from his lips.

Lost in the moment, I didn’t realize we had moved to the stairs of the pool. Our kissing started to get a little heated and just then, another couple entered the pool area.

“Back...room,” I whispered to Jasper’s ear and he nodded as we wrapped our towels around us and headed back.

As soon as the door shut behind us, he went straight to the shower, turning it on.

We continued kissing, my legs still wrapped around his waist as the hot water started to warm up the small room. It didn't take long before I realized how chlorinated our skin and suits were. If I could smell it, no doubt Jasper could too.

“Let’s get our suits off,” I whispered as he ran his fingers along my sides before resting them on my hips. I took off the long sleeve top and tossed it onto the floor as Jasper untied my bikini top.

I untangled my legs from him and slid down to shimmy out if my bottoms and then grabbed the waistband of his shorts, slowly slipping them off his body as we continued kissing and moaning. Once the suits were off he lifted me up again and stepped into the tub, adjusting the water and shower head.

I felt the slightly cool wall on my back as Jasper’s body pressed against mine, the combination with the hot water made my body feel a little more sensitive. I tried to moan out his name but when he ran his tongue along my neck, I think I managed to only mouth it out as my head tilted back.

“Tell me what you want, baby girl,” he murmured as he nipped my earlobe.

“You...in me...now,” I panted out and arched my back, pressing harder against him.
“Hold on,” he whispered harshly as his breathing increased.

He was hard and I knew I was ready for him. I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and my fingers wove into his hair, tugging slightly to spur him on. As soon as he started to slide into me, my eyes fluttered and I heard moans that echoed in the small room, not realizing at first it was me.

The movements were slow and even though I tried to get Jasper to move faster, he kept his rhythm. I looked into his darkened eyes as he moved slightly harder, his hands back at my hips. I was close to the edge and my legs were shaking.

“Come for me,” he gritted out as his thrusts sped slightly but enough to have me screaming out his name.

If I could, my nails would have dug into his flesh as I came. We were both moving hard and fast, his breaths mirroring mine as we gazed into each other’s eyes. I was close again and based on our near frantic movements, he was too.

“Jasper! Yes...don’t stop!” I whimpered as my eyes started to close and my body began to tense.

“Fuck, I’m close...” he growled and moved even faster.

Light exploded behind my eyes and I heard my name escape from Jasper’s lips. I was in a daze as I felt the water stopping and Jasper wrapping us in towels, not fully aware of my surroundings until we were both on the bed.

The passion began to subside and I felt my eyelids getting heavy. I slowly got back up to get ready for bed knowing tomorrow would be an emotional one.

**Carlisle POV**

As soon as Esme left the house, I went downstairs to search for Alice. The house was empty again since Rose and Emmett flew out to New York this morning. Edward left a couple days prior, deciding he needed some time to himself. I suggested that he spend the time at our island in South America since it was quiet and he could reflect on things.
Alice was sitting out on our patio, just staring at the mountain range in front of us. I sat down next to her as she turned to me and smiled.

“Are we alone now?”

“Yes, Esme will be back tomorrow. She needed to do some shopping and decided to fly to Anchorage. I might have some ideas on your head pains,” I began.

“Oh? Good news I hope,” she replied.

“I’m not sure. I’ll find out in a couple weeks when Esme and I head to the medical conference I signed up for. There is an acclaimed neurologist that I’m hoping to meet with.”

“It sounds promising, I guess,” she said and I could see she was disappointed. “So you found nothing from your books?”

“No and because I didn’t want to draw Edward’s attention, I took longer than usual. I’m sorry about that,” I said and took her hand. “Have they gotten any worse?”

“No, the pains seem to come and go but the intensity hasn’t changed,” she explained. “If they did, I wouldn’t have been able to be as patient.”

I nodded as I took a closer look at her. There were no physical changes that I could see. “It sounds almost as though you’re getting migraines?”

She tilted her head in thought before looking back at me. “I guess. Maybe you can use that term when you’re doing research once Edward gets back? I mean, he shouldn’t catch on, right?”

I smiled at her suggestion. “That is a good idea. I can think about my patient ‘Mary’ who has suddenly, in the past year, been plagued with the illness.”

“Do you know when he’ll be back?”
“Not really,” I said and shook my head. “He said he needed to be on his own and that is all I know. He knows the school schedule so I won’t be concerned until mid-August.”

“It is good that he gets that time. I know I needed it. Hey, you want to grab a couple caribou tonight?”

“Sure, let me change into something else.”

“Me too, back in five?”

It has been a while since my adopted daughter and I hunted and I was looking forward to spending more time with her. I hoped that my upcoming conference would give me some answers because if it didn’t, my only option would be to contact the Volturi for their help.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmmm...there’s something rotten in the Cullen household - to paraphrase Shakespeare. :)

Did you enjoy that?

Thank you so much! Until next time ~ sushi
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

Hope y’all are having a good weekend. I realize I can’t post on Thursdays because I’m in total TVD mode.

Thanks for the R&Rs, alerts and faves. I’m glad y’all are still reading this story.

Thank you to the fab women who’ve made this story pretty - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy.XOXO

Not SM, never was - I just have fun with her characters.

Onward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 59

BPOV

The usual scent of coffee and Jasper woke me up, but unlike most mornings, it had been a rough night. It didn’t matter that Jasper’s arms held me; I still had trouble falling into my normal peaceful sleep. I knew today was going to be tough and the stress along with anticipation had me tossing and turning most of the night. A couple times when I was asleep, I woke up because I had Elbowed Jasper and, well, he was like a damn brick wall. I hoped that didn’t mean I’d wake up with bruised arms.

“Coffee, baby girl?”

I nodded before getting out of bed so I could check to see if I looked like I was in some wrestling match the night before. I breathed a sigh of relief when I noticed my arms were not black and blue, but they were just a little tender.

When I came out, I looked over at Jasper who was laying on his back with the sheets covering his lower body, his forearm splayed over his eyes. If I didn’t know any better, he looked asleep. I smiled and tiptoed back to the bed so I could climb back in before giving him a kiss on the lips.
“How are you feeling?” he asked as he sat up and brushed his fingertips along the backs of my arms.

“Sorry for elbowing you last night, not that it would have hurt you,” I muttered as I reached over for the mug. “I’m a little tired but functional.” I held onto the coffee mug and took a couple gulps, feeling the slight jolt to my system.

“I could have helped you sleep peacefully.”

“I know you would have if I asked and believe me, it was tempting, especially after I whacked you with my elbow the second time,” I replied with a grimace. “I just don’t want to hide from the feelings, because I know sooner or later I am going to face them in some shape or form, you know?”

He pulled me onto his lap with such ease that my coffee didn’t even slosh around. “I understand, which is why I didn’t just go ahead and do it. Do you need to sleep more?”

I took a deep breath after taking another gulp and looked over at the clock. “It is really tempting but no, if I doze while we head down to Olympia, that is one thing, but now that I’m awake, I don’t think I can go back to bed.” An idea popped into my head and I looked at Jasper. “Hey, after the ceremony, can we go to Forks?”

“Yeah, I think that would be fitting. Will your friends from the Quileute tribe be at the ceremony? I mean, what if they saw me and associate me with them?” He looked at me and I could tell he was nervous.

“Jasper,” I began and turned so I could run my fingers through his hair. “You’re my husband, my present and future. That day I had you hide in my room, I didn’t want them knowing about you because things were just too fresh. Now it is a different story. We’ve been through a helluva lot together and if they truly care, they’ll have to deal with it their own way.” I set my mug aside and cupped his face before giving him a kiss. “Besides, I sent Jacob our wedding photos so he knows that we’re married and that I’m madly in love with you.”

He smiled brightly and held me closer against him. “I love you too, Isabella. I guess I see them as your family members which is why I’m a little anxious.”

I grinned and kissed him one more time. “Come on, I’ll keep you safe.” He smiled knowing those
were the same words he has said to me on numerous occasions.

We got dressed and headed downstairs so I could grab a pastry before getting on the road. Sure enough, I dozed for a bit during the ride so Jasper nudged me when we were about thirty minutes away.

When we got to the entrance of the memorial, I spotted a small crowd gathered by the flagpoles that were to the left of the granite wall of names. A small cloth covered one section like a curtain. Chairs were arranged in front of it with a small podium.

A few uniformed officers greeted me and I vaguely remembered one or two from the funeral from a year ago. When I saw Jacob and his father, I waved enthusiastically and smiled at the men. Lisa, Jacob’s girlfriend, was also there and she waved back.

“Bells! It is so good to see you, honey,” Billy said gruffly as I bent down to hug him. “Texas and married life seem to have done you a world of good.”

“It is good to see you too, Billy. I take it Jake showed you the pictures?”

“He sure did. We even took one of them and placed it on your dad’s grave, I hope that was alright.”

I looked behind me at Jasper just as my eyes started to tear up. He walked over and held my hand knowing I needed his support right there. “Yes, it was a wonderful idea, Billy. I wish I had thought of that.”

The elder man looked up at Jasper and narrowed his eyes. I was so glad that it was a typical overcast day and Jasper was wearing sunglasses to hide his red irises.

“You were once a Cullen, but you’re both Whitlocks now?” he asked with a confused look on his face.

“Yes sir,” Jasper replied. “You see, I took on the Cullen name when I was being fostered by them but after coming of age and doing some research on my actual family history, I discovered I was a descendant of a young Confederate Army major and was named after him, so I thought it was best that I changed back to my original name in his honor.”
If I hadn’t known the truth, I would have been damn impressed with the story. Apparently Billy was too, along with Jacob and Lisa, who had walked over to us just as Jasper explained.

“Confederate, huh? I thought I noticed an accent.”

“My family was originally from Texas but they fell onto hard times. It is how I ended up in the foster system.”

“I can see from Bells’ face that she likes you, a lot. You better take care of her or there will be hell to pay, young man.”

“No problem, sir,” Jasper replied and looked over at me. “She’s been using a heavy bag to punch and kick so if I ever do her wrong, you’ll have to wait in line.” He winked at me and I felt the blood rushing to my face.

They all shook hands and smiled as I introduced Jacob and Lisa to Jasper. The three of them congratulated us just as someone directed us to take our seats. Jasper and I quickly suggested that we meet up at the Forks diner after to catch up since we were leaving the next morning.

Since I was family, Jasper and I were seated but many others were standing behind us. I hadn’t expected a crowd here and held onto Jasper’s hand tighter, more grateful now than ever he was here. To be honest, I wasn’t sure what to expect.

The ceremony itself was short. There were a couple speeches, one from the mayor of Forks and another from the current Chief of Police. I had remembered the police officer as he spoke. He had been the one who handed me my father’s flag; the one who said he had been the current Chief of Poulsbo.

With Jasper holding my hand, I had the mental and emotional strength to listen to the ceremony without breaking down like before. Tears fell down my face but I was still in control. It wasn’t until the small section of the wall was unveiled that I broke down in a small sob. There, engraved in granite, was my dad’s name, now forever honored by the state of Washington.

I shook hands and thanked everybody for showing up after the dedication. A few wanted to stay and talk more so I suggested that they meet us at the diner where we could have a small gathering. After we were finally alone, Jasper stood by sending me his love as I walked to the wall and took a
picture of my dad’s name. I was so grateful for the support he was giving me and continued to send him my appreciation as we headed towards the parking lot.

As soon as we got near the truck, I turned and gave Jasper a huge hug. “Thank you so much for being here. I was such a mess last year. I’m so glad you came back when you did.”

He lifted me up into the passenger seat and then got into his side. He smiled and held my hand as we left the Memorial. “You’re welcome, baby girl, I was glad I didn’t linger in Texas any longer. I hope my backstory to Billy and Jacob was okay.”

“Okay? It was awesome!” I exclaimed. “Hell, if I didn’t know your true story, I’d have believed it.”

“Good, I wanted something somewhat plausible. They were all really proud of you. Billy seemed to warm up after I began to explain my family situation to him.”

“Well, you know how the Cullens had the fancy cars and shit. It bothered the tribe because they saw it as the Cullens flaunting their wealth around. They knew Carlisle was a doctor but the big house, cars and hoity-toity attitude didn’t sit well. Billy and Jacob didn’t really say much in the beginning, but after you all left, they made their opinions heard. You know from the foundation work that they and their tribe aren’t wealthy by any means. For the Quileutes, seeing their version of acting like humans really got to them. There might be more to it than that, but that was the gist I got from all the guy talk and stuff.”

“Hmm, that is a good point. No matter though, they’re going to join us at the diner so we can have a laid back meal with them.”

“Yep, just sit next to me and hopefully they won’t be any wiser to you and your feeding habits,” I teased and winked at him as I settled in for the ride. “You don’t mind that some other people might show up?”

“I don’t mind if you’re comfortable. Just give me a sign to leave and we can, at any time.”

“I will.”

Like earlier this morning, I dozed off and was jarred awake by the sound of a car honking in the
other lane.

“What the hell?” I muttered and looked around.

“Car in the next lane got cut off by the silver Honda there. It is probably good timing since we’re about twenty minutes from town. Will Ashley be meeting us or are we going to meet up with her tonight?”

“Tonight. She has stuff to do today in Seattle but she’s got a band lined up for tonight and she’s got some news for us too.”

“Sounds fun,” he replied as we headed towards Forks. “I’m glad you kept in touch with them, they’re all good people.”

“I pretty much ditched all the school folks but they continue to send random emails and requests that I join some social media thing. I think that’s the term for those internet sites. I figured if I was changing soon, that wouldn’t bode well with me never aging and all.”

“If you want to keep in touch, there are ways, but it is all up to you. The only thing is we’d have to be damn careful of how much information we reveal and stuff.”

I shrugged. “Right now it isn’t a priority yet, but maybe in a few years it might be nice.”

Jasper slowed the car when we got to the city limits, allowing me to look around. Not much had changed from the past year - a couple houses sported new coats of paint, reminding me that the old house had new owners. As we got closer to the house, I began to grow curious and was tempted to suggest that we go visit, but at the same time I wasn’t sure if I should.

“You okay, baby girl?”

“Yeah,” I whispered, feeling a little choked up. “We’re nearing the house and I was... was wondering, or rather, debating whether or not I wanted to drive by it.”

“We could if you want.” He grabbed a hold of my hand and brought it to his lips.
I knew we were a couple blocks away and took a breath as I realized I wouldn’t be able to put things behind me unless I looked. “Sure, just a drive by, even if people are out front, especially if anybody is out front.”

The house looked relatively the same except now there was some construction going on. It looked like they were putting a cover over the driveway to protect the cars. Rose bushes lined the front of the yard and really made the house look more welcoming. It was sad to see but at the same time, I was happy that the new owners were making this their home.

We headed down the familiar street to the diner. I smiled fondly as I remembered the times Dad and I had gone. It was his favorite place and we went so often, I joked once I could probably drive there with my eyes closed. Jasper chuckled when I shared that story with him and immediately, I felt his love wash over me. There weren’t a lot of cars parked in the lot, but I recognized Billy’s car in the handicap space.

When we got inside, Billy and his family had gotten a table for us and I was relieved that we were sitting in the far corner away from the windows. The mayor, new chief along with a couple other men I saw earlier sat at the table next to us.

We sat down and did the usual sharing of meals to avoid any questions. We had done this so much that it was almost like second nature to us.

As we waited for our food, Billy and Jake asked about school and we explained that we were taking next year off to travel and then maybe do some studying abroad. I assured them that I had every intention of finishing and obtaining my degree, but I wasn’t in a hurry.

The new police chief asked us about Texas and what we were studying. He agreed that my dad would have been proud I was interested in something that was related to his line of work.

Once the food arrived, we talked about Jake and how he was excited about becoming an ASE Certified mechanic. He had always enjoyed working on vehicles and now he’d be able to earn a living doing just that. His girlfriend, Lisa explained she was going to take a couple business classes at the community college in Port Angeles. She was hoping she could earn a living being a bookkeeper or maybe even an actual accountant.

Billy shared with us that Harry Clearwater wasn’t in good health and even though he was put on a strict diet, the years of eating bad foods had caught up with him. It was bittersweet because even
though Billy was about to lose yet another close friend, he had taken Seth under his wing now that Leah, Harry’s daughter was given a full scholarship to study medicine at the University of Washington. Everybody was proud of her and given her dad’s failing health, she really wanted to become a doctor in hopes of opening a clinic on the reservation.

I was really proud of the folks that were like my adopted family and stood up to give them all hugs. It was also a way of distracting their attention from Jasper so he could switch his plate with my nearly empty one. Sure enough, when I sat back down, it looked like he had eaten his pancakes and bacon.

A few minutes later, the mayor explained he had to leave for some meetings and that he had taken care of our bill. We thanked him and waved as they headed out the door.

“Jake, you and Lisa are going to the coffee shop tonight, right?” I asked as we were getting ready to leave.

“Yep, Lisa and I are looking forward to it.”

“Good. Hey if they don’t have plans, maybe Harry’s kids would like to join us too. I mean, I don’t really know them all that well but if they needed a break, they are welcome as well.”

“I’ll let them know but no promises on them showing up, especially Leah. Knowing she’ll be moving to Seattle in a couple months, she’s spending a lot of time with her dad.”

Once we said our ‘goodbyes’ and ‘see you laters’, Jasper and I headed to the flower shop down the street. I bought a small bouquet and then we decided to walk to the cemetery which was about a mile away. After the lack of sleep and then the ceremony this morning, the walk helped clear my head.

My pace slowed when we got closer and closer to where he was buried. I was a little nervous seeing it nearly a year later. I wasn’t feeling guilty, not a day would go by that I didn’t think of my dad in some way. It was easy to put Renee out of my mind since she seemed to have forgotten about me now that they had their son, but my dad was never too far away from my thoughts. There had been a few moments when I would look at his badge and flag on display and talk to him.

“Hi Daddy,” I whispered and sat down on the grass. Jasper sat right next to me. “I miss you and I think about you all the time. I had a pretty good year at school. You’d be very proud of me. Jasper
helped me study.” I smiled as I saw the wedding picture that Billy left on the headstone, noting that he took the time to laminate it so it could withstand the weather out here. “Next year, we’re going to be in Italy. In fact, we’re probably going to leave soon, but we are taking your shield and flag so I will continue to talk to you.”

I looked over to Jasper and took his hand with a smile. “Jasper’s been wonderful in helping me heal and soon he’ll help me adapt to being like him. He’ll also help me so I will never forget you. I love you so much and don’t worry about me. I’m doing so much better these days.”

I watched as Jasper moved closer and started whispering something to my dad that I couldn’t quite catch. After, we sat there for a couple minutes more before I was ready to leave. We walked back in silence to the truck.

“So what did you say to my dad?” I asked as we got back on the road to Port Angeles. “That is, if you want to share.”

“I wanted to explain that if he had been alive, I wouldn’t have proposed to you without his permission first. I also promised him that I’d continue to love and care for you, no matter if you’re human or vampire. You’ll always know that I adore you,” he explained. “The last time I was there with you, I promised that I’d be there for you but honestly, I wasn’t sure how far it was going to go so it was a silent vow to your father. This time, knowing what we know and how we both feel about each other, I didn’t feel like I needed to be completely silent.”

There was a lump in my throat as he explained. I was touched by his words and wiped the stray tear that started to fall from my eye. “Thank you for telling me. Now I know he would have loved you as a son in-law. You’re a good man, Jasper Whitlock.”

“I am a better man because of you, Isabella,” he said and squeezed my hand gently. “We should be in P.A. soon. Anything you want to do or do you just want to relax?”

“Relaxing in bed, in your arms sounds like a wonderful idea,” I replied. “It has been one hell of a trip so far.”

“Hmm, you want to nap in my arms? What if I had plans?” Jasper asked and I turned my head at him ready to ask until I saw the smile on his face.

“Well, I guess I’ll try to find some other hunky guy to fall asleep with,” I deadpanned and turned
towards my window so I he wouldn’t catch my smile.

“You know? Your feistiness was one of the things that attracted me to you. I was so thrilled you didn’t just take shit anymore. I felt brief moments of it... before, that is.”


“Yeah, I guess passing through here made me think.” He pointed to a parking lot ahead of us. “I remember Eddie telling us all about the night you were accosted by some men.”

I shuddered. “I remember now. Shit, that seems like ages ago.” I shook my head and then held Jasper’s free hand. “After that, I was so enamored by his so-called, perfection.” I laughed at the word. “Can you believe I really thought he was perfect and believed it was what I needed? I was still pretty messed up back then.”

“So if you saw him as perfect to the point he was flawed, how do you see me?”

“You’re not perfect and have moments of being an ass, just like I have my bitch moments. You don’t treat me like I’m a fragile object. You let me do things; experience life even if I end up learning more of those life lessons. You’ve let me get crazy drunk during Halloween and we’ve gone gambling in Vegas. And the whole Space Needle thing! Do you think I would have had those memories if I was still with Eddie? I sure don’t. You’re not perfect, but you’re perfect for me.”

“I love you so much and I think you’re perfect for me too, Isabella.”

The truck had stopped and I looked to see we arrived at the hotel. He helped me out of the car and with our arms wrapped around each other, we headed to our room so I could take a nap. We stripped out of our clothes and held each other, staring into each other’s eyes until I fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

So, what did y’all think? Hope that wasn’t too much of a tear jerker. I didn’t want this to be as sad as the actual funeral but still be emotional.

Until next time! XOXO ~sushi
Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

Happy Friday - which means another update! :) AND the fun part is, Eclipse is on.

Thank you to all for the R&Rs, alerts and faves. In case you were wondering (and it had been ages since the Quileutes were in a chapter), there are no shape-shifters. It is just a legend/myth. :)

Need to thank AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy for making this story look good. You ladies rock!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 60

JPOV

Isabella was napping in my arms as I relaxed, happy that she was finally able to sleep. Her body felt less tense and I was relieved that her stress was waning. As much as the trip, and particularly today, had been trying on her emotionally, I could tell she needed to see Forks and the familiar faces once more before she turned.

Tonight, we were headed to the coffee shop where she worked and then tomorrow, back to our house. Although there really wasn’t a set timeline, we both knew once we got back to Texas, it wouldn’t be long before we needed to prepare for our extended trip to Italy.

We both agreed that we wouldn’t sell the house and had been working with my attorney to hire a caretaker to look after it as well as Peter and Char’s property. If he had found someone, we would have met Jenks this trip out, but he was still conducting background checks knowing how we were very private folks. Up until recently, my siblings had employed a retired couple to come by periodically just to make sure their place didn’t look abandoned, but unfortunately, their health had deteriorated and were not able to travel anymore.

I brushed the hair off Isabella’s face and smiled before kissing her cheek. A part of me was looking forward to our next journey together but at the same time, knowing that this life of hers was coming to an end was a little bittersweet. It wasn’t as though I thought her soul would be damned or she wouldn’t want to be with me for eternity. I was going to miss this part of her life because it
was who we were when we saw each other again, when I saved her and she, in turn, saved me in her own way. Her human life was when we started out as friends and evolved into so much more.

I shook my head of the negative thoughts knowing my memory could replay them with perfect clarity. I’d be able to share the memories with her as well and hopefully paint the visions so well that she could close her eyes and visualize everything. I was still a little nervous about the change itself, but knew my brother and sister would be close enough to intervene if something were to happen. I trusted them to allow us the privacy Isabella and I both wanted, but to be readily available at a moment’s notice. By now, I had accumulated three vials of my venom just in case it was needed for the change though I was still hoping to do it the conventional way.

While a part of me was sad about her human life becoming a memory, I was also looking forward to her new one as a vampire. I wasn’t looking forward to the normal newborn aspects, but as her mate, I couldn’t wait to watch her rediscover herself. Her passion and fire would be more pronounced and I grimaced knowing her stubbornness would too. While I never complained about her sexually, I wondered how things would be with us once I no longer had to worry about my own strength. Of course, that thought always led to sinking my teeth into her, marking her flesh and I hoped she would return the favor.

I glanced out of the corner of my eye, noticing it was nearly five in the evening so I sat up slightly and carefully peeled back the covers, exposing her skin. I began slowly kissing her body to wake her up. She moaned softly when my lips left a trail up her back and rolled over, wrapping her arms around me.

“Jasper,” she whispered as she slowly opened her eyes. “I much prefer you over a stupid alarm clock.” She gave me a saucy wink before getting up. “Be right back... bathroom,” she mumbled.

While she was taking care of her needs, I went around the room and started to gather our stuff into piles and pulled out some clothes to wear tonight.

“Oh you’re wearing your Skynyrd shirt? When did you see them?”

“It was back in the early 1970s and I had a rough time with the animal diet. I ended up taking a month away from the family as I tried to find myself. Peter and Char were more nomadic at that time so I couldn’t stay with them. I remembered calling their telephone over and over again but wasn’t able to actually get a hold of them until I was in Manitoba. By that time, I was once again in control of things and headed back to being a Cullen.” I looked down at the shirt and chuckled. “I wouldn’t say I was actually at the concert, as in amongst the crowd, but I was able to hear them and managed to grab a souvenir afterwards.”
“Manitoba, as in Canada? Did you enjoy living out there? You were able to control your diet on your own then, Mr. Vampire Petty Thief?” she teased.

I pretended to be hurt by her silly nickname as I watched her pull on a Ramones T-shirt Char had helped her find in a vintage shop. She grabbed her jeans and sat down next to me.

“We were in the northern reaches of the province so it was very remote and close to Nunavut, which, at the time, was still a part of the Northwest Territories. The only good thing was because it was so far away, none of us had to go to school. Of course, being that we didn’t go, we hung out with each other more.” I looked at her and winked when her lip curled slightly in a sneer.

“Oh god, that must have been cabin fever, vampire style! What did you all do to keep from tearing each other apart?”

I smiled when I heard her say ‘you all’ in a way it almost sounded like she had a slight Southern drawl. “It wasn’t easy, believe me. We had some epic chess matches and it helped to curb some of the angst. Rose kept getting cars delivered up to the property so she could tinker with them and that meant that she was out in the garage most of the time with Emmett. Alice and Edward took trips out to the different cities at least once a month. Their reason was always either something about shopping or wanting to see the world changing. I pretty much kept to myself until I was out hunting that one day and ended up feeding on a Native.”

“So did they force you to leave them once they found out?”

“Not really, they spewed their guilt and it was magnified because we were all in such close proximity without an outlet. I remembered how horrible I felt at the time. Looking back now, it was nothing. The guilt I felt after your birthday incident was worse but as you know, I managed to manipulate their emotions to my advantage. This particular incident, I just felt lost in their emotions. Needless to say, Eddie gave his two cents and became the biggest one in laying on the guilt.”

“Of course he did,” Isabella muttered and pulled me into her arms. “You had mentioned that Eddie and Rose had lingering ideas that they were damned. Do you think their emotions also perpetuated in you slipping? I mean, I don’t think they purposely tricked you into feeding on a human, but being around them probably didn’t help and just added fuel to the fire.”

“I know the lure of human blood made things difficult for me and their angst certainly didn’t help when my emotions were running amok,” I replied and rested my chin on her head. “With school, even though it was often a pain in the ass being back with teenagers, I could fuck with the students
by playing with their emotions and sort of let loose.”

“How?” she asked with a grin and a twinkle in her eye.

“Since I wasn’t able to control my emotions as precisely as I can now, I used to unleash a shot of anger or sadness to the class.” I winked at her and she responded with a grin. “Just a quick wave of it and girls would start crying or guys would want to fight. It was distracting for teachers, but I was like a tea kettle where I had to let the steam out every so often. My favorite was sending a wave of lust to the class and then watching the results.”

“Jasper!” She play punched me and laughed. “That is terrible. Funny as hell, but terrible.”

I watched as she looked at me again and shook her head with laughter. “I wish I could have seen that. I guess I could understand the tea kettle analogy, if you didn’t, there would have been bloodshed, right?”

I nodded and sat closer to her. “It was never planned so Alice wouldn’t be able to warn anybody and I made sure neither of them was in my class, not that it was a problem seeing I was in a different grade than they were.”

“So now, if you’re stressed you can just unleash it when you feed and since you’re on the human blood, it is more controlled,” she concluded.

“Exactly. Lately though, things are so mellow that I don’t need to in that grand of scale, but it is what I would do. Now I can be more precise. You remember what I told you about that biker bar before I came back here?”

“Where you had shot lust to one guy and almost caused a bar brawl? Yeah, I want to see that before my change. It doesn’t have to be tonight, but maybe before we leave for Italy?”

“I could do that.”

By now she was dressed and was walking to the bathroom to put on some makeup. I watched from the doorway as she added some color on her eyelids and then added some mascara. She noticed that I was there and smiled at me from the mirror.
“You’re so beautiful, baby girl,” I murmured as I ghosted behind her and wrapped my arms around her waist. “I like that you don’t cake on that makeup shit like some of the women at school.”

She shook her head. “Mindy was pretty bad right before winter break. Not only did she not blend her makeup enough, her skin started to look really orange.”

We both laughed at the memory and she put her stuff away before heading out. The original plan was to go and get her a bite to eat on the way to Forks, but after talking to Ashley, she wanted us to come over on an empty stomach. When we arrived, we discovered that the restaurant that was next door to Java City was now an expanded part of the coffee shop.

“Bella!” Ashley squealed as she tottered over to us.

“Ashley!” Bella cried out and I saw the surprise in her eyes. “Ash, you’re expecting!”

Her former boss smiled and caressed her swollen belly. “I am, a girl. Hey,” she looked up at me and smiled. “Jasper, it is good to see you again. You two, sit here.” She gestured to a table in front of her. “You’re my special guests tonight.”

Ashley showed us a menu and explained how she purchased the restaurant after the holidays, about the same time she found out she was pregnant. She talked about how her husband was no longer assigned to India so her dream of opening up a shop there was put on hold but when the opportunity came to buy the restaurant, they decided to take the chance.

“I can’t drink coffee anymore so being here, with the scent of espresso beans, helps and now there are hot wings and burgers too.”

All of us laughed over her enthusiasm. Isabella was truly happy for her friend.

People started trickling in before long and Ashley got up to greet everybody. The place was busy and excitement filled the air. Isabella stiffened slightly when some kid from high school came up to her. It took less than a second to realize it was that Mike Newton kid. I caught a sense of lust coming off him but as soon as she introduced me as her husband, it dissipated and went off in a different direction, towards a woman who just walked in.

“Some things never change,” Isabella muttered under her breath as we watched Newton turn on his
charm. “I was so glad he found a girlfriend around graduation, but I guess that didn’t last long.” When he didn’t get the results he was after, we watched as he pursued another female. “Ugh, what a sleeze!” She motioned for me to move closer to her. “I think you have the perfect subject right there. Show me what you got, Mr. Whitlock.”

I looked at her and she was radiating a lot of mischief. She was practically buzzing with anticipation as she looked at me and nodded, giving me a pleading look.

I winked at her and sat back in my chair, watching Newton walk by some older women, including Mrs. Cope from the high school. I reached for Isabella’s hand and squeezed to get her attention before shooting lust at Newton and letting it bounce off of the school secretary.

Isabella’s hand clapped over her mouth as she fought her laughter when the older woman reached over and squeezed Newton’s ass causing him to whirl around, spotting the culprit. I shot another wave of lust and desire at the two and watched as they frantically grabbed each other’s hand and ran out the door. Once they were out of view, I stopped sending them emotions and with my senses, heard Newton’s muffled cries and guessed he was being mauled by the woman.

I was running the play by play to Isabella, much to her enjoyment. Five minutes later, Mrs. Cope walked back inside, her lipstick smeared and hair disheveled. Mike walked in a minute later wearing the woman’s pink lipstick on his neck and an expression of disgust. We watched as he found a small table near the corner and sulked most of the night, clearly avoiding any eye contact with everyone.

Isabella started munching on some dish with chips and stuff on top of it. This was something I hadn’t seen her eat before and asked her quietly when she handed me a small plate. She explained that they were ‘nachos’ and was one of the specialties of the house. Ashley highly recommended the dish and she couldn’t say no.

By the time she was nearly done with her food, the band started to warm up. There wasn’t an empty table and some folks were left standing once they actually started to play. Jacob and Lisa showed up just as the band started and explained they couldn’t stay too long. There was an impromptu celebration tonight at the reservation as Harry was no longer confined to a bed. His strength was up and even though his health was still failing, the tribe wanted to do something special for him. We both understood and thanked them for coming. They promised to keep in touch and wished us both well.

When the band took a break, Ashley sat down next to us. Isabella told her about how we were going to travel to Europe for the year before doing a study abroad program. She was really happy for us and wanted to make sure we kept in touch, even if it was through email.
We left Java City at midnight, the band played a few more encores before finally ending the show. Isabella was still shaking her ears when I helped her into the truck.

“My ears are still buzzing from the show,” she said. “Did you enjoy it?”

“Yeah, I liked the songs they played. They really got the crowd going with their guitar rock.”

“It was the best band I saw play at that coffee shop.” She looked at me and grabbed my hand. “Jasper, please don’t ever let me forget that Mike Newton incident. Please?”

I saw the sad eyes she was giving me and grinned. “Baby girl, I won’t let you forget that if that’s what you want. It was pretty fucking hilarious. I knew Mrs. Cope liked younger men which was why I didn’t send her a whole lot of lust. She just needed that little push to go after Mikey.”

“When you told me he was outside, begging to be rescued but his mouth was muffled, I almost wanted to run out there to see it. At the same time, I didn’t because what I pictured in my head wasn’t a pretty sight.”

We both laughed much of the way back to the hotel.

“What time are we getting up in the morning?” she asked as we got in the elevator.

“We can leave anytime. They’ve given us a late morning window but it can be changed. I’d just like to leave before noon.”

“We can do that. I enjoyed our date tonight.”

I held her in my arms and kissed her hair. “I enjoyed it too.”
The next morning we were up and finished packing our things before 9. By the time we got on board the plane and stowed our stuff in the closet, we were told there was no wait to taxi and we could leave as soon as we wanted.

“It is going to be so different when we come back here next time,” Isabella mumbled after I got the engines fired up.

“Like I said, once you’re able to acclimate into the human world, we can come back as often as you like. We do need to be careful since we’re not going to age, but I would never deny you from coming back to visit your dad.”

I felt her love wrap around me in response.

“So speaking of changing and not appearing to age, are there any physical changes to the body other than the cold, hard flesh?”

“I guess it all depends on the age when you’re changed. As you noticed from the kings, they appear older than Carlisle’s age, but they aren’t as old as your friend Billy Black. Then there are the twins, they look like they were changed early in their adolescent years so their bodies aged a little, but they will never pass for adult.”

She nodded and reached over to touch my arm.

“You, having been changed past your teenage years... that is why you look more adult than the twins or even Eddie?”

I nodded as I maneuvered the plane to get ready to take off. “Let me continue after I am done talking to the tower, baby girl.”

“Gotcha,” she replied and watched as I revved up the engines and was speeding down the runway before she sat back and shut her eyes.

Once the tower ended communications and we were in cruising altitude, I took off the headset and hung it above me.
“Now then,” I began as I undid her safety belt and pulled her onto my lap. “You were asking me about physical changes. From my experiences and observations, and mind you, it isn’t scientific, it seems to depend on a couple major factors. There is the age factor that I just mentioned which is the simplest to explain. The second factor is a little harder to explain because it has to do with the condition of the body at the time of the change.” I took a breath adjusted the controls before continuing.

“A healthy body will change a little differently than one that is ill or starved. From what I noticed all those years, the healthier you are, your body will look slightly more mature than one who was changed while ill or malnourished. Of course, you still need to factor in the age level as well, which is probably confusing.”

She looked at me and I could tell she was processing what I had told her. “So while the condition of the body plays a role in how a human changes to a vampire, there are limitations based on age? You were raised on a farm and then became a soldier and that’s why you’ve got such a hot bod?” She waggled her eyebrows at me and grinned. “And because Eddie was younger and on his deathbed, that is why he isn’t as buff looking right? And it is also why he can pass for a teenager while you look more like an adult? Since I have been in pretty good shape, will I end up looking like a body builder? Will my boobs grow crazy big?” she blurted out her questions in rapid succession.

I chuckled lightly at her questions. “Yes, if an Olympic athlete were to change, they would look more powerful and muscular compared to someone who had been starved and their body atrophied. As far as you lookin’ like a body builder, it won’t be that extreme. Go grab my computer if you’d like and look at someone like Mia Hamm or the ice skater, Sasha Cohen. You’ve got a grace about you, from exercising and from your confidence. You’ll never bulk up. As far as your tits, they’ll never get crazy big.” I couldn’t help but cup them in my hands. “They’ll still be fucking sexy and you’ll never have to worry about gravity.”

She snickered as she slid off my lap and walked over out to the cabin of the plane to grab my computer. She returned and together we looked at the female athletes. I sensed her appreciation and her acceptance before she shut it down and set it aside.

I pulled her onto my lap again. “So you think I’ve got a hot bod, Mrs. Whitlock?” I kissed a spot just behind her ear.

“Oh fuck yes,” she whispered breathlessly and tilted her neck to me. “Extremely sexy and hot. Best of all, Mr. Whitlock, you’re mine.”

We got lost in each other for a while. I only looked over at the controls periodically to make sure we didn’t steer off course.
“Baby girl, we’re over Texas now so we’ll be home soon.”

She smiled and kissed my lips before getting up, taking the computer with her. I heard her putting it back into the closet before walking to the lavatory. By the time she returned, I had my headset on and was beginning to communicate with the tower.

The landing was smooth and I noticed Isabella wasn’t as stressed over it like the previous trips. I inwardly gave myself a high five for making sure I landed the plane as smoothly as possible. It didn’t take us long to taxi into the hangar and unload. In less than an hour, we were on the road back to our house.

Just before we turned into our street, my phone rang and I had Isabella answer it for us.

“Hello?”

“Little one? Y’all back yet?”

“Oh, hey Peter. We are almost home. What’s up?”

“So Jasper is near?”

She looked at me and I nodded. “Yes, he’s driving but he can hear you.”

“Good. We might have a lead on a caretaker. There are a couple folks that have passed their background check. I was hopin’ we could have gotten it done while you were out in Seattle so you could settle it with Jenks, but Char and I could fly out there to take care of it if need be.”

“Sounds good, bro,” I replied knowing he’d hear with no problem. “So you think by mid-July we could be ready to head to Europe?”

“No later than August, for sure. Is that okay, little one?”
“Yeah, I mean I am not going to be changed as soon as we are in Italy so it works. Right, Jasper?”

“Yes ma’am. There is no rush once we’re there. Anything else, Peter?”

“Sort of, I got one of those images which was why I called. I’m not sure what to make of it. All I saw was Aro and Caius calling for our help.”

“Shit,” Isabella muttered. “It has to be Maria, right? I hope it isn’t some crazy, fucked up battle.”

“I hope not either,” I replied. “Thanks Peter, I think it is safe to say that we need to get there just to be on the safe side. Remember she’s not after us,” I said, mostly for Isabella’s benefit. “If the rumors are correct, she’s going to be after the Volturi and they’ll need our assistance in going after her.”

She hung up the phone and I sighed. “I guess we need to start packing and hiding stuff that screams of vampire. Hey, how do Peter and Char get away with their house that has a kitchen out in the barn? I mean, it doesn’t seem like humans would do something like that.”

I chuckled at her puzzled expression. “They tend to stage the house so it looks like they’re in the middle of a renovation job. No one is usually any wiser.”

“You are all so creative in protecting your true nature,” she said and grinned as I pulled into the garage. “Let’s relax before we start planning on what we need to store and what to take. I love you, Jasper.”

“And I love you, baby girl.”

Chapter End Notes

Did you like that? Just a little fluff but as you can see, big changes are in the horizon.

XOXO~ sushi
Chapter 62

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU SO MUCH for all the R&Rs, alerts and faves. It really made my week especially given it was not an easy one at work.

The following wonderful women have helped with this chapter - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy.

No, I’m not SM - I just like to play with her characters.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 61

BPOV

The next two weeks were a bit of a whirlwind as we started to pack things for our trip to Europe. Since the house we purchased was in dire need of repairs, we also worked with our friends at Volterra to order items so we’d be comfortable there. Unfortunately, as we got closer and closer to our tentative leaving date, it became clear that the house wasn’t going to be habitable by human standards, so we scrambled to find another place that was relatively close by.

Peter and Char said Aro’s house was big enough for the four of us but Aro, regrettably, explained that his house didn’t have running toilets. They were there but nothing was plumbed. He explained the other kings had homes in Italy’s countryside that had working bathrooms but they were further away than his. In the end, we opted to stay in that little town outside of Volterra, in the same house as when we first visited. While it meant we had to drive over an hour to get to our new home, we both thought it was better than staying in a hotel.

Before we knew it, it was the day before we were flying out. Peter and Char had flown out to Seattle to settle the paperwork for the caretaker with Jenks, the attorney and last night, after they returned, they brought over some papers for us to sign, transferring some of our assets to an account in Europe.

I huffed as I tossed an armful of clothes onto the bed and wiped my brow. Even though we had the house cooled, all the work in sorting my clothes and packing things away was a pain in the ass. “Jasper? I’ve got one more box that can go to storage.”
In a flash, he was right next to me, holding the box easily with one hand. “Winter stuff?”

“Yeah, I am not sure if we should donate it or not since who knows when I’ll actually wear a parka. This was stuff I brought from Forks.” I looked up at him to see if his expression would sway my decision or not.

“You know, unless it is sentimental, you could donate it and repurchase stuff in the future. You’re right, even when you’re turned, you won’t need to wear this stuff except to be around humans.”

“I know,” I muttered. “That and who knows if my clothes sizes will change after I’m turned.” I sighed as I realized my decision. “Put it in the donate pile, someone will need it more than I do. We should have enough to make a trip into town, right?”

“I’ve loaded up the Blazer with pieces of furniture and stuff we are giving away. There are about a half dozen boxes of clothes, since you helped me weed out my stuff.”

“Well, you don’t wear those stupid khaki pants and sweaters anymore. Why did you have them with you?”

“Those were from storage, they were buried in that box that had the vintage T’s in them so I just left them in the box. Ugh, back when pleated pants were in style,” he said with a look of disgust.

I couldn’t help but start laughing at his indignant expression. His reply was to glare at me which made me laugh even harder.

“Oh Jasper,” I said as my laughter subsided. “Everybody has, at one time or another, worn horrible clothes. I mean, look at my winter stuff. I looked like a giant puffy marshmallow.”

“Well, you are good enough to eat,” he whispered in my ear and gnashed his teeth together.

“Big, bad vampire,” I muttered and rolled my eyes playfully at him just before he ghosted back down the stairs.
I shook my head and continued to chuckle to myself as I surveyed the room. We were nearly finished, most of the furniture was staying with the house. My kitchen stuff, like the coffee machine and grinder were packed in a donation box. I didn’t want to give them away and actually sulked when Jasper reminded me of the difference in electrical outlets and that there was a cafe across the street from our rental. I walked out to the landing and looked down at our main living area.

“Hey, why are you crying?” Jasper asked, breaking me out of my thoughts.

“Huh? I didn’t realize I was. I am being silly, I guess,” I replied and went straight into his arms.

“No, you’re not being silly. I can tell you’re upset about something.”

I sighed and nuzzled his chest, enjoying his scent. “I’m going to miss this place,” I replied into his shirt.

He gently cupped my head, lifting it so I was looking into his eyes. “It is our first place together, Isabella. A part of me will miss it too which is why I was happy you didn’t want to sell it either. I know eventually we can build our dream house on Whitlock land, but for us, this place will always have sentimental value.”

I gave him a small smile as he used his thumbs to wipe the tears. “This place held a lot of firsts for us.”

“It has and I’ll make sure you remember each and every one of those memories. You ready to go into town?”

“Yes, ready,” I replied as I slipped on my sneakers.

We made a couple stops to donate our stuff and on the way back, we picked up food for me. Some of it was for tonight and the airplane ride, but I also ordered some tamales and tacos so I could freeze and have my taste of Tex-Mex while out there.

When we got home, I put most of the food into the freezer and grabbed a beer, noticing the styrofoam box that contained blood bags.
“Do you need to top off before the flight tomorrow?”

“Nah, I’m good. I am able to go nearly a day longer now than a year ago.”

“Really?” I replied as we headed out to the patio. “How does that happen?”

“Age mostly,” Jasper answered as he lit the citronella candles and switched on the globe lights. “Well, age and diet, to be specific.” He sat down next to me on the outdoor couch. “When I was on the animal diet, I’d have to feed about every other day, pushing to every two days was risky. Then when I switched back to the human diet, I was going about once a week and pushing to about 8 days if I had a bag of blood. Now, I’m going at 9 days with a bag of blood.”

I took a sip of my beer. “But doesn’t stress also play a role?”

“It does especially on animal. It is like an athlete who needs more calories because of the amount of work they’re putting their bodies through. My ability also seemed to require more blood in order for me to function on a regular basis. But added stress, like a fight or having to deal with a large, immediate population would take its toll too.”

I couldn’t help but feel guilty all of a sudden. I knew once I turned and I was in that newborn phase, I’d be putting stress on Jasper.

“What is that for?” he asked as he turned his body towards me.

I explained the reason why and reassured him that I wasn’t changing my mind.

“Isabella, I am not gonna lie and tell you that the change will be wonderful and your newborn year will be worry free. It’s expected and we’ll both learn from it. I’ve never had to change someone I cared deeply about, so it is new to me. Save for Peter, the vampires I sired in the past were all destroyed, in the name of war; Maria’s war. This will be different. You’ll have difficulties but we’ll work through them. If the stress means I feed more often for the time being, it will be fine. WE will be fine.”

I gave him a sheepish smile and against his shoulder. “You’re right, I’m just being irrational. It
doesn’t help that I am a little tired.”

We spent the rest of the night relaxing. Everything we were taking with us was packed or ready to be packed in the morning. I fell asleep that night a little sad but excited for our next adventure.

~*~*~*~*~

“There is enough room in the bulkhead for your stuff,” Char said after we got out of the car. “We don’t have a whole lot of things to take with us on this trip.”

I watched for a few minutes as Peter and Jasper started to load up the underbelly of the plane with our things, before following Char up the stairs to the main cabin. I put away the styrofoam box of blood and my food in the mini-fridge.

“The stuff in your backseat is carry-on right?”

“Yes,” I replied from the galley. “Just my little wheelie bag and Jasper’s computer bag, everything else can be stowed away.”

By the time I was done putting my stuff away, everybody was on board with Peter and Char in charge of the first leg of the trip. Once we were in the air, Jasper and I moved closer toward the cockpit so the four of us could hang out and talk easier. I knew they wouldn’t have a problem anywhere they sat but was happy they accommodated my human ears.

“So if you had to name a favorite time of your vampire life, what would it be?” I asked after Peter pointed the Atlantic Ocean out to me.

“Mine was during the 60s,” Peter began. “Char and I actually settled out in Montana for about a year which, at the time, was a big feat for us. We enrolled in some classes at a small college and she used to wear cardigans and skirts to school.” He looked at her and smiled as they held hands. “I loved being able to carry her books for her because it felt so normal and we weren’t looking behind us for any danger.”

I smiled as I saw the love my brother and sister had for each other. Jasper motioned to me and got out of the seat, sitting on the narrow hallway between the main cabin and the cockpit. I sat on his lap as we waited for Char’s story.
“Those were good times for sure,” she replied and smiled over at us. “For me, it was years later and we made our way back to Texas. It was probably during the early 70s when we found our farm. I remember when we finally got the keys, we both looked at each other and realized this was our home. We no longer considered ourselves nomads anymore at that very moment. I mean when we were in Montana, we stayed in an abandoned house but it wasn’t ours. This was ours and will always be home for us.”

“What about you, Jasper?” I asked as I curled into his lap. “And this has to be before me.”

“Okay, a good memory before you,” Jasper agreed and grinned. “I’d have to say it was the late 1940s. We had been running, literally, after they helped me escape and one early morning, hours before dawn, I finally had enough and decided I wanted a car. Now, even though they had been around for a few decades already, I had never driven one, let alone been in one, but whenever we were in town to feed, I had seen them.”

“Oh shit, you’re gonna talk about how you stole the car?” Peter asked and started to laugh.

“You stole a car?” I asked but couldn’t help the grin forming on my mouth.

“Um, yeah,” he admitted and gave me a sheepish grin. “That wasn’t the worst of it either.”

My brother and sister were laughing even harder now, obviously knowing the story.

“So what happened?” I asked, curiosity getting the best of me.

“Well, I was in a small town and it was after a feed. I saw a car sitting there with the motor running but the driver wasn’t around. I slipped into the car and started pulling levers and knobs. I got the windshield wipers going and then horn honking before my feet felt the pedals and I pressed down, causing the car to lurch forward. It took a couple jerking surges before I was able to leave the street. By this time, the driver was running down the steps, shaking his fists at me and cussin’ up a storm. I had stolen the man’s taxi and was running through town in this stop-and-go motion.”

“You stole a taxi?” I nearly screeched out and laughed.
“That wasn’t the best part. Not only did I steal the taxi and didn’t know how to drive until I left the city limits, but I crashed it in a gas station by accident. I guess I must have blown a tire during my crazy ass driving and overcorrected the steering. I headed straight to a gas station and broke the brakes when I tried to pull the car to a stop. Realizing that gas and a combustible engine were not a good mix for a vampire, I kicked the door open and jumped out of the car. I was a block away when I heard the crash followed by a fireball that lit the sky. Needless to say, I didn’t drive for a few weeks after that and then found one that the 3 of us practiced on before we all got the hang of driving.”

“We figured it out because the car we stole this time was from a garage so we took a couple manuals too,” Char quipped.

Jasper looked at me and grinned. “I know it doesn’t sound like it could be a favorite time, but it was. Even though we were running from potential danger and feeding on random humans was starting to take its toll on me, the three of us were free. The moments of calm and peace gave me time to actually see the changes in the world. It was fascinating how buildings became exponentially taller since my human time. For me, I cherished those moments because things were so new. That being said though, my favorite time has to be when I saw you again and we became friends. I would never trade that for anything in the world.”

I sent him all the love I had and watched as his smile became brighter.

“Okay little one, I have to ask you a question. What is your fascination with pirates? It can’t just be that movie, can it?” Peter asked.

I smiled as fond memories flooded my brain. “No, it isn’t just the movie, though it helped. From the time I was 8 until I was 12, the only time I got to see my dad was during the summer and it always included a trip to California, especially Disneyland. Out of all the rides, the Pirates of the Caribbean was both our favorite and we’d leave there singing that ‘Pirate’s Life for Me’ song. We loved it so much that when I was 10, we went on that ride a dozen times throughout that trip. We decided to tackle Six Flags Magic Mountain the few years after that and enjoyed all the rollercoasters.” Jasper pulled me closer against him and ran his fingers through my hair. “When the movie came out it sort of took me back to those fond memories.”

“That is beautiful. I can see why the pirate theme is important now,” Char commented. “I believe your dad would have enjoyed your wedding.”

“I think so too. I’m glad you both shared in our memory.” We continued sitting there for a few more minutes before I motioned that I needed to get up.
After my bathroom break, I went to heat up some food as Jasper came over to explain that we were nearing the halfway point and we’d switch once we refueled in the UK. I ate my dinner as we watched the James Bond movie, Casino Royale.

I dozed off as the ending credits played, only waking up once we landed. All of us stayed on board as we got more fuel. By the time we were done, Jasper and I were sitting in the cockpit. He was communicating with the control tower while studying the flight plan. As usual, I listened in to the radio conversation and looked forward to the future when I could fly a plane.

Once given the thumbs up, he taxied out and moments later, we were once again airborne. I realized that I wasn’t as nervous as my previous airplane trips and looked over at Jasper.

“I didn’t freak out this time,” I said. “You three make good pilots because I don’t get as edgy as usual. Thank you.”

“One time, little one,” Peter replied from the main cabin.

“It should be a quick flight, no more than 3 hours,” Jasper said and adjusted some controls before hanging his headset.

“Do they know what time we’re arriving?” I asked.

“Yep,” Char answered. “Demetri and Felix will meet us since there is more stuff this time. They know to bring the SUVs.”

I settled back and relaxed as we headed closer and closer to our new home for the next year or so.

APOV

I turned off the engine of my Porsche and made sure my hat would cover the sun’s rays before slipping on my oversized sunglasses. I got out of the car and walked quickly to the post office, happy that there weren’t a lot of people out today.

Carlisle and Esme were at the medical convention and would be back at the end of the week. He
sent me an email last night to let me know his meeting with the neurologist was unsuccessful. He also mentioned that he called Aro and explained my plight. Aro assured him that he’d contact him in a few days and he was surprised the king asked for his email address. I had chuckled at my adopted father’s surprise but was happy he was going to contact them.

I got to my personal post office box and checked to see if I got anything. It had been months since I talked to that stupid cow, Victoria and I was sure she’d go for my idea. So far, I had heard nothing and it was frustrating especially since I wasn’t able to see any future. I hadn’t been for months now and I hated it. The last thing I had pictured was a future life of opulence. That hadn’t changed and I was glad.

My luck must have been changing. There was a postcard addressed to me. It was unsigned and the photo was from the hotel in Coeur d’Alene.

“I’ll be ready in 18 months.”

Now it was just a matter of waiting.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, they’re finally Italy bound. And what is going on with Alice? Hmmm, doesn’t sound good, does it? What do you think?

Thank you! Until next time! XO ~sushi
Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

Happy Friday folks! If RL didn’t cough a hairball at me this week, I would have updated earlier.

Thank you for all your continued support for this story! And thank you to the wonderful women - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNnerdy. Give them some love. :)

No, I’m not SM, just like to bend her characters at my will. :) Here you go... I hope you enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 62

Aro POV

I was still shocked that Carlisle called me a couple days ago about his ‘daughter’, Alice. I knew she was once Jasper’s wife so I wasn’t sure how to answer him. I was also aware of her ability to see the future, which was why I asked for his email so I could reply back once I had the opportunity to speak to the Whitlocks.

“Renata, can you pull up both your shields around the castle?”

“Sure, are we in danger?” she replied from the next room.

“No, I just want to be able to speak freely and I suspect your ability will allow me to do so. It will be just until Demetri and Felix leave to pick up our guests.”

Demetri, having heard his name arrived in my private office less than a minute later.

“Demetri, are you going to the airport now?”
“Yes, your majesty. Felix and I are taking the larger vehicles since they are bringing more than just a couple suitcases.”

“Excellent. Please let Jasper and Isabella know that I’d like to speak to them when they arrive. And show them to the conservatory.”

He nodded before he headed in the direction of the garage.

**JPOV**

The flight was smooth and fairly quick due to the tailwinds. We were starting to slowly descend into Italy.

Isabella was still dozing off in the chair next to me. Not wanting to disturb her slumber, I made sure her safety belt was cinched up as I adjusted the wind flaps on the wings.

About a minute after I touched down and was applying the brakes to slow the momentum of our aircraft, Isabella woke up and stretched her arms as she looked out the windows.

“We’ve landed?” she asked groggily.

“Yep, we just did. We should be in the hangar in about fifteen minutes. There is a little traffic up ahead so the tower is having us wait.”

“I’ll go freshen up so I won’t look too messy when the customs and immigration people arrive.”

She got up and walked into the main cabin. I could hear my sister pulling the box of blood and stowing it into a hidden compartment we had built into the galley. It stored some extra passports in case we had to use different aliases. It reminded me that Isabella and I should talk about future names and while it didn’t matter now as a human, I wanted her to be aware of it before her change so it didn’t feel like I was hiding anything.

An official from the Italian government met us at the hangar and cleared our paperwork in no time. As we exited the plane, I saw Demetri and Felix standing next to two Chevrolet Suburbans with
darkened windows. We greeted them before Peter and I started to unload our luggage. With their help in the now empty hangar, we were done in five minutes. Isabella and I sat with Felix while my siblings rode with Demetri.

“Aro asked to meet with you as soon as you got in,” Felix said as we left the airport. “Are you both ready? I can stall a little if you need time to freshen up.”

“No, I napped on the trip out here. Is it serious?” Isabella replied.

“I don’t think so. Demetri said the meeting will be in the conservatory so it is informal.”

“Sure,” I replied. “We can meet with him. You’re just going to drop us off at the castle then?”

“Yes, that is why we separated the cargo like we did. Demetri, Peter and Charlotte will take your things over to your farmhouse while I drop these off at the rental house,” he replied and pointed towards the trunk. “I should be back before your meeting is over.”

“Did you get us a vehicle as well?” I asked.

“Yes, I got you a Volkswagen Touareg. Just be aware when you’re refueling because it is a diesel.”

“No problem, I know they’re more popular out here than in the States,” I replied and wrapped my arm around Isabella.

For the remainder of the trip, Felix filled us in on all the deliveries to the farmhouse. They knew we both wanted to fix it up our way so they left the items in the house for us but offered to help once we were ready. Most of the items for the bathrooms had arrived and would probably take a couple days to get fully plumbed. Even though her time as a human was going to be short, Isabella had insisted on ordering a toilet for the downstairs bath. She explained that even after her change, if by any chance we ever had humans in the house, they’d want to use the bathroom and might suspect something if no toilet was available. It made sense and she was perfectly fine with just one of them in the house.

“You know it’ll take a couple days for me to get all the plumbing done in the house based on what Felix said,” I began as Felix turned off the main road and headed towards Volterra.
“I know,” Isabella replied and smiled. “Work on it tomorrow. Char and I can shop for both our houses. We still need linens and stuff. She even told me Peter would help you out.”

“Alright. Come by when you start getting those pangs. I don’t want you overstressed,” I whispered to her ear and she nodded in response.

“Heidi and I can also help out tomorrow as well. We worked on the nightclub and got it working in no time. We’re better with electrical but we can do a little plumbing too,” Felix replied. “Demetri is good with flooring and tiles so if you need help at that point, go talk to him. He’s usually free during the day.”

“Thank you, I really appreciate, no. We both really appreciate that,” I replied and was touched by their offer.

“Well, Whitlocks, we’re here. I’ll just drop your things in the living area and come back. If you don’t see me after your meeting, Rosa will have your house keys and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

We waved at him after we got out of the car and watched as the SUV zoomed back out of the palace grounds.

“Mr. and Mrs. Whitlock! How are you?” Rosa greeted as we entered the main doors.

“We’re fine, Rosa, how are you?”

“Good, did Signore Volturi tell you to go to the conservatory?” she asked and gestured towards the doors Felix just left from. “Do you need directions?”

“No, Rosa, I remember the way, but thank you,” I replied and took Isabella by the hand. “We’ll see you later.”

I led us through the twisting corridors until finally reaching the double doors that led to the conservatory.
“I’m glad you remembered how to get here,” Isabella grimaced. “I would have gotten lost and probably wound up in the garage.”

“Maybe not the garage, but most likely the kitchen or the grand ballroom,” Aro replied fondly as we reached the gazebo.

We laughed as we prepared to bow in front of him but he stopped us. “No need. Come. Sit. I’ve got news for you but first, let me get Renata here.”

Seconds later Caius and Marcus appeared with Renata. They sat down next to Aro after greeting us.

“I wasn’t sure if my brothers were going to be available but I’m glad they were. Renata is here to shield this conversation since I truly believe this would work,” Aro began cryptically. He looked around and smiled. “Carlisle called me a couple days ago about his daughter Alice.”

Isabella looked at me with confusion and concern before her attention was back to the kings. I held onto her hand and wondered what the conversation was all about.

“It seems that Alice has some sort of malaise, if you will. Carlisle is concerned over some head pains. Apparently he’s compared them to migraines and it has been going on for a while. He’s just now contacting me, after exhausting all his medical avenues. He didn’t say anything else and I just said I’d look into it. I didn’t give him any answers because I wanted to discuss it with you two, first.” He looked at us and chuckled. “My response was to ask for his email address so I could respond later, much to his surprise.”

Isabella giggled at his response and cleared her throat. “I bet he wasn’t expecting that. They think I’m dead for some reason. Jasper and I got a card addressed to my father soon after we moved to our house in Texas. Esme sent a sympathy card to my dad about his loss and how I was like their daughter. Do you think maybe these head pain things have rattled her brain? Unless she’s somehow lying and knows we’re together.”

“But that wouldn’t make sense if she knows we’re together,” I replied. I still thought it was strange receiving that card but didn’t really put too much effort in figuring it out at the time. “I mean, we’ve done things that surely would have irked the hell out of her, to say the least.” I looked at Isabella. “I’ve gone back to feeding on humans and I’ve tasted your blood.”

“If I may interject,” Marcus cut in. “You both brought up good points. If the seer had been lying
about seeing Isabella dead, then wouldn’t the mind reader have seen it in her thoughts? That ought to have caused some other reaction from the Cullens that we’d be aware of. I truly don’t believe that theory is plausible, or rather, the odds of it being plausible are low. I am not aware of vampires having ailments but maybe it has affected her gift?”

“That is why you have Renata here, right? Because she can shield your thoughts as you make a decision?” Isabella blurted out and then grinned proudly when the vampire kings nodded.

“As I mentioned, I wasn’t going to make a decision without talking to you beforehand. My first inclination was to invite her out here but I wasn’t sure if that would be wise if you were in Italy.”

“Jasper,” Isabella looked up at me. “I don’t want them swarming us. I have a feeling if Carlisle doesn’t get his answer, the whole family might end up coming out here or something. Ugh, I don’t think Volterra needs that kind of drama.” She looked over at the kings and they grimaced at the idea. “At the same time, I don’t want her to be near us, but I’m also curious about her situation.”

“No, you have a point.” I looked up to the kings across the table. “If you stall too long, they could very well bring the family out here. I will admit, I never thought much about it when we got their card. If it meant that they wouldn’t arrive in Texas, unannounced, the two of us had no problem with that. I will admit though, I am a little curious too, not just because she was once a, um, companion but because of these pains. They must be bad if Carlisle is contacting you.”

“Brother, why don’t you invite her, and only her out here?” Caius suggested. “When she does arrive, the Whitlocks can observe in the laboratory.” He looked over at us and noted our confusion. “It is lined with some special materials that prevent your scent from being recognized. You two will be safe there.”

“Yes,” Aro said thoughtfully. “That could work. You haven’t been in our laboratory yet, have you?”

We both shook our heads.

“Seeing that you two were interested in criminal justice, you might find it very interesting. Once you’re settled and not dealing with jetlag, we’ll arrange for Alec to give you the grand tour,” Marcus replied.

Once again I was a little surprised by the generosity of everybody here at Volterra. A part of me
was still skeptical given my past views but it was quickly changing as I noted how they doted after Isabella. They didn’t treat her like a child as Esme often did, but they treated her with respect and I could see that she was fond of them as well.

I could sense Isabella’s excitement in visiting the laboratory. “We’ll definitely take you up on the offer,” I answered. “Felix, Heidi, Peter and I are going to work on the plumbing at the farmhouse tomorrow but maybe the day after that?”

“I should be fine with jetlag. I’ll just get a good night’s sleep tonight and I should be good by the day after tomorrow,” Isabella replied.

“Alright then, I’ll go ahead and email Carlisle and let him know we have some official business to tend the next few days so we wouldn’t be able to spend time with Alice. I will tell him that she can fly out at the end of the week. That should give us some time to better prepare for her visit. I’m rather curious about her ailment as well.”

“No, that sounds good, it gives us a chance to get settled before we see the likes of her,” Isabella said. “Even if it is from a different room,” she muttered.

“I’ll keep you both up to date if I hear anything else,” Aro replied. “Thank you for coming out.” He gestured to everybody at the table. “All of us are pleased to see you again and I know the guards have been excited about your arrival as well. We’ll see you the day after tomorrow then?”

We got up and nodded, surprised that the kings came up and shook our hands before walking with us back out towards the main lobby area.

“We still haven’t found the spy,” Caius announced as we rounded the second corridor. “I am beginning to think that was a ruse.”

“It could be as a diversionary tactic,” I replied. “If I can borrow a set of the robes, maybe I can go into town and interact with the local merchants? Maybe my gift can pick something subtle up that might help.”

“Be careful, Jasper,” Isabella hissed in an almost vampiric manner. “I don’t want anything happening to you, especially if Maria is out there. Maybe just wandering around like a tourist would draw less attention.”
I held her closer to me as we neared the front of the castle. “We could do that, it’s a pretty good idea. I won’t let anything happen to me or to you, baby girl. I promise.”

The kings said their goodbyes as soon as we crossed the ornate doors that separated the castle from the public area.

Rosa greeted us again and handed over the keys to the rental house and pointed towards the driveway.

“Felix had your rental vehicle delivered. It is the dark blue car outside.”

We thanked her and went out to get settled into our new life here.

Chapter End Notes

So I guess you can say Jasper and Bella are now entering yet another chapter in their lives.

Did you like Aro’s POV?

Until next time! XOXO ~sushi
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

Wow, it’s Friday! What a week too! I saw Muse for the very first time up in Dallas and that was one helluva show. I had planned to update on Thursday but my DIY project (you can follow my DIY tumblr acct - on my FFn profile - if you’d like) sort of took over.

Anywhoo - I’m not SM - never was - never will be. I just like to play with her characters. :)

Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 63

Carlisle POV

I stared at the brief message from Aro, still surprised that he was using email to communicate. I shouldn’t have been surprised since we were in the 21st Century, but I never saw him as someone who embraced technology. Even though I hadn’t seen Volterra in well over a century, a part of me still pictured the three leaders as somewhat ancient; draconian even.

Without seeing your daughter, I don’t think we can make an evaluation based on your description of the symptoms. We have to tend to official business most of this week, but you can inform her that she can leave for Volterra at week’s end. We’ll make sure she has an audience with us.

Sincerely, Aro of Volterra

I replied back, letting him know that I appreciated his generosity. It occurred to me, as I sent the message, I hadn’t heard from Alice. Surely she should have known after I made my decision.

I shook my head out of the thoughts and figured that perhaps she was packing so I shut off my computer and headed out of my home office. I noticed her violet scent was downstairs and when I blurred down, I saw she was watching some romantic comedy movie.
“Hi Carlisle,” she said, her eyes never leaving the screen.

When I explained that I received an answer from Aro, I noticed she didn’t act as though she had known all along, her typical reaction. I kept my expression neutral as she ghosted upstairs to pack.

What was going on with her gift? How long had it been since she was like this? I quickly scanned my memories and realized there was a possibility this happened soon after her vision of Jasper and Bella’s death. She said it was her grief that caused her to not pay attention to her visions which we all seemed to have accepted and never questioned.

*Hmm, maybe that was why Edward was so concerned about her?*

No matter, if it was linked to the pains she had been suffering, maybe there would be a chance of a cure for her when she went to Italy. I also thought it might be a godsend if her visions had disappeared as well. Aro might not see her as someone he could recruit into his guard, no longer valuable now that she had no ability.

In the meantime, I wasn’t about to let her or the rest of the family know I had my suspicions.

**BPOV**

“These sheets are soft and the price isn’t bad,” Char said as she motioned me to the shelf in front of her.

“Would you buy them for yourself?” I asked.

“I have a couple sets of them at our house in Texas and I’m getting a couple sets of the navy ones for Aro’s house.”

Jasper and Peter had gone to the farmhouse so they could work on the plumbing with Heidi and Felix while Char and I drove to a larger town that was near the house so we could do some shopping.
Those do feel nice. Alright, I’m going to get the soft grey set,” I replied. I also grabbed some of the ivory ones as well.

“Hey, can we go to the wireless shop across the street,” I asked as we set the linens on the counter and looked at bath towels.”

“Sure, you have anything in mind?”

“Yeah, I think we need new phones since we’ll be here in Europe for a while, and normally I’d just have him get it but I was sort of bitchy this morning,” I said and grimaced at the memory. “I want to make it up to him.”

“What happened, if you don’t mind me asking?”

I sighed. “I got up earlier than normal. You know, with all the travel and stuff. Well, I guess I’ve been spoiled to have coffee as soon as I’m awake. I got up minutes before the cafe opened and sulked around because I didn’t have any caffeine until he was able to get it for me. I apologized after, but I felt like such a bitch.”

“Bella, you know we should stage an intervention with that caffeine addiction of yours,” she deadpanned.

I snorted. “Yeah, believe me, after today, I really thought that was a good idea.” I shook my head. “That wasn’t the worst of it. I think it was a reaction to an email I saw from Renee last night. I tried not to let it bother me and I think I even convinced myself that I wasn’t affected by it but I realize now that it probably added to my crankiness.”

“Honey,” she replied and hugged her arm around my shoulders gently. “I’m sure he knew.”

“I’m sure he did too. Like I said, I tried to not let it bother me last night so I thought if I completed this errand, and take one thing off his to-do list, it would help me when I tell him about the email I got. You can help me with phones, right?”

Char nodded and we brought more items to the front of the store. “I’m not into technology as much as the guys, but I know enough to help you out. He’ll appreciate it,” she said and grasped my hand lightly.
We put our purchases in the SUV before heading to the store across the street. It didn’t take long to find a couple phones. With her help, I bought iPhones for us even though I was concerned about the whole idea of a touch screen phone for Jasper. She understood my concern but couldn’t explain immediately because the salesman was eyeing us.

“Are you sure this would work with your skin?” I asked as we got into the car.

“Yes,” she replied and pulled out her phone. “Peter and I love ours. We’re able to use it, even with our cold, hard skin. The only thing is, in the beginning, we had to swipe on the phone a few times.” She turned on the phone and checked some messages before continuing. “You’re in luck though. Bring them when you go to the castle tomorrow. Alec has created this clear coat spray that makes the phone respond as though there was nothing different with our skin. See?”

I watched as she opened up apps and was able to open them as easily as I did.

“Wow, that is great! I hope he’ll like it.”

“I’m sure he will. He doesn’t always act it, but he is a fan of technology,” she said and then sent a text message to Peter. “Let’s get you some food and we can go see the guys. Drive down to the intersection there. There are cafes and other food shops all along that street.”

“Sounds good, I’m getting hungry.”

We arrived at the house about an hour later. It probably would have taken longer if I didn’t have both navigation and Char directing me. Before I was out of the SUV, Jasper was already outside and helped me out of the car.

“Jasper,” I whispered as I wrapped my arms around him and tucked my head against his neck, breathing in his scent.

“You okay, baby girl?” he asked and ran his fingers through my hair.

“Yeah, I just feel awful for this morning. I’m so sorry.”
“Shh, it is okay. No sorries, remember?” he chided and kissed me. “Now, you wanna see how we’ve fixed up the house so far?”

I looked at him and smiled. “Hell yeah. Let’s go.”

“First, I smell food. Let’s get that in the house.”

He held onto me as he opened the car door to grab my take out order and then headed into the house.

Once we got there, all the vampires were waiting, almost anxiously as Jasper showed me the work they did. In the downstairs, there was a functional bathroom what looked to be a kitchen area. The stove was overturned on its side but the refrigerator looked new and I could hear the faint hum, indicating it was connected. Jasper showed me the microwave that was built into the wall.

“I normally boil water to heat up the blood but you can also throw it into a mug and microwave it,” Felix replied.

“Wow, this looks great and all the lights work and stuff?” I asked.

“Not yet,” Heidi replied. “We managed to rewire the kitchen so we could get the refrigerator working. The wiring is old and Felix and I will need to spend at least another day or two running new electrical wire.”

“We also need to replace the hot water system,” Jasper replied. “It is much closer to livable, but without all the electrical and no hot water, we’ll need to stay in town for a week most likely.”

I looked up and smiled at Jasper before looking around the room at my new vampire friends and family. “Thank you so much for helping us work on this.” I was a little overwhelmed with emotion and was close to tears until Jasper pulled me closer to him.

“Are you hungry?” Jasper asked and reached over to the kitchen counter and grabbed a wool blanket. “Here, you can have a picnic if you don’t mind everybody else working.”
“I am a little hungry,” I admitted and grabbed the bag of food before sitting on the floor. “I’m a little curious though, if we had hired humans to do this project, how long would it take?”

I watched as the vampires looked at each other. There was a low buzzing sound that meant they were probably talking about it in vampire speed.

“We’re guessing anywhere from 6 months to maybe a year. It would depend on how many people you had on the job and if you hired specialists,” Jasper explained.

“Yeah and don’t forget how much you’re willing to pay too,” Peter added.

“Okay, so how long for a team of vampires then?” I asked and took a bite of my pasta.

“We can probably get the interior done by week’s end,” Heidi replied. “That includes having the tile cure.” She looked at my food and took a small sniff. “Penne all’arribbiata?”

I nodded. “I’ve never had it but Char overheard one of the waiters tell a patron it was one of their popular dishes and I asked to have some chicken added in.”

“It’s a good thing my Italian is passable,” Char remarked and laughed.

“I recognized it because a couple decades before Gianna came to work for us, we had a secretary, Marcella, who ate that all the time, at least once every two weeks, sometimes once a week. Did you know, it literally means ‘angry sauce’?”

“Really? That is funny,” I replied with a grin. “What happened to her, Marcella? Was she turned?”

Heidi shook her head. “She didn’t want to, even after she was diagnosed with cancer, she wanted to live out her natural life.” She sighed. “She was well liked by everybody in the castle. So much so, that after she was too sick to work, the kings bought her a small cottage along the coast where she lived out her days. She had no family to take care of her so we would all visit her on a regular basis. After, per her instructions, we set the cottage aflame with her inside and then scattered some ashes in the ocean and the rest in the Italian Alps.”
I was sad to hear her story but thought what they did was a loving tribute to his person they were fond of.

“Merda!” Heidi exclaimed, jarring me out of my thoughts. “I am so sorry for such a sad story.”

“No, it is okay,” I replied and smiled. “It was sad but I was thinking how beautiful you treated her, even until the end, as she was dying, you made sure she knew that she had people who cared for her.”

She smiled before I watched as she cleared some of the construction materials.

After my lunch, Peter and Char left with Heidi and Felix to grab more supplies. It gave me a chance to show Jasper the linens and towels for the house along with the phones.

“Wow, baby girl, those are some nice phones,” he said after opening up the box.

I explained what Char told me about Alec putting some sort of coating on it so he could use the touch screen better.

“Yeah, I see that it isn’t as responsive as Peter’s phone,” he murmured as he swiped the screen a few times.

“But you like it though, right?” I asked nervously. “I never bought a cell phone before other than to replace the one I broke the night I got the news about my dad.”

“Isabella,” he murmured and lifted my chin so I could look into his eyes. “I love the phones, we see Alec tomorrow, so a day without using something new is nothing.”

His brilliant crimson eyes were full of love as we continued looking at each other before I broke and looked down. “I’m sorry about this morning. I didn’t tell you that I saw an email from Renee last night when I was online.”

I felt his hands run down my back. “You tried to ignore it didn’t you? I caught an abrupt change in emotions last night but figured you’d talk to me.”
“I tried not to let it bother me. I mean, I figured I am going to be changed soon, so it shouldn’t matter. The problem was, I couldn’t. I really wanted to be nonchalant about the email, but it wasn’t possible.”

“Isabella,” he said and sat on one of the stone steps, pulling me into his arms. “It bothers you because you still care. A part of you, even after your change, might still care.”

“But...”

“But nothing. You’re a kind hearted woman that sees the good in people. Just because she has dismissed you as kin doesn’t mean you will. I know you’ve distanced yourself emotionally from her significantly in the past year and you’ve done a great job in not being hurt after her baby news.”

I rested my head on his shoulder. “You’re right. I guess this is like your relationship with the Cullens but on a slightly different scale.”

He took my hands in his before taking a deep breath. “Pretty much, I mean while we’re estranged on a different level, it is similar. So, what did she say?”

I rolled my eyes. “She didn’t say anything about my grades but get this,” I gritted out. “She finally acknowledged our wedding. After six months, she had the nerve to ask if you knew about my medical situation, like it was some ugly secret or something.” I was angry again and breathing hard as those words flashed in my head. “I really wanted to tell her to ‘fuck off’ last night but then started to distract myself with something else because I didn’t want to be hurt from her..”

“Oh baby girl, I wish you had mentioned it last night, but that is neither here nor there.” He tapped my chin. “We’re in this together and you won’t ever need to deal with her bullshit emails on your own anymore, whether it is a stupid forwarded letter or a quick update on her new family. She can be petty if it makes her feel more significant but whatever she says, I’ll be here with you, no matter what.”

I smiled and kissed his lips. “Thank you. Now you know why I was probably more cranky this morning.”

“Hey, come on, let me give you a tour of the upstairs. Hop on my back and I’ll show you the second floor.”
The upstairs was a mess with plaster on the cracked floors and water stains on the walls. Jasper pointed to two holes and explained that Peter punched through the walls to see if there were new leaks.

“It looks like they were from the bad pipes which we already planned on replacing. He just wanted to make sure torrential rainfalls hadn’t been the cause. I think this room could be a great bathroom, what do you think?”

I looked around and gasped. There was a huge window that overlooked some hills and one of the villages nearby.

“Oh, can we put the tub there so we can see the view? When I’m turned I could see even at night, right?”

“I was thinking the same thing. The tub right near the big window and then to the left of it, we’ll install a big walk-in shower.” He grinned and I nodded in agreement. “We can get a nice, deep soaker tub. I know there was one I wanted for our Texas house but it wasn’t going to fit, style wise. It would be perfect here with a stone surround. And yeah, your night vision will be astounding when you’re turned. Here,” he said and set me on my feet before pulling out some sketches from his back pocket. “What do you think?”

“The way you designed this room, with the columns, there is almost an Ancient world feel to it.”

“That was the vibe I was going for,” he replied and I could feel the pride radiating from him. “Since we’re here in Italy, I thought it would be a good fit but all our stuff will be modern, for the most part. Felix said there is an ancient quarry that they’ve gone to in the past to decorate their own homes. It had been around since the Ancient Romans and they are going to go tomorrow to get some stone for this room.”

“Yes, that would be so cool. A modern take on an Ancient Roman villa,” I replied. “Did you ever watch that show on HBO? I think it is still on. It is about Rome? Dad had a free month of HBO and I caught a few episodes.”

“I don’t think so, we can always find it online and watch it if you want.” He walked around and pointed. “Now next to the bath will be our bedroom and as you can see, the stone hearth fireplace can warm it up. It just needs a good scrubbin’.”
The bedroom also had some large windows that faced the same direction as the window in the bathroom. The room itself looked like it was in good, but dingy condition. The next room we looked at was slated for the library. Jasper explained that they were thinking of knocking down one wall to install floor to ceiling windows and then the rest of the walls would be covered with books. I noticed this room shared walls with our bedroom and asked if we could share the fireplace as well.

“We might be able to do something where we can share the heat. I like that idea too. It might take us years before our library is filled with books but I think we can have fun whenever we travel. I hear the cars coming down the driveway. Let’s go back downstairs. We’ll call it day soon.”

When everyone came back, there was a discussion on coordinating the renovations and our meeting tomorrow. Most of the items had to be picked up in the morning so Jasper and I were fine if they wanted to work on things while we were in Volterra.

The two of us told them that we were extremely touched by their generosity and Felix explained how they enjoyed working on home projects. “Ever since we transformed that warehouse into our nightclub, we’ve worked on each others’ residences. You’ll both get your chance to repay. Demetri is looking for something modern in Rome and once he does, we’ll all go and help him fix it up,”

“If we didn’t have these side projects to work on, we would go crazy,” Heidi cut in and winked. “Seriously though, we all enjoy it and while we do like to train and fight, that gets mundane. That is why Felix and Demetri built that Formula One track and are trying to get some sponsorship for a race. That is why the twins work in the lab and Alec draws. That being said, we better get back. Felix and I are running the club tonight so we need to change. We’ll see you late tomorrow then?”

We said our goodbyes with Peter and Char before they left to spend some time together and go hunting. Jasper and I got in the car and started to head back to our rental house.

“Oh, Heidi said that probably by the end of the week, we should be able to start ordering furniture. “

“Wow, it is fast but so exciting to see. You’ll take pictures of the progress, right? When I’m not here or working on something else?” I asked.

“I can and I know Peter started to today. He didn’t say why but maybe he got that feeling?”

“Possibly,” I replied and reached for his hand on the console.
“So for dinner, do you want to go anywhere special?”

“How about that one cafe that we went to the last time... you know, the one where we ended up dancing afterwards?”

“Sounds like a plan, baby girl. It’ll be a beautiful, warm summer night too.”

“Yeah, the salesman at the wireless shop said limoncello is a refreshing drink for nights like this. He did warn me that it is very high in alcohol but sometimes you aren’t aware until it hits you. You’ll be able to cut me off before that right?”

He chuckled. “Don’t worry, baby girl, I will make sure you don’t drink too much tonight.

Chapter End Notes

Nerd alert - the chicken penne all’arribbiata is my ode to Eddie Izzard’s Deathstar Canteen comedy skit. Check it out on Youtube - my favorite version is the Lego version.

Thank you to the wonderful women who’ve been working on this story to make it look good - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, DarkNNerdy and LetsJustDance.

I might be slow in updates next week. The ‘rents are visiting. I can’t promise a chapter but I’ll see what I can do.

XOXO ~ sushi
Chapter 65

Chapter Notes

I’m back! Sorry for the delay, I needed to unwind after my parents left.

Thank you to AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy. And a big thank you to you, the readers :).

I’m not SM so I don’t own the story. I just like to play with her characters.

Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 64

JPOV

I was so happy and relieved that Isabella was still asleep when the cafe across the street opened. My woman was, at times, ornery to say the least when she didn’t have her coffee. I pulled on some shorts and headed there. While waiting for her cappuccino, I chuckled to myself as I recalled her expression yesterday when she woke up and her drink wasn’t there. She pouted and was irritable as hell until the cafe opened and I could grab her a cup.

I paid for her drink and also grabbed some sort of egg bread. It was still warm and the scent sort of took me back to my human days when my mama used to bake bread nearly every morning. As I ran up the stairs to the bedroom, her slow heartbeats indicated she was still asleep but close to getting up.

She was exhausted by the time she fell asleep early this morning. We danced for several hours last night before coming back here and having some fun in the shower.

I got undressed after setting her coffee and breakfast on the nightstand. Her soft, warm body automatically curled up next to mine and I could hear her heartbeat pick up.

I rolled her so she was on top of me and ran my hands down her back. I felt her happiness as she
nuzzled close to my neck. She let out a breathy sigh that sounded like my name and I smiled. I really was one lucky son of a bitch to have her in my life.

I continued running my hands along her skin, occasionally threading my fingers through her long, silky hair. Ten minutes later she turned her head and smiled as soon as she opened her eyes. I motioned with my chin over to the nightstand and she let out a small squeal of joy before rolling off and stumbling off to the bathroom.

We spent the morning in bed as she enjoyed her coffee and bread. I told her how the fresh baked smell brought back memories from when I was human.

“That must have been amazing to wake up to the smell of fresh baked bread almost every morning,” she replied. “You must have had churned butter too?”

“I honestly don’t remember everything, but I’d imagine during the wintery days, the oven or hearth would have warmed up the house. As far as butter, I want to say it was a staple until the war when supplies became low.” I noticed she was nearly done with her breakfast. “Are you almost ready for our trip to Volterra?”

“Yes! I am really looking forward to visiting the lab. I guess we should start getting ready,” she said after taking another gulp of coffee. “Thank you, Jasper for getting this for me this morning.” She looked down with a smile as a blush appeared. “And for last night too. You wore me out.”

The leering grin she gave me had me laughing as we got out of bed and got ready for our meeting, leaving the house an hour later.

It didn’t take me long to get us to the ancient city. Rosa greeted us and explained Alec was on his way to show us the laboratory. He arrived a minute later and directed us to an elevator that was hidden behind a recessed panel.

“We hide it because an elevator just doesn’t seem to belong in a castle. To be more specific, the queens thought a modern contraption wasn’t aesthetically pleasing so, Aro obliged,” he explained as he pressed the down button. There are other ways to get to the lab, but this is the most direct.”

When we arrived, it was obvious that the facility was huge. If I had to guess, it covered the entire footprint of the castle and possibly out towards the walled city.
“Wow, it is so modern looking,” Isabella exclaimed as we walked down a steel and glass corridor.

“It is. Many centuries ago, there were tunnels similar to the catacombs in Rome. The problem was the soil is more porous out here and over time, the tunnels slowly began to erode. It wasn’t until the late 1990s when an earthquake hit Umbria that the tunnels started to collapse. We decided to build an underground facility that would support the castle structure and as you can see from the windows here, we’ve kept some of the tunnel ruins as a reminder of our history.”

He stopped in front of a window and pointed towards the darkness. It was just light enough for Isabella to see the ancient tunnels.

“They were built during Ancient Roman times?” she asked as she continued to look at the catacombs with awe.

“Yes, according to Caius, the reason for building them was to join up with the ones in Rome so a network could be built as a means to escape in case of enemy invasion.” Alec chuckled. “Vampires were not involved in the construction of these tunnels otherwise they probably would never be in danger of collapsing, but that’s neither here nor there.”

He motioned to some doors that opened pneumatically with a hiss and we stepped inside.

“Wow, you’d think it was daylight in here,” I said as I looked at my skin to see if it shimmered.

“We have a variation of solar tubes we’ve installed that brings the light down here. You won’t actually see the tubes if you’re in the castle. Instead, you see the stone columns that encase them.”

“If this is actual sunlight, how is it that our skin isn’t affected?” I asked. “Is the glass in the conservatory made of the same material?”

Alec grinned and his pride nearly bowled me over. “Yes, it was purely by accident that we discovered this. Remember the story of the werewolves?”

I nodded as I reached out for Isabella’s hand.

“What Caius didn’t mention is these creatures are basically poisonous to vampires, especially their fangs. It is the only thing, other than another vampire’s venom, that can leave a scar. We had some
werewolf saliva that accidentally got onto some glass and discovered it prevented our skin from sparkling. So we started adding that into the glass that we get made and it’s worked ever since.”

“But you said that these creatures were hunted basically to extinction,” Isabella replied.

“We did. It was before my time but somehow, the kings, Felix and Demetri all found a way to preserve all the bodies so now we can do research. It only takes a drop or two so we have a good stock. I’m also working on synthesizing it so we’ll have an infinite supply.” He waved us into another room. “Here is where I spend most of my time,” he said and opened the door.

Inside was a state of the art laboratory with electron-microscopes and what looked like clean room facilities along the far wall.

“This is where we do our research,” Alec explained with a flourish of his hand.

“What kind of research?” Isabella asked.

“Pretty much everything. The lab was originally built to be a research facility on blood. Since then, it has grown to include studying DNA and human diseases, which is done in the clean rooms over there. Any time a human goes to a hospital or somehow gets their blood typed, it goes into databases and we are able to access that information. Have you heard of the human genome project?”

I nodded.

“I’ve heard of the term but don’t really know much else,” Isabella replied.

“Basically, it is studying the genetics of humans. We’re doing similar and we’d like to take it to the next level and use our knowledge to study vampires. All of us work down here but you’ve probably heard that this is my passion.”

“So the information on the blood helps you form links with the humans? You can figure out families just by studying their blood or DNA?” I asked.
“Exactly!” he exclaimed excitedly. “We use blood because it is readily available for us. We can take a bag of blood and one drop is all that’s needed to help us build that map. It won’t be something we’d share with humans though, unless it is absolutely necessary.”

“So you’re able to build this genetic map of humans but you’re also interested in the link between vampires? How much blood do you need?”

I looked at Isabella and saw the determination on her face.

“A small sample would suffice. We’re also trying to synthesize blood as well if you don’t mind us studying yours more thoroughly.”

“I don’t mind at all,” she replied and took a hold of my hand. “I want to help with this when I’m turned too. Jasper, you don’t mind, do you?”

If you’re okay with it, I don’t mind. To be honest, it would be interesting to see what we find in your human blood.” I looked at her and smiled. “Wait. Alec, have you started to study vampire venom?”

“A little, with our small population, we’ve just gathered venom from all of us and studied it. We haven’t had anybody turn in a while so Gianna has already offered and now your wife.”

“Here,” I said and pulled out a syringe of my venom. “I’ve been gathering it in case she needed to be turned in an emergency. Is that enough?”

“This is more than plenty,” he replied. “Thank you so much for giving this to me. From what we know so far, our human DNA is still in the venom but has mutated during the change. With your venom and Bella’s blood, we’ll be able to do more comprehensive research now and after the change.”

“That means I’ll need to provide a sample later on. I can do that. This sounds so exciting!” she said. “I know you’ve said that you have had participation with everybody in Volterra but what about those who aren’t willing to give their venom. Like enemies, theoretically, of course.”

“We haven’t run across many that oppose us, but we have means.”
She looked at him and I could see she was about to ask.

“We’ve created instruments from werewolf fangs we can use on a vampire to get venom, amongst other things.”

I felt a little uneasy as I thought about what the ‘other things’ meant. I was almost certain that he was referring to torture and was grateful I never ran into the Volturi during the Southern Wars.

We watched as Alec took my vial of venom and then passed a syringe. “Do you want to do this? I know Marcus wasn’t comfortable when I was about to draw Gianna’s blood so he ended up doing it for us.”

“I can do it,” I replied and took the needle before looking up at Isabella. She nodded as Alec ran off to another part of the lab before returning with a chair, some first aid supplies and a rubber ball.

“You can squeeze this, but sit first,” Alec explained and then excused himself to give us some privacy.

“You sure, baby girl?” I asked as I swabbed her arm with an alcohol pad.

“I am. They’re not asking for a whole lot.” She pointed to the vial. “I can handle it.”

“Let me know if it hurts,” I said and made sure the vein was ready before inserting the needle gently into her skin.

She let out a hiss and then her eyes were locked into mine as she breathed slowly and remained calm. From the corner of my eye, I could see we were nearly done. I removed the needle and kissed her wound as I capped the vial. I ran my tongue along her skin and watched as the needle mark sealed up.

“I didn’t hurt at all other than the initial sting. I think the anticipation was worse,” she said and smiled. “It wasn’t bad. I’ve had nurses who would bruise me just from taking a sample of blood.”

Alec returned and stored the blood before showing us a specially designed area where we’d be able
to watch the throne room without anybody noticing.

“Even though we’re still below them, we’d be able to see them as though we were right there,” he began. “There are cameras through the entire room but they’ve been modified so they’re not like your typical surveillance cams. There is always somebody observing during gatherings in the throne room. Then, there are guards that are usually stationed behind the actual thrones and are ready to fight if necessary.”

I looked at Alec. “So who was in the observation room when we were there that first time?”

“It was Afton and we were ready to assemble behind the glass but ended up coming out with all the commotion. We learned afterwards that Aro had just found out from your brother and sister that you were in there. Then Afton signalled Aro through his phone but we were all on our way regardless.”

“That was scary to see,” Isabella said quietly as we continued to stare at the empty throne room.

“Here, I’m texting Jane to go into the room so you can see just how clear the audio and visual is. I heard you had bought new phones with a touch screen? Do you want me to enhance it while we wait?”

“Sure,” I replied and we pulled out the phones just as Alec ghosted out the door. By the time I set it down on a small table, he was back.

“The coating has no effect on humans so I can treat both of them. The liquid creates a polymer that will enable you to use your phone more effectively and it will respond like it should. It seems to last a while,” he explained and sprayed some colorless and odorless liquid onto the phone. “Once it dries, you’re all set.”

I thanked him and started to play around with the phone before Jane appeared and started to walk around the room, softly singing a pop tune at first before her voice grew louder and stronger.

“She’s singing Britney Spears,” Isabella commented and tried to hold back a giggle as Jane started to dance around the room.

Alec started to chuckle and then I broke down in laughter as well. The ornate double doors opened
and Aro appeared, promptly halting Jane’s performance. He laughed at her and shooed her away before he spoke out loud.

“Alec, I hope you’re showing Jasper and Isabella around the laboratory,” he began as he slowly walked around. “I’m guessing they are with you since you asked your sister to sing.” He chuckled before stopping at a column.

“Jasper, Isabella, I’d like to talk to you. I’ll wait by the elevator door,” he said and walked out.

“Shit, is he mad at us?” Isabella exclaimed.

“Well if he is, let’s not further piss him off by stalling,” I said and grabbed Isabella’s hand.

We decided to speed back to the elevator knowing he was waiting for us. I held onto her as she wrapped her arms around me and ran back with Alec following.

I set her down just as the elevator doors opened to the main floor. Aro was close by and nodded his greeting before motioning us to follow him. I used my gift to see if he was upset but he wasn’t angry which was a relief. It appeared we were heading towards the conservatory but instead of turning right in the last corridor, he made a left and went through an a couple of ornate, iron doors.

He opened another door and we were in an office. He sat down but not before motioning for us to sit.

“Did you enjoy your tour of the laboratory?” he asked as he poured a glass of water for Isabella.

“Thank you,” she replied. “It is a beautiful facility and I’m fascinated by the research with blood and DNA. I was wondering if I could help out, you know, when I’m changed.”

“I think that is a wonderful idea. I have no objection at all if you or even the both of you decided to spend some time there. We’ve been able to give, in the past, Felix college credit when he decided to pursue a degree in molecular biology a few years ago.”

He looked out the window briefly before continuing. “I apologize for the abruptness earlier. I
didn’t think it would be fair that Alec heard what was going on before I spoke to the two of you,” he explained. “I heard back from Carlisle and he’s explained the situation to his daughter. Alice will be here sometime after this weekend.”

“That will be interesting to see,” Isabella murmured before looking at Aro. “Are you sure you’re okay with the two of us observing?”

“I have no qualms about it,” he replied. “Carlisle won’t expect anything less than a formal audience which we will provide. You two are more than mere guests here.”

There was a sense of familial love coming from him as he spoke those words.

“What about Peter and Char?” I asked, wondering how to bring this up to them since they never saw her as family.

“You can tell them, I’ll tell the rest of the guards at tonight’s briefing. If they want to be here, they can be behind the glass wall.”

I saw the small grin on his face and started to chuckle. Isabella saw it too and before long, the three of us were laughing.

“Thank you for letting us know,” Isabella said a few minutes later.

“There will be more details to follow once I get her itinerary,” he explained as we all got up. “I heard from Heidi and Felix on your villa. They really enjoy working on building projects. They said they’ve recruited Demetri for some stone and tile work. Did they tell you about the ancient quarry? There is still plenty of pre-cut stone there for you to use.”

“They are already pre-cut?” I asked, intrigued by the news.

“By slaves, before Julius Caesar,” Aro replied.

“So you can still see the chisel marks? Or whatever tools they used to shape them?”
He pointed to a photo that hung on his wall. “This is Marcus’ new country home that Heidi, Felix and Demetri helped to renovate as a surprise for Gianna. The stone from that wall came from the quarry and you can see the scrape marks on them.”

“Wow! Jasper, we need to use this in our bathroom,” Isabella remarked, excitedly. “This would be so cool especially with the view we have.”

“Ahh, young love,” Aro said fondly. “You two are lucky to have a love already so strong. It is a rarity to see amongst humans. All I have to do is turn on the television and see all the despair and grief, sometimes even anger that comes from their relationships. I’m really happy you two have found each other.”

I could hear the soft hitch in Isabella’s breathing and knew she was becoming overwhelmed with emotion. I looked at her and saw the sheen of tears in her eyes. I nodded at her and let her know how much I love her. I looked at Aro and slowly walked up to him before he looked at me with slight confusion. I took in her emotions and gave him a taste of what she was feeling before he pulled her gently and almost timidly into his arms for a brief hug.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “You’ve really made us both feel welcome. Not just you, but everybody here at Volterra. You’re like family to us.”

He smiled back at her with genuine happiness and nodded before admitting to her how he thought we were like family too. He reassured the two of us that he wasn’t looking to be a replacement father figure like Carlisle.

“We don’t expect you or your brothers to be,” I reassured him. “We don’t have to put labels as to how we are related. Knowing that we all feel the same type of kinship is enough. Thank you.”

“You can see your way out? I’ll inform everybody that we’re expecting a guest in a few days. Go and enjoy the rest of your day.”

Alice POV

I immediately started sort through my entire wardrobe as soon as Carlisle told me the news. I was
going to be in Volterra and tried to tamp down my excitement as he looked at me. It made me feel a little exposed since it occurred to me he probably expected me to be packing before he even came up to my room. No matter, I’m sure once I was there, I could fib a little and just say this loss of my gift was sudden and recent.

I knew from the years as Carlisle’s adopted daughter, he had clued us all in on Aro’s gift of reading minds. Would he be able to see the truths? What would I do at that point?

My long awaited goal was getting even closer so I had to just act innocent as possible. If it came to it, I had no problem swearing fealty to the Volturi. In fact, that might work to my advantage if I did.

I packed some Dior outfits along with my Louboutin stilettos. I made sure my seat was in first class and since it was a few days away, I made another flight to New York so I could do some shopping before my flight to Italy. Not too much though, since I was going to be near Milan.

I had to look good when meeting with royalty, after all.

Chapter End Notes

A little more info about Alice and her crazy mind :).

Did you like the Volturi interaction with Bella and Jasper? Love to hear your thoughts!

Have a Happy Easter for those who celebrate. It’s a nice, normal weekend for me :).
XO ~ sushi
Chapter 66

Chapter Notes

Why yes, I’m updating on a rare Thursday night. :) Mostly because the Vampire Diaries is on a break until mid-month.

Thank you for the reviews, alerts and favorites. Also a BIG thank you to the wonderful women who have made this story readable - AlexisDanaan, JamesRamsey, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy.

I’m not SM, nor will I ever be. I just like to play with her characters.

Ready for this?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 65

Alice POV

The flight from New York to Rome wasn’t as bad as I thought. There was nobody sitting next to me and even if there had been, the first class seats gave the illusion of privacy. Still, I patted myself on the back for renting the Porsche Cayman yesterday for a trip to Upstate New York. A couple hours of running around chasing deer was exactly what I needed.

I smiled at the flight attendant as I exited the plane and headed immediately to clear my paperwork and get my luggage. Once I was done, I looked around and spotted a man with very pale skin and dark glasses. He was wearing a dark suit and held a sign that said ‘Cullen’.

I walked over towards him, pushing my two, large suitcases on the trolley. As soon as I was close enough, I left the bags in front of the chauffeur and walked by him.

I heard quiet grumbles behind me in Italian but I didn’t pay much attention to what he was saying until he finally addressed me.

“The car is ahead of us, the black Range Rover.”
I nodded as I got into the backseat knowing that in a couple hours, my dream might actually come true.

**BPOV**

The past few days seemed like a whirlwind as we continued to work on our farmhouse. While it was impressive watching my vampire friends and family work at their speed, they also showed me how to help with the renovation as well. Heidi taught me how to connect the electrical wires to outlets, while I helped Peter install some bathroom fixtures. I enjoyed the work and one of the biggest thrills was seeing them slightly grimier at the end of the day.

I knew all of them could easily work on the house without me, but I appreciated that they were patient while teaching me a few new skills. I actually felt a sense of accomplishment when the electricity was turned on and everything I worked on didn’t catch on fire, much to their laughter when I told them. Most of all, I was glad that I had been in shape much of the year. I was so exhausted the past few nights, that I fell asleep while in the shower and Jasper had to finish rinsing the soap off of me.

Jasper and I walked around Volterra’s marketplace yesterday so he could use his gift and see if there was a spy in the city. At first, Jasper didn’t like the idea of potentially putting me in danger but changed his mind after Felix and Demetri explained that there were hidden cameras throughout, and with the system of tunnels, they could appear in seconds.

The original plan today was to go to the house for a few hours and then head back to Volterra knowing Alice had her meeting with the kings. Before we even left though, Demetri called and explained that he didn’t finish until early this morning. We decided, after I had breakfast at the cafe across the street, to head towards the castle and spend a couple hours at the market square. He explained that being around other humans could help mute our scents in the off chance Alice noticed us when she arrived.

We walked around and actually bought some wool blankets for the house. After, I got some gelato and we sat around a stone fountain in a quiet, shady courtyard.

“I don’t understand,” I began. “We don’t really need the blankets.”

“Technically we won’t but I like the ambiance when we get the fire going and stuff,” he said and smiled as though he just revealed a deep, dark secret.
I laughed as I stuck my finger in the chocolate gelato and dotted his lip with it before kissing it off. “I won’t tell anybody,” I whispered before kissing him again.

“Mmm,” he murmured before whispering in my ear. “Keep distracting me like that. I am sensing some curiosity coming from my left.”

I kept calm as I set my food on the ledge and then moved to sit on his lap. “How’s this?” I asked as I traced my tongue along his ear lobe.

His response was a low rumbling that sent shivers of pleasure down my spine. I was enjoying our impromptu make out session until an elderly lady walked by and chided us in Italian. We separated as she continued on and I didn’t have to understand her words to know what she was talking about. I looked down at my hands as I tried not to smile until she went inside a building and slammed the door shut.

We laughed and I wrapped my arms around Jasper for a chaste hug. “Was it her that you felt?” I whispered.

He shook his head and nodded slightly to his left. “Come on, let’s check out that castle over there,” he drawled out. I knew immediately he was pretending to be a regular tourist. “Let’s see if they offer tours.”

“That’d be great,” I responded with an exaggerated drawl of my own. “Maybe they’ll have t-shirts we can get for your mama.”

We walked back towards the bustling market away from the courtyard and were greeted by Alec who was wearing a deep red, almost black robe. “Felix just sent me a text message. They’re on their way back,” he explained as he escorted us to a nondescript set of doors that looked like they were for a small shop. “He complained that she treated him like he was hired help.”

The three of us walked inside the door and then Alec directed us to the back of the room. “This is another way to the lab. I figured you shouldn’t be near the lobby in case she recognizes your scent.”

“Thanks, Alec,” Jasper replied. “In the courtyard, by the gelato stand, I felt some curiosity but also something that just didn’t feel right. It didn’t feel normal... there was something else...fear and
determination. It is hard to explain but the person in question is human. I saw them yesterday, he has a stand near the gelato cart. The one who makes jewelry.”

“That is good to know. Thanks, Jasper,” Alec replied. “We’ll go check it out.”

“I am sorry the emotions are a little vague,” Jasper continued as stopped in front of a metal door. “We got interrupted by an older lady, yelling at us.”

I couldn’t help but laugh when he said that.

“Oh?” Alec commented as the door opened and he ushered us inside. “Why was she yelling?”

“I’m not sure what she said but she didn’t look too happy about our inappropriate behavior,” I said.

“Wait, was this an old, wizened lady who wears a kerchief around her head?”

“Yeah,” Jasper replied. “You’ve seen her before?”

“We all have,” Alec replied. “She yells at everybody in Italian and has been for years. We simply refer to her as ‘Nonna’, or grandmother. I’ve been yelled at for my hair, Felix for being too tall and even Caius for not smiling one day.”

The three of us laughed and I pictured her shaking her fist at Caius while she cursed him.

“Here we are,” Alec remarked a minute later and we were, once again in the lab.

An electronic chirping noise broke the silence and Alec looked at his phone. “Demetri will be heading down. Aro wants me there just in case I’m needed.”

We both nodded and watched as he turned and ghosted down a steel corridor.
“I didn’t realize there were so many different routes out of here,” I remarked to Jasper as we looked at the monitors in front of us. The throne room was still empty but I knew, any minute, it would be bustling with activity, pomp and circumstance.

“I think it is a smart idea to have different routes in case you need to get somewhere without being seen.”

“And the steel hallways are the modern version of the catacombs, right? Invasions were probably more likely back then especially with those werewolves.”

Jasper shuddered. “I couldn’t imagine having to battle those things.”

“From what I heard, it wasn’t an easy battle,” Demetri cut in as he entered the surveillance room. “Isabella, I brought you some prosciutto and figs.”

I grinned as he held up food container. “This is from that shop that you said was one of Gianna’s favorites?”

“Yes,” he replied. “We just got back. She wanted you to try it and would have come down but you know, duty calls for her.” He looked over at Jasper and they did some sort of one arm, man hug. “She also told me she liked the tamales you shared with her. So Jasper, this Alice Cullen, you were married to her?”

Jasper nodded. “It seemed like a thousand lifetimes ago, to be honest. She convinced me of a better life and I went without question. It was nothing like the life I have now, things are much better.” He looked at me and while he was smiling, I could see the slight sadness in his eyes as he talked about the former family and how they treated him.

I reached my hand out and held onto his as I made sure he knew exactly how I felt about him.

“Felix sent me a text while Gianna and I were heading back. He thought she treated him like hired help when he picked her up at the airport.”

Jasper sighed and shook his head. “I’ve seen her do that before while on her shopping trips. I couldn’t believe that she acted like she was some sort of celebrity or something. I once ended up tipping the driver an extra hundred after he dropped us off during one of her shopping excursions. I
remembered the man was so frustrated about her incessant talk of designer labels and her air of pretentiousness. It was embarrassing. Hell, if Felix and I were human, I’d owe him a fine bottle of Scotch or something.”

Demetri chuckled and patted Jasper on the back. “Just tell him what you just told me and it will make him feel better. Heidi though, if she had been there with him, Miss Cullen would have had some missing limbs at her meeting.”

“If I hadn’t fed last night, I think she might have even without Heidi being there,” Felix grumbled as he walked in and joined us. “The meeting will take place shortly. They’re having Alec escort her, much to his chagrin. Jasper. Isabella.”

We nodded and sat back down as Demetri and Felix sat behind us. I heard a low buzzing sound and realized that the vampires were talking in their speed.

“You can speak out loud, Felix,” Jasper replied. “Isabella knows first hand about Alice.”

“Merda,” he uttered. “The queens aren’t even that arrogant. Her lip curled at the sight of the SUV.”

“Why Felix,” I said and laughed. “Didn’t you know? You should have met her wearing white gloves and driving a Rolls Royce.”

The guys laughed as Felix rolled his eyes. “Clearly, I should have donned a chauffeur cap as well.”

On the screen in front of us, a group of Volturi guards assembled behind the three thrones before walking through a sliding door and into the hidden chamber. I sat up and grabbed a fig, taking a bite quickly before the actual meeting began.

“Oh my god, this is wonderful,” I whispered to Demetri. “I think I like these better than tamales.”

Demetri tipped his head just as the kings arrived from one of the side doors. The three of them wore dark robes and from the way the light played on the fabric, I guessed that the fabric was made of silk.
I quickly popped another fig into my mouth before the double doors opened and an unhappy looking Alec led Alice towards the thrones.

“Jesus,” I muttered as I saw the petite vampire’s outfit. Stilettos were not the right word to describe the skyscrapers she had strapped onto her feet. She probably thought it made her look sophisticated but really, I thought she looked like she raided a stripper’s closet.

I turned to see what the guys’ reaction was and we all had similar looks on our faces. We didn’t say a word as Aro raised his arms up and looked behind him.

“That is his signal to make sure Renata’s shield is engaged and the other guards who have defensive gifts are ready,” Demetri explained.

“Today’s meeting is with the daughter of a dear friend of the Volturi. Alice Cullen, what brings you here?”

Alice stepped up towards the kings with a big grin on her face. I was glad Demetri had turned on another monitor and was replaying her movements in slow motion for my benefit.

“As Carlisle... I mean, my father explained, I’ve been having pains in my head. He doesn’t know what to make of it.”

“I see,” Aro replied. “The three of us might be vampires, dear child, but when we conduct a formal audience, we like to maintain a human pace. Please remember that.”

My jaw dropped and I tried not to laugh as Aro chided Alice in front of everybody.

“I... I’m sorry, your majesty,” she replied with a pout. “As I said, I have been having pains in my head and he thought you’d be able to help diagnose me.”

“Quite possibly,” Caius remarked, sounding bored. “How long have you suffered from your malaise?”

“Since last year. You see, I am not sure what my father said but I lost my mate and best friend at
around the same time.”

I looked at Jasper as his shock hit me. I was surprised I was able to keep quiet.

“My condolences,” Marcus replied, playing his role of a sad, lonely king. “I too, have lost...” He turned his head mid-sentence before looking at the ceiling with a sigh.

“Yes, I’m sorry for your loss, Miss Cullen. It must be difficult to have endured such pain.” Aro said as he slowly stood up.

“We were together for so long,” Alice continued.

We watched as Aro stepped down the raised platform and walked towards Alice.

“Let’s continue this tomorrow. You’ve had a long flight and no doubt you’d like some time to relax and refresh yourself.”

“No, I’m fine,” she said quickly, reaching out to touch his hand before she must have realized what she had done because she let go as though burned.

“I insist,” Aro replied. “Felix mentioned you had accommodations nearby? We insist on you staying in one of the guest chambers.”

“Alright, your majesty,” she said and curtseyed. “My things are still at the hotel.”

“They’ve been brought over.” Aro said in a tone that had no room for argument.

“Our meeting will adjourn until tomorrow. Dismissed.”

As soon as she was escorted out, we saw as Aro wiped his hand on his robe. He looked up straight at where one of the cameras was located. “Conservatory, now.”
Chapter End Notes

Dun-dun-dunnnn... What was up with Aro at the end?

Wish me luck, I’ve got a 10K this Sunday and I’ve been fighting a cold this whole week.

XOXO ~ sushi
Happy Friday! I got sucked into a new show on Thursdays...Hannibal. It is creepy but fascinating at the same time. LOL

Thank you for all of the reviews/alerts and faves. Sorry for the dramatic ending last chapter. It was the perfect place to stop. Oh, I achieved a personal best on the Capitol 10K (yes, that was the one Bella ran, many chapters ago), beating last year’s time by a little over 3 minutes. 😊

Thank you to AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy. JamesRamsey is working on some personal stuff right now but she was awesome as both a prereader and beta. You ladies rock.

Okay, enough jibber jabber...I’m not SM, nor will I ever be. I just like to play in her world.

Onward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 66

JPOV

As soon as Aro directed us to meet him at the conservatory, we all scrambled to leave the lab. Isabella practically jumped into my arms as I followed Demetri and Felix out to the elevator. It took us less than 5 minutes to get to the outdoor garden and the 3 kings were already there along with the queens and some of their chosen guards. They were no longer wearing the hooded robes as they milled about in the garden. I spotted my brother and sister immediately and went over to them before setting Isabella on her feet. There were chairs already arranged and we all sat down.

“I assume you saw the meeting,” Aro said as he walked by us. A water bottle was passed over to Isabella from one of the side entrances.

I nodded. “We saw it all.”

“We wanted to unnerve her which was why we insisted on the human speed. We also knew Carlisle would have briefed her on protocol and I wouldn’t be surprised if he said we were
“difficult,” Caius remarked and then smiled at Isabella. “Besides, we wanted to make sure you saw everything.”

“I did, thank you,” she replied. “So what happened there?” She looked over at Aro. “She touched your hand, did you see anything?”

Aro got up and started to pace around muttering in some ancient language before turning to face us. “I saw quite a bit, actually. In the briefest second when she touched my hand, I saw some things and decided to call all of us together. First and foremost, her gift doesn’t work anymore.”

“So she’s not no longer a seer?” I asked.

Aro shook his head. “No, it has been a year since she had an actual vision. While I am not sure if it is the catalyst that caused it, but her last viable, vision was seeing you, Jasper and Isabella.”

“Us? Really?” Isabella said and immediately reached for my hand.

“I’m not sure when the vision took place, but you had just seen his eyes and you shut yours before falling to the ground.”

“That was when I saved you from Laurent,” I said. “After that her visions were gone?”

“Actually, it is a little more complex than that,” Aro explained. “She only saw a snippet and from there interpreted it as seeing you killing Isabella. She concluded once Bella was killed, you threw yourself into the fire upon realizing, too late, she was your mate. The vision was never there, obviously, but she interpreted it as such.

“That is why they think I’m dead!” Isabella exclaimed. “Wait. You’re dead too, Jasper?”

“She truly believes it and has even told the Cullens about what she saw,” Aro continued.

“That would explain that sympathy card,” Isabella muttered and looked around. “Sorry, we can go into our details later. Did you find anything else out?”
Aro nodded and continued to walk around the enclosed garden area. “I have seen very brief glimpses of her visions but the details are not extensive as they used to be and certainly not enough for someone to draw conclusions from, but that was around the new year. She hasn’t seen anything else since. However, she has planned something to disrupt the Cullens. I didn’t get all the details of it though. Her mind is complex, to say the least.”

“So what are we going to do with her?” Sulpicia asked.

Isabella looked up at the sound of the queen’s voice. Although we had met Sulpicia and Athenodora briefly during our visits, the two vampire queens kept mostly to themselves. The only one that we had ever talked to so far, has been Gianna.

“Is she a danger to us?” Demetri asked with concern.

“I don’t think she is a threat to us,” Aro explained. “In fact, one of the reasons why I didn’t get a full glimpse of her memories in that touch was because she had what appeared to be a thought playing in what you would call, a loop.”

He looked disturbed as he continued to pace around. I used my gift to get a read on his emotions and one of the prominent ones was disgust.

“This is difficult to explain,” he said, almost mumbling as he looked down on the ground. “What I kept seeing was the idea that she was going to be queen.”

The room was now filled with shocked gasps and more ancient words from the kings. I still couldn’t figure out what they were saying, but from the tone and the feelings they were emitting, I would not have been surprised if they were curses.

“What do you mean, she wants to be queen?” Caius asked and Marcus looked at Aro and nodded.

“That is all I got from her head,” he replied. “I am not sure what to make of it. She has this idea or even a dream that she will one day be queen.”

“To who? Marcus?” Gianna burst out. I didn’t need my gift to see she was upset.
“She wasn’t specific,” Aro spat out in disgust. “Nor, it seemed, did she care.”

Isabella raised her hand to get Aro’s attention before speaking. “You mean, she has no qualms, in theory, of who she ends up with? Isn’t that what you call a courte... a mistress or a harlot?”

“A courtesan?” Marcus replied and winked at her. “It sure sounds like it. While she isn’t a threat to us, brother, I think I can speak for all of us in requesting that we keep a close eye on her. I can tell you for certain, I did not see a bond link on any type from her to any of us. Not even our guards.”

“Oh, I intend to make sure she’s guarded at all times. That is why I insisted on having her stay at the guest quarters,” Aro replied.

“My king, I think you need to do more than just insist that she stay here in the castle,” Sulpicia said as she stood up. “I am not just speaking for myself but for my two sisters as well. I suggest that we make sure she’s watched at all times.”

“How do we feed her?” Caius asked.

“We could give her bottles of human blood, I suppose,” Aro mumbled.

“You have a point, given the memories I was able to see,” Aro replied and then looked at the queens before his guards. “Jasper Whitlock brought up a good point regarding Alice Cullen. From what I had seen, she liked to abuse her gift, often times using it to her advantage in order to manipulate others. I think we need to consider gathering small game for her to feed. We can have Rosa contact the local farmers and provide them with containers to store the blood from their slaughtered animals. We’ll just collect it on a daily basis and use that to feed her.”

All the Volturi vampires seemed to like the idea but at the same time, I could tell it was something that didn’t appeal to their appetites.
“I think we should also have Chelsea compel her into thinking she’s getting some sort of equivalent to a gourmet meal,” Marcus suggested causing many to chuckle.

“We’ll bottle it and she could be none the wiser,” Aro replied. “That is a good idea. Chelsea, please remain and the rest of you are dismissed.”

As Isabella and I stood up to leave, Heidi came over and asked me about this morning near the gelato stand.

“I’m not absolutely certain that this person is a suspect, but while we were in the secluded courtyard nearby, the cocktail of emotions I got caught my attention,” I explained as Jane, Alec, Demetri and Felix gathered around us. “I’m certain it was the jeweler.”

“The silversmith?” Jane asked and I nodded. “Hmm, that could be, he’s relatively new in the marketplace. Come on, we can all talk about this in our common room. It’s more comfortable there.”

We followed her through a set of doors we hadn’t passed through before and up a stone stairway. Jane opened the set of large, carved double doors and led us into an enormous room.

“Wow, this is cool,” Isabella exclaimed as she slowly twirled around, taking in the entire room. “As we were going up the stairs, I really pictured a room with just tapestries on the wall. I guess I was somewhat correct, but I didn’t expect the modern furnishings.”

“We wanted to keep our history but at the same time, we also embrace technology,” Alec explained. “Jane and I still live here in the castle, while many of the others have properties and businesses outside of Volterra so they don’t stay here as often. We created this room as a central location for us guards to relax, strategize and plan our training sessions.”

"Or for you to play video games,” Jane uttered as she rolled her eyes and stuck her tongue out before looking at us. “Here, have a seat. Oh, Bella we don’t have any refreshments here but if you want, we can ring up the kitchen.”

“No, that is alright,” Isabella said as we sat down on a leather couch. “I still have my water from earlier.” She held up the bottle and gave it a little shake. “Hey, before we talk about the potential spy, I didn’t quite understand what happened out there? Why didn’t Aro just have Chelsea compel Alice to do his bidding right away? And there is something else I noticed, is Aro the leader
amongst the three?”

After she was done blurting out her questions, she began to blush and mumbled out an apology for being rude.

“You’re not being rude,” Felix replied and laughed. “I think I can help answer your second question after a little history lesson.”

The other Volturi guards stopped whatever they were doing and sat down, ready to hear the story. I looked over at Peter and he just nodded over to Felix and mouthed out, “Listen, it is good.”

“Demetri and I have been around since this area was known as the Holy Roman Empire. We were probably changed at about the same time though I was moving from one village to another in my thirst for blood. Being a tracker, he used his gift to find other vampires.”

“A tracker?” Isabella exclaimed. “James was a tracker too. He was the one who chased me and gave me this.” She held out her arm and showed Demetri.

He muttered a string of profanities in his native language before responding. “I had heard of him before he was destroyed. He was a different sort of tracker, in that he hunted for the mere sport of it,” Demetri explained and clenched his jaw slightly. “Those are the rogue type of vampires that are the most dangerous because they don’t care how sloppy or careless they are.” He took a deep, unneeded breath and smiled. “We can talk about my gift another day. Going back to Felix’s story, I was certain there had to be others but I wasn’t sure.” He looked at the other vampire and patted his back. “We became friends quickly, brothers if you will. Like Jasper, we were soldiers too. He fought for the Empire and I was a soldier from a poor village in what is today, Russia. Had we been human, we probably would have fought on opposite sides but we both recognized a kinship and together, we wound up here in Volterra.”

“When we first met the kings, they were ruthless and the oligarchs that the legends are based on. It was, as we came to find out after a few decades later, a reaction to the whole werewolf and Didyme saga. They trusted no one and we actually had to battle other vampires to earn our keep here as a guard. It was almost like a gladiator battle, vampire style.” Demetri pointed out to the windows. “Back then, this wasn’t much of a city, just this building existed. The marketplace that you see today was the battleground.”

Isabella grabbed my hand in hers as we listened. She was thoroughly engrossed in the story and I had to admit, I was too. We weren’t the only ones, the entire room was enjoying Felix and Demetri’s tale.
“Obviously we earned our keep and discovered this type of sport was something Caius was most interested in,” Felix continued. “He is, for the most part, in charge of all things that have to do with security. He was the one that declared war on the wolves and he is the one that is most interested in Maria’s whereabouts. Aro, on the other hand, is more the politician. He enjoys the official meetings and the frills that come with being a king. This is why Aro chose to meet with Alice in such a manner today. Well that and he figured Carlisle would have expected it.”

“But what about Marcus?” I asked.

“Marcus prefers to stay rather neutral on both topics so he can be the tie breaker in any potential conflict,” Felix answered. “He likes to deal with the inner workings of the castle; to make sure everything runs smooth. He is also a huge patron of the arts so many of the myths that you’ve read or seen about vampires are mostly due to him.”

Isabella laughed. “I remember he chuckled over the garlic thing when we first met him.”

Everybody nodded agreed that it was a funny legend they created given we were all here in Italy.

“So she’s really going to be drinking farm animal blood instead that have been stored in plastic barrels?” Isabella asked and watched with horror as they nodded.

“I don’t know all the reasons why Aro didn’t fully compel Alice, but I gather some of it is so Carlisle won’t be suspicious when he talks to her,” Demetri replied. “He is still a sore subject for all of us and Aro knows that he will contact Alice at some point so controlling her blood intake would seem rather minor, but he’ll have Chelsea fool Alice into thinking she’s getting exotic blood for meals.”

I shuddered at the thought and actually felt like my stomach was going to turn. Wildlife was bad enough but farm animals like chickens or pigs? I had to drain a chicken once after losing a bet to Emmett and ended up wanting to retch it back up so badly.

“That is so gross,” she added and tried to look disgusted but was having a hard time hiding the laughter in her voice. “I guess it is subtle enough it won’t cause any suspicion like eye color. I’m sure any abrupt changes would have the entire Cullen clan coming out here too.”

“It is one of the reasons why controlling her diet would be something Carlisle would least suspect. Oh, I’m sure he’s already concerned that we’ll force her into drinking human blood but he’ll see
proof soon enough. This is a way Chelsea can weave her gift on Alice and she’d be none the wiser,” Felix said and the room erupted in laughter. “There are still questions Aro wants answered based on what he discovered so far. I wouldn’t be surprised if he is trying to earn her trust in a more organic manner instead of exploiting Chelsea’s gift.”

“Both of us met him, Carlisle, when he stayed out here,” Demetri replied. “I think he thought we were...involved, you know, a couple, given the looks of disgust he kept throwing at us. We didn’t fraternize with him, he was just so arrogant in his mannerisms.”

“I remember that,” Felix groaned out. “By then, it had been well into a millennia that we thought of ourselves as brothers. When he arrived at Volterra, we were the only guards that were at the castle. I think his strict, religious upbringing caused him to come to the conclusion we were more than brothers and give us the judgmental looks.”

“Well, you weren’t the only guards, not technically,” Alec interrupted. “We were there, Jane and I, but we were about 6 months into our new life and being trained as soldiers. It wasn’t until we had proven ourselves that we became part of the guards.”

“When we weren’t at the castle, we were being trained so we actually had camp-type quarters,” Jane explained. “If there had been danger, all of us would have been able to fight though.”

“Alice won’t be harmed in any way will she?” Isabella asked. “I mean, I know you all and the kings but there are still guards I haven’t met and...”

“No, she won’t be,” Heidi answered. “After everybody learned of my human experiences, it became an official edict that nobody is to be violated in such manner. While we may serve to bring justice in our world, we won’t incorporate torture. Other vampires though, the rogue types, they’re another story.”

“Going back to this spy thing, I suppose it would be Caius that would decide on whether to have this potential spy compelled?” I asked.

“Probably,” Heidi said as she got up to sit next to Felix. She looked up at me. “Maybe Jasper, you and Bella visit again and play tourist? We’ll be nearby in case we’re needed. If that man is a human working for Maria, she won’t associate you with us, right?”

I looked over at Isabella. “What do you think, baby girl? Are you comfortable enough to go out
there again and pretend we are just visitin’?”

She looked at me and squeezed my hand before addressing everybody else. “You have cameras there right? You’ll be able hear us?”

Demetri nodded. “If you’re not comfortable, we can come up with another plan.”

“No!” she exclaimed. “I mean, I want to help, but I was going to go one step further and approach his jewelry stand. She won’t storm the marketplace right there, right? I’m not afraid of that man. I just don’t want to be caught up in some crazy, power hungry bitch’s scheme.”

“That would be too much of an amateur move for her,” I replied, sending her reassurance. “She’s been around too many wars to do something like that. She rarely used humans back then. When she did, her M.O. was to capture someone they cared deeply about and then blackmailed them into spying for her. Little did the humans know, she had either killed the person or had plans to change them once her spy was no longer useful.”

“That was what we thought too when I briefed Demetri right before the meeting,” Alec replied. “I think with your gift, Jasper, we can get a better feel if you’re out shopping.”

“Here,” Demetri said and pulled out a small vial out of his pocket. “If you get close enough, this is a homing device that you can plant on him.” He handed it to me and I showed Isabella.

“It is smaller than a grain of rice,” Isabella said as she hopped off the couch. “We can go back out, now. We can act like we’ve finished the tour.”

“Yeah, we can do that,” I said getting up. “Hey guys, I know you mostly supplement with blood, but are there places to actually grab a meal?”

“There’s the Catacomb,” Demetri said. “It is the complete opposite of the nightclub we took you to months ago.”

“The Catacomb is a shithole,” Peter exclaimed and winked at Demetri. “Technically, it is an underground, rave-like club; a really nondescript warehouse building. Demetri owns this club and over the years, it just became a place for druggies and riffraff to hang out. But it is good feedin’ grounds for us.”
“Seeing how some of us still prefer to participate in hunting, I have just allowed the place to get more dark and seedy,” Demetri explained. “It might be home to illicit activities, but it makes a pretty good profit.”

“Do you need to feed tonight, bro?” Peter asked.

“No, not tonight but probably in a day or so. I’ve been able to hold off for a little over 2 weeks with the bagged stuff. Whatever you put in it, makes it taste fresher.”

“Years and years of study,” Alec replied smugly. “Believe it or not, it is actually blood that is no longer able to be used for medical purposes. We run it through a dialysis machine to clean it up and then run it through another machine to fortify and preserve the flavor. But you’re right, nothing beats a hunt now and then.” He looked over at Isabella and immediately shot his head down. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean you.”

Isabella laughed. “I’m not bothered by it. I suppose before the end of the year, I’ll have experienced the Catacomb as both human and vampire. I’d be safe going there right? I couldn’t not be close by.”

“You’d be safe, Bella,” Char replied. “We’ll go with you and keep you company. We were there last night to feed and we go there a couple times a month.”

“You can help me so I won’t stand out right?” she asked and my sister nodded. “Alright, let’s get up to the marketplace,” she said with an exaggerated drawl and pulled me towards the stairs.

“We’ll be outside the courtyard and in the surveillance room,” Alec said as I took my woman in my arms and sped down the steep, stone stairs.

Once we got back on the main floor, I slowed down so we could walk together out of the castle. When we got to the main lobby, I stopped. “Shit, what if Alice smells our scent?”

“Don’t worry, we’re all going to take turns watching her,” Heidi said as she appeared in front of us. “There is no reason for her to come back out this way.” She pointed to another set of doors to the side as we waved to Rosa. “This is the visitor entrance. Once you are at street level, make a right and you’ll be in the marketplace. We’ll be watching.”
We both nodded and headed out the glass doors that were well hidden from the austere lobby. Once we got to the street, we walked together towards the gelato stand; our arms around each other.

“I really enjoyed that tour, darlin’,” I drawled out.

“I did too,” she cooed as we stopped for some pistachio gelato. I noticed immediately that the curiosity from the silversmith was back. This time, as we waited for her dessert, I noticed that the man was nervous as well. From the corner of my eye, I could see beads of sweat on his forehead and he gulped nervously as he reached into his pocket and grabbed a handkerchief.

Once we got to the stand, Isabella looked at the items on display. I was proud of her acting like a tourist and asking questions about not only his wares, but the city as well. The man didn’t respond to the questions about Volterra and I could tell he was feigning as though he didn’t understand what she was saying. I noticed that my woman actually flicked her wrist, exposing the bite mark a few times at the man, causing him to be even more nervous.

That was a brilliant move because he knew what that mark meant. Even if he wasn’t a spy for Maria, he knew something, so I went back to playing the loving husband and bought some jewelry. Under my breath, in vampire speed, I let the Volturi know what was going on as I took out the homing device and flicked it directly into the jeweler's bag of tools.

After buying several necklaces and bracelets, we thanked the man and as we were heading out, I could see the Volturi emerge from a doorway and give us a thumbs up.

Chapter End Notes

So what did you think? Other than the fact that Alice has a few loose marbles upstairs.

I took some liberties in changing Felix and Demetri’s background. I am a fan of history so I love incorporating real events into this story.

Thank you!

XOXO ~sushi
Chapter 68

Happy Thursday! Sorry I just couldn’t bring myself to update last week with all the bad news events.

Regarding Alice – yes Aro caught some of her thoughts but because she’s a little off her rocker, her brain is a jumbled mess. It will take a little more for him to get a better read.

So here is the next chapter. Thank you all!

Still not SM.

Onward

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 67

BPOV

“You did good out there, baby girl,” Jasper said as he helped me into the car.

“Really? Did you get anything more from that man?”

“I did, especially when he caught sight of your bite mark. Was that on purpose?”

“It worked? I wasn’t sure it would, but figured if he knew about Maria, he might react to it,” I replied and smiled, proud that I was able to feel useful.

Jasper turned out of the driveway and onto the main road to our rental. “What was that burst of emotions?”

I smiled as I placed my hand over his. “I liked helping you and the Volturi today. It’s good to feel
useful, you know? I didn’t have that... before us.”

“I remembered your frustration back then. I admired how you remained gracious even though I could practically see steam coming out of your ears.” He squeezed my hand lightly before shifting gears. “As I realized the depth of our relationship, I vowed that I’ll never coddle you like a fragile object.”

“That is the thing I noticed about you. In the beginning, you didn’t crowd me and we talked about possible dangers. You let me go about my normal running routine and didn’t follow my every move. What I appreciate the most is you let me do stuff like the motorcycle and working on our house. I mean, I look back and think how I probably wouldn’t have been allowed to get dirty or stuff like that.” I looked at him and smiled. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to bring up the past. It just makes me appreciate you more.”

“It doesn’t bother me, baby girl. If you, in the time we’ve been together, lived in the past or hid your true self from the world, we’d be having a more serious talk. Hell, if I was, I’d expect you to give me this speech.” He looked at me and smiled before bringing my hand up to his lips. “All that being said though, if you wanted to, for example, go to battle with me against a rogue vampire, I’d have to say no while you’re human. I have to draw the line somewhere.”

“No, it was bad enough that I deceived you back in Phoenix, so long ago.” I looked at the scar on my wrist. “I learned my lesson and I’m sorry for running away from you like that.” I felt his understanding as he gently squeezed my hand again. I looked up and smiled at him. “Once I’m changed though, it will be different right? I mean with the fighting part? I just don’t want to feel defenseless.”

“I think we can arrange for that, I mean, we can see if the guards would assist in training you.”

I brushed my fingertips up and down his arm as I sent him my appreciation. “I’d like that, a lot.”

By now we were cruising into the little village and once Jasper parked the car, we walked across the street to the cafe for dinner.

“What do you want to do tonight?” he asked after the waiter left with my order.

“Since we’re going to some dive bar tomorrow night, let’s just stay in. I’ll be safe at Catacombs, right?”
“Peter and Char will be with us. Just don’t drink anything that is offered to you by someone other than a bartender or one of us and you’ll be fine.”

We didn’t talk about anything related to vampires over dinner, preferring to stick to ideas on furnishing our new place. I think I surprised Jasper by suggesting brighter colors than how we furnished our house in Texas. We both agreed, as I finished my chicken dish, that adding some vibrant reds in the house seemed to fit for a house in the Italian countryside. Once I was done, I ordered some dessert to take back to the house and after leaving some Euros on the table, we headed back to the rental.

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“With this whole Maria thing, is it wise for me to change soon or should we wait?” I asked as I stepped into the shower with Jasper.

“Given that you’d be unpredictable and volatile as a newborn, I’d say no. The last thing I’d want is for you to attempt to attack her and endanger yourself in the process,” Jasper replied as he turned me around and started to lather my hair.

I was a little relieved at his answer because I knew as rational as I was now, I wouldn’t be later.

“As much as I’d love to change you right away, I think given that we’re at Volterra and we’re in good graces with the Volturi, we should wait until this blows over. All of us will protect you which puts me at ease more than if she was after us back in the States.”

I leaned against his body as his fingers massaged my scalp. My hands ran up and down his thighs before he turned me back so I was facing him.

“Shut your eyes for me,” he whispered as he moved us under the rain shower and began to rinse the soap off my hair. “Soon, baby girl, I’ll change you soon, I promise.”

I nodded and sent him my love before wrapping my arms around his neck. Our caresses and kisses quickly became heated before I felt the cool stone tile against my back and his hands gripping the back of my thighs. I wrapped my legs around his torso as he slid himself into me. We both moaned at the sensation as he slowly began to move. I licked and nibbled on his jaw and neck, earning muttered curses and groans from him. I watched as my husband’s eyes turned darker until they were onyx. His low growls vibrated along my body, adding to the pleasure.
“Jasper! So close!” I gasped out as my fingers dug into his shoulders even harder.

“Me too, baby girl,” he said through clenched teeth.

Hearing his heavy breathing and seeing his muscles tighten around his neck and chest sent me over the edge and I screamed his name. He thrust a couple more times before he shouted mine and smacked the shower tiles with his hand. The sound of porcelain cracking broke us out of our passionate daze and we laughed at the cracked tile.

“I guess we won’t be getting that deposit back,” I muttered as he handed me a towel.

He laughed and shook his head as he wrapped the cloth around his waist and grabbed another one to dry my hair before we headed to the bedroom.

“Can we put a patio and those twinkle lights at the farmhouse?” I asked as he got his laptop open to start our house planning.

“Yeah, Peter and I could build one. You want it semi covered like the one at our Texas house, baby girl?”

“Maybe a little more open so we could see the stars. It will be like a little piece of Texas for us, wouldn’t you think?”

“So long as I can dance with my girl in the evenings, I have no objection. Best thing is we won’t need those citronella candles once you’re turned.”

“We won’t really need the lights either, I suppose, but we can still use them to add to the ambiance, right?”

“Oh definitely,” he replied and kissed me on the lips. “You know, with the furniture we’ve ordered already, we could probably move in as soon as it’s delivered. It will be pretty basic especially with all the room we have but we can have our own place.”

“Yeah, let’s do that. Of course, I’ll need an espresso machine,” I said and winked at him.
“Woman, you and your coffee,” he teased as he ran his fingers along my sides.

“You are ruthless,” I gasped in between giggles. “I’ll find your tickle spots once I’m turned and you know, turnabout is fair play.”

He pulled me closer to him, “I’ll look forward to it.” He continued to look at me as he ran his fingers gently under my eyes. “Are you tired, Isabella?”

“I am,” I mumbled out my reply and snuggled closer to Jasper. “This is probably the first night we’ve actually had some downtime since we started to renovate the house.”

“Get some sleep, baby girl; I’ll throw that pastry in the fridge so you can have it for breakfast.”

“Okay,” I muttered as I tried to stifle a yawn. “What time are the kings meeting with Alice again? I want to listen in.”

“Morning,” he replied. “I’m curious too since this will be more extensive, I’m guessing.”

I closed my eyes and let Jasper’s scent wash over me.

The next morning, I felt so much more refreshed as I slowly sipped my latte, enjoying the caffeine rush through my body before getting up and dressed. Jasper explained that while I was asleep, Peter and Demetri sent him text messages letting him know the meeting was at eleven so afterwards, if I wanted, I could have lunch with Gianna. I was looking forward to having an informal meal with her so I took a little extra care in getting ready.

When we got to the ancient city, we parked at the castle but then wandered immediately into the market area as Jasper sent out a text message. We walked towards some buildings and I noticed
that one of the doors was opened. As soon as we stepped through, Jasper had me in his arms since it was pitch black inside due to the covered windows. He opened a door and walked down some wooden steps and I could see a dim light down below. He set me back on my feet and took my hand as we walked through a glass and steel corridor. I knew immediately this was, yet another passage into the Volturi laboratory.

We stopped momentarily in front of a solid steel door before I heard a soft beep from the other side and then it opened with a *whoosh*.

“Ah, good morning, you two,” Demetri said as he patted Jasper on the back before giving me a much gentler one.

“Morning,” Jasper replied. “Any developments since your text last night?”

“No, we did break into the jeweler’s house and implanted a more permanent surveillance device on him.”

“You microchipped him?” I exclaimed and then laughed. “I guess that is one way to make sure you know his whereabouts.”

“It isn’t just a microchip. Alec modified it so we can also listen in on conversation.”

“So it is a combination homing device and bug? Wow, that is cool!” I was excited by the notion that maybe one day soon, I’d be able to work in the lab and help create things like that too.

We got settled in the surveillance room and watched as the guards emerged from the side before going into the hidden panel behind the three thrones. The queens took their place on the side, and they all wore rich colored gowns.

The kings emerged and walked up to the platform. Like yesterday, they wore dark robes but this time, I could see that they were slightly different and must have said it out loud.

“Very observant, Bella,” Demetri said. “You’re correct, today’s meeting is a lot more formal. Watch for Aro to take control. The kings do this to intimidate, so expect them to act cold and heartless. I’ll let you both in on a secret though, unless it is a dangerous enemy, they really enjoy playing those roles.”
I leaned my head against Jasper before he pulled me onto his lap as we continued to watch the show.

The ornate double doors opened and Alec walked in wearing dark red robes with some sort of embroidery on them. He was stoic as he led, almost like a procession, Alice who was once again dressed in outrageously high heels and some sort of wacky patterned dress. I had a feeling that she was wearing it because it had an expensive label. I looked quickly at Jasper and he rolled his eyes at the scene.

“Christ, all those years,” he muttered. “What the hell was I thinkin’?”

I cupped his face before kissing him. “Hey, we all do stupid, fucked up things. It’s a part of life. You moved on just like I did and it is us.”

He kissed me on the nose before we turned our attention back to the monitors as Renata followed behind Alice and shut the doors.

Alec stopped all of a sudden and the two guards moved to the side.

“You didn’t see it, but Aro gave a signal for them to move,” Demetri explained. “Everything is highly choreographed.”

“State your name, please,” Aro addressed Alice. His voice was stern and authoritative, much different than when we first met him.

“Alice Cullen,” Alice said out loud.

“Your full name?”

“Mary Alice Brandon Cullen,” she replied.

“And the reason for wanting an audience with us?”
“My father, Carlisle Cullen, explained to you that I’ve been experiencing pain in my head. He
doesn’t understand why I’m feeling this way,” she continued, her eyes never leaving the kings.

Jasper hissed out softly as he watched and I looked at him confused.

“She’s trying to garner their attention,” he explained. “She gave them a very quick wink as she explained.”

“No, really?” I asked as I grabbed the remote to rewind one of the monitors so I could see it. Sure
enough, in slow motion, I saw her give the kings a smile and wink as she finished. “In front of the
queens? Wow, that is outrageous.”

"Miss Cullen, so you are here to seek a diagnosis for your malaise? Are you aware that it could
take some time before we discover anything? More so, are you prepared if there is no cure?”

I watched as Alice appeared to fidget and I wasn’t sure if it was from excitement or nervousness
given what we’ve learned. “Will I be staying here? Am I allowed to speak to my family?”

“Miss Cullen,” Aro began as he stood up from his throne. “We wouldn’t deny you from
communicating with your family.” He stepped off the platform before appearing to almost glide
over to her. “As far as staying here at Volterra, I’d say for now, you should stay here until after
we’ve run tests. Is there anything else you’d like to tell us before we dismiss you?.” He extended
his hand out to her and gazed into her eyes.

I wasn’t sure what he was doing but I watched as she slowly, almost hesitantly, reached out to put
her hand delicately in his. “I guess I could rest in my room,” she said with her voice a little softer
and if I wasn’t mistaken, huskier. “You know where you can find me.”

I clapped my hand over my mouth as I watched this strange scene on the monitor. If I wasn’t
mistaken, she was, once again, trying to proposition Aro and when I looked over at the queens, the
sneer from Suelpicia told me that I wasn’t misreading this.

“Yes.” Aro waved his hand. “You’re dismissed. We’ll start conducting tests soon. In the meantime,
I’d advise you not to roam around the corridors.” He smiled at her but even I could see it didn’t
contain the warmth as it usually did. “You’re an esteemed guest and we want to make sure you’re
not taken advantage of while you’re here.”
“Thank you, your majesty,” she said breathlessly as she curtseyed to Aro and then to the other two kings. As she turned to leave, I could see she had a bounce in her step that she didn’t have when she first came in.

As soon as the double doors closed, Aro sat back down in a huff. “Guards, you can come back out,” he said and the hidden panel slid open as the guards trickled back out, sans their ornate robes. “Heidi, you and Felix install some cameras in front of her door. I don’t think she’ll try to escape because she still thinks there are evils that lurk in the corridors here. Let’s continue giving her the blood and we’ll collect a venom sample from her in a few days. You’re all dismissed for the day.”

“The pomp and circumstance is over,” Demetri explained. “Bella, this is usually the time when Marcus and Gianna have their time in the conservatory. I know she’s been asking for you if you’d like to meet her there.”

“Was that really a threat at the end or was it a fear tactic?” I asked and sincerely hoped it was the former.

“Aro was playing it up mainly because of her perception of Volterra. Although, I wouldn’t be surprised if the queens would want a piece of her after her antics today,” Demetri explained.

We thanked Demetri before walking out of the laboratory. It took a few minutes to get to the elevators since I insisted on walking and stretching my legs. By the time we reached the garden, Marcus and Gianna were already there and a vampire had just set some food out with two place settings.

We greeted each other before the four of us sat down in the gazebo.

“I’m glad you came. Demetri said you enjoyed the figs and proscuitto? I have one of my favorite dishes that you might be familiar with,” Gianna said enthusiastically.

“Oh? What?”

She reached over and removed the dome cover that was in front of us.
I gasped. “Is that barbecue?”

“Yep, Peter helped me find a place that delivers overseas. He told me that you enjoyed it too, so Marcus placed this order and it came in early this morning by courier.”

I laughed as I helped myself to a plate. “Hey Gianna, once you’re queen, will we still be able to talk to each other? I mean would that be frowned upon if we stayed friends?”

“I’d like for us to remain friends,” she said and smiled. “I know there are royal duties I would be in charge of and would be spending more time with my two sisters, but we can still talk. We wouldn’t have lunch together though.” She winked and the rest of the table laughed. “Besides, you and I will be changed around the same time, it would be nice to know someone who was changed in the same era, you know?”

“I never thought of it that way, but I suppose since everybody except for Heidi was turned centuries ago or even longer, it makes a difference.”

“It does. Oh, we decided a theme for our coronation celebration after I’m changed and have gone through a few months of learning my control.”

“Theme?” I asked and looked up at my friend.

“Sometimes when we have parties, it is very regal but other times, we like to have less formal affairs. Marcus and I both want something fun, so we took one of Aro’s ideas he had a few years ago. We’re going to have a costume party and the costume you wear has to somehow be representative of your human life; something significant. That means, we won’t have it until you’ve changed too.”

“I don’t want to keep you from the event,” I said. “Jasper and I decided to wait until we see what happens with this whole Maria thing.”

“If it is any consolation, we are too,” Marcus said. “I understand we’ve got a suspect now, thanks to you both.”

“Yes, sir,” Jasper replied. “We managed to put a homing device in his personal property yesterday and Demetri informed me that they have now implanted a microchip with audio capability on
“Caius was relieved when he heard that. He’s hopeful that it is a good lead.”

Jasper explained how the man became more agitated when he saw my bite mark on my wrist. I nodded as I ate some brisket and smiled when he said he was proud of my quick thinking.

“I let Caius know. Thank you to the both of you,” Marcus said.

“Jasper? Bella? Should the queens be worried about Alice Cullen?” Gianna asked after she finished her plate.

“I don’t think so, but maybe I can monitor her emotions the next time to be sure. If Aro is correct and he says it is almost like a dream instead of an actual vision, then I’d have nothing to worry about.”

“She was outrageous,” Gianna muttered.

“I, for one, am glad that she doesn’t have her gift or it isn’t working,” I said. “She used to tell me that she had visions of me wearing specific outfits and things like that. I explained to Jasper early on that it was one thing if something dangerous was going to happen but visions of clothes is ridiculous.”

“What do you mean?” Gianna asked and we explained how Alice used to tell both of us what to wear because she saw it in her vision.

She scowled before looking at Marcus. “Would it be petty if I wanted Chelsea to compel Alice into thinking she’s got a closet full of couture when in reality she’s wearing cheap, imitation outfits?”

Marcus laughed and then looked over to the side. I noticed Jasper doing the same thing.

“My dear, that is positively devious but it is a brilliant idea especially if she becomes a long term guest. You know, you should tell Sulpicia – she could convince Aro.” He looked over at us. “Speaking of, he’s coming to see you. We’ll take our leave.”
We said goodbye and Gianna pulled me into a hug before they walked away.

Jasper and I looked at each other as I wondered why Aro would want to meet with us.

“We’ll soon find out, baby girl. I’m guessing it has to do with what he saw when he touched Alice.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all liked it…it isn’t a real cliffie (I hope) since Aro has already read some of her thoughts.

Thank you all for all the reviews/faves/alerts. I also want to thank the wonderful women who’ve helped me with this story - AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNnerdy.

Until next week... sushi
Chapter 69

Chapter Notes

Can you believe it’s already May? Time is sure flying by.

Thank you for all the alerts, faves and reviews. I am so glad you’re all still enjoying the story. This story wouldn’t be as great if I didn’t have a wonderful team of women making sure this story reads right and looks good - AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy are awesome!

So just a quick explanation of Alice from the previous chapter. She's delusional because that "dream" of hers where she sees herself as queen, she's interpreting that as a vision and therefore truth. That is why she's trying to flirt/seduce her way to the throne. The Volturi aren't buying it though. :)

I’m not SM - just like to bend her characters to my will. :)

Enjoy -

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 68

JPOV

Spending time with Marcus and Gianna was refreshing. I didn’t need my gift to see that they were both deeply in love with each other and like Isabella, I felt a sense of kinship with them. I was proud of Isabella for bringing up the subject about whether or not she could continue her friendship with Gianna after she was officially named a queen. I was pleased her concerns were put to ease when Gianna reassured her that they could still be friends especially since they will be changed close to the same time. After the brief conversation yesterday about the past, I knew and could relate to her moments of uncertainty.

I noticed how both Marcus and Gianna were agitated when the topic of Alice was brought up until she suggested tricking the pixie. I personally thought that was fitting given how she was always so bossy when it came to clothes. Apparently, Gianna’s suggestion did a number on the king; his lust grew and with one knowing look at each other, I could see they wanted alone time.

Aro happened to choose his time well and let Marcus know he was coming to visit with us. Less than a minute after the couple left, Aro walked in, slightly faster than human speed and sat down in front of us. He first wanted to thank Isabella and me for spotting the potential spy and said initial reports show he is a likely suspect. Since the man was still human, he wasn’t going to make a
move immediately, but guards were closely monitoring his activities.

The next thing he wanted to bring up was Alice and what he saw when he touched her hand.

“Unlike last time, I was able to get more information,” he explained. “I now have a better read on some of her intentions.”

Isabella and I looked at each other with excitement and anticipation before I took a hold of her hand. I nodded for Aro to continue.

“She still sees that dream like vision, if you can call it as such. It seems to play endlessly in her mind. I was also to see a better picture on what she has in store for her family.”

“Her family? You mean the Cullens?” Isabella asked.

“Yes, it seems she got this idea to wreak havoc on them by locating a red haired, female vampire.”

“Victoria!” Isabella exclaimed. “But why the Cullens?”

Aro looked at us and we briefed him on that baseball incident from so long ago that culminated with Isabella being bitten by James.

“...He removed the venom instead of changing you?” Aro asked incredulously.

“Yes and at the time, I was so enamored by his so-called perfection and control that I thought it was proof of his love for me. Now I’m just grateful I wasn’t changed by either of them so Jasper’s venom will run in my veins, eventually.”

Aro sighed. “Thank you, Jasper for destroying two of the rogue vampires. We don’t condone that type of bloodsport whatsoever. I think you showed great mercy by destroying James quickly. Had he still been alive, he would have had to answer to the three of us for what he did to Isabella.”

It was at that moment that I could see how fond of my woman the vampire leaders were. I could
feel the familial bond between all of us grow even stronger.

“Now back to Alice, it seems that at first, she was bored and just wanted some sort of excitement by looking for this Victoria. As the weeks and months progressed, her gifts started to deteriorate, the only thing she was able to see was the vision of her being here in Volterra as some sort of royal member and is interpreting the idea as a vision. Her memories aren’t tainted, but she started to associate Volterra with Victoria and concluded that using Victoria could be a sign of fealty to us. In short, it is as though she cannot discern the difference between reality and fantasy.”

“She’s going to use Victoria to go after the Cullens? Do we know anything yet?” I asked.

“So far nothing. Right now, we’re closely monitoring missing person reports in North America. We’ve noticed a greater percentage of bodies found but nothing that has me sending a team out yet. However, if it continues, I can deploy a couple of my field guards over for a few days. I’ve got a couple currently in Romania who could use a change of scenery,” Aro replied and added a chuckle at the end.

“What is out in Romania?” Isabella asked.

“There are two brothers, Stefan and Vladimir, who live up in the Carpathians...”

Isabella gasped. “The Carpathians? Like Count Dracula?”

Aro let out a rich laughter that caused both of us to start laughing as well. “They are probably the closest to fitting the image of the vampire myth. You’re correct though, they were the inspiration for the Count. They are basically recluses who continue to live up in the mountains and will only leave the comfort of their lair to feed; humans, animals, whatever they run across. Believe it or not, they continue to live as they have centuries ago and ignore any modern comfort like hot water or electricity. We monitor them from afar because they did, at one time, express an interest in overthrowing us. We don’t think they’ll do anything at this point especially since we’re more technologically advanced than they are, but for peace of mind, we continue to watch them.”

“But I thought farm animal blood is gross.”

“It is absolutely vile, but these ancient ones continue to feed like they did over a thousand years ago. They’re very set in their ways and have not deviated from them over the centuries.” He shrugged. “I really don’t know why they do what they do.” He shook his head and rolled his eyes
before smiling again. “So I hear you’re going to Catacomb tonight?”

I nodded and said we were going to be there with Peter and Char. I noted that Aro looked at Isabella with some concern before he reached into his pocket.

“Isabella, you might want to put these on for tonight,” he said and placed a set of crimson contact lenses on the table.

“Oh, thank you,” she replied, touched by his concern. “I have some of my own but I think they’re in one of the boxes packed for the house.” She looked up at Aro and smiled.

“We’ll take our leave now,” I explained knowing it was a drive to the club and she would want to get ready.

We said our goodbyes and left for the rental. When we got there, Peter and Char were waiting for us with a couple shopping bags for tonight. Char took Isabella into the second bedroom as Peter tossed me a shoe box.

“Doc Martens?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’ll fit better than your shit kickers you seem to live in,” he explained and I punched him on the arm.

“Fuckin’ smart ass,” I muttered as I tried them on.

“Here, we found this at the vintage boutique too,” he said as he aimed a t-shirt at my head.

“Sex Pistols?” I replied rhetorically as I looked at the tears and rips.

“Yeah, those concerts were good places to feed,” Peter replied. He threw on a heavy metal band t-shirt over his long sleeve tee as Char uttered her agreement from the other room and then explained to Isabella our conversation, causing her to laugh.

I was curious what Char was doing to my woman and was pleased the door opened a minute later.
Isabella was also wearing Doc Martens but hers laced up to just under her knees. She had a pair of fishnets under that were torn and then a jean skirt with a ripped up black top. Each tear on her shirt had safety pins, giving just a hint of her skin. She had darkened her eyes and she held out her hand showing me her contact lens case.

Char wore similar boots and stockings but she had a skirt that looked like netting and a vintage Ramones t-shirt.

“I’ll put the lenses in when we get closer. Do you think I’ll blend in tonight?”

Peter and Char nodded as I pulled her close to me. “You look good, baby girl,” I whispered against her ear.

“So do you,” she replied and stood on her tiptoes to kiss me.

I looked at Peter and realized I was missing one thing. “I’ll be back,” I said and headed into our room and quickly searched my suitcase before finding my old, faded flannel shirt. I threw that on as I walked back into the main room and Isabella immediately helped me roll the sleeves up to expose my forearms.

“Oh, you look grungy,” she said. “How long is the drive?”

“It’ll take us a couple hours if we are able to drive fast, otherwise, it will be closer to four,” Char replied as the four of us headed out the door. “Do you want to take two cars or ride with us?”

“We can ride with you?” Isabella asked as she held onto my hand. “We’re not staying, right?”

“Nah,” Peter replied as we got into his car. “The place is teeming with potential meals. We’ll get back late tonight.”

“We’re good, baby girl,” I replied and took her hand in mine. “This is probably worse that some of the dive places we’ve gone, am I right?”

Char snorted. “That cantina that Bella got drunk from tequila is a luxury compared to Catacomb.”
We are usually there for an hour max.”

“So you drive all that way for a meal and come back?”

“Yeah, we only go a couple times a month because out here, we drink the bagged stuff more. Catacombs is like a vampire buffet,” Peter chimed in and then apologized to my woman when he realized his words.

Isabella shook her head and snorted. “Is it safe to say that this outing is like a vampire date night?”

“Pretty much, Bella,” Char replied as she started twirling her blonde hair into little twists and pinning them up.

“What are you doing with your hair?” Isabella asked as she looked up.

“Trying not to draw too much attention when we get there. I can do yours up if you’d like.”

“Hmm, I might do the same thing, sort of,” Isabella replied and started grabbing a random section of her hair and braiding it. “Since we have so much time to kill, this will keep me occupied.”

I sat back as I watched her fingers twist her hair into a braid. Char tossed a box of rubber bands to me and I plucked one to hand Isabella when she looked like she was done.

“What?” she asked me as she moved to another section.

“Nothin’,” I replied. “It’s just cool seeing you do your hair up.” It was too. After so many years being with someone who had short, spiky hair, running my fingers through Isabella’s hair was almost like a balm to my soul. I chuckled to myself at my poetic thoughts and continued to watch as she continued to add random plaits all over her head.

“So back to this idea of vampire date night, will we be doing this one day?” she asked me as she shook out her arms.
I used my fingertips to gently massage her arm muscles. “Yes, ma’am. It’ll be dinner and dancing if we were to come out here. But if you wanted a movie night, we could do that too. Going out isn’t always about feeding.”

Char turned and nodded. “One of our favorite, non-meal dates is to find a drive-in theater and Peter will usually take one of his classic cars. We’ll go and just enjoy the movie.”

“That is sweet,” Isabella said as she grabbed my hand. “I haven’t been to a drive-in since I was a kid. Renee took me once and I loved it because I could wear my pajamas, bring my teddy bear and talk all during the movie. It is probably one of the only fond memories I have with her.”

I moved so I could wrap my arm around her while she still had her seatbelt on and kissed her temple.

“I’m okay Jasper, but thank you,” she whispered. “Those are memories I’d like to cherish but remember, I need to know about both the good and bad.” She looked at me and started to laugh. “Of course you’ll remember...duh.”

We all laughed and Peter announced we were a little over an hour away.

“You need help with your hair, baby girl?” I asked as she continued to add braids around her head.

“Are you able to braid the back for me? My arms are getting a little tired.”

An hour later, we were around the corner from the club. I could hear the booming bass coming from the nondescript brick building. Once we parked, Isabella threw in her contact lenses and then the four of us walked towards the building. Before we stepped inside, I steeled myself from the upcoming onslaught of emotions from the humans and was grateful I had more control than ever. Lust and the emotions associated with being intoxicated on alcohol as well as illicit drugs was heavy. Just then, I felt anxiety coming from Isabella and stopped to look at her.
“Jesus, this place is surreal,” she muttered as she grabbed both my hands. “I don’t want to rush you but do you think you’ll be able to find a meal quickly?”

“You okay, Isabella?” I asked as I pulled her into my arms moving our bodies so it looked like we were dancing.

“I’m fine, this place... I feel so out of my element,” she said with a nervous laugh. “Me, who has hung out in a room full of badass vampire guards and I feel uncomfortable with these people around me.”

Peter and Char were nearby after they walked around the nightclub in case there were other vampires here.

“All clear, bro,” Peter said once they were next to us.

I looked around the room and noticed a couple seated around a small table inhaling a white powder. A part of me wanted to keep Isabella from seeing this and I even told her as I continued to hold her against me.

“Jasper, you don’t need to shield me from this. I mean, this isn’t something I wish to see, but it happens and we’re here. Come on, you need to feed. I can hang out with Peter and Char. Let’s play the part.”

I reluctantly let go of our embrace and the four of us went to a table that Peter said was reserved for us.

“Demetri set it up,” Char explained as we sat down.

“But the card says it is for ‘James Ford’,” Isabella murmured as she grabbed the placard.

“You watched that show about the castaways on the island, didn’t you?” Peter asked as he grinned at my woman. “That is that guy Sawyer’s real name. He thinks it is funny using fake names like that.”
Isabella seemed more relaxed now and asked for a bottle of water from the waitress that stopped by. The rest of us ordered beers as I started to scan around the room.

“Anything capture your attention?” Isabella whispered against my ear once the waitress left with our drinks.

I nodded.

“What do you look for?” she continued, as she moved closer to me. She was genuinely interested in what I had to say.

I pulled her onto my lap and played with one of her braids, twirling it around my finger. “I use my gift and my vampire senses to scan the room, and try to hone in on someone who is endangering others. See the man over there with the sunglasses and the short sleeve button down?”

“The bowling shirt guy to my right?”

I nodded. “I’ve been watchin’ him ever since we stepped in this club. He’s selling drugs here. I can also zero in on his heartbeat and notice that it is erratic. He’s also sweating and has dilated eyes which means he’s most likely on something and it is wearing on him. Finally, he has been on his phone talking about female attributes like they were a laundry list.”

“Prostitution, you think? Does gender matter when you feed?”

“I am thinking it is more like human trafficking. I’ve fed from females and males, there isn’t a difference now but before, during the war, there were times when it did make a difference.”

“What do you... oh, when both your pleasures were sated,” Isabella replied.

I kissed her lips. “I’m sorry baby girl, that was a long time ago.”

“Don’t be sorry, Jasper. Like you said, it was another lifetime ago.” She put her hand on my leg
and then looked at the man. “Hey, he’s moving around.”

The man was closer to us as he continued to talk on the phone and I was now able to hear him over the din of the music. He was definitely looking for women to exploit. I waited patiently as I continued to survey the room. Isabella was back on her seat as Peter and Char entertained her with stories from their visits to this nightclub.

“I’ll be back,” I murmured as I kissed her cheek, ten minutes later.

“I love you, Jasper,” she whispered. “Go.” As I turned to walk away, she smacked my ass and laughed.

I watched as Bowling Shirt guy, as Isabella nicknamed him, moved further into the nightclub before slipping out one of the exits towards the back. I slipped quietly behind him after making sure I wasn’t being observed.

This area I was now in was almost like a cave and I realized this was the reason for the name of the nightclub. They were private rooms that looked as though they were underground tunnels. The residual scent of drug use and sexual activity weighed heavily in the air as the man got on his phone again and told the other person that he was out here waiting for the delivery. He was more nervous now than he was inside the club. He was sweating more profusely and his eyes were darting back and forth. He was definitely coming down from whatever drug he was on.

I rushed past him just as he was finishing up his call and latched onto his neck before he saw me. The blood was tainted with drugs that left a slightly bitter taste. It wasn’t bad, hospital blood bags were worse. I drew more and more blood as I pushed him against the wall before I let his drained body slump to the floor.

I looked around for the hidden incinerator Peter had mentioned during the ride over and spotted it due to the slight temperature change of the cavern wall. I pulled on a rock and exposed a hole and the tell tale sign of a furnace hundreds of feet below. I pushed the body through and then sealed it back up. Once I slipped back inside, I returned to the table as we hung out for a few minutes more before heading back.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the Dakotas...
I looked out into the open field from the outcropping of rocks. It managed to hide me from the sun’s rays as I stared at the ashes that was once my newborn.

“Damn yellow-eyed Cullen bitch,” I muttered under my breath. “Oh, it is easy, just bite, inject venom and three days later, voilà, a newborn vampire.” I mocked as I looked out onto the horizon.

I had done what she said and ended up killing a few humans because I drained too much blood on more than one occasion. I also bit through a neck of a couple others; no amount of venom could save them.

Once I did manage to turn a couple vampires, they destroyed each other in a moment of rage.

This last one, the one that is now ashes on the ground below me, I managed to keep alive for nearly 2 months before she tried to wrench my head off. I had no choice but to burn her.

A part of me wanted to give up and just go on with my empty life without James.

Oh James, why did you have to find that girl and make her a tasty hunt?

“Dammit!” I screeched out. I had to do this. He was my mate and now he was gone. If I didn’t do anything, I would have nothing and just find the first brushfire to hurl myself into it.

I needed to try one again, but first sate my thirst before I made new vampires. I gave myself a goal and although I had hoped for an army of newborns to help me avenge my James’ death, I was willing to settle for a handful of them.

First thing though, I needed to wait until it was night so I could continue my mission.

Chapter End Notes

So, did you enjoy that? I not making it easy on Victoria on purpose. I figured if it was so easy to turn humans into vampires, wouldn’t there be more than there were?

And yeah, the Volturi are using human addictions and crime to their advantage. If you’ve read my first story Bound in Blood, you’ll see a slight resemblance there.
Until next time, ~ sushi ~ XO
Chapter 70

Chapter Notes

Happy Thursday!

Here is the next chapter for you all. A couple notes - 1. Maria and Jasper’s backstory has changed somewhat from the books. Just a couple tweaks here and there. 2. Remember, this is not canon and alternate universe.

Nothing has changed from last week. I haven’t transformed myself to SM. I’m still me...the minion to my cats.

Note - the italicized stuff that is center justified is a phone conversation.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 69

BPOV

“What is all this?” I asked as Renata and Demetri opened a set of double, cabinet doors in front of me and Jasper.

“These are our special instruments,” Demetri explained while looking at two of us. The way he emphasized that word and the expression on his face, I had a good hunch what he was talking about.

I gulped and held onto Jasper’s hand tighter. The Volturi had almost offhandedly mentioned the weapons and now, we were looking at their arsenal.

“Werewolf,” I whispered.

“Yes,” Renata replied. “It is one of the few things that can pierce our skin and is much more painful than having foreign venom introduced into our bodies.” She grabbed some gloves and pulled out a needle. “We’ll use this to get some venom from Alice so we can study it. I guess we could have asked for it and had her voluntarily offer, but the kings and their queens insist on
“Making things more difficult.”

“No, that’s fine,” Jasper said. “If she objects, you might want to mention something about her showing loyalty to the Volturi.”

“Good idea,” Demetri said as he shut the doors. “She’s been very eager to cooperate and hasn’t been pushy in her desire to leave. In fact, in her phone call to Carlisle last night, she actually explained to him, on her own free will, that she was comfortable staying here indefinitely.”

“Oh really?” I exclaimed. “Does that mean the rest of the Cullens will take up residence in Italy now?” I hoped like hell the answer was no.

Renata led us back to the lab. “No, there wasn’t any indication. We’ll continue to have her stay in touch with them. Right now, he understands she has to convalesce and Volterra has the best chance for her to recover. I’ve got to bring this up to the meeting, but you can all stay and observe.”

I sat down in the surveillance room and Jasper sat next to me as we waited for the meeting to start.

“Have you heard anything new from the silversmith?” Jasper asked Demetri.

“Nothing since that phone call. It still looks like the meeting is tonight.” Demetri replied and handed me a file. “This is the file on Mikael, the silversmith. Bella, normally we don’t use files, but we put our notes together for you so you’re aware of what’s going on.”

“Thank you,” I replied, grateful I was being included in their spy situation. I started to flip through the notes and read what they learned about his man.

He was born in Russia. His mother was originally from Rome so when she left her husband, she relocated them back to Italy. His childhood didn’t seem out of the ordinary - he was a star student and could have played soccer, or football as it is known here, at the university level but he injured his leg and he went into jewelry making instead.

“His fiancée is missing?” I asked as I looked up at Demetri and Jasper who were talking in vampire speed. “This is why he is helping Maria, right?”
Demetri nodded and looked at Jasper. I could see the concern in his eyes and reached out to grab Jasper’s hand.

“She was expecting,” he said and handed me a sheet of paper.

I looked at the doctor’s record and shook my head. “He’s holding out on hope that she’s still alive, isn’t he?” I took a deep breath, hoping that I could stop the tears from forming in my eyes.

“It looks like it, baby girl,” Jasper replied in a near whisper. “I don’t think we can be too hopeful about her fate given this is Maria.”

I nodded. “I guess being she was half-way through her pregnancy, there was no way Maria wouldn’t have known?”

Jasper brushed his lips against my temple. “No, our hearing would have detected the heartbeat. Plus, she would have been showing the physical signs of her condition.”

“We recorded their phone call that he made last night. I’ll play it after the kings have their meeting with Alice. We managed to triangulate the signal and since it hasn’t been destroyed, it will act as a homing device. We’ll get her,” Demetri said with confidence.

Our thoughts were interrupted for the time being as the monitors showed the meeting was about to take place. I watched as Alice was escorted up to the thrones and bowed in front of the kings. She was still dressed in designer clothes but I noticed she wasn’t wearing shoes that were sky high like her first few meetings.

“Miss Cullen, the reason why we called you into this meeting is to make sure you’re still interested in finding a cure to your ailment. We wanted to give you time to think because this can be a tedious process, even for vampires,” Aro said as he stared from his throne. “It could take years because, to be honest, we haven’t seen a case like yours before.”

“Yes, your majesties. I appreciate the time you’ve given me and I am prepared to stay here until a cure can be found,” she replied.

“Very well.” Aro got up and started to step down the platform. “We need to gather some venom for our research.”
“Oh,” she exclaimed and pulled off her scarf she had around her neck and placed it in front of her mouth. I guessed she was trying to gather some venom onto the piece of cloth.

Aro raised his hand, indicating that she stop. “We need a purer source,” he explained and pulled out a needle. “Hold still, please.”

I could see her wincing as the needle entered her skin.

“Yeah, that stuff burns,” Demetri said as we watched Aro draw a couple vials of venom from Alice.

When he was done, Alice let out a hiss and rubbed her hand over her neck.

“You’re dismissed. You might feel out of sorts due to the needle injection,” Aro said as he sealed the vials.

Caius gave a hand signal and Alice was immediately dismissed. Marcus looked up directly at one of the cameras and nodded to us.

“Come on, they want us to meet about this Maria thing,” Demetri explained as Jasper pulled me into his arms. “We’re all meeting in a more informal setting.” We sped up to what looked like a giant conference room.

We greeted the kings before they gestured for us to sit down.

The first thing we discussed was Alice as Aro placed the 2 vials onto the table. “We probably could have used her handkerchief that she saturated with venom but this way, I could also look into her memories while she was distracted with the pain.”

“What did you find out, brother? You normally let Marcus and me know but to have us all here, well, what’s the news?” Caius asked.
“She has been wreaking havoc for a while now,” Aro began and looked over to Jasper. “She led you to believe you two were more than companions. She wanted you to believe she was your mate and manipulated situations in order to make sure she had, to put it frankly, a tight hold on you.” The room erupted with mumblings of disgust. “Tell me, Jasper, the times you slipped from the animal diet, were there circumstances that prevented you from feeding on a regular schedule?”

Jasper let out a low growl. “Not every time I slipped. I’d say more than half the time, I was probably hungrier than normal because I had to go run errands for her or with her.”

“Did she make you feel bad after?” Renata asked and Jasper nodded.

“Every time I returned to the house, everybody already knew about my ‘incidents’ thanks to Edward blurting it out to everybody and I could feel the guilt and shame coming from them.”

There were harsh whispers from around the table and I saw the kings shaking their heads. I reached over to hold Jasper’s hand as I sent him my trust.

“She knew that you both were mates and she tried to break that on your birthday, Isabella. I saw more of Alice’s memories unfold when I touched her,” Aro said. “She kept Jasper busy that day, running errands and being around humans so his control was weakened. Alice didn’t see the vision of you cutting yourself but she figured given your propensity to accidents, she would play the odds.”

“That was why they were elaborately wrapped,” I concluded. “Of course I did get a papercut and then it set a domino effect with everybody’s bloodlust. That was her look, she was hoping you’d attack me!”

“I think you were generous in using the werewolf venom syringes, brother,” Caius muttered through clenched teeth. “Truly disgusting behavior from Carlisle’s family.”

“I expected more from him,” Marcus commented and there were more mutterings of agreement from around the table. “And he thinks we’re ruthless.”

Aro raised his hands in an effort to quiet the room. “The point is, right now she is willing to let us help her. As long as she continues to feel like she’s welcomed, we can make sure there isn’t any interference from Carlisle. We can always take our time with the research, if need be. Now, I brought you all here because of this Maria situation.” He looked over at me and noticed the file
folder on the table. “Demetri, please play the telephone conversation for all of us.”

Demetri set a recording device on the table and pushed a few buttons.

The recording began with some static and then the conversation began.

“Mikael, how nice of you to finally call. I’ve only been carrying this phone with me for the past month. I hope you have some news.”

I noticed the slight flinch from Jasper as the female’s accented voice filled the room.

“I’m sorry, Mistress. I haven’t had much to report until now.”

I could tell from the tremble in his voice that Mikael was nervous.

“Well, what do you have then? I don’t have all day.”

“The upcoming holiday, ‘Ferragosto’, is approaching and there is going to be a celebration here at Volterra.”

Demetri clicked off the recording device. “We took your advice, Jasper on trying to flush her out and figured if we got the word out that we were going to have a festival, she would take the bait.”

“Wait,” I blurted. “What is this holiday?”

Aro explained during the reign of Augustus, this holiday was to celebrate the upcoming harvest. There had only been a handful of times when Ferragosto was recognized in Volterra even though it was considered a national holiday here in Italy.

“Will the tourists be safe?” I asked.
“We won’t let them infiltrate the city. Here, let me play the rest of the conversation,” Demetri replied.

“I see, that is certainly an interesting developments, mi querido.”

“Now will you let my Sophie free?”

She chuckled lightly before replying. “I’ll give it some thought. Perhaps we will meet in person before the day of the fiesta. In fact, I shall meet you at your flat.”

“O-okay. Will Sophie be there?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I’ll see you in a few days.”

“She’s very close then,” I murmured as I held onto Jasper’s hand. “Does he, Mikael, live close?”

“No, he lives in a town to the east of the castle. You’re safe,” Aro explained.

I breathed a sigh of relief that we moved to the farmhouse yesterday.

“Are you keeping an eye out already?” Jasper asked.

“You haven’t met Santiago because he tends to keep to himself, but he’s been watching Mikael. We know from what you’ve explained, that she will most likely send a small contingent before she actually shows up,” Demetri explained. “Given that the holiday is the 3 days away, I’m going to meet with Santiago after this and we’ll both keep watch.”

Felix stood up. “What Demetri hasn’t explained is Santiago has a unique gift. His vampire scent is like an animal and as such, he is able to blend into his surrounding areas. This is also why you haven’t met him, he prefers to live outside of the castle and, pardon the pun, likes being a lone wolf.”

Jasper stood up and started to pace around the room, running his fingers through his hair. “That is
good that you have someone monitoring her. Demetri said that you’ve located her cell phone signal but has Santiago gotten a visual on her yet? Have you found any evidence of newborns? You know, missing persons, massive grave from feedings or even ashes from the newborns she’s destroyed?”

“Santiago received the coordinates of the area and has been searching. The area is near a major city center but it hasn’t moved. He’s aware that she could have thrown the phone away. Either way, we’ll hear from him shortly,” Demetri explained. “Ever since we received word that she was interested in overthrowing us, we’ve made sure any large number of missing persons would be investigated. So far, we have missing people in the northern part of the United States, near the Canadian border. Up until a month ago, we were at a loss, but then there were some people reported missing over in Slovenia and Croatia. The trend started to move towards Italy, but it was slow and there has not been an indication that there is a large camp.”

“A month?” Jasper asked almost rhetorically. “That sounds about right.”

I looked at him as he turned towards Peter and Char who responded back to him with a silent nod.

“She has them at their most vicious and feral,” he continued. “If she’s looking to start something, she’ll only have given them blood as soon as they woke up, and then it is probably no more than bucket-full. She’s starving them from here on out. Any evidence of ashes?”

“There was, near the Swiss and Italy border,” Caius replied.

“Going back to the cell phone, where exactly is she? Can we get a map displayed?” Jasper asked.

“Yes, near Torino,” Demetri said as Jane pulled up a map of Italy on her laptop and projected it onto a screen.

“Okay, so she’s close but her current second in command is actually leading her charge,” Jasper said as he finally sat back down. “Either it is a ruse or she is having her team be the sacrificial lambs and my experience says it is the latter.”

Aro looked up, surprise on his face. “Why would she do that?”

“To test the fortitude of the Volturi. My honest guess is she’ll have this group attack, almost
expecting to lose this time around. Unless they are well trained, the chances of them surviving close to zero. In the meantime, she’ll be close enough to note the strength and skills so that she can regroup for another attack,” Jasper replied. “That is my most sincere answer. She’ll start to gather allies to her cause so that she can start some sort of massive revolt.”

Jasper then described how Maria managed to destroy her two sisters by doing the same thing. “I was still quite young as a vampire. She had a second in command lead a charge to destroy Lettie and Lucy for betraying her, but those two had a much bigger force and Maria was left with two newborns after that battle. She insisted that I remain by her side, and kept telling me that I needed to observe and learn; I would be the one that would lead the next charge. Sure enough, a couple months later, I led a new charge and came back victorious.” Jasper looked over to the kings.

“So everybody will be safe during the celebration?” I asked, not really following the almost military type of strategizing that was going on.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Jasper replied and came over to put a reassuring hand on my shoulder. “I just believe, from personal experience, that she is using her current team but, we still shouldn’t overlook the possibility that she’s going to attack. If there is one thing she craves more than blood, it is power and control. Is there enough protection to prepare for both scenarios?”

Caius nodded. “We have the elites here but we also have about two dozen soldiers that are fully trained. They are young, less than a decade old. They just arrived from their training in Africa a few days ago but they're ready to fight if need be.”

“Good, they need to be ready. The city itself, especially if it is full of humans, will be her final conquest. She likes to make cities rain blood,” he said with disgust. “After this holiday, is there another major holiday that brings a lot of tourists?”

“There is the Saint Marcus Day festival in the spring,” Marcus replied. “You think that is the actual target date for her?”

“I think so,” Jasper replied. “This is just her testing the waters but we’ll be ready and if all goes well, Maria won’t be able to celebrate this spring.”

I sat there as they all continued to strategize. Even though they spoke in human tones, I still couldn’t follow much of what they said because it sounded too like military talk. About an hour later, Marcus left the room and returned with a covered food tray for me. I thanked him as he went back to the planning session.
I nibbled on my meal and was finishing up a breadstick when the phone rang. Demetri answered and then announced to everybody that Santiago was on the phone and he was switching to speaker.

“I spotted her along with a young female,” Santiago said. “I managed to get close enough to see she had a tight grip on the female and was reassuring her potential leadership skills. I didn’t stay long because they were going to feed, but they’re here in Torino, close to where the Olympic village was. Also, from what I can see, Maria still has her mobile phone as well.”

“Alright, who wants to help Santi?” Caius asked and both Jane and Alec raised their hands.

“If you can capture her, will she be brought back alive?” Jasper asked.

“Yes, we’ll hold her in the dungeon, it is reinforced with werewolf venom on the bars. Virtually indestructible,” Caius replied.

Peter and Char volunteered as well. “We’d like to take part.”

“Peter, you know how to fly a helicopter, correct?” Caius asked and Peter nodded his head. “Good, take the unmarked one and make sure you stop by the arsenal to load up before taking off.”

Santiago hung up after giving Peter some coordinates on where to land before the meeting adjourned.

Jasper and I said our goodbyes to the Volturi before he stopped his siblings.

“Are you sure about wantin’ to go?” Jasper asked as he placed his hands on Peter’s shoulders.

“Yeah, don’t worry we will both be careful. The twins and Santi will do most of the dirty work, so to speak. You okay, bro?”

“I’m good. A part of me wants to be there for closure but I’m also confident that y’all will be able to capture her and bring her back. I’ll get my closure then,” Jasper replied as he held onto my hand.
“Text me,” he began and then looked at me. “Text us when you have news. We’re going back to the farmhouse and relax.”

“We will,” Char replied as the two of them sped over to the open doors and headed to the cache of weapons.

Chapter End Notes

According to Wikipedia, Ferragosto is a national holiday in Italy.

Thank you to AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy for making this story look awesome. Did you enjoy it? As you can guess, the story will pick up once again.

Until next time! ~sushi
Chapter 71

Chapter Notes

Whoa, look at me updating on a Wednesday night! This is going to be a long A/N but I figured I’d explain a few things from the last chapter.

With Maria and her potential attack - Maria has her soldiers heading towards Volterra as decoys - therefore sentencing them to their death knowing they'll be attacked as they near the city. It is her way of gathering intel about how tough the Volturi soldiers are. Meanwhile, she's hiding with her "future" next in charge. Her intent is to use the intel and then attack/overthrow the Volturi around St. Marcus Day. :)

Also, some of you asked about Jasper and why he didn’t join in capturing Maria. That conversation is coming up in this chapter.

Thank you readers for continuing to follow this story. AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy have been wonderful in making sure the story is pretty and makes sense.

Lastly, I’m not SM - I just like playing with her characters.

Okay that’s all I have for now...see you at the end of the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 70

JPOV

We left the castle soon after my brother and sister left. I helped Isabella into the car and then we sped off to our new house.

“I have questions but at the same time, I want to wait until we’re home,” Isabella said.

“Okay, baby girl and you know, you can ask me anything.” Since the meeting, I could tell she wanted to talk to me, presumably about my past. I wasn’t sure what her questions were and while I always reiterated to her that she could ask anything, I was also apprehensive in case she asked for details.

“I know. There is just so much going on in my head that I want to formulate them first before
Less than an hour later, I shut off the engine and together we walked inside our house and without words, headed upstairs to our bathroom. I started the tub for us before running back downstairs to grab some water for Isabella and set it on the window ledge that was near the tub.

Once the tub was full, Isabella came in and waited until I got in first, knowing my body would help make the hot water more comfortable for her.

“Talk to me, baby girl,” I said as she leaned her back against my chest.

“What you said during the meeting about Maria and how she used her own soldiers as fodder made me wonder if you were ever used that way.”

I took a deep breath and wrapped my arms around her. “After I was put in charge and was still in my first year, she did attempt to have me used as bait. I was nearing my year’s time and she must have thought by sending me in with a ragtag group of volatile newborns, I’d be destroyed in no time, just like all the others. It was a win-win situation for her because someone else would do the dirty work for her and even though I knew she lusted after me, it was all business with her. I hadn’t fully tapped into my full potential with my gift so to her, I was just a step above a typical foot soldier.” I shuddered as the memories filled my head. “Our targets were arrogant and I had little help from my charges. It was this very battle that I realized just then how strong my gift was when I was able to render the enemies defenseless by sending enormous amounts of fear. They were practically frozen so I came back almost unscathed.”

I purposely left a lot of more gory details out of the story and hoped she wouldn’t ask.

“So what happened when Maria found out you survived?”

“She was both pissed off and impressed at the same time. She wasn’t quick to acknowledge I was the better soldier and even commanded that I square off with her newest protégé, Raymundo, who would have been my replacement. He had brawn and I’ll admit, he was one helluva soldier but I still managed to defeat him and prove to her I deserved to be her second in command.”

“Did you...” she began nervously. “I mean, were you two...you know, together back then?”
I kissed her neck and then sighed as I rested my forehead gently on her shoulder. “We weren’t...it wasn’t like that at first. A year after I had proven myself to her, she started offering herself as a ‘reward’ for successful battles - that was how she phrased it. Of course, there was a price as well, her punishments were harsher because of her attraction to me, if that makes sense.”

“She sounds sort of sick in the head. As much as it bothers me that you did things with her, I know a part of it was survival and you’re a man, with needs.”

“That and the brainwashing. You need to remember that I woke up on my own in a dark, dingy building. She made it clear, early on that she had the control and could easily destroy me. She ordered when I got to feed and just as quickly, she took it away. It didn’t take long for me to do her bidding and then the rest was an extension of her control.”

She ran her hands down my legs and sent me her emotions, reassuring me that she understood, trusted and loved me. “Do you have a need to be a more active part of her capture?”

She was frightened and I understood why she wanted us to talk.

“If I didn’t have you in my life, I’d probably want to participate and maybe even track her with Demetri. While I would still love for her to be stopped from her quest for power, the need isn’t as great. Yes, I do want closure and hope to get that in some form. I know the kings would most likely grant me a few minutes to unleash all the anguish at her and you know what? That would be enough to finally close that chapter in my life. I don’t need to tear her limbs or physically throw her body into a pyre. I won’t lie either and say I don’t want to see it; to make sure she’s gone once and for all. But no, I don’t need to be there first hand doing the damage.”

I reached over and poured some body wash on my hands, massaging it into her skin before continuing. “With you in my life, I don’t have that need to destroy like I did. Even with the Cullens, if given the opportunity, I would have left them in a heartbeat to rip her into shreds. Most of my life after I was rescued, I thought of nothing else because she was the source of my misery. I’m in a better place now, thanks to you...much better. I’ve got family and I now know what it really means to have one and be accepted for who I am. Maria needs to be stopped but the difference between now and back then, I don’t feel like it is a life mission.”

“It is a very philosophical way of seeing things,” she murmured as she sank lower into the water in order to rinse the soap off. “Will that really give you closure?”

“A few minutes, hell, even one is all I want. I won’t even touch her physically, I want to unleash all the pain and anguish from my years with her. She needs to feel what I felt. Not just me personally,
my personal hell was from all the lives I took, both humans and vampire alike. We didn’t just kill humans for food, we killed just to see the blood on the ground.”

“That is horrible!” she exclaimed and turned around, wrapping her legs around me. “And if you didn’t, she would have punished you, right?”

“Believe me, I balked in the beginning and you can see the result on my flesh.”

“Give her my anger too,” she practically growled. “If I wasn’t a human, I’d want to kick her ass and then use some of those werewolf weapons on her, mark her skin like she did yours.”

I pulled her against me and smiled. “I knew early on to never piss you off. You have a bit of a mean streak in you, Mrs. Whitlock.”

“I don’t like to see or hear the folks I care about get hurt,” she stated. “I can’t even imagine the horrors you experienced. You’re a survivor and I know you often thought of yourself as a monster, but the true monster is Maria.”

I ran my fingertips along her skin causing her to shiver and her anger to slowly subside. “All this talk of her aside, if the Volturi are confident in capturing her, maybe we should talk about your upcoming change?”

“I guess as soon as we get word. I mean, a part of me was sort of hoping it was going to be done already but Maria going after the Volturi so aggressively is more important. We should make sure she isn’t going to be a safety issue. And then there’s crazy Alice, not that I’m worried about her. In fact, a part of me would love to be a vampire right now so I can help with the research.”

“I think you’ve found a passion there, baby girl,” I said and kissed her lips. “We’ll need for you to be able to handle the delicate instruments too, remember that.”

“Damn, for a moment there, I forgot.” She took a deep breath. “Our safety and security first, then my blood control as well as my grasp, no pun intended, of my new body.”

“If you’re determined, we’re probably looking at a couple months before you can work in the lab for a few minutes and then we build it up. It will require work from you too.”
“I know. It is a long road ahead but I’m excited about my new life...our new life together.”

The rest of the afternoon we relaxed up in our room, which was the most furnished in the house. We both sat on the small couch as we went online to look at furniture for downstairs.

“I still don’t think we should spend too much, Jasper. I mean, I will need to learn my strength, I can’t go around breaking furniture left and right!” she exclaimed.

Her frugal side was coming out and as much as I wanted to convince her not to worry about expenses, I figured we could, instead, look for some sort of compromise.

“How about this?” I asked as I showed her a company that had some nice but affordable pieces. I knew they wouldn’t stand up to a newly turned vampire, but it would make the rest of the rooms look less empty.

“I guess we could do that and then once I can control things, we can go for some nicer stuff?”

“Sure baby girl, we can use this stuff until you are ready to get newer or more durable things. You know me when it comes to furniture, I just like clean, simple lines. None of that gilded or fancy stuff for me,” I admitted, thinking how Esme would have insisted all the rooms be fully furnished with high end pieces in very light tones. I much preferred the more simplistic approach.

“And if by chance there are good pieces left, maybe we can donate them or something? Maybe we can even send it over for the Charlie Swan Foundation...for the summer camp office.”

I smiled at her and nodded. “We can definitely do that. Even if we don’t have used stuff to donate, we can always buy it for them.”

“Okay, I’d like that. Hey, speaking of the foundation, can we arrange it so my dad has flowers on his grave during specific times of the year? I would love to be able to place them there in person but it isn’t practical for now. If I didn’t have his flag and badge, I’d feel like the worst daughter in the world.”

“It is too late to contact our attorney today, but we can have it arranged. You can even specify the
kinds of flowers too if you’d like.” I tapped my finger gently on her nose. “You’re not a bad daughter, he knows how much you loved him.”

“I’d like that,” she said and turned to look at me. “It is kind of strange how we’re sitting here, talking about tying up loose ends in my human life and getting ready for my new, eternal one.”

“Now that you brought it up, it is a little different because you’re the first one that I am close to who’s planning this out...” I began but was interrupted by my phone indicating I had a text message.

I went and grabbed it, seeing a message from Peter.

_You might find what y’all are looking for in the barn. The door is on the floor._

I chuckled at his message and then showed it to Isabella.

“He thinks he’s funny with his cryptic text messages, doesn’t he?” she said after a snort.

“He thinks it adds to his character. It was worse when he used to actually call and use what he thought was a ‘mysterious and ghostly’ voice.”

We laughed as we got dressed and she hopped on my back so I could run us to the barn. We had both looked inside once but then she started sneezing from the dust and we decided to tackle the project another day.

“It might be dusty, you gonna be okay?” I asked as I set her down.

“Yep, I thought ahead this time and brought his bandana to cover my nose and mouth a little,” she said as she tied the cloth around her face.

I opened the doors and peered inside for some sort of lamp and flipped it on. I guess I should have known that during the renovations, someone had gone inside this building and tidied up a little. I could even see the new wiring attached onto the walls. It was still primitive compared to the house, but it was a lot better than when we first looked in here.
I took in the busted up windows that were loosely boarded up with wooden planks so light still filtered through. I found the metal door in the middle of the floor and pulled. The door let out a rusty groan before creaking open.

I looked around at a makeshift workbench and found the tools we had bought when we worked on the house. Inside one of the drawers was a flashlight we had gotten for Isabella when she helped Heidi on some of the electrical.

“You’ll need this. I see there is a ladder so let me hop down with the flashlight and then you climb down.”

“If that ladder breaks, you’ll catch me right?” she asked and started to climb down.

“Of course,” I replied knowing that her question was more rhetorical than anything.

Once we were both in this below ground area, I handed her the flashlight and she panned it left and right.

“It’s a tunnel cut into the stone,” she murmured and grabbed my hand.

We walked along and after a hundred feet, we came to a wooden door. I pushed it open and inside was what looked like furniture built probably a century ago based on the aged wood.

“Whoa, this is a storage area! And look, the simple lines. Do you think they’re antiques? Jasper, we can use some of this to add to the house!”

I laughed as she rattled off her questions and comments quickly. “I think we can incorporate this into the house. I’m not an expert but I think they are antiques from an age perspective and not a value one. I could be wrong though.” I lifted up a bench and found that it had been made by someone who knew furniture; the joints were strong and while the wood probably needed a little TLC, it was still in excellent condition.

“I don’t want to use all of it though. I would feel awful if something like this got broken,” Isabella said as she dragged her finger along a dusty chest of drawers. “We can still get some of that other
“Of course we can. How about I bring up some of the more worn looking pieces for now and save the rest for when you have more control as a vampire,” I suggested as I pointed to some chairs, a trunk and the bench. “Maybe a couple more once I can get a good look at everything here.”

“Perfect!” she said as we headed back to the tunnel entrance. “Are you going to convert this barn like Peter did to his in Texas?”

“I might do something with it eventually. Maybe Peter would like to use it and store the vehicles he collects in Europe. Right now, he has them stored in rented units but I’ll ask.”

Once she was up on the main level, I stayed down so I could bring some of the pieces up.

“Hey, baby girl, I was thinking, remember how I told you about your thirst after you wake up?”

“Yeah, you said it could feel as though I was being consumed by it. Why?” she asked as she tried to look into the darkness.

“Well, when I was pulling the iron door open, I thought of an idea. Since we’re fairly far from humans, I was thinking of maybe asking Peter and Char to bring us some humans for when you woke up. They can be in here waiting.”

“Your typical kind of human, right?” she asked and I nodded. “I guess it would be safer for the general population if you didn’t take me to the nearest town on my first feed. This would be more discreet too. We should ask them first but if you think that is the best approach, I trust you.”

We sped back to the house. She was once again on my back and I had an armload of furniture with me. After cleaning the dust off of them and applying some oil on the wood, we arranged the chairs and one of the benches downstairs and took the other bench and chest into our room. We sent Peter a thank you text and let him know we needed to talk to him about an idea we had soon. He replied saying they were coming over in the morning and would bring Isabella some breakfast foods.
“They got her,” Peter announced as soon as I answered the door.

“Isabella, we’ve got news, come downstairs when you’re ready,” I called out and heard her scrambling out of bed.

Fifteen minutes later, she was dressed walking slowly down the stairs. As soon as she was on the bottom step, I handed her some coffee and she walked around taking sips before smiling and greeting everybody.

We were used to her caffeine quirk by now and knew better than try to say anything important until she was fully awake.

“Demetri and Santiago caught Maria early this morning. They’re on their way to the castle,” Peter said once Isabella sat down.

“No way. Holy shit! Really?” she exclaimed as I went over and pulled her onto my lap.

“What happened,” I asked.

“As soon as Santiago spotted her, he called Felix to have him drive the twins over just in case they were needed. Demetri was already close to Santi and was able to fight off her newest prized soldier, Nathalie. She was easy and must have been chosen for a gift. In the meantime, Maria was still there and hadn’t realized her second in command was nothing more than ashes. When the twins were a mile away, they moved in and captured her,” Peter explained. “She attempt to fight but Alec intervened and then Jane took over before they bound her and took off towards the castle.”

“Are they there yet?” I asked as Isabella stood up, anxious to get to the castle just as I was.

“Not yet, they just called when I was getting Bella some coffee and pastries,” Char said and handed her a bag that smelled like bread.

“Thanks Char, should we leave now? I can eat this on the way if you don’t mind the food and if you want to ride there together.”
“We don’t mind, little one,” Peter replied as we shut the front door.

On the way to the castle, Isabella and I talked to Peter and Char about our idea for her first feed in an effort to get our mind off of the Maria situation. They agreed to help us.

“If we can’t find anybody on our own, we can ask Heidi too,” Peter said.

Aro was in the lobby waiting for us when we entered the castle. We both shook his hand.

“Good, I’m glad you’ve both been briefed already,” Aro began as he led us down another corridor. “Thank you Peter and Charlotte. Now, Jasper, I know you would like a few minutes with Maria before we dole out her punishment and we will grant you 5 minutes. Would you like the element of surprise as well?”

Thank you, Sir. I would,” I replied.

“Then you should don one of these robes and go in the back chamber. Peter and Charlotte will be there as well. Isabella, you would like to observe, correct?”

“Yes,” she said and Aro smiled.

“Gianna is in the observation room. Since Maria has such a disdain for human lives, Marcus wanted her to be safe. You can keep her company. Heidi will join the two of you shortly. If we can incapacitate her, we will send word and he’ll escort the two of you up to the throne room, if you’re interested,” he explained. “But only then, my brother will have my head, and I am sure your Jasper would too, if you both arrived too early. This is a serious matter and we can't have you both in any sort of danger.”

Marcus met us all at the end of a corridor and I gave Isabella a hug, knowing we were going separate directions. I followed Peter and Char into a small room with neatly hung robes. I slipped one on and pulled the hood over my head just as my brother and sister did before entering a larger chamber. The wall in front of me was slightly translucent and I could tell we were behind the thrones. Heidi greeted us and explained this was going to be a slightly smaller group hidden in the back.

“She’s a prisoner so Jane will take a spot in front of the chamber. Felix, due to his brawn, will also
be in front as well. Demetri will be back here as well as Afton,” she explained. “The convoy hasn’t arrived yet so we are rearranging the thrones for this meeting. Oh and by the way, this is a special wall where we can see out but nobody can see in here.”

“Oh?” I asked and then look a good look through the semi-transparent wall.

“It has been specially treated, some sort of werewolf essence. Since this falls under Caius’ territory, he’ll be heading this...I guess you can call it a trial. Aro and Marcus will be sitting slightly behind him.”

“You okay, Jasper?” Peter asked and I nodded.

“Yeah, Isabella and I talked about it yesterday and I’m in a good place.”

“You know if she is sentenced to death, it won’t be merciful. We’re part of that team,” Char said as she placed a reassuring hand on my arm.

“I’m good, honest,” I replied and send them my emotions. “The 5 minutes I’m granted will be plenty. She, on the other hand, might think it is too long.”

Suddenly the lights flickered three times and led a small group of robed guards into the throne room.

“It’s showtime,” Jane announced and we all stood still as we waited for Maria to arrive.

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUNNNN!!!!

Sorry for the chapter ending like that. The next one is a switch in POV. :)

Next week I want to update a few days before the start of the Memorial Day weekend. I can’t promise but I’ll try since I’ve got an upcoming project - taking down popcorn on my vaulted ceiling.
Hope you enjoyed it!

XOXO ~ sushi
SURPRISE! I decided to keep somewhat of a normal schedule. Tomorrow I’ll be busy moving stuff around the house as I prep my living room for my popcorn removal. I know, y’all are so jealous! :P

Sorry for the mini cliffie last week. I hope this makes up for it.

AlexisDanaan is a true rock star beta! LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy have also helped in prereading.

No, I’m not SM, I don’t own the characters. Floyd and Puck own me though.

ONWARD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’m glad you’re here today, Bella,” Marcus said as we walked towards the lab. “You don’t mind keeping Gianna company, do you? Heidi will be down here right before the trial takes place.”

“No, I don’t mind at all,” I admitted as he stepped through one of the metal doors. “It will be good to have some company.”

“Here we are,” he said as he opened the observation room and Gianna came over to give me a hug.

“Bella, I have a small table of refreshments here. Please help yourself,” Gianna said as she was pulled into Marcus’ arms.

I turned away from them, in order to give them some private time as I grabbed a plate of fresh fruit.
After Marcus left, shutting the door behind him, Gianna handed me an espresso and then sat down next to me.

“Can I ask you a personal question?” Gianna asked once we finished our coffee.

“Sure,” I replied.

“You know how memories are going to be faint or forgotten after we change? How do you feel about that?”

“Jasper and I talked about this soon after I made the decision to be with him forever. He knows that I have experienced some bad memories in my life and I told him, I wanted to remember them all.”

“You really want to do that - remember everything, I mean?” She looked at me with what I thought was admiration. “I’m still up in the air about it. You see, before coming here to Volterra, I had a different life.”

Gianna talked to me about how she was born into society and was an only child.

“I was spoiled to say the least,” she said with a small smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes. “The summer before I was to enter the Sorbonne in France, my parents gave me a gift. I spent my summer travelling throughout the United States. That is how I discovered barbecue.” She looked over at me and smiled. “Well, little did I know while I was partying with my best friend, Andrea, my parents found themselves in dire financial straits. My father had made some bad business decisions and his company went out of business. My mother discovered this the same day she also found out he was having an affair with his secretary. She was devastated and they must have argued. A few days before I was to fly back, she shot him and then herself, leaving me with nothing but a letter explaining things. It was horrible and not only did I have to bury them, but I also had to forget my dreams about following my father’s footsteps in his business. I was shunned by my friends and people in our social circle. Instead, I packed what little I had left and ended up here.”

I reached over and pulled her into a hug. “You’re here and you’re one of the queens now.” I reminded her.

“I know and I’m so grateful things turned around for me. A part of me wants to remember because I managed to move past it all, but a bigger part of me would rather forget.”
“Does Marcus know the entire story?”

“He does and we’ve talked about whether or not I want him to remind me.”

“Since he knows the story, maybe you can wait until you’re ready to hear it. It could be the day you wake up or centuries from now.”

“You make a good point. By sharing that memory with him, I know it will be safe. I think deep down, I knew that, but just needed to talk to someone who could relate.”

“You’re welcome. Does that mean you’ll be changing soon?”

“Definitely before the end of the month,” she said. “We’re aiming for a week’s time but it depends on this whole Maria situation.”

The lights flickered inside the throne room and the monitors showed Jane smiling at one of the hidden cameras, letting us know the trial was about to begin. A minute or so later, Heidi came in to keep us company as she explained the protocol for today’s trial.

“Caius will be sitting in front of the platform because he’s in charge of security issues. You’ll see more guards in front to protect as well as intimidate the subject. Everybody is wearing the dark, hooded robes as well. Bella, your husband is behind the throne, along with Peter and Char. Like Aro, Caius will also insist that everything be conducted in human speed.” Heidi pointed to the monitor. “We’re getting set up so this will start very soon.”

I watched as members of the Volturi guards began to enter the room. They weren’t wearing their robes yet so I was able to see how serious Jane and Chelsea looked.

“Heidi, is it normal to conduct business in human speed?” I asked.

“It depends. With Alice, Aro insisted on it because he wanted to be sure you would be able to observe. He wouldn’t have with just an official meeting, but because the situation involved you and Jasper, he felt it was only fair,” she replied. “Now, for today, Caius will insist because of Maria - it is a method of throwing her off her game. It is one of their favorite tactics to use because it
really doesn’t require much effort for any of us but for someone in front of the kings, it can be really intimidating.”

All of a sudden, the guards all pulled their hoods over their heads and I instinctively knew the trial was about to begin. I pulled my chair closer to the monitor as soon as the kings entered the throne room, led by Renata. As soon as they sat down, the double doors opened and a guard entered the room dragging a petite woman wrapped in thick, metal chains. Behind her, another guard turned to shut the doors before following.

“Felix is in front with Alec at the end. He can use his gift on her if she tries to escape but the chances of that are unlikely.” She pointed to the monitor. “The chains are coated with werewolf venom and Jane is ready to take action if necessary.”

“Do you have many trials?” Gianna asked Heidi as we watched Felix on the monitor. He stopped just in front of the kings and bowed. “In the few years I’ve been here, I haven’t seen any or was aware of them.”

“No, we try to keep things in relative order and the last time we had an incident was in the 1960s. Rogue vampires who were careless in leaving bodies strewn everywhere. They were in Kiev when we captured them.”

Caius stood up and raised his hands. “This trial will come to order. Bring the subject forward,” he said authoritatively.

Felix pulled on the chain just as Alec pushed Maria forward.

“State your name.”

I could almost see the movement of Maria’s lips but I didn’t hear anything.

“Repeat!” he demanded. “In human speed.”

“Maria,” she gritted out, clearly showing her disdain. “Humans. What is the purpose of speaking like those lowly creatures? They’re only good for one thing and that is blood.” Her lip was curled in a sneer as she stared at the podium.
“That is enough of your insolence! Do you know why you’re here?”

She continued to stare silently so Caius nodded to his right, where Aro sat. As Aro stood, a guard stepped forward and walked with Aro towards Maria.

“Jane,” Heidi explained.

“Brother, please scry the subject since she is not cooperating.”

Aro and Jane continued to walk over to Maria as Alec took the chains from Felix who turned and pulled Maria’s arm out forcefully with a loud pop. A growl escaped her lips and I could see the slight slope of her shoulders as he must have dislocated it. Aro grabbed the now extended hand and I could tell by her wince, he was not as gentle as he was normally.

A minute passed and then another as Aro continued to read her thoughts before dropping the hand like it was dirty.

“Maria, the so-called Warlord of the South has graced us with her presence because she’d like to overthrow us,” Aro announced to the audience while appearing to mock Maria at the same time. I figured he did it to either humiliate her or put her in her place, or even both.

Maria opened her mouth to say something but then yelped out in pain. Jane must have used her gift to keep her quiet.

“Silence!” Aro shouted. “You had your chance to speak but you chose to remain silent. You have created a newborn army to attack citizens and humans near Volterra. As we stand here, they are being watched and will be captured shortly.” Aro started to walk around Maria as though he was stalking her. “I have seen that some of the soldiers she’s created are young...children.”

We gasped out and could hear similar reactions from the monitor.

“Did you see any other crimes?” Caius asked.
“Plenty. Her memories span for several centuries and includes torture of both humans and vampires.”

Caius nodded and Aro walked back to the platform as Caius stood up. “Plotting to overthrow us and using children to turn into vampires. Those are two very serious crimes. What do you have to say for yourself?”

“I couldn’t care less about using children to do my bidding,” she sneered. “They’re nothing more than a means to my goal, their only purpose is to serve my needs. When I end up ruling the vampire world, I will make sure everybody submits to me - humans...vampires...even your guards will do my bidding. As for you three, when I get my hands on you...filthy *perros*, you’ll be nothing more than training dummies for my army. You’re nothing!”

I turned to look at Gianna when she grabbed my hand, clearly shocked at Maria’s words.

“That was who turned your Jasper?” she whispered to me.

I nodded. “I think the power has gotten to her head. At least, that is what I am gathering from this crazy scene.”

“It is a good thing she’s captured. She is a danger to the world,” Gianna replied and Heidi nodded.

“You have lofty goals,” Caius commented as he sat down on the throne. “Too bad you won’t be able to achieve them because you’re never going to overthrow us.”

“He’s toying with her,” Heidi said quietly. “It is a sign that she will most likely be executed.”

“I’ll find a way to escape and then I’ll be back. Back with an even bigger army. You won’t know what hit you until it is too late,” she practically purred.

“Very well then. While we discuss your sentencing, you can remain here and scheme your way out,” Caius taunted and the kings stepped down. As Marcus walked off the platform, we watched as he raised a hand and nodded towards the hidden wall. The kings left, followed by a small group of guards while many of the others remained and began to position themselves in a circle.
“They’re giving Jasper his time,” Heidi whispered as the wall behind the throne slid open and a hooded figure emerged.

Even though his face was covered, I could tell it was Jasper by the way he carried himself as he sauntered towards Maria. He began circling around her.

I didn’t realize I had gotten up and had moved towards the monitor until Jasper finally stopped.

“Hello Maria,” he said with a heavier drawl than normal. “It’s been a long time.”

If I didn’t know him as well as I did, it would have looked like he was flirting with her. She looked up in shock as he slowly pulled the hood off and I could see the predatory look on his face. Given what he had told me about her, I could almost imagine that he was sending her false emotions in order to lull her into feeling safe.


“I have something for you,” he continued and she smiled.

“Oh, querido, it’s been a long time,” she replied and tried to move towards him. “Are you here to rescue me?”

“Darlin, I wouldn’t do anything of the sort,” he replied with an evil smirk.

She screeched out in pain. “Major!”

“I told you, I had something for you,” he whispered after she stopped. “I’ve waited a long time for this.”

She screeched again and then fell to her knees, cracking the marble tile below her. Jasper continued walking around her as she started to pull her hair out, her face in agony. She was blubbering in what must have been Spanish when she wasn’t writhing out in pain. It continued as the sounds got louder. I could see that Jasper was saying something to her but the microphones couldn’t pick up his voice with her continuous shrieks.
A few minutes went by before the side door opened again and the kings stepped back out. Jasper stopped sending the cocktail of emotions to Maria and she was now panting needlessly on the floor.

“I hope you liked our surprise for you, Maria,” Caius replied as he pulled on a pair of gloves and grabbed her hair.

“The fingers of the gloves have been dipped,” Heidi explained and I knew it was more werewolf venom.

“We’ve decided to sentence you to die for your crimes,” Caius announced and ran his gloved hand across her face leaving a trail of marks in his wake. She cried out loud at the pain.

The door to the laboratory opened and Jasper came rushing in and held me in his arms before pulling me onto his lap. I held onto him as we both watched as part of the stone floor opened and a fire roared to life.

“Heidi, do you mind escorting me back to my chambers? I don’t need to see the violence. Will you be alright Bella and Jasper?” She asked as she squeezed my shoulder as a show of comfort.

I nodded as I wrapped my arm around Jasper, making sure he knew I loved and cared for him. “We’ll be alright,” I said softly. “Thank you, Heidi for keeping us company.”

Heidi nodded and then walked with Gianna out of the observation room.

“Are you okay, Jasper?” I asked as I ran my fingers through his hair.

He took a deep breath. “Yeah, I truly am but at the same time, I can’t wait to see this chapter finally close in my life, once and for all.”

We continued to watch as Caius removed his gloves and nodded to the side. The guards arrived, this time without the hoods over their faces and formed a circle, slowly moving Maria closer towards the fire.
“While we stepped out, we received word that your so-called army had been captured. They attacked our soldiers but were quickly defeated. Those that survived were offered a life as a Volturi soldier and only one took it,” Caius said. “Any last words?”

Maria looked at the kings and spat some venom out at them but they moved away before it hit them. Immediately, she was writhing in pain as Jane stared down at her. I could hear Maria mumbling but couldn’t make out the words so I looked at Jasper.

“She’s cussin’ them out in Spanish,” he whispered as he breathed in my scent. “You don’t have to watch them tear her apart, baby girl. It will be brutal.”

“If it gets bad, I’ll turn away,” I said. “I want to be here for you.”

Felix and Afton pulled Maria up from the floor and held onto her arms as Caius brought out a silver case and opened it. The kings stepped down from their platform and walked forward, stopping in front of Heidi. Caius reached into the case and brought up a curved knife, watching it glint menacingly in the light. He moved closer to her, within arm’s reach and dragged it down her cheek before handing it to Aro, who did the same thing but on the opposite side. Finally, the knife was handed to Marcus who took it and stabbed it straight into her shoulder as she yelled from the pain. The three of them turned around and walked back up to their seats before Caius gave a nod to the guards.

“I thought it would be done quickly,” I stated.

“They’re dragging it out. When the side door opened and I ran down here, I quickly touched Aro’s hand so that he would know, during their interrogation she showed no remorse or guilt about anything. She also believed every single word she said. You should know that the story Caius told her about her army is not true. The Volturi have them under surveillance and since it is still daylight, they won’t move until the sun goes down. The wanted to rattle her even more...you know, twist that knife into her just further to show her who is truly in charge.”

“How are they observing them then?” I asked as Chelsea moved forward and grabbed one of Maria’s hands, ripping it off her body, the metallic sound echoing in the chambers.

Chelsea nonchalantly tossed the torn hand into the fire and stepped back in place. Jane followed and quickly swiped something but I wasn’t sure what it was before she grabbed the other hand and ripped it off.
“The Volturi use and embrace technology while Maria, as you might have gathered from her attitude, abhors it. I think the kings will send some guards to make sure things are taken care of.”

I winced at the sound of vampire flesh being ripped apart. “What did Jane do right there?”

Jasper reached over to the monitor and turned down the sound. “She gathered some venom into a small jar since it was leaking profusely from her open wound,” he explained. “Probably for their lab research. Is the sound better now?”

“Yes,” I replied as more body parts were removed and tossed into the fire.

Peter was next and he smiled at Maria when he got in front of her face. I watched as her eyes bugged out right before Peter pulled on her arm, removing it and then hitting her knees with the torn limb. Char followed suit and spat into the exposed shoulder earning more vile curses from Maria.

“Foreign venom hurts like a son of a bitch,” Jasper explained. “The extra pain they’re giving her is their way of getting back at her for all the pain they saw me go through.” He shook his head. “I told them they didn’t have to, but it was something they both felt strongly about.”

“That is because they love you, Jasper. If I was out there and was able to, I’d have probably done something similar. Both of them have been with you a long time and saw the hell you went through. Not only are they doing this for their closure, it is for yours too.”

“I’m just extremely humbled by it, is all,” he admitted. “When did you become so wise, Mrs. Whitlock?”

I sighed, enjoying the light moment we were sharing right now. “Oh, I don’t know... I think it must have happened when a hot man with blond hair captured my heart.”

We kissed before a painful roar interrupted our moment. I turned back to look at the monitor, having turned away after my brother and sister. Maria was, for the most part, just a torso and a head with a very scarred face. There were deep gashes along her upper body, venom dripping and staining her tattered clothes.
The guards all looked at the body and then the inferno. I was amazed that they continued to move in human speed as they held her off the ground and as a team, they hurled her into the fire. Huge purple flames shot up towards the ceiling as the guards continued to watch until it slowly started to die down.

“You ready to leave?” Jasper asked and I nodded. “Good, let’s go. I want to spend the rest of the evening with my girl. I hope you don’t mind, but I asked Marcus if Gianna’s chef could cook something up for you. I just want time with you.”

“I don’t mind at all. Her cook is amazing so I’m sure whatever he whipped up will be good.” I replied as we walked out of the laboratory together.

Chapter End Notes

Did you like that? I debated whether or not I wanted to end the previous chapter with Jasper coming out and greeting Maria. In the end, I realized that would have been more cruel than how I ended it last week.

So now that one issue is taken care of, what do you think is going to happen next?

Those who celebrate, have a wonderful and safe Memorial Day weekend. Also, thoughts going out to those who were affected by the tornadoes earlier this week.

XOXO ~sushi
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes

I did it! I removed all that nasty popcorn from my vaulted, living room ceiling. It took 2 days and then another 2 to prime and paint it. :) I’ve updated my DIY blog if you’re interested in checking it out. Hopefully it will work. I tried one night to think of some other clever URL but was unsuccessful.

Thanks for all the alerts, reviews and faves! I’m glad you’re still enjoying the story! I can’t say enough of the wonderful women who’ve made this story look good - AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy.

I’m not SM, I just like to play with her characters. If only I could use them to help me renovate the house...

ONWARD!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 72

JPOV

Isabella and I walked quickly out the lab and into the steel elevator in silence. When we got to the lobby area, Peter and Char were waiting for us.

“Here bro, take the keys we’re going to run back home instead and spend some quiet time together. Tomorrow before dawn, a group of us are going to meet up with Santiago and the Volturi soldiers. We want to make sure her mess is cleaned up,” Peter explained.

“Thanks,” I replied and took the keys. “You two alright?”

“Yeah, we are,” Char said as Isabella gave them both a quick hug. “Are you okay, Jasper?”

I nodded. “I wouldn’t have been able to do it without all y’all,” I said and gave my brother a man hug before embracing my sister.
“We’ll pick up the car once we’re done. Don’t crash it,” Peter snarked as the two of them walked away.

As we passed Rosa, she handed us a bag of food, from Gianna’s chef and then we headed back home.

I was still reflecting on the whole Maria thing as I drove. Isabella was also a little preoccupied. At first, I was worried she was upset over seeing another vampire get brutally torn apart but I did not sense that. What I did feel, was determination, love and a hint of lust. The first two emotions I could understand but the last, it surprised me; in a pleasant way. I looked over at her and gently grasped her hand, setting it on the gearshift as I pushed the car slightly faster.

Once we got inside the house, Isabella ran straight to the refrigerator, put her food away and grabbed a blood bag, tossing it into the microwave. As we waited, she poured herself a glass of water.

“Get the tub ready, I’ll meet you there,” she said and gulped down her water.

“You okay, baby girl?”

“I am, just parched. Can we spend time in the tub? Given everything we went through today, I think we both need it.”

I sped upstairs and started the tub. Five minutes later, she was in the bathroom with a tray holding a couple bags of blood for me and a pitcher of water for her. I set it on the window ledge as we undressed and got into the tub.

I sighed as she ran her fingers against my skin as though she was making sure I wasn’t hurt. I could have protested but was enjoying her soothing touch far too much and pulled her onto my lap.

“I have a confession,” she whispered as she trailed kisses along my jawline. “When I saw you taunting her, at first I was a little jealous but turned on at the same time. Does that make me a freak?”
I cupped her face and kissed her lips. “No,” I replied. “You’re not a freak, baby girl. You needn’t worry. I remember that night I saved you from that robber and you saw me feeding from him. We weren’t together like that at the time but I knew you were attracted to me.”

She smiled and traced a couple scars on my legs. “I remember that night and then how you took away the memory of the gun.” She turned and dragged her tongue along my jawline, just as I did to her many months ago.

I shut my eyes and smiled. “Isabella, as far as being jealous, it wasn’t intentional. I was just trying to lure her into a false sense of security before I dropped her with my emotions.” I nipped at her earlobe. “Were you really turned on?” I ran my fingertips down her arms, watching the goose pimples erupt on her skin.

“Yes,” she replied. “It was wicked and hot.”

“You naughty girl,” I whispered huskily against her ear and she rested her forehead against my shoulder as a soft moan escaped her mouth.

Her legs tightened around my torso as she kissed me hard and grabbed my hair. Our passion and the need to be close to each other exploded. Our moans and the sound of water sloshing over the tub filled the room. She cried out my name as I held onto her hips, thrusting into her. This wasn’t a time for us to savor and linger over each other. No, this was frantic and wild.

“More!” she gasped as I stood up and held her against the stone tiled wall. She ran her nails down my back as I growled out her name.

“I’m so close,” she panted out and held onto me tighter as I moved just a little harder, causing small spasms to rack through her body. I moaned as her walls began to clench and her legs tightened around me. She was close and I was too.

“Fuck, Jasper!” she screamed, jerking her head back as I slowed down making sure she wouldn’t slam her head onto the stone tile. I increased the intensity bringing me even closer as I held onto her trembling body. Before she could ride out her orgasm, I came inside of her so hard, I swore there were spots in front of me.

I rested my forehead on hers as she slowed her breathing. Even though I didn’t need air, I was panting hard as well.
“I needed that,” she said and smiled at me before kissing me sweetly. “It was slowly building up ever since you came into the observation room.”

I sat us back down into the tub, adding more warm water since some of it had spilled over.

“I tried to think about other things so it wouldn’t distract you,” she admitted, almost shyly. “Did it work?”

I told her what I felt from her on our way home and she joked about how she was glad I didn’t crash the car from her lusty thoughts.

For the next half hour, I held her in my arms as we talked about today. I admitted to her that I was, for the briefest of moments, worried that I wasn’t going to be able to handle seeing Maria again. Then I explained to her the evil I saw in her eyes. She might have changed from wearing clothes slightly more modern but her eyes never changed. She was determined to overthrow the Volturi and believed every word that spewed out of her mouth. I told her how I got brief flashbacks of my soldier days and used that to launch the cocktail of pain, anger and guilt that I carried for over a century. It was cathartic releasing it all back to her, but talking to Isabella and having her in my arms eased my soul.

All the while, as I was explaining everything to her, she was sending me her own cocktail - love, trust and adoration were the main components and it was strong.

Her stomach rumbling brought us out of our little bubble and I hopped out of the tub, grabbed some towels before carrying her out of the bathroom so she wouldn’t slip from the water.

“What kind of food did you get?” I asked as she slipped on her giraffe robe and I reached into the closet for mine.

“Tex-Mex. She was telling me that she spent the summer exploring the United States and that is how she discovered the foods I like too.”

“I’m glad you two get along,” I said as I tied the belt around my robe.
“I am too. It will be nice to have someone who is changed around the same time as well. I mean, we might not hang out all the time but knowing we are both going to go through the same thing helps.”

We walked down the stone steps and she heated up her food as I ghosted back upstairs for the bags of blood she had warmed for me.

“Oh, I guess we got a little distracted while in the tub,” she said and laughed.

“You won’t ever hear me complaining,” I replied and winked at her.

We sat on the kitchen counter she ate her dinner and I sipped from a blood bag.

“Gianna is going to change soon,” Isabella said, about half way through her meal. “She had told me it was going to be most likely soon, like within the week once the Maria thing was taken care of.”

I looked at her and noticed a slight shake in her hand as she raised her fork to her mouth.

“Baby girl? Your hands are shaking.”

“I’m just a little nervous,” she said and gave a little laugh that didn’t quite reach her eyes. Something was bothering her and at the same time, she was projecting a lot of determination as well. I knew she’d tell me once she was ready so I just rested my hand on her knee and hoped it was soon.

“I’m fine, Jasper. It’s just a little weird because this could very well be my very last meal as a human,” she replied softly.

I gasped as her words sunk in. “There is no rush, Isabella. I don’t want you to feel pressured.”

“I’m not. Honest,” she said. “It is just a little surreal that it is happening. I had wanted this earlier in the summer, but then Alice came to Volterra and I didn’t want her interfering with us. Once we discovered she wasn’t a threat because we’re dead in her brain, we got distracted with the whole
Maria thing.” She took a deep breath and continued. “I knew, from all the stories, she was dangerous, the unknown factor. Now that she’s taken care of, I am ready.”

She finished her dinner and threw away the trash. I held her close as she gestured with her head up to the second floor. I took the second blood bag with me as I carried her up to our room and went to the bathroom to bring the pitcher of water to her.

We sat on the small couch after I turned it so we could watch the sunset.

“The sheets will get messy with blood, right?” she said just before the sun disappeared.

“I could put a towel down. I don’t care about the sheets, baby girl. You’re gonna hurt like hell during the transition period and the most important thing is your comfort. We can always buy more sheets.”

“You’ll be there the whole time?”

“Every minute, until you wake up.”

“What about you? Will you make sure to text or call Peter and Char if you need them?”

“I promise,” I vowed. I knew if I needed them in a moment of panic, my emotions would project to them faster than I could contact them on my iPhone.

“You have the syringes handy?”

“Yes ma’am,” I replied and flashed over to one of the nightstands to grab a couple syringes. I walked back over to her and pulled her up to her feet. “Come on, you always like to relax in the shower.”

Once in the shower, we kissed and caressed each other. I nibbled on her skin and tasted her before sitting on the tiled bench and bringing her onto my lap. Our movements were slow as we savored each other, unlike earlier in the tub. She stared at me as though she was putting this moment, or even me in her memory.
The steamy shower was now turning lukewarm as she moaned my name.

“I’m so close, come with me,” she gasped out as I shifted my body slightly. I had brushed up against a sensitive spot inside her and felt her muscles begin to twitch. I pushed her upper body back slightly so my thrusts hit that spot and she let out a long moan of pleasure.

I was getting close as well as I moved harder. I flipped us around so she was now grabbing onto the bench and slid in from behind. She let out a string of curses and I growled as her walls clenched onto me hard. I grabbed her hips, knowing I was bruising her but it didn’t matter. One more thrust and I roared out as she screamed my name.

The water was now cold as I shut it off. I reached for the towel hanging on the hook and sat back down on the bench, bringing her back to my lap.

“You want to do this tonight?” I asked her once again.

“I love you, Jasper. Make me yours forever,” she whispered and softly kissed my lips.

“Alright, baby girl. Let me get myself mentally prepared for this.”

“You’re worried about your venom still?”

I nodded as I brushed her wet hair back, exposing her neck. “I am. I could run kiss, lick and nibble on you but the venom isn’t coming out like it does when I feed. I know we have the syringes as a last resort but I’m still skeptical as to the potency of it in a glass vial.”

“Maybe sip on the blood bag? You think it will help? Maybe I need to smear it on me?”

I kissed her. “No need to look like an extra in a horror film, Isabella.” I chuckled as she stuck her tongue out. “I’ll take the blood. It will help me from drinking too much of yours as well.”

I ran my tongue feeling her blood rushing on her neck. I took a slow breath hoping that my venom
would activate once I was ready. I began to focus on her heart beat, listening to the steady rhythm, committing each second and minute to memory. With her legs still wrapped around me, I walked us back to the bedroom and sat on the bed. I held her close and breathed her scent in before kissing her neck once again.

“Wait!” she exclaimed as she pulled her wedding rings off her finger. “I don’t want to damage them. Can you hold onto them for me?”

I slid them onto my pinky and kissed her lips. “I’ll hold onto them until you’re ready, baby girl.”

I could detect a small amount of venom in my mouth so continued to concentrate on her jugular vein throbbing just below the surface of her neck. I wasn’t quite ready to bite yet.

I looked up at her and saw concern on her face. “Almost,” I explained. “Is it bothering you?”

“I just don’t want you to fret,” she admitted. “I’m really proud of you and your control around me. I trust you, you know that.”

I could taste more venom in my mouth and knew it was time.

“I love you, baby girl. Forever.” I kissed her lips once more. “Forgive me.”

I bit down at the same time I grabbed a syringe and made sure there were no air bubbles. As I drank a couple gulps of blood, Isabella whimpered in pain, her hands gripping around my arms. I counted my seconds and briefly savored the taste of her blood. I had probably taken a couple pints by now and knew a couple more draws of blood was my limit. The needle was ready in case I needed to jab it into her heart, but just as she started to writhe, my body finally started to produce more venom and I pushed it as much of it as I could into her vein. I could hear her heart working harder now that there was a foreign body invading her bloodstream. Her blood was already starting to smell slightly different than before.

I sealed the wound on her neck and went to her left arm, biting over the mark James had left her years ago. I had told her I would wait until after her change to replace the mark but now that I had venom flowing from my mouth, I bit down and injected more into her wrist. I bit down twice, just to make sure his bite was covered with mine, just as she had wanted.
I placed her on the bed once I made sure her wounds were no longer bleeding. She was whispering my name over and over and tears were streaming down her eyes. It broke my heart, seeing her in so much pain but I reminded myself that it was what we had both wanted.

My confidence was rattled seeing her like this and I grabbed the prepped syringe and stabbed it through her ribcage and injected even more venom into her heart. Her body jerked violently off the bed and she let out a shrill scream. It was most likely unnecessary and did nothing more than cause more pain for her but I needed to make damn sure she survived this change. I didn’t know what I’d do without her in my life. I debated whether to bite her ankles and her major arterial areas but instinctively, I knew she already had a lot of my venom in her system by now.

“Jasper,” she shrieked, her eyes wild and unseeing as she continued to thrash in pain.

“I’m here, baby girl. I’m so fuckin’ sorry for the pain,” I whispered against her ear and crawled into bed with her, holding her body next to mine.

The temperature difference was almost immediate. She was burning already and I let out a sigh of relief that she was changing already. The surprise for me was what I felt from her. Pain was the most prominent emotion, but I also felt the love and trust she was sending me. The idea that she continued to think about me, even semi-conscious humbled me to no end.

I reached over to the other nightstand and grabbed my phone, looking up Peter’s number.

*I bit her, she’s changing.*

He replied a few minutes later.

*I figured as much. During our run back, I had that feeling we needed to be close by. I had a hunch what that meant, but didn’t want to bother you. How are you both doing?*

*I’m fine. Keys are in the SUV. I’m going to stay with her the whole time.*

*Okay, we’re here if you need us. We will probably bring some humans as we near the third day. Char’s already sent Heidi the message. We’ll also let the Volturi know. Oh, they ended up moving the schedule a few hours.*
Oh? So they attacked her army already?

Some of her younger soldiers started to drift toward a nearby village. The Volturi had to act fast. Army’s destroyed. One person offered to join us but she was quickly torn apart by her own men.

I shook my head, not surprised that the newborns were starved for blood and destruction. Thanks bro and tell Char thank you too.

Isabella was now quieter, probably passed out from the pain and the rising temperature of her body. She would start thrashing about again soon so I got up and quickly found my phone charger. The next few days, it would serve as my only means of communication to the outside world. I went into the bathroom and threw some of the towels down to sop up the water from hours ago.

Even though I was never supposed to get tired, I was and went back to the bed pulling Isabella tight against me and shut my eyes, waiting for her to start screaming once again.

Chapter End Notes

The end.

HAHA, just kidding. I know it has been a LONG time coming. In a way, this chapter could be an end to what might have been the 2nd installment of this story. I didn’t choose to break it up that way though.

Was it worth the wait? :) Let me know your thoughts.

Until next time! XO ~sushi
Chapter 74

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the love in the last chapter. I can’t believe you’re all still enjoying the story - I totally appreciate it!

I couldn’t have given you a wonderful story if it weren’t for AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNeedy. These ladies ROCK!

I’m not SM so it means I don’t own it.

Are you ready for Bella’s change?

Onward

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 73

BPOV

*Burning*

My body was on fire.

My thoughts...scattered.

Where was I?

Why was I in so much pain?

“Kill me! Kill me now!”
“Put me out of my misery.”

_Calm_

What? It was coming somewhere.

A voice - so familiar, but who was it?

Who was I?

My thoughts...words... dark cloud... a void...

**JPOV**

Twelve hours later, Isabella finally stopped screaming and begging me for her death. It had started about two hours into her change and in between incoherent mutterings, she grabbed onto me and pleaded that I kill her right then and there. At times, her eyes opened, but they were nothing other than the whites of her eyes. I kept calm during her screaming, knowing all too well it was a part of her change - I had been a part of hundreds of them and knew she’d eventually stop. Still, it was not easy to hear and I continued to send love and calm to her.

I had to admit to myself seeing her open her eyes with only the whites showing, freaked the fuck out of me. _That_ was something I hadn’t experienced. I never held a human during their change, never soothed them. Instead, I remember standing around and watching the writhing, not giving a damn whether they were in pain or not. This was entirely different than back then. This was Isabella, not some nameless human. This was my world.

Now that she was fairly lucid, I answered emails and text messages from our Volturi friends and family. They continued to check-in on us to make sure everything was going on schedule. Around midnight, Marcus had sent me a text message to let me know he was changing Gianna before the sunrise. He was also curious how many syringes I had ready and how many I actually used. It was now a few hours until the dawn and I quickly answered him.

I got out of bed and carried Isabella to the bathroom, filling the tub with cool water. Her skin had
been heating up and she was drenched in sweat. I didn’t want to leave her to fill a bowl with water so I figured I’d bathe her instead.

I carefully sat in the tub with her and gently washed her skin. Her body was still feverish and there were signs of her change already. Her muscles were firmer and more defined on her arms and legs. Her skin was smoother, her human scars were healing and becoming more faint, almost right before my eyes.

I whispered to her, telling her how much I loved her and how proud I was. She was still in pain and would whimper or cry out as I continued to cleanse her skin from the sweat and grime. Her heart thumped harder as I imagined the venom-tainted blood in her system thickening. I got a sudden image of her heart acting like a cauldron or a furnace, forging her body to her new vampire one.

“If you remember that I basically compared your body to that scene in that Lord of the Rings movie, you’re welcome to kick my ass,” I whispered. “I’ll admit it, baby girl, I miss talking to you, even though it has been only thirteen hours now. You’re the most important thing in my life and it scared the hell out of me when I bit you. I panicked, which was why I pushed that syringe of venom into your heart.” I ran my fingertips over the injection site, noting it was slightly harder than the rest of her flesh. “You’re changing now and so far, everything seems to be on schedule.” I kissed her hair and ran my fingers through her strands noting it seemed silkier than before. “I love you, baby girl.”

I told her all the messages from our friends. “I guess ‘friends’ is really not the right word, is it?” I asked rhetorically. “They really care and have welcomed us into their huge family. I have a confession. When I left the Cullens and before going to you, I often imagined my family as being you and my siblings. Of course, I had to convince you first.”

I got out of the tub and dried her skin with some soft towels before carrying her back to bed, holding her against me, once more.

Twenty-four hours later, and she was still in my arms. She had actually gone more than three hours without begging for death but she still let out occasional screams of pain. I had started to share her memories with her a couple hours ago, starting from her childhood, living with her mom. I was now telling her about summertime and the Disneyland trips with her dad. Everything she had shared with me ever since she decided on forever, I told her - every anecdote, every laugh, everything.
I continued noting her physical changes as I touched her skin and ran my fingers through her hair. She was no longer burning hotter, her body temperature was still too warm for a normal human, but it had stabilized.

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**BPOV**

“...and your dad bought you a pair of Mickey Mouse ears with your name. You wore those every, single night just before bedtime. When the ears finally fell apart, you cried... ”

I felt gentle hands and heard stories from that voice. Was it the same person? I wasn’t certain but I think it was.

There were moments I remembered things, but then they would disappear - memories that seemed crystal clear one minute was foggy, the next. Right now I felt coherent but I had a feeling that I was going to forget simple words and faces any minute now.

I no longer had any concept of time - has it been a minute? Or weeks?

Oh no! The dark cloud was coming back.

It was getting harder for me to think.

Cloud

Black

Void
JPOV

Thirty hours and I was starting to tell her stories of how I first met her, when she came to live with her dad in Forks. I hated telling her about Edward and how she fell for him, but I made her a promise. I told her everything - how she fell for him but always felt inadequate, the heartache after her birthday and then how she became herself again.

I gasped out, all of a sudden. She was sending her emotions back to me. I knew they weren’t just an automatic reaction to my own, it was familiar. This was Isabella’s own signature. I breathed a sigh of relief, but I knew we were only partly into her change. And as soon as I thought of that, her emotions dissolved away and she was back to whimpering.

I continued to hold onto her. By now, any lingering baby fat on her body was gone, replaced by curves and muscle. I chuckled as I shared with her that conversation we had about her body changing and how she didn’t want to look artificial.

“Baby girl, you’re looking amazing and I promise you, you don’t have a body builder physique. You’ve got a beautiful looking, athletic body. Your hair has grown a little longer and the natural highlights are enhanced now. I can see golds and reds throughout.”

My phone buzzed with a new message, breaking me from my one-sided conversation. I reached over to grab it, seeing the message was from Heidi.

*How many will you need?*

I looked over at Isabella and then replied back.

*3 or 4 would be enough. Thank you.*

I knew she’d likely make a mess on her first feed, it was practically unavoidable.

*You’re welcome. I’ll text you with more details tomorrow.*
Thanks - make sure Peter and Char are aware too.

Yep. They are right here with me. Give her our best. Oh, Marcus and Gianna are doing fine. I’ve got to find them some bodies too.

I shared with Isabella that Gianna was into her transition as well.

“There will be meals for us when you wake up, baby girl,” I explained. “Peter and Char will deliver them to the barn.” I told her how my protective instincts would likely kick in if there was a scent I wasn’t completely used to. “I’ve known them the longest and while I like our Volturi family, I cannot risk harming them if they get too close to the property. You’re my top priority and cannot defend yourself right now, so I’m going to be the crazy, overprotective, son of a bitch vampire until you wake up.” I looked at my phone and let out a soft laugh, mostly at myself. “I, for one, am glad that technology is playing a part in keeping me in touch with everybody without them being around here physically.”

I knew I was babbling to her, but talking about anything and everything calmed me even though she couldn’t respond.

I drew another bath for us. Her body temperature hadn’t changed from hours ago, still running over 110, if I had to guess. As I lathered her body, I could feel her skin was even smoother than before. I took a hold of her hand and compared the pads of her fingers to mine.

“Your fingerprints are still there but they’re too fine to be printed. You can be a criminal now,” I teased. “I should know, I’ve stolen a few cars and left finger marks but the prints were never lifted.”

When I carried her back to bed, I noticed that her emotions were flickering on and off. It was a different feeling from before and this had never happened when she was human.

“It must be your shield,” I murmured. “If we hadn’t met Renata, I wouldn’t have known and probably would have panicked. To be honest, baby girl, not feeling any emotions from you is strange and also disturbing, but I know what it is now. I probably would have torn up this room if we hadn’t decided to came out here in the first place.” I kissed her tenderly on the lips. “To that, I thank you, again, for being brave enough to suggest we come out to Italy over Spring Break.”

Her scent was changing, the strong vanilla notes from my venom were now blending with her
lavender ones. The freesia scent from when she was younger was even more faint as she was becoming a vampire.

_Vampire._

At that moment, it hit me. I wasn’t going to be alone in this world. Like Peter and Char, I’d have a companion, a lover, a mate of my very own. I wrapped my arms around her bringing her even closer. The sense of having someone to love and be loved back for eternity, filled me with joy despite the fact she was still in her change. I had to remind myself she may not recognize our bond at first and I had to be patient. We had forever.

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**Near the end of Day 2**

The past hours I had talked about my life and then how I came back to her. I told her the friendship we shared in the beginning and then we became a couple.

“You and I both wanted a simple ceremony and when we got to Vegas, you found, in a magazine, how we could get married on the pirate ship at Treasure Island.” I smiled as I continued to talk about how we booked our wedding for New Year’s Eve. “You were so beautiful with your cute, white dress and you even wore your crimson contact lenses.” I shared with her our vows and then when we were married, there were cheers coming from the onlookers.

If it weren’t for my hearing, I wouldn’t have heard my name after she whimpered.

“Jasper,” she breathed out, a little louder this time.

“I’m here, Isabella,” I replied and ran my hands down her bare back.

“Love...you.”

“I love you too, baby girl. I love you so fuckin’ much.”
I felt my venom tears form in my eyes from her words. Not only did she utter them, but her emotions told me the same. She was also in a great deal of pain so I continued to send her calm and serenity.

Dawn was starting to break as I continued to hold and comfort her. I bathed her once again as the sun painted the sky pink. Her skin was closer to alabaster and I could see the faint glimmer on her flesh. The marks I had given her sparkled more brightly now and was definitely cooler and harder than the rest of her skin. The colors of her tattoos were much paler than before, but still very detailed. I brushed my lips against the one on her shoulder.

“I’m so damn proud of you. We’re close now,” I told her as I brought her back to our bed.

I brought her on top of me so that we were chest to chest, her head almost nuzzling against my neck. The normal rise and fall from her breathing was much slower now. I kept my count and in the next hour, she breathed in only a dozen times. Her heartbeat was now erratic - it was no longer a steady beat but would thump wildly then slow to a handful of beats a minute. Where I used to find it calming, it was now nerve-wracking and I kept running my fingers through my hair each time the pattern changed.

It was mid-morning when I heard the sound of a car approaching the property. Just as I held onto Isabella tighter against me and growled, the phone rang.

“Hey, you mind reining in the protective mojo? We have your humans and while they’re knocked out, your juju could give ‘em a heart attack,” Peter chided as I pushed the speakerphone button.

The sound of his voice caused Isabella to cry out and I quickly sent her calm. “It’s alright, baby girl. I’m here. It’s just us here,” I whispered before putting the phone to my ear.

“Sorry bro,” I said somewhat reluctantly.

“We understand. We’ve got you some triad gangs. We flew out near the Turkish border and nabbed 8 of them so now Gianna will have a few to feed from too,” Peter explained. “Human traffickin’, gun runnin’, drug dealin’ to name a few. They’ve been knocked out ever since we prepped them on the plane.”

“Prepped?” I asked.
“You know, their study. They took blood so Alec can record it later. You’ve got 3 humans, Marcus has 3 waiting for him.”

“What about the other 2?”

“Heidi and the others have drained them and we’re celebrating tonight. Two bodies and whatever they do to the blood, it will be enough for all of us to have, at the very least, a pint.”

“Thank you and please tell Heidi too.”

“We will,” he said as the sound of the car door slammed shut. “We’ll be gone shortly. They’ll be snoozing for most of the day. If you need to, knock them out. We were both able to feel your warning as soon as we turned into your driveway.”

I thanked him once again before hanging up, drawing Isabella closer to me. I told her about Peter and Char since she reacted to hearing my brother’s voice earlier. “They brought us 3 humans.” Even though I wasn’t sure if she would comprehend, I continued to talk to her about our meals. “They’re part of a gang triad known for kidnapping women and using them against their will for their financial means. They also run drugs and weapons according to Heidi.”

Sixty-five hours, twenty four minutes and ten seconds later, I heard her heart begin to beat faster. I wasn’t surprised; the three day change was never an exact science. I also thought having been exposed to my venom, even in small doses, could speed her change. I quickly ran to our closet and pulled on a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt. As I headed back to the bedroom, I drew open the drapes and opened the window a couple inches to air her human scent out of the room so she wouldn’t be overwhelmed when she woke.

As I dressed her, I noticed that her skin was now stony like mine with the telltale sparkle. Her lashes had grown longer and thicker, much like when she used that mascara stuff.
“You are breathtaking, Isabella,” I murmured as I pulled a pair of my old boxer shorts up her long, lean legs. “You were always gorgeous to me.” I helped her into one of my t-shirts. “I would have dressed you in something else, but this is what you picked out. I love you, baby girl.” I brushed her silky hair off her face. “Soon,” I added, noticing her heart beating even faster.

I sat on the bed as she started thrashing about, wanting to be close by but not wanting to be so close that she would become frightened or disoriented when she woke. I sat and waited.

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**BPOV**

My heart felt like it was about to leap off my chest. The thumps beating harder, they were fast before slowing down and then speeding back up. Any minute, I thought my body would be crushed by the fierce and erratic heart rate. It was agonizing and I wanted it to end.

I tried focusing on other things in an effort to distract myself from the pain. My brain was much clearer now, able to formulate thoughts and words, but I could tell my brain was thinking of other things at the same time.

A great many things.

I could tell there was a breeze coming from my left and heard it whisper by. I could also smell the breeze. The scent of flowers was easy but I could tell there were were different kinds of flowers mixed together, I just didn’t know what they were. There was also something else coming from that outside air. It was sweet and mouthwatering. Whatever that stuff was, I wanted to get to it.

I needed it - whatever it was.

The pounding slowed again but the force didn’t ease. I wanted to tear into my skin and rip that thing out of my body. I think I was about to when something gripped my wrists and pulled them away.

It wasn’t something...it was someone...him. Quick images flashed in my head of a man with blond hair, red eyes and a gorgeous smile. The two of us dancing and spending time together. I wanted to reflect on it but a shriek filled my ears before I realized that it was me screaming.
Thumps no longer described the feeling. No, it was worse. The pounding on my chest was harder
now, reverberating through my whole body. It hurt and it scared me. I wanted to breathe but I
suddenly felt like I couldn’t. My heart felt as though it weighed a ton and was threatening to burst
out of my chest.

What felt like an explosion from within me had me arcing my body off the bed.

I gasped, now breathing and tasting the air around me. That sweetness coming from outside was
stronger now and I was determined to get to the source as quickly as I could.

My eyes fluttered open and immediately, I could see dust particles floating as the sun’s rays burst
through the open window.

I sat up before the thought was completed in my head and spotted a man looking at me intently
from a few feet away.

He was beautiful and familiar. I knew he was important from the memories I had earlier. His eyes
dropped so they weren’t looking directly at me now but I could tell he was aware of my every
move. There was something dangerous about him and it made me scared. I wanted to run or jump
out the window. At the same time, I wanted to run to him. Instead, I just sat on the bed and stared.

I opened my mouth to ask what was happening, but then grabbed my neck - a fierce burning
engulfed me.

What was happening?

Chapter End Notes

So what’s happening indeed? Did you like that? If you’ve read my one shot “I Burn
for You”, you’ll see some similarities in the story. :)

I hope you enjoyed it!

Until next time, XO ~sushi
Chapter 75

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is a day later than usual. I was running a 5K last night and was a little pooped when I got home.

Thank you readers, I love you all. AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy have made this story possible.

I’m not SM, I’m just having fun with her characters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 74

JPOV

I got off the bed as her heart began its final, thunderous beats. I wanted to be near her, offering her comfort, but I also knew from experience it wasn’t a wise idea. I absentmindedly rubbed the rough scar on my shoulder as I remembered the time a newly awakened vampire grabbed my arm and wrenched it off because I was standing too close.

I reluctantly positioned myself against the wall so I could continue to monitor her as her human life began to wane. I had to intervene when she started to grab at her chest though. Her hands were clawlike and her jaw clenched as she tried to rip her heart away from her body. The pain she was feeling was intense; but was flickering periodically and I knew she had no control of herself at the moment. I gently grabbed her wrist as I sent huge amounts of calm to her, probably more than what was needed, but her shield was somewhat engaged. I pulled her hands off of her chest and held them on the bed for a brief moment before I let go and walked slowly back to my spot.

She screamed out as I could hear her heart as it played out the last notes of its death before a sheer amount of pain burst from her, almost knocking my ass against the wall. Her body contorted and then, there was silence.

Isabella was no longer a human. She was dead.
I wanted to go to her and hold her as her senses started to take over. I could hear her sniffing the air and see her eyes fluttering before they opened.

Brilliant crimson eyes, like rubies, looked at me and my breath caught. She was still the very essence of Isabella, my wife, but she was different. Her inky lashes framed her eyes and made them sexy, innocent and alluring. I wanted to stare at her more but I could feel her fear and decided to lower my eyes so we no longer had direct eye contact.

I could see her instincts were on high alert - her body poised in flight mode, her eyes full of fright and soft whimpers coming from her mouth. I slowly raised my hands up, in human speed, to show I meant no harm and noticed affection coming from her. They were slight, compared to the confusion and fear but the soft whispers of love and lust she was sending me gave me hope that she recognized me.

Isabella opened her mouth and looked like she was going to say something. Before she could, a breeze blew through the window, with it, carried the scent of the humans that was coming from the barn. Her eyes quickly darkened and a whimper escaped her mouth as she grabbed her throat. She was beyond hungry and I could feel my eyes turning from absorbing her emotions, nearly causing me to double over.

“Isabella,” I said softly and her attention immediately went to me.

I didn’t need my gift to see that she was at war with her emotions. There was recognition but also fear. She was hungry and kept glancing towards the window, sniffing the air and now hearing the heart beats. I could tell she wanted to run, her muscles poised to leap out the window, but at the same time, she didn’t move at all.

Taking a chance, I moved slowly, once again in human speed, forward. I continued to say her name softly and slowly, but at the same time, I didn’t want Isabella to run off like a frightened animal. When I was 6 feet away from my woman, she began to whimper more and I could see her throat working to swallow the venom that was flowing out of control. A thin stream of it was starting to make its way out of her mouth.

“Isabella,” I began again and brought my hand out. “Let’s go feed. You’re hungry, baby girl.”

She tilted her head at my words and stared down at my open palm. Once again, she was conflicted on what to do.
A minute passed before she raised her own hand, too quick at first and it flung, towards her as if it had a mind of its own. Her eyes widened at her action and I watched as she tried a couple times before her hand landed on top of mine. I tried not to wince when she grabbed me, her strength now rivaling my own.

I pulled her gently towards me, sending my affections to her and whispering words of encouragement. I ran my hand through her hair a couple times before letting go and pointed to the window.

“Let me open this and then we can go feed,” I explained as I led her closer to the wall.

Once I got the window opened, I pulled her closer. “We can jump down from here,” I said. “Don’t worry, you won’t get hurt.” I continued as she grew nervous. “I’ll take care of you.”

I stood on the sill and jumped, landing on the ground with barely a sound. “Your turn,” I called out. “Remember, I’ve got you.”

She let her leg dangle out the window for a few seconds before swinging her other leg out. Before I could say anything else, she pushed herself off so hard that I could hear the sill crack. Isabella landed right next to me, a little harder than I did, leaving a couple divots on the ground. I reached for her hand again and smiled.

“Come on, dinner is that way,” I said and pulled her into my arms. “Is this okay?”

She let out a gurgle in response and since she wasn’t squirming away or fighting me, I took it as a yes and hustled us over towards the barn.

Pools of venom dripped from her mouth as I reached over to open the door. The humans were awake now and while they weren’t aware of what was happening, instinctively they were afraid.

“There are 3 of them in there. All criminals,” I whispered to her. “I’ll pass them to you. Let your instincts take over, baby girl. I’m here for you.”

I set her on her feet and immediately flashed over to one of the larger men and brought him to her. She was panting now, venom dripping onto the floor. With a gurgled growl, she pulled the man to her, her newborn strength dislocating the man’s shoulder. He let out a howl of pain, causing the
other men to panic and piss on themselves.

I watched as she crushed the man’s ribs as she wrapped an arm around him and began to sniff his neck. I was beginning to get turned on so I began to concentrate on the odors coming from the other two humans.

Before I could instruct her further, she grabbed the man’s hair and exposed his neck further and bit down. Blood sprayed her as she fought to seal her mouth around the gaping wound so she could feed.

I could tell she was going to need more blood so I pulled the other two humans with me and let them watch their partner in crime be drained of his life, right before their eyes. They were cursing and blubbering now as they realized their fate. Once Isabella had made the last pull of blood and was now sucking on empty veins, I pushed her next meal towards her, earning a warning growl and a hiss. I shook the man to get her attention and she dropped the dead man before pulling her next meal against her.

“Do you want to see how it is done?” I asked softly as I looked at her.

She didn’t respond but continued to look at me, not feeding right away.

I slowly brought the man closer to me. “When you bite down, you have no more than a heartbeat to seal your mouth around so you don’t lose as much blood. Only after, do you start pulling the blood into your mouth,” I explained before demonstrating.

I was on my second pull when she moved to imitate my actions. I could see she was being more careful this time but still managed to lose about a pint of blood on her and the floor. I tried not to stare as she fed but I could feel her eyes on me. I looked up and noted they were still dark but no longer onyx like moments ago.

She drained him in no time flat and dropped him before growling at me. Her hunger for blood appeared sated, but now another strong emotion slammed into me as I drew one last mouthful before the man’s heart quit.

I let him go and the body slumped onto the floor. Then I looked warily at Isabella. Her lust was running wild and while a part of me wanted nothing more than to tear off her clothes and fuck us into oblivion, I knew she wasn’t completely in control and was still at war with her feelings - her
lust and fear. I stood still watching as she stalked me, circling me slowly.

She was amazing as she continued to move closer towards me. I was now officially her prey. Her throaty growl did nothing but go straight to my groin. I wanted to mark her as mine as much as I wanted to feel her teeth on my skin.

I would have continued with my fantasy, but she launched herself at me and my back slammed against the barn wall. I vaguely heard the cracking of boards but was more interested in Isabella as she grabbed a hold of my shirt and started to sniff my neck.

I growled out softly as she continued sniffing me and brought my bloodstained hand to her face, licking the blood off my skin. Isabella pulled me to her once more, my shirt now shredded from her hands. I moved slowly towards her and sniffed just as she had done with me. Her scent was mouthwatering and her arousal was strong - I was completely intoxicated. Her base scent of lavender was still very much like human Isabella but it was now more complex, with a strong vanilla note I knew was from me.

Isabella growled again and moved her hips against me before tearing the rest of my clothes from my body. I was nearly undone as I slowly removed her clothes and tossed them into a pile.

“Isabella,” I whispered as she hitched her leg over my hip, grinding herself against me. I grabbed a hold of her and growled out before thrusting into her.

“Fuck!” I groaned out. “God, you’re so wet and tight.”

She responded by moaning out and wrapping her arms around my neck. Her eyes were black with lust as I continued to move frantically and harder than I had ever with her. She responded by tightening her thighs around me and threw her head back, moaning in pleasure.

We both didn’t last long and as her walls began to contract around me, she bit down on my chest, where my heart used to beat. I roared out and sank my teeth into her exposed neck just as we both came hard. I sealed her wound and admired the mark before sliding down to the floor with her still in my arms. Both of us panted out unneeded breaths as we answered each other’s purrs.

“Jasper,” Isabella whispered.

“I’m here, baby girl,” I murmured as I stroked her bare back.
“Did... did I hurt you?”

I looked down at my chest, noticing venom leaking out. “Run your tongue over the bite so the skin can seal,” I explained and kissed her gently on the lips, noting the look of worry on her face. “It didn’t hurt, I promise. Did yours?”

She shook her head erratically as though she was moving faster than intended. She stopped halfway and gasped as she saw the bloody scene from her feeding.

“I did that?” she asked.

“You were really thirsty,” I replied.

“I sort of remember... things,” she said. “I’m confused though. Why do things make more sense now than before?”

I sat her on my lap and held her against me as I explained what happened when she woke up and how her thirst overwhelmed all her senses.

“...and then after you fed, your demon sort of took over.”

“My demon? Did it recognize you?” she asked.

“Oh hell yes, baby girl,” I replied as I nuzzled her neck. “You ripped my clothes off and jumped me.”

“Me?”

“They are shredded to bits,” I said nonchalantly.

“So after...that purring was also from me,” she whispered and sat up, running her hand down my
chest. “We’re marked now?”

I nodded and reached over to brush my fingertips along her neck. “We are, in the vampire sense but know that I have belonged to you for a while now.”

“So this calmness won’t last?”

“I’m afraid not, Isabella. You’ll have moments when everything feels normal and then the next, you’ll be craving blood.”

She sighed and moved closer to me. “It gets easier though right?”

I nodded and kissed her hair. “While you never can truly outrun your craving for blood, you eventually won’t be ruled by it under normal circumstances. It is typical to being a young vampire.”

“Even though you warned me, shouldn’t I have known better?”

“You’re showing more control now than any hours-old newborn I’ve known and that’s saying something. When you’re consumed by bloodlust though, any sense of reason goes out the door.” I looked at her and sensed her confusion. “When you grabbed the first man to feed, even though you dislocated his shoulder, you still weren’t as rough as some vampires. I’ve seen some who have punched through a human and others have gutted their first meals. You did pretty damn good.”

She looked at the bodies once again and I felt her body relax against mine.

“If you put it that way, I guess I could be proud of myself.”

“Come on, baby girl, let’s get washed up and we’ll talk more. I’ve got some blood bags on hand if you need it.”

I picked us up, ignoring the fact we were both butt-ass naked, and ghosted us back to the house. I drew us a bath and set us both in the hot water as I started to wash her skin.
“You did this. When I was changing, I mean,” she said and turned around to face me.

“Several times,” I replied.

“I am getting these faded memories but they seem almost like a dream. Will you tell me about it?”

I nodded and began by first explaining how human memories will appear less vivid than vampire ones. After toweling us both off, I carried her over to the bed and continued to talk to her about her change. For the most part, she remained calm as I explained how I held her during most of the time.

For the next 24 hours, we talked and I fed her blood bags. At some point, Peter and Char arrived to clean up the bodies in the barn. They sent me text messages and left promptly.

“Why didn’t they stop by?” Isabella asked.

“They wanted to give us some space. They didn’t want you to feel threatened but don’t worry, we’ll be meeting with them soon.”

I told her the news from our Volturi family and she was happy that Gianna was most likely going through her first day as a vampire as well.

At dawn, she got up to pull out some clothes from the closet and promptly ripped her underwear and jeans as she tried to put them on.

“Dammit, why can’t I do this?” she yelled as I hurried over to the closet and saw that she had, by now, ruined three pairs of panties already.

“Your strength...you’re much more stronger now so things will break or rip if you’re not aware.”

“So...so I can’t dress myself? This is so stupid,” she muttered and tossed another scrap of lace onto the floor.
I pulled out some clothes and quickly pulled them on her before she had time to protest.

“Would you like a quick lesson?” I asked and pulled her close to me after I threw on my own clothes.


I pulled out some old clothes and brought them to her. “Remember, this is delicate in relation to your strength now. See if you can pull this shirt on and button it up.”

I watched as she grasped the fabric with her thumb and forefinger, bringing it close to her face. When she looked at me, she smiled sheepishly.

“It smells nice,” she confessed. “It’s yours, isn’t it?”

I nodded as she pulled her arm through one sleeve and then the other.

“I did it!” she exclaimed and smiled briefly before realizing she had tugged too hard, leaving a 2 inch tear on the seam.

I sensed her disappointment immediately and could tell she was about to shred the shirt but I took hold of her hands and brought her attention to me.

“Try buttoning now. Don’t think about the whole shirt, just concentrate on one button first and then another. Baby steps.”

She bit her bottom lip and grabbed the bottom of the shirt. She carefully pushed the plastic button through the hole and breathed a sigh of relief when she got one done. She repeated the process a couple more times before pushing one too hard and the plastic piece fell to the floor.

“Don’t think about that one. Keep going, you’re doing fine,” I said and sent her reassurance.

Minutes later, the shirt was buttoned up and while she had torn 3 of them off, she still did a great
job. I had her remove the shirt the same way before starting all over again. In an hour, she had
gotten to the point where, if she concentrated, she was able to button up a shirt without damaging
the fabric or popping buttons out.

“That was twice you buttoned and unbuttoned the shirt without problems. Good job, baby girl. I’m
damn proud of you.”

She smiled weakly and quickly went to my arms. “How did you dress yourself in the beginning?”

I brought us to our sitting area before I told her. “I wasn’t given an opportunity to bathe for a
while. When I did, I was just given some soap and led to a small stream. I didn’t even take my
clothes off so it was more of a rinse than a bath.” I took a deep breath before continuing. “It was a
control tactic. My clothes were bloodstained and in tatters before I was given a new pair of trousers
and a shirt that was for someone with a slighter build than me.”

She looked up at me, clearly upset. “That is horrible! I’m glad she’s no longer around to harass us
at all,” she growled out and smacked the arm of the couch, cracking the frame.

“I am too,” I replied and took her hands in mine once again. “Look.” I pointed out the window. “It
is near dawn, do you see how the sky is slightly brighter? It is still too dark for humans to notice
but if you keep looking, you’ll see the colors of the morning.”

She was nice and calm now, distracted from things that would have been a catalyst for an
emotional outburst. We snuggled together and enjoyed the view from our window.

Chapter End Notes

There you go, Bella’s first feed and now they’re both marked. ;) I hope you enjoyed it.

So there is a chance that my weekly updates might be moved to maybe every 10 days
or so. My reserve of chapters is depleting and the chapters are taking slower to write
too. I want to make sure I start tying up storylines so this story doesn’t hit triple digits.
:P

Thank you all! XOXO ~sushi
Chapter 76

Chapter Notes

Finally, I’m back, right? Sorry for the delay, the chappies aren’t coming as easy as they had been :-(. I think I’m getting there though.

Thank you all for your patience!

I’m not SM - just like to play with her characters.

I hope you enjoy this chapter.

Onward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 75

BPOV

It has been nearly four, full days since I woke up as a vampire. With the exception of the first few hours, which Jasper explained was due to my overwhelming thirst, I was able to remember every minute of it.

Twenty-two hours were spent in Jasper’s arms as he re-introduced me to sex. It was unbridled and passionate, but also loving and tender. We broke our bed frame and cracked our bedroom door. There is even a divot on the shower wall that is about the same shape as my ass cheek.

I tried a few more times to dress myself and so far, I have ruined almost all my panties and bras. I also discovered after my change that I got a little curvier so the one time I actually got my bra on without breaking it, I was spilling out the top. Because of my challenges with putting on clothes, I was now wearing some of Jasper’s t-shirts and boxers.

Ever since feeding on the humans, I was given a blood bag every couple hours. The constant feeding of blood not only sated my thirst, but I was able to think more clearly and feel like me. I still couldn’t do much on my own, Jasper had to pull open the valve on the blood bags the first couple of days and I actually splattered a couple of them before he told me to visualize a giant dial and move my strength back by 75%. Amazingly, my brain seemed to know what that meant and I while I was still grabbing harder than I should, it didn’t result in blood spilling everywhere.
It wasn’t entirely easy though. I was very distracted. Everything was new and fascinating to me. I spent several hours looking at my skin yesterday afternoon. Today, I spent another two. It was cool to see how the sun caused tiny prisms on my skin. When Jasper walked out to our enclosed patio, I froze - momentarily frightened of this man in front of me. It frustrated me that I reacted like that; I knew who he was to me but for the briefest of moments, not even a second, I was scared.

“As a vampire, especially a young one, you will rely on your instincts first and foremost,” he had explained after I broke down in tears - tears I couldn’t shed. “Do you remember how I tried to explain how we’re closer to animals?” I thought back to my file of human memories and nodded after a couple seconds. “This is the same thing. It will ease up, it already has. Do you know your fear lasts half a second at the most? When you woke up, it was almost a constant.”

I opened my eyes and stared up to the sky. The sun was starting to set and I was lying on the floor of the patio, soaking in the warmth from the stone floor.

“Would you like some company, Isabella?” Jasper called out from inside the house.

I turned and saw him walking towards the doorway. “Sure,” I replied and patted to the spot next to me.

He walked out slowly, and handed me another blood bag before sitting down. “What were you doing out here? I felt a lot of different emotions going through you and wanted to ask but you looked so preoccupied so I thought I’d wait.”

“Oh? I was just thinking about the past few days,” I said and took a sip from the bag. “It is weird how I can remember everything so clearly now. And that whole dial thing you talked about when we were working on my strength, I can actually see a giant dial in my head and can adjust my actions. Does this mean I’m in control now?”

“It means you’re learning, Isabella,” he said and leaned back so he was looking up at the sky as well. “You’ll still have moments when your dial in your head won’t engage with your body. When you’re a newborn vampire, you’ll sometimes think you are, for example, using 50 percent of your strength but in actuality, you’re using all of it. It is when you’re consistent or rather, consistent enough, that you’ll have a sense of control.”

As much as I didn’t like his answer, I knew he was right. “It is frustrating but I guess I can see where the term newborn comes from.” I rubbed my fingertips on the stone floor and managed to
leave a couple imprints on it. I sighed when I saw them. “So if I need to rein everything in, is there ever a time I can be a vampire and not have to worry about control and stuff?”

He turned and smiled at me. “How would you like to try it when it gets dark? We can just run around the property so you can get the feel of it. The moon isn’t full tonight, you’ll be able to really see just how much more enhanced your vision is as well.”

“Yes!” I squealed and jumped up with excitement, nearly busting open the half-empty blood bag. “Oops, got distracted again,” I muttered and gave him a sheepish grin.

We stayed out in the patio and watched the sky turn darker as night settled in. I could hear the soft flapping of birds’ wings as they returned to their nests in the nearby trees. Out in the distance, about a mile or two to the north of us, I could hear the sounds of wild boar rustling around for food.

“Would a human be able to hear all the animal sounds?” I asked.

“No, the feathers on the wings are too soft. Humans, might be able to hear the occasional chirp from the baby birds in the nest though but the pitch is very high so they won’t get the full effect. The herd of wild boar out in the distance is definitely too far for humans to hear.” He smiled and then looked to the east where a grove of cypress trees divided the property between ours and Aro’s. “I once thought these sounds were nature’s symphony. There were times, especially when we were far from civilization, I’d climb to the highest tree or mountain and just sit and listen.”

I reached over and touched his hand before climbing onto his lap. “Do you feel emotions from animals?”

“No, I can’t, but I can tell from their eyes if they are suffering or not. I did try to be humane when feeding on them, you know, snapping their neck so their death came quick. I think that was another reason why I detested the animal diet like I did - the blood never tasted as fresh. I just couldn’t see myself harming them anymore than I had to with my bite. Some of the Cullens preferred to play with them, kept them alive after injecting venom into them, I just didn’t care for that. As much as I sometimes enjoy toying with humans by drawing on their fear, it was different with animals. Maybe it had to do with the fact I was raised on a farm. There were memories of some of our horses getting hurt because they broke their legs...the look of pain in their eyes and then having to put a shotgun to them so they wouldn’t suffer anymore.”

I reached up and kissed him on the cheek and he smiled.
The two of us sat there for another hour before we left the enclosed patio. “Now, follow me first so you know the property. I can’t wait to see you run at full speed, baby girl.”

“Should I change?” I asked as I tugged his t-shirt at the hem.

“You don’t have to if you’re comfortable with what you’re wearing.”

I followed him as he jogged over from one end of the field to the other until we went around the entire perimeter of our property.

“Alright, let’s see what you’ve got,” he whispered and I took off running.

He chased me around the property and while I expected to be fast, I didn’t realize just how fast I was going. The overgrown field where the grape vines once grew sped by, momentarily distracting me because I expected my vision to be blurry. Instead, I could see every gnarled root from the old vines to the rocks and weeds. There were also sounds from small animals, probably rodents as they scurried away. Even in the dark, my vision was clear. I could see everything in clear detail and found myself, once again, being distracted. I managed to jump up into old trees but because of my lack of control, I broke a couple before, once again, picturing the giant dial in my head.

We took turns chasing each other around and I really enjoyed being able to run around at full speed.

“Gotcha,” he said, an hour later, and wrapped his arms around my waist, preventing me from trying to climb up a cypress tree. “Did you have fun?”

“I did,” I replied and settled on his lap. “I realized as I was running and trying to climb trees, I had to control my strength in order to try and hide from you. Otherwise, I would have continued to tear trees down.”

“You did really well and you’re damn fast.”

“I won’t be as fast once I’m past this phase, right?”
“No, but we can always play ‘chase’ and I’ll adjust my speed accordingly if you want.”

“This was fun and I’d like to do it again.”

“Should we run back to the house?”

“Race you,” I said and took off running.

I was about half-way to the house when a new noise caught my attention. It was a car on the road before our turnoff. We didn’t get many cars so it caught me by surprise and Jasper was instantly next to me.

“Maybe it’s Peter and Char?” I asked.

“No, the sound of the engine isn’t familiar, besides, they’re somewhere near Russia tonight to bring some humans back for you and Gianna. This car doesn’t belong to the Volturi either,” he replied. “They must be lost, but they’ll follow the road out to the highway.”

I turned to follow Jasper back to the house when the sound of brakes squealing, the blaring of the car horn and crumpled metal broke the nature sounds that had surrounded us.

Then I smelled it.

_Blood._

I was instantly heading to the where the car was and most importantly, the blood.

“Isabella! Wait!” he called out just as I reached the road. I felt his hand on my shoulder as I looked at the scene.

There was a bloodied deer trying to get up on its legs but I could see his hind legs were broken. It must have bounded out onto the road and the driver tried to stop, judging from the tire marks. The car, a blue convertible, had flipped at least once, throwing the driver, a lady, onto the asphalt. She
was bleeding profusely from a head wound and from the odd angle of her body, it was obvious she had some broken bones.

As I stared at the gruesome scene in front of me, human memories flashed quickly - my dad’s accident and the picture of his mangled car in the paper. I brushed my hand against my hip as I recalled being pinned in a car. Even though the memories were from my human life and weren’t as vivid, I was still moved by them.

“Oh shit,” Jasper muttered, interrupting my moment as he also surveyed the scene. “What a mess. Can you stay here, Isabella? I need to check her pulse.”

I nodded and although the blood was perfuming the air, I wasn’t as hungry as I had been when I first fed. I wanted it, but I felt strangely in control of my thirst.

The poor deer was still trying to get up and her frantic movements caught my attention. I saw the glossy black eyes and remembered instantly what Jasper had said earlier. I could tell this poor animal was in pain and as much as I wanted to get to the human blood, I flashed over to the deer causing it to panic even more. I stared at it, realizing what I should do to put this animal out of its suffering but I was frozen.

“Do you want to do this? I can snap the doe’s neck if you want,” Jasper whispered from behind me.

“Can you help me?” I asked and looked over at him.

He nodded and I was sure he felt the determination I was sending him. “Okay, take a hold of her head and give a twist. Do it quickly. She’s in pain, baby girl.”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered as followed his instructions and gave a huge twist, putting the deer out of her misery.

I stared at my bloodied hands after and while it was red like human blood, the scent was different - watery and earthy. I brought my hand up to my face and my curiosity got the best of me as I stuck my tongue out and licked my hand. It was gross and did not resemble the taste I was now familiar with. I couldn’t imagine drinking this on a normal basis.
“The girl is dying,” Jasper said, breaking me out of my thoughts as he rubbed his hand on my back. “Even if I called for help now, she wouldn’t even make it to the nearest hospital.”

“She can’t be saved?” I asked as I stared at the girl, trying not to think about the blood streaming from her wounds. She was probably a couple years older than me and had pretty, auburn hair.

“No, she’s got not only a head wound but her neck is broken and so is her spine. She wasn’t wearing a seatbelt when she hit the deer. I can’t snap her neck like you did with the deer. This is probably gonna sound cold but if you’re willing, I can show you a way of feeding off of her.” He looked at me and then shook his head. “No, that would be a dick move. Forget I said that. You don’t have to feed from her if you don’t want to.”

“What do you mean feed off of her? Wouldn’t my bite be detected later?”

He sighed and I wasn’t sure if he would even explain, as agitated as he was. “Peter, Char and I have done this a handful of times in our lives. When we see humans that are dying like this, we’ve been able to drain them of their blood by just latching on the wound and sucking the blood out. No biting.”

“Like I do with the blood bags?” I asked, intrigued and impressed. “If I were to, can I do it and not mangle the body even more?”

“Are you sure you want to? I was afraid you’d be pissed off I even brought up the idea.”

“Like you said, she’s dying. I just don’t want to hurt her more than she is already. Will you help me?”

He looked at me as though gauging my hunger before nodding. “Sit down next to me.”

“O-okay,” I stuttered and sat down on the pavement.

I watched as he braced the lady’s neck. I could hear her heart beating unsteadily and she was, for the most part unconscious but her eyes kept fluttering.
“I’ll bring her to your mouth and you’ll latch on and suck. The same pressure as when you drink the bags. Do you think you can do that?” I watched as Jasper brushed aside the matted hair and exposed the neck wound. “I’ve got her pretty sedated right now if you want to. No pressure.”

“Would she be suffering if we weren’t here?”

He nodded. “This road is so deserted, who knows how long she would have been out here.”

I took a deep breath and whispered my apologies to the lady before latching onto her neck wound. I managed to draw a couple large gulps of blood before letting go.

“I c-can’t,” I whispered, not trusting myself anymore. “Can you finish it?”

He nodded and squeezed my hand before moving closer to her neck and taking enough blood that her heart stopped pumping. I stepped back so I wouldn’t be tempted as I watched him look at the scene once more.

“Come on, baby girl, let’s go back to the house and I’ll call the local magistrate to report the accident.”

Once we got to the house, Jasper was on the phone and reported the accident, explaining that he had heard it but by the time he got there, both the deer and the lady had died.

“They’ll be here shortly. Let me get cleaned up so I can give them a report once they arrive.”

“Will they be here in the house? What if I attack them?” I blurted out in a panic.

“No, you can stay here in the house. Besides, I wouldn’t want you meeting them wearing that.”

I looked down at my outfit and if I could still blush, my cheeks would have been red. “Noted,” I replied and followed him up to our bathroom.

“So, why did you stop?” Jasper asked once we got in the shower.
“The blood drew me to the road and then I was hit with my human memories, my dad...me. I felt weird because as much as I wanted the blood, I didn’t. Maybe remembering my own personal experiences helped me because that desire to feed was so different than when I fed on those men or even blood bags. Don’t get me wrong, her blood tasted good. I just didn’t want to hurt her or mangle her and I didn’t trust myself. Plus the whole thing with the deer sort of bothered me - seeing it just try, over and over again to escape but fail really made me feel awful. Are you mad?”

“No, baby girl, I was just curious and proud that you showed such control. I’m not sure if it was from the regular feedings, but that is not typical of vampires.”

“I’m pretty proud of myself too,” I admitted. “I don’t want to be lulled into thinking I have this amazing control. For all we know, tonight was a fluke. I wouldn’t want to run to accident scenes just to find out, you know?”

“Tonight was a unique experience, that’s for sure. A part of me still doesn’t know if what we did was a good thing or not. There probably could have been less brutal ways of ending her suffering. I knew she wasn’t going to make it since the nearest emergency hospital was a helicopter ride away. I couldn’t let her die in pain or even bring her into the house.”

“I’m glad you didn’t bring her here. I might have lost control for sure. We didn’t mangle her and you did give her calm and peace so she didn’t suffer, right?”

He nodded. “By the time I took the last couple gulps, her blood was already starting to taste less fresh.”

“You made sure I didn’t leave any marks on her right?” I asked as I finished rinsing off. “I kept hearing ‘no bite’ in my head over and over.”

“You were gentle. You did well, Isabella.”

I gave him a small smile. “I hear the sirens, they’re heading this way.”

“You gonna be okay?” He asked and pulled on some clean clothes. “I need to give a report of what I saw. I’ll be back.”
“I’ll grab a blood bag while you’re out there,” I said and sent him reassurance. “I love you, Jasper.”

“I love you, Isabella,” he replied and kissed me before walking back outside.

I pulled on clean clothes and then headed downstairs to the kitchen wincing as I saw the dent on the refrigerator door from slamming it too hard. I carefully opened the door, grabbing a bag from one of the bottom drawers and then practiced walking slowly to the couch, remembering something Jasper had said early this morning.

“My life was different as a vampire where I didn’t acclimate to being around humans until after I escaped, decades later. I mimicked human speed and sometimes found that it helped control my strength. Just follow my lead and see if it works.”

I sat down and carefully pulled the valve on the blood bag before settling in and sipping. Even with the windows shut I could hear two, distinct, heartbeats outside. Not wanting to become fixated on them, I concentrated on the conversation they were having with Jasper, instead. Between Jasper’s rough Italian and the local magistrate’s broken English, they were done in 10 minutes.

“Well, they found a bottle of pills in her purse,” Jasper said when he came into the house. “Some sort of medication and even though there was a warning label, they think that she must have taken them and then got disoriented. From her identification, they knew she lived fairly close so she should have been able to find her way back had she not been careless. They will contact her family.” He sat down and pulled me onto his lap.

“Jasper? Do you feel bad for what we did tonight?”

He looked straight ahead for a brief moment. “A little. What if you weren’t ready or if you weren’t in control? I’ve been keeping a close eye on your emotions so I would have felt your bloodlust, but still...” He sighed. “It was foolish that I put you on the spot like that. You could have reacted as a typical newborn vampire and then we’d be having a different conversation now. I’m sorry, Isabella.”

I leaned my head against his shoulder once he sat down next to me. “Don’t be sorry. I don’t want school type lessons all the time. This was a real situation and you showed me how you could take blood and show mercy at the same time. I am not going to judge you.” I tilted my head so I could look at him in the eyes. “Yes, a lot of different scenarios could have resulted from our actions, but only one actually occurred. Like I said earlier, I know that if this were to happen again, the outcome might be different. I’m sorry that you’re bothered by it. Can I ask you something?”
“You know you can always ask me, baby girl.”

“I actually have a couple questions,” I admitted. “Why does feeding that way feel so strange?”

“It is different because it goes against our nature of wanting to bite. Did you feel the rush of venom in your mouth?” I shook my head. “You produce little to no venom in that type of feed. It is like our blood bags. That is why, while you’re still getting blood, it feels different. The Volturi, because they don’t actually hunt as often, are used to drinking blood like this. I couldn’t say it is right or wrong, it is just different. So, what was your other question?”

“Because she was an innocent human who was in a bad car wreck, did it make you feel guilty?”

He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into his lap. “A little bit. I think it is mostly because I feel like I brought you into a situation that could have ended badly. I do feel bad for taking the rest of her blood but I made sure she didn’t feel a thing.”

“I feel bad that she was in the wreck but we didn’t kill her. Like you said, she would have died out there on her own. We kept her from suffering. Yes, it was a crappy situation but that is a part of life. We can’t be protected from seeing that, ever, nor do I want you to. I’m not saying we should go out there and purposely wreck cars so I can learn to deal with it. I’m just saying that if the situation arises, whether good or bad, I want to learn from it.”

He looked at me and smiled. I could feel the pride he was sending me. “I think after tonight, I’ll start incorporating exercises so you can acclimate to the world. I don’t want to keep you holed up in the house for months. You’re right that you shouldn’t be protected from all the bad stuff as though you were a human. I want you to experience training and seeing our friends. How does that sound?”

“I’d like that,” I replied and smiled. “Are you sure I’ll be okay around other vampires? What if we get near a town or a crowd of humans?”

“We’ll take it one step at a time. No rush. We can do as little or as much as you’d like.”

“I want to see Peter and Char. I mean, really see them, not on Skype like you had us on a couple nights ago.”
“I’ll text them right now and let them know.”

“Can you ask Char to pick me up some underwear? I know you don’t mind me wearing your clothes but eventually I’ll need to learn to dress myself and I sort of want girlie things to wear.”

He laughed. “No problem and you’ll probably want more bras right?”

“Yes, with a bigger cup.” I rolled my eyes as he tried to hide his disappointment.

I watched as he quickly typed out the messages and then waited a few minutes before Char responded.

_We’re supposed to come back tomorrow night. We’re finalizing a transfer of six prisoners. They will be here a couple days later. Do you need more blood bags too?_

Jasper quickly responded back with ‘yes’ and I couldn’t wait for the day I’ll be able to text on a phone again.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted this chapter to show a couple things. First, I wanted to show uncertainty coming from Jasper which was why I created the car accident scene. Even though he had this backstory of training newborns, it was a different time and humans were nothing more than blood bags. I also wanted to show he didn’t have all the answers and is doing the best of his abilities.

With Bella, this isn’t any new skill or gift. I want her to have a hold of her humanity still, even as a newborn vampire who drinks human blood. I’ll explore more of this in future chapters but she isn’t going to be the fully controlled vampire she was in the book but she won’t be a typical newborn either. Sure, she’ll have her moments when her animal side might come out, but I want her to be just a wee bit more stable than a typical newborn. I want to play up the idea that environment plays a part in her development as a vampire. Had she been changed by someone like Maria, she’d have a rougher go at it than she is experiencing right now. :)

Will she have slip-ups? I almost had her slip on this one and was planning that scene, but instead, Jasper started to hound me and intervened. It was meant to feel a little confusing because it is supposed to go against their nature - or the nature that Jasper is
used to.

Thank you - I hope you enjoyed it. Love to hear your thoughts too. :) XOXO sushi
Chapter 77

Chapter Notes

Hope you’re all enjoying your summer so far. :)  
Thank you AlexisDanaan, LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy for making sure this story makes sense. Thank you readers - I appreciate you all continuing to follow the story.  
Last I checked, I’m not SM, I just like to play with her characters.  
Onward

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 76

JPOV

“So what time are they coming?” Isabella asked as she slipped on one of my shirts.

“They’ll be here in the afternoon,” I replied and helped her button it up after she ripped the first two off.

“Thanks,” she said and smiled. “I guess I need to dial down my strength a little more.”

“Is that working for you?” I asked, as I started to straighten up the room before we headed downstairs.

“I have to envision it otherwise it won’t work,” she admitted. “Plus, I wasn’t concentrating completely.”

“It’ll happen from time to time.” I sent her reassurance which brought a smile to her face.

We headed downstairs and I looked at the growing pile of broken furniture and torn clothes before I gathered an armload to take out to the trash. Isabella also grabbed some things and followed me
outside.

“You didn’t have to, baby girl.”

“No, most of this mess was because of me,” she replied. “Plus, doing normal day to day stuff helps.”

Once we were done with our chores, I joined Isabella out on our patio. She slowly sat down on one of the lounge chairs. I immediately felt her pride when she managed to sit without incident.

“Your advice on slowing down my movements helped,” she explained as she settled in and pointed to the chaise next to her. “Come enjoy this with me.”

Over the next hour, we enjoyed the sunlight. I could tell Isabella was happy but also deep in thought as other emotions started to flitter around. They weren’t strong, nor did they linger so I chose not to interrupt her. A minute later, her shield started to manifest but it wasn’t engaged fully, her emotions coming through like pulsating waves.

“Baby girl, are you okay?” I asked once her emotions started to grow increasingly negative; sadness and insecurity the most prominent.

“What? Yeah, I was just going through some human memories like my mom and stuff.”

We talked about how Renee was flighty and how often she changed hobbies and interests. Isabella was convinced that motherhood was one of those items she was interested in and then decided it wasn’t her ‘thing’ anymore.

“I just don’t get why she thought I was so disposable like that,” she muttered.

“I am not sure but you said your folks married young? Maybe she didn’t know how to handle real life before she got married and had you.”

“That is what I always thought, too. I think she couldn’t stand my dad’s career either, he was a dedicated cop. I have memories of Renee always complaining about the long hours he worked.
Even years after we left, she brought it up. It just sucks, you know? As morbid as it sounds, I’m sort of glad I didn’t have a normal human life.” She added air quotes for effect. “I wouldn’t have wanted to live with the idea that I could repeat history. Even though Renee and I are, for lack of a better word, estranged, it still hurts the way she acted.”

I reached over to hold her hand, sending my love to her, wishing I could take some of that heartache away from her for good.

“Of course, my crazy brain started going haywire after that and I just got sucked into this hole of insecurity,” she confessed as she gave me a sheepish smile. “Can I ask you something about us?”

“You know you can ask anything, baby girl.”

“I know you love me...even when I was human. Did I...did I satisfy you?”

I quickly jumped out of my chaise and onto hers, pulling her into my arms. “Hell yes,” I replied and held her even tighter. “Never doubt that. If you want, I can show you what I felt for you as a human.”

“I know you do. These damn memories!” she growled out. “I was thinking happy things and then the memories got sad and like I said, I fell into this chasm of crap.”

She was beginning to grow upset so I quickly sent her the love and desire I felt for her back when our relationship was beginning to grow more intimate.

“What was that?” she asked, her eyes no longer taking on the teary look.

“That was what I felt when we first made out and you showed me some of your scars.” I sent her more of my emotions. “I just showed you what I felt our first time...in our shower.”

She was no longer feeling down about herself and wrapped her arms around me.

“Thank you for sharing that with me,” she whispered. “I needed it. I’m sorry for being such a crazy
mess. At this rate, I’ll probably give you a migraine.”

“Nah.” I chuckled softly before kissing her hair. “This is all a process you’re going through. I woke up not remembering much, but I remember how easy it was to get so engrossed with thoughts. So much so, that they consume you. Most of mine were based on blood and my next meal…” I shook my head as recalled those days. “One minute it was a casual thought in my head and the next, I let it rule me. It will be different with you,” I continued to explain. “I’ll be along each step of the way and so will our family. I’m really proud of your progress. You’re a lot calmer than many newborns and I’m beginning to believe that environment plays a huge role in your development.”

“Maybe we can meet with Gianna soon?” she asked, excited at the prospect of seeing her friend.

“Let’s see how you do with Peter and Char first. We need to make sure you’re comfortable being around others first before we introduce you to our Volturi family. We also have to make sure she’s comfortable and ready to be around others as well. That being said, we can, if you wanted to, Skype with them.”

“I’d like that. I want to see others but I don’t want to be a burden.”

“Isabella, you’re not a burden. Don’t ever think that. A lot of this is new for me too. Like last night, I still feel a little shitty for having you exposed to that car accident like I did.”

“Don’t feel bad, Jasper. It was a real life situation that presented itself. I was able to control myself,” she chided softly as she ran her fingertips down my arms. “Wait, has your guilt grown from feeding on her?”

I sighed. “Yeah,” I admitted. “That and the potential danger I brought you into. I should have known better.”

“When you used to feed from humans, back before your modified diet of today, was this how you felt afterwards?”

“Worse. Even though she was dying, I still felt bad. Now imagine, a healthy human. Age...sex...whether they had family... none of it mattered. The only thing I refrained from doing was feed off of children.” I took a deep breath. “I was forced to once, as a show of my loyalty but after that, I never did. I’ll never forget that incident either because it haunted me for a long time.”
Isabella sprung up, out of my arms and glared at me. “I’m glad that bitch whore Maria got burned then,” she growled, her eyes darkening as anger poured out of her. “If she was still around, I would want to tear her apart.”

I got up and held her close as we both started to calm down from our emotions.

“You said something very similar right before your change.” I kissed her hair. “Come on, let’s think of happier stuff,” I suggested.

“I’m nervous seeing Peter and Char again. I mean, I’m excited, but I’m nervous too. Have I...have I changed much? Do I still act like me? I think I do, but my perception could be wrong,” she rambled.

“They know and understand you’ll be, to paraphrase Peter, skittish when they come over today. That is why they suggested coming here instead of us meeting them. They want you to be as comfortable as possible. They won’t make any sudden movements that will put you on the defensive.”

Isabella looked up at me with a slightly confused expression. “Jasper, when you said sudden movements, I suddenly had a human memory of a big guy spinning me around. Was that one of them? One of the Cullens?”

I nodded. “Yeah, that was Emmett. He thought of you as a little sister and when you used to come over to the house, he had a tendency to spin you around until you were dizzy.”

“I’d probably kick his ass now,” she muttered and then smiled as she must have imagined it in her head.

“I remember feeling your frustration many times back then,” I replied. “And to answer your question a couple minutes ago, you’re still you. Your emotions are stronger because as vampires, we are just more enhanced than when we were humans. You, Isabella, are still a strong, determined, stubborn woman.” I nudged her playfully. “You’re also kind-hearted and caring. You’re full of love and have so many who love you back. You might be a vampire, but you’ve kept a lot of your humanity with you.”

She smiled brightly and wrapped her arms around me. Her emotions were calm once again.
I breathed an internal sigh of relief, feeling fortunate Isabella was, for the most part, in control of most of her newborn senses. There had been too many times when I was bitten by feral, young vampires who relied on their ‘flight or fight’ instincts. I would much rather take her often erratic emotions over violence.

A couple hours later, we both headed back up to our room as Isabella insisted on changing into something more decent. I helped her with a simple, cotton summer dress as we both heard a car pull off the main road and into our private drive.

I walked out of our room and gestured for her to follow me. I chose to move much slower than vampire speed, giving her extra time to compose herself before we stepped outside. The car engine had stopped and I could hear the two doors open.

“Ready, Isabella?” I asked once I reached the door. Noting her nervousness, I reached over to hold her hand. “I’m here. If you’re uncomfortable, let me know. They’ll understand.”

She nodded and squeezed my hand lightly. I opened the door and saw my brother and sister parked 100 yards away. I gave them a nod as the two of us stepped outside. As we slowly walked towards them, Isabella began to hold onto my hand harder; enough to cause me to wince slightly.

When we were about 25 yards away from the house, I stopped and nodded again towards Peter and Char. My siblings slowly exited their car and walked slowly towards us. Isabella automatically moved slightly behind me and out of the corner of my eye, I could see her peeking around me to see what was going on.

Once they were 10 feet away, I sent them a warning shot of emotions causing them to stop.

“Hello Jasper... hello Bella,” Char said softly.

Isabella moved from being completely behind me but continued to keep a tight hold of my hand. She waved slowly at them.

I looked over at her and then nodded towards my siblings, silently asking if she was ready and comfortable enough to move closer. Isabella responded with a nod and then waved to Peter and Char.
“Hey bro, hello, little one,” Peter called out.

“I’m okay, Jasper,” Isabella whispered before addressing our siblings. “Let’s go out to our backyard.” We turned and headed back around the house, my siblings following. I sent her my pride knowing she was still nervous about being around other vampires but she was determined.

Once we were there, I sat down on the chaise next to Isabella while Peter and Char sat on a matching outdoor sofa.

“I sort remember you both but at the same time, the memories are fuzzy,” Isabella began and smiled. “It’s a weird feeling now seeing you both with my new eyes.”

Char smiled warmly. “We’re both really glad to see you both. Instant messaging and Skype only go so far.”

“You seem in good spirits, little one,” Peter said. “Has it been relatively smooth?”

Isabella looked at me sheepishly before replying. “For the most part. I’ve torn some clothes and broke some stuff but I can drink the bagged blood and not get any on me, after I busted a couple.”

“I’ve given her some basic ideas on how to control her strength,” I added. “I had thought about using toys but after discussing it with her, I realized there was no value or incentive for her to use blocks or whatever.” I looked over at Isabella and kissed her temple.

“We might be able to brainstorm some ideas,” Char said and then looked at Isabella. “Bella, I brought some clothes for you. Would you want me to bring them in?”

“Maybe we can go together?” Isabella asked. “That way the guys can catch up?” She turned and looked at me. “I’m good, I am glad she asked because I do want to spend a little time with Char. Is that okay?”

I looked over at her and then my sister before nodding. “Baby girl, go enjoy yourself. If you’re up to it, I won’t say ‘no’. Char, we’ve been walking a little faster than human speed, it helps her control her strength better.”
“Sure, we can do that. Ready, Bella?”

The women happily walked away and I found myself smiling at them as they rounded the corner, heading back to the front of the house.

“You okay, bro?”

“Yeah, I’m good,” I replied and then got up to sit in a chair next to my brother. We could both hear Isabella and Char laughing, their fondness for each other still strong.

I told Peter about how I nearly fucked up with the car accident victim and he told me basically the same thing Isabella had said earlier.

“So you’re looking for ideas on how to control strength?” Peter asked just as we heard the girls walking down the stairs and out to the patio.

“We brought blood bags,” Isabella announced and placed a metal tub filled with hot water and blood bags.

The four of us caught up on news at Volterra. Like us, Marcus and Gianna had sequestered themselves from most of the Volturi other than the kings and queens. From what Peter explained, Gianna was also relatively calm compared to the newborns the three of us were exposed to back in our war days.

“Maybe you’re right in thinking our environment plays a role in how we act and react,” Isabella replied after finishing up her first bag. “Plus, we both turned on our own, free will.”

“And love. You both turned for love,” Peter added.

“You’re such a romantic,” Char teased and pulled him into a kiss.

“So the rest of the guards haven’t seen her yet?” Isabella asked.
“No, they’re close by, just in case they’re needed,” Peter replied. “The guards know that Marcus will be extra protective at this time and during Gianna’s change, he didn’t even allow his brothers or sisters near. They’ve just recently been integrated into their lives. They do receive updates via text messages or Skype as well. It’s very much like our situation but on a grander scale. We’ve been sharing news with each other when we can. Everybody is excited and they hope to see you both soon but they understand. We’re really happy that the technology is there for us to communicate as we are now. Could you imagine if this was a different time? Back in the days of telephone? Or better yet, telegraph?”

“Telegraph? Like Morse Code?” Isabella asked. “I sometimes forget that you’ve been around for so long.”

“We like to keep up with appearances, it makes blending in easier,” Char replied. “Speaking of technology, maybe we can use that as part of your strength and control training, Bella.”

“I like that,” I replied. “We can get a bunch of different phones and computer devices as a way for you to learn how much pressure to apply on objects before they break. Would you like that, baby girl?”

“I definitely think that is better than blocks or Legos. I mean, I’d love to be able to use a cell phone again,” Isabella replied, excitedly. “That won’t mean you’ll be buying brand new phones and laptops in bulk, will it?’

We all laughed as we realized her frugalness hadn’t disappeared and she laughed too when we explained it.

“Used equipment,” Peter suggested. “We can get the stuff that is about to be sold or can’t be donated for one reason or another. It won’t be an expense when they’re destroyed.” He paused and looked around as we all nodded at his suggestion. “Little one, were you still interested in your criminal justice research stuff?”

“Yeah, but I’m not reliable yet to work in a lab,” she replied.

“Would you be interested in learning to pick locks?” Peter asked.

“Why would I need to learn that? Couldn’t I just break the door?”
“You could but the point is finding areas of interests for you so we can create exercises that would help with your control as well as give you that extra incentive to succeed,” Peter explained. “When it comes to picking locks, you’ll need to use fine instruments so you don’t bust the cylinders. For a run-of-the-mill burglar, they probably wouldn’t care. Now a jewelry or art thief, they’d want to be more careful. They would -”

“You’re not going to be the bad influence and get Bella into a life of crime.”

“Sure, why not?” Isabella said. “I mean, not the cat burglar part, but learning to pick locks would be different and it sounds interesting.” She looked at us and smiled. “Does that mean I will be able to drive soon too?”

“We can always get some junker cars delivered to the track,” Char said. “I’m sure Felix and Demetri won’t mind if you started out there. It would be more controlled, but let’s work on smaller things first, like we talked about.”

“Y’all are going to visit junk yards and stuff then?” I asked out of curiosity, trying to tamp down my curiosity over what my sister and Isabella were talking about upstairs.

“Not really,” Peter replied and looked at Char. “We’ve started a new business. It was from a vision I had recently. We’re now going to collect used electronics as well as automobiles for salvage.”

“So you’re now in the junk business? I asked.

“Yes and no,” Peter replied. “We’re trying to avoid dumping this stuff in landfills, to recycle or somehow reuse this stuff as much as possible. That was the vision I had. Then I saw what must have been a world sometime in the far future where the earth was just destroyed by the humans because they kept dumpin’ their shit in traditional landfills. Chemicals got into their water system and people started to die off. I’m just doing my part in assuring we’ll have a blood supply for a long time. Alec has even expressed an interest in my venture and has been researching ways of disposing some of harsher chemicals in a safe manner.”

“You think this will be a successful venture?” I asked.

“I think eventually we’ll see these companies becoming more popular. You want in?”
“Jasper, I think he’s got a point. That whole global warming thing sounds scary. We should think about investing.”

“Sure, we’d like to get in. Just a small investment for now, say 25% and we can expand from there?”

“That’s great!” Peter replied and automatically sent an email to our attorney.

“Hey, we’re going to get going soon,” Peter said. “We’ll be back early morning with a couple humans. Heidi’s just emailed me saying we’ve got some drug runners.”

“Okay, just leave them in the barn,” I said. “We’ll clean up this time.”

“He’s teaching me everything, even the not so pretty stuff,” Isabella said excitedly. “Hey Char or Peter? Can you let Renata know that I’d like to Skype with her soon? I want to see if she’s got any advice on controlling my shield thingy.”

“Yeah, we can do that. Okay, we’ll get going.”

A few minutes later, we followed my siblings out towards their car and said good-bye. Peter said he would text once they were on their way back with the humans. As they drove off in their car, Isabella wrapped her arms around my waist and looked up at me.

“I’m glad they came over. I really missed them.”

I kissed her on the forehead as we walked back to the house.

“Were you comfortable around them?” I asked as we sat down on the couch together.

“I was nervous when I first saw them and I know you felt that,” she began and smiled. “After we headed to our patio and started talking, I started to grow more comfortable around them. Then Char and I went to grab stuff in their car which was nice. I needed to get a little girl time.” She let out a sigh. “It was a little embarrassing though.”
“Oh? What happened?” I didn’t think Char would do anything to make Isabella uncomfortable but I couldn’t help but ask.

“When we got upstairs, she had bags of clothes, like underwear. She even washed them too,” she said excitedly. “Seeing as I was wearing a bra that barely fit, I decided to change into a new one, but I broke the strap. Your sister had to help me get dressed.”

I reached over and pulled her into my arms, she was clearly upset over her loss of independence.

“You know I don’t mind helping you for the time being,” I replied.

“I know you don’t. She did give me a helpful piece of advice. She said I should just concentrate on using only my thumb and forefinger when putting on delicates, as she calls them. She also said to use the same pressure and strength as when I handle the blood bags. It isn’t a guarantee that I’ll avoid shredding them, but she said to start there and then dial down as necessary.”

“You told her that imagining a dial helps?”

She nodded. “Char said she’ll share it with Marcus. She thinks they’re using a similar tactic. Did you have a good visit with Peter?”

“I did, he told me basically the same thing you did about the car accident. I just have to put it behind me.”

She ran her fingers through my hair. “As unorthodox as it was, you know I don’t think what you did was wrong. You can feel it, right?”

I was hit with a strong wave of love and devotion. There was no guilt or negative emotions coming from her at all.

“Alright, baby girl. I’m going to let it go. In the meantime, are you excited about feeding tonight?”

“Yeah, Char even got me some hunting clothes, they’re like the fatigue pants you wear but they look more feminine. She even washed them already.”
I chuckled at her enthusiasm. “I’m going to teach you the dirty stuff after, we’re cleaning them up.”

“Okay, do we need to bury them out in a field and throw lime so they’ll decompose quicker?”

I shook my head. “So you really did hear everything I said during your transition. I wasn’t sure you’d remember that day we had that conversation. No, we won’t be doing that. Instead, we’ll take them to one of the incinerators the Volturi have set up. Peter will send me the coordinates tonight. They will look like a typical manhole cover but inside is actually an elaborate system they created to dispose of the bodies. I’m not sure how it works exactly, but they’ve had it in place for over a century.”

“I guess it is better than a burning dumpster or a house explosion?”

“Probably. You’ll be well fed tonight since I’m not going to feed. It’ll be good because we’ll be running the body to the nearest disposal site.”

“I’m not taking your meals from you, am I?” she asked with a worried look on her face.

“No, baby girl, I guess you could say I’ve topped off with the blood bag today. I’m good for a few more days.”

“Okay,” she replied and snuggled closer to me. “I think one thing I miss is sleep. Do you miss it?”

“It never really occurred to me until I came back to Forks. When you fell asleep, you had this wonderful sense of peace that I relished. I could recreate it for us if you’d like.”

“You can? That sounds wonderful, should we go to bed?”

“Yes ma’am,” I replied and took her hand.

“We’ll pretend sleep until it is time to feed.”
“Sounds good, Jasper. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, baby girl.”

Meanwhile, somewhere near the North Dakota - Saskatchewan border

“One-one thousand...two-one thousand...three...venom...venom...venom...”

I unlatched my teeth from the neck of the young man just as he started to writhe and scream. I tore off a length of his t-shirt and shoved it into his mouth, in an effort to quiet him. Next, I pinned his arms down and wrapped some rope I had brought with me. I heard the crack of a couple ribs as I tied the ends into a knot and then carried him to the old, abandoned barn 6 miles north.

Once I got there, I tossed him, none too gently, onto the stale hay and then used my fingernail to slice the rope off of the man. My venom had already started invading his bloodstream and he had passed out. There was still some wet blood on his neck and I licked it off, savoring each drop.

Before sitting back for the next few days, I decided to dig through this man’s pockets to see if he had anything useful and valuable. There were several, twenty dollar bills and a bus ticket showing he was headed to the East Coast. The bus was leaving early in the morning. He also had a bunch of receipts from recent hotel stays shoved in his jacket. Finally I spotted a Washington State driver’s license with the name of Riley Biers.

I began to weave a story for him about how he had been kidnapped by some golden-eyed monsters and I managed to rescue him but only after he had been bitten. I repeated the story over and over hoping that once he awoke, he would believe me and would want revenge.

“Let’s hope you survive, Riley. We’ve got a mission ahead of us.”

Chapter End Notes

I used the term “global warming” because in 2007, that was the phrase commonly used before climate change.
How did you like Bella seeing her sibling in-laws again? And how about crazy Victoria?

Just FYI, I’m working on chapter 87 at this moment, I think you’ll all enjoy what I have in store. My goal is to finish this before it hits 100 chapters. :P

Until next time ~XO sushi.
Chapter 78

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for everything! I found out last week I was nominated for an Energize WIP Award in the non-canon category. :) I totally made my day. I wouldn’t have done it without all the help from wonderful women who have worked on the story so it makes sense. And thanks to you, the readers!

Okay enough of that, I’m not SM, I just like to play with her characters.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 77

BPOV

“Jasper!” I nearly hissed. “Quit staring at me! I’ll break another lock if you keep doing that.” I pointed to his opened sketchbook. “Can’t you just draw or something?” I asked in exasperation.

He chuckled. “Baby girl, even if I started sketching, I could still see you.”

“I know,” I replied as I picked up the lock pick. “It just wouldn’t feel as though you were, if you looked busy.”

He held up his hands in mock defeat. “Okay, I’ll be right here on the couch.”

Taking a deep but unnecessary breath, I carefully stuck the pick into the lock and slowly started to wriggle and turn the tool. I could hear the tumblers moving in the lock cylinder and hoped that this time, I could actually jimmy the door lock without damaging it at all.

For the past week, I’ve been practicing. Peter had delivered a couple old doors with several locks installed, some old suitcases, a couple car doors...just about anything that would need a key, he brought over. I broke quite a few along with the different picks and tools as evident in our overflowing trash bin. Trying not to wallow in the not so successful attempts, I grasped the tool
with my thumb and forefinger and slowly turned until I heard a ‘click’. Not wanting to get overly
excited and damage the lock as I withdrew the pick, reversed my movements until I could set the
thin piece of steel onto the table. I grabbed onto the door handle and turned, letting out a squeal
when I successfully unlocked it.

“Shit!” I gasped out as I crushed the knob. “Son of a bitch, I was so close!” I threw the stupid knob
onto the floor and winced as I heard a crack and the small puff of dust from the now busted stone
floor.

“You did good, baby girl,” Jasper said as he set his sketchbook down. “You showed a lot of
restraint as you manipulated the lock cylinders and even when you removed the lock pick. Next
time, you’ll remember not to get too excited at the end. You’re learning.”

I sighed and ran over to the fridge to pull out a blood bag. “You want some?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

When I got back to the living room, I sat down on the couch next to Jasper.

“So what were you drawing?”

Jasper flipped the sketch book over, revealing a picture of me running. My hair was trailing behind
me and I had a smile on my face and a body over my shoulder.

“You drew a picture of me last week when we were running to dump the body?”

He nodded. “You were so insistent in helping and then when we were running, there was that brief
second when you went past me.” He pointed to the corner of the drawing. “It’s not completely
done but this is where I’ll be adding the arm from the body I was carrying. Less than a second
later, we were running together.”

“Yes, I remember that. I got that burst of speed all of a sudden and was tempted to just run off.” I
felt bad as I admitted it.
“You fought your instinct and slowed back down. It is not unusual for a newborn vampire to run off. The instincts are based on the whole idea of fight or flight.”

“Will there ever be a time when I revert back to this once I’m no longer a newborn?”

“I’ve heard that it can happen if you’ve been starved for an extremely long time. I don’t mean missing a day or even two. I’m talking about going several months or even longer without blood of some sort - to the point where your body feels like it could shrivel away and turn to dust. It is quite extreme and I’ve never seen it personally. It was one of Maria’s favorite threats to use. Maybe the Volturi know more.”

I shuddered at the thought of being forced in that type of situation, but grateful Jasper was never subject to such brutality. I couldn’t imagine being deprived of blood for so long and understood how it would be easy to revert back to that feral state of being. “Hell, I bet even at that point, animal blood would be a godsend.”

He nodded in agreement. “Hey speaking of Volturi, are you excited about seeing Renata?”

“I am. It has been nice to Skype with her as well as the rest of them.”

Jasper’s phone chimed, indicating he just received a text message.

“Demetri just let us know they’ve left Volterra and are headed here,” he said.

I looked down knowing I was still in pajamas. “I am going to go upstairs to change into something more decent.”

“Do you need my help?” he asked as he got up from the couch.

“Keep me company. I want to see if I can do this on my own first,” I replied and started to walk up the stairs, slightly faster than human speed.

“It’s getting easier to walk this slowly,” I said as I reached the top step.
“Good. I was hoping it would, I figured it would be easier to learn now. We’ll start moving even slower soon. Eventually, what should happen is your acclimation to the human world would become second nature.”

“It makes sense. It’s sort of like teaching kids to learn a second language, I suppose,” I replied as I put away my jammies and started pulling on my yoga pants. I let out a sigh of relief when I managed to get them on without destroying the fabric. Next, I repeated my slow movements as I got my bra on and winced when I heard the delicate lace tear.

“Dammit!” I put my arms down and took a couple calming breaths - an exercise Char had taught me so I could regroup before attempting it again.

It took a couple tries and one more tiny rip of fabric before I was successful. Finally, I threw on a t-shirt before looking at Jasper.

“Very good, baby girl. You’re definitely improving on your control. When they get here, do you want to meet with them inside or out?”

“I’m more comfortable having them in the house, Jasper. At least, we can start in here and then if I need it, we can go outside,” I replied and sent him reassurance. “I’m glad you had Peter and Char come over a couple times this week too. I’m getting used to seeing others.”

He reached out and held my hand. “Are you going to put shoes on?”

I pointed to the flip flops on the floor.

“You never change,” he said and started chuckling. “You had so many pairs when we lived in Texas.”

“I remember that.” I giggled at the human memory. “You said something about me needing an intervention.”

We laughed for a few more minutes until I heard the sound of a car engine heading our direction.
“Ready?” he asked and I nodded, following his lead as we headed outside to wait for Renata and Demetri.

A sleek, red sports car pulled into the driveway a few minutes later. Just like a week ago, when Peter and Char visited us, Demetri and Renata kept their movements to a minimum, while Jasper made sure I was comfortable before inviting them closer.

“Hello Jasper. Hello Bella,” Demetri said with a wave. “If you’re more comfortable, I can stay here while you visit with Renata.”

Jasper looked at me as he waited for me to reply.

“I’m okay,” I answered and smiled. I was nervous but was trying hard not to let it affect me as I remembered how close Renata and Demetri were. I also remembered the guards explaining one time how they rarely travelled alone. “Come on in.”

Demetri smiled and then turned towards the trunk of the car. “Let me grab the container of blood we brought.”

Once we were all inside, Demetri and Renata sat on one couch while Jasper and I sat on the other. The conversation started out slow as I became reacquainted with them. Even though we had talked over the computer, seeing them in person and being aware of their vampire scents was almost as though I was meeting them for the first time.

“Are you okay, baby girl?” Jasper whispered and I nodded.

“Sorry,” I said with a small smile. “I had to keep reminding myself in my head that I knew you both and I wasn’t in any danger.”

“It’s okay, Bella,” Renata replied. “If it helps, you’re looking great. Peter and Char have said you’re doing really well too.”

“Thank you. I still have my moments but I’m growing comfortable with my new skin.”
“Good!” Demetri said. “Gianna is as well. It would appear you both were always meant to be vampires.”

“We were on Skype early this morning,” Jasper explained. “They were both really excited to see each other even if it was only through a video screen.”

“Oh! That would explain the excitement we heard from Marcus’ quarters,” Renata said and laughed. “Since there was no indication of danger, we just let them be.”

The conversation shifted to news of the other guards and Demetri pulled out a cardboard tube from his jacket.

“This is for you two. It’s from Alec.”

I took the fragile container and handed it almost immediately to Jasper. I knew I wasn’t in control of my strength enough to handle whatever was inside.

I watched as Jasper reached in and pulled out a piece of paper and unrolled it.

“Is that a cartoon drawing?” I asked and giggled.

The picture was of me and Jasper both wearing what looked like superhero capes. We were running and carrying bodies.

“When he heard your story of your feed from last week, he decided to draw this as a gift,” Demetri explained.

“This is great,” Jasper said and chuckled. “It’s funny because just before y’all sent me the text message, I was drawing a scene from that night.” He showed Demetri and Renata the drawing. “I have to say though, I prefer the superhero look.” I watched as he quickly sent a message to Alec, thanking him for the gift.
“Oh, we have some interesting news from Aro,” Renata exclaimed excitedly. “It happened about an hour before we got here.”

I sat close to Jasper as we waited for Renata to continue.

“Aro met with Alice today and discovered she had a vision.”

My attention was perked and I could tell Jasper was too because her condition had been status quo for nearly a week.

“What was her vision?” Jasper asked.

“She saw Bella as a vampire, apparently. Since Aro could read her thoughts, he knew she was disturbed by what she saw. She doesn’t believe it to be true.”

“What exactly did she see?” I asked.

“According to Aro, it was you fighting with a few of us.”

I looked at Jasper and he shrugged before speaking. “So this could be a legitimate vision unless you’ve changed your mind?”

“No, I want to be able to learn to defend myself. Even though the chance of danger is low, I want to learn,” I said adamantly before turning my attention back to Demetri and Renata. “Should we be concerned about her visions coming back?”

Demetri shook his head. “Aro doesn’t believe so. He makes it a point to check in on her a few times a week and this was the first time she had a vision in a long time. Like Renata said, she quickly dismissed it as false - much like her pirate vision.”

“He’s letting her believe that her vision was false?” I asked and both the Volturi guards nodded.

“Aro thinks it is best. He believes her gift is waning for some reason and as long as she’s
cooperative, he sees no harm in continuing the charade of keeping her as an esteemed guest,” Demetri elaborated. “As long as she isn’t a danger, he’ll let things be. He hasn’t had Chelsea compel her other than to believe the farm animal blood is gourmet.” He visibly shuddered. “She still talks to Carlisle on a regular basis and he’s still amenable to her staying here to convalesce without interference.”

“I guess if she started to believe her visions were coming back, she would be more difficult to deal with,” I murmured mostly to myself but then everybody in the room nodded in agreement.

“Enough of that talk,” Renata said and smiled. “Bella? Are you ready to work on your shield?”

I nodded enthusiastically and jumped off the couch.

“Perfect!” she exclaimed and looked around. “Jasper, can we use the patio?”

“Sure, go right ahead. Demetri and I will be in here.” He looked at me and squeezed my hand. “Give me a holler if you need anything, baby girl.”

“I will,” I replied and walked with Renata out the door.

“Let’s sit on the ground,” she said and found a spot. “Ah, it is nice and warm from the sun. Sit right here.” She patted on a spot in front of her.

I plopped down and crossed my legs just as she did.

“So your shield is stronger now but you aren’t sure how you’re controlling it, if at all?”

I shook my head. “Jasper feels it when his emotions don’t reach me. He says they waver sometimes especially if I’m upset or hungry.”

She nodded. “Do you feel any different? A tightening in your head, perhaps?”

I thought for a moment before responding. “Not really as far as a tightening goes. I guess I get a
twitch in my eye? I don’t even know if you could call it that. I barely feel it and actually had to think back on the times Jasper mentioned my shield,” I explained, grateful for my vampire memory. “Maybe he could see this twitch?”

At the mention of his name, Jasper appeared at the doorway. “I never noticed it, baby girl.” He looked directly at Renata. “Is there anything we should be concerned about?”

She smiled. “No, I think that is her shield engaging itself. We’ll assume it is and go from there. You and Demetri can observe if you want. It might actually be good to have you here Jasper. You can sense whether her shield is working or not.”

“Yes ma’am,” Jasper replied and motioned for the other guard to come outside. They sat down under the shaded area to give us some space to work with.

“So back to your shield,” Renata continued. “Like I said, we’ll assume, for now that your shield is activated when you get that twitch feel. Have you blocked anybody physically?”

I shook my head. “No, am I supposed to?”

“I’m not absolutely sure but we’ll have a chance to try it, eventually. When I became a vampire, my physical shield was the most prominent and it wasn’t until a couple months into my new life that I discovered my mental shield as well. I don’t remember much of my human life, other than I was born during the Renaissance and most likely had a high station in society, based on the gown I was wearing when I woke up into this new life.”

Renata had a faraway look in her eyes that I now recognized as someone remembering their human life or an era much different than today.

“I lost most of my memories during the turn. I’m not sure if my shield was ever triggered as a human like yours but I would have guess that there had to be some evidence, given that we’re all gifted.” She gestured with her arm to show she meant the guys as well.

“I had, what my superiors called, charisma,” Jasper said. “I was easily able to command an army unit, and as a result, was able to move up in the ranks quickly.”

“Before becoming a soldier, I was one of the best hunters in our village,” Demetri stated. “I always
brought home the biggest game.”

“Do you think your mental shield was evident as a human?” I asked as the guys settled back and let us work on my shield.

“I am not sure. I’m just basing my assumptions on what I’ve noticed with you. Please don’t be too hopeful that you’ll have 2 shields. I want you to be prepared if it does happen, but I don’t want you becoming upset if you only have one.”

“No, I’m not. I just want to be able to control it, whether it is one shield or two. I have no reason in shielding Jasper from my emotions. It frustrates me and if I’m already upset, it...well, it becomes this vicious cycle until things normalize. That usually means blood.”

“Okay. Well, we’ll work on control for now. You’re familiar with Yoga, right?”

I nodded. “But we’re already pretty limber as vampires. Why would we need exercise?”

“It is not the flexibility but rather, the breathing. As funny as it sounds, given that we don’t need to breathe, the slow, controlled breaths are exactly what I needed to learn to control my shields. So just watch first and then join in when you’re comfortable.”

Renata closed her eyes and held her palms up, facing the sky. She took a deep breath in and then slowly let it out. She repeated it again before I copied her but with open eyes at first so I could get the rhythm.

By my second breath, my eyes were shut and I was breathing like she was.

“Good, now continue that but start to picture your shield. Imagine it is a finely woven net and with each breath you take, you’re casting it out over you and retracting it back in.”

I did as she requested and did the breathing exercises a dozen more times, falling into a cadence. At the same time, I did as she requested and pictured a mesh piece of fabric covering me and then disappearing.
“Now stop and open your eyes.”

I looked around, half expecting something to have happened while my eyes were shut.

“Did you notice that twitch, Bella?”

“At first I didn’t but I towards the end, I could feel that twitch each time I took a breath. Does that mean it worked?”

“Jasper, did you notice anything?”

“I did, I could feel her concentrating heavily especially at first. Towards the end, the concentration skipped every other breath.”

I gasped as I realized visualizing the net appeared to have worked.

“Good!” Renata exclaimed. “Now let’s try again but this time, do it with your eyes opened. You’ll be distracted but it is good practice for you.”

I repeated the motions and realized she was right. Having my vision was distracting. Every time the cloud moved into a different shape or a slight breeze carried small clouds of pollen across the patio, I either forgot to breathe in the same rhythm or the mesh netting disappeared.

After two minutes, Renata placed her hand over mine. “How do you feel?”

I explained the distractions but thought I managed a few times to get my shield to engage and disengage at will. We both turned to look at Jasper.

“You had a string of 8 breaths and then you went nearly a half a minute without interruption. Towards the end the pattern was shorter.”

“That is great,” Renata exclaimed. “You should practice this exercise a few times a day. Try both with your eyes closed and open. As you grow comfortable, I’m hoping you’ll be able to control
your shield without the need for breathing exercises but for now, you should stick with it.”

I nodded. “How did you learn the whole Yoga thing? I can’t imagine you sitting on the floor and breathing while wearing Renaissance garb.”

Renata laughed and squeezed my hand. “We had, at one time, a human visitor. He was, different...a mystic of sorts. Or at least, it was what he claimed to be.”

Jasper and Demetri quietly sat down next to us as Renata continued her story.

“I was about a month into my new life and while I was still fighting bloodlust, we were less caring over humans back then so blood ran freely in the castle. This man, Luca, appeared at Volterra one day. He was different, exotic looking and when he spoke, he had a heavy accent that I couldn’t place. Aro spotted him first and was about to feast, as you could probably imagine, but then when he touched his arm, he saw his thoughts.”

Jasper pulled me onto his lap as Renata explained some of Aro’s visions.

“Luca was a nomad and had travelled everywhere. Back then, it was a feat in itself but what made Luca so interesting was the fact that he wasn’t afraid of us. In fact, he offered to serve Aro - begged him to take him in as part of the court. Aro agreed and Luca became an advisor. It was through Luca’s thoughts that Aro decided to send me off to the Moghul Empire, or what we now call, India. Luca also convinced us all that I would find my answers out there and he didn’t lie.”

“Luckily, we were vampires and didn’t have to rely on ships or horses to get us there,” Demetri said. “I volunteered to accompany Renata and we made it there in less than a week of running.”

“Talk about a different world - exotic was an understatement. Together we explored the land, studied Sanskrit, and fed. I also learned the art of Yoga and other meditation exercises. The breathing exercises helped me as my shields manifested and I was able to slowly control them.”

“There was that very week that you became more upset than normal and engaged your physical shield and I couldn’t get near you even when I brought a human to the edge of your shield.” Demetri took a hold of her hand and smiled.

“Wait, you can see her shields?” I asked.
“Only her physical one at first. It was later when she honed in her skills that she was able to render her physical shield nearly invisible.”

“I was a newborn, give me a break!” Renata teased. “Here.” Right before my eyes, I saw the two Volturi guards in some sort of transparent, shimmering skin.

“Can I touch it?” I asked and Renata nodded.

Both Jasper and I reached out to touch them but we were stopped by the shield. I was soft and cold, almost gelatinous but more solid.

“I can also expand my shield so that there is more of a barrier. It comes in handy when we’re near enemies.”

“And your thoughts are protected too?”

She nodded. “It took months more of practice but we only stayed there a couple weeks. Rumors were running rampant about some evil lurking so we decided it was best to head back to Volterra. When we got back, I spent the rest of the time controlling my shields and training so I could best protect the kings. Luca was still there when we got back. He had managed to charm, not only the kings but the two queens as well.”

“It was too bad he repaid us for our generosity a few months later by trying to break into our coffers and running off,” Demetri continued. “Chelsea captured him and he would have been sentenced to death but Aro had a soft spot for Luca. He was clearly fascinated by the man and his travels. He was well liked, despite his attempted thievery. Unfortunately, he grew insane by winter. Sulpicia attempted to change him, knowing Aro thought of him almost like a son. He didn’t survive but he did leave quite a legacy we discovered.”

“Yes,” Renata said and grinned. “Do you know the story of Czar Nicholas II of Russia? The last Czar who was assassinated?”

“Sort of,” I said while Jasper nodded.
“Rasputin, was Nicholas’ advisor and was a descendant of Luca. Rasputin was rumored to be a bit of a mystic as well.”

“What do you mean, exactly by mystic? Was he supernatural?” I asked.

“No, he was human but believed he had special abilities. Luca believed he had the ability to heal. His loose interpretation of the word also included changing metals into gold.”

“He was an alchemist?” Jasper asked.

Both Renata and Demetri shrugged while Demetri pointed to his head. “He believed it would be done with potions...it was like a blend of witchcraft and alchemy. Centuries later, when we learned how to study the human body much like humans do today, we exhumed his remains. He had ingested a high amount of metals that he shouldn’t have and I’m sure that played a part. The lead content alone was enough to have poisoned his mind.”

“Wow, I think that man would have freaked me out if I was around during his time. You say he was never scared being around vampires?”

“If he was, he never acted like it,” Renata replied. “As strange as that man was, I do owe it to him for having that knowledge. I don’t know if I would have been able to learn and control my shield as well as I did if we didn’t cross paths. I think that was one of the reasons why he was buried in Volterra when he succumbed to the poisons.”

“Why was Aro so fond of him?” I asked and then covered my mouth quickly. “Oh, I didn’t mean it to sound as bad as it did.”

Demetri laughed. “We asked that question as well...all of us did and finally, one Sunday afternoon, a decade to the date of Luca’s death, Marcus explained that Aro had a son during his human days but the boy didn’t survive. For some reason and Aro never elaborated, but something about Luca reminded him of his child. It could be a memory or it could be the color of his hair. We never asked out of respect and he never opened up to us. It’s okay though, I think each of us who knew Luca, appreciated him in some way, even after his attempted theft.”

We practiced on my shield a few more times before Renata and Demetri left.
After, Jasper and I sat on the couch and sipped on blood bags as I slowly practiced my shield with him.

“I’m so proud of you, baby girl. That was a full minute without interruption.”

I grinned and wrapped my arms around him. “It feels good to accomplish something like that. Do you think I’ll have a physical shield too?”

“I don’t know,” he replied with a shrug. “Do you still want to learn to fight? That could be a good trigger to see if you do or not?”

“You’re still okay with me learning?” I asked.

“Sure, it won’t be right away though. You should have a little more control before learning to fight otherwise, it is harder to learn without extreme measures.”

“You mean violence,” I said after a few seconds trying to dig through my human memories.

“Yeah, that was the only way we could control an army of newborns,” he replied. “I don’t want you to feel expendable, which was how we treated them back in the day. Give it a month or so and we’ll ease into it.” He smiled brightly after a moment. “I know, your birthday is a few weeks away. Why don’t we wait until after your birthday and then you and I could slowly learn a few things before we involve the Volturi. I’ll teach you basics but in slow motion.”

“Almost like my breathing exercises and my shield?”

“Same idea, using human like movements and exercises so you become accustomed to the action. It builds that foundation for you. Is that okay?”

“I think so, it’s worth a shot, right? I’d like to learn some basic moves before the real thing. We didn’t bore you did we? When Renata and I were out there?

Jasper shook his head. “No, Demetri and I were talking about some things going on back in the States. They’ve sent a small number of Volturi guards to observe. They don’t suspect anything
other than a careless vampire so they’ve sent lower ranking guards for now.”

“Do you think it has to do with Alice’s vision? I mean, it could be a long shot but still...”

“It is early to tell but they’ll gather some intel first before they take action. The Volturi are being extra careful because Alice isn’t a completely reliable source since she’s not entirely stable.”

I nodded. “They’ll keep us up to date, right? Do you think I’ll be able to work at their lab soon?”

Jasper chuckled and wrapped an arm around my shoulder. “We have all the time in the world. I know you want to do and experience so much but there is no schedule. We’ll take everything slow so it doesn’t overwhelm your senses.”

I smiled and knew if I was still human, I probably would have been blushing. “I am a little more impatient than I used to be.” I sighed. “I know I need to take smaller steps but my mind practically buzzes with anticipation. I want to do so and experience so much, right now if I could but I know I can’t. I’m not entirely ready yet.”

“Well let’s just have a low-key rest of the day.”

He smiled and we spent the rest of the day watching movies with shield practice in between.

_Somewhere in Alaska..._

_Carlisle POV_

I headed into the great room and joined Esme to welcome our nieces. We haven’t seen them in a while since the three of them decided to take an extended vacation to Vladivostok. The two of us stood outside as the dark, G-class Mercedes appeared on our winding driveway. Within minutes, we could hear the girls’ laughter as they got out of the car and I quickly looked at Esme and smiled.

“It’s been a while since we’ve heard laughter,” I whispered against her ear and sighed.
“It will be good to see them,” she replied and squeezed my hand. “The house seems so empty without the rest of the kids.”

I could see the sadness in her eyes knowing how much she missed having a full house. Rose and Emmett were spending time in Eastern Canada. Edward had planned to come back from his travels in time for the new school year, however, since Alice was now in Italy hoping to find a treatment for her ailment, Edward decided to stay abroad for a little while longer.

“The Russian men were to die for,” Irina said, causing the other two to slap her playfully as they got out of the car.

“Luckily the sailors we met didn’t die,” Tanya joked. “Though, we certainly tried to kill a few of them.”

If vampires could have blushed, I was certain Esme and I would have been. In all the years, we were still not unaffected by their ribald jokes.

“You two are just horrible,” Kate hissed out. “Come on, behave!”

“Uncle Carlisle, Aunt Esme!” the girls said in unison as we greeted each other with hugs.

Once we settled in the house, they started to talk excitedly about their recent trip to the Russian seaport, their laughter and enthusiasm brightening up the room, almost immediately.

“Sorry if you heard us out there,” Tanya said. “Where’s Edward?”

“I spoke to him yesterday. He’s enjoying his time in South America. He did send his regards,” I replied. “I gather you had a good time on your trip?”

“We did and it kept Irina from moping over that nomad she liked,” Kate piped up.

Irina hissed something in their native language before looking up at us. “I wasn’t moping. I was
just sad at first he left but he was a nomad. I doubt he would have changed at all.”

This wasn’t the first conversation about Laurent and how he suddenly left. He seemed so comfortable with the new lifestyle change at first that it came as a shock when he left. In time however, we all decided that settling down in one place and converting to a new diet must have been too much for him to handle. Even Irina, who was quite smitten with him seemed to have gotten over it so we had to as well.

For the rest of the night and well into the next day, we shared stories and I knew Esme was pleased to have laughter in the house, even for a short time.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed that chapter. I had a lot of fun altering Renata’s history. Don’t worry, there is a method to my madness - hehehe.

For those who are interested in voting for the awards, the address is energizewipawards (dot) blogspot (dot) com.

Until next time! XO ~ sushi
Chapter 79

Chapter Notes

Oh look! A chapter! :) I actually had a writing spurt so I decided to update early.

Thanks to all the alerts, favorites and reviews! It totally made my day. Congrats to all the nominees and winners of the Energize WIP awards. It was truly an honor to be on the list with some wonderful stories.

This chapter was preread by LetsJustDance. She also did an initial scrub. AlexisDanaan is on a bit of a break for this month so any mistakes are mine.

As always, I'm not SM - I just play with her characters.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 78

JPOV

For the next few weeks leading up to Isabella’s birthday, she worked extra hard on all her exercises. The first visit with Renata seemed to have lit a fire under her and she was damn determined to gain control.

I was proud of her as she practiced her mental shield exercises over and over. I was amazed how easily she adapted to the breathing techniques as well. In less than a week, she managed to open and close her mental shield while working on other things such as dressing herself or her strength control.

So far, though, there wasn’t anything to indicate she possessed the ability to have a physical shield and we decided not to press the issue. If she had one, it would show itself eventually and if she didn’t, there was nothing to worry about. Both of us were relieved when her control over her shield became second nature.

I even started to introduce her to electronics so she could get used to using them once again. There were many crushed and destroyed phones and computers, but each step was a learning experience for her as she started to become more aware of her new body. It wasn’t to say that she didn’t lose her temper or she didn’t destroy clothes, lock picking tools or even furniture, but compared to when
she woke up, there was a noticeable improvement.

“I just want to be able to have my birthday with our family,” she had said last week when I asked her about her determination.

So we worked hard and I continued to invite people over on a regular basis. Peter and Char were over almost every other day, sometimes it was just a quick visit, other times it was to watch a movie. Having Isabella used to being around other vampires was important, I didn’t want her to be skittish around others and it helped her re-establish her relationships with everybody. Plus, they were all excited to see us and didn’t mind short visits. It helped me further realize how we have all truly become a huge family.

The only ones we weren’t able to see in person were Marcus and Gianna, but we relied on Skype to communicate. Gianna was taking to her new vampire life as easily as Isabella but with her new life, she was also busy becoming a ‘proper’ vampire queen, according to Char. We weren’t sure what that all entailed since the Volturi guards weren’t privy to much of it. We figured it was learning the finer protocol from both Sulpicia and Athenodora, preparing her for her formal coronation which was to take place in October.

Tonight though, was an exception.

“Jasper, can you zip my dress up? I still haven’t gotten the hang of zipping up my back without tearing fabric.”

I walked over to her and grabbed the zipper and slowly brought it up, kissing her skin along the way. Her body relaxed and she even let out a purring sound when I brushed against her bite mark as I moved her hair back from over her shoulder.

“You are so bad, Mr. Whitlock,” she murmured before taking a step away from me. “You’ll distract me if you keep this up. Not that I’d mind, but we’re going to finally see Gianna and the others.”

To say Isabella was excited was an understatement, she was radiating with it. For her birthday celebration, she wanted to have an actual party and share it with her loved ones.

I had to admit when she first referred to them as such, I was taken back. I wasn’t used to newborn vampires to have such a positive outlook on life. I was pleased to see that she had embraced it and
was happy. Sure, there were moments when she had her emotional outbursts but for the most part, she hadn’t changed much from who she was before her transformation.

Everybody seemed excited about the upcoming party and were willing to lend a hand. When we looked to the Volturi for potential venues, Felix offered his racetrack as a location and Isabella immediately jumped on that idea.

“I’m still surprised you want a party,” I said as I pulled her back against me, wrapping my arms around her and resting my chin on her shoulder.

“I know I was not a fan of them before, but it isn’t really a fancy thing, which I always hated. there isn’t going to be any pretentiousness,” she replied as she tossed some more casual clothes into a small backpack. “Everybody will be there, but there is no need for a cake or food. Felix and Demetri said there would be fancy cars for most of you to play and then there will be less fancy cars for me to practice driving. We’re all going to have fun tonight.”

I took her bag and we headed downstairs and into the car. Out of habit, I opened the door for her and offered her my hand to help her up. She smiled and placed her hand gently on mine as she slowly got inside.

Once I started the engine, she let out a small laugh.

“You know, I sort of remember you always making sure I had my seatbelt on before we went anywhere.”

I chuckled as I set the car in reverse. “You’re a little more durable now, baby girl. There is no seatbelt law here, but if there was, both of us would have to. I’m not gonna force you to use the seatbelt if you don’t want to. Are you excited about tonight?”

“Excited is an understatement,” Isabella replied as bursts of her emotions flooded my system. “It isn’t just my birthday, it is the fact that I’m going to be able see everybody and we can all enjoy ourselves.”

I reached over and took her hand in mine. “I think we’ll all have fun. Everybody’s looking forward to seeing you.”
The rest of the ride was in silence. Isabella kept looking out the windows and I imagined she was taking in the scenery with her new vampire eyes. A half hour later, I turned into the road leading to Felix and Demetri’s Formula One race track. There were several big rigs loaded with exotic cars and one loaded with cars that appeared to be destined to a scrap yard. Isabella was practically bouncing on her seat as we spotted our family waiting for us with smiles on their faces.

I cut off the engine and got out of the car so I could help Isabella out. I was actually surprised she hadn’t gotten out of the car already. Taking her hand in mine, we walked over towards the crowd. As we neared, her nervousness grew and I gave her hand a reassuring squeeze to let her know I was here.

I wasn’t sure how long we’d be able to stay. Earlier today, we had decided that if she wanted to leave at anytime, she could just either tell me. I even suggested she use the word ‘coffee’ if she was too uncomfortable about leaving early. I knew our family would understand.

I stopped when we were close and looked at Isabella. She looked over at me before smiling shyly towards the crowd.

“Hi everybody, thank you for coming out here,” she said.

I gave a nod and we were now greeted by handshakes, hugs and pats on the back. Everybody gave Isabella birthday greetings. I stayed close to make sure she wasn’t overwhelmed but I could tell she really missed seeing everybody.

“Bella!”

At the sound of her name being screamed out, Isabella looked up and saw Gianna standing next to Marcus.

“Gianna!” she replied and stepped towards the young vampire queen.

I walked with her in case Gianna suddenly got skittish and ran back to her mate. I didn’t want Isabella too close if Marcus felt his Gianna was in danger.

The two women came up close before stopping and stared for a few seconds before launching themselves at each other in a bearhug. They were both laughing and crying with joy. I was smiling
as I looked over at Marcus. He was looking at his wife fondly as the crowd moved towards the four of us.

“You look gr-” both women began and then started laughing once more.

Before they could say anything, the Peter and Alec sped by with what looked like a giant cake between them. I was about to ask why they would have human food here, when a familiar scent hit my nose. Judging from the amount of mischief coming from several more members of the Volturi, I decided to see how played out. Surely they knew not to piss off a newborn vampire.

“Happy birthday, Bella!” Alec exclaimed as he and Peter set the cake down on a table that was suddenly set up in front of her.

“What? Why do you have that?” Isabella asked as she looked at the multi-tiered, hot pink cake. “We don’t eat human food so why -”

She paused mid-sentence and sniffed the air. “That smells familiar,” she said softly and took another sniff. A sudden sadness came over her and I was quickly by her side.

“You okay, baby girl?”

“The smell... it brought back some human memories.. my...my dad. What is...” She sniffed again and then smiled. “Wait...is that...that’s shaving cream!”

She stepped closer to the cake and tilted her head. “I also smell cardboard?” She looked around. “This is a fake?”

“Surprise!” Jane replied with a huge grin. “We wanted to do something fun and since we didn’t want to waste food, we decided to make this out of old boxes and shaving foam. If Alec had his way, we would have had a giant Transformer instead of this pink number.” Everybody started to sing the ‘Happy Birthday’ song to her and from what I could tell, they were singing badly on purpose. Whether it was a way to keep the twins from arguing, it definitely took the attention away from them.

Isabella started to laugh. “That was...wow. Thank you.” She reached over and grabbed my hand before looking down on the floor. “Thank you for this...the party, the faux cake...everything.” She
started to fidget, much like when she was human, uncomfortable with being the center of attention. “You all have been so supportive to me and to Jasper...I think I can speak for him in saying that we’re both fortunate to have such a wonderful group. You’re all family to us.”

“Isabella,” Aro said as he emerged from the crowd. “There is a little something for you...for both of you, actually, inside the cake.” He gestured for her to find it immediately.

Isabella stuck her hand right into the cake. I was pleased she was actually excited to see her gift and moved so I was right next to her. When she pulled her arm out, she was holding onto a small velvet jewelry box.

She was suddenly apprehensive as she held onto the top and bottom half of the box and attempted to open it.

“She’s beautiful,” she whispered when she broke the delicate hinges.

Inside was an old-fashioned key with a jewel encrusted head.

“It’s beautiful,” Isabella said softly as she looked around and smiled.

“It is to symbolize you’re both family to us all and are always welcome at Volterra, no matter where you call home,” Aro explained.

Isabella looked up at me and sent me some of her gratitude before nodding her head towards the crowd. I sent both our emotions to the crowd.

“We’re both very moved,” I said. “Thank you all for making us feel welcome. It means a great deal for the both of us.” I reached over and wrapped my arm around Isabella, giving her a kiss on her temple.

“Let’s all have fun!” she said and looked at the key once more.

“Sorry we didn’t have that commissioned sooner,” Caius said once the Volturi started to move towards the exotic cars. Music started to play through the speakers as the festivities began. “Our
jeweler is actually a human and was on holiday for the past month.”

“You don’t use vampires to work on the jewelry?” Isabella asked.

“For certain things, like the ‘V’ the Volturi guards wear as part of their uniform is a design from Afton. He is almost certain he was a jeweler before the fell to the bubonic plague and would have nearly died if it weren’t for us looking for meals. Aro must have seen great things and decided to save him instead. For vampire related jewelry or weapons that resemble jewelry, we go to him. For other items, we continue to work with humans in an effort to keep the economy going.”

“If we relied solely on vampire skills, we might cause smaller countries to fall into bankruptcy,” Marcus said as he and Gianna moved towards us.

“That makes sense,” Isabella replied. “Does everybody get a symbolic key?”

“Now they do,” Marcus explained. “We used to have rings with a ‘V’ carved out of the onyx. Over the years, as the Volturi came to symbolize power and evoked fear from many, mainly thanks to Carlisle’s perception of us, we decided to change things. We thought if people came to see the initial and were automatically frightened, we should incorporate it into official business. The key is different, it is how we truly view each other...we’re a family and we will always welcome you back. We do have the soldiers who aren’t family right now but rather, they’re employed by us. When they’ve served their time and they want to stay, eventually they have the opportunity to be welcomed into our family.”

I nodded. “Makes perfect sense,” I commented, remembering how I was told to remove that piece of Cullen jewelry what seemed like ages ago. “We both consider y’all family too.”

“So did that silversmith, Mikael, work on the key?” Isabella asked.

I realized with the whole Maria incident and then Isabella’s change, Mikael was almost a forgotten factor.

“No,” Caius replied and sighed. “After the Maria incident, we sent a few guards to meet with our soldiers to intercept Maria’s army. Peter told you about the young vampire who was going to join our soldiers?” I nodded. “She had a letter, written in Mikael’s fiancée’s hand...Sophie was her name. Our theory is the young vampire must have grown close to Sophie and was able to compose quick note for the vampire to relay to Mikael. She had the note inside a jacket, we found a mile
“Did you manage to give Mikael the letter so he had some closure?” Isabella asked.

“We did and he left his jewelry stand almost immediately. He left that night, headed towards Russia. Unfortunately, just a few days ago, there was a report of a major, multi-car accident near the Ural Mountains. Mikael barely made it alive, he’s currently at a hospital in a drug induced coma.”

Isabella squeezed my hand, suddenly feeling sad. “That is horrible news. Was...did he cause the accident?”

Caius shook his head. “No, there was bad visibility and a car tried to beat a train. Authorities thought the car spun out of control due to the high speed and then caused a chain reaction. We’ve made a generous donation to the hotel towards Mikael’s hospital bills. It isn’t a guarantee that he’ll survive, but he’s getting the proper care he needs.”

“Thank you for telling us about him. I know I just spoiled my birthday with all this sad talk. Can we still have fun tonight?”

“Sure, go enjoy!” Caius exclaimed. “See the silver cooler? There are blood bags in there. Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to find Dora. I know she’s got her eye on that new Ferrari prototype.” He ran off looking for his queen.

“You okay, baby girl?”

“Yeah, I feel like I just spoiled the party.”

“Nonsense,” I said. “Look around you. Everybody is still enjoying themselves. You ready to try driving?”

“Hell yes!” she said. “Wait, maybe you should hang onto the key. I mean, I still can’t wear my wedding rings yet, I shouldn’t be touching something so delicate and pretty.”
I slipped the key into my pocket. “Okay, we’re going to have to use one of the less elegant cars. You’re okay with that right?”

“Sure, I just want to drive,” she said. “But first, let me change into jeans.”

Once she was ready, we walked over to where the junk cars were. I knew Peter made sure they were still in running order so I watched to see which car Isabella would choose.

“Oh, this car is horrible looking!” she said and pointed to a rusted out, green Ford Pinto. “Let’s take this one because I won’t feel bad at all if I destroy it.”

I nodded and walked around to open the driver’s side so she could climb in before getting into the passenger side. If I wasn’t a vampire, I probably would have wretched. The inside of the car still smelled like cigarettes, some sort of human snack food and a dirty gym socks.

“Now don’t get too distracted with everybody ahead and those who will pass you,” I said and pointed towards the track, hearing the cracked, vinyl seat creak with my movement. “Just concentrate on this car so you can learn the mechanics as well as your control.”

“Aye, aye captain,” she said and smiled. I watched as she grasped the key with her thumb and forefinger and turned the ignition. It was a rough first attempt as the gears ground together and she tried again. On the third attempt, she was able to get the motor cranked and then gingerly shifted the car into ‘Drive’.

“I miss driving, even this piece of junk,” she said as she pressed on the accelerator causing the car to lurch forward. “Dammit. Sorry...I’ll get it right soon.”

It didn’t take long for her to adjust to the pressure of the pedal. Once she was on the track, her confidence grew and she was enjoying the fact that she was driving.

“They’re stopping!” she exclaimed as she rounded another corner.

“You’re the birthday girl! Of course we’d stop!” Peter yelled out of a bright green Lamborghini.
With every cheer and word of encouragement she received, her grin grew bigger and bigger.

“I’m going to go faster now,” she said as we took on a hairpin turn.

Soon, we were going nearly 80 miles an hour. Behind us, Gianna and Marcus had just gotten onto the track in a yellow VW Bug.

“You’re doing great, baby girl,” I said as she pressed the accelerator a little harder. The instrument panel showed she was close to redlining and I could hear the slight sputtering from the tiny, underpowered engine.

All of a sudden, there was a loud pop. We must have blown a tire and sure enough, the damn car started to fishtail. Isabella tried to correct the steering and must have pulled too hard to the left causing the back end of the car to slam onto the concrete barrier.

I immediately smelled it.

“Isabella, we need to get out of the car now,” I said and hoped she didn’t panic.

“Shit! Is that gasoline?” she asked and started to fumble with the door handle. “I broke it, Jasper!”

“Kick it,” I said as I got out of my side and hurried to her.

“Come on,” I said and sped us to a safer distance. “We would have been okay since we reacted like vampires,” I said looking at the car that was now engulfed with flames. “Up until you broke the door handle, you didn’t seem to panic.”

“No, I was fine until then. The thought of fire scared me,” she said. “I wasn’t sure how long before the car blew up. I thought there would be enough time but wasn’t absolutely sure. Oh god, I hope I didn’t fuck up the track.”

“You were good, Isabella,” I said as we watched Demetri and Felix arrive with some emergency equipment to put out the fire and tow the destroyed car away.
“Look,” I said and pointed to Felix who was giving us the thumbs up. “You didn’t damage the track. Do you still want to drive?”

“Yeah, I just won’t go so fast like that. I don’t want to blow out another tire. I think I ought to drive slower until get better control and can use a real car. What do you think?”

“Sounds like a good idea, baby girl. You were doing really well before you started to speed things up.”

The next few hours, Isabella drove a few more cars. Some lasted longer than others. There was no repeat of the Pinto incident, but some cars just died on the track due to their age or lack of care. We took breaks so I could drive some fancy sports cars and Isabella admired the way I was able to maneuver around the track with very little effort.

Everybody was having a great time and it showed. Just like Isabella, Gianna was drove a few of the junk cars to the ground as well and right now, the two were cruising around the track in a burgundy colored Oldsmobile with giant wire-spoke wheels, laughing and talking about the upcoming coronation celebration. Their conversation easily heard by everybody.

“It’s more of a party,” Gianna explained. “Just think of something significant that occurred in your time. It should be easy for us since we’re the youngest.”

“I think I can do that,” Isabella replied. “Is there enough time to order costumes?”

“There should be. It will be fun too. Everybody will be there and maybe some other important vampires.”

“Not the Cullens, I hope.”

Several of us chuckled lightly at the comment. I looked up at Aro who was shaking his head and mouthing out ‘no.’

“No, Marcus said they’re not important enough to attend. Besides, we wouldn’t invite them without letting you and Jasper know. You two are family. Remember that.”
“Okay, you have a point. Gianna? Can I drive now?”

Three hours before dawn, the party ended. The exotic cars were loaded back into the covered car carrier while the destroyed cars were loaded onto a scrap hauler with Peter at the helm. We all said our goodbyes before heading back home.

“Did you have enough blood?” I asked as we got onto the main road.

“I did,” she said. “Gianna and I were drinking them when we drove around the pimp car.”

I laughed at her response. “I’m glad you both spent some time together.”

“I am too. I know you have been telling me the things I was doing was normal, but to realize someone else was going through the same, exact thing really helps. So were you all able to hear our conversation about the party?” I nodded. “What are you going to wear? Will you wear a uniform?”

“Baby girl, would you like me to wear a Civil War uniform?”

I was hit by a sudden burst of lust and knew immediately that the answer was an emphatic yes.

“Would you mind? I bet you’d look handsome,” she said as she tried to look nonchalant about it.

“Well, I guess I could,” I replied, toying with her. “I was thinking of dressing up as Abe Lincoln or something.”

“What? Why would you do that?” she exclaimed.

She was getting upset at my decision and since we were still in the car, I decided to stop teasing her. “I was just playin’ baby girl. I think it might be fun to dress up in a Confederate uniform again. So what are you going to wear?”
“I think I have an idea but I’ll need to do some research online. It will be a pop-culture reference though,” she said. “I might end up destroying our current stock of old computers but I want to surprise you.”

“Okay baby girl. I won’t ask but if you need my help, you get me.”

“I will. Jasper? Did you have fun tonight?”

“I had a blast. Did you, birthday girl?”

“Other than setting a car on fire, yeah! I had a great time!”

“Well, I don’t think the fire was all your fault,” I said and then explained how Pintos got a bad stigma back in the day because of potential fires from similar accidents.

“So how is it that Peter managed to find one of them around?”

“You know him, he has his strange ways. Maybe somebody had it in their barn all this time and then discovered it. It looked like it was from the States so maybe he just ordered one somehow.”

“You’re right, he does have his ways. That was one ugly and stinky car.”

I chuckled and brought her hand to my lips. “I’m glad you enjoyed yourself tonight.”

“Well, I know technically it is the day after now but it is still the 13th back in the States and I want you as my present.”

I gunned the engine.

“I actually have a real present for you, baby girl,” I replied as I tried not to think about what she had in mind for later. “Look in the glove box.”
She reached inside and pulled out a satin jewelry pouch. Inside was an exact replica of her wedding band and engagement ring.

“I had a copy made so you’d be able to wear them and if they get destroyed, you wouldn’t feel so bad,” I explained. “The jewels are crystal and the metal is silver.”

“They’re beautiful,” she replied and took a hold of my hand, examining her rings that were still on my pinky. “If you hadn’t said it, I probably wouldn’t have looked. I can see the difference. I’m glad you’re keeping the real set safe. I guess you can put those away for now. I’ll wear these and not feel bad if they get destroyed.”

“I have a couple extra sets at the house too. Don’t worry, I’ll keep this set safe.”

A few minutes later we arrived back in the house and once I helped Isabella out of the car, she practically dragged me into the house and up the stairs.

“I love you, Jasper,” she said and pushed me against the wall before pressing her body against mine. “Thank you, for everything.”

“You’re welcome, baby girl,” I said as I wrapped my arms around her before pulling her into a long, passionate kiss.

Our hands began to wander, ripping off clothing as love and lust swirled around us. Ever since she had mentioned me wearing a uniform she had been aroused.

“Shower, Jasper,” she murmured as she pushed off of me removing the last tattered bits of clothing.

I nodded and pulled her rings off to set in a small jewelry box that sat on the bathroom counter, before following her into the steamy shower.

Once inside, I pulled her into my arms as the water rained down on us.

“I want to try something,” she whispered as she started leaving a trail of kisses along my neck.
“What?”

“Just enjoy and don’t argue with the birthday girl,” she said and pushed me against the wall.

“Yes, ma’am” I replied as she slid down to her knees.

Oh shit, I about lost it right there as I saw her looking up at me with her beautiful eyes darkened with lust. I was breathing heavily even though I didn’t need to as she dragged her fingertips down my thighs, lightly raking my skin with her nails. I was already hard and didn’t know what would happen once she wrapped her lips around me.

I tilted my head against the wall and shut my eyes as I felt her breath on my hip, teasing and making me even harder.

“Isabella,” I whispered almost painfully.

“Shh, just enjoy,” she said and wrapped her fingers around me, squeezing lightly.

I hissed out and opened my eyes to see her mouth open, her tongue reaching out to lick and taste.

“Oh fuck,” I moaned out and let out a growl when she took me into her mouth.

She felt amazing. She only tried this once when she was human and I nearly lost control before I had to stop her. Now, knowing she was not as fragile, I was lost to the sensations. Her mouth was warm and her tongue kept exploring the underside of my cock. Amazing was actually an understatement as I began to feel a tightening sensation near my stomach.

She kept at it, her head bobbing in a steady rhythm. It had been so long... decades, hell, more like nearly a century since I was pleasured like this. My eyes were open now and I looked down at her as she continued her sweet, agonizing torture. Without thought, my hands wove around her wet hair and I began to thrust in time with her movements. When I felt her throat I stopped and panicked, hoping I didn’t hurt her.
She didn’t say anything but smiled around me and gave me a saucy wink. I took her response as permission to continue moving my hips. She was excited as hell as I started to fuck her mouth. I could hear myself calling her name out in between curses, but for the most part, I wasn’t thinking about much of anything. I was getting close and when my balls started to tighten, I started to grow worried.

By now, her hands were grabbing onto my ass as I continued to move frantically.

“Baby girl, I’m so fuckin’ close,” I growled out.

She continued to hold onto me as I moved closer and closer.

“I’m gonna come,” I grunted out, giving her a chance to move away.

She stayed and held onto me even tighter. I thrust a few more times before I roared out her name, slowing down as I started to throb.

“Was it good?” she asked as she ran her tongue around the corners of her mouth, licking any evidence of my release on her.

“Fuck, that was beyond good,” I replied as I pulled her up to her feet. “That was...that was...wow.”

She laughed. “Did I actually leave you momentarily speechless?”

“Yeah, baby girl, you did,” I said and shut the water off. “Did I hurt you? I was a little more forceful than I probably should.”

“You didn’t hurt me, Jasper. Did you really like it? I mean, I only did what I remembered from listening to locker room talk and reading magazines.”

“I loved it baby girl. It was fuckin’ amazing.”

Once we were both dry, I picked her up and threw her over my shoulder.
“Now it’s my turn to ravage you.”

Chapter End Notes

So what did you think of Bella’s birthday celebration?

My dad had to drive a Pinto for a while when I was a kid. The only thing I remember was it was a green color.

Thanks for reading! Until next time, sushi.
Chapter 80

Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday!

Thank you all for continuing to read this story!

Here is the next chapter that was pre-read and scrubbed by LetsJustDance. All other mistakes are mine.

I’m not SM - just like to play with her characters.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 79

BPOV

“When I come after you, you have a tendency to spin away in one direction. You need to mix it up, try using the element of surprise to your advantage.”

I glared at him but knew he had a point. “Okay,” I grumbled.

“This is why we’re moving at this slower pace, so you’ll get used to the movements.”

I nodded at Jasper and resumed my fighting stance. Seconds later, he jogged towards me and this time, I ducked down and then rolled away from his initial attack.

“That’s great, baby girl!” he exclaimed as he helped me off the ground. “Ready for a break?”

“Yeah, sit with me?” I asked as I grabbed a bag of blood from the nearby cooler. “Want one too?”

“Sure, I’ll take one.”
For the past few weeks, we’ve been working on some basic fighting skills. We started moving at a human pace and have progressively moved faster so that it was almost dance-like. It was strictly no-contact, something I had protested at first, but Jasper reassured me this was a foundation to fighting and in order to be an adept fighter, learning the basics was important. He wanted me to be used to the fluid movements and to react as a seasoned vampire would, not as a newborn.

We’ve already worked on my attack. At first, I moved straight forward when he ran towards me. He explained afterwards how it was natural and purely instinctual, especially for a young vampire. Since then, we worked on getting me to grow comfortable in moving laterally and vertically as I tried to fend off would-be attackers.

“I hear a car coming,” I said when I was nearly done with my blood.

“Your senses are strong and you’re on alert. That’s good. It took a fraction of a second before I heard it. Does the engine sound familiar?”

I closed my eyes and concentrated on the motor revving. “I can’t tell the type of car just from the sound, but I can tell it isn’t wimpy.”

Jasper chuckled as he finished his blood bag. “What else do you hear?”

The faint sounds of country music could be heard. “Hmm... is that George Strait?”

“Yeah, that’s really good!” he replied and smiled, sending me pride. “Are you okay greeting them on your own? I’m gonna go and put on some clothes that can withstand our upcoming wrestling match.”

“I can do that,” I said and got up to meet my brother and sister.

“Bella!” Char exclaimed as soon as they got out of the car.

I flashed up to them and gave them quick hugs, explaining that Jasper was changing.
“So are you excited to see them wrestle?” Char asked as she linked arms with mine and we headed to the back yard.

“Yeah, are you ready, Peter?” I asked.

“Sure am,” he said and began to flex his muscles. “Is my brother dollin’ himself up?”

Jasper appeared in front of his brother and grinned. “Don’t hold back, brother.”

Peter scoffed. “When have I ever?”

“Are they going to hurt themselves?” I whispered to Char as we sat down to watch.

“Nah, they’ve been having these mock battles for ages. They know not to bite or anything but they’ll come close. You’ll learn quite a bit from watching them.”

“We’re almost ready,” Jasper said as he looked up at the sky.

“It’s a good storm today,” Peter replied.

The men started to circle each other as the sky began to darken and the air pressure changed. As soon as the thunder rumbled, they began to move at each other. Lightning started to flash as Jasper and Peter moved fast and fluid, taking turns attacking each other. They were evenly matched as they used arm takedowns and leg sweeps on each other. When one was on the ground, seemingly defeated, he jumped quickly and managed to counter with moves of his own.

“Wow, they are good,” I murmured, engrossed in their mock battle.

“In all their time together as civilians, there had been only one time when they actually hurt each other.”

“Oh? This looks pretty real though, minus the fact they’re not biting.”
“If this was real, they’d be growling like rabid animals,” Char explained. “Trying to bite or otherwise maim each other would be another telltale sign. Look at their faces. See the occasional smile? They’re serious but having fun at the same time.”

“So they have actually brawled?”

“It was decades ago and Jasper lost his finger and his wedding band.”

I thought for a brief second. “I vaguely remember that story. You mentioned it the night we went to shop for Jasper’s ring, right?”

She nodded and told me the story of how they had started wrestling like this but then Peter started to taunt Jasper about Alice. More specifically, he started to taunt Jasper about how Alice treated him like a servant.

“It didn’t help that pretty boy here was wearing preppy clothes. All he needed was a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and he’d have passed as a nerd from the 1950s,” Peter quipped as he grappled with Jasper.

“Jesus, do you have to remind me that I dressed like a damn pussy back then?” Jasper growled out as he tossed his brother over his shoulder.

Char shook her head and I could see she was trying not to laugh at the guys’ antics.

“She didn’t treat any of you like family, even Jasper, did she?”

“No, she looked at us as though we were second class citizens. It wasn’t a surprise that the ‘holier than thou’ Cullens did, but she was his wife. She should have given him some support, not treat him like a pet project.” She gave me a hug. “Don’t worry, that is all water under the bridge. Besides, she’s now at Volterra, drinking farm animal slop and wearing fake couture.”

“She’s wearing fake labels? Didn’t they talk about doing that before my change?” I asked as I continued to watch the guys wrestle around, the ground now full of body-sized divots.
“It was Aro’s way of placating the queens. They weren’t happy learning of her so-called dream of being part of royalty so they decided, especially learning that she used her gift to manipulate people into dressing a specific way, to find counterfeit clothing for her - badly made counterfeit clothing. Aro finally agreed a week after your birthday and Chelsea was more than happy to weave that compulsion too.”

“Alice is still clueless about all of it? The compulsion and her gift?”

“Yeah, Aro hasn’t seen another vision from her. He knows if there is another real vision, to just let her believe it is false. They’re so infrequent now she won’t know the difference.”

“Do they...the Cullens, do they know all the details?”

“She still keeps in regular touch with the Cullens and they don’t appear to suspect anything. Aro also gives regular, ‘official’ reports to Carlisle. He hasn’t said much about progress and it’s true. Nothing in the archives indicate a reason or even a cure.” Char suddenly pointed at the guys. “Watch this. I think you’ll be impressed.”

I drew all my attention back to Jasper and Peter as they started to move away from each other until they were nearly a football field length away. Suddenly, they sped towards each other and as soon as they got within 6 feet, they both jumped and did a move that would have made Keanu Reeves’ character in ‘The Matrix’ very jealous.

“Wow, that was cool!” I exclaimed as they continued spinning around each other, ducking and diving from punches and kicks. “Will I be able to learn to do that?”

“With practice, you’ll come pretty close. Hey, you should secure your hair better.”

I reached up and touched the messy bun on top of my head. “Oh?”

“I suppose it must have slipped Jasper’s mind,” Char said and glared quickly at her brother. “Your hair could be used against you if you’re not careful. Your opponent could grab you by pulling on it and while it won’t fall off, they could use it to their advantage. Besides, you don’t want to draw attention to your head at any time.”
“I would have told her eventually,” Jasper said as the two took turns throwing each other onto the ground. “But thank you for explaining.”

I started to undo my hair and quickly braided it, just like Char had done with hers.

“Do you want to practice your moves with me?” Char asked.

“Sure, that would be great!”

“Okay, follow me. Any indication of another shield yet?”

I shook my head. “No, so we’re just going on the assumption that my shield is only mental. If it does appear, we’ll adjust accordingly. We’re just going to go with the theory that I only have one. If another happens to manifest itself, it will be an added bonus. Either way, I want to have a good foundation of fighting.”

“That’s a good plan. You won’t come to rely on your gift to save you. We’ve seen too many vampires become arrogant and use their gift. They become too dependent.”

“Um, like the Cullens?”

She smirked as we found a spot that was still close to the guys but allowed us room to move about.

“Like them and like the ones we fought during the Southern Wars.” Char crouched down slightly. “Okay Bella, you attack first.”

I backed up until I was about 50 yards away from her before I started to run forward. I headed in a straight line but at the last minute, veered over to my left in hopes I could trick her.

Instead, she anticipated me and quickly mimed a hip toss.
“Try again,” she said and once again positioned herself, facing me.

Once again, I backed away and then headed towards her, ducking down to aim for her knees at the last minute.

Just like before, she maneuvered out of the potential danger and I would have been bitten if this had been a real fight.

“Your shoulders move in the direction you head just moments before you actually act on it,” she explained. “Now try again.”

I repeated my motion and as I got near her, she started to talk to me.

“So Jasper said he took you into town yesterday,” she said and threw me off my concentration.

“Huh?” I replied and then realized we were still in a mock battle. “Oh yeah, we did, I think I did okay.”

“Continue talking to me while we fight,” she instructed. “Your brain will be able to do both at the same time. The added bonus is you might not overthink your movements.”

I followed her instruction, moving forward as I continued to explain my adventure. “It was cool to see the town through vampire eyes now. We walked around for a bit, but I started to smell the blood and got scared that I would attack the village.” I leapt into the air and came close to kicking her square on the shoulder.

“Great job!” she exclaimed as I landed on my feet. “Do you notice your brain accommodating the extra thoughts?”

I nodded. “I never paid attention to it before.”

“You looked good, Isabella,” Jasper said he stood near Peter. “She was great last night. We managed to walk a circle at human speed before she started to feel nervous and hold her breath.”
“You just made it sound so easy!” I exclaimed just as he me pulled towards him and planted a kiss on my temple. “I immediately held my breath as we walked back to the car. Those few minutes were agonizing because I didn’t want to attack.”

“Oh, Bella, you’re too hard on yourself,” Char said and smiled. “The fact that you recognized the potential problem and moved away to avoid it is an accomplishment. You really should be proud of yourself.”

“Little one, Char and I... hell, Jasper too... we’ve seen vampires who were several years older that couldn’t do what you did. You ought to pat yourself on the back.”

I looked at the ground and toed the mud a little as I quickly replayed their words and the memories of last night. “I guess you’re right,” I admitted somewhat reluctantly. “I guess I need to stop setting such lofty goals and look at the smaller ones as successes.”

“Just remember, it’s okay to set expectations and goals but when you’re still young in this life, you can break them down into smaller achievements,” Peter said while the other two nodded their heads in agreement.

“Okay, I’ll remember that. Hey, when can I visit Volterra?” I asked, purposely changing the subject. Even though I was a vampire, I still wasn’t keen on all the attention.

“Are you up to the drive and all?” Jasper asked as he sent his concern to me.

“Well...I mean, we won’t have to spend all day there. Plus they have some quieter areas in case things get overwhelming...”

Jasper raked his fingers through his hair and then looked at me. “Did the scent of the other vampires bother you when we saw them over your birthday?”

I shook my head. “No. I did notice them though, like Gianna’s scent has a hint of rosemary and citrus. Why?”

“We’ll be in closer quarters and I don’t want you overwhelmed by all the vampires,” Jasper
“Do blood bags keep you calmer?” Char asked and I nodded. “They will have them available and look at it this way, you can stock up as well.”

“It will be good,” I added. “We’ll be there in a couple weeks for the Gianna’s coronation party. I just wanted to see them before the celebrations.”

“Speaking of which, have you picked out your outfit yet?” Char asked.

“Sort of. I ordered a couple different ones in case I changed my mind,” I replied.

“And she destroyed almost a dozen computers as she placed the order herself,” Jasper said and then squeezed my hand. “I know you wanted to do it on your own, but I will always be here to help you.”

I smiled and gave him a quick peck on the lips. “I know. This was something I wanted to do,” I replied and thought back to the conversation earlier. “Besides, it was good practice - the very last computer wasn’t busted up that bad compared to the others.”

“Peter, Char do y’all want to let them know we’ll be arriving?” Jasper asked just as I turned towards the house.

“While you figure things out, I’ll go and change out of these clothes,” I said.

Once I was inside, I could still hear Jasper talking to his brother and sister as they neared the house. They were going to go ahead of us so we would meet them there. Their concern was my close proximity to Rosa and I didn’t blame them. I didn’t want to hurt her after all she did to help us.

“You promise to let me know if you’re feeling overwhelmed and need to go?” Jasper asked as he
changed out of his muddied clothes.

“I promise,” I said as I grabbed some clothes.

After a quick change into a simple skirt and blouse, which were about the only things I had been able to master, I slipped on my flip flops and headed back downstairs.

The car ride was uneventful. I was excited though and from the small smile on Jasper’s lips, I knew he could feel it as well.

I began to play with the different buttons on the car. I was careful not to apply too much pressure and break something and was proud of myself that I could adjust the temperature on my heated seat even though I really didn’t need it.

“We’re almost there. You having fun?”

I laughed and stuck my tongue out at him. “Did you see? I didn’t break anything!”

“You did good, baby girl. Are you taking Peter’s advice and making your milestones smaller?”

“Yeah, he had a good point. I figured instead of fewer, big milestones, I could break it down to smaller ones and they could, in theory, be more frequent.”

“You’ve got a good attitude about it. I’m really proud of you,” he said and reached for my hand. “Here we are.”

Once we were both out of the car, we walked together into the main lobby area. Inside, Peter and Char were there along with Aro, Felix and Heidi. I noticed Rosa sitting behind her desk and waved to her.

“Welcome back!” she replied with a wave. I could hear her heart beating a little faster than before.

“Jasper, I think I’m scaring her,” I said in vampire speed.
“It’s okay,” Aro answered. “Whitlocks, welcome!” He was speaking slower and louder now for Rosa’s benefit. “I’ve got something to show you.”

We followed him through a set of double, carved doors.

“I’m sorry if I scared her,” I said.

“It’s okay. She knew you had just been turned so she was nervous. Don’t worry, we would have intervened,” he replied and I felt Jasper squeezing my hand in reassurance.

We walked through another set of ornately carved doors and into a huge room.

“Here we are,” Aro said with a grand, sweeping arm gesture. “This is the ballroom where the festivities will take place.”

The room reminded me of something from a fairy tale. There were carved and gilded columns that supported a glass dome and from the lack of sparkles reflecting off of our skin, I knew it was the special glass they used. The walls around the room were filled with murals depicting the kings and queens in what seemed to be different periods of history.

“This is beautiful,” I murmured as I slowly turned to take everything in. “Wow, the murals are just...wow!”

Aro laughed. “I’ll let Sulpicia and Athenodora know you liked their artwork.”

“They painted them?” I asked.

“A couple decades ago, they decided to carefully remove the ancient frescoes and display them around the castle. You see one of them at the lobby and there are a few more along the corridors. Since we don’t use this room often, they both felt it was a shame to hide the frescoes in here and decided to paint murals of us all instead.” He pointed to a painting with the three queens in modern ballgowns and the kings in elegant tuxes. “This was done just last week. Gianna won’t see this officially until the night of her party but we all dressed up to take an official, royal photo and then they painted this.”
“Is she excited?”

“For the most part, I believe she is, but my Sulpicia and sister in-law have been running her ragged with all the protocol. It doesn’t help that she’s still very young in her new life, like you are. She’s determined and has Marcus to help her along the way as well. Did anybody mention the dance to you?”

I looked at Jasper and we both shrugged.

“It is tradition when we open our parties, to have a dance. Usually we don’t have enough vampire couples to add the more intricate movements so we’ve had to take those steps out, but you’re both more than welcome to join us if you’re interested.”

It took a few seconds to catch what he was saying. “You invite humans to these celebrations?”

“We do and since this is to commemorate a coronation, we extended our invitations to more than just our usual art and history patrons. There will be some government officials and perhaps a few celebrities as well. We will also have vampires but they’ve been vetted to make sure they can mingle with humans and not harm them. For them, it will just be a grand costume party, not realizing we will all be wearing something that represents something from our human lives. At the end, we make sure Chelsea has compelled the crowd so they would remember having a grand time but nothing vampire related.”

“But I’m a newborn,” I whispered in a slight panic and immediately felt Jasper calming me down. “What if I lose control or get hungry?”

“We will have room where you and Gianna could escape to, if needed. It’s over there,” he explained and pointed to a niche in the wall. “It’s what Sulpicia and Athenodora like to call a ‘fainting room’, just like back in the days when women wore corsets. There will be blood bags in there for you both, should you need them. We all have confidence in the two of you though.”

I smiled. “Thank you. Can you show me the dance?”

“I can. Do you mind, Jasper?”
Jasper smiled. “I’ll watch the steps,” he said and took a step back.

“The first thing we do is face each other and I’ll bow while you curtsy,” he explained.

The dance was similar to a waltz that Jasper had taught me but there were also some fancy twirls and footwork I knew I wouldn’t have gotten as a human. I quickly got the hang of it and imagined how elegant this dance would be if everybody wore fancy ball gowns.

We were going through the steps once more when the doors to the ballroom suddenly opened.

“Sir, the queen is looking for you,” Renata announced.

“Thank you for the dance,” Aro said and bowed once again before running out. “I shall see you two at the ball.”

“Let’s try this,” Jasper said as he took Aro’s place and bowed.

“Quick learners! You two definitely have to join in the dance!” Renata exclaimed once we went through all the steps. “You’ll both do great!”

“So who are these vampires who will be here,” I asked out of curiosity. “I would have asked Aro but he ran off so quickly.”

Renata laughed. “He knows not to rile up Sulpicia,” she said with a wink. “The vampires will be those who are close to the Volturi. I believe at one point, the Cullens would have gotten an invitation but due to the circumstances, he’ll be sending the coronation announcement after the fact.”

“Oh good!” I said. “Could you imagine if they showed up? I really did think they would, especially with Alice here.”

“The kings wouldn’t do that without consulting with you two first,” she said as the three of us walked around the room. “You two are more family than the Cullens will ever be. There was a rift before and that chasm has grown after we all learned about the way they treated you two. It will
take time for the Cullens to get back on his good graces, if ever. It isn’t just Aro, both Caius and Marcus feel the same way.”

As we walked by a mural of the kings and queens wearing Renaissance clothes, a thought came to my head.

“Renata, that story about Luca had me thinking, you mentioned something about his lineage. At the time it didn’t occur to me, but could there be some sort of link with Alice?” I asked and began to apologize for not mentioning it earlier.

“No, there is no harm done. We’ve all been newborn vampires before,” she replied and halted. “Back to your original question, anything is possible. “What is her background? Do either of you know?”

“She doesn’t know much of her human life,” Jasper began. “It’s a bit of a mystery other than she was institutionalized in Mississippi during the early part of the 1900s and she was known as Mary Alice Brandon.” He continued to explain what little we all learned, thanks to that nomad James and then some research after. “There were no records of her at all, either before or during her stay at the asylum. Hell, I managed to find records of my human life and I was born decades before her.”

“See?” I quipped out. “Not to make light of her past, but if she was able to channel her visions while she was human, there would be reason to put her in an asylum, right? It’s a stretch but a seer could also be a sort of mystic.” I looked at the both of them and didn’t see any doubt coming from Renata or Jasper so I continued with my theory. “And then we have to consider her deteriorating gift. I’m not saying that there is a definite connection, but maybe her DNA could uncover things. Even something about her lineage, though it might not mean anything given her current plight.”

“Hold on,” Renata said and pulled out her phone. “Alec, come up to the ballroom, you will want to hear this.” After she put her phone back in her pocket, she looked over at me. “Do you mind repeating what you said when Alec comes up? He’s got the most knowledge of this DNA project and he might be able to tell you more than I can.”

“Sure,” I said just as the doors opened and Alec flashed over.

The four of us went into the ‘fainting room’ and sat on the lounge chairs. As I gave Alec my theory, I could feel Jasper sending me a great deal of pride. It was only after I was done that Alec said anything.
“It makes sense now that you brought it up. I have to admit the thought entered my mind but I didn’t think it was a viable theory given Luca’s Gypsy background and Alice’s expensive taste. I thought she was a person of society but the idea that she might share a similar background to Luca is more than I have now. Plus, in terms of practicality, I didn’t look at Europe and just concentrated on the North American data.”

“This could all be some crazy theory of mine,” I said. I really didn’t want to get too excited over a crazy hypothesis. “Is it extensive work to match her up?”

“Not really. It’s a lengthy process though even with our vampire brains to get the profile, but once it is created, we can easily pair it with another to see if there are matches and if so, the percentage...” Alec drifted off in his thoughts. “Are you comfortable enough to come down to the lab?”

“I’m good,” I said. “I might need a blood bag after but I’m okay for now.”

“Don’t overextend yourself, baby girl,” Jasper whispered. “If you need a break, just let us know.”

“I will,” I admitted, grateful that everybody was so caring.

It took us less than a minute to go down into the laboratory and immediately, Alec began to type on a massive computer. “This is going to be more detailed than say, a DNA test to determine paternity.” A rotating double helix design appeared on the screen. “I’m not going to get into the entire code today, this is a broad overview.”

A panel of bars and lines in various shades of color was projected onto the screen. “Okay, now here is Luca’s DNA on the screen,” he explained. “Now on the second screen, I have Alice’s.” After her’s appeared, the two panels began to move close together until one panel showed. “Now this is the difficult part is finding the matches and the degree of matches,” he explained and pointed. “I can see a couple matches which means, at the very least, they do share a common heritage but that doesn’t exactly indicate that they are true relatives. We can’t determine until we do more research. I don’t want to get your hopes up.”

“This is interesting. I noticed on Alice’s panel, the lines and bars were a little not completely straight, but wavy, or were my eyes deceiving me?” I asked. “The pattern was also longer.”

“That is a great observation!” Alec commended and pulled up a couple more panels. “I hope you’re
still interested in helping out here. I think you’ll be a great addition. These are yours, Bella. On the left is when you were human and on the right, we gathered a sample of your venom. What do you see?”

“The pattern, for the most part is similar but on the right, the lines are wavier and longer.”

“Would that be due to the venom?” Jasper asked.

“Yep,” Alec replied and pulled up one more panel. “This is your profile, Jasper.”

Alec went on to explain that my minimal exposure to Jasper’s venom while still a human didn’t alter my DNA until more venom was introduced into my body.

“The best guess analogy I can think of is the venom hooks onto the human DNA, which is why you see the jagged lines or barbs. Then during the actual change, it appears that your DNA pattern becomes longer as you can see. And if you were to match it up with Jasper’s, you can see where many areas are almost an exact match.”

I looked at the profiles on the screen as I gathered my thoughts. “So what you’re saying is once we become vampires, we’re linked via DNA with our maker while still carrying many of our genes from when we were human?”

“Exactly,” Alec replied. “Your human DNA remains and there is an addition to your profile string, thanks to your maker or sire. I didn’t see this or knew about it until the evidence presented itself, thanks to you, Jasper, Marcus and Gianna.”

“We had wondered if there was any linkage for ages,” Renata interjected. “Mostly out of curiosity but now the evidence is there.”

“I’d imagine there’s a huge potential for research,” I murmured as my brain began to spewing ideas. It was a little overwhelming, but very exciting at the same time.

“Huge potential,” Alec replied. “It’s one thing to have the profile. The next step is to interpret what the patterns mean and if we can isolate the vampire strains. Just think, maybe one day we’ll be able to find a way to inoculate ourselves so we don’t sparkle or something. I mean, anything is possible.”
“Wouldn’t that be something?” Renata quipped.

“That’s my girl,” Jasper said and pulled me into a hug. “So damn proud of you. Your dad would have been too.”

I smiled as I wrapped my arms around him. “I’m damn proud of me too.” I looked up at Alec and Renata. “Thank you for testing out the theory. Like I said, it could be a wild goose chase but we should find out if Alice losing her gift is something that could affect us one day, you know?”

“No Bella, thank you for bringing it up!” Renata replied and smiled. “It might be something or it might not be. We won’t know until we check.”

“Exactly what she said. I’ll concentrate on her DNA now and see if I can discover anything. When you’re ready, maybe we can work together in more extensive studies with regards to our vampire DNA?”

“Yeah,” I said and nodded. “I’d like that but I want to make sure I am in control first and foremost. Speaking of which, I’m starting to get that twitchy sort of feeling.”

Jasper immediately got up and the four of us left the lab, stopping to grab a blood bag for me and a supply for the house.

Once we got back to the main floor of the castle, I knew it was time to go back home. We said our goodbyes and headed outside.

“You did really good, baby girl,” Jasper said as we left the castle grounds. “You okay?”

“I’m feeling a bit overwhelmed,” I admitted. “It was a good visit though. Do you mind sending me some of my human sleepy vibes? My brain just feels like it’s on overdrive with all that we learned today.”

“I can do that,” he said and pressed a button on the console so my chair reclined back. “Do your Yoga breathing and close your eyes. We’ll be home soon. I love you, Isabella and I’m so damn, fucking proud of you today.”
“Love you too, Jasper,” I replied and smiled as I shut my eyes and relaxed.


Later that day in the castle...

Alice POV

“No, Carlisle, there is still isn’t any news but they haven’t gotten worse,” I said through the microphone as I SKYPEd with my dad.

“You’re looking good,” Esme replied with a sad smile.

“They’re really treating me well here,” I replied and smoothed down my Christian Dior dress. I still couldn’t believe all the new clothes I was receiving on a regular basis. I didn’t have to really shop anymore, they’re just brought to me!

“Well, my dear, you will let us know if there are any updates to your condition?”

“Yes, Carlisle,” I said. It was becoming habit now. “Say hi to everybody for me!” I waved and blew them kisses before ending the signal.

After shutting the laptop cover, I plopped down on the bed and stared at the delicate silver tray that held my meal. I no longer had to hunt, receiving a bottle of blood twice a day. I still thought the blood tasted a little odd but I was told that it was from exotic animals specially drained for me.

I was finally where I belonged.

Chapter End Notes

I love having Alec as the brainiac and yeah, he’s a bit of a nerd.

For those who have never seen a DNA test, do a Google search. I’m not a scientist but the way they map and try to match these things is pretty amazing. I did take some liberties in tweaking some of the vampire DNA so they had a longer string. Some of this will come back in later chapters.
I hope you liked it. Let me know your thoughts.

Thank you! XO ~ sushi
Sorry for the slowness! I got a newer, used Mac last week and then I started to work on a kickass cat tree for my boys.

Thank you to all you wonderful folks who reviewed/faved/alerted this story. TRULY APPRECIATE it. :) It made me really happy that you all liked nerdy Alec. There will be more of him in future chapters.

Welcome back AlexisDanaan - she’s been a wonderful beta for this story. Many thanks to LetsJustDance for prereading. Also to DarkNNerdy for her help as well.

Well, here you go - the grand party. I hope you enjoy. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 80

So what’s been going with with Victoria?

Riley and I have been together for a few weeks now and while I liked having a companion to do my bidding, and he was certainly eager to please, I was ready for him to be out of his infancy stage. As difficult as it had been to change a human, it was even more of a pain being in the presence of a baby vampire...several in fact.

I had kidnapped several more humans from the neighboring towns and only 2 of the 9 were able to make it through the change. The rest were drained by Riley in his eagerness to help me.

My new fledglings were close to waking up now and I was hopeful that they would survive. I related a similar story to the humans during their change, still painting the Cullens as evil. I didn’t care, as long as they were ready to attack when the time came. It was all that mattered.

“I haven’t seen these yellow-eyed vampires you keep talking about,” Riley muttered as he sat on the floor of the old barn we were hiding from the day.
“That’s because they keep running off. They’re scared to reveal themselves, but don’t worry. We’ll take care of them soon enough. We just need to make sure we’ve got enough support,” I replied, trying hard not to sound agitated by the same questions being asked repeatedly.

“Oh... I still don’t understand why they wanted to kidnap me if they drink from animals.”

That was one observation I was hoping he wouldn’t catch on. I had to think quickly. “Just because they drink animal blood doesn’t mean they don’t harm humans. They have a doctor... at least, that is what he calls himself. What he really does is experiment on humans - how much pain they could take before they passed out or died, how hard to pull on an arm until it is dislocated...things like that.”

“I hate them!” he growled out and punched through the rickety wall of the abandoned barn. “Okay, we need to make more of us to go against them.”

“We will, Riley. We will.”

JPOV

Ever since our visit to Volterra, Isabella was bound and determined, more than ever, to gain enough control so she could work in the lab. She insisted on continuing our mock battles and while they were still no-contact, I could see she was ready to start sparring. I was pleased she had already built a strong foundation for fighting. Although she was eager, we discussed it and decided to wait until after the coronation ball.

She was also spending more time in our room with the doors shut. She explained how she wanted to regain the ability to dress herself and insisted on trying different types of clothes. Char brought over many of the outfits were either from Thrift Stores or items our vampire family no longer wore. It didn’t matter if the sizes were too big or if they once belonged to the males, Isabella just wanted to be able to handle different types fabric without tearing them to shreds. She practiced every single day and I had to tamp down my desire to help her as I heard her struggling and cursing whenever a zipper broke or buttons popped off. Still, she insisted on doing it herself and most of the time, I ended up sitting in our library listening and sending a steady stream of calm to her.

It was now early evening and we were both getting ready for the coronation ball. Isabella practically begged me to change in the library because she still wanted to surprise me with her outfit. I wasn’t sure what she was wearing tonight and realizing how important this was for her, I
I pulled on the wool trousers and looked into the mirror. It had been over a century since I put my real Confederate uniform on, but I had to admire the workmanship of the reproduction. I noticed they were baggier and rose higher than my normal jeans as I pulled the suspenders up and tucked the white, dress shirt in.

Seeing myself in this uniform was familiar and brought back faint memories, but at the same time, it felt completely foreign. I wasn’t as lean back then as I was now and definitely didn’t sport bright, red eyes. I looked over at the remaining pieces of my uniform and knew I needed Isabella’s help.

“Baby girl? Are you nearly done? I need your opinion on something.”

“Yeah,” she replied and then cleared her throat. “I mean, yes. Come in, Major Whitlock.”

I shook my head and smiled as I slowly opened the door to our bedroom.

Isabella stood there wearing a beautiful, long velvet, greyish dress with silver trim around the neckline.

“How do I look?” she asked, nervously.

“You look gorgeous,” I whispered, unsure what her outfit represented.

“You look sexy and handsome. Why are you feeling confused?” she asked, looking at me up and down.

“I’m sorry, I’m just not placing the costume.”

“Does this help?” She carefully put a matching cape around her and pulled it over her hair.

“Lord of the Rings?” I blurted out the first thing that came to mind as I caught sight of the clasp that looked like a leaf.
“Yes, I’m Arwen!” she said as she walked into the bathroom, motioning me to follow her. She held out a couple pieces of fake flesh near her ears. “You’ll have to help me put these on. They sort of match my skin, maybe the humans won’t be able to tell. I got the palest shade I could find.”

I chuckled to myself over her nervous rambling before taking the fake elven ears and affixed them onto her. “We’ll be able to tell, but I think the shade is pale enough that a human won’t notice right off.” I looked at the piece of jewelry on the counter and pointed. “Is that part of your costume too?”

“Yeah, it is too delicate for me to put over my head. I was thinking of skipping it.”

“No, it looks pretty on you,” I said as I took the delicate chain and wrapped it around her so that it resembled a crown. “How’s that?”

She smiled and then responded to me in Elvish, causing us to both laugh.

“Taking advantage of your vampire brain?” I teased as I led us back to the bedroom.

“You know it. So what kind of help do you need, Jasper?”

I ran back to the library and grabbed the rest of my uniform.

“I don’t know whether or not I should wear the longer, frock coat with cavalry sash, or should I wear the shorter one?”

“Hmm, you need to show me both,” she said.

I quickly threw on my shiny, black boots and then slipped on the shorter jacket first. Isabella walked around me and nodded before she looked at the longer coat. It took me less than a minute to switch coats and tie the gold color sash around my waist. Once again, she walked around before standing in front of me.
“The long coat, definitely. You’re wearing that hat, right?” She gently ran her finger on the gold embroidered trim along the sleeve.

I nodded as I needlessly, straightened up the coat and made sure the sash was tied properly.

“Are we ready to go, m’lady?” I drawled out as I held my elbow out to her.

“Why yes, Major Whitlock, lead me to your steed,” she replied.

Before we left the house, I quickly grabbed a small insulated container and stowed some blood bags in case she needed them before or after the party.

“So why Arwen?” I asked as I drove away from our house.

“It was hard to find something that really represented my human time that was appropriate. I looked up famous celebrity outfits and there was no way I was going to wear a swan dress or some green dress that left nothing to the imagination. There wasn’t anything iconic in a dress like other eras. You know, like Marilyn Monroe or Audrey Hepburn. So then I started to think about movies and decided to pick something from a really memorable blockbuster. My first idea was to dress like Elizabeth Swann from ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ since her name was similar to my maiden one. Then I started thinking how she was in tattered clothes and bloomers in most of the first movie and I didn’t think that would be appropriate for a coronation.”

I knew that the outfit was pretty tame compared to some dresses we’ve seen on TV but still, I was glad she didn’t prance around in that tonight.

“Then I thought Harry Potter and wanted to be Hermione Granger. I even bought the outfit, but decided me dressed as a schoolgirl or witch, rather, was not an outfit to wear in front of royalty.” She paused and quickly added. “Or in public, either.”

My brain suddenly became overloaded with images of her in a school uniform and I growled.

“See? Totally inappropriate,” she said and winked at me. “Like I said, I do plan on keeping that outfit.”
“Oh hell, yeah!” I murmured.

“Finally, I thought Arwen was appropriate and plus the movies were so huge! I think it made a big impact. They may not have been around the entire time I was human, but at least a decade.”

“No, it’s a good outfit and you’re right. It does fit the occasion.”

“So what about you? Does the uniform bring back memories? It looks in good condition.”

“There are companies that continue to manufacture the uniforms,” I explained. “You’ve heard of those Civil War reenactments? They mostly cater to those folks. As far as memories go, they’re still faint but I do remember how proud my folks were.”

She brushed her fingertips along the jacket fabric. “Do you think you would have had a career in the military had you remained human?”

“You know, you’re the first person other than Peter who has asked me that. I think I would have but then again, the South didn’t win the war so things might have changed in that respect. Plus, I am not sure if the Union would have accepted me.” I shrugged. “I probably would have returned back to our farm, married a local gal and then settled there for the rest of my days, most likely as a farmer.”

“So is this uniform yours or do you have to return it?”

“It’s all mine,” I replied, noticing a hint of lust coming from her. “Why, baby girl?”

“I don’t know,” she said and started to fuss with the cape. “You look really sexy in it. You look much better than the picture from that book.” She turned her body towards me and stared. “You’re more chiseled than before and you look manlier.”

“Why Mrs. Whitlock, are you fascinated by seeing me in a uniform?”

She looked out the window and I could see her smile from the glass reflection. “Maybe.”
The sound of a car horn from a distance behind us broke us out of our flirting bubble.

It was moving very fast and soon, we both heard the familiar sounds coming from its radio.

“Peter, you’re lucky I wasn’t some human. You could have caused an accident!” I growled out as he got within hearing range.

“Keep your pants on, bro,” he replied with a laugh. “We left the house five minutes after you passed the property. We didn’t start speeding up until just now.”

We reached a stretch of road that now had two lanes on each side and Peter gunned his sports car so they were right alongside of us.

“Lookin’ good, barkeep,” I teased as I got a look at his costume.

“I almost went for a Roaring 20s mobster but I liked this look instead,” he explained and we both waved at Char who was more quiet than usual.

“We’re coming onto one lane again,” Peter remarked. “We’ll have time to chit chat more when we get there.”

A few minutes later, Peter led us to an underground parking structure.

“Hey Char, you look really pretty tonight,” Isabella said after I helped her out of the car.

My sister smoothed out her dress in a nervous manner. “Thank you, Bella. I wasn’t really sure what I was going to wear, but then I found this dress at a small vintage shop and I decided to look like one of those beautiful movie actresses of the 1930s. It is more glamorous than I’m used to.”

“Hush, woman,” Peter chided. “You run circles around those starlets.” He took her hand and twirled her around in the parking lot before looking over at me. “You two look good, though it looks funny when you step out of a SUV.”
We all laughed as Peter gestured to the entrance to the castle.

“You gonna be okay, baby girl?” I asked before joining my siblings.

“I’ll be fine. I’m a little nervous about the humans in the same room.” She took my hand into hers. “If it gets bad, and that fainting room doesn’t cut it, we leave, right?”

I pulled her close to me and kissed her hair. “That’s why I brought a couple blood bags with us. If it becomes overwhelming for you, we can go. Don’t feel bad about it either. Now, ready to have some fun?”

“Yes, sir,” she replied and once again took my elbow.

Before we even arrived in the ballroom, I could feel the excitement and I could also smell the blood from the several humans already enjoying the festivities. Isabella halted her movements for a split second before moving once again.

I immediately pulled her off to the side to make sure she was alright.

“I’m fine, it just took me a little by surprise, you know?” she said. “I might have to hold my breath most of the night but I’ll keep my shield down. I know I can control that part, for sure.”

I kissed her lips. “Give me the word and we’ll leave, don’t try to be brave about it either.”

“I promise.”

When we walked in, it was just like a scene from a movie. There was a man, standing by the door who asked for our names and then announced us as we entered.

My brother and sister gestured for us to follow and we were met by Heidi.
“You all look wonderful!” Heidi exclaimed. She looked like a pin-up girl that just stepped off of a World War II airplane.

All the Volturi guards were there and we made our way around the room greeting them. It was as though history had come alive as I took in the various costumes that represented their human time. Instead of soldiers during the Middle Ages, Felix and Demetri dressed like noblemen. The twins greeted us as a witch along with her witch hunter.

“This is so cool,” Isabella nearly squealed out as she gave Jane a hug. “The costumes are so beautiful!” She looked around the room. “Even the humans have gotten into the spirit of things. I see some guy with tattoos and a soccer uniform and there are a couple of women dressed as...” she began whispering and then paused. “Is that...are they dressed as Spice Girls?”

Jane looked over and nodded along with several of the Volturi guards nearby. “The guy in the football uniform is dressed as David Beckham and he’s here with the two women dressed as Posh Spice and Ginger. They were in this summer’s production of Aida over at the Arena di Verona.”

“That’s the play the kings and queens enjoy right?” Isabella asked and smiled as a few more human guests walked by and greeted us.

“They have been huge patrons of that opera for centuries now,” Alec replied. “What was surprising was how much Gianna enjoyed it as well.”

“Speaking of,” I began. “Where’s the royal party?”

“They should be announced soon. It’s sort of protocol,” Heidi explained just as she joined us with Felix and my brother and sister. “They will all walk in with Aro and Sulpicia in the lead, followed by Caius and Athenodora with Marcus and Gianna as the last to enter.”

“But first, once they’ve been announced the orchestra will start playing the Volturi anthem. It gives us time to line up so the procession walks to the very front of the room,” Jane interjected. “Once the music stops, one of the kings, most likely Aro, will greet everybody and then open the ball officially with the dance.”

“The fancy waltz one?” Isabella asked and everybody nodded.
“You’ll join us won’t you?” Felix asked. “Heidi and I will be in their group, they always rotate us around as to who joins them and we’re joining them this time.

“You’ll be dancing with us,” Char said. “Along with Jane, Alec, Demetri and Renata.”

“I can handle that,” Isabella replied. “That is, if Major Whitlock would like to dance with me.”

I bowed as I took her hand in mine. “My apologies, ma’am. It would be an honor if you will accompany me in the opening dance,” I requested, remembering some of the etiquette from an earlier time.

With her hand still in mine, she curtseyed. “It would be a pleasure, kind sir.” She looked up batting her lashes and I could see she was trying to look demure but at the same time, I could tell she was trying to hold back her laughter.

Just as we were about to continue, we heard a group of footsteps heading our direction and Rosa quickly walked over to the man near the door, an earpiece visible on her.

“I guess they’re about to make their entrance?” Isabella asked rhetorically. We could all hear the conversation Rosa was having both to the man and then to the other person on the mic. “Who is she talking to?”

“Since we’re all here,” Demetri explained. “We have a small group of soldiers watching the castle tonight. They’re the most senior and most trustworthy amongst the humans.”

Word quickly spread that the royals were about to arrive.

“If Italy is run by a president and parliament, how do the Volturi not get backlash for having royal titles?” I asked out of curiosity.

“In the human world, they’re more like the rich and famous connoisseurs of art. They’re treated like royalty because of their philanthropic efforts. What the humans don’t know is Volterra is, in fact, its own sovereign city. Similar to the Vatican but ruled by the Volturi,” Jane explained as we all followed her towards the front of the room. “It’s official and legal but buried in ancient scrolls and written in a language that can’t be translated. We just let the humans assume what they want. Worst case scenario is Chelsea compels them if needed.”
I would have asked more but the doors opened and the man made the announcement. Sure enough, Aro led Sulpicia to the front. The three kings wore similar outfits that resembled something from Ancient Greece while the two queens wore beautiful long dresses from around the same time. Gianna looked radiant as she walked right next to Marcus. His ancient tunic was a sharp contrast to the silvery dress she wore. I couldn’t tell at first what she was supposed to represent but then I saw a small pin of the Winter Olympic games on her dress.

“I don’t get what she’s wearing,” Isabella whispered into my ear.

“I think it has to do with the Olympics that were held here,” I quietly responded back. “I saw the logo they used for Turin or Torino.” Isabella nodded and her attention was once again focused on the royal procession.

“The silver gown she’s wearing is a replica of what Carla Bruni, wore. She carried the Italian flag during the Opening Ceremony,” Renata replied.

“Wow, you look great!” Isabella said.

“Thank you, it was actually one from my human days but I cheated,” she replied. “I adjusted the fabric so I wouldn’t have to wear a corset.” She winked at me. “I don’t care if you’re human or vampire, those things are atrocious to wear when it is a requirement.”

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Aro began and the crowd grew quiet. “Thank you all for being here as we celebrate and welcome Gianna into our family. As tradition, we like to open the celebration with a centuries old waltz. You’re all welcome to join us.”

The orchestra began to play as the royal family got into their group and we joined the group next to them. At the right count, I bowed just as Isabella curtseyed in front of me before taking my hand. As we moved along to the music, the two of us smiled as we heard the human conversations around us. They were all admiring us for our synchronized movements and how we all must have practiced for weeks to get the timing so perfect. We spun around the dance floor and switched partners at the appropriate times, moving in a circle until once again, I was in front of Isabella just as the song ended.

“That was so fun!” Isabella exclaimed as a big band song started playing.
“Baby girl, you gotta watch this,” I said as I led us off to the side.

Peter and Char along with several other couples made their way onto the dance floor and all of them started to swing dance. As the music picked up, everybody dancing became more animated and started to spin and twirl wildly.

The crowd cheered the dancers on and once the song ended, they were given wild applause.

“That was so cool!” Isabella exclaimed as Peter and Char walked over.

“We probably would have been even more elaborate if I didn’t have this silly dress on,” Char said.

Peter rolled his eyes. “She gets a little shy and uncomfortable when she wears formal dresses. I think the dress looks stunning on you and I’m glad you chose it.”

She gave a small smile as the two of them got lost in their moment. I decided to take the time and dance with Isabella.

Over the next few hours, we danced and mingled. We talked to many of the Volturi and a few humans but the other vampires who were guests stayed away from us.

“Why didn’t the other vampires even say hi?” Isabella asked as she sipped on a blood bag in the ‘fainting room’. “And is blood more enhanced when humans drink?”

“The other vampires saw me and my scars. Even though my frock coat covers most of the scars, they saw a few of them,” I explained. “I felt their fear and since it was obvious you’re with me, they have been keeping a safe distance. As far as alcohol, it doesn’t enhance their blood to make it more appealing. We’re mingling with them and they’ve been dancing so the scent is stronger.” I looked over at her. “You okay?”
She nodded. “I didn’t feel the burn or anything. I just felt a little overwhelmed. The blood tastes funny though.”

“Are we interrupting?” Gianna called out from the entrance with Marcus behind her.

Isabella stood up and smiled. “No, no, we’re just taking a breather. Do you want to be alone?”

“No, I need a breather too. Do you mind the company? It would be like old times.”

“I’d...” Isabella looked over at me and I smiled. “We’d like that.” She grabbed a blood bag and handed it to the new queen. “Congratulations by the way. You look beautiful.”

“Thank you, Bella,” Gianna replied and the two women hugged. “You make a lovely Arwen.”

As the two women started talking to each other animatedly about the various costumes, Marcus took a seat next to me and I offered my congratulations on the official coronation.

“I’m glad it’s over,” he remarked. “Almost as soon as she became a vampire, she had been preparing for this day. I think my two sisters in-law were over enthusiastic in finally having a new queen. There was etiquette and protocol to learn and being she was a newborn vampire, it was hard.”

“For the past several weeks, she’s been trying to dress herself in all kinds of clothes. It didn’t matter what she wore, she wanted to be able to dress herself and handle fabrics without them tearing at her fingers.”

“You too?” Marcus asked and laughed. “I should have known when Renata and Heidi started asking all of us to clear out our closets for clothes we didn’t need anymore. Gianna showed up at the conservatory one night wearing a Cossack coat and a pair of my old tuxedo pants.”

“That’s not bad. Isabella was wearing a sari and then wrapped a tie around her neck.”

“I was learning to wear clothes on my own,” Isabella muttered. “I was proud of myself I didn’t tear the fabric at all.”
“Marcus didn’t see I had rain boots on with a suit jacket and a top hat once. I felt like the witches in Harry Potter when they wore Muggle clothing,” Gianna said and we all started to laugh. “Oh Bella, I heard your comment about the blood before we came in. This is stuff from hospitals so you’re tasting the chemicals to keep the blood from coagulating. You could say that we hid the good stuff since there are so many vampires around,” she whispered loud enough so only we’d hear.

There was a sudden sound of glass breaking coming from the ballroom area.

“Oh dear,” Marcus groaned out. “I think there are a few humans that are getting too inebriated. It seems inevitable whenever we have these elaborate parties. A few decades ago, it was bad. Not only was there disco music but some of the humans were doing drugs out in the open. Some of our vampire guests almost lost control when they started to inject themselves.”

“Sir?” Demetri called out after a soft knock. “There is a problem with one of the celebrities. I think Aro is about to have her escorted out.”

“Is it the wild one, Demetri?” Gianna asked. “The one who is always in trouble with the law according to tabloids?”

Demetri nodded.

Marcus sighed. “We don’t need the paparazzi getting wind of this. Gianna, you can stay here, I’ll be back shortly.”

As soon as the king left grumbling about crazy, spoiled humans, Gianna shook her head. “It’s my fault. She is one of my favorite entertainers so I had Marcus extend an invitation. I didn’t realize she’d get drunk or whatever here.” She sighed before looking at Isabella. “So I hear you’re going to be engaging in contact battles?”

Isabella grinned. “Hopefully tomorrow. Will you be here at the castle?”

“No, official business will take us all on a trip. Some of our allies weren’t able to make it to tonight’s celebrations so all of us, along with Renata, Heidi and Felix will be joining. Chelsea and Afton will meet us there.”
The women talked more minutes before Marcus returned. “She’s going to be fine and no one is any wiser,” he said as he took Gianna’s hand. “Our song is coming shortly.”

“Jasper,” Isabella began once we were alone. “Can we go hunting tonight?”

I looked at her and nodded as I took in her emotions. “We’ll have to run home and change first. Will you be alright until then?” I could tell she wasn’t suffering from bloodlust but I asked all the same.

“I’ll be okay. I just thought since tomorrow I’ll be really fighting and all. Actually, not tomorrow, in a few hours, right?”

“We can start saying our goodbyes and make our way out.”

“Is it too far for us to run to Catacomb or something?”

“We can do that if you’d want,” I replied. “I can tell you’re not starved for blood so we should be safe. Just stick close to me, okay?”

I stood up and held my hand out to her.

“I will,” she said as she placed her hand in mine.

Two dances and a few goodbyes later, we were heading home. Our plan was to quickly change and then run down towards Rome to feed and then run back before dawn. I could tell Isabella was looking forward to our night out and I was too. It had been a while since I actually fed on a human, now becoming acclimated on the specially treated blood that we get from the Volturi.

“Jasper, did you have fun tonight?”

“I did, baby girl. I liked the costume idea especially being somewhat of a history buff. Did you?” Just like when she was still human, I felt her immediate appreciation that I asked instead of just
taking in her emotions.

“"It was fun!” she exclaimed. “Well, I thought my birthday celebration was more fun but this was Gianna’s night. I liked that it wasn’t stuffy formal and everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves.”

“Come on,” I said as I stopped the car. “Let’s go change so we can enjoy the rest of our date night.”

“Wait, if this was a date, shouldn’t we have had dinner before dancing?” she teased as she unbuckled her seatbelt.

“I guess I’ll just have to redeem myself by dancing with you after our meal.” I winked at her as we headed into the house.

“I like your idea, Mr. Whitlock. It’s a date.”

Chapter End Notes

I know she’s known as Carla Bruni Sarkozy now but remember, this is October 2007 and she wasn’t the (now former) French first lady until 2008.

The celebrity in question is really no specific person though it was about the time of Britney Spears’ antics so I might have used her as an inspiration.

For those who watch The Vampire Diaries, Aro’s speech was inspired by Elijah’s in Season 3 - Dangerous Liaisons as they opened up the dance at the Mikaelson’s ball. The opening dance sequence in that episode was sort of how I imagined this dance to look like - only more elaborate.

Let me know what you thought of the chapter - always love to hear from you. :) 

Until next time, XO ~sushi
Chapter 82

Chapter Notes

So happy y’all enjoyed the last chapter. :)  
Here is another one for you. Many, many thanks to LetsJustDance and DarkNNerdy for prereading and the wonderful, AlexisDanaan for being a super awesome beta. As always, thank you all for reading this story.  
Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 81

BPOV

“Does it bother you we don’t hunt as often as you’d like or are used to?” I asked as I carefully pulled up a pair of fatigue-style pants.

“I think it would bother me if all we had to drink was the hospital grade stuff,” Jasper replied as he emerged from the bathroom, drying his hair with a towel. “You certainly are eager to get to Volterra.” He chuckled as he walked by and snapped the towel over the back of my legs.

“You are damn lucky that didn’t hurt,” I grumbled. “You’re right, I’m really excited about full contact fighting. Thanks for taking me hunting.”

“You’re welcome, baby girl,” he replied. “Now that you’ve gotten a chance to drink the hospital stuff, the Volturi blood and blood straight from a human, can you taste the difference?”

“I can now. That stuff they had at the ball tasted different... sort of funny, but I would still choose it over animal blood. That tiny taste from that night with the dying deer was enough.” I made a face at the memory. “The Volturi blood is really close to fresh stuff. The only difference is the lack of the hunt.”

Jasper nodded as he got dressed. “The hunt is what makes us so similar to animals. You could say
it is our demons being unleashed for that brief moment. Even when I was drinking animal blood, going hunting was important.” He walked over and sat on the bed. “The problem is, we as vampires need to adjust and adapt. We can’t just take humans whenever we want and just drain them. As they become more advanced in technology, we need to modify our hunting tactics to avoid being caught. That is why the Volturi drink the bagged stuff more often than going out hunting.”

“Does that mean one of these days, we will all have to drink bagged blood?” I asked as I finished braiding my hair.

“As long as humans have wars and disease, we’ll find a way. It might be similar to how I showed you with the lady and the car accident,” he replied. “Are you okay with us hunting about twice a month? We could always adjust accordingly if we need to.”

“We can play it by ear, right? The fact that we have blood readily available helps. I don’t feel as off as I was in the beginning. It seems to help me with my control too. Well...maybe not my control but more like my concentration.”

“No, your control has improved greatly from when you woke up to this world. Remember when you tore all your underwear trying to put them on?”

“Gee, thanks for the reminder.” I grimaced as I recalled the frustration from failing doing the simplest of actions. “I felt so useless at first.”

“Look at you now. Slowly but surely, you’re getting the hang of it. Now, are you ready to go?”

I looked quickly at my clothes. “Should I bring an extra set to be on the safe side?”

“Good idea. You might not need it, but it is good to always be prepared.”

Less than a minute later, we were in the car and headed straight to Volterra.

“Do you mind if we continued our conversation about feeding?”
“Go ahead, baby girl. You know you can always talk to me.”

“Well, the idea that we won’t be hunting as often because we have the Volturi blood is sort like we’re tamping down that animal side, right? It just got me thinking if that side would ever be tamed.”

“I suppose that is something a vampire could evolve into,” he replied. “Conversely, we could completely disregard our civilized side and embrace the animal one completely. There are pros and cons to both. I think the key is to be able to find that balance. Like I said earlier, we might need to adjust accordingly. It would be the same if we fed from animals.”

I thought about his words for a moment and remembered the vampires like James and Laurent. “You’re right. We could be wild and not care whether or not there are dead bodies dumped all over the earth, which would be dangerous because we’d be on the Volturi radar for bad reasons. Speaking of which, any word on those bodies in North America?” I asked, vaguely remembering hearing about them days before I became a vampire.

Jasper shook his head. “I haven’t heard anything. We can ask when we get to the castle. If it is something that concerns the possibility of vampire activity, they’ll know.”

Demetri was waiting for us as we arrived at the castle.

“I can show you the training grounds if you don’t mind giving me a ride,” he said.

“Hop on in,” Jasper replied.

On the way outside the walled city, we asked about potentially suspicious activity in North America.

“The missing body count has escalated since we last mentioned it,” Demetri replied and then pointed out the windshield. “Turn here and take the road until it ends. We will run the rest of the way. After the Maria issue was taken care of, Caius sent a couple soldiers over to observe but right before Gianna’s coronation, he brought them back and sent Santiago instead because of his gift. The guards haven’t been briefed on anything yet but the fact that Santi is nearby and he’s able to go spy undetected means they want more intel.”
“Knowing that Alice had some sort of scheme that involved the Cullens and now the missing bodies, it doesn’t seem random,” I murmured as Jasper stopped the car and shut off the engine.

“Santi will be able to find some answers,” Demetri explained as he motioned us to follow him. “We’ll learn what’s going on soon and hopefully not at the undue expense of human lives. Oh, speaking of Alice, did Aro tell you about her during the party?”

We both shook our heads. “No, what happened? Did she get out?” I asked.

“Nope,” Demetri replied. “Get this, we had her monitored throughout the party and she was completely oblivious. All she did the entire night was organize her clothes - several times.”

“That sounds strange,” Jasper murmured. “Was it a rouse?”

“Aro thought it was and checked her memories. It corroborated with what the servants saw. He even checked twice and both times showed she was unaware of the celebration. She didn’t even react to the humans nearby.”

“Wow, so we all attended a party that Alice Cullen wasn’t invited to?” I quipped. “Seriously though, it does sound strange. Maybe it is her head thing?”

“That is what we think. We’ll know more once with research.”

It took us a couple minutes to reach a large field surrounded by rocky hills and trees, creating a natural hidden space for vampires. Jane, Alec, Peter and Char were all there and waiting.

“Are you excited, Bella?” Jane asked. “The surrounding area will help mask the sounds from our fighting. We chose this spot centuries ago because it is so far from any curious humans.”

I nodded. “Very, I’ve been practicing basic movements for weeks now.”

“This is just back and forth sparring, no use of gifts,” Jasper said as he pulled me into his arms. “I want you to learn to fight but at the same time, I am wrestling with my emotions on wanting to protect you from harm.”
I looked up at him and gave him a small smile. “I love that you want to spare me from violence. I just feel like I need this on the small chance I need to defend myself,” I explained as I ran my fingers through his hair. “Will you be okay watching me?”

He sighed. “A part of me doesn’t want to but I know I ought to.”

I understood his conflict and gave him a kiss on the lips. “I’ll be careful.”

I turned and headed towards Char as the other vampires moved closer to us.

“We’ll start out at half speed,” Char explained.

I could see from the side, Jasper talking to Alec. I shook my head quickly as I focused my attention in front of me. Keeping all the training in my mind, I took off towards my sister-in-law. As I got close, I quickly turned right before I made contact. Char moved away from me and quickly tried to jump up and give me a flying kick. I ducked just in time and took a hold of her leg, spinning her away from me like a giant frisbee.

I was expecting her to crash onto the ground hard but instead, she landed on her toes and quickly ran towards me. I watched as she got closer and closer, wanting to wait until the last possible minute to defend myself. As she approached, I leap-frogged over her and tucked myself into a ball so I could roll away quickly before countering.

It was a back and forth battle that probably lasted for no more than a few minutes but to me, it seemed like hours. I was glad I had the training to move in different directions and several times, I could feel Jasper’s pride being sent to me. I was damn proud of myself too but kept telling and reminding myself not to get too cocky. These were all trained fighters and all I have for experience was fancy footwork.

“Good job, Bella. Are you ready for full speed?”

“Sure,” I replied.

“Hey, can I try this?” Jane asked and looked over at us.
“It might be good for you to practice with someone you’re not quite familiar with,” Char explained.

“Okay Jane,” I said. “Just fighting right?”

Jane crouched slightly and nodded in agreement. “You attack first.”

I glanced over at Jasper once again and quickly took a breath as I readied myself. I crouched low, my leg muscles primed to spring towards Jane. I took off in full speed and raced towards her, moving away from her direct line at the last minute. Since she wasn’t familiar with my fighting style, she moved a fraction of a second too late and my foot grazed her shoulder before I landed on the ground.

Now it was my turn to anticipate her attack. She was fast as she sped towards me before she suddenly bounced away.

I was confused as I stood there still half crouched as Jane got up and started to laugh.

“Her physical shield decided to join us today,” she practically sang out and tried to approach me once again but this time in a non-threatening manner. Just like before, she couldn’t get too close before she was stopped.

It was then that I saw some sort of shimmering film in front of me. It was clear but sort of moved, reminding me of how oil looked in a body of water. I held out my hand as if to reach it and could almost feel the air pressure changing slightly. From what I could tell, it was not a bubble like Renata’s but sort of an outline of me.

“I don’t know how it happened,” I explained, somewhat embarrassed that this shield thing wouldn’t go away.

I tried the breathing exercises like Renata had taught me early on but I still saw it. After a few minutes, I began to get frustrated and sat down in a huff. “I can’t withdraw this damn thing.” I growled out.

Jasper walked up slowly towards me. “Are you okay, Isabella?”
“I just don’t know what to do,” I admitted. “The Yoga breathing isn’t working, Jasper. What if this thing is permanent and I live like this forever?” I was starting to panic, now picturing this extra protective shell surrounding me for the rest of my life.

“Shh,” he whispered as he moved closer. “Your emotions are all over the place, baby girl. Shut your eyes and do those breathing exercises.”

I did what he suggested and suddenly felt the shell move and bend slightly. I quickly opened my eyes and saw that he was able to stick his hand through the shell.

It was a weird feeling as the shell expanded to accommodate his form. “This is so bizarre, not only do I see it, but I can feel it moving as though it was a part of my body.”

“In a way it is,” Demetri explained as he looked at his phone. “I just sent a text message to Renata for advice. She thinks having someone you didn’t interact with on a regular basis triggered the shield when Jane attacked.”

“Jane, I’m so sorry!” I muttered.

“Hey, don’t be sorry, Bella. It is better that you discovered it now rather than in a real emergency situation.” She looked over at her brother who was now busy drawing into his sketch book. “What are you doing?”

“I’m capturing the moment,” Alec replied without looking up from his drawing. “If you look at Bella with the sun in back of her, you can see her shield. That would be a cool superhero ability.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at his remark. Leave it to Alec to make use of my strange predicament and start drawing comics. I shook my head just as Jasper managed to get himself completely in my shield.

He pulled me into his arms and stroked my hair. “We’ll figure this out. Is anybody else able to get in the shield?”

The rest of the gang approached us and tried to stick their hand through just as Jasper did, but none
of them were able to.

“So just like the mental shield, you’re able to get in?” Demetri asked.

“Looks like it,” Jasper said and I nodded.

“It must be our bond or something?” I asked.

“I think so,” Demetri said just as his phone chirped. “Bella, Renata said to try sitting on the ground like she had done with you. Jasper, sit facing her and take a hold of her hands. Try to calm her with your gift while she does the breathing exercises. Renata thinks that now that it has made an appearance, with practice you’ll be able to manipulate it just like your mental shield.”

We did as he suggested and I shut my eyes as I breathed in and out. I also tried to picture the shield as something that was tangible. Feeling Jasper’s hands in mine and his calming cocktail helped with my breathing as I started to feel a tugging in my brain, which was a different feeling than the twitch in my eye that triggered the mental one.

It was probably a minute or two before that tugging softened and then disappeared altogether. I slowly opened my eyes and noticed that the shield was gone.

“I think I did it,” I whispered as Jasper helped me up.

“Yes you did,” Jasper replied as he motioned for Char to approach us. When she was able to hug me, I knew for sure that the shield was dropped completely.

“Does this mean I won’t be able to practice sparring?” I asked once I went over to Jane and gave her a hug too.

“I don’t think so, little one,” Peter said. “I think we need to have you practice and incorporate your shield into these sessions. You should practice pulling it up and dropping it at a moment’s notice and then once you’re used to it and feel you have a good grasp of your shield, we can go back to practicing without your shield ability.”
We practiced the rest of the day and well into the early morning hours. By the time the sky was beginning to brighten, I was able to control my shield more than half the time.

“That’s great Bella!” Char exclaimed as she tossed a blood bag in my direction. “You need a break now.”

I sat down and looked over at Alec. “How did you draw me?” I asked.

He smiled as he began to flip the pages until he got to the picture. It was a female who had long hair and she was wearing what looked like a camouflage catsuit. Her eyes glowed white and guessed that was how she triggered this honeycomb net that surrounded her.

“Wow, that is pretty cool.”

“You’ve got a really good talent for that,” Jasper said as he sat down next to me.

Alec reached over and flipped to another page. “As you can see from the initial sketches, I was going to make her look more like you but I decided to borrow your gift and put it on her.”

“Natasha?” Jane asked as she sat down next to her brother. “That is his favorite comic character,” she added.

“It is not,” Alec grumbled as he quickly closed his book shut and shoved it in a bag. “Are we ready to practice more?”

I looked over at Jasper and gave him a wink and started to get up. “Sure, I’m game.”

The next few hours we practiced on my shield. One of the vampires would race towards me ready to attack. I watched and waited as I tried to engage and disengage my new gift at a moment’s notice. It was becoming more natural for me but then they started to throw a wrench into the plan by having two vampires coming after me in opposite directions in an attempt to distract me.

I had to admit I was enjoying the challenge but it was frustrating at the same time. My shield would either not engage on time or I would have problems withdrawing it in a timely manner.
“Hang on, let’s break,” Jasper called out as he headed my way. Throughout the entire time, he had been on the sidelines watching and sometimes pacing as I practiced and tried not to get tossed around.

“Are you overexerting yourself, baby girl?” He asked as he pulled me over to an overturned tree trunk. “I can sense your frustration.”

“I wish I could get this thing working. It isn’t as easy as my mental shield.” I rubbed my eyes out of habit.

“It’s okay that it takes time to cultivate your new gift. You just discovered it nearly a day ago.”

“We’ve been practicing for that long? I mean, I knew it got dark and then day again, but I’ve been so engrossed with it I sort lost awareness. Is it really considered a new gift? That makes it sound so complicated.”

“I could feel how determined you were in trying to manage your shield so I’m not surprised time just sort of got away for you. Would it make you more comfortable if we called it an extension of your existing gift?”

I nodded. “It might be silly and a matter of semantics but it makes it sound less intimidating.”

“Okay, if that puts you more at ease.” He looked over his shoulder before kissing me on the cheek. “There are some folks concerned about you,” he explained.

I motioned for them to join us and when they arrived, I explained how I was feeling during the sparring.

“Jasper’s right,” Demetri replied. “Remember as vampires, we have nothing but time. And don’t fret about getting your physical shield in control. I’m sure Renata will agree with me in that your mental shield is more dominant than your physical one. It is natural for you to get a grasp of it first.”

“For Renata, her physical shield is the dominant one. I remember her story and how she still had
moments when she couldn’t control it.”

Demetri nodded. “By the time we returned to Volterra from our trip to present day India, she had enough control that she could leave it down during sparring sessions. She wasn’t always successful but she managed to become a decent fighter without her gift.”

“So are you all trained to actually fight? I know you talk about soldiers and guards, are there distinctions?” I asked.

“For the most part, we all started as soldiers,” Jane explained. “Renata was one of the few exceptions due to her extraordinary gift. She was tasked to guard the kings and queens right away.”

“She still received the training of a soldier,” Demetri clarified. “Jane’s correct though. All of us began as soldiers for the Volturi. Felix and I quickly became guards for the kings and queens due to our loyalty and hard work.”

“It is more than just hard work and loyalty,” Alec replied. “Having a gift helps but it is also how we get along with the royals. Jane and I had reputations as being aloof with other soldiers. Back then, the kings often visited the training grounds more often and must have been impressed with our skills. We really weren’t standoffish, it was because we were both younger looking than the others.”

“Gregor didn’t help matters either,” Jane interjected. The way she said that name, I could tell there had been bad blood with this person.

“Ah yes, Gregor,” Demetri said as he shook his head. “He was such a gifted soldier and probably would have been a guard if he didn’t volunteer to help train future soldiers.”

“He was skilled and neither Jane nor myself would deny that,” Alec added. “He taught us how to fight and fight well. The power of being able to command so many vampires got to his head and he became ruthless and a danger to the very folks he had been trained to protect.”

“He started abusing his power and became ruthless. One of his punishments was to dismember a soldier and then walk away, leaving the body to slowly and painfully mend back on its own,” Jane said. “Alec and I were fortunate, we were never subject to his abuses. We were sent off to fight in a battle so we avoided much of it. We didn’t hear the stories until we returned and by that time, we had proven ourselves to the royal family. One evening, we had just arrived in the soldiers’ quarters
and were clearing out our personal effects when we saw what was going on with our own eyes. From what we heard, it shouldn’t have warranted such brutality.” Jane sniffled and looked up, her sad eyes glassy with venom.

Alec reached over and took his sister’s hand. “We both reacted on instinct and subdued him. Then we sent some of the witnesses to the castle and Aro had to have read their mind because soon after, some of the guards arrived and promptly destroyed him. I mean, as part of the guard, we all had to experience the feeling of losing a body part at least once, but doing what he did and believing it was justified was not right.”

“Wait, losing a limb is something you all have experienced? It’s required of each soldier?” I asked incredulously.

“Not a limb,” Jane explained. “I tore off Alec’s finger. Well...the first knuckle of it.”

Alec looked down at the finger and shrugged. “I got you back and tore your ear off.” He looked up at me and smiled. “It sounds bad and maybe even a little gruesome but it was a part of the training process. Each of us had to lose something and continue to spar before we were able to reattach ourselves. We had to learn to fight through the pain instead of letting it consume us. I guess that was how Gregor became more bloodthirsty, so to speak.”

I took in Alec’s story while I couldn’t believe they all experienced being torn apart in some fashion, I also understood the reasons.

“That Gregor guy sounds like he was the nicer, male version of Maria,” Jasper muttered. “We went through the same exercise only it had to be a limb and it had to be reattached with foreign venom.”

“Should I do that too?” I wondered out loud.

A chorus of “what” echoed around me.

My eyes widened at the response and I could tell that Jasper didn’t like my idea from the emotions he was sending out.

“Hear me out,” I said quietly. “I know I’ve got this new physical shield but I don’t want to be dependent on it. What if it failed for some reason and I was exposed to an attack? This is why I want to learn to fight. I don’t want to have others fight for me.” I quickly looked at everybody to see if they were following my train of thought before continuing. “Yes, the chance of me being in
danger is probably slim, but I don’t want to play the odds. If I can’t use my shield and I’m hurt or
dismembered, I need to be able to fight on.” I turned to look at Jasper and reached for his hands. “I
can’t afford to lose. I have too much to live for.”

“Dammit, Isabella,” Jasper growled out and let go. “I don’t want to see you hurt. This isn’t just
sparing, you’re gonna feel a lot of pain.”

“I know, Jasper but like I said. What if I’m in a situation where I have to defend myself. It’s a long
shot but I should still know.”

Jasper started pacing around, raking his hands through his hair. “Fuck! I hate this but goddamn it,
you’re making a good point,” he growled. I could see this was really bothering him.

“I can’t be selfish and keep you protected forever as much as a part of me wants to. I know you
want to do this, I can feel how your determination. You want to do this today, don’t you?”

I nodded slowly. “Might as well get it over with, right?”

“Fine,” he said a couple minutes later. “Peter and Demetri, you might want to be near me in case
you have to hold me back. Alec, I might need you again. I might not have a lot to say in this matter
but I’d prefer Jane or Char to spar with Isabella. I just don’t want my protective, son of a bitch side
coming out.”

As the other guys began to walk towards the sideline, I was wondering what Jasper meant about
Alec.

“She better not lose an actual limb,” Jasper grumbled out as he turned abruptly and stalked away.

I was nervous as hell and a part of me thought I should wait until I gained more fighting skills
before experiencing the feeling of having a part of my body ripped away. That part cursed me for
being so damn stubborn, mostly likely enhanced from being a vampire.

Meanwhile, Char and Jane were quietly talking, mostly some sort of strategy. I pushed aside the
negative thoughts and crouched low as I knew they were going to attack me.
They were fast as they both ran towards me from opposite sides. I see both of them from the corners of my eyes as I waiting until the last possible moment before moving. All the while, I was hoping my physical shield didn’t make an appearance. I didn’t feel the tugging sensation so I assumed my shield was not engaged.

As I got ready for the impact, I turned towards Jane who was still more petite than me. Apparently, the women anticipated my movement because she caught one side of me as I was spun around. Jane had a tight hold of my arm and leg and I felt as though I was going to be tossed into the air any minute. I tried to squirm out of the hold but to no avail.

Suddenly a blur passed me and grabbed my hand twisting out a finger as Char flew by. The metallic sound of my pinky being removed from my body was high pitched and loud. It was drowned out by a loud wailing sound that caught me by surprise when I realized it was me.

That shit hurt as I continued to scream out and kick my way out of the hold. I wanted to grab my lost appendage that was on the ground, a hundred yards in front of me. I tried not to look over at Jasper who was now on his feet with the other guys talking to him. I had to concentrate, knowing I wasn’t done. In my pain addled mind, I kept telling myself I needed to fight my way free before I could heal.

Char was now standing near Jasper and I could see he was upset with what he was seeing. I needed to end this now.

“Come on, focus. Push past the pain,” I muttered to myself as I got ready to attack.

I twisted my body towards Jane, and used my momentum to hook my free leg around her neck and pulled her off balance. I wasn’t sure if that move would work so I twisted even more until my free arm was on the ground. My forward momentum threw her backwards and I felt her grip on my leg loosen. From there, I managed to tackle her to the ground before my shield decided to make an appearance.

I basically bounced away from Jane and then scrambled to grab my pinky.

As soon as I was free, Jasper came charging after me and only slowed down when he was nearby. He reached out towards me, concern evident on his face.

“You’re right, this hurts like a motherfucker,” I gritted out as I tried to line up the exposed flesh
together. My hand was shaking and I had a hard time seeing due to the tears in my eyes.

“Can you pull your shield back or do you want me to get in your shield again?”

I concentrated on retracting it back, feeling that weird tugging sensation in my head. Once it was down, Jasper immediately pulled me onto his lap and held me close.

“You need to get the ends wet, baby girl. You probably should have replenished yourself with blood before this because that isn’t enough venom. I could help you but it’ll mean you’ll scar.”

“It shouldn’t hurt as much as true foreign venom, right? I mean we’ve marked each other so my body knows your venom.”

“Yeah, it’ll sting,” he said. He took my pinky and coated it with his venom before grabbing a hold of my hand and stuck the ends together.

I hissed as the ends met. He was right, it did hurt. I cursed out a string of profanities as Jasper continued to hold me.

It was a little gross watching the process but fascinating at the same time. I think if I had seen this as a human, I probably would have hurled. Then there was the tingling feeling of my body knitting itself together, it was bizarre, to say the least.

“Here Bella, you’ll need this,” Jane said as she brought me a bag of blood. “For what it’s worth, that was a good counter move you did to get out of the hold I had on you.”

“Thank you,” I said as I pulled the valve and took a sip.

When I was nearly done, Jasper pulled me up to my feet. “Let’s go,” he said quietly and waved goodbye to everybody. “Thank you for giving her the opportunity to learn the past day. We’ll be back, this wasn’t easy for me to witness.”

I nodded. “Let’s go home and spend time alone.”
NOTES:
Part of my inspiration for the idea of the physical shield came from the wonderful James Ramsey and her story Insecurities. :)

I wanted to make Bella just a little more impulsive partly due to her newborn mentality. What did you think? BTW, in case you're wondering how/why Jasper was so calm, he'll explain it in the next chapter.

Until next time ~ sushi.
Chapter 83

Chapter Notes

Ready for the next chapter?

Thank you AlexisDanaan for awesome beta work. LetsJustDance helped me tremendously in getting this chapter right.

Lastly, thank you to all you readers. I am glad you’re enjoying this ride. :)

As always, blah blah, disclaimer, blah blah, I don’t own.

Onward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 82

JPOV

“You’re angry with me, aren’t you?” Isabella asked when we were half-way home.

“No, not really,” I mumbled. “We’ll talk when we get home.”

“Okay,” she said softly. “I love you, Jasper.”

“And I love you, baby girl. I just need a few more minutes to calm down and gather my thoughts.”

I maneuvered the SUV down the winding road and we were home within minutes. After turning off the engine, I quickly ran over to Isabella’s side and helped her out of the car.

“Go draw us a bath, I’ll bring us some blood bags.”

I watched as she ran up the stairs and got the tub ready.
Less than a minute later, I brought the blood bags into the bathroom and dropped them into the tub, using the hot water to warm them.

“Now that you’ve had that experience, please tell me that is enough,” I spoke as I undid her hair. “I don’t know if I could handle seeing you attacked like that again. It almost brought me back to when you were going through your change.”

“I’m sorry,” she replied as I wrapped my arm around her waist. “I didn’t realize how traumatic it was for you. I won’t purposely ask to have parts removed again. “It didn’t occur to me how you’d be affected.”

“It didn’t occur to me either,” I said and finished undressing.

“It seems more than that,” she said as I stepped into the tub before holding my hand out for her. I knew it was an unnecessary gesture but I could tell she appreciated it all the same.

“You’re right, it is more than that,” I admitted. She sat down in between my legs and I handed her a warmed blood bag.

“Oh, this is good,” she said in between sips. “It’s almost human body temperature.”

I nodded. “I didn’t want to freak you out when you were human so I never warmed the blood this way.”

“So talk to me, Jasper.”

I took a pull from my own blood bag and then sighed. “I knew it would not be easy watching you spar. It was one thing when it was just learning footwork and some simple exercises but this time, you were going full speed, and short of actually maiming, it was actual contact. And that was just the beginning.”

She took my hands in hers and I was immediately flooded with her love.
“So before your shield made an appearance, I was standing there and talking to the guys. I ended up asking Alec about his gift and how it worked.”

“What?”

“Yeah, when he told me he’s able to take away the senses, I asked him to give me a shot.”

“What?” she asked again, louder this time.

“I’m getting there,” I said quietly. “It was weird because I could understand the concept of his gift but I think you still had me in your mental shield because his gift couldn’t take away my senses. It was a good distraction because otherwise I would have started to pace around.”

“So what were you able to see or feel or...”

“He told me to imagine being blindfolded and then put into some darkened cell. Now also imagine that you’re not able to talk or smell or even feel your fear. That is how it was supposed to feel. For me though, I was able to see you but my emotions weren’t there even though I knew what they were supposed to be.”

“Okay,” she said and I could tell she was trying to understand where I was coming from.

“That was just the beginning because then you wanted to fight again and this time, be dismembered.”

“Before you stomped off, you had said something about needing Alec again. Was that what you meant?”

I nodded. “Yeah. It was the same in the beginning but then when you got hurt, I fought it and this time, I think my gift started to overtake his.”

“How does that work?”
I sighed and shook my head. “I’m not sure. Hell, he wasn’t either, but we both figured it had to do with the close bond you and I share. At the moment when your finger was torn, he said he could tell his gift had weakened. For me, I was able to see, like before but this time, my other senses were in some sort of fog.”

“But I saw you...you were upset.”

“I was fuckin’ pissed and wanted to unleash hell but his gift managed to subdue much of mine. That is why I said it was like a fog. Or if you can imagine, thick, distorted glass,” I explained.

“I’m sorry,” she replied, upset over the situation. “I didn’t realize.”

I pulled her closer to me and turned her slightly so I could kiss her. “I know you didn’t realize. Like I said, I didn’t either.”

“Are you better now?”

I shrugged. “In addition to what I was dealing with as I watched you, I was also dealing with some of my ghosts. I started to think about my past and how I could have destroyed bonded couples without thought. I recalled Peter’s emotions when he used to see Char get hurt, but it wasn’t until today that I realized the anguish he must have experienced. Even though what I actually felt was muted by another’s ability, the guilt of it all flooded me as soon as he lifted it and I was able to run to you. It was one thing to feel the emotions back then, but it was a hollow feeling for me because I was detached from the reason - from the heart. I didn’t have the knowledge to give those feelings some substance. I don’t even know if that makes any sense.”

“Oh Jasper, I think I understand,” she whispered and turned her body around, wrapping her arms and legs around me. “All those feelings were foreign to you back during the war. It wasn’t until you and I reunited that you would have understood, right?”

“Pretty much. Even living with the Cullens, where life was was more peaceful, relatively speaking, I understood more but it wasn’t until I personally could relate that it hit me. You know I’ve seen people get torn apart many times, but yeah, it was as though I was out there getting an arm ripped off too even though I couldn’t feel the pain, my mind knew the pain.”

“Your gift is pretty complex but I am following you. It’s like being in a dream and seeing it and knowing how it should feel, but you don’t actually feel it right?”
I nodded. “I love you baby girl and I know why you wanted to do what you did. I didn’t like it. It was hard enough watching you get attacked but it was even harder to see you getting injured.”

“So was that why Demetri, Peter and Alec surrounded you?”

“Partly, like I said, Alec could feel my gift was overtaking his and there was a slight chance I could overtake him. The guys were ready to subdue me physically if needed. A part of me wanted to run to you and hurt Jane while the other part was dealing with the demons of my past.”

“So having that mating bond makes you feel as though you were being hurt too?”

“It’s probably the best way to describe it. Demetri explained how Felix nearly went rabid when he saw Heidi injured the first time during a training battle. Then he went on to say how fortunate he was that in all the years, he had not gotten that mating bond feeling.”

“Does that make you regret that we’ve got this bond?”

“What?” I asked incredulously. “No! I don’t regret it one bit. Don’t ever think that.” I tapped her on the nose. “I guess it was a good conversation, given the situation. They were able to calm me of my emotions. It also helped take some of the guilt away.” I took another gulp from the blood bag. “Now, enough about me, how do you feel?”

I took her hand and looked at the small scar on her finger.

“Overall, it was a good practice session. I certainly didn’t expect to have another shield pop out.” She chuckled as she shook her head. “I was so confused when Jane bounced away and then I panicked when I couldn’t withdraw it.”

“You sure did,” I replied. “I could still feel your emotions and yeah, if you were still human, it would have been a full blown panic attack.”

“Were you able to touch the shield? What did it feel like?”
“Hmm, at first when it made its appearance, I was too concerned about your wellbeing but then realized you needed my help.” I recalled the moment and smiled at her. “It has a weird feel and look. It sort of reminded me of that human food that comes in different colors and jiggles when you move it around.”

“Jello?” she asked and grimaced when I nodded. “It reminds you of Jello? Wait, how would you know how it feels?”

“A stupid bet with Emmett during one of my stints in high school,” I grumbled. “If it weren’t for me projecting my emotions out, I would have had to taste that damn stuff.”

“What did you do?”

“I sent some pretty heavy emotions towards a couple guys who were known enemies and they started a fight in the cafeteria. No one was ever wiser and I was spared from eating when a food fight broke out.”

“Nice distraction,” she replied and we both started to laugh. “Thank you for helping me. As freaked out as I was, it sort of helped that the twins started doing their own thing.”

I laughed, recalling how Alec just sat down on the ground and began drawing. “They certainly have a way of distracting and diffusing the situation.”

“They sure do. Knowing them now, I don’t see how they were perceived as aloof like Jane mentioned in her story. I suppose they’re comfortable being around us.”

I nodded as I ran my hands over her body. It wasn’t really meant to seduce her but rather, to make sure she was unharmed. As I realized there were no other injuries, the harmless touches and caresses became more heated.

Water sloshed over the tub as our whispered words of love became feral growls of passion. I barely paid attention as I heard the sounds of stone cracking when she somehow tackled me onto the bathroom floor and began to ride me hard.

“Close! Jas-per!” She moaned and panted as I flipped us over, running my tongue over the first bite mark I gave her.
“Yes!” I gritted out as I continued thrusting, grinding her body down onto the floor.

She sat up and began raining kisses on my chest, stopping where my heart used to beat.

“Bite,” she whispered as her muscles clenched my cock and I bit down.

Just as I sank my teeth in her, she did the same to me, right near the first mark she made. That movement was my undoing and I ended up roaring out.

A few minutes later as our emotions calmed and our unnecessary breathing slowed, I pulled her up and surveyed the damage to our bathroom floor.

“It’s not that bad,” she said as she dragged her toe over the dust from the pulverized stone. “We could chisel out some of the rougher edges and soften the indentation, couldn’t we?”

I shrugged. “I suppose we could try it. If it doesn’t work, we could replace the more damaged blocks.” I looked over her mark and ran my tongue over it once more as she mimicked my actions. “I’m not bothered by it. Are you?”

She looked at me and smiled. “I’m not bothered either. Well, unless it makes this floor susceptible to falling through.”

I chuckled as I pulled her closer to kiss her lips. “Nah, the floors feel fine. Look.” I demonstrated by bouncing on my feet to show there was no heavy creaking.

A pinging sound from my phone broke us out of our thoughts.

We both walked downstairs, not bothering with towels.

“Hmm, it’s a text from Aro,” I said as we slowly walked back up to our bedroom.
"What does he want?"

"They’re on their way back with some news. He wants us there."

"Do you suppose it has to with what Demetri said? About Santiago?" she asked as she slowly and carefully put on some clothes.

"Your guess is as good as mine," I replied as I threw on a pair of cut off sweats. "Demetri did hint that they were growing concerned over the senseless killings." I replied back to the text letting Aro know we’ll be at Volterra when they arrived. "We’ve got a couple hours before we need to leave. Do you want to see if you could work on your physical shield without any threats around?"

"I guess we could try to see if it pops up. It definitely isn’t second nature like my mental one."

We headed back down to the patio where a warm, autumn breeze was blowing softly. I watched as she sat down and took a deep breath. I could tell she was trying to do something with her mind but it wasn’t working as frustration began to build.

"Dammit, this stupid thing is a pain in the ass!" she muttered as she smacked the patio floor.

"What can I do to help?" I asked.

"I don’t know. Maybe you could send me some scary ass emotions or something."

At first I thought she was just joking and was about to tease her but then realized she was being completely serious.

"Are you sure, baby girl?"

"We can try it? I mean, I can’t get this to work when I’m calm so I thought maybe if I felt like I was threatened, it might engage."

"Okay," I said almost reluctantly. I could tell she really wanted to understand this new extension of
her gift so I obliged. “We’ll try it for no more than two minutes. I’ll stop the emotions after that but you could always tell me before if it gets too much.”

“Deal.” She turned so her body faced away from me. “So I won’t be tempted to look at you,” she explained.

I started slow, sending her apprehension as I closed my eyes and pictured myself as a predator. I began to add fear into the mix as I began to stalk the prey in my mind. I wanted her to be aware that there was some sort of danger so I sent some of that to Isabella as well as I heard her breathing out. I could also tell she was nervous and slightly scared from the artificial emotions I was sending her.

I opened my eyes after a minute to see if there she managed to get her shield going. At first, I didn’t spot it but then, it shimmered slightly with the wind’s movement. Her shield was up and while it wasn’t as noticeable as out in the practice grounds, it was there. I upped the emotions just a couple notches and saw the shield become slightly more visible. I also noticed Isabella was growing more uncomfortable and I knew from the determination she was sending out, her stubborn ass wasn’t going to stop me before the two minutes were up.

As I cut down the emotions, I slowly walked over towards her and attempted to breach the shield once again. Just like before, I was able to and ran my fingers through her hair. “Okay baby girl, I’m pulling it back.”

“I think it worked, did it? I didn’t really like those emotions but I tried to suck it up for the two minutes,” she blurted out as soon as I had withdrawn all my artificial emotions.

“I noticed you were feeling distressed so I took it upon myself to stop before the two minutes were up,” I explained as I pulled her to my lap. “Your shield did engage but it looked more faint than when you were sparring.”

“I felt it but didn’t want to open my eyes,” she said. “I wanted to imagine I was actually in a dangerous situation so I kept my eyes closed and concentrated on the feelings you were sending me. I felt a tugging in my brain. It wasn’t as strong as when I was up against Jane and Char, but I could feel it.”

“Very good, baby girl. I’m really proud of you. You’re really adjusting to this new life easier than I expected.”
“I feel good but at the same time, I think I have a tendency to be too impulsive.” She looked down at her hand. “This scar is a good reminder of that. I probably should have waited but I was bound and determined to get it done.”

“Yeah you were,” I replied and kissed her hair. “You’ll be the death of me, Isabella.”

“I promise I won’t be as rash again. I won’t purposely go and get body parts removed because that shit hurts,” she vowed and then looked up at the sky. “I suppose we should get ready? Get there a little early?”

“Sure, we can do that.”

After changing into more decent clothes, we left the house and were on our way to Volterra. Both of us were eager to hear Aro’s news. The trip took a little longer than normal, thanks to some wild boar that were running on the main road, causing slow traffic. It was nearly an hour later by the time we got to the castle.

“Those animals smelled really musky,” Isabella said and wrinkled her nose as I helped her out of the car.

“Imagine biting into them,” I teased and she responded by pretending to gag.

“Hello Rosa,” I said as soon as we entered the main area of the lobby.

“Mister and...I mean, Jasper and Isabella, they’re on their way via helicopter and will be here momentarily,” Rosa said. She was still nervous but not as much as she was the first time we visited after Isabella’s change. “Everybody is gathered in the conference room.”

“Thank you, Rosa,” Isabella replied and waved as we headed towards the carved, double doors.

When we arrived, we were greeted by my siblings, the twins and Demetri.

The sound of an approaching helicopter broke us out of the small conversations and I looked out a bank of windows.
“There is a helipad here?” I asked.

“You’ve seen that church-like building across the way?” Peter asked me and I nodded. “You’d think it would have a steeple or domed roof right? Well, the reason for the flat roofline, is because the helipad sits inside so it’s kept mostly hidden.”

“That’s pretty spy-like,” Isabella mused.

We all laughed at her comment.

“You could say that,” Demetri replied. “The reality of it is they wanted to maintain the ancient feel of the city because that is what Volterra is known for. The church had been an abandoned building for nearly a century before it was gutted. The helipad was installed where the pews once stood. We ended up donating them to the nearby village when they were renovating their own church.”

The double doors opened and the guards that were travelling with the royals arrived explaining that the kings were helping the queens settle down before they met with us. Renata and Isabella were quietly talking and from the gestures they were both making, I could tell they were talking about her shield.

A side door opened and Caius emerged followed by Marcus and Aro. They casually greeted us all before sitting down. Isabella gave Renata a quick hug and then sat down next to me. We were all waiting anxiously for news from the kings.

“Thank you all for assembling so quickly. I apologize for calling the meeting as soon as we arrived, but Santiago contacted me just as we arrived at Yerevan’s airport.” Aro sensed my confusion and looked over with a smile. “We land in Armenia and then run to the war torn lands nearby. We still call that part of the world by the name Mesopotamia, but you know it by the modern name of Iraq. We had turned off our phones when we crossed the border so we could feed without being distracted or causing distractions.”

“It wasn’t until we made it back to Armenia that we powered our phones and we received messages from Santiago,” Caius explained. “Aro quickly spoke to him as we were taxiing and sent you the message to meet us here. We haven’t gotten all the details but Santi is at a hotel now waiting to brief us all.”
Marcus pressed a button on a remote and a screen lowered. Within seconds, a man’s face appeared along with a red light indicating we were on a web conference.

“Good evening Volterra,” Santiago said. “I’ll just cut to the chase. For the past few days, I’ve been observing a couple vampires who were suspected of killing many of the humans along the Saskatchewan - North Dakota border. Normally, a situation like this doesn’t warrant an urgent meeting but under the circumstances, I thought it was best and the I’m glad the kings agree as well.”

At this point, Isabella turned and looked at me with a knowing look in her eyes. Even without the explanation, we both knew this had something to do with Alice, the Cullens and the redheaded vampire.

“The leader of this small group of misfits, is a red haired, female nomad who goes by the name of Victoria,” Santiago continued. “Her protégé is a young man she calls Riley. From his attitude and actions, I’m guessing he’s fairly young in this life, no more than a handful of months.” He took a breath before continuing. “She’s trying to create an army and has fabricated a story to get her vampires to follow her.”

“What exactly is she telling them? And how successful is she in creating more vampires?” Caius asked with concern.

“She has blamed the Cullens. From what I have heard, she told Riley that she somehow saved him from becoming some sort of science project to the doctor. For the vampires she is cultivating, she is telling them that they need to help her avenge her lost family and for Riley. She is having some difficulty in keeping the humans from dying during the change. She’s even asked her newborn to help turn humans with zero success. As far as the very few that do make it through the change, their rate of survival is low. She’s not taking care of them and has made this Riley newborn in charge of their care.”

I could only imagine the chaos going on and just shook my head at Victoria’s stupidity.

“So it isn’t an easy feat to change a human into a vampire?” Isabella asked.

“No, it takes discipline to be able to stop drinking the blood and inject the venom,” Aro explained. “While it sounds easy, it really isn’t without some skill or control.”
“I only managed to change a couple vampires myself,” Peter explained before taking a hold of Char’s hand. “Only one survived the actual transition.”

“Well I’m grateful you didn’t drain me of all my blood,” she said as rested her head on his shoulder.

“I’m proud of you, Jasper,” Isabella whispered and began to send me her pride for changing her successfully.

“In their quest to create this army, they’re becoming careless and sloppy with the bodies,” Santiago said. “Just last night, a couple young teenagers, twins, were nabbed from their homes while they were asleep.”

“This is disgraceful,” Caius growled out. “So this is the redhead that young Alice has convinced to do her bidding?” He looked at Aro. “You said her memories indicated she was doing this because she wanted to show her fealty but also because she was bored?”

The room grumbled in disgust after Aro nodded.

Aro stood up and began pacing around. “We need to stop this before more humans are killed.”

“Yes we do,” Caius replied. “At the same time, we can’t just destroy these rogues on the spot. At the very least, we need that redhead captured and tried here in Volterra.” He looked around the room. “Jane, Alec and Demetri, I want you to rendezvous with Santiago ASAP. Santi, do you need us to dispatch soldiers as well?”

“No, sir,” he replied. “She has a few humans that might wake by the time we confront her, but we can handle them.”

“Very well, Chelsea and Afton, you go as well in case we need Chelsea’s gift. Get packed. Wheels up in two hours.”

The chosen guards got up quickly and dismissed themselves.
“Santi, please coordinate with the group,” Caius continued, his voice was not as authoritative as moments before. “Once you’re back, you can go on your holiday. Thank you for your hard work and dedication.”

“Thank you, your majesties,” Santiago said and disconnected the web conference.

“Now there is still the issue of our esteemed guest,” Caius said as soon as the call ended. “Such actions usually warrant a trial for conspiring to create vampires. A trial and possible execution. The fact that you’ve seen her vision of wanting to attack the Cullens as a means of showing her allegiance to us...” He shook his head, seemingly at a loss for words.

Aro sighed and sat down once again. “What a mess. If she wasn’t Carlisle Cullen’s so-called daughter and if she didn’t have this dementia-like condition, I’d suggest we go for a full trial. A part of me wants to capture the redhead, get her confession on record and then have the Cullens learn that potential threat to their very being, was thwarted by us. Let him and his family realize just how vulnerable they would have been...”

Marcus snorted, interrupting his brother. “A subtle way of showing up Carlisle and having him feel like he owes us or something.”

Aro shrugged and gave a quick smirk. “Not that subtle. To be honest, I’m at a bit of a loss. It would be so easy to insist that the Cullens make an appearance here in Volterra.” He looked over at Isabella and me. “At the same time, I’m hesitant because I don’t want you two to feel threatened by their potential arrival. Do any of you have other ideas?”

“If you invite him, there is a chance all of them would show up, isn’t there?” Isabella asked. “I mean, it would make sense, especially if he wasn’t aware of Alice’s malicious plans or the Victoria threat. He’d probably want to bring the whole family to visit Alice.”

“I think I’d be surprised if he didn’t,” Caius remarked.

“Isabella? What are you thinking?” I asked seeing she was now deep in thought.

“Well, sooner or later our paths would have to meet. If Santiago hadn’t been sent to observe and report on Victoria, Carlisle might have contacted the Volturi for help in defending an army of newborns, right? I mean, in theory it could have happened.”
“I believe that could have been an outcome,” Aro replied. “We wouldn’t have forced you two to fly out there though.”

“Who’s to say we wouldn’t have volunteered?” she continued. “I mean if we’re theorizing, anything is possible, right?”

I began to wonder if her slightly unorthodox thought process was due to her newborn stage. I certainly hoped so. That phrase ‘she’ll be the death of me’ began to echo in my head. I sent her my concern and confusion.

“I’m not saying that is what would have happened exactly, but it is certainly plausible. I’m just saying that it seems we are fated to cross paths with the Cullens at least once more.”

“But it doesn’t have to happen,” I said. “If they came out here, we could stay in our house or visit other areas of Italy.”

“I know that. I think we need some sort of closure with them. I’m not scared to see them again,” she said and looked over to the kings. “During your trip, I practiced sparring with Jane and we discovered I have a physical shield.” She held out her hand to Aro. “It isn’t as powerful as Renata’s but it’s there.”

“Did Renata give you some helpful ideas on gaining control of your shield?” Aro asked as he released his hand from hers.

“She’s helping me and so has Jasper. Peter and Char have been very supportive too. I guess what I was trying to say was not to let us get in the way of your official business. If they’re coming out here and neither one of us is ready to face them, we’ll keep away or we’ll watch from the lab. And if we feel up to it, maybe we could have some time to have our say?”

“Are you two sure?” Caius asked.

Isabella turned and looked at me. “Look, I know we’ll probably need to discuss this some more but whatever we decide, whether we rise from the dead and greet them or we go off and do our own thing while they’re here, we’ll decide together.”

“I nearly forgot that they think we’re both dead,” I replied with a chuckle. “The idea of showing up
in front of them is tempting for sure. Even for my own personal reasons.” I looked over at the kings. “I agree with Isabella. Please do what you would normally would in these types of situations. We will adjust accordingly.”

“I think we can figure something out as soon as we get word that this situation’s under control,” Marcus said. “This will give us all time to weigh the choices. We should hear something from the guards tomorrow evening. Shall we reconvene then?”

We all stood as the meeting was dismissed. The kings bid us a good evening and promptly left.

“Since we’re meeting tomorrow, do you want to plan on coming over early and we can work on your shield?” Renata asked Isabella.

“Sure, I don’t think we have plans,” Isabella replied and looked at me.

“We can definitely get here early,” I replied. “I’d be interested in learning if there is a way I could work on her shield as well.”

“I’ll see you both tomorrow then,” Renata said. “I’m going to take the group to the airport. Have a good evening.”

Felix and Heidi followed Renata out the conference room leaving us four Whitlocks alone.

“Are you two going to be okay if they all showed up to meet with the kings?” Peter asked with concern.

“That is what we need to talk about,” I explained. “Isabella, do you mind if Peter and Char joined us on this conversation?” I looked over to my siblings. “That is, if y’all don’t have any plans.”

“No, I don’t mind. It might be good to get a different perspective as well. Besides, we’re family.”

“We don’t have plans. Want to meet us at our place? Aro’s got a larger patio.”
“Sure, that sounds good. We’ll run over there after we get home.”

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully that all made sense about Jasper and why he didn’t go crazy seeing Bella in the last chapter. Once again, the credit to Bella (and Renata’s) shield was inspired by JamesRamsey’s Insecurities.

For all you US folks, enjoy the Labor Day weekend. In case you’re wondering, I’ll probably get this to 95 or 96 chapters and an epilogue. :)

Thank you again! XO ~ sushi
Chapter 84

Chapter Notes

Here’s the next chapter for you all.

Thank you readers for continuing to read/review/follow/fave this story. Many, many thanks to AlexisDanaan and LetsJustDance for making this chapter look good.

(this space reserved for the disclaimer)

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 83

BPOV

“I did it again, didn’t I?” I asked as I changed into a pair of shorts and a t-shirt.

“Baby girl, I’m not mad if that is why you’re apprehensive,” Jasper explained as he also changed into some casual clothes. “I just don’t want to talk about it now, knowing Peter and Char would want to hear us out. I don’t want to repeat myself, that’s all.”

He walked over to me and pulled me into his arms. “You’re coming up with good ideas. Sometimes the way you’re processing your thoughts surprises me a little, but the final outcome doesn’t bother me.”

“I surprise you? How?”

“Your journey from point A to point B isn’t a straightforward one. If you can envision that idea, instead of the direct line, you sometimes take a winding walk before you reach the conclusion.”

I pulled away from him, mortified. “Oh my god, am I sounding like a dumbass?” I blurted out. “Everybody probably thinks I’m crazy right now!”
“No, baby girl,” he whispered as he ran his fingers through my hair. “You’re neither a dumbass, nor do you sound like one. It isn’t a bad thing and I’m sorry if I made it sound like it was. I just think your brain is processing so many ideas at the same time and you’re still learning about your vampire life. Nobody thinks you’re crazy. Believe me, I’d know if they did.”

I knew he had a point. Knowing Jasper, he probably would have called someone out if they did think ill of me. “Will things ever…” I paused briefly to think of the right word. “Um, normalize? As far as my thoughts go? Sometimes I feel like there is so much going on up here that I cannot catch up,” I continued and tapped the side of my head. “I guess that is why you feel like my thoughts take a funny journey?”

“Baby steps, Isabella,” he said. “Remember how we all told you there would be potential days where you feel wonderful and in control while other days you’re not? The same goes with your brain as well. It isn’t unusual to have moments when you feel like you are being completely irrational. To be honest, we’ve all seen tantrums from newborns. You and Gianna are exceptions, even the Volturi have noticed it.”

“Hmm,” I murmured. “So having had a change that was by our own free will is the difference?”

“I think it is a big part of it,” he said as we both walked down the stairs. “It is also the fact you both are in a positive environment. You weren’t changed to fight and you haven’t had to fend for yourself as many others have. That helps as well to tamp down a lot of the extreme emotions you’d otherwise feel.”

“So these tantrums...are they like when I couldn’t dress myself?”

Jasper laughed as he took a hold of my hand and we started to run towards Aro’s country house. “Oh, baby girl, that would not have been considered a tantrum. Don’t get me wrong, I could tell you were pissed off and frustrated, but the tantrums that I have seen wouldn’t compare. There were newborns who ran off to nearby towns and started to feed in front of humans. Sometimes they wouldn’t even feed but just tear bodies apart.”

I shuddered at the mental images. “I guess I should be grateful I’m not like that. You’d stop me to the best of your ability, if you got that murder vibe from me right?”

“Yes, Isabella. I promise. I was ready to that night of the car accident in front of our house.”
“Okay, I guess I can understand why you were so worried at first,” I replied as we crossed into the next property. “I began to take in the different floral scents coming from a garden. “They like flowers, don’t they?”

“They sure do. Peter said something about how they want to do a miniature version of the hanging gardens of Babylon and have been, for a few centuries, trying to cultivate some ancient plants through grafting.”

“I’m not much of a gardener but I’m picturing this as a plant version of the DNA modeling that Alec is leading?”

“It sounds like it,” he said. “I remember some of the basics of farming but most of it was long forgotten.”

The sound of a door shutting from a couple hundred feet away brought me out of our conversation. A couple seconds later, Peter and Char emerged from behind a flower covered gate.

They greeted us and we followed them into a garden area.

“This is one that both of us spend the most time in,” Char explained. “Many of the other gardens have flowers with heavy fragrances. While it is nice in small doses, neither one of us hang out in them for long periods. Maybe we will since it is cooling down though.”

“I’d end up smellin’ like one of those perfume counters at a department store,” Peter said with a grimace.

“Once. You’ve gone to a fancy department store once in your long life and accidentally got spritzed. That was nearly two decades ago,” Char chided.

“That was enough to traumatize me.”

I was enjoying their banter, knowing they weren’t truly upset. The two of them stopped after a couple more jabs and then gestured over to a table that was under an ivy covered patio.
“So what’s going on?” Peter began as the four of us sat down. “Are you considering moving back to the Cullens or something?”

“What?” Jasper burst out. “No! I am not interested in being a Cullen right now...if ever even. Isabella brought up some good points during the meeting with the kings and I think we should spend some time discussing the possibilities.”

He placed his hand in mine and I felt the pride he was sending me.

“I know in the past, I was pretty adamant about not seeing them for a while but what if we ran into them. I mean I’d love to explore the world with Isabella and could you imagine if we ran into them?”

Char shuddered and shook her head. “Oh hell no,” she muttered.

“I don’t remember them clearly,” I began. “I don’t think I’d want to be in that situation, what if I felt threatened and popped out that physical shield in public? Could you imagine?”

“Good point, little one,” Peter replied. “I guess I could see where y’all are coming from. I’d hate to run into them like that. Talk about awkward.”

“Exactly,” Jasper said. “I don’t want to feel like we’re always having to look over our shoulders. The three of us did that when you rescued me, remember? I don’t want to experience that again and I definitely don’t want Isabella to go through it.”

I leaned over and rested my head on Jasper’s shoulder, sending him my love.

“So what? You’re going to meet with them if Aro and the other kings decide to bring them here?” Peter asked.

“If we decide to meet them, it would be a better scenario than being caught unaware, right?” I asked.

“From what I’ve seen from the guards and the kings, I would definitely say yes. I’m not saying I
want to meet them but if we decide to, this option would be on our terms,” Jasper explained.

“What if they tried to convert you back?” Char asked.

“You make them sound like a cult!” I blurted.

Everybody laughed and then started to talk in funny voices. I wasn’t sure what was going on. Peter had this falsetto voice and kept wringing his hands together. Char kept switching from flipping her hair around to sounding like she was pretending to be an actor.

“Wait, are you pretending to be them?” I asked, still confused. “You’re imitating the Cullens?”

Jasper nodded, almost sheepishly. “We’ve done this on occasion. Do you remember details about them, baby girl?”

I shook my head. “The memories are a little blurred but I want to say that you’re all over exaggerating?”

Char snickered. “Just a little bit. I won’t beat around the bush either, they treated us like we were second class citizens and yeah, I hold a bit of a grudge for that. I also hold a grudge over the fact that they treated Jasper like shit too.”

“We won’t mock them if it bothers you, little one,” Peter said.

“No,” I replied. “It isn’t that I’m bothered by it...not really. Maybe if I were to ever see them again, I’d be able to appreciate your fine acting skills.”

All of us laughed at my statement.

“I guess if we do decide to rise from the dead and meet them, I should make sure I’ve got a better grasp of my shield. I remember the big guy with the hugs, I don’t imagine he’s got a sense of personal space.”
“Out of that family, he’s the one that is probably the most outgoing,” Peter explained. “But, I was sort of hung up on that personal space as well. Probably a product of my earlier vampire life. He either didn’t understand or didn’t care.”

I reached out for my brother-in-law’s hand. “Well, I for one am glad you weren’t that way when we met.” I fondly squeezed his hand probably a little too hard, judging from the wince on his face. “Oops, sorry.”

“That’s okay, little one. Maybe if Emmett tries to hug you and your shield doesn’t work, you could shake his hand instead.”

I laughed and stuck my tongue at him.

“Seriously though, we had heard a lot about you from Jasper so we were looking forward to meeting the lady who captured our brother’s eye. Then seeing how you and Char got along...well, I didn’t care if you got in my personal space.”

Jasper growled out. “Peter,” he said and I could see he was warning his brother.

“Not in an innuendo sort of way!” Peter replied, bringing his hands up in the air. “I definitely meant as kin, not kink.”

Char just shook her head at his words. “Diggin’ a hole, Peter. It’s a good thing we are in front of family, unlike that one time you said something similar at a nightclub and people thought we were swingers. Talk about embarrassing.”

“I didn’t know that was a sex club!” he exclaimed. “How was I supposed to know? All I saw was a club called ‘Sin’ and the booze was runnin’ freely.”

I looked over at Jasper trying not to laugh and I could tell he was too.

“Even though I’m a vampire, there were things I saw in there I wish I never did,” she replied and glared at Peter.
“Oh, you know you love me, Char.”

“Yes,” she sighed dramatically. “I do but sometimes you have a tendency to speak or act before thinking.”

Jasper cleared his throat to break them out of their moment. “So I think we need to inform the kings that we’re comfortable with them conducting business as usual. As much as we both appreciate their concern for our well being, they are, first and foremost leaders and we shouldn’t interfere. We will also think about whether or not we will be there when they arrive.”

“May I suggest something?” I asked. “If we do decide to meet up with them, I think it would be to our advantage if we waited until after they’ve met with the kings?”

Jasper smiled and nodded. “I was thinking the same thing. Plus, if they get the truth out of Victoria that shows Alice was plotting against them, I’m going to guess they will feel out of sorts. Don’t think I’m putting pressure on you to meet with them, though. I’m not. Whatever the decision is, we’ll make it together.” He looked up at his siblings. “We’ll talk about it with you as well so there are no surprises.”

“I’m already thinking that if we did meet, it ought to be at the castle.”

“I don’t think they’ll try anything.” Peter replied. “It is a safe move though. They’ll already be out of their game with the kings. Then if you decide on makin’ an appearance, it is a double whammy.”

“Plus, if you’re going to be there, no doubt you’ll have the support of the kings and guards,” Char said. “We’ll respect any decision you make.” She smiled at both of us. “So Renata is going to give you some more pointers on your shield today?”

I nodded. “She mentioned they’re just going to be simple exercises so I can feel more at ease with my extended gift. You know, similar to the breathing exercises with my mental shield.”

“Well, we can get over there if you wanted,” Peter suggested.

“Sure, we should probably change first,” I replied looking down at my casual clothes.
“Just bring a change of clothes along with y’all,” Char said. “You can meet them at the training field so there is room to practice. We’ll meet you there. Demetri asked that we keep abreast of any security developments, as he calls them. We’re going to the castle for a couple hours and then we’ll run over to the field if you don’t mind us riding to the castle.”

“Nope,” Jasper replied. “Sounds like a good plan. We’ll see you then.”

“Bella! I see you’re ready to get down to business,” Renata said as soon as we arrived at the training fields.

I nodded. “I want to figure this out. Are you able to give me any pointers?”

“I can,” she replied with a nod and gestured Jasper and I to follow her. “Here we go. Jasper, you sit beside Bella.”

Renata sat in front of me, cross legged so I moved to copy her.

“The first thing I need for you to do is relax, take those yoga breaths if you need to. Close your eyes and breathe in and then out.”

I did as she suggested and felt a lot of the weight lift.

“Can you describe what you saw when your shield came up?”

I told her about the sparring session and how Jane triggered it when she ran towards me to attack. “It took some time for the shield to drop,” I continued. “Jasper helped me by telling me to do these same breathing exercises.”
“That is perfect. Thank you Jasper for helping her. Do you see your shield at all?”

“Well, it is clear but at the same time, it reminds me of those old windows where you see the distortion. There was a slight blue tint to it and it sort of shimmered a little in the sun,” I replied, a little unsure of myself it sounded like I was asking a question instead of making a statement.

“Hmm,” she said. “Open your eyes.”

Once they were open she continued.

“I think first and foremost is you need to be comfortable with your extended gift. You’re uncomfortable with it, aren’t you?”

I nodded. “It’s one thing to have the mental shield but this news and discovery is overwhelming to me,” I admitted. “I don’t want to feel like some sort of superhero or something. I just want to be me.”

“Baby girl, you are you,” Jasper said as he reached for my hand. “You may never need to use that part of your gift as a means of defending yourself but it is there when you need it. Just because you have a gift, doesn’t mean you have to use it constantly.”

“Jasper is right. Your mental shield is definitely your dominant gift and you were able to control it easily. This one isn’t as inherent, which is why you need to learn to embrace it.”

“Is that what you had to do when you discovered you had the two shields?” I asked.

Renata nodded. “As you know, my situation is the opposite of yours but I quickly learned to accept both of them and it made them easier to control.”

“Okay, so I will need to come to terms and accept my gift.”

“Good!” she exclaimed. “The second thing you might want to do is picture your shield as something tangible. Alec told me he drew a picture of it, or rather a rendition of what he saw. You don’t need to see it as a golden net if you don’t want to, but picture it as something.” She looked as
though she was lost in thought for a brief second. “Let me preface that by saying it should be something that is tangible and pleasant. It wouldn’t do you any good if, for example, you pictured it as a hot pink bubble when you despise that color.”

I smiled at her suggestion. “I wouldn’t have thought about it that way. It makes sense though.”

“I must warn you though, it may not be immediate. You might have control more than half the time but keep practicing.”

“Should I also have Jasper send me scary vibes? I asked him to do that yesterday.”

“I suppose you could, but this way is more organic. You’re learning from within. Besides, it is probably best that you learn without the onset of fear. It would be as though you’re being controlled by it instead of the other way around.” She laughed to herself. “I think I’m sounding a little too philosophical. I learned quite a lot about myself in that early trip to India.”

“You have a good point,” I replied. “I can appreciate your advice, thank you.”

“Are you now ready to start putting those ideas into practice?”

“Not yet,” I said. “I need a few minutes to process this. Do you mind?” I looked at the two of them and Jasper nodded slightly.

“Okay baby girl, we’ll go over there and talk so you have some time to your thoughts.”

I watched as they stood and sped over to a small crop of boulders before I concentrated on everything Renata had said. I knew I needed to accept my gift but at the same time, I wanted to weigh the pros and cons. I began by thinking of the possibilities if I chose not to accept this physical shield. I quickly recalled what I had said earlier when we were visiting with Peter and Char. While I wouldn’t be too bothered if the shield appeared if they tried to touch me, I wasn’t comfortable imagining it popping out in the middle of a tourist attraction.

“Oh god,” I whispered to myself as I pictured Jasper and me on an exotic vacation to the Great Wall or something and suddenly, my crazy gift blew a hole out of the ancient structure. The idea of potentially exposing us to humans or injuring innocent ones had me worried. I slumped onto the ground knowing that I couldn’t allow myself to lose control in that manner.
“... didn’t mean to push her, Jasper.”

I could hear some of the conversation Renata and Jasper were having. He was now explaining to her about my current thought process.

“...her way of processing things right now, she’ll come around.”

I leaned back so I could look at the sky, noting how the weather was slowly changing. I was also thinking about controlling the shield. It certainly would avoid the nightmarish thoughts that ran through my head moments ago. “You might never need it, Bella,” I continued mumbling. “The shield is there if it is ever needed.”

Renata was right and even though I knew it, I still needed to think about it. I laughed as I finally understood Jasper’s words, how I wandered my way on my journey from point A to B. I stood up and ran to the others.

“Okay, I’m ready” I said with genuine enthusiasm. As anxious as I was realizing my shield was more complex than anticipated, I was determined to understand it and work towards accepting my new extended gift. I was relieved that Renata wasn’t forcing me to pop the shield at will but rather become familiar with it.

“Good!” she replied and sat on the ground, pointing to a spot in front of her and one next it.

Jasper and I sat down as she began with the breathing exercises.

“Now, as we practice, contrate on the shield itself. Don’t just concentrate on its appearance, but feel the air around you, does it shift slightly when your shield becomes engaged? Listen to the sounds and see if they change as well. Take a breath or two when you know it is out and see if it tastes different or even feel different. These are things that will also help you become familiar with your shield.”

For the next hour, I worked on changing my attitude about the physical shield. I was now relieved that there wasn’t an audience because I didn’t want to feel pressured. The more time I spent with the simple exercises, I realized I wasn’t as opposed to the new shield on top of my mental one. A part of me wondered if my reluctance had to do with the fact I never liked being the center of attention.
Having the guard act as my mentor really helped me because I knew she could relate to my plight. While my gift wasn’t as strong as hers, she still went through what I’m now dealing with.

“When you start picturing your shield, try not to change its appearance each time, especially in the beginning. You want to, as the saying goes, be at one with it. Personalizing it will help you be more comfortable with the idea,” she continued.

Taking her advice, I pictured my shield like a turquoise bubble that shimmered in the sunlight. It was a beautiful color that reminded me of the summer skies in Texas at our house. I decided the bubble was a good visual as well, I didn’t want to use the Jello description that Jasper had told me about but I did make the bubble look more substantial than the stuff that was made from soap.

Just visualizing the object with a new attitude seemed to help comfort me. I realized this wasn’t a bad thing to have at all.

A phone chimed bringing me out of my thoughts.

“It’s a text from Peter, they’re on their way,” Jasper announced. “Sorry for breaking your concentration.”

“No, it is okay,” I replied. “I feel like I can take as little as a few minutes at a time to familiarize myself with my shield.”

“Exactly,” Renata said. “Don’t move it in your mind just yet. I want you to be used to the idea first and only then should you start moving it. Allow yourself some space when you do in case your brain triggers the shield to move. I know it sounds as though they are tiny steps but they don’t have to be. You can set the pace and if you’re going too fast, you’ll be able to tell. If it does happen, just pull back and start again.”

“That makes a lot of sense,” I replied and heard footsteps approaching us.

Less than a minute later, Peter and Char arrived.

“How’s practice coming along?” Char asked and I provided her with a recap of things I learned
“That is great you have Renata to help you,” she said as all of us walked towards the car.

“I am truly grateful,” I said and squeezed the guard’s hand, making sure I didn’t apply as much pressure as I did earlier today with Peter.

“I’m sure you would have figured it out, Bella. I thought this approach was more of a natural progression for you. This was how I would have preferred to learn.”

“Any news, Peter?” Jasper asked as he helped me into the car.

“Nothing critical. We did receive word that Demetri will join us on a video conference later today.”

“How much time do we have?” I asked as I looked down at my casual clothes. “I should make myself a little more presentable.”

“We’ll meet up in a couple hours,” Peter replied.

“You can use the showers in the tower if you like,” Renata added as we headed back to the castle.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked that. While not quite a full blown, fluffy chapter, it is definitely setting up the stage for upcoming chapters.

Things are going to happen and I hope you like what I have in store. :)

Let me know your thoughts. Always love hearing from you all.

Until next time - XO ~sushi
JPOV

We got to the castle in no time because the early weekend-evening traffic was extra light. Renata led us to a different entrance of the castle that led directly to the guards’ tower and showed us to a private room with an attached shower.

“This used to be Heidi and Felix’ suite until they moved to their own place years ago,” Renata said. “You’re welcome to freshen up here and join us in the lounge after.”

“Thank you, Renata. I really appreciate you helping Isabella today,” I said as we walked into the room.

Renata thanked me after I told her that we’d be out shortly.

As soon as the door was closed behind us, Isabella grabbed the bag of clothes in my hand and tossed it on the bed before taking my hands and walking us to the bathroom.
“Baby girl,” I whispered, noting the mischievous glint she had in her eyes. “They can hear us.”

“I just need your help, Jasper,” she whispered back. “No funny business, I promise... for now.”

I shook my head and tried to give her a stern look but as she started removing her clothes and being both coy and careful at the same time, I smiled and sent love and pride to her.

I pulled her into my arms and leaned over to turn the shower on. She started to slowly unbutton my shirt, planting small kisses along my skin.

“You minx,” I growled against her ear and stripped the rest of our clothing off.

Once we were under the shower spray, we held each other as she told me she now understood what I was talking about in her thought process.

“I felt your emotions when you were thinking about things. I wanted to go to you but at the same time, I knew I had to let you figure this out yourself.”

“Thank you, I know it must have been troubling for you. I know I was probably giving you some crazy emotions,” she replied. “I needed to weigh the pros and cons.”

I held her as she told me some of the thoughts that went through her head. While some were farfetched, I knew she was doing her best to make a smart decision.

“Renata had a good point, I had to realize how important it was to embrace my gift,” she continued as I shut off the water and grabbed towels for us. “I didn’t want to at first.”

“I like her philosophy,” I admitted. “I sort of wished I had a mentor like her when I discovered my own gift.”

She looked up at me with worry in her eyes. “This isn’t bringing up painful memories, is it?”

I held her and smiled, sending her reassurance. “No, baby girl. I just remember the shock of
discovering my gift and how I fought with it for what seemed like ages. We can talk about it some more when we get home.”

“Okay, we’ll talk about it more then,” she said and smiled, standing on her tip toes. “You just want for us to talk about it alone, right?” she whispered and I nodded.

“Can you help me with the zipper? I should have brought something easier to change into.”

I kissed her shoulder as I helped her finish dressing before getting dressed myself. We both walked out to the common area where my siblings were drinking blood bags with Renata.

“Sit!” she said and tossed me a couple bags. “Help yourselves. Demetri sent me a text - we’re going to meet in an hour. Oh, he also relayed a message from Alec,” she continued and faced us. “He said when he gets back, if you’re ready, he’d like to work with you two in the lab.”

Isabella’s eyes lit up. “I’d love to!” she exclaimed. “Jasper! Can we?”

I couldn’t say no to her excitement. “When he comes back, let’s meet with him first. Maybe we can work for a few minutes first and build up from there.”

She nodded. “We can do that, maybe also spend time working on my meditation exercises so I’m used to my shield.”

“We’ll try to do a little at a time,” I replied. “I won’t give you a strict schedule though and say that we’ll train for ‘x’ hours a day. I don’t want you to feel like we’re pressuring you.”

“You’re not. None of you are. I think I am the one that pushes myself more than you,” she admitted.

“I know but you’re not as bad as a month ago.”

“After Peter suggested that I make smaller goals, I have really tried to tamp them down,” she explained. “I know I need to take things easy if I’m going to work in the lab and be around blood.”
I pulled her against me just as she finished her blood bag. Renata had excused herself and was on the phone, presumably with Felix since they were talking about the nightclub. Meanwhile, Char and Peter were relaxing on the couch across from us.

“You okay, bro?” I asked, noticing the two of them were disturbed about something.

“Yeah, I just got one of those visions while y’all were freshening up.”

“You look upset, what did you see?” I asked and sat up, pulling Isabella to my lap.

“I’m not sure when but I got a vision that one day in the future that athlete, Lance Armstrong, is gonna lose all the titles he’s won because the fucker was using banned substances,” he grumbled, clearly upset. “Not to mention his credibility. The guy was a hero to many folks and was an inspiration!”

I looked at my brother, sending small waves of concern to both of them.

“He met him once and thought Armstrong was a stand up guy,” Char explained.

“The guy wasn’t even intimidated and I even wore one of those damn bracelets for the rest of that day.” Peter finally looked up at me and shrugged. “I’m not going crazy. The guy just seemed so genuine and even I was bamboozled.”

“Peter,” Isabella said and stood up, walking over to take his hand. “I’m sorry you discovered news about someone you admired. Think about all those humans who are going to be shocked when they hear the news though.” She paused and looked out, as though in thought before looking back. “My dad even wore one of those bracelets when I first moved to Forks. I can’t remember but I think it was a first responder...a fireman or something, not a cop... he was diagnosed with cancer so everybody showed their support for him by wearing one. You’ll at least have time to prepare for the news as shitty as it is.”

Peter sighed before giving Isabella a small smile. “Thank you little one, I’ll get over it, eventually. Blasted humans and their drugs.” He chuckled. “I guess I shouldn’t complain too much since they are part of my diet when I hunt.”

My brother seemed to be back to his normal self when Renata came back to the common room.
“Sorry for that, Felix and Heidi will be here soon. They were prepping the club for tonight. We can head down to the conference room if you’d like.”

We all nodded and followed Renata out.

A minute after we arrived in the conference room, the side door opened and Aro walked in, followed by Caius.

“Aro, did you speak to Demetri? Is he heading the meeting tonight?”

“Yes, he knows it will be informal, per your request.”

“Marcus will be here shortly,” Aro said as he sat down. “Renata, did you speak to Demetri? Is he heading the meeting tonight?”

“Thank you, Renata” he said and smiled before explaining, clearly noting my interest in his conversation. “Santiago is a wonderful guard but he often has a difficult time in letting go of formalities. He was a court member during the 1800s in Spain. That is about all we know about his history. He’s a loyal and valuable member even though he spends most of his time working out in the field,” he explained.

“Does he ever stay at the castle?” Isabella asked.

“On occasion,” Caius replied. “He prefers working out in the field, especially if it takes him into the wilderness. I think it is part of his wanderlust; he’s going on holiday as soon as he’s done with this particular mission. I have often speculated whether he was a royal gamekeeper or something in his human life,” he added with a chuckle.

“Where is he going this time?” Aro asked his brother. “Floating along the Nile River? Walking along the entire Great Wall?”

“I think he said something about going from London to Istanbul via train before exploring that part of the world. He wants to follow the route used by the famed Orient Express first.”
“That’s right, he’s been eager to take his train out ever since he’s renovated it so that it resembled the luxury ones from back in the day.”

“He’s interested in starting a charter service if the ride is nice enough,” Renata said. “It wouldn’t be exactly like the legendary train, but it would still be a luxurious trip.”

“Jasper, that sounds like fun, don’t you think? The only time I was ever on a train was in Disneyland as a kid so I don’t think that exactly counts.”

I smiled and reached over, kissing her cheek. “No, I don’t think that counts either. You know me and history, I’d like to take a trip like that.”

“As well you should!” Aro exclaimed. “Once things are calmer, I would encourage you both to travel, explore the world.”

“We plan on it,” we both answered and then laughed knowing we were both on the same wavelength.

The main set of double doors opened and in walked Felix and Heidi.

“Has it started?” Felix asked as he and Heidi greeted us. “Our club manager was stuck in traffic so we left later than anticipated.”

“No, we’re waiting for Marcus,” Caius explained. “He took Gianna to town today and they witnessed a young child falling and breaking a limb. They ended up taking the boy to the hospital and then with the paperwork and all, they arrived not too long ago. Gianna was upset because she started to feel the thirst. She didn’t act on it but thought about it.”

“Will she be okay?” Isabella asked with concern.

“She’ll be fine,” Aro replied and turned towards the door. “Marcus is on his way, we can ask him. I guess we could get the video feed set up.”
A few seconds later, Marcus arrived and quickly apologized for any delay. He greeted us all before sitting down.

“Will Gianna be alright?” Isabella asked.

“Yes, she’s just feeling guilty because she believes she should have known better. At the same time, she’s relieved she didn’t act on her thirst,” he explained, touched that she was showing concern for his mate.

“I know how she feels,” Isabella replied. “Can you let her know if she wants to talk, I’m here for her?”

Marcus smiled at those words. “You don’t mind?” he asked and Isabella shook her head. “She didn’t want to wait in our chambers and she wasn’t in the mood to be with her sisters. Do you all mind if she joined us?”

All of us said we didn’t and Marcus quickly flashed away just as Demetri appeared on the web conference.

“Hello Demetri,” Caius began. “We’re waiting for Marcus, he’s bringing Gianna to the meeting.”

“That is fine,” Demetri replied and greeted us all. Jane and Alec were in the background waving at us.

The side door opened again and the young queen entered the room followed by Marcus.

“Hello everyone, hello Demetri,” she said with a wave and then sat down. She reached her hand across the conference table towards Isabella who squeezed it to show her support. Gianna mouthed out her thanks before turning her attention to the video screen.

“As you can see, I have Jane and Alec here with me. Santiago has gone into the nearest city to feed while Afton and Chelsea keep watch on the abandoned barn.”

“Any news of their potential attack?” Aro asked.
“No, as Santiago hinted, she’s quite inept but is continuing to weave this story of how the Cullens were the cause of this Riley newborn’s fate,” Demetri continued just as Alec tapped him on the shoulder and passed what looked like a flash drive to him.

“Let me load up the surveillance photos,” he said. A minute later, his face disappeared, replaced by a black and white photo of a dilapidated building. “Here is the barn. We did use thermo imaging to see if there were humans or near humans there, but as you can see in this next photo, there are no heat signatures. The horizontal shapes in the middle of the room are either humans in their change or they are just corpses. They all seem to be bound in chains and gagged.”

“So there are 4?” Marcus asked.

“There are actually 5 from Santiago’s observations. He said one of them is a young child, hidden behind one of the bodies. Like I said, we couldn’t determine whether they are undead or truly dead.”

There was a loud hiss of disgust from the kings.

“We couldn’t tell because the building smelled like rotting bodies,” Jane interjected. “Santi has also observed rotted flesh tossed out haphazardly. We believe they have been using the space for a while now.”

I wrinkled my nose in disgust. “Hell, even in Maria’s camp she made sure to clean the bodies up before they putrefied.”

“Yeah, she’d rather it smell like spilled venom from torn vampires than dead human flesh,” Peter remarked.

Isabella put her hand over her mouth in an automatic gesture. “That is just gross. I...I couldn’t imagine.”

“Be thankful you don’t have to,” Caius replied. “We ran close to piles of decaying bodies in the war zones we visited recently. It was not pleasant.” He looked back up to the screen. “So what are the next steps?”
“Chelsea is weaving her magic as we speak. She’s not going to compel them into complete submission, but she’s going to make the Victoria woman and her lackey amenable when we arrive.”

The kings nodded in approval.

“And what of the potential newborns?” Demetri asked. “Should we try to bring them back to Volterra?”

Caius looked at the ceiling for a brief moment. “If they can be controlled to travel back, then yes. We could always offer them jobs here or if they want to be soldiers, we can provide the necessary training. If however, they’re not, then we will need to put them out of their misery.” He looked up once more and let out a huge sigh, clearly showing he was not enjoying this particular conversation. “We just don’t have the capability of training them there if and we can’t let them run amuck.”

“Let’s hope they’re able to endure the ride back,” Aro said quietly as he patted his brother’s back. “With Chelsea’s gift and Alec’s, the chances are good they can survive the trip here. Make sure everybody is well fed, your gifts might be needed throughout the entire trip.”

“When do you anticipate capturing them?” Marcus asked.

“The three of us will relieve Afton and Chelsea in a few hours. With winter approaching, the days are growing shorter and there is a chance of some bad weather later today and well into the morning. We should be able to nab them before nightfall tomorrow. We’re confident we can get them back to Europe but we might need assistance in getting them to Volterra.”

Caius nodded. “Very well. Peter and Char, would you be able to meet them, if necessary to help transport the newborns?”

“Sure, I suppose we could,” Peter replied and Char nodded.

“We can set the rendezvous point in France and then you can transport them via truck,” Demetri continued. “We can work out those details on our own but if you two don’t mind, we would appreciate it.”
“Keep us informed on the status, otherwise we’ll see you when you return,” Caius said and we ended the conference with us wishing the guards luck.

“Okay, so now that we’re a step closer in capturing the rogues, we have the Cullen issue to deal with,” Caius continued.

I explained the decision that Isabella and I made to the kings. “We’re not sure right now if we want to confront them but if we do, we’re hoping to do so after they learn of Alice and this potential coup she was trying to brew.

“As much as Jasper and I appreciate your concern, we both agreed that we didn’t want to interfere with your role as leaders. If you had protocol you should be following, we didn’t want you to deviate from them for our sake,” Isabella added. “But like I said, we were both touched by it.”

“Like we said before, you’re family,” Aro said. “Not just you and Jasper, but Charlotte and Peter as well. If you need our help, we’ll be happy to be there, even if it is just support.”

The other kings nodded, agreeing with his words.

“Okay, I guess we should call Carlisle and invite him and his family to Volterra,” Aro said. “Caius, can you ask that the queens join us. I know they will enjoy the call I’ll make when they get here.”

Caius smirked and quickly left the room.

“The queens weren’t fond of his attitude either. I think Sulpicia wanted to force feed him human blood at one point just so he could be, how do you say it? Knocked down a couple notches?”

We all laughed and I could tell we were all looking forward to this phone call.

As we waited for the queens to arrive, Gianna walked over to Isabella and sat down next to her.

“I’m happy to see you,” she said.
“Are you okay? I know exactly how you feel,” Isabella replied. “I’ve felt guilty for feeling the slight thirst because of an innocent human.”

“Really? I guess it isn’t unusual, is it?” Gianna asked, almost rhetorically. “I didn’t act on it and I’m so glad I didn’t.”

“No, this happened when we were walking around our town one evening before the weather started to cool. This was my second time visiting since my change. We had gotten to the coffee shop and of course, I wanted a cup because I still like the smell of it. We were sitting outside and there was a young couple with their daughter walking past our table, just enjoying the evening. Suddenly, I wanted to drink their blood. I think I even drooled a little and panicked. Luckily Jasper was aware of my emotions and we managed to leave as quickly as we could in human speed.”

“You did really well, baby girl,” I said. “I had her bend her head down as though she was feeling ill as I walked us back to the car. You didn’t even hold your breath like you had to the first time we visited the town.”

Isabella smiled. “I didn’t but I still felt guilty even though I didn’t do anything.”

“We’ve all done that before,” I explained not just to Gianna but to Isabella as well. “That is why I prefer to feed on criminals when I hunt. Having the blood bags also helps our control as you might have been told.”

Gianna nodded. “Everybody has been so supportive and yes, they all said the same thing about it being natural and I should still be proud of myself for not acting on my craving. You’re right on the blood bags, too. If I didn’t have them, I might have reacted differently. I just can’t stop feeling a little guilty.”

“As a predator, you’re driven to the blood. You can’t help it, it is what we are,” I continued. “The guilt comes from the human side. You two have maintained a lot more of your humanity than my siblings and me. The three of us had to find it from within our darkened souls after all the death and destruction we caused. It took us years... maybe even decades, to begin feeling small doses of humanity but in time, it grew. You two are fortunate to have kept it. Don’t look at your emotions as a bad thing, necessarily. It is a sign you still care - you still have regard for human life and that isn’t truly bad if you look at some of the awful things vampires have done in the past...present company included.”

I began to feel the gratitude from everybody in the room. I knew my siblings and I weren’t the only ones with dark pasts and all of us were able to relate to the guilt Gianna was feeling.
The young queen smiled. “I appreciate it and I know I should look at this as a positive experience. It’s just that I feel as though I should have reacted better since I was more informed as a human. I guess I need to stop that mindset.”

“You and I both,” Isabella mumbled. “I’m so glad we’re dealing with similar experiences.”

“Me too. As soon as I can control my typing or texting, we’ll talk more, okay?”

“Deal!” Isabella exclaimed.

From outside, we could hear some footsteps heading our way and quickly settled down again.

“Darling, what is this about bringing the Cullens here?” Sulpicia asked irritably as soon as she opened the door, followed by Athenodora and Caius.

“My dear, I think it is time we bring them in, under the circumstances,” Aro began and then quickly gave them a rundown on the whole Victoria mess.

“I suppose we should let him know of his daughter’s nefarious plans,” Sulpicia replied. “He better not be as infuriating as he was the first time we met him.”

“Do you know if he’s still that sexist know-it-all like he was when he first set foot here?” Athenodora asked. “He’s mated now, is he not?”

The two queens looked at me, curiosity coming off of them.

I shrugged. “While I never saw a mark on Esme, other than the one that changed her, I’m certain they are, they did act as though they were mated. They didn’t venture far from each other and during hunts and we weren’t allowed to feed too close to each other. I don’t see him as a know-it-all, necessarily. I think he’s more judgemental than anything. His son, Edward, now he believes he knows everything because of his mind reading ability.”
Aro placed his hand over Sulpicia’s hand. “We won’t know about their relationship until Marcus can see their bond.” He looked up and explained. “My guess based on Jasper’s observations is that they are, but the animal blood suppresses some of the more vampiric instincts.” He looked around the room. “Are we ready to call him?”

We all nodded and I pulled Isabella closer to me knowing it was our cue to be extra quiet.

“Hello, Carlisle?” Aro asked after the phone picked up. “It is Aro here.”

“Aro? Is everything okay? How is Alice?”

Aro rolled his eyes. “Yes, she is fine. I’m calling on official business. We want you and your family to come out to Volterra.”

“Official business?” Carlisle replied, worry causing just a slight crack in his voice.

“Yes, Marcus has a mate and we’d like for you and your family to meet our newest queen.” The other end of the phone was quiet. “There will be an opportunity to discuss Alice as well.”

“Of course, how about after the new year?”

“Why Carlisle, it is nearly the holiday season. Surely you would like to spend them with young Alice, wouldn’t you?”

“I would need to arrange my schedule at the hospital…”

“Excellent!” Aro exclaimed, interrupting Carlisle’s rambling. “We’ll see you and your family in a fortnight. If you’d like, we can send our plane out to you. You’re in Alaska now, correct?”

“Thank you, Aro,” Carlisle replied, his voice cracking slightly more. “That shouldn’t be necessary.”

“It is no trouble at all. We’ll have the plane ready for you in Anchorage. See you soon, my friend.”
As soon as he hung up, the room erupted with conversation.

“Darling, you were wicked,” Sulpicia said, smiling. “I think my sisters and I will need to do something to shake things up upon their arrival.”

The kings chuckled. “Nothing too brash, my dear,” Aro said.

“We should have the children’s party the same time they meet us!” Athenodora announced. “That would surely cause a ruckus given our ‘barbaric nature’.”

I felt curiosity coming from Isabella and my siblings. I was wondering about their plans as well.

“What is this party?” Isabella asked.

“During the holiday season, we bring children from the local orphanage to visit our castle. We decorate the ballroom in some sort of holiday theme and it becomes almost like a carnival for them,” Caius explained. “The queens began this tradition nearly two centuries ago and it has continued ever since. Well, except during the second World War.”

“This is also one of Alec and Jane’s favorite events. Alec usually designs the backdrops and then Jane helps us with the costumes,” Sulpicia continued.

“We all help out in some fashion. One year, we all created ice sculptures and the ballroom became this crystal carnival with pale blue lights everywhere,” Marcus added. “The children were so excited.”

“So we should parade the children in so they think we’re going to have them as meals?” Heidi asked. “I’d be leading them since they believe I am the huntress, right? Maybe I can do that with a holiday themed costume.” We all laughed at the idea.

Aro nodded. “He doesn’t know about our tradition and thinks we have absolutely no regard for human life so let him think such. If they so much as interfere, they risk exposing their true nature to young children.”
“If we do have the celebration the same time as the red-haired woman’s trial, we’ll need to make sure the children are safe,” Marcus said. “Especially that lackey of hers if he’s indeed a newborn.”

“We’ll use our were-venom devices on them,” Caius replied. “They won’t get near the children. We simply won’t allow it.”

I was a little shocked and amused by their audacity and I could tell Isabella was as well. A part of me didn’t blame them and knew they wouldn’t endanger the lives of those children. If they were the very vampires that my former family believed them to be, the incident with Marcus and Gianna earlier would have ended differently.

“He is that one who thought Felix and Demetri were lovers, correct?” Gianna blurted out.

“Not that there is anything wrong with that but yes, he thought we were abominations,” Felix answered through gritted teeth. “He’s my brother!”

Heidi ran her hand down his shoulder. “It’s okay, mon cœur, I think they’ll be too concerned about other issues than to worry about your supposed love life.”

“You might want to conduct the meeting with the Cullens using vampire speed,” Isabella suggested.

Aro chuckled. “We will certainly do that and they wouldn’t expect anything less. I certainly hope you two decide to view the meeting at the very least. No pressure but I think you might enjoy seeing them squirm.”

“We will certainly take that into consideration,” I replied. “It is very tempting and if we both decide not to, will you record it?”

“Don’t worry, we will,” Renata said.

“Well, that is all we have,” Caius announced. “This meeting is adjourned.” Immediately, the royals got up and left through the side door.
“Thank you, Heidi and I are headed back to the club,” Felix said. “Maybe when everyone is back, we could go out dancing.”

“Sounds like fun,” Isabella said and then looked to me. “Maybe we should hunt the night before or something?”

“We’ll figure it out,” I said. “We’ll also play it by ear to see how things go the next few days as you start working on your shield and stuff.”

“True,” Isabella replied and then looked at the guards. “Soon, I wouldn’t want to cause a scene, you know?”

“We understand,” Heidi said as they stood to leave. “We can also meet on the practice field when you’re ready to practice.”

Isabella smiled. “Thank you, once I’m ready to, I will let you know.”

“You ready to head back home, baby girl?”

“Yeah, are you coming along?” She asked Peter and Char.

“Sure, can we get a ride back? We decided to run here earlier today.”

A couple hours later over at Casa de Cullen

Carlisle POV

“What do you think they really want?” Esme asked as we were walking back from our morning hunt.

“He said something about a new queen,” I began. “Then he mentioned something about some
official business. I’m not sure, to be honest.”

“And he insisted on the whole family?

I nodded. “He brought up the fact that it was near the holidays and we could visit Alice. At the same time, he told me he was sending his plane out to pick us up.”

“Well, I guess we need to let Emmett and Rose know to come back home. How long do we have?”

“Two weeks.”

“Two weeks,” she repeated and gripped my hand a little harder. “We haven’t done anything wrong, have we?”

“No,” I said and put my arm around her. “They are probably just exerting their power. We just have to be wary though. Their kind is unpredictable.”

Internally I shuddered as I recalled the atrocities I witnessed those centuries before when I lived at Volterra for a brief period. Something was up, I just knew it, but I wasn’t sure what it was. I wished Alice’s skills were working and she wasn’t under the Volturi’s thumb.

Once we arrived home, Esme quickly grabbed her phone and left a message on both Rose and Emmett’s phones.

“So we’re going to Volterra?” Edward asked as soon as he walked in from his hunting trip, having read my thoughts.

I nodded. “Aro called and practically insisted on us all going out there in a couple weeks. How was your hunt?”

He scowled at the mention of Aro’s ‘invitation’. “The hunt was good. I managed to find some caribou in Denali National Park. Did you two just get back?”
“We didn’t venture quite that far but still managed to find some moose,” I said through my thoughts. I also mentioned Aro’s insistence and how he offered the use of his plane.

“Wow, it doesn’t sound like he was going to take ‘no’ for an answer.”

I shook my head. “No, it sure doesn’t.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation - mon cœur - literally - my heart

So did y’all enjoy that? I hope it has answered some of the questions regarding the Cullens. I’d love to hear your thoughts.

Okay so from now until the end of October, the posting schedule will be wonky. I’ll try to get the chappies out regularly as possible. I’m also going to be on vacation in mid-October and cannot promise I’ll be able to post. That being said, I’m still hoping to hit that ‘complete’ button before the end of the year.

Thanks again - until next time! XO – sushi
Chapter 86

Chapter Notes

Hey everybody! Here’s the next chapter - as I said last week, my posting schedule will be wonky from now until end of October. I’ll try not to post a cliffie type chapter before I go on vacation. I couldn’t do that to y’all. I can’t promise a post while I’m on vacation, I’ll have my laptop but it will all depend on whether or not I’ll have time.

Thank you AlexisDanaan for being a super duper beta and to LetsJustDance for prereading. And thank you, readers!

I’m still not SM so the characters aren’t mine.

Enjoy -

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 85

BPOV

I crouched down low and focused on Renata and Heidi’s movements. I tried not to look at Jasper who was currently talking to both Peter and Felix.

“Concentrate, Bella,” I mouthed out to myself as they started towards me from opposite directions.

I took a deep breath as they began to move even faster, not quite at top speed but it was close. Heidi leaped into the air ready to kick towards my head and Renata fell a couple steps behind, ready to smash into my torso. I could automatically see how, if this was an actual fight, their moves would have caused my body to break.

I continued a couple more strides, and hoped I was leading them into believing I wasn’t paying attention. At what I figured was the last possible minute, I ducked down to avoid Heidi’s foot and stuck my right leg out, sweeping it at around to catch Renata.

“That was great, Bella!” Heidi said as I helped Renata up. “It almost looked like a martial art move.”
“I think I saw something similar on The Matrix,” I admitted and smiled, waving to Char who was sitting on the sidelines.

The sound of a car nearby had us all turning around and I noticed it was a fancy SUV driven by Caius, the other kings riding along.

“They come out to observe on occasion,” Renata explained. “Try not to let them distract you, okay?”

I nodded. “Sure, shall we go again?”

“Yes, but this time, I’ll sit this out,” Heidi said and immediately, Char sprang up and took her place beside Renata.

I jogged back to my spot as I waited for them to attack.

Suddenly, there was a commotion from where Jasper and the guys stood.

“Fuck you!” Peter yelled at Felix and was immediately grabbed by the throat and slammed onto the ground.

Jasper pulled Felix off and started to push and punch the Volturi guard.

“Jasper!” I screamed out and started to run towards them.

“Bella! Wait!” Renata yelled out but I ignored her and the other women.

“Leave him alone!” I snarled out, as I saw Jasper slammed down just as his brother was.

“Fuck!” I muttered and was about to jump into the fray when I felt a strong pulling sensation from my brain. My physical shield had made itself known and instead of protecting me, it had now
formed a wall around Jasper. Felix couldn’t get at him and as soon as I approached, I crouched low and continued snarling.

“It’s okay, baby girl,” Jasper called out.

Felix started grinning and backed away towards Peter who was also smiling.

“What the hell is going on?” I yelled out and felt Jasper’s hand down my back.

“You can take the shield down and I’ll explain,” he replied.

Everybody was now gathered around us as I shut my eyes and pictured the shield pulling back to my head. It took a couple tries before I could actually ‘grab’ and then disengage it. I reached out to Jasper, wanting to make sure he was okay as I continued to glare at Felix.

“It was planned, baby girl,” Jasper said. “Peter’s argument with Felix and then me pretending to get into the fight was staged.”

“What? Why?” I asked, still pissed off but now also confused.

“I wanted to see if you would react and if the shield would be used.”

“Jasper Whitlock! That is a fucked up thing to do!” I turned and tried to stomp off.

He took my hand and sent me his apology and trust.

“I know it was a shitty thing to do,” he said.

I scoffed and rolled my eyes. “Oh, you think?!”

“We thought if you had known and anticipated it, we wouldn’t get the full effect.”
“So you planned this? Everybody knew? And yeah, it was a shitty thing to do,” I huffed.

“I’m sorry, Bella,” Felix said. “If it is any consolation, Jasper had to send me a great deal of anger to get me to react that way to both of them.”

“I kind of get it but I am not keen on being tricked. I’m still freaked and pissed about it. Jasper, I thought you were going to get hurt and nearly got into the fight physically!”

“We would have stopped immediately,” Jasper explained as he pulled me into his arms. “When you were deciding on whether or not to embrace your physical shield, Renata and I talked about the possibly of setting up a fight while you were unaware.”

“You were in on it?” I asked Renata.

She nodded. “There was no way of knowing whether or not you’d react unless someone attacked Jasper. We didn’t want to wait until there was a real scenario so I thought it would work as long as you were comfortable with your shield. Had you chosen not to accept your new skills, we would never have put this into motion.”

I huffed again. “I see your point. I know this is a safe environment to test theories, I just wish I didn’t have to see that. I panicked.”

“I know you did, but I was proud that you reacted like that,” Jasper said and kissed my hair.

“How did my shield do? I know I protected you but I was a little too upset to really analyze it.”

“You managed to push your shield completely away from you and protected Jasper,” Renata said. “It was also a lot brighter than earlier when we practiced it.”

“Wait, so I was no longer protected? That would have been bad.” My anger dissipated as I began to wonder if that was a flaw or potential weakness.”
“It would have, but I think with some practice, we can make sure you are in your bubble at the same time,” Renata replied and Jasper nodded.

“You looked almost feral when it popped out so I’m guessing as you gain more control, you’ll be able to hone in on your skills some more.”

“Kind of like a newborn thing?”

“I think so,” Renata replied. “It sort of reminded me of things I did when I was new in this life. Granted it was my mental shield so I was able to protect certain people but left myself open. I’m glad Aro was patient enough to let me continually practice.”

“But now that I have seen that sneak attack, wouldn’t I know if you plan another one and anticipate it?”

“You will but I don’t know if we need it anymore,” Jasper replied. “One thing I really noticed was how quickly you dropped the shield once you realized I was safe.”

I nodded. “It took a couple attempts but you’re right, it did seem faster, or at least it seemed like it took less effort.” I shut my eyes and tried to replay the actions. “I felt it...a twitch before it burst out and somehow I guess, I pushed it out?”

“That is great progress, Bella!” Renata said. “We know you can control it in the beginning and the end. Now we need to work on the ‘during’ part.”

“I can’t always control it though,” I admitted. “How is that progress?”

“You’ve got a good grasp, right?” Char asked.

“Yeah, I guess, compared to a few days ago. Hell, compared to a few hours ago,” I said.

“Isabella, we’ve seen many vampires who wanted to be soldiers and they didn’t have it in them to fight,” Aro said softly as the kings approached us. “Your fighting technique is impressive and so is your shield.”
“Thank you,” I said and knew if I was still able to, I’d be blushing.

“You two have a very special bond,” Marcus said with a smile. “The fact that you instinctively kept him safe while leaving yourself vulnerable is saying a lot. I think Renata is right, with time, you’ll be able to manipulate your gift so it protects the both of you but you reacted instinctively just now.”

“You know, if you two ever decide you want to join the guards, just say the words and we’ll welcome you,” Caius said with a wink. “If those Cullens saw what we did, they’d be convinced that we’d capture you and force you to serve us. Perhaps, if you’re up to seeing them, you should both look miserable and act like we’re holding you against your will. Maybe we should have you wear robes with a giant ‘V’ emblazoned on it.”

Leave it to Caius to break the tension as I burst out laughing at his crazy idea. I turned around to find Felix and reached out to shake his hand, letting him know I was no longer upset.

“While I’m not mad at you, I hope you won’t trick me like that again,” I growled out.

“Sorry for pushing your limit, baby girl,” Jasper whispered before we turned our attention once again to the kings. “Any word from Demetri and company?”

“Not yet, we should hear from them in a few hours though,” Caius replied. “Isabella, were you planning on practicing some more? Would you mind if we observed?”

I looked at the kings and slowly shook my head. “I could practice some more,” I replied, a little nervous now that I was going to have an audience.

“Gianna expressed an interest in learning some basic skills and I was curious to see how you’re progressing,” Marcus explained. “I told her she would never need such skills but she insists. I thought since you were turned around the same time, I could get an idea of what to expect and anticipate when I have Renata and Heidi train her.”

“Of course,” I said, now understanding their sudden interest.
“Sir, will she be observing one day as well?” Heidi asked.

“I believe so. No offense, Isabella but I wouldn’t match her up against you.”

I raised my hands up. “No, no offense at all. I think I might be too paranoid that I’ll lose my concentration and end up hurting her by accident,” I admitted. Last thing I needed was to get on their bad side.

The kings chuckled and said from what they saw earlier, they were quite impressed with my movements.

I got up and jogged to the middle of the open field and waited until Char and Renata moved to attack me from opposite sides. I crouched low as I watched both of them move closer and closer before leapfrogging over Char and then twisting my body around so I spun haphazardly towards Renata who ended up engaging her shield so I ended up skimming off and bounced onto the ground.

“That was cool,” I said laughing as I stood back up, wiping the dirt off my pants. “It was bouncy, are you able to control the strength of your shield?”

“Yes,” she replied with a smile. “I wanted you to feel what it would sort of feel like when you run into one. I kept the shield soft which was why you bounced off nicely. If I had it on full strength, you probably would have shot straight towards the sky.”

“I would have landed hard and left a giant crater!” I exclaimed. “Timeout.”

Needing a break, I walked over to Jasper and he handed me a blood bag from the cooler.

“That was pretty impressive,” he said as we sat down on a nearby boulder. “Now, her shield looked like that jello stuff I described before.”

“Could you imagine if she had it on full strength? I would have landed on my ass and created a huge divot!” For some reason, I really thought that was hilarious.
“Isabella?” Marcus asked as he approached us. “Did you have any self defense training when you were human?”

I shook my head. “Not really, I took some a couple Tai Chi lessons when I was in Phoenix when Renee got into one of her many ‘phases’. Then when Jasper and I got together, he bought me a heavy bag and gave me some basic lessons on kick boxing, nothing serious. Why?”

“You look like a natural out there.”

“I do?” I asked. “Thank you, I remember one point in my life when I felt really clumsy.”

“Jasper, did you teach her all those spin type moves?”

“No sir,” he replied. “My sister and the guards have helped her but a lot of her moves that she’s using, she adapted from watching movies like The Matrix. I’ve only given her basic fighting strategies since I didn’t want to feel like I was being overbearing.”

“You’re not overbearing,” I chided as I pulled his arms around me. “Before I actually started sparring, he taught me the basics, how on instinct, we tend to move in a straight line towards the opponent. He taught me to move not just laterally but to also use the space above as well as below.”

“So you didn’t just go into sparring right off?”

We both shook our heads.

“I taught her how to move in different directions and we started in a slower pace,” Jasper replied. “The moves were noncontact and at times, they were more like dance steps.”

“The slow movements helped me to become familiar with them so they became a part of my repertoire,” I added. “It has only been a few weeks. We decided to wait until after the coronation to begin actual, physical sparring.”

“Thank you, I guess I can work with her on the basic footwork. Jasper, did you have a hard time
“Yes sir, I still do,” he said and pulled me closer to him. “The first time, Peter and Alec had to distract me whenever she faltered. It makes it slightly easier that the women are sparring with her otherwise, I think they’d have to restrain me.”

The king patted his back and must have sent Jasper some emotions.

“You’re welcome, anytime,” Jasper replied.

After another hour of practicing, this time with Renata trying to help me move my shield voluntarily, we all decided to call it a day and decompress before meeting back at the castle before dawn. By then, there should be some news from the guards.

*An old, rickety barn near the border of US & Canada*

*Victoria POV*

I was now realizing creating an army of vampires was becoming a daunting task and I was failing. The child died after its heart exploded from the high temperatures and then the other 2 humans must not have had enough venom because they still haven’t woken up after 4 days. They were too still and at first, I refused to believe they had succumbed. After the fifth day, it became painfully obvious that they were dead when their bodies began to bloat and smell.

“Riley, throw the bodies out the window,” I growled out, glaring at the 2 remaining bodies. I knew they were changing, I could see the twitching but why is it taking more than 3 days? They were starting to make some noises, their voice boxes now somewhat healed but I could tell they were never going to sound like a normal vampire. It hadn’t been my original intent to change them. I was in the middle of draining them when I decided at the last minute to push my venom into their wounds. They were twins, identical and I was pleased they appeared to be on their way to becoming vampires.

“I need to feed,” Riley groaned out. “I’m tired of hanging out here in this shack. Where are these Cullens again? Let’s go fight them now!”

I had half a mind to tell him to head north and go after them himself. I shouldn’t have promised that
crazy yellow eyed girl that I’d help her. She made revenge sound so easy and so convincing. She said she saw victory in the future and that I’d finally have my peace. I wish we never set foot in that part of the world. If we didn’t, James and I would still be together terrorizing human, not stuck in the middle of nowhere with still trying to build an army with this stupid newborn named Riley.

“What’s that?” Riley asked, all of a sudden, his head turned towards the dirty window that was covered with a greasy rag.

“What are you talking about?”

“Something is out there. I can hear it.”

Damn his acute newborn hearing. I walked closer to the window. “It might be the smelly wildlife,” I replied. “I think we’re near one of those nature parks or something.”

As I moved closer, I noticed the animal scent was no longer strong. I was glad that the herd of whatever that was, had moved away.

The sound of the blowing wind from the storm was making it hard for me to hear anything unusual at first but then, there it was - the crunching of snow and from what I could tell, there was more than one set of footsteps and, they weren’t from an animal.

Riley was now half-crouched as he started to back himself towards the wall. They were coming closer towards the barn. I looked to my right and then my left, my head never moving as I looked for an escape. For some reason though, I wasn’t rushing to leave even though I felt as though I should be.

Meanwhile, Riley was now beginning to growl, venom dripping out of his mouth as he kept looking for an escape.

“Well, run then if you’re wanting to so badly,” I hissed out.

“I want to,” he sneered. “But I can’t. Is this some sort of vampire thing you didn’t tell me about?”
He was nearly shouting. If there was someone or several beings outside, they would now realize this was NOT an abandoned building.

Before I could think or say anything else, the door was ripped open and several, hooded figures emerged from the blowing snowstorm.

I stared at the figures. “What is the meaning of th-”

“Silence!” the taller figure commanded as two smaller beings, flanked his sides. “You two are now in the custody of the Volturi.”

I gasped as I realized these figures were not human, nor were they regular vampires. These were the Volturi and I wouldn’t be able to escape from them even if I tried.

Before I could say anything else, my was placed in some sort of trance. My brain was still working but I could no longer see, nor could I hear anything. In fact, all my senses were gone. I wanted to panic, I wanted to scream and run but I couldn’t. I just stood there as my hands were pulled roughly behind me and secured. I tried to break free but couldn’t.

I wonder where Riley was. Did he make it out or was he captured too?

I was escorted somewhere but I wasn’t sure where exactly. It was surreal not knowing where I was or what was going to happen to me. Time lost all meaning.

Has it been an hour or days?

If I could be scared, I knew I would be.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this was a short chapter and I did sort of end it right there. I sort of had to or else the chapter would have been crazy long. Any theories?

I know a few of you were hoping the Cullens were going to be at Volterra already.
Remember in the last chapter that he “requested” that they arrive within a fortnight (2
weeks - I’ve always wanted to write a character who used that word). That is why I had to switch gears a little and go back to the Victoria and Riley story.

Have no fear though, the Cullens will be in Italy but certain things need to take place before their arrival.

Love to hear from you and thank you for reading.

XO ~sushi
Chapter 87

Chapter Notes

Can you believe it’s October already?! Well, here is another chapter.

Thank you to you all for your continued support. I really appreciate it.

I’m not SM - I like to play with her characters - like in this chapter, I’ve gone a little AU on Jane & Alec’s gift.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 86

JPOV

“I didn’t bite you too hard, did I?” Isabella asked and ran her tongue on my skin once more.

I rubbed my right collarbone. “You didn’t hear me complain, did you?” She shook her head. “Did I bite you too hard?”

“No,” she whispered. “It was...wow. The way you had me straddling the tub...your fingers and mouth...wow.”

I smiled as the image of her screaming out my name as I bit her inner thigh popped into my head. “I’m glad you weren’t upset I bit you there.” I gently ran my finger along her new mark.

“You didn’t hear me complain, did you?” I laughed as she threw my exact words back at me.

She began to wrap her legs around me and then looked up. “So changing the subject to what we talked about the other day, about the whole mentor thing. When you became a vampire, you had to figure out your gift on your own?” Isabella asked.
“It started when I was in a battle,” I murmured and then pulled her closer to me as some water nearly spilled over our bathtub. “My opponents were arrogant and I felt it, believing it was my own. Then after I defeated them, I received a human and felt their fear. I slowly began to understand my gift and its limitations. It wasn’t easy though, most of the time in those early days, my demon ran freely. Hell, the early decades.”

“So you were only able to realize what your ability was when you were calm and lucid?” she asked and I nodded. “That must have been so hard to understand, especially when you were also shoved in the middle of war and starved.” She reached behind me to grab a washcloth and began running it along my skin.

“It wasn’t easy, but I learned pretty quickly especially since it was a means of survival,” I replied and then closed my eyes, enjoying her emotions as well as the way she was taking care of me. “Feels good.”

“And you just learned how to use your gift through time?”

I nodded. “I became really good at sending fucked up stuff to opponents and to my meals. They were more expendable and safe to practice on.”

She shook her head. “I’m so glad you escaped from that.”

“Me too, baby girl, me too.”

“You know, I should be mad at you for that whole Felix thing but I’m not. You really scared me though,” she said as she continued to wash my body.

“Forgive me?” I asked as I opened my eyes and pulled her towards me, kissing her lips.

“I forgive you,” she whispered. “Especially since we were able to discover new nuances about my gift. I had no idea I could push the shield out to protect only you.”

“I hope we can practice enough so that you can be protected as well. I’m confident in time you’ll get a good grasp of it.”
“Let’s hope I never actually have to use it outside of practice.”

“Ditto.” I looked out our window. “Hey, I guess we should get ready to head back to the castle.”

“You think there will be news? Does it bother you that we’re spending so much time there?”

“It doesn’t bother me one bit. I enjoy our extended family and I think there will be some news this morning. I don’t know if it is the news they’re wanting but I think there will be news all the same.”

“Would you ever want to go on missions like that?”

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t say never, but it depends on the situation. It would have to be something that is important to me or to us for me to want to get involved. I wouldn’t want to be like Santiago and go all over the ends of earth, you know? I kinda like being home with you. Who knows what the future holds,” I admitted. “What about you?”

“I don’t want to be gone for long periods of time either. I like our time away from the world when we get home. A part of me was afraid you’d miss it.”

“Nah, I’ve seen enough death and destruction to last several lifetimes. If something interests me or you, we’ll talk about it.”

“Like we’re talking about the Cullens issue?”

I nodded. “Exactly. Do you have any new thoughts about it?”

Isabella shook her head. “No, nothing new. I sort of want to see what they discover with Victoria first and then go from there. I mean, if Alice did encourage her to attack the family, that is pretty serious stuff.”

“Yeah it is. It also sounds like she broke some rules too like being sloppy and attempting to turn a child.” I kissed her on the lips once more. “You ready to get out of the tub?”
“Yep,” she replied and untangled her legs from my torso. “We sort of have a thing for water, don’t we?”

“Even when you were a human,” I said and chuckled. “I never minded then and I don’t mind it now.”

“Oh, I’m not complaining whatsoever,” she said. “I like our private time and the water seems to cleanse the day away, you know?”

I nodded and helped her up even though we both knew I didn’t need to.

“Would you get mad if I thought we should confront them?” she asked. “I’m not saying that I’m a hundred percent certain, I’m just asking at this point.”

“Not really,” I said as we headed into the closet to get dressed. “I knew sooner or later, we were bound to cross paths. You had some excellent points about using their trip to Italy to our advantage.” I paused to pull a shirt over my head. “Plus, we have a great support system here.”

“Yeah, I would much rather meet them here than if we went back to Texas,” she said as she carefully hooked her bra, breathing a sigh of relief when she was able to without the usual sound of tearing fabric. “I did it!”

“You did, baby girl,” I said and pulled her into my arms. “I’m so damn proud of you and feel so fucking lucky to have you in my life.”

“I love you so much, Jasper. Thank you for giving me forever with you.” She looked around and started laughing. “Did we just say some vows to each other in the closet?”

“Yep,” I said and chuckled as we were not fully dressed. “I believe we did.”

We finished dressing and then grabbed the empty blood bags still floating in the bathtub before heading downstairs and out the door.

“Looks like we’ll need to stock up on more blood,” I said as I helped her into the car.
“Is the cooler in the back?” she asked and I nodded.

“I try to rotate them and keep one in the trunk at all times.”

I watched as she pulled out an older iPod, one that Peter had given her as part of her control training, and started fiddling with the music. I felt her accomplishment when she found one of our favorite playlists and Muse started to play.

“You’re doing really well with your control, baby girl.”

“I haven’t broken any electronics for nearly a week now,” she said. “Knock on wood.” I chuckled as she tapped her head with her fist. “I’ve also gone a day without tearing clothes. Well, not counting when we got home earlier.”

“No, we won’t count that at all,” I replied, reaching over to hold her hand. “Besides, you were still a little upset when we got home. I could tell the fake fight really affected you and had a feeling you were going to check me to make sure I was really okay.”

“I tried to calm myself but kept seeing you getting slammed by Felix. Are you sure that didn’t hurt?”

“It didn’t hurt. If we were human, that would have been another story. You are a vampire and saw me in danger. It is our instinct to protect our mates. I’m not surprised that you got riled up and wanted to make sure I was okay once we were safe. Remember when we first visited Volterra?”

“Yeah, I was still human and felt the need to make sure you were okay. Sometimes I still wonder if my actions are normal.”

I sent her understanding and love. “You’re looking and feeling a lot more comfortable being a vampire now. You’ve progressed quite a bit.”

“In the beginning I was on eggshells, wasn’t I?” she asked and I nodded. “That dial thing helped but learning to control everyday things like cell phones and laptops really made a difference. I’m glad you and Peter thought it was a good idea for me to use items that I found to be important
instead of toys. It sounds like Gianna and Marcus are doing the same thing.”

“I believe so. I think for the most part, they’re doing the same thing we are but on a different scale. She’s also learning the protocol of being part of the royal family.”

“Based on what Marcus asked about me sparring, I take it the queens don’t fight?”

“That is what I’m guessing as well. It makes sense given they have the elite guards as a first line of defense.”

“And having gifts like Alec, Jane and Renata doesn’t hurt either, I suppose. So could you tell if Marcus was angry over Gianna wanting to learn some basic skills?”

I shook my head. “No, he was curious and unsure how to proceed. I could see his point of view. He wants her protected, obviously, but he’s unsure of how far to go. I’m sure having been in this world for so long, this is new for him.”

“But there are other females who have been trained and several serve as part of the elite group.”

“Yes but those women are guards and she is his mate.”

Isabella thought for a moment. “And even though they’ve all evolved from when they were first vampires, he’s still of the ancient world mindset when it comes to protecting her?”

“I think that plays a part, though the way I saw the queens interact the other night I’d say they’re pretty outspoken. I think their history plays a part of it and while they are more liberal than Carlisle’s Puritanical background, they’re probably not as modern and liberal as you or I. More so from your point of view, it might appear like their relationship is not as equal from a gender standpoint.”

“Am I considered a feminist then?” Isabella asked. “Isabella Swan Whitlock, feminist vampire... because you know, if I am one, I should actually drop your last name or hyphenate it.” While she was looking at me with a serious face, I could feel her amusement.
“Thou hast broken my heart, m’lady,” I gasped out dramatically as I smacked my hand over my heart.

“Jasper, you are silly.” She giggled as she scooted over and gave me a kiss. “Thank you for always making me smile.”

“Woman, I’m not silly,” I growled and wrapped my arm around her shoulder. “Thank you for believing and trusting me, especially in the beginning. I will do my damnedest to always put a smile on your face.”

“We’ve come a long way, haven’t we?”

“It has been a wonderful journey to get here.”

“Yes it has,” she said. “I get your point about the gender thing. It is why you still help me even though you don’t need to, right?”

“Sort of, it was how I was raised. I mean, I might have been treated like I was nothing more than a war machine at one point in my life, but I was brought up to be and remain first and foremost, a gentleman. That being said, I think Marcus will have her learn some fighting skills, but not as extensively as you. You’re practically being trained to be a soldier.”

“Really?” she asked. “I didn’t realize. Does that bother you?”

“Like I said on the field, it bothered me at first but I’m better. Now if you decided you wanted to fight with Felix or even Alec, I might feel differently.”

“No, don’t worry,” she said. “I like practicing with the girls. I’m more comfortable than the idea of sparring with a guy. Even with Peter, I’d feel a little uncomfortable. I know if this was a real life situation, I wouldn’t necessarily be paired to fight another female but fighting a male is similar to fighting a female right?”

“Well, you know the sensitive areas of a man. It is the same for a vampire. One of the reasons why I had you learn to use the vertical space is in case you fought with someone bigger than you. While they’re more apt to rely on their brawn, I’ve taught you agility and to think outside the box. The spinning kicks and the leg sweeps aren’t typical movements but you’re using them and it throws
opponents off their game.”

I pulled into the parking lot and helped her out of the car.

“That was why the kings were so impressed?”

I nodded as we walked to the entrance.

“It’s why I thought you were ready for your comfort zone to be pushed. If you weren’t, I wouldn’t have but I was monitoring you the entire time.”

“I’m sorry for that outburst in public.”

I kissed her hair. “And I’m sorry for scaring you and upsetting you.” Before I opened the door, I looked at her. “Ready?”

She nodded and I guided her inside, greeting Rosa.

“They are in the conference room,” she said and waved at us as we entered the ornate double doors.

“Hey bro, Bella,” Peter said as soon as we entered the room. Char followed suit and gave us both hugs.

“Renata had to run back up to the tower to grab something. She’ll be back.”

Less than a minute later, Renata appeared with Felix and Heidi close behind. She quickly set up the monitor.

“They’re on board the jet so I needed to grab a different video cable,” she explained.
The kings arrived a few seconds later and quickly greeted us.

“They’ve run into a patch of turbulence and as soon as they fly out of it, we’ll be linked,” Renata said and then turned on a different screen from the one we used before.

“Thank you, Renata,” Caius replied.

“Hey, I just thought of something,” Bella announced and looked at me. “Didn’t you tell me when I was human that the Cullens were not comfortable seeing your scars?” I nodded and she turned to address the rest of the group. “Maybe, when you have your meetings with them, if you have any, to show them?”

I winced at her suggestion, hoping that her outburst didn’t insult the kings any.

“Actually, Sulpicia suggested something similar. She thought the queens should wear dresses that will show their marks,” Aro replied and then looked at me. “Jasper, you sort of got the topic started when you said you never saw a mark on Esme. And now that our theory is practically confirmed with Isabella’s statement, we can guess they will not like seeing marks on the queens.”

“I don’t understand why those marks would bother them,” Isabella said, softly brushing her neck where I first marked her. “I think they’re beautiful. Even the ones you gave me when I was still human.”

“I can only guess that the marks shamed them and would serve as a constant reminder of their true nature,” I answered.

“I think you might be correct,” Aro said. “I think if there was a cure for vampirism, he’d take it in a heartbeat.”

“Given the way they looked down at Char and me, I’d say your scar theory is spot on. Maybe you should roll your sleeves if you two decide to confront them,” Peter suggested.

“I have considered that,” I admitted. “I just don’t want to intimidate the rest of y’all.”
“Nonsense,” Caius replied. “Yes, when you first arrived, I will admit, I was unnerved. Now that we’ve all had a chance to know you, I think I can speak for everybody when I say that you are always considered part of the family. Don’t forget, we saw you out on the field and you were wearing a short sleeve t-shirt.”

The room nodded in agreement and I felt their acceptance. “Thank you, I have had issues because of the scars for a long time. It wasn’t until Isabella accepted me, that I began to grow more comfortable and feel accepted. We still haven’t decided yet but hopefully soon.”

“Take your time,” Aro said. “We won’t be disappointed if you’re not ready.”

The buzzing sound from the radio quickly brought our attention back to the issue at hand. A few seconds later, a somewhat grainy video feed appeared.

“Hi everybody,” Jane said with a wave. “Sorry for the delay, there was a fierce snowstorm and we needed to fly over it and in doing so, hit some turbulence. Hang on, while I set up the auxiliary camera.”

A minute later, a second screen appeared on the screen.

“I’m going to give the report today. Demetri is flying with Afton while Chelsea and Alec are making sure our guests are subdued.”

Jane showed her brother and Chelsea, seated and looking as though they were asleep. She then scanned over to Victoria and a male vampire. They were sitting towards the back of the plane and were staring straight ahead. Their arms and legs were shackled and I was almost certain they were laced with werewolf venom.

“Jane, how long have they been under?” Aro asked with concern.

“Since we entered the barn, a couple hours ago,” she replied.

“Jane, please make sure your brother doesn’t wear himself putting those two under for so long,” Aro continued.
“What of the bodies?” Caius asked.

Jane faced the camera once again. “It was horrible. There were three bodies that had decomposed but you could see the bite marks. One of the dead was still a child.”

“Disgusting!” Caius spat.

Jane nodded. “There were two others who appeared to be in their change. They were brothers, twins. Once we had our subjects in custody, Demetri and I examined them and discovered they had not been injected with significant venom to complete their change.”

“They’re still stuck in that transition stage?” Aro asked, anger and disgust rolling off of him.

“No. If we could have injected more, we would have but they were both beyond help. We also noticed their throats were ripped out and they were suffering.”

“Dear god!” Marcus exclaimed.

“We found a cell phone on one of the brothers and switched it on before we set the building on fire. It was the most humane thing we could do,” Jane said. “The signal will alert the authorities and give the families a chance of having closure. We had to put them out of their misery.”

“Did you take evidence?”

She nodded. “We did, we took pictures as well as blood and tissue samples before we left. We should be in Europe in approximately 8 hours given the current weather conditions.”

“Do you need an escort?” Aro asked.

“If we do, Demetri will radio once we land in the United Kingdom for fuel.”

“Very well, keep us abreast of any developments. You can contact us via satellite phone if you’re over the ocean,” Aro said.
“We will and thank you,” Jane replied and then promptly ended the transmittal.

“What a disgrace!” Marcus spat. “A part of me would prefer to just destroy those vampires, Cullens be damned.”

Aro nodded. “I feel the same way especially given how Alec will overtax himself by keeping those idiots in control.”

“I don’t mean to interrupt, but what is this about Alec’s gift?” I asked.

“The limit of both Jane and Alec’s gift isn’t infinite,” Caius explained. “They can use their gifts continuously for a short period of time. I believe they are now just shy of half a day. If they go longer or have to push the intensity up, their gifts drain faster. We often wondered if it was a twin thing for them.”

“So what happens once their ability is depleted?”

“They have to feed and rest in order to regain their strength, but they’re practically comatose,” he looked over to the other kings. “What is it that Alec says? Something about his health points?”

Marcus chuckled. “Something like that, he compares himself to a video game when that happens. The twins tried to show me once.”

I revealed to the kings how Alec helped me when Isabella was sparring the first time. “If they need someone to help subdue them, I could help,” I volunteered.

“Jasper, are you sure?” Isabella whispered as she clutched my hand tightly.

“I’m not saying I’ll be needed but remember, I have the experience controlling the most feral of vampires. I could step in and help if needed.”

“As Isabella asked, are you sure?” Aro asked. “If the estimate is correct on the younger vampire,
Alec’s gift might wane by the time they reach European airspace. I know he’ll want to push as far as he can but there is a great chance his gift will be depleted before they reach Italy.”

“I’m sure,” I replied.

I could tell, Isabella was agitated over my offer. As much as I wanted to keep her safe, I knew she wouldn’t take no for answer if I left to escort the vampires back here. I had to push my protective instincts aside and be confident in the fact she could protect herself.

“Isabella, can I trust you to remain out of harm’s way if you accompany me?”

“I can go?” she asked. “I didn’t have to put up a fight?”

I sighed. “As long as you’re safe,” I said and then looked up at the kings. “I do have one request and that would be for Demetri and Santiago to return separately.” I hoped I didn’t just piss them off, I just couldn’t have two, non-mated males on the plane with Isabella there. “I’d also like Peter and Char to join as well.” I knew my siblings would provide some protection if needed.

“We’ll do it,” Peter said after looking at Char.

Caius nodded. “They’ll understand. Afton can fly. Chelsea’s gift doesn’t deplete like Alec’s. You’ll need to bring a stock of blood bags for both of them and if Alec is incapacitated or close, Jane will be too worried about her brother. This is going to be an undertaking, Jasper.”

“No, I understand,” I replied. “My gift doesn’t wear down like his so I can make sure they are subdued.”

“Thank you, all of you, we all appreciate your offer,” Caius said as everyone in the room sent me their gratitude. “We’ll make sure to keep you updated on the details. Since they’re already planning to land for fuel in the United Kingdom, we should just switch out at the hangar. You four could fly out and then board that plane when it lands. We’ll contact them as soon as they move away from the storm cells. Please be prepared to fly out in a few hours and make sure to keep the ground time to a minimum for everybody’s comfort.”

The meeting was adjourned as the kings left the room.
“Thank you, Jasper for offering to help,” Renata said. “Don’t worry about the guys, they’ll understand.

“It’s nothing,” I replied. “I’m glad to be of help.”

“Well, thank you again,” Renata said as she got up. “I’m going to monitor the radar and let everybody know the change of plans as soon as they have clear skies.

Felix patted my shoulder on his way out with Heidi. “Thank you for helping Alec like that. Everybody’s right, knowing him like we do, he’d probably push himself too far. Last time that happened, he was zombie-like for a few days.”

“He helped me the other day,” I explained. “It’s the least I could do.”

“Why can’t Chelsea just compel them into being calm?” Isabella asked. I had to admit, I wondered about that as well but figured the kings had their reasons.

“When Chelsea compels and then reverses, it works well with humans but vampires still get faint memories of it. Since this Victoria person is going to be on trial, Aro wanted the full, unfiltered story. In past, similar situations where the subject on trial had been compelled in some fashion, their story or rather, the way they recanted their story didn’t seem genuine,” Heidi explained. “Aro doesn’t want that, especially if there is a chance the trial takes place in front of the Cullens. He doesn’t want them to even think the story was fabricated. Plus, one of them is a mind reader, right?”

Isabella nodded. “That makes sense. Thanks for explaining it.”

“No problem, you all have a good rest of the night,” Heidi said and reached for Felix’s hand.

As soon as they left, I wrapped my arm around Isabella’s shoulders and looked at my siblings. “You guys good?”

“We should be asking you that, bro,” Peter replied as we headed back to the lobby area. “That is really cool, what you’re doing, by the way. Are you okay with this, little one?”
“I think so, the idea of being near a feral newborn is disturbing but that just means I should be prepared in the next few hours.”

“We can work on it as soon as we get home,” I said. “First we need to stock up on blood.”

“We do too,” Char said as we headed to the cars and grabbed the coolers. “Let’s get a supply for Alec and Chelsea while we’re here. The castle staff will make sure it gets loaded on our plane.”

We all headed to the supply room and quickly stocked up. Isabella helped Char gather a cooler full of blood for the plane trip later. They slapped on a label and then stowed it in one of the large fridges surrounding the room.

When we got back to our cars, we agreed that Peter and Char would pick us up in a few hours to head to the airport.

“Ready to head home, baby girl?” I asked.

“Sure am,” she replied as I shut her car door. “We’ll actually visit the UK one day right?”

“Of course we will,” I replied.

“So what made you volunteer so fast?”

“Part of it was how Alec helped me and how we discovered how my gift reacted to his. Then when the kings said what they did about his gift having limits, I knew I could help and there was no way I was going to ignore it.”

“Wouldn’t that put you in danger though? And now I’m going with you! Oh my god, I might distract you from making sure you get that Victoria and Riley under control!”

“Shh,” I replied and sent her some calm. “First of all, you’ll be safe. I’ll make damn sure of that. Second, I can control them easily, remember my past, a feral newborn and a crazy vampire are
practically nothing. Besides, if they do start something, I will quickly send them the rage I felt when I first found you, they won’t know what hit them.”

“Oh,” she replied and quickly looked out the window. “I think that Laurent guy said something about how she wanted to get her revenge on me and he was going to be merciful.”

I growled. “I will make sure that bitch gets a dose of this rage I’m feeling then.” I took Isabella’s hand into mine. “Let’s go home and have you practice your breathing. Since we’re going to be in close quarters when we’re onboard the plane, we need to make sure you can control it in a smaller space.”

“So we’ll be working on this indoors?”

“Yes ma’am, we sure are.”

After getting home, we changed into some more comfortable clothes so we could work on her shield.

“We’re going to the barn?”

“Sort of,” I replied. “Do you remember the room with the old furniture?”

“It was... a tunnel?”

I nodded. “The plane will be narrow and I thought this confined space was best suited for us.”

Once we got to the barn, I lifted the trap door.
“You want to go first?”

She nodded and immediately jumped into the hole, landing with a soft thud on her feet. I followed less than a second later.

“Nice landing, baby girl, it was nearly silent.”

“Big difference from a few months ago,” she said and laughed. “I have left so many craters from my body whenever I jumped.”

I led us to the middle of the tunnel and then stopped.

“Okay, from what I’ve been told, their plane is larger than ours and this tunnel is narrower but we can pretend we’re inside an airplane cabin. You ready?”

“Yep, I am.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“For now, just sit with me and see if you can get your shield to pop out and back in.”

We sat down and she shut her eyes, beginning to breathe like Renata suggested. It took several breaths before a faint shield appeared in front of me and grew larger and more visible until it disappeared.

“Did that work? I mean I felt that thing in my head but did you see it?” she asked excitedly.

“I did, baby girl,” I replied and went on to describe what I saw.

“I tried to just picture it at first and it probably became stronger when I started to picture that incident out on the field. I didn’t want to at first because I want to do this on my own, without recalling bad things.”
“Did you notice a difference physically when you did that?”

“It took a little more effort to get the shield to appear at first but once I did and switched to those memories, it seemed easier and I was able to pull the shield back the first try!”

“I’m really proud of you,” I replied and also sent my feelings to her. “It sounds to me like you’re beginning to notice the nuances of your gift. While there is no timetable as to when it all becomes easier, I think you’re beginning to build a foundation of knowledge.”

“Hmm, it seems as though a lot of things begin with a foundation of knowledge,” she said and looked at me. “You had me build my fighting skills by learning footwork. Even long before that, when we got to know each other, we began as friends and built that into something more.”

“Something much more.” I smiled. “You’re right though, having a foundation is important.”

“Let’s try this again,” she said.

For the next hour, we worked on her shield inside the stone tunnel. She did most of the work while I watched and gave her insight when she asked. I was impressed at how quickly she was beginning to push and pull her shield from her mind.

“You’re doing really well, Isabella,” I exclaimed when she finally decided she needed a break.

“I think it is easier for me to retract it than it is for me to engage the shield. I am noticing sometimes it takes an extra fraction of a second,” she said as we jumped out of the tunnel.

“I noticed the shield isn’t as transparent as it was when we started an hour ago. Are you still recalling that memory?”

“A little,” she replied as we headed back to the house. “I try to use my mind first and it isn’t until the end that I use that memory to sustain the shield until I’m ready to pull back.”
“It’s a smoother transition,” I said as we entered the kitchen and fixed ourselves a bag of blood.

After our snack break, Isabella and I moved to the living room to continue but that space was large and wasn’t as challenging as I wanted.

“How about moving to the library?” I suggested after successfully getting her shield up several times in a row. “The books and our photos are there and your goal is to control your shield without disturbing the surroundings.”

“I’m up for the challenge.”

We practiced for over an hour and I could see she was a quick learner.

“Do you think you can push that shield to protect me?” I asked after we received word that Peter and Char were picking us up at three in the morning.

“I can try,” she replied.

I moved around the room as she tried her best to protect me. It was hit-and-miss which was beginning to frustrate Isabella.

“How about one more try and then we need to get ready?”

She nodded and once again sat back down. I feigned to my left and then moved to my right as she managed to follow me for a few steps before her shield moved too far and hit the far wall.

“Oh shit!” she exclaimed as I turned and saw that she had broken the shelf that held her father’s flag and badge.

I quickly moved to grab them just as they were about to hit the floor. Once I set them on a small table, Isabella quickly ran to me, clearly upset at what almost happened.

“Shh, it’s okay,” I whispered as I held her and ran my fingers through her hair.
“I froze when I saw them falling,” she said as she sobbed tearlessly. “I could have broken them.”

“I’m sorry for pushing you like that,” I replied, sad that she was so distraught. “I’m really proud of what you’ve accomplished so far. You should be as well.”

She calmed down and nodded. “I am noticing that it is easier. You didn’t push me and I could have said no but I wanted to.”

“Well, I think you’ll do fine on the plane. You have a pretty good grasp of your shield.”

“You really think so?”

“You know I wouldn’t bullshit you,” I replied. “You even challenged me on that.”

“I guess I did, didn’t I?” she said and smiled. “I am glad you helped me with my human memories. I was pretty feisty when we first saw each other again.”

I chuckled and walked us over to our bedroom. “Yes you were. You didn’t hold back and made sure I didn’t give you any BS when we talked about vampire stuff or the Cullens.”

“So what should we wear?” she asked as we got to the closet.

“If I have to deal with those nomads, I’m going to wear my fatigue pants and probably a thermal top with a t-shirt under. If they get out of control, I’ll take the thermal off and show my scars. You can wear anything but you might want to avoid dresses for this trip.”

“Okay,” she replied and pulled on her fatigue style pants. “Unlike you, I’ll wear my t-shirt over my thermal top. And unlike you, I won’t be in all black,” she teased.

I laughed as she threw on a dark purple thermal henley and paired it with one of her black t-shirts.
“Pick out an extra set of clothes too. We most likely won’t need them but better safe than sorry.”

Once I packed up the small duffel bag with our emergency clothes, I sent a text message to Peter and Char letting them know we were ready.

*We’ll be there in five.*

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked that chapter. :) I’m off for a couple weeks - I’m not sure if I’ll have the time to update during my trip. If I do, I will but if not, I’ll make sure to update as soon as I can.

Thank you all again - AlexisDanaan and LetsJustDance worked on this chapter to make it look pretty.

XO ~ sushi
Chapter 88

Whoa, what is this? Why, it’s the next chapter to the saga!

Sorry for the delay, Hong Kong was fun and I got back to the States early Friday morning. Then had to catch up to the time zones and work. Talk about stress :-/.

Thank you all for your patience! I’ll thank my wonderful team of women at the bottom.

Blah blah, disclaimer… not SM… blah blah.

Onward

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 87

BPOV

“Wait! I didn’t pack my passport!” I exclaimed soon after take-off.

“I grabbed them when I got our extra clothes,” Jasper replied and held them up for me to see. I smiled and sat down next to him.

“So what should I expect or anticipate?”

“Well, since we know Alec’s gift is most likely depleting, as soon as we enter the plane, I’ll relieve him,” Jasper said. “Given what the kings said, Jane will probably be taking care of him at the time. Luckily, the trip is less than three hours so it will be pretty quick.”

“Okay, but what about me? I don’t want to look like I have no clue what to do,” I admitted.

“They’ll have moved the 2 to the back of the plane by the time we board. I need you to stay away from them as much as possible. I can send them emotions that will keep them pretty subdued but we don’t want them seeing you on the off chance they’re still around when the Cullens arrive. Stay
close to Char or even Jane though I don’t know if she’ll be preoccupied in helping her brother.”

“If I can help, that would work,” I said. “Victoria might still recognize me though.”

“Little one, check the coat closet by the door,” Peter called out from the cockpit.

I shot Jasper some curiosity and he shrugged. I got up and carefully opened the cabinet. My strength control was manageable as long as I wasn’t distracted.

I gasped as I saw the dark, velvet hooded robes hanging there. “Jasper, I they’re Volturi robes.” I pulled one out and held it against my body. “Oh, this one has Char’s name on it.” I flipped through the others and noticed the silver embroidered thread labeling them. “We have our own!” I held them both up to Jasper.

“Yes, Caius had those ordered for y’all after Bella’s birthday celebration. He wasn’t sure if they’d ever be worn but wanted you to have them just in case,” Char said. “I helped with the sizes. They’re exactly like the ones they wear when they’re on official business.”

“The fabric is beautiful, thank you,” I whispered as I ran my fingertips over the fabric before carefully removing the robe from the hanger. I slipped it on and then threw the hood over my face. “Does this hide me?”

Jasper nodded. “It does.”

“So will you be hidden too?” I asked as I draped our robes over one of the chairs and sat back down.

“I will. We should plan on having the hoods up as much as we can. I can take the long-sleeve shirt off too - the sleeves are wide enough that my scars will show if I need to intimidate them.”

“What if they get violent? Are you going to unleash your emotions on them?”

“From what we saw, they’re restrained and I have no intentions of removing their shackles,” he began and I could hear Peter and Char agreeing wholeheartedly. “As much as I’d like to give
Victoria a taste of the rage I felt when I heard Laurent threaten you, I need to refrain. I don’t want to reveal ourselves before we’re ready to."

I sighed. “Oh yeah, you’re right. I don’t want them to know we’re alive either. At least, until we know more information. So, is this sort of like a top-secret spy thing?”

Jasper chuckled. “If it makes it easier for you, yeah, you could put it that way.”

I smiled as I felt his love wash over me. “I’m a little nervous but excited at the same time.”

“I know you are,” he replied with a wink. “If you need it, I’ll send calm your way.”

“It won’t take your attention away from the prisoners or whatever they’re called?”

Jasper shook his head. “Remember I had some blood earlier. I’ll be fine. I’m just, for the most part, gonna sedate them as much as possible. I can help you relax if you want, just sit back and close your eyes.”

I nodded as he reclined the seat for me.

“Take deep breaths. You’ll be fine, I believe in you.”

I began to relax, as I heard the droning of the engines and the low murmurs from Peter and Char. Jasper was sending me his love and affection as I returned them wholeheartedly.

“We got some nice tail winds,” Peter said a few minutes later. “We’ll be down on the ground soon.”

“Wow, that was fast,” I said and sat back up to see the early morning sky.

“We’ll be there shortly,” Char said. “They will be landing a couple minutes after us.”
“Will there be authorities checking our papers?” I asked.

“No, they shouldn’t,” Jasper said. “Technically we’ll just be in the hangar but we’re not going outside the airport at all so we’re not entering the country. We’ll definitely have to when we return to Italy though.”

I nodded. “So you guys are okay with Demetri taking our plane?”

Jasper shrugged. “It doesn’t bother me any seeing as we’re not using it often.”

“He’s a good pilot,” Peter said. “He won’t take this girl for a joy ride.”

I immediately felt the change in altitude and braced myself for the inevitable freak out I had when I was human. Jasper sensed my discomfort and held my hand.

“Let me see if I can conquer this on my own,” I whispered to him.

“Okay, baby girl, if it gets too much, squeeze my hand and I’ll calm you.”

I mouthed out my thanks as I shut my eyes. I was determined to remain calm as we landed. Besides, I really didn’t want to look vulnerable when there were crazy vampires close by. I took a deep breath and started to picture happy thoughts taken from my human life and my current one. As the pressure of the cabin changed, I willed myself to exhale slowly.

As the wheels hit the runway, I popped open my eyes and smiled. “I did it! I didn’t freak out!” I exclaimed. My brother and sister cheered as Jasper wrapped his arm around me.

“I didn’t doubt you for a second.”

Peter steered us into the enclosed hangar as Char grabbed the cooler from the rear of the plane. We all slipped on our robes but left the hoods down as we exited.

“Will the authorities say anything about the cooler? What if they opened it and saw the blood?” I
asked quietly, not wanting to get caught.

“They won’t, Chelsea can compel them once they’ve landed if we need to,” Peter said. “That is why she’s not switching planes back either.”

“What?” I asked not following.

“Chelsea and Afton could leave if they wanted with Demetri and Santiago, but they’re not going to because of the detainees,” he explained. “The Volturi forged extradition papers for Victoria and Riley but on the off chance the authorities begin asking more questions, she could do her thing and no one will be any wiser.”

“I get it now. It is more elaborate than I would have thought.”

“Yeah,” Char said with a chuckle. “The Volturi are really good at beating the government bureaucracy game.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they invented it,” Peter mumbled. “I’d sure hate to be on their shit list.”

We all laughed at his comment just as another private plane arrived in our hangar. It was much larger than our own plane.

“Whoa, that plane is big for a private jet,” I exclaimed. “I mean, I knew they wouldn’t have one smaller than ours.”

“Our is a real private jet where the Volturis bought this Boeing 707 from a defunct company and renovated it,” Peter explained.

“Okay, I might be a vampire but motor talk still confuses me,” I quipped. “I do understand more than I used to though.”

“This is the plane they’ll most likely send to Alaska to pick the Cullens up. I don’t see them using any of the other planes in their fleet.”
“They’ve got a fleet? I mean, I don’t know much about planes but that sounds impressive.”

“They’ve been around for a long time,” Peter said. “Demetri said their favorite is still their Boeing 707. They’ve had it for decades but they love that they can travel far and it can accommodate all the royals. If they fly out for official events with many of the guards, they’ll use that plane. Otherwise they use a larger version of our Gulfstream.”

“If it’s a favorite of theirs why would they use it for the Cullens?” I asked.

“Because it is a plane from decades ago. If they offered up their new Gulfstream, it would break the illusion that the Volturi are antiquated. They don’t want to start throwing them off their game yet,” Peter said.

As that jet plane’s engines cut off, we all looked up and waved to Demetri sitting in the cockpit. Minutes later, the door opened and he stepped out.

“Thank you for helping,” he said and greeted us all. “Here, I’ll take that before the fuelers arrive.” He took the cooler from Char’s hands and quickly ran back onto the plane.

“You okay, baby girl? The humans are coming.”

I nodded, thankful I had a blood bag on the way to the airfield.

Demetri returned just as the fueling truck arrived.

“She’s got enough fuel to make it back,” Peter said to Demetri as they walked around our plane together.

“What are they doing?” I whispered to Jasper as we started, at human pace, towards the Volturi jet, Char had already gone inside.

“Pilots do that to make sure everything looks okay. They’ll walk around the plane and then go in to
check the instrument panels. We don’t necessarily have to but since there are humans around, we do that mostly for show,” Jasper explained.

“So you did that whenever we’ve flown?”

“You probably never noticed, but humans were never around so I did my visual checks from afar. We all did the instrument panel check though.”

We neared the metal stairway and greeted Santiago. He greeted us and quickly boarded our plane for the ride back to Volterra.

I nodded and climbed up the steps, behind Jasper. As soon as we neared the top, he pulled his hood over his head and I did the same.

“Hey,” Jane said with a smile. “I’m glad you’re here.” She looked around and then whispered. “Alec is, as he calls it, down to his last health points.”

Jasper nodded. “I’ll make the transition as smooth as I can but they’ll regain some of their senses. Isabella, can you please stay with Jane?”

“I will,” I replied.

Victoria POV

The darkness and haze slowly lifted and I could see again. Or rather, I should have been able to see again. There was a heaviness in my head and some strange feeling in my stomach. Nothing really made sense and voices were just foggy and loud.

I knew I was sitting down but I couldn’t stand. My wrists and ankles burned with every small movement, breaking free from whatever they were, was impossible.
I turned to my right and was met with a wall. I turned the opposite direction and noticed Riley sitting next to me. I couldn’t see him clearly but I could definitely smell him.

At least, I wasn’t in this alone.

Jasper POV

I was glad the plane had swivel seats as I sat down facing Victoria and Riley. As soon as Alec lifted his gift, I immediately threw them a crazy combination of emotions - the ill feeling from a major hangover, the euphoria and haziness from drugs, and lethargy.

Behind me, everybody was getting prepped for take-off. Char was up front checking on Afton and Chelsea while Jane was tending to her brother. I could hear Isabella asking if she could help. Meanwhile, Peter sat a couple rows over, creating a barrier in case the captives started to get unruly.

“Can you hand me a blood bag, B?” Jane asked.

I was relieved everyone on board knew not to use our names, particularly mine and Isabella’s. We didn’t need careless thoughts to slip and show our presence if Eddie boy was showing up at Volterra soon.

“Flight ready for take-off,” Afton announced to the tower.

As soon as the plane started to move again, Riley began to stir. I knew the two of them had were-venom laced, shackles and just left them be. The redhead seemed lucid at the moment but I could see the newborn wasn’t going to be fully cooperative.

He started to move once we sped down the runway. I had sent him a double dose of the emotions
and it calmed him once again. I could tell he was trying to talk but was only able to make gurgling noises, thanks to my gift.

“Oh my god,” Isabella whispered. “Is that how a newborn acts?” Her concern doubled and I sent her a low dose of calm.

“A feral one, yes,” Jane replied. “You-”

“Need more health points,” Alec whispered hoarsely. I zoned in on his emotions to make sure he was okay. He was exhausted but not in pain. Despite the toll his gift had taken, he was still in good spirits. Had he been human, he probably would have passed out.

“As I was saying, you’re doing great,” Jane replied. While she was radiating concern for her brother, she was also upset. I figured it had to do with her brother’s present condition. “Newborns who don’t have good mentors will act more like him.”

Isabella was calm after that and began to radiate curiosity. I turned around and saw her watching me with the others.

“Hey B,” Char said as she emerged from the cockpit. “Wanna come and sit with me?”

“Sure,” Isabella said. Char took a seat in the row in front of Peter and motioned to the chair next to her.

“Are you two going to be okay?” Isabella asked the twins.

Jane nodded. “We’re just going to sit and relax.” She looked over at me. “Call me if you need my help.”

“I will,” I replied and turned my attention back to the task.

Victoria was still drugged, so to speak. I focused on the newborn. Once again, he was fighting the emotions and was now tugging on the constraints, hissing and growling as his limbs burned.
“Stand down,” I commanded as I stood in front of him, exposing my arms slightly.

My tactic worked, for now as he submitted due to fear. I had a feeling it wasn’t going to last long though and was thankful we didn’t have long to fly.

Isabella began to send me concern again and I sent her love and gratitude in return. I also sent her pride since she was still a little nervous about being here.

“We’re just a little over an hour from landing,” Afton announced. “I’ve already radioed our ETA and requested transport. They’re getting everything ready for our guests.”

From the corner of my eye, I saw Peter signaling me. “Hey, most likely they’ll have a truck to bring them to Volterra.”

“The armored transport will be there,” Afton confirmed. “Renata sent a message earlier that they dropped off the Land Rovers at the hangar. The Gulfstream should be there shortly after we arrive, they’re making good time.”

“Works for me,” Char replied.

“Where am I?” the newborn growled, venom dripping from his mouth. “Who are you?”

I stood up and pulled up the sleeves on the robe, revealing more scars.

“You’re in Volturi custody,” I growled out and began to push more lethargy and calm to him.

“The who?”

I quickly gave an overview of the Volturi, only talking about things that would matter to a newborn.
“So? I had to have blood. So what if I left bodies around?”

“It means that you and your companion could have exposed yourselves to humans. Didn’t she teach you anything?” It was my turn to growl. I was getting frustrated at the stupidity of the two vampires.

“She taught me how the Cullens are evil!” he shouted.

“Riley! Shut up!” Victoria muttered, having been roused from her stupor. “You don’t have to say anything at all. Just. Shut. Your. Mouth.”

“No! I don’t want to!”

I shook my head as they began arguing, once again thinking how stupid the two were. I really couldn’t fault the newborn, he was just being his feral self. I was surprised he could even formulate words.

Victoria though was a different story. I couldn’t understand how this nomadic bitch was supposed to be wiser than she was behaving. Out of curiosity, I decided to dive into her emotions to see if I could get a read on her. She was angry but there was something else, an underlying cocktail of despair and heartbreak. None of those surprised me but what did was defeat that seemed to be interwoven amongst her more stronger feelings. I wasn’t sure what that meant and hoped Aro would get more answers.

I looked over to Jane and tried to get her attention using my emotions. Jane whispered something to her brother who nodded before she walked to the back to see me.

I motioned to them. “Can you give them a little shot?”

Jane smiled, sending me gratitude. “I sure can, given how they practically debilitated my brother. Not to mention how they harmed those twins.” She turned towards the front of the plane. “Brace yourself Afton, this might cause the plane to jar,” she said knowing he’d hear everything.

Less than a second later both Victoria and Riley screeched out in pain. I watched as she stared at them intently. Even though her face was partially hidden by her hood, I saw a small, almost serene smile on her face as she used her gift. I cringed as I remembered feeling like I was being burned
with fire and acid. Twenty seconds later she stopped and watched as the captives were slumped over and panting.

“Thank you,” I said and sent her appreciation, noting she was not as upset as she was earlier.

I looked over at my brother and motioned for him to watch them for a few minutes as I went over to Isabella.

“How are you doing, baby girl?” I asked as I sat down next to her.

“I should be asking you that,” she replied. “I’m okay, a little worried about you, obviously.”

“You needn’t worry,” I said. “The emotions I’m sending them aren’t going to bring my demon out.” I told her all the emotions I have been using.

“You’re not scaring the crap out of them or anything?” she whispered.

“No ma’am. While I’d like to send Victoria some of my rage, she hasn’t really done anything to piss me off. That Riley is just feral and undisciplined.”

“You’d tell me if you were being overwhelmed, right?”

I nodded. “If I was, I’d definitely let you know. This is a piece of cake though.”

“Okay,” she said and looked over at Victoria and Riley. “He’s stirring again.”

“Yep, and I’m back on duty,” I replied and gave her a kiss. “Perfect timing, we’re about to land.”

Isabella nodded and I could tell she had shut her eyes to prepare herself for the landing.

I sent the captives a triple dose of my cocktail and watched as they once again slumped over. I
swiveled my seat so I could see them from the corner of my eye but also kept a close eye on Isabella in case she needed me.

We landed a few minutes later and taxied to the hangar. Since it was now broad daylight, we couldn’t land in the airfield we had left from hours before. From the windows, I could tell it was the same airport we landed in many months ago.

The engines stopped ten minutes later and Chelsea entered the cabin. “The customs agents are on their way. I can take your passports and have them stamped if you’d like.”

I watched as Char pulled out all four of the Whitlock passports and handed them to Chelsea. Jane handed her the other ones.

From inside the cabin, we could hear Chelsea produce the necessary paperwork to the authorities.

“You did see us and verified our identity,” she said to the human. “You’ll just stamp our passports and extradition papers and we’ll be on our way. Oh, the Gulfstream G450 that is arriving in this hangar, you’ll stamp their passports and send them on their merry way as well.”

“Si, Signora Volturi,” the man replied.

We started began to exit the plane and since the man was waiting for Demetri and Santiago, we had to load up the cars using human speed. It didn’t take long and then it was time for us to move Alec into the Land Rover.

I watched as Jane had her brother’s arm over her shoulder and was walking with him towards the doorway. Afton appeared behind them and helped the twins down the stairs and into one of the cars.

As soon as Demetri and Santiago were cleared, the human agent left the hangar and we were now alone.

I watched as Demetri went into the cab of the armored truck and grabbed some heavy, leather gloves. He slipped a pair on and then looked up.
“Jasper, can you ride with me and keep them sedated?”

I nodded and he tossed the second pair to me.

“The inside of the cargo area is treated with were-venom so we use the gloves to protect ourselves,” he explained.

I walked over to Isabella who was loading our duffel bag into another SUV.

“You doin’ okay, baby girl?”

She nodded and smiled. “Yep and I’m really proud of you. Char said that one of the vehicles will be in front and the other behind the truck. I guess they’ll be driving close.”

I moved her away from the Volturi plane’s line of sight and pulled our hoods off. “We’re almost done.”

“I know. This was a good learning experience. I had no idea what a newborn would be like, typically and I’m now feeling fortunate for the choices I made.”

I held her close and kissed her lips. “As much as I didn’t want you to see, I’m also glad you did.”

”Come on, let’s get this show on the road.”

Demetri handed Afton and Peter some more gloves and then we went into the plane to grab Victoria and Riley. They were still sedated so we carried them out to the armored truck and seated them on the metal benches opposite each other.

“Okay, let’s move,” Demetri said as we all hopped into our assigned vehicles.

Afton drove the first car that had Chelsea and the twins. We followed closely, while Santiago, Peter, Char and Isabella followed us.
I had to say the procession to Volterra was probably a head turner for humans since we were probably no more than a few feet from each other’s bumpers.

“How are they doing, J?” Demetri asked and nodded towards the back of the truck.

“They’re still sedated,” I replied.

“Was Jane still upset when you were on the plane?”

I nodded and told him that I gave her a few seconds to unleash some of it on them.

“Good. It nearly crushed her when she saw those twin boys and how they were mutilated.”

“It is because she’s a twin as well, isn’t it?”

“That’s part of it. It isn’t my story to tell but once Alec is back to his old self, feel free to ask them.”

“I will, thanks.”

A sudden thrashing in the back had me sending fear to them for a few seconds before slamming them with my sedative cocktail.

“We’re almost there,” he said. “We’re about twenty kilometers away. I’ll say it again, I’m grateful for your help today. We all are.”

“It was no problem. He helped me so I returned the favor.”

He chuckled. “I heard about the Felix incident. Is her shield control improving?”
I nodded and smiled feeling amusement from Isabella in the car behind. “She’s growing more comfortable with not just the idea but using it. We practiced inside the stone tunnel under the barn before we flew out.”

“I’m glad Renata’s advice is helping her.”

The car in front of us turned off just before we reached the walled city.

“This is the easiest way to the cells,” he explained.

“Are they ready for them?”

“Yes. Felix would have started arranging the transportation while Heidi prepared the cells and ordered the dead blood.”

“Dead blood?”

He nodded as he followed the car in front of him. “It’s the blood from the dead. No matter how much we run it through machines, you can’t wash out the slight putrefaction that has occurred. While it is still a blood source, it isn’t palatable.”

As soon as we stepped out of the vehicle, Isabella ran up to me. “Gross!” she exclaimed, wrinkling her nose. “Is it worse than animal blood?”

Demetri chuckled. “I suppose it is since fresh kill is more oxygenated than this stuff.”

She shuddered as she wrapped her arms around me. “I’ll pass on dead blood, thanks. I’m trying to cut down.”

I shook my head as I pulled her close to me and pulled the hood over her head. “Just until those two are secure.”

Heidi and Felix were waiting for us in front of some rusted, iron double doors. As soon as we all got out of the car, they both opened the doors, revealing a dark, musty room divided into separate
enclosures. Three hooded figures in black hoods appeared just as Felix and Heidi pulled their grey robes over their heads.

I stood close by in case I was needed as I pulled on the leather gloves. Felix already had a pair and he also had a thick metal chain looped over his shoulder.

“Bring them out,” Caius called out and I guessed it was more for the benefit of the vampires we had incarcerated. I toned down the emotions I was sending to Victoria and Riley and replace them with an equal dose of calm.

As though choreographed, Felix and Demetri opened the doors to the armored truck. Felix quickly hooked the chain through Victoria’s handcuffs before bringing Riley to stand behind her, tethering him to her. Their leg shackles were quickly modified to allow them to move as Felix and Demetri dragged them into the dungeon.

“Come on, bro,” Peter said and moved past the prisoners with Jane, Afton and Chelsea. I looked over at Isabella who was with Char, both supporting a semi-conscious Alec.

“We’ll stay, we can watch from here,” Char said and I ran to catch up with the crowd.

I watched as Aro took a glove and used it to hold one of the cells open. When Victoria got within an arm’s length of Aro, he reached out and touched her shoulder for a few seconds. I felt his surprise at whatever memories he saw.

“Keep her sustained,” he announced as he wiped his hand on his robe. The guards quickly undid the restraints and shoved her into the cell. “I think the Cullens will find what I discovered, very interesting.”

Another cell was opened and Riley was next. The newborn was growling lowly, his hunger beginning to overtake his reason.

“We’ll reevaluate this one in a few days,” Aro announced. “We’ll decide whether he is worthy of being part of our guard, a servant or is worthless.”

Once he was led into his cell and unshackled, the metal gate clanged shut.
“Heidi, have them fed and make sure we’re using the 50-50 mixture. I don’t want their eyes to turn though,” Caius said and then looked at all of us. “Thank you all for today.” The kings left soon after.

There was a soft chime and what sounded like a vacuum cleaner. In a matter of seconds, blood was dispensed into the metal trough-like containers in each of the cells.

“Come on this way, Demetri said as he looked out to Isabella, Char and Alec. “We’ll go into the castle this way.”

I turned to walk back to Isabella and my sister when Jane ran over and hoisted her brother over her shoulder in a fireman’s carry.

Once we got to the main floor, we removed the hoods and I walked up to Heidi. “So what was the blood concoction?” I asked knowing it was now safe.

Heidi laughed. “While you were on your way, Caius thought mixing the dead blood with the animal slop we’re giving to Alice was a better punishment. Marcus thought it was a good idea too and said it was like the vampire version of gruel.”

Many of us shuddered at the idea and I went to Isabella, pulling her into my arms.

“You ready to go home?”

“Yeah, just a sec,” she said and pulled me towards Jane and her brother. “So how long will he be like this?”

“Once I get him up the tower, he’ll have several bottles of blood. He’ll begin to feel like himself in about eight hours and will spend the rest of the time playing video games. His gift probably won’t be 100 percent for another day or so. You should go and unwind. That is what we’ll all do today. Come back tomorrow and I’m sure Alec will be in better spirits. Especially if he’s up to working in the lab.”

“Oh! Jasper maybe we can come by in the late afternoon.”
I smiled, seeing and feeling how excited Isabella was. “Sure, we can do that.”

The guards thanked us once more and told Peter his car was outside before Felix tossed him the keys.

“Y’all ready?” Peter asked as we walked towards the reception area.

“Yeah, what an adventure,” Isabella commented. “So was this really a mission and if it is, does that mean I actually participated in one?”

I smiled as I pulled her closer to me. “I think we just participated in a Volturi mission, baby girl.”

Chapter End Notes

So there you go, Crazy Victoria and Riley are both being held in Volterra now. This means we’re a little closer to a reunion.

Thank you AlexisDanaan and LetsJustDance for making this chapter pretty and legible. :)

Until next week…

XO ~ sushi
Chapter 89

Chapter Notes

Can you believe it’s November already?! Here’s the next chapter. Thank you all for the reviews/favorites/alerts! I truly appreciate it. Of course, I couldn’t do this without the help of LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan.

I’m not SM - just like to play with her characters.

For this particular chapter, there is some AU back history on Jane and Alec. It will hint on a sensitive topic - it isn’t detailed but might be a trigger for some. This is one of the rare times I’ll warn you readers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 88

BPOV

As soon as we were a near our village, I grew really restless.

“You okay, baby girl?” Jasper asked.

“Sort of. All that sitting on the plane, keeping still and quiet...I just feel like I’ve got this pent up energy.”

“Peter, drop us off at the edge of the town, over there, by the grove of cypress trees,” he said.

“Yep, will do.”

Once we were there, Peter pulled over and we hopped out of his car. We waved to them as they moved back to the road, not wanting to draw too much attention. I was so glad it was a drizzly, late autumn day.
“Ready?”

I nodded and took Jasper’s hand and we ran the rest of the way home. While I didn’t run as fast as I could, considering I was just a little faster than Jasper, feeling the fresh air on my face and seeing the myriad of colors flying by was just what I needed.

When we got to the property, I quickly took the robe off and set it on the ground. I let go of his hand and we ran around as I jumped over small trees and grabbed branches and twirled myself like a gymnast.

“Feelin, better?” Jasper asked with a smile as I made one more rotation from the branch and landed on my feet.

“Much better,” I replied. “I needed that.” I reached down and grabbed my robe before taking his hand again. “So Riley was the type of newborn you had had to deal with back in your day?”

He nodded as we walked towards our house. “Yeah, imagine dozens of them, just as feral, worse.”

“Jesus,” I muttered. “You seemed pretty calm during the plane. I kept watching you.”

“I know you were, I felt your concern. I was calm though he was starting to get on my nerves when he fought through the emotions I was projecting and then when they were fighting...” he shook his head. “I was close to sending some wicked stuff but thought Jane was the more appropriate person to handle it.” He opened the front door and led us to the kitchen where he grabbed a couple blood bags and headed upstairs. “She was grateful that I gave her that opportunity to let loose some ‘tension’.”

“The stuff with her brother and seeing those twins must have done a number on her,” I said and smiled sheepishly. “I sort of heard you talking to Demetri on the way to the castle. I mean, I heard bits and pieces until you mentioned the dead blood.”

“It’s okay, I think we were close enough that most people heard the conversation.” He tossed the blood bags onto the bed and then headed into the closet. “That dead blood sounds nasty, and now mixed with that farm animal stuff that they feed Alice... I am glad I’m not on their bad side.”

“Yeah, me too,” I replied and made a face. “So what are we going to do?”
“I was thinking about a nice relaxing shower and then we’ll go from there.”

“I like that Mr. Whitlock, lead the way,” I said.

After our passion-filled shower, we were once again in the closet.

“How about we just relax in the study - I’ll build a fire and we can watch some movies?”

“That sounds good.” I changed into a pair of his boxers and a t-shirt. “Hey look! I did it near vamp speed and didn’t tear anything!”

“Awesome, baby girl,” he said as he pulled on a wife beater and then some flannel pants. “Go ahead and pick some movies and I’ll get the fire started.”

I looked through our library and pulled some DVDs out.

“The Harry Potter series?” Jasper asked as he loaded the player.

“What? The next movie is coming out on DVD soon.”

“Nothing,” he said. “I would much rather watch this than a girlie movie.

“Hmm,” I said. “I’m guessing you were forced to watch them before we got together.”

“Oh god, yes,” he replied and set me between his legs. “I don’t mind watching on the rare occasion but it was all the damn time. I like that you’ll watch different genres. You like a little bit of everything, just like I do.”
“We’ll need to order the snow-making machines, soon,” he said as we started the third movie.

“We’re getting ones that last, right?” I asked as I tried to figure out what to get him for Christmas and then his birthday. And then it occurred to me that we’ve been married nearly a year.

“Isabella?”

I looked up. “I started thinking and then realized we’ve been married almost a year.”

“Yeah we have, seeing you again and now with us together, this has been the best time of my long existence,” he said.

“Really?”

“Yeah, it’s the first time, I feel whole and an equal.”

I ran my fingers through his hair as I kissed him on the lips. “Having you in my life has been amazing. Thank you.”

“And thank you! As far as the machines, let’s see what they have. If we buy ones here, they might work when we move back to the States. We could always get some for Europe and some for when we’re in North America.”

“Good idea, I don’t think it is easy to sell snow making machines online or something.”

Our movie marathon lasted into the following day. After my four movie choices, it was Jasper’s turn to choose and we watched some of his favorite movies.

“I didn’t know you liked ‘Shawshank Redemption’, I said as the movie began. I thought back on some human memories. “That was one of my dad’s favorites. I once caught him playing that opera song while he cleaned the house.”

“I was able to relate to Andy Dufresne, especially that scene when he finally escapes and it is
I leaned into him and showed him just how much he meant to me.

“I love you too, baby girl.”

When the movie was done, I looked around the room, my eyes spotting Jasper’s sketchpad. “Hey, wanna show me the idea I told you about our dream house. I’m just curious about what my ideas were before my change.”

He brought the book over and we flipped through the pages together until we got to the drawing of the house. I looked at it for a few seconds and a thought came to mind.

“Jasper, is it possible to move our house to that property?”

“You’d want to do that instead of build this design?”

“If it isn’t possible to move it then I would. I just remembered how attached I was to the place.”

“I like that idea. I think anything is possible,” he said and smiled, sending me his excitement. “Hell, I love that idea. It’s our first house together that we made into our home. I don’t see any harm checking to see if it is even possible to relocate it. Thank you, Isabella for the idea.” He hugged me close to him.

I turned and gave him a kiss. “We can always modify the inside of the house to suit us more but yeah, let’s look into it. So, you didn’t have homes before we were together?”

He shook his head. “They were either the Cullens’ houses or she chose them. I never got a say in things until you came along.” He went over to grab his laptop from the nearby desk. “I’ll send an email to my attorney to see if he can look into it or refer us to someone who knows about moving an entire house. Since it is mid-afternoon, I’m going to text Alec to see if he’s well enough to visit with us.”

I watched as he started texting, slightly envious that I haven’t managed to type as fast and as easily,
yet. After a few exchanges, he laughed and showed me the phone.

_Alec, Isabella and I are hoping you’re feeling better._

_Thanks, I’m almost recharged :)._

_We’re thinking of coming over to visit you in the lab. Are you up for company?_

_Oh god yes, Jane is hovering over me so I could use a break. :-/_

_Okay, we’ll be there soon._

_THANK YOU!! :D_

I couldn’t help but laugh at the exchange. “We should get ready then,” I said as I hopped off the couch.

It was Jasper’s turn to laugh. “Excited, baby girl?”

“Hell yeah!” I exclaimed and headed to the closet. “If I get a hang of this, I can maybe think about finishing my degree at some point. They mentioned something about college credit, right?”

“Yeah, I think once you’ve got consistent control, we can definitely look into you finishing your degree.”

“You know, you could get a degree too,” I said as I pulled on a pair of jeans. “You’ll get to study something that you’re truly interested in and not a subject you’re forced to study over and over.”

“True,” he said as he pulled on a light grey henley top. “You know what would be cool?” I looked up at him. “If we could get our degrees at the same time.”
I grinned. “I’d like that a lot.”

It didn’t take us long to finish and head outside.

“Hey,” he said as he stopped on the side of the road. “Do you want to try your hand at driving to the castle?”

“Okay!” I said and began to scoot over to the driver’s seat, careful not to knock anything over or worse, break it.

“Just put the car into gear,” Jasper said once he got in.

I managed to lurch the car forward once before quickly getting the feel for the right amount of pressure. “Sorry, those junk cars from my birthday didn’t have power steering or brakes so I pressed harder than I should have.”

“It’s okay,” he replied. “You’re good now.”

I drove a little slower than Jasper would normally but it was a good experience. The slower speed helped me get a better feel for the car and the different sounds the tires made on the road. It surprised me that I wasn’t completely distracted from driving by road noises and other cars. The traffic was lighter than usual so it still didn’t take me long to get to Volterra.

“Great job!” Jasper exclaimed as he ran over to open my door.

“Thanks, I was slow though.”

“You still went a little over the speed limit. I won’t call you a granny driver...yet,” he said jokingly as he wrapped his arm around my waist.

“Granny driver?” I blurted out and tried to look mad. I couldn’t help but laugh as I remembered how slow I drove around the racetrack.
He chuckled and kissed my hair sending me love as we entered the lobby area. We waved to Rosa who looked like she was about to end her day and headed down the elevator to the lab.

As soon as we stepped out of the elevator, Jane and Alec greeted us.

“You’re looking much better, Alec,” I said as Jasper and I followed them to the lab.

“I spent most of the day lounging and then started to play Lego Star Wars early this morning. My gift probably won’t fully charge up until the next day or so.”

“The lab gives him a chance to work on other things while he fully heals,” Jane said as she pressed the button to open the pneumatic doors. “Next time, you can enter from one of the doorways from the village. You don’t need to come in from the lobby all the time.”

“We didn’t want to impose,” Jasper said.

“It’s not an imposition!” Alec exclaimed. “You’re family!” He led us into the lab and stopped just outside a small room. “Do you need blood? If so, there are bags in the refrigerator. The only rule is whenever we’re working with blood, we leave our drinks in this room to avoid possible contamination. We have lidded cups so it is less messy. So before we begin, I just wanted to say thank you for helping the Volturi with this mission we completed. I hope it wasn’t a hassle.”

“You’re welcome and no, it wasn’t any trouble at all,” Jasper replied as Alec motioned to some chairs. “You helped me the other day when Isabella was sparring so it was the least I could do.”

Jane grabbed what looked like a sketch pad and sat down at the table in front of us. “We are both grateful, so thank you. I know you were concerned and we are both touched.” She looked at her brother and smiled. “Jasper, I heard some of what you and Demetri were talking about. I guess we could share our story with you two.”

“Only if you’re comfortable,” I said.

“We don’t mind,” Alec said and sat down, kicking his legs against the metal chair legs. “As you know, we’re twins. I am older but only by a few minutes. Our mother passed soon after giving birth so what we know of our early years came from our father.”
“If this happened in today’s world, I don’t think we’d call him a father,” Jane spat. “He basically had a wet nurse raise us until we were a few years old and then he sold us.”

Jasper and I gasped. “Sold?” he asked.

Alec nodded. “Well, more like loaned… Nathaniel, someone he owed a debt to. It was some sort of agreement where he kept us for a decade and then we’d be returned. This man, and we use the term loosely, was an evil man. He started to hit us and hurt my sister. I was treated like a house slave so the only time I could see Jane was at the end of the day.”

I reached over and immediately grabbed Jasper’s hand. I couldn’t imagine the hell they had been through.

“He used to talk to me and help me forget all the nightmares I had to deal with,” Jane said, both of the twins had venom tears shimmering in their eyes now. “This lasted until around our fourteenth year, when the debt was considered paid. A few months before we were officially released, Nathaniel was inside his barn when it caught fire.” She took a deep breath as Alec put his hand on his sister’s shoulder. “We went back to our birth home and while we were taken back in, we were no longer treated as his offspring.”

“We were both scarred from that demon we were forced to live with, mentally and physically. He saw us differently.”

“One thing about Nathaniel was he was frightened of us,” Jane added. “One of the things Alec and I discovered as we got older was we sort of knew what the other was thinking or feeling. We’re not telepathic or anything. We know now that it is most likely a twin thing but back then, we were seen as a threat; witchcraft was often the explanation. Since Nathaniel often bragged about how he punished us, the villagers must have believed everything was under control.

“So when we returned back to our birth home, we realized Nathaniel must have told our father. He treated us like servants and were often beaten. Luckily my sister was no longer abused like the past so we just endured it for nearly two years. It wasn’t long until our father was killed in some sort of bar incident. A few days after, the village went after us.”

“Yeah, we ran or else we were going to be burned. We were hiding in the forest when a vampire caught us. And the rest, as they say, is history.”
“So was your gift active when you were human?” I asked.

“I think Alec’s was, sort of,” Jane replied. “He was able help me from feeling all the stuff I had to deal with. While he just talked to me at night, my mind was able to shut out the bad stuff. I don’t think my gift really materialized until I was a vampire. I only wished Nathaniel felt the pain I had to deal with but the fire was a mere coincidence. I won’t lie though, every night I wished him to be harmed.”

“Is that why you were upset about seeing the twins?” Jasper asked.

“We both feel strongly about seeing children harmed in any way given our history,” Alec explained. “Seeing the twins hit us both hard. Of course, I was out of sorts but Jane wasn’t. Thank you, Jasper for letting my sister send just a little pain to those idiot vampires.”

“Anyway, Athenodora and Sulpicia found us,” Jane said. “Back then, the kings and queens travelled to violent areas where there was possible vampire activity. The technology wasn’t there to keep them safe while soldiers and guards did their reconnaissance. The queens managed to find us and with Aro nearby, he saw our history. He also saw our initial attempts in using our gifts, which, by the way was pathetic.”

“He must have seen some promise with our ability because they took us in and we began to train as soldiers.”

“I couldn’t imagine such a tough life,” I said. “I’m glad the queens found you and you’re here now.”

“We are too,” Alec replied and cleared his throat. “Well, enough of that. Let’s get to your first lesson here. Eventually you’ll use actual microscopes but we like to use this machine and project them to the wall.”

“Don’t mind me,” Jane said as she opened her sketch book and began drawing.

“She’s here to make sure I’m okay but she’s also helping me design the holiday party for the orphans.”
As much as I had seen the two bicker, I was now able to see the bond they shared and was glad they had each other. I also realized how many of the guards we interacted with have shared their stories and I made a point to share mine with them one day and soon.

“Before we work on DNA, I want you to become familiar with the blood cells. I am sure you both had some biology courses, correct?”

“I had some high school biology,” I replied.

“I had an actual college course decades ago but wasn’t allowed since then. I had to forge my grades in order to receive my many history degrees.”

The twins shook their heads. “Cullens,” Jane muttered out as though it was a dirty word. “I’m not much of a scientist but I know Alec trusts you both.”

An image appeared on the screen in front of us.

“Now this,” Alec began and pointed. “This is what normal red blood cells look like.” He flipped to another slide. “This is your blood when you were human, Bella.”

I stared at the screen, noting how there were the shallow, bowl shaped cells along with a few oval, almost football shaped cells.

“What are those cells?” I asked.

“That’s venom, from Jasper. As you can see, they were in your body but it was a small percentage. Now this is from Jasper’s venom sample.”

Once again, he flipped to another slide and this time, there were more of the venom cells and what resembled the red blood cells, no longer had that plushy look, they had a rougher texture and were attached to the venom cells.

“They’re attached?” Jasper asked. “Is the roughness of the cell membrane indicative of our skin?”
“Great questions!” Alec exclaimed, clearly enjoying this moment. “Yes, the red cells are what we had as humans but as you can see, they’re now attached to the venom cells. To the second part of your question, it is one theory but we haven’t concluded that it is fact. All evidence seems to point to the idea that because our skin is now hardened, the cell membrane has taken that characteristic as well.”

“That is so cool,” I exclaimed. “Can we look at mine? Do I need a werewolf needle to extract the venom?”

“We can look at yours… here, just stick this swab in your mouth.” Once I handed it back to him, he switched slides and sure enough, the image looked very similar to Jasper’s.

“Alec, what do you think of this?” Jane asked and showed him a sketch.

“I like that,” he replied. “It has sort of a Tim Burton, ‘Nightmare Before Christmas’, feel to it. Jasper, there are a few more slides there if you and Bella want to look through them. I think I pulled Alice’s and a werewolf just to give you a variety.”

“Yeah, we can do that,” Jasper replied and we laughed as the twins began brainstorming rapidly on ideas.

The first one we looked at was from a werewolf and for the most part, it looked very much like human blood. We did notice very transparent, rod shapes that were pointed at the end.

“Alec, are the clear rods the were-venom?” Jasper asked and I laughed because I was thinking the same thing.

“Yes,” he replied. “We think they’re shaped the way they are because they would then be able to pierce the vampire cells but leave the human cells alone.”

“I never realized how interesting biology could be,” I said. “Let’s look at Alice’s venom. Alec, have you looked at it since we talked before Gianna’s party?”

He shook his head. “I’ve been working mostly on the DNA stuff. Even for vampires, it is tough
work mapping everything out.”

Jasper switched the slides for us and I was grateful I didn’t have to since I knew I wasn’t quite ready to touch the thin, glass pieces.

The initial look on the screen was very similar to Jasper’s venom and mine.

“What is that?” Jasper murmured.

“The slide?” I asked and continued to stare. “Something doesn’t seem right.”

“There,” he said and got up to point. “The little spheres that look like they’re barbed. I saw it but they’re so small and clear, it was hard to spot.”

“Yeah, that’s what I see too.”

“What is this?” Alec asked and looked up. He inched towards the screen slowly. “Wow, like you, I didn’t see them right away. I thought it was a dirty slide. I’m not sure what that is.”

He went over to a drawer and pulled out some files.

“These are our venom - all of us here at Volterra,” he said as he sat down once again. Jane was now watching us, her sketches momentarily forgotten. “They might look a little different because they’ve been preserved over time. We archived some data a couple decades ago to make room for new slides.”

We looked through the files and did not notice that barbed cell in any of them.

“So is the venom contaminated or is it from drinking animal blood?” I asked.

“No, I don’t think our diet would change down to the cellular level. It might be contaminated. Hang on, let me see if I can get a new sample.”
After a brief text conversation, he looked up. “I’ve got Renata to get us a small sample. Chelsea is with her too in case she’s needed.”

A minute later, Renata entered the lab with a small piece of cloth. “Will this work? It sounded important so I didn’t want to run down here for a swab.”

“Is it clean?” Alec asked.

“Yes, it was a sterile gauze pad from the first aid kit in the lobby.”

“Oh good,” he replied and smeared the sample onto the glass before reaching over for a test tube. “Here is the slide and now we’ll have a current sample from her without the werewolf venom.”

“What’s going on?” Renata asked and Alec quickly filled her in and showed her the slide in question. “You’re right, if you hadn’t pointed it out, even with our vision, we would have overlooked it.”

“So here it is,” he said and projected the slide up. “Hey! There are more of them!”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Jasper replied. “Some of the vampire cells have multiple barbs attached. This is strange. You have never seen anything like it?”

“It’s latching on like a parasite,” I said.

“Aro’s going to want to see this,” Renata said and immediately called him. “Sir, it looks like we’ve got a development. Yes. We’re here in the lab. Okay, we’ll see you shortly.” She looked up. “He’s on his way.”

We continued to look at the slide.

“Do you think we should put both slides up?” Jasper asked.

“I can do that,” Alec said and hooked another microscope to the screen.
Aro arrived and greeted us warmly. “What’s the news?”

“Sir, I was showing Jasper and Bella around and when I let them look at some slides. They discovered something unusual about Alice.” He began to show Aro the slides and explained how he asked Renata to get a new sample.

“This is an interesting development for sure. I want to thank you both for noticing,” Aro said as he looked at both Jasper and me. “Had Alec not pointed it out, I too, wouldn’t have seen it right away. Alec, did you check all our venom to make sure we were free from this parasite or virus-like growth?”

“Yes, I did and we are free.”

“Could this be the cause of her losing her gift?” I asked.

Aro shrugged. “It could be but without knowing the actual cause, we won’t know for sure. Alec, can you hand me a swab, I’d like to see if my continuous contact has contaminated my own venom.”

Jasper and I watched as Aro took the large swab and stuck it into his mouth for a second before handing it to Alec who then prepped a new slide.

We all breathed a sigh of relief when Aro’s latest venom sample did not show the same barbed cells that were in Alice’s.

“Just to be safe, I’ll have our servants provide a sample as well,” Aro announced. “If they’re clear, then we could safely assume her gift is being affected by this growth.”

“If it is a virus, wouldn’t it need a viable host to spread?” Jasper asked. “Maybe this is more of a genetic thing.”

“Wait!” Alec exclaimed and went back to the metal cabinet.
When he returned, he quickly switched out Aro’s slide and displayed the image. “This is Luca’s tissue sample that we had preserved. I can’t guarantee if we’ll be able to see anything, the integrity of the cells might be compromised.”

Aro mumbled something in what must have been his native, ancient language.

“Is that...oh shit,” Jasper murmured.

I was speechless as we looked at the image. Luca’s blood cells also had the barbs. There were venom cells as well so I guessed this was a sample taken sometime during his unsuccessful change.

“They’re smaller than Alice’s but they are similar in shape,” Alec said quietly. “Jasper, you might be correct that this is genetic. What I don’t understand is why is it multiplying?”

“Her mind is deteriorating and at the same time, these barbs appear to be multiplying,” I thought out loud. “There has to be a correlation. I know we don’t grow but we regenerate, right? That would be how our broken limbs mend? There has to be some sort of cellular growth or regrowth to attach everything together.”

“Yes, yes,” Aro said. “Continue with your train of thought, Isabella.”

I stood up and started to walk around the room slowly. It helped me to gather my thoughts and arrange them in a logical manner.

“As a vampire, we might not grow or age but in a way we do.”

The rest of the vampires looked at me while Jasper sent me a small wave of encouragement and confusion.

“Our minds. We might not grow old but we have the capability to expand our minds infinitely, right?”

“Yeah, so what you’re saying is that is our way of growing?” Alec asked.
“Yeah, if vampires couldn’t grow, even mentally, we’d be stuck in our feral minds and whatever time period we were from.”

Aro snapped his fingers. “Like the Romanian brothers. They would be a good example of vampires who have not grown mentally even though they had the opportunity.”

“Maybe,” I said softly, realizing there might be a hole in my theory. “Or it could be they’ve grown to a certain point and can’t anymore. I don’t know.”

Alec turned on a computer. “I did a DNA map of Stefan and Vladimir years ago. I’m pulling it up now. Renata, can you pull their venom sample from the drawer?”

“Sure,” she said and after she grabbed their files, she displayed them on another screen. “They aren’t barbs.”

“No, but there is something,” Aro said and pointed. “Renata, can you enlarge this section?”

As soon as she did, we all noticed the vampire venom didn’t have small, barbed spheres attached like Alice’s sample but there were some growths that were attached to their venom.

“This has to be some sort of connection,” Jasper said. “They might not be related like Luca and Alice might have but maybe we’re looking at a mutation of sorts. How old are these Romanians?”

“They’re about a millenia... we don’t know for sure because they didn’t make themselves known until they tried to overthrow us,” Aro replied. “We should definitely research this some more and maybe get some concrete theories down before the Cullens come out and visit.”

“How is she of late? Still status quo?” Jasper asked.

“The servants tell me that she spends most of her time sitting and staring out to nowhere. When I check on her, it seems her brain has taken her elsewhere because I see her shopping in Paris and Milan. If this theory holds, it makes sense given how there are more of these barbed growths in her venom cells. We’ll continue keeping an eye on her.” He got up as though to leave. “Thank you Jasper and Isabella for noticing the anomaly. This has been highly educational. Please keep me
informed.”

Aro said his goodbyes and then left saying something about a ‘date night’ with Sulpicia.

“I need a break,” I said and got up to head towards the kitchen. There was so much going on in my mind that I needed a blood bag and I knew stepping away was a smart idea. When I got to the kitchen area, I found a pretty aqua lidded mug as I heated up the blood bag.

“You were really impressive out there, Isabella,” Jasper said as he fixed himself a cup of blood.

“Thanks, it was funny, all of a sudden, it was like these ideas and theories came to my head. I mean, I know my brain is more complex now but still, this was a subject I didn’t really know much about, except from what I had seen on TV and that isn’t real.”

“Is it too much for you?” he asked as we sat down next to a small table.

“It was getting a little overwhelming, which is why I took the break when I did.” I peeked out the window to see what the guards were doing. Jane and Alec were back to drawing while Renata was going through the different slides.

“They’re taking a bit of a break too, it appears,” Jasper remarked. “Hey, you know, you just recognizing you needed to step away, that is an impressive show of control.”

“It is?”

He nodded. “You weren’t about to lose it or anything out there but I’d say you were beginning to get tense.”

“It was as though my brain expanded even more so I took it as a hint that I needed to step away for a bit.” I took another gulp of blood. “So you really think I was impressive out there? I thought you were too.”

“We sort of fed off of each other’s ideas, didn’t we?”
“I think so, we make a pretty good team, Mr. Whitlock.”

“We sure do, Mrs. Whitlock.”

“Sorry to interrupt,” Jane whispered at the doorway. “I think Alec and Renata are going to work on a mapping chart that compares Alice with Luca and the Romanian brothers. They said you could come back in the morning if you want.”

“Sure we could do that,” Jasper replied.

“Thank you both for coming, those two are already in their zone. You know, I’m not always here in the lab but I have to say, this was exciting today.”

We smiled as we got up to clean out our mugs.

“Thanks Jane,” I said. “We were talking about how exciting it was too.”

“Oh, wait,” she said as she pulled open a drawer and grabbed a marker. “Put your names on your cups so you now have your own. I’m going to go finish up the sketches for the sets. Now that Alec has a science project to work on, he’s letting me create the designs but he still wants to have the final say.”

We both gave her a hug and asked her to let her brother and Renata know we were returning in a few hours.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that was okay. I LOVE nerdy Alec.

Next chapter will have some insight on Riley’s past as well as Alice’s. The Cullens are coming - you’ll definitely see them this month.

In other news, the main story has been written - finished this week and I just started on the epilogue.
Thank you and see y’all next week!

XO~ sushi
Chapter 90

Chapter Notes

I wasn’t going to update this until tomorrow but changed my mind.

Thank you readers for all the reviews/faves/alerts! This story couldn’t happen (or look as pretty) if it weren’t for the wonderful LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan.

I’m not SM, never have been nor will I be - Just like to play with her characters.

I messed a little with Ancient History as well as well as the background of a few others (per Twilight Lexicon)

Ready? Let’s go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 89

Down in the dungeon -

“Victoria!”

“Shut up!” I screamed.

I couldn’t believe this was happening. How could I have been so careless that I was caught? Not just caught, I thought to myself, I was captured by the Volturi. I shook my head as I shuffled over to the corner of my cell and stared at the blood in the vessel.

It smelled rancid but it was blood. I had tried to hold out, not wanting to be treated like a common criminal, but the vessel kept filling up. It was now ready to overflow and I knew I had to push my pride away to feed.

I kneeled in front of the metal container and gulped. I nearly shuddered as the acrid taste hit my lips but I was too hungry to really complain.

Riley was still screaming out my name but I ignored him as I continued to devour the blood.
I wanted to blame that yellow-eyed Cullen bitch, I really did. If it weren’t for her idea of me attacking her family, I would have continued to look for that brunette James was after.

No, I reminded myself, yellow-eyes said she was dead.

Maybe if I calmed down enough they won’t see me as a threat. Maybe they would show mercy.

I sighed. Was I just fooling myself?

JPOV

Our days were becoming busier. I wasn’t complaining though. To be honest, I enjoyed being busy. When I wasn’t helping Isabella with her shield, we were in the training field so she could refine her fighting skills. Her strength training that we worked on in the beginning of her change was no longer needed as she was beginning to integrate herself into the world.

As we left Volterra after a very productive evening at their lab, I now realized we needed to carve out some education time for us. While I didn’t want to put us on a schedule, I figured we’d use that chunk of time to study this whole Alice thing. Having some time set aside for lab work was also good practice when we decided to take up our studies again.

Tonight was an eye opener, seeing how one small, nearly invisible cell on a slide became a much bigger issue. The excitement in discovering this tiny growth and all the theories that accompanied it was addicting and I could see already just how much Isabella was enjoying this research.

“Hey, you’re quiet,” she said, breaking me out of my thoughts.

“Just thinking about tonight,” I said as we turned onto our private road. “I can see already you have a passion for this type of thing. The fact that you like to solve those mysteries, leads me to believe forensics would be a great field for you to study.”

“Yeah, Sam Houston’s got that program where my major could have a forensic science emphasis.”
“You’d still want to graduate from there?”

“Sure, why not... couldn’t we work it out so we’re studying abroad?”

“Yeah, I think we can work it out and it seems the kings are proponents of higher education.”

“Would you end up getting the same degree?”

“I’d stick with the Criminal Justice major but I saw there was a ‘Victim Studies’ program that would have some psychology classes that I thought would be interesting given my gift.”

“Oh yeah, that would be perfect for you. I guess had I remained human, we’d end up not being in many classes together as we got to upper division courses.”

I nodded. “But if we’re studying abroad, we’d be able to study together. Hell, we could double major if we wanted to.”

“I never thought of it like that. Yeah, we could. I might just do that but I won’t commit to it yet.”

I laughed. “That’s a good plan. So, Peter and Char are heading back to the States before dawn.”

“Oh yeah, it’s near Thanksgiving and they have a tradition, don’t they?”

“New Orleans. I think they said something about taking the 707 so they could drop it off in Alaska on the way back.”

“Will they fly commercial then?”

“Nah, I think some of the guards will pick them up on our plane.”
“Oh! If the Cullens were nosy they’d see the older plane and realize Aro means business.”

“Yep and that plane has the Volturi logo on the tail. Our plane is pretty nondescript.”

“But it’s pretty.”

“Yes ma’am, Peter picked out a really nice airplane.”

When we got home, Isabella wanted me to send her those sleepy emotions from her human days. She said all the excitement with the mission we were in and then now with the potential news of Alice, she needed the peace and calm. I was happy to oblige and deep down, I was looking forward to it, too. We got into bed, our skin touching each other as I sent immersed us in peace, tranquility and calm.

As the sky began to lighten, I began pulling back those emotions, allowing us to ‘wake up’.

“Morning Jasper,” she whispered before kissing me.

“Morning, baby girl.”

“You know, a part of me misses coffee.”

I began to laugh. “Oh, you got pretty pissed off a few mornings when I couldn’t get your coffee in time.”

“I was a beast,” she said and laughed along with me. “Are we going to the castle this morning?”

“We can and if Renata is there, maybe we could work on your shield some more. I’m sure she could use a break now and again.”

“Yeah, I like that,” she said and quickly got dressed.
We were out the door headed to Volterra in no time. Isabella was practically buzzing with excitement as we got closer and closer to Volterra.

“You seem happy,” I said as I turned into the walled city.

“If it weren’t for you and the sleepy vibes you sent me, I probably would have paced around all night thinking up theories. Who knew research would be so fascinating!”

I laughed as I fed off of her excitement. I had to admit, I was looking forward to being in the lab once again. “Here, we’ll go through this door,” I said and led us to what appeared to be a storefront.

We were in the lab in no time and even before I entered the research area, I could feel the energy coming from the other side.

“Jasper! Bella!” Demetri and Alec shouted as we walked in. Renata was tapping away at a laptop while Felix looked engrossed in some ancient looking books.

“What’s going on? Did we miss something cool?” Isabella asked as we walked over and greeted everybody.

“We’re just opening the research up,” Alec said. “As you know, Renata and I began to map the DNA to see if there was a possible link between the Romanians, Luca and Alice. We didn’t find any with Stefan and Vladimir so we’ve ruled out the theory Luca and Alice are direct descendants of theirs. Between Luca and Alice, however, there were similar sequences and enough to determine that there is a high probability that she is a descendant of his.”

Renata hooked up her computer with the projector and then continued. “Here are their DNA maps and you’ll see in this next slide, we circled the sequences that were very similar. We used similar standards as paternity tests but also knew we weren’t looking for Alice’s father so we didn’t expect exact matches.”

“I came down near midnight and they briefed me on the work you were all doing,” Demetri said. “I decided to check if there was something in history that would cause the similar growths in the blood cells. After Felix and Heidi returned from the nightclub, he decided to help too.”
“So where is Heidi?” Isabella asked.

“She’s working with Gianna. Jane is helping her while also helping the other queens with the party,” Renata replied. “Aro has told us to let him know if we discover anything new. Right now though, we’re just trying to add to the story by pulling in history.”

“That is where I come in,” Demetri said. “I started to look for possible reasons why the cellular structure of those in question were so similar but couldn’t find anything that dated around the time we were human. I didn’t find anything so I looked even further but nothing.”

“When I got back, Demetri was in the library perusing through the ancient tomes,” Felix continued. “Heidi and I decided to help until Marcus asked that she start working with Gianna. We didn’t find anything until I started to look at legends and mythology.” He gestured us to come closer to a book that was opened on one of the tables.

“Is that Russian?” I asked, not able to interpret the words from what little I knew.

“It’s actually an early form of Cyrillic,” Felix explained and pointed to a passage. “This is a rough translation, but it basically says that an ancient sun was swallowed by the sky and fell to the earth. We initially interpreted it as a possible solar eclipse which was quickly followed by either a comet or a meteorite.”

“Oh no,” Isabella murmured. “Please don’t tell me that it’s radiation or, better yet, aliens... or an AllSpark.”

“No,” Felix said with a laugh. “It’s nothing that crazy, although your idea of radiation is a good one. Renata, will you pull up the next slide?”

“Sure,” she said and pulled up a list of dates. “Caius helped us with the astronomy piece and noted the times there had been solar eclipses in this part of the world. He also confirmed there was one eclipse that occurred that darkened the sky before a brilliant light flashed by.”

Felix nodded. “Through more research, we figured this was one that occurred in 29 A.D. From there, we began to look once again at the legends and discovered something interesting.” Felix pulled up a map of Europe. “These are the Carpathian Mountains and here, near Romania and Moldova is where the ‘falling sun’ legend is most prevalent. Legend has it, the sun fell and cursed the land - crops were destroyed, livestock killed and people were plagued.”
“So whatever fell from the sky, contaminated the land?” I asked.

“But not exactly, the likelihood of radiation from meteorites is very low, but they could do damage to the ground when it hits the earth. We think it loosened up some minerals or a combination of minerals that leached into the water supply. People back then weren’t as aware of sanitation and so they would use that water for bathing, eating as well as feeding their plants or animals.”

“Oh!” Isabella exclaimed. “So that is the curse, but wouldn’t that have destroyed the human population?”

“You would think,” Felix continued. “Look at the recent stories of flu epidemics. It wipes out many but doesn’t kill all. Some humans are more resistant than others.”

“Which means some of these people were able to survive the poisons? Was that what we saw? I mean, the smooth, round growths on the Romanians’ venom sample?”

“It could be. Then over time, something else caused further mutation to the barbed growths,” Alec broke in.

“Renata,” Isabella began. “You said this Luca went insane in his later years. Is this barb thing an extra gene? Could that be what caused him to ingest lead and lose his mind?”

“We looked at the samples and we don’t think those barbed spheres are anything extra, like a gene,” the guard replied. We think their blood cells mutated and either it began to attack the normal ones, feed from them or they just grew on their own. We do believe it affects their minds though.”

“That would suggest Alice’s heritage is that part of the world? But Brandon doesn’t sound Eastern European,” Isabella replied.

“We were about to start that research now if you’d like to help,” Alec said and pointed to a laptop. “You two can use that computer to check. We’re linked to archive databases, newspapers... you name it. Interpol and your FBI would be jealous if they knew what we knew.”

I looked over at Isabella as she grabbed my hand and led me to the table with the computer.
“You drive, Jasper,” she said as she watched me start typing. I knew she was eager to do this research but still wasn’t confident she’d be able to type without damaging the keyboard. As we began to look, she asked, “What do you know of her past exactly?”

“Well, she was in an asylum, somewhere near Biloxi, Mississippi. The building and all its records have been destroyed though.”

“Okay, what about the time of her change? Do you know what era?”

“She wasn’t absolutely sure but thought it was sometime around the 1920s give or take.”

“Were birth records accurate back then? I mean, people didn’t always or couldn’t always go to hospitals right?” Isabella asked.

I nodded. “That’s correct, especially in rural areas.” I began to look through newspaper articles in that general vicinity.

“You’re looking at stuff from the early 1900s?” she asked.

“I don’t know what I’m really looking for,” I admitted. “If she was in an asylum and didn’t remember her past, her human life could have been anything. I’m going to see if we can find out something about her parents.”

“You’re right,” she said. “She’s a seer too, like another of Luca’s descendants... that Rasputin guy.” She began to pace around the table, mumbling out ideas. I heard the names muttered a few times as I continued to peruse the news articles and other archived data.

“Wait, a seer can also be another name for a fortune teller!” Isabella exclaimed. “Are there ads for a traveling circus or carnivals?”

“Oh, Bella, that is a great idea!” Renata said. “Jasper are you focusing on Mississippi? Maybe we can each take a state nearby and do similar searches.”
“That’s a good idea, thanks guys,” I replied and scrolled over to another page.

It wasn’t until I was reading news from 1899 that I noticed a small ad. “Hey, come check this out.” It was a small blurb about a travelling circus coming to town. It probably wouldn’t have caught my eye until I saw ‘fortune telling with the Amazing Aurelia’ in the article.

“That could be something. Aurelia is a Romanian name,” Renata said. “Is there anything else?”

I searched again. “No, not even a social events-type article after they left.”

“I might have something,” Demetri said and we all walked over to his table. “Jasper, your article was in 1899, what month?”

“August,” I replied.

“Well, I found something from early 1900 in Mobile, Alabama. Listen.”

_The female body that was discovered outside city limits has been identified as Valeria - a known circus entertainer._

“I’ll check the police records,” Alec said and started typing away. It seemed everybody had now immersed themselves in this mystery and it was exciting to see. With Alec checking the Alabama police records, I decided to go back and check police records in Biloxi.

“This is bad,” Alec said, a minute later. “She was beaten and it appears she was with child, but there were no suspects.”

“Shit,” I muttered and started pulling up reports from different law enforcement agencies.

“What, Jasper?” Isabella asked and looked over my shoulder. “She wasn’t the first woman to be beaten. There were more of them. They were all known to work in a circus or carnival environment. Could they also be from the same mother country?”
“There is definitely a pattern but nobody is listing a suspect,” Felix remarked.

“Hey, I might have found something,” I replied and pulled up a newspaper article.

*Junior debutante Cecilia Branson, daughter of William and Alicia Branson, was discovered beaten and violated, early this morning in Biloxi. Police are on the lookout for carnival operator, Teddy Pope as a possible suspect.*

“But the name is different,” Isabella said. “What’s a junior debutante? How are you all doing this? I mean, one second, one of you is coming up with a theory and the next, another one takes it into a different tangent. The thing is, these tangents make sense,” she blurted out, confusion washing over her. “I am trying to follow but I can’t get past my brain imagining the clothes they wore or minor, insignificant details. Is this a newborn thing? Will things get better?”

I looked at her and pulled her to me. “I’m sorry baby girl,” I said and kissed her hair. “Your brain will be able to process stuff easier in no time. You’ll be able to filter and compartmentalize things that aren’t important so you can focus on the important stuff. I was feeding off everybody’s excitement but maybe we can slow down and give you a chance to process and ask questions?” I looked over at the guards who were starting to feel a little sheepish. They all nodded to my question.

“Sorry, Bella even without Jasper here, we tend to feed off of each other’s energy,” Renata said. “Do you have questions so far before we get to the latest possible lead?”

“How do you know these are truly leads?” Isabella asked.

“We start by searching key words and phrases. As Alec explained, we are able to connect to all sources including police databases, credit card companies, libraries, you name it. What he didn’t explain is our computer - it is probably as close to one of those Cray Supercomputers in its speed and capacity.” She must have noticed Isabella’s confusion and smiled. “In other words, it isn’t like a typical computer you’d buy at an electronics store.”

“Oh, okay,” she said. “So you’re basically picking up on ideas that might possibly show a link, right?” We all nodded. “So you started to look at those travelling carnivals and if there were any suspicious or criminal activity reported around the same time they were in a particular area?”

“Exactly,” Demetri said. “Though the likelihood of all these incidents is mere coincidence is
beginning to wane. It is looking more and more like the crime is following them.”

“Okay but that last story that Jasper pulled up. The girl’s name was similar but not an exact match. The only thing that was suspicious was the guy who was linked to carnivals.”

“Yes and I’ve just done a search on Teddy Pope, aka Theodor Popa. I am looking at immigration records right now. He sponsored nearly a dozen women to enter the United States in five years before this Cecilia story.”

“So,” Isabella began, “are we looking at human trafficking?”

“It might be,” he continued. “Did they ever catch this Teddy person, Jasper?”

I did a quick search and this time, I let Isabella help me.

“There!” she said and pointed. “I saw the name...scroll back up a bit.”

I clicked on the link and an article popped up. “Hey guys, check this out. This was from Gulfport, Mississippi.”

*The brutally beaten body that was discovered behind Dolly’s Bar has been identified as Teddy Pope. He had been a suspect in a violent crime that occurred months ago in Biloxi.*

“No word on Cecilia’s condition,” Isabella murmured. “Are there hospital records?”

I was proud of Isabella. Now that we dialed down our thought process, she was beginning to see the connections we were seeing.

“There was a Cecilia Branson that was admitted to Biloxi General. She was unconscious and had torn clothes and evidence of having been sexually assaulted. She was discharged to her parents a week later. What is interesting is there is no death or marriage certificate though,” Alec said.

“So this Cecilia is Alice?” Isabella asked.
“No, I don’t think so,” he replied. “Let me check something. If she ran in social circles, not quite a debutante yet, she must have been quite young. She was a victim of a vile crime so if you were her parents, what would you have done?”

I was certain we had all come to the same conclusion but wanted to see if Isabella was following our train of thought.

“Hmm...I’m guessing emotional or even mental health was a terrible stigma back then?” she asked, almost rhetorically. “If she was assaulted, she probably had some sort of emotional trauma... was she admitted to an institution?” Before we could answer she gasped out. “Could it be that Cecilia’s family admitted her under an assumed name? Like Brandon?”

“You’re doing really well, Bella,” Renata said and gave her a reassuring squeeze of her hand. “I was thinking the same thing.”

“Except I’m not as quick as you all are,” Isabella replied. “I mean, I’m faster than a human but still. Thank you for slowing down a couple notches for my newborn brain.”

“We’ve all been there.” Renata grinned. “Is it easier for you to filter out the minutiae when we go slower?”

“Yes it is.”

“Bella, your hunch is panning out,” Felix said proudly. “A Cecilia Brandon was admitted to an asylum outside of Biloxi a month after her hospital stay. Merda!” he exclaimed. “She gave birth in there to a girl and called her Mary Alice. Cecilia probably named her after her own mother.”

“Okay so we’ve now established she was born in a mental hospital and the likely father was that carnival guy,” Alec said. “I think we need to call Aro and let him know what we’ve discovered so far.” After placing the quick phone call, he explained that the king was on his way.

“We can’t check Theodor’s blood anymore, so how do we know for certain he carried the mutant gene. I mean, there is a strong possibility given his behavior,” Isabella commented. “Or he was just a crazy guy who had violent tendencies.”
“You’re right, we don’t have solid proof,” Alec replied. “If he’s truly nomadic in nature, the chances of tracing his lineage will be near impossible.”

“There’s news, I hear!” Aro announced as Alec extended his hand out to the king.

“Great work, all of you,” he said after thanking Alec and smiled as he walked towards us. “Isabella did you enjoy that research session?”

“It was difficult at first because of my brain,” she said and held out her hand. “It was taking me a little longer to follow everybody’s train of thought but then they slowed down enough so I could keep up and it helped.”

“You also helped them with the research,” he replied. “Do you think you’d enjoy this fast-paced learning?”

“Will this be how classes are from now on?”

“I think if you were to attend a class taught in human speed, you’d likely grow bored.”

“I might want to wait a few months before going back then,” she replied. “But yes, I did enjoy the research a lot.”

I smiled as I watched her with the king. Both of them radiated a familial fondness for each other.

“Whenever you’re ready, we will make sure you get some college credit for today. Let’s keep this theory under wraps for now before we reveal it to the Cullens. In the meantime, do what you can to see if this Theodor was related to Luca or even Rasputin, but don’t spend too much time on it though. Can we also see what happens over time like if she deteriorates or not?”

“Sure, we can work on that,” Alec said. “Do you still want us to look into that newborn?”

Aro nodded. “He’s still pretty feral even with the regular feedings.” He looked over towards my direction. “Isabella, if you’re so inclined, would you like to lead us in the research?”
Isabella looked up as a flash of uncertainty hit me. “What would I need to do? I don’t want to break the computers.”

“You won’t have to. What you’ll do is talk the team through your thought process and they will do any of the searches that you require,” the king explained. “Since he is fairly young in his vampire stage, it shouldn’t be hard to find records of him.”

“What if I don’t do this right?” Isabella asked.

“Do what you feel makes sense, baby girl,” I said and sent her the confidence from the room.

“You all believe in me that much?” she asked and gave a small, almost shy smile when we nodded. “Okay. Do I need to stay seated or can I move about?”

“Whatever you’re comfortable doing,” Renata said.

Isabella looked around the room and stood up. “Can we look at a map of where this barn was located?”

“Sure thing,” Demetri said. When the map appeared on the screen, he got up and pointed. “As you can see, it was really close to the US and Canada border.”

She looked at the map. Much of her insecurity was gone now, replaced with concentration and excitement. “Hmm, that means he could be from anywhere, basically. I think if we were to look at all the missing males, we’d probably have a pretty long list.” She closed her eyes and took slow breaths, a sign that meant she was trying to focus. “Why don’t we start looking at the name Riley. I guess it could be spelled a couple different ways and it could be both a first or last name so that might still give us something, but it shouldn’t be as extensive. Wait! If we can, maybe filter by age as well. He’s obviously not a child so maybe anywhere from about sixteen to maybe forty just to be safe?”

“I’ll take it,” I said and began to type in the criteria. Isabella was watching my every move. The search came up with over a hundred possibilities.
“Hmm, so we need to eliminate all the ones that have been found.” The list was even further narrowed and more manageable. “Okay maybe we start looking at their physical description first before we open more of their files. Wait, no...eliminate the ones that have been missing for a while, first. I don’t think she’d have kept a human captive for long. We need to look at missing Rileys in the past year.”

I filtered out my search once more and eliminated several more before we had physical descriptions left.

“Okay, now we’ll look at their driver’s licenses.”

I hooked up my computer to the screen and began to open the potential matches, one by one. I was able to easily eliminate several when the physical description didn’t match the newborn. By the time we got through the list, there were only five.

“So let’s look at each record,” she continued. “I hope we’re on the right track.”

The first one was reported missing earlier this year, during a vacation to the Andes. It was originally a mountain climbing adventure to celebrate his upcoming marriage. During one of their hikes, he went missing and hadn’t been seen since.

“No, I don’t think that is a possibility especially if he was out with friends. Plus, wasn’t it summer in the Southern Hemisphere in January?”


The second man was last seen heading to Mexico. As I scrolled down the screen, Isabella’s hand stopped me.

“If he was last seen in Mexico, the chances are probably slim that Victoria is involved. We can put him in a ‘maybe’ pile but I think the chances are low.”

Riley #3 was Riley Biers. There was no real missing person’s report and instead, I managed to retrieve some information from law enforcement.

*Seattle Police are looking for Riley Biers in connection to several rapes that have occurred on or
near the University of Washington.

The Campus Rapist has now been identified as Riley Biers.

It is believed Riley Biers is no longer in the Western Washington area. Police warn he’s dangerous. Do not approach him. Contact law enforcement immediately.

I pulled up the artist sketch and had to admit, it looked similar to the vampire we had downstairs. The second picture was grainier, taken at what looked like a convenience store. It was a few months ago outside Spokane.

“Whoa, that is a really close fit, he was even headed east,” Isabella said. “I guess we need to look at the other two in order to make sure we’ve got the right person.”

Riley #4 was reported missing by his parents. He had a slight mental disorder and they feared he hadn’t taken his medication when he wandered off. I scrolled through the documents before coming across a hospital file.

“He’s been found,” Isabella replied when she saw the discharge papers. “Is it often that files get mislabeled like that?”

“It’s a small percentage; or more like a percent of a percent but it does happen,” Felix replied.

The last Riley was a soldier who was MIA. As soon as Isabella saw the report, she eliminated him.

“It looks like Riley Biers is his name unless anybody else thinks otherwise.”

“Nope, you were great with your thought process,” Alec said. “You have good hunches.”

“Thank you,” she replied and I could tell even without my gift she was pleased to hear those words.

“Very well,” Aro said. “Due to his violent nature as a human, I don’t want him serving us as a soldier. I’ll talk to Caius and Marcus but I think they’ll agree with me. Isabella, you were
wonderful out there. Now if you all will excuse me, I must go relieve Caius. He’s been helping Sulpicia and Athenodora with the design sets for the party.”

Once he left, Isabella motioned to Renata to follow her to the kitchen area so she could grab a bag of blood. As the two sat down, I could see they were working on her shield. I looked around and sent my appreciation to the guys in the research area.

“Thank you for this opportunity,” I said. “We’re both grateful to have you all in our lives.”

“Hey, no problem,” Felix said and smacked my shoulder. “Hey, Heidi and I will be taking your Gulfstream along with a couple soldiers so we can leave the plane in Anchorage. You’ve lived up that way, any good places for a meal?”

“I had to eat a lot of caribou during my Alaska days,” I said and laughed when they all shuddered. “Stop in one of the large cities on the way. You’re bound to find something there.”

Chapter End Notes

Did that all make sense?

Now you have an idea about Riley’s background as well as Alice’s. The chapter pretty much wrote itself except all the research on names of Romanian origin.

NASA does have a webpage that shows when and the type of eclipses have occurred in history so the actual eclipse was around that time. The backstory with the meteorite is made up.

Until next time! XO ~ sushi
Chapter 91

Chapter Notes

This takes place a few days after the last chapter - less than a week when the Cullens are supposed to be at Volterra.

As always, I’m not SM - I just like to play with her characters. See you at the bottom!

Let’s go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 90

Alice POV

I laughed as I tried on some Louboutin shoes knowing they would work perfectly with a Yves Saint Laurent dress I saw earlier. I knew they’d have it in my size, I had seen it.

“I’ll take the black pair and the gold ones,” I told the sales lady and handed her my credit card.

“Would you like them delivered to your hotel, Mademoiselle?”

I nodded. “I’m staying at the Sofitel nearby. Just ask for the Volturi suite. I’m there with my sisters.”

“Oh, Mademoiselle Volturi," the sales clerk stuttered.

Ah, life is good.

BPOV
Based on the evidence, I strongly believe Riley, newborn vampire being held at Volterra is none other than fugitive, Riley Biers. - I.S.W.

I breathed a sigh of relief as I finished typing out my research report for Aro. He thought not only would it be good practice for my strength control, it could be used when the Cullens arrived. It had taken me a couple days to complete, not having enough patience to work for more a few minutes at a time.

“You finished, baby girl?” Jasper said as he came up to the library with a couple blood bags in his hands. “I come bearing gifts.”

“Thank you,” I said as I took a bag and pulled the valve out. “You must have felt my relief when I got done. It was hard to type this out on the computer and be careful at the same time.”

Jasper sat down next to me. “You did really well and you didn’t break off the keys completely.”

“No, I cracked some plastic. I had to use just my forefingers and type. I didn’t feel completely in control if I tried to type like a normal person. It was good practice but I’m a little frazzled now from trying to be careful. Do you think Aro will really need the report for the Cullens?”

Jasper shrugged. “I don’t know, it sounds like they left it up to him whether or not he can behave enough to be trained as a servant. Even then, the kings wouldn’t want him to be too close to the queens. I think they’re trying to give him a chance to make amends. While you were practicing with Renata, Demetri and Alec confided in me that in the past, an out of control vampire like Riley would be executed immediately. We’ll know later today when they hold his trial. They suggested that we be there since we helped. Peter, Char, Felix and Heidi will be back for it.”

“I guess we can do that. So I meant to ask, did you see how I’m beginning to control my shield now?”

“I did and I was pretty impressed. Your success rate is in the high 70, low 80 percent.”

“You calculated it?” He nodded. “Wow, that is pretty damn expensive.

I was also getting better at sparring with the girls. Jasper actually got involved in the early morning hours to show me what I should do if I ever had to fight a male. We didn’t actually practice with
full-contact, it was more the slower motion, choreographed movements like the beginning.

“I am, I think it is all starting to come together - the strength, the crazy mind, the control and don’t forget my gift. I am not a hundred percent with everything but it feels like things are easier.”

“That’s great!” he exclaimed. “I started noticing your confidence after Aro suggested that you look for Riley’s story.”

“I was so nervous,” I admitted. “But at the same time, it was so much fun. While I was voicing my thoughts out loud, it was as though, something just clicked into place. It sounds silly with all the advice and support I received from everybody but I guess it just took that one moment for it to really sink in.”

“Like I’ve said for weeks now, I’m damn proud of you.” As he kissed my hair I felt his emotions and I smiled even more. “So what do you want to do until we leave for the castle?”

“Can you help me go through emails? I don’t think I’ve done anything since the change, but I need a break from typing.”

“I can do that, do you want me to send your report to Volterra?”

“Shit! I forgot to do that, can you?”

“Done. So your first email is from Jacob. If you’d like, I can give you some privacy.”

I took a hold of his hand. “No, stay with me. It isn’t like I’m expecting an email about your gifts or anything.” I made a note to myself to ask Renata or Char, once she was back, to help me. Jasper would be none the wiser with Christmas or his birthday.

“Oh?”

“I have ideas but I won’t say a word. I do have an idea for our anniversary.” I winked at him and gave him a kiss on the cheek.
“What do you have planned?”

“How about we have a party, maybe see if we can go to the nightclub? Unless you wanted a quiet celebration.”

“I like that. It will be fun especially for New Year’s Eve.”

I was so happy I quickly pulled him into a hug. “Okay, I should read Jacob’s email now.”

Jacob was enjoying his mechanic training and told me he was now working at Sam’s garage. Business was booming and they actually expanded a few months ago. Harry Clearwater passed away a few weeks ago and as a result, Billy had taken the Clearwaters under his wing.

“Jasper! Look, he sent a picture of the ring he bought for Lisa! He’s going to propose soon.”

“Did you want to give Leah the scholarship for next year?”

“She’s got a full scholarship but I think we can get one for Seth. I don’t know them well but Harry was one of dad’s closest friends, next to Billy.”

Jasper helped me reply back to Jacob asking about Seth and when he was graduating. I also wished him luck on his proposal.

“It looks like Ashley sent you an email a couple days into your turn.”

Ashley gave birth to a baby girl and named her Madeline but they gave her a nickname of Saffron.

“Ashley said her husband talked her out of naming their daughter after a spice because it sounded too much like a silly, celebrity type name,” I said and we both laughed.

“Can I ask you something? Did that ever bother you? The not being able to have kids part?”
“Not really,” I began and took a deep breath as I recalled the events. The memories weren’t as painful as they were when I was a human but I wasn’t numb to it either. “I mean, I was young when the accident happened and the idea of having kids wasn’t even an issue. I didn’t mind not having to deal with the monthly stuff but my biggest concern was whether or not I was normal. I mean, you saw how I was when we were first getting intimate.”

Jasper pulled me onto his lap. “You were but you quickly overcame that.”

“Thank god,” I muttered. “Would things have been different for us if things weren’t normal?”

“I was already in love with you. I would have made sure you weren’t feeling pressured into doing something you weren’t comfortable with.” He lifted my chin so we were looking at each other eye to eye. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I am,” I said and smiled, sending him reassurance. “I guess I was in one of those ‘what if’ type of moods. As far as the kid issue, I probably wouldn’t have thought about it until I was older - maybe out of college and stuff. I mean, adoption would have been a possibility or I could have been the neighborhood crazy cat lady.”

Jasper laughed out loud. “Oh baby girl, I can’t picture you with a house full of cats.”

I giggled at the mental picture. “It’s a little silly, isn’t it? Would you have left the Cullens if I wasn’t in the picture?”

“I probably would have left for a while, I was due for a visit with Peter and Char. If Alice stayed with the Cullens and her condition worsened, I think it might have been a longer visit.”

“Hmm, so maybe if I never showed up at Forks, I might have met you in Texas? If not for school maybe for Spring Break?”

“Anything is possible, I guess. Hell, maybe we’d end up meeting in Vegas and I got to charm you off your feet.”

“Okay, you win,” I said and smiled. “I feel better now. Is this part of being a newborn too? I’m not
regretting my decision but all of a sudden, I started to feel weird, maybe a little nostalgic."

“It might be a newborn thing. I only saw the negative side of newborns. We’ll deal with it if it continues. In the meantime, did you want to reply back to Ashley?”

“Can you give her our congratulations and then...is it okay if we sent them a small gift? I don’t know much about babies but I’m sure they’ll need stuff.”

“Yeah we can send her a little gift if you want. The rest of the emails have to deal with school. They know you’re taking a break and you can start back up when you’re ready.”

“Is there anything in the special file?” I asked since that was where Jasper helped me filter Renee’s stuff so I wouldn’t see it.

“Nope.”

“I was thinking, is it possible to set something up for that half-brother of mine?” I asked as we headed to Volterra. Once again, Jasper let me drive.

Set something up? You mean like a scholarship?”

“Not quite,” I said. “There will, most likely, come a time when Renee will fuck something up. I just thought maybe an emergency account set aside for him would be smart. Nothing huge and outrageous, maybe 5 grand or something. It can be used for college, fresh start, rehab, who knows?”

“Rehab?” he asked and shook his head. “Yeah, we can arrange for something.”
“They won’t know, Phil and Renee? I want it kept anonymous - nothing that ties back to us. I have no intention of visiting him or anything crazy like that.”

“Yep, I can do that,” he said and started typing on his phone.

I sighed. “I can’t wait until I can do that. You make it look so effortless.”

“Look at the bigger picture though, you’re driving us to Volterra and you’re doing much better than last time.”

“No more old lady driving,” I quipped as I turned into the parking lot.

As soon as Jasper helped me out of the car, a robed vampire approached us. It didn’t take me long to smile as I realized it was Aro.

“Oh good, you both have your robes. I have some interesting news about Alice,” he said after greeting us.

We followed him as he led us through another entrance to the castle. When we got to an office, I realized I had been here before.

“This is your office,” I blurted out.

He nodded with a smile. “Your human memories are very strong. I am glad you decided to keep them. I’ve known vampires in the past who have opted to start anew, with no recollection of their human life other than their name. Sometimes it worked but more often than not, something of their past will creep up and they won’t have the ability or knowledge to work past the issue.”

“I wanted to remember everything,” I replied. “Even the bad stuff. It was who I was and who I am now - just more durable.”

“That is a great attitude, my dear.” He gestured for us to sit and then he sat on the desk in front of us. “I saw Alice today. She thanked me for the shopping trip she went on yesterday.”
At his remark, we both sat up and looked at each other, confusion on our faces.

“What?” Jasper asked.

Aro put his hands up and shrugged. “I felt the same thing when she said that. She hasn’t left the castle since her arrival and there only have been a handful of instances when she was allowed to leave her room, escorted, of course. Needless to say, I played along and patted her shoulder so I could see what she’s talking about. From the reports I’ve received, she’s just been sitting either at her bed or the small sitting area the majority of the time.”

“Were you able to see anything?” I asked.

Aro nodded. “Her mind has distorted her memories so she believes they’re occurring in real time. I could tell it was a memory from a while back based on the cars on the road but she pictured herself shopping in Paris. You’ll never get this but she pictured the queens going on holiday with her and referred to them as her sisters!”

“It’s the barbed growths, isn’t it?” Jasper asked.

“I think so,” Aro replied. “Alec is running tests to see what could happen if things continue. It could take days for the results.”

“Wow, that is messed up,” I replied.

“If you two don’t mind, do you want to walk by her room and see if there is any reaction, emotional or otherwise?”

“I don’t mind, do you, Isabella?”

I shook my head. “I don’t mind.”

“Thank you, keep your hoods up and follow me.” He dialed a number quickly. “Phillipe, can you
open Miss Cullen’s door for a few minutes? Yes, ten is more than plenty, thank you.”

We pulled the hoods over our heads and followed the king down a winding corridor.

“This is where the guest quarters are located. The Cullens will be staying here,” he explained.

I noticed how all the doors were ornately carved, similar to the main doors of the throne room. He paused when we neared an open door and turned, motioning us to keep quiet. As I passed the door, I turned slightly and noticed her sitting on the bed with a blank stare on her face. After we were at the end of the hallway, Aro motioned to us again and this time, we headed to the lab.

“Hey guys!” Alec said as soon as we entered the room.

Aro quickly gave Alec a rundown of what happened. “I’m going back up to see if she had any reaction. Did you pick up anything, Jasper?’

“No, I didn’t, she had that look like she was in the middle of a vision though.”

“I’ll be back.”

“So no recognition? Hmm, I’m at a bit of a loss myself with the barbs. I took her venom and put it into similar conditions as though it were still in her body. I introduced blood to it on a regular basis and there have been no additional growths but they haven’t shriveled up either. I’m glad Aro brought you both down here. I just got finished with these.”

We watched as he grabbed a couple of boxes and set them on the table.

“These are for you,” he said and opened them.

Inside, nestled in a satiny fabric was a silver chain with a ‘V’. They were the chains I had seen the Volturi wear.

“You can wear them today during Riley’s trial.”
“Why didn’t we need to wear them when we took part in the airplane transfer?”

“That was in the middle of the mission,” Alec explained. “We wore them when they were captured but we normally take them off on the plane. Some of us don’t have our hoods up during the ride, we’re just less formal. So before I hand them to you, you must be aware of a couple things.”

He pointed to a large, round diamond on one edge of the letter. “If you’re ever confronted but unable to fight, press the diamond like so.” When he demonstrated, there was a soft click from the necklace. “At the point of the ‘V’ there is a small needle treated with werewolf venom.” He pulled it out with his thumb and forefinger. “As you can see, the silver part is safe to touch with your bare hands. Don’t touch the gold color and especially the tip. This is sharp enough to pierce through vampire skin. We normally suggest somewhere like the neck or the eye. Just stick and shove it in.”

I shuddered as I imagined it.

“Yeah, it is nasty business and lucky no one has had to use one yet. See the ruby inset on the letter? That is a homing device and if you press it, it will send a signal to all of us and we’ll be able to find you.”

“This is some cool spy stuff, Alec,” I said.

“Thanks! Afton designed the hidden needle and I worked on the homing signal.”

“Is all this precaution necessary?” Jasper asked.

“We’re not in any danger, I assure you. It is a matter of ‘better safe than sorry’. Maria was probably our biggest threat in ages but even so, we prefer being careful and try to make sure we don’t go on a mission alone. The only one that can is Santiago if it involves recon work in the wilderness due to his gift; it wouldn’t work if his mission was in a big city.”

Aro arrived just as Jasper and I were looking at our Volturi chains.

“Oh good, they got them,” he said to Alec.
“Did you find anything out?” Jasper asked.

“She didn’t recognize anything. She was in the middle of some other shopping adventure. This time with Baroque furniture. She didn’t even notice the door opening or the three of us passing by.”

“Was she aware you were there the second time?”

“No,” he said and shook his head. “She looks like she is in a vegetative state but in her mind, she is busy as can be.” He looked as though he was about to leave when his phone buzzed. “Their plane just landed, they’re on their way. In the meantime, Alec, have you made any progress on Alice’s lineage?”

“Very little.” He walked over to show us some slides. “Even though Luca’s tissue samples are not the cleanest given how old they are and how they were preserved, I still managed to find some common DNA matches as I’ve shown before. Now if I took the tissue sample of Rasputin, I could find a couple more matches that between them. The likelihood of them being related is now a few percentage points greater than before. Without more samples, like Theodor’s or even her mother’s, we can’t make any further matches. Besides, I don’t have a means of gathering the birth records. There simply weren’t any.”

“I was afraid of that,” Aro replied. “Even if we did find records, these were a group of people that tended to travel about, hardly ever settling in one place. If by chance Carlisle Cullen was to question the validity of the tests, would you be able to prove otherwise?”

“Sure,” he said. “This is basically the standard that is administered in paternity tests, but because of our vampire ability, I managed to notice more matches than the human eye and human-programmed computers have not discovered yet. Considering we’re not looking for her parentage, I think the odds they’re related are great.”

“Very well, put that into a report, just in case he does ask. We also have Isabella’s report on Riley. I think the evidence speaks for itself.”

The lights softly flickered a couple times.

“Well, that’s our signal to get ready,” Alec explained. “Jasper and Bella, stay towards the back. They’re bringing Victoria in and we don’t want her to even imagine that you’re both here.”
“Sure, we can do that,” Jasper said and spun me around so I faced him. He pulled me into a hug and kissed my lips before pulling the hood back over my face. “There.” He reached behind my neck and straightened out my necklace and then I mimicked his actions.

“Ready?” Alec said as Aro ghosted out the door.

“As we’ll ever be,” I replied.

“Okay, so the procession will be similar to when we brought Maria to trial. Felix and I will lead Riley and then Heidi and Jane will bring Victoria.” Alec led us out of the lab. “I’ll leave you in the throne room. They’ll make sure you are away from the action.”

When we entered the throne room, Peter and Char waved us over.

“Hey guys, how was New Orleans?” I asked.

“Wicked,” Char replied with a wink. “I swear, put some alcohol in some humans and they become entirely different people.”

“Yeah,” Peter said. “Too much alcohol and some scantily clad women... it fueled the fire but it turns out they were some mafia or pretending to be mafia. We took care of them.” He stopped and looked over at us. “So you two look very official. Jasper, I know you were hiding behind the wall the last trial but we’re not going to be hidden this time. You can stand next to us. We’ll be to the right of the kings.”

“Since this is sort of a security issue, does that mean Caius will run the show?” I asked and Peter nodded. “Will the queens be here?”

“No,” Demetri said as he greeted us. “They all decided this trial wasn’t important enough for them to be here. They’ve convinced Gianna to help with the set decorations for the party. She’s not comfortable attending but is going to try and help instead.”

“How was Alaska?” Jasper asked.

“Cold as hell,” Peter replied. “Jesus, I don’t know how you were able to stand that dreariness, it was getting dark so early! We were only there for a couple hours while we waited for Felix and
Heidi. Luckily we waited inside the plane because during the trip, I got that funny feeling the Cullens had someone watching."

“Oh? Who?”

“Dunno, I got a faint image before we landed and decided we had to stay put. Sure enough while we were waiting, we saw something or someone, I’m almost positive it was a female.”

“Hmm, maybe it was one of the Denali sisters,” Jasper said and shrugged. “So yeah, y’all stayed inside until they arrived?”

“Yep, with 4 soldiers. They’ll be the ones that make sure the Cullens will get on board the plane.”

“We’ll talk more later, it looks like they’re about to begin,” Char said as we all started to assemble.

I found this whole experience really interesting and hoped I didn’t lose focus in the middle of the trial.

“You okay?” Jasper mouthed out and I quickly explained my predicament.

“You’ll be fine, Isabella,” he whispered. “Take my hand and if you feel like you’re about to drift off, give it a squeeze and I’ll send you some calming vibes.”

I nodded and stood ready when the kings arrived and sat down. Soon after, the double doors opened and Felix led the procession, holding onto a chain that secured Riley’s cuffs. I could barely see Alec but I knew he’d be there just in case.

“Let me out!” Riley growled out and hissed when he tried to jerk his arms free from the cuffs.

As I watched him, it finally hit me that my change, as well as Gianna’s was pleasant and definitely more positive. I was also able to understand what Jasper had meant by newborn tantrums and I was so grateful my real moment of being feral was when I first woke up. I hoped, at that moment, I would not ever get to a point I behaved like that.
“Silence!” Caius commanded as he stood up. “Bring the next prisoner in.”

Alec must have used his gift on Riley because he stopped thrashing just as Heidi brought in Victoria with Jane following. Unlike her partner, Victoria was relatively calm, almost meek as she followed the Volturi guard up to the front.

“State your names,” Caius continued.

“Victoria, sir,” she whispered.

“I’m Riley!” he spat out.

“Well, Riley, do you know why you’re here?”

“Yes, your thugs captured me and here I am.”

Caius took a deep breath. “You’re here because you have committed a number of crimes and while most of them will be answered in the near future, by your maker, you’ve been summoned here today so we can decide your fate.”

“You’re going to let me free so I can destroy the Cullens?”

“Riley, shut up!” Victoria whispered harshly. “Unless you want to die, you better listen and behave.”

“Listen to them just as I listened to you?”

“Enough!” Caius yelled. “I suggest that you listen to your maker and cease your disruptions, Riley Biers.” He stepped off the platform and moved in front of the newborn. “One of our options is to offer you a place as a trained and paid soldier of the Volturi.”
Riley began to nod.

“But then, we did a check on your human life,” Caius continued and began to walk around the two, slowly. “You were accused of raping women at a university in Washington state and then evading arrest by the human law enforcement. What do you say to that?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Riley replied with some hesitance.

Caius looked over and nodded towards Aro. Once he stood next to his brother, he looked over at Felix and Alec before touching Riley’s hand.

“Lie,” Aro said. “He doesn’t remember much of his human life but I saw some memories of women screaming for help.”

Although we all knew his past, there hadn’t been a real confirmation until now. I wondered if having a regular supply of blood brought some of the memories back.

“I figured as much,” Caius replied. “Do you want to recant your previous statement?”

“Whatever,” Riley muttered.

“I also saw that he brutally violated a young girl before he tried to change her,” Aro continued as I gasped out. I wasn’t the only one, several others did too.

“Did she encourage him to?” Caius sneered as he pointed his finger at Victoria.

“I didn’t know. I had no idea!” Victoria blurted out.

Aro grabbed her hand and then shook his head. “She’s speaking the truth. She did wonder about the bloodied clothing but figured the girl was going through her courses at the time.” He turned to Caius. “I can’t see him as a servant for the castle. Not with his history.”

Caius nodded as Aro headed back to the platform. Marcus shook his head when Caius looked over.
“Very well. Guards? What say you?”

Immediately, Alec and Jane put their thumbs down, followed by Felix and Heidi. I held out my hand and put my thumb down, as did the rest of my family.

“Well, it’s unanimous. Riley Biers, you’re sentenced to death,” Caius announced. Take the other back to her cell.”

“We need to move closer to the front,” Char whispered. “The floor will open up shortly.”

“Riley Biers, do you have any last words?”

Riley growled. “That’s it? I die because I fucked a few women? They wanted it and I gave it to them.”

“Jane,” Caius said and nodded his head.

Riley crashed to his knees shrieking out in pain as Jane took her hood off and glared at him. “You don’t deserve to be called a man, you filth.”

She walked away, still using her gift on him, flexing her fingers as she got close to her brother. He quickly hugged and comforted her.

I looked up to Jasper and squeezed his hand.

Aro walked over to Felix and gestured to the cuffs. Felix slipped on a pair of gloves and quickly removed them while Riley continued to suffer.

“Jane,” Aro said and Riley was left panting on the ground. Before he could react, Aro had torn off one arm and was grabbing onto the other when the other two kings moved closer.
“We could draw this out and show you as much mercy as you gave those women you victimized,” Caius sneered as he grabbed Riley’s head with both hands. Marcus stood behind, pinning his arm against his body. “However, we won’t. Goodbye, Riley.”

Riley’s head was ripped off with a loud, metallic screech. His wild eyes looked everywhere as he searched for his body. I guess his larynx was no longer attached to his mouth as he screamed silently. Aro took the twitching arm and tossed it into the roaring fire on the floor. Marcus followed with Riley’s torso with Caius making sure the head saw everything before it too was tossed.

“Well, you’re all dismissed,” Caius said as he wiped his hands on his robe. “Thank you, all of you.”

“Can we have an audience in an hour?” Jasper asked just as the kings were leaving.

“Is everything okay, Jasper?” I asked.

“I want to talk to y’all about our decision regarding the Cullens.”

*Speaking of the Cullens...*

*Edward’s POV*

The house was quiet for now. Esme and Carlisle had driven down to Anchorage to pick up Rose and Emmett from one of their many trips. They weren’t happy their so-called ‘honeymoon’ was called short but this wasn’t their first trip to Isle Esme.

When I first saw Carlisle’s thoughts about Aro’s insistence that we all visit Volterra, I wasn’t thrilled but Carlisle had a point, we could visit with Alice. She must be miserable there with those heathens. What if they were violating her? What if Aro ended up forcing her into being a guard? The idea disgusted me and I wish she didn’t have to be there.

I missed Alice, the few times I’ve talked to her over the computer, she looked different. Sure, she was happy and talked about her adventures, but there was something about the way she looked, especially her clothes. Maybe it was just the fuzzy video feed. Carlisle had also noticed but has never brought it up but I couldn’t wait to see her and find out.
I was hoping they would forget about us but then, just the other day, Tanya called to say she was with Irina in Anchorage and they saw the Volturi plane land.

Would the Volturi force me into a life of servitude once they saw my gift? From what Carlisle has said, Aro was quite the collector and loved to use his guards as pawns. I had to prepare myself and maybe, if I played up my grief, they’d take pity on me. I thought about the possible outcomes.

They could either allow me to grieve with my family over my lost love or they could still force me to join them but maybe I’d get to serve for a short period of time.

*Yes, I could bargain with them!*

I wish Alice was here to see if the plan would work. It just had to.

Chapter End Notes

There you go, a little insight from the Cullens.

Thank you to all the new readers! I received a few new reviewers the last chapter so YAY! Of course, I also appreciate those of you who have stuck with this story in what seems like forever. This story wouldn’t be possible if it weren’t for LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan. They’ve worked tediously to make this story pretty and easy to read.

Until next week! XO ~sushi
Surprise! I know I’m early in updating but I don’t think you’ll complain. :) I’m going to be starting my flooring project this holiday weekend and figured I’d better post early rather than later.

Thanks for all the R&Rs, alerts and favorites! Truly appreciate you readers.

Also need to thank LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan for all their wonderful work.

A few of you asked about the “spy” and I know I left it vague. In my mind, I pictured Carlisle telling the Denalis about their impending trip and it didn't take much arm twisting to get Tanya and her sisters to go to the big city for “entertainment”. I pictured them stopping at the airport to check on things during their trip and reported the arrival of the Volturi plane to the Cullens. It really didn't have a whole lot of bearing on the story so I left it at that. :) 

I’m not SM, just like a few of her characters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 91

JPOV

As I stood there and watched Riley’s trial, I kept a close monitor on Isabella’s emotions. I could almost guess at one point, she was comparing her life as a young vampire to his when she looked at me and sent me gratitude.

Of course, seeing that Victoria nomad had me thinking about the Cullens and their upcoming arrival. I knew what I had to do and hoped Isabella was would support my decision.

When Caius dismissed us after Riley was executed, I requested a meeting with our Volturi family.

“Is everything okay, Jasper?” Isabella asked with some confusion and curiosity.

“I want to talk to y’all about our decision regarding the Cullens.” I sent Isabella reassurance.
“How about you meet us in the conservatory in an hour?” Aro suggested.

“That sounds good,” I replied, sending them my appreciation.

“You okay, bro?” Peter asked as the room cleared.

“Yeah, can we all go somewhere to talk?” I asked as we pulled our hoods down.

“How about we walk over to the abandoned church where the helicopter is located?”

“Sure, lead the way.”

We followed Peter along a darkened tunnel, avoiding the town altogether. “This is the quickest way. Plus we won’t draw attention to ourselves,” he explained.

Once we were in the main area, we sat down on some benches along the side.

“So I think I’m going to confront them... the Cullens and I’d like your support.”

“Jasper, you know you always have our support,” Peter replied and gave me a man hug.

Char nodded, echoing Peter’s words.

“You know I’m here for you. I love you, Jasper,” Isabella replied and kissed me.

“I love you too, baby girl. That is why I want to meet with the Volturi in a bit. I wanted to make sure they knew our decision, however, I don’t want to confront them until after they learn about Victoria and Alice’s scheme.”
“Are you ready to see them, Jasper?” she asked. “I don’t want you to feel like I’ve pressured you or anything.”

“You’re not, Isabella. I’ve debated myself over the situation.” I looked at her and then my siblings. “I’ll explain more when we talk to the Volturi. Should we head back?”

We took our time getting back to the castle, this time walking through town. Being it was a chilly day, we drew our hoods back up.

“Peter, the blanket vendor is here,” Char said. “Let’s get some for the house.”

“Hey, we’ll meet y’all back at the castle. This guy is only here for a few weeks out of the year.”

I nodded and waved to them as we continued to walk.

“Jasper, look. It’s Jane and Alec.”

“Hey guys!” Alec waved as we approached them.

“Hey,” Isabella replied and let go of my hand to greet the twins. “We’re about to head back.”

“Us too,” Alec said. “We both needed some fresh air after the trial.”

Jane nodded. “It brought back some hard memories. It may have happened centuries ago but some scars don’t go away when you turn, you know?”

Isabella quickly threw her arms around Jane. “I know,” she whispered.

I sent my understanding and compassion to Jane as I fist bumped Alec.

“Thank you,” Jane said. “I was really grateful Caius gave me the opportunity to send some pain back. Enough of us, let’s go back. I’m curious what you’re going to say about the Cullens.”
I smiled as we followed the twins back to the castle.

When we arrived at the conservatory, the kings hadn’t arrived yet. Those who were there were curious about my decision. The castle staff were arranging the seating for us all even though we really didn’t need them.

A few minutes later, the kings arrived with the queens and motioned me to come to the front of the garden area.

“Jasper, whenever you’re ready,” Aro said.

“Thank you all,” I said. “I just wanted to let y’all know that I’ve decided to make an appearance when the Cullens arrive. Isabella and I talked about it and it makes sense to close that part of my life.” I looked over to her and held my hand out as she walked up to join me. “While I’m grateful I was able to meet Isabella while part of that family, they don’t define who I am anymore.”

“Is there anything we can do to help?” Aro asked.

I looked around at the faces of our extended family. There was no disdain for my decision, only support and I sent them all my gratitude. “Thank you, if you could keep us a secret, we don’t want them to know until after they have learned about Victoria and Alice.”

“That isn’t a problem at all. Renata, perhaps you and Demetri could escort in the second SUV while Felix takes the first.”

“I can do that,” Renata replied. “Don’t worry Jasper and Bella, my shield will keep your identity a secret until you’re ready.”

“Maybe you could enlighten us about the rest of the Cullens. I know Aro has seen some memories from Alice but who knows if her memories are real at this point,” Marcus said. “Is there anything we should prepare ourselves for?”

“Well, Carlisle has a painting with the four of you and while he paints the story of how you’re all leaders, I remember there was disdain whenever he talked about his time here. I think he
completely believes the fabricated stories so you’re dictators who live a hedonistic lifestyle here in
the castle.”

“What of the others?” Caius asked.

“Esme is his mate and wife. As mentioned in previous meetings, I cannot confirm if they’re truly
mated or not. She plays the role of the mother figure in the family but I often thought she never
saw the ‘kids’ as young adults. They were forever children.”

“I remember you saying that,” Isabella said. “As a human, I remembered how there were always
some sort of homemade treat she made whenever I visited the house. She reminded me of those TV
housewives from the 1950s.”

I smiled. “She also talked about Isabella as though she was much younger than she was. Then I
guess you have Edward who has the gift of mind reading.”

“Ah yes, Peter has talked about him,” Aro said. “He thinks he knows all because he can see it in
their minds right?”

“Yes, he doesn’t know about boundaries or he doesn’t care. Because he is Carlisle’s first, he is a
bit spoiled.”

“My mind was blank to him,” Isabella added. “Jasper also explained, when we started to get closer,
how I was his singer.”

“La tua cantante,” Aro whispered. “And yet, he managed to remove the venom from you?”

“I guess,” Isabella replied. “He had a thing about wanting to keep my soul from being destroyed;
becoming a vampire was one of those ways. He also had a very ideological vision of life. I suppose
he wanted me to have the typical, white picket fence, dog name Spot and 2.5 kids.” She rolled her
eyes and shook her head as she got lost in her thoughts.

I figured she was remembering her accident and sent her love before continuing. “Another brother
is Emmett. He’s mated to Rose who was often my so-called twin sister while I was living with
them.” I knew those two had claimed each other at one point in their lives, having seen them in
various states of undress throughout the decades. “For the most part, Emmett is pretty easy going
but he tends to defer most of the decision making to Rose. If you were to see her, you’d think she hated humans but I could feel she was extremely envious of them, of their mortality and the ability to bear children.”

“Lovely family,” Sulpicia muttered. “They all sound very judgemental.”

“Emmett also thought I was younger than I really was,” Isabella said and looked to the crowd. “You know, a lot of you have shared your stories with us but I have never told anyone other than Jasper. If they are going to be here and if we confront them, there might be...hell, there is a good chance I’ll say something about my less than perfect past.”

“Are you sure, baby girl?” I whispered to her.

She looked at me and smiled as she ran her fingertips along my jaw. “I’d rather tell our family now than later during a fit of anger because of something the Cullens said or did.”

I held her hand as she talked about her childhood, having to live with her mom and then seeing her dad during the summer.

“...And then I was in summer camp but missed the bus...” I sent her calm remembering this was about the time she had her breakdown when she first confided to me.

“...so I moved to Forks to be with my dad and that was how I met the Cullens. I was so insecure and shy, having been practically ostracized in my previous school that I was a shell of who I really was...”

I was so proud of her for opening up and letting everybody know about her past. Even though it happened while she was a human, the hurt was still there. The anger was still there. What Jane said earlier about scars was so true.

“...and then Jasper saved me from one of Victoria’s cronies, Laurent. He pretty much said she would prolong my pain and suffering whereas he’d show mercy and kill me quickly. Jasper and I became tentative friends at first and then we eventually fell in love and here we are.” She looked back at me and squeezed my hand. “I’m okay now. I just have this feeling that one or more of them will question my decision for changing and how I destroyed my human life.”
“Oh Bella,” Gianna said as she pulled her into a hug. “I’m so proud to call you my friend. I’m glad you’re not one of those snooty Cullens. I haven’t met them, but I don’t like the way they act superior to others.”

“Thank you Gianna,” Isabella replied, hugging her back. “Thank you all for your support. It really wasn’t until I met Peter and Char and now all of you that I realized how a true vampire family should act. It means a great deal to me... to us.”

“That was good insight into the family Jasper,” Aro said. “Thank you for letting us know. We expected as much.” He looked over to Isabella. “Even though I couldn’t read you when I first met you, I could see you were already an amazing young woman. You both have all our support and perhaps we could work on some communication signals before they arrive.”

“We can do that,” I said.

“Good,” Aro replied and grinned mischievously. “Now onto more important matters. We’ve been informed that someone will be celebrating a birthday tomorrow.” He scanned the room and immediately, his eyes landed on Peter.

“Did you tell him, woman or did Jasper?” Peter muttered.

“I did, baby,” Char said as she kissed his cheek. “I needed some help in getting everything set up.”

“Are we having a taxidermy party?” I quipped remembering the look on his face when he received Isabella’s rattlesnake last year.

“Shut up, old man,” he jeered. “Your turn is coming at the end of the month, remember that.”

“I’ve already got dibs on his birthday!” Isabella yelled out, joining in the fun. “I want to have a party at the club since it is also our wedding anniversary.”

“We can do that!” Felix replied.

“It will be a grand celebration!” Heidi added excitedly. “It’s New Year’s Eve right? I know the
I looked over at Peter and chucked him on the shoulder knowing his plan to mess with my birthday was now nixed.

“Yes, Charlotte asked that we help with the birthday celebration. Let’s meet up over at the track in about an hour. We’ll see you all there,” Aro announced and then got up to leave with the rest of the royal family following.

“So what do you think Char planned?” Isabella asked as soon as we got into the car.

“Not sure,” I replied. “I didn’t even realize she had asked the Volturi to help plan.”

“Shit, we didn’t get him anything.”

“We don’t always exchange gifts,” I explained. “The fact that we’re all together means more to him than anything. Same with me. The gift giving thing was more the Cullens and sometimes they were outrageous. For us, it is enjoying the moment or like tonight, celebrating with family.”

“I think the Volturi are the same way. I mean, they probably could have gotten me an island for my birthday or even a small country but I’m glad they didn’t.”

“I think you’re right about them. It’s more about family, like the key they gave us. Hey, we’re almost at the turn. Remember, there aren’t signs but you should be able to see the turn just past the cypress trees.”

“Okay,” she replied and slowed the car down. She made the turn and followed the road to the racetrack which was brightly lit. “Whoa, what’s going on? There are lots of cool looking cars parked in the middle... oh wait! There is a screen! Jasper, it is one of those drive-ins right?”
“It sure looks like it, baby girl,” I said smiling at her excitement.

Once she parked the car, I helped her out and she practically dragged me to where our family was. My siblings hadn’t arrived yet. We greeted everybody and I noticed immediately, Aro was radiating mischief. I sent him my curiosity and he started to laugh.

“I told Charlotte to make sure she insisted on driving so they’d be the last to arrive.”

“I hear a car coming,” Isabella said.

“Quick, hide behind the cars and shut the lights!” Heidi said laughing as we all ducked in the various classic cars like kids.

“Woman, what’s going on? You got me a lot full of classics?” Peter asked once they got out of the car.

“No, just be a little patient, will you?” she chided as they got out.

“What? It isn’t like I couldn’t smell them,” he grumbled. He really wasn’t upset but just didn’t like not knowing.

“I know that, but I wanted to do something nice. Stand right there Peter. Okay everybody!”

The lights popped on and we all emerged from our hiding places. “Happy birthday, Peter!” we all shouted.

“What is... aw damn, y’all got me a movie night at a drive-in?” he muttered, clearly touched by it all.

“Yeah babe,” Char said as she pulled him into a hug. “I had to enlist their help to get this set up.”
“And the cars?”

“They’re all from our private collections,” Aro explained. “Well, except for the DeLorean.”

“Happy birthday, babe.” Char handed him a set of keys.

“You... you got me a DeLorean?”

“Since it is one of your favorite movies, and you’ve been talkin’ about it for a couple decades, I’ve been lookin’ for one for you. Then Heidi mentioned something about a car collector one day during one of Bella’s training sessions. The guy was going bankrupt and needed to get rid of his cars so she helped me make some calls and here you go.”

“Oh my god, I love you, Char!” He held her by the waist and began to spin her around. “You’re one amazin’ woman.”

“I love you, Peter Whitlock,” she whispered. “Now come on, we’ve got a whole slew of movies to last us until the sky lightens up!”

There were cars to sit inside and a couple older trucks. I grabbed the one that was turned so the tailgate was facing the screen and helped Isabella up.

“There are some blankets in the cab,” Felix said as he sat in a Gran Torino with Heidi. “Instead of a concession stand, we’ve got bottles of blood. Help yourselves, there’s plenty.”

I hopped down and grabbed the wool blankets, setting one on the floor of the truck bed and then using the other to wrap us up as we snuggled. We didn’t need it but enjoyed the feeling of snuggling together.

“Nice car, Alec!” I said as he got into a bright blue, classic Corvette convertible with Jane.

“Thanks! This one is actually Jane’s car. Mine’s red. We drive it a few times out of the year, usually on a major holiday when there are less people on the road.”
The lights dimmed and there was even a nostalgic, black and white movie trailer advertising for a concession stand and bathrooms.

“Be right back,” Isabella said and hopped gracefully out the side of the truck, speeding to grab a few bottles of blood. She came back before the trailer was over and once again got settled in the truck bed with me.

The first movie was ‘Back to the Future’ and Peter let out a loud ‘whoop’ as soon as he realized what it was.

From where I was, this looked like a real drive-in theater without the human food smells. Everybody was happily enjoying the evening in classic cars and watching movies.

“So have you thought about how we’re going to approach the Cullens?” Isabella asked in a whisper after Marty McFly just went back in time.

She had been deep in thought as soon as the movie had started and I had a feeling she was thinking about our upcoming meeting.

“I’m interested in what you’re thinking?” I replied back.

“You are? Is it because I think in a funny way?”

I smiled. “It’s cute,” I replied and laughed when she made a face. I pulled her so she was sitting between my legs and held her close. “Seriously, your brain is beginning to adjust to your new thought process and things are starting to be more logical right?”

She nodded. “Yeah, you’re right, it is. So you’re really interested?”

“Always, you should know that by now.”

“I do, it is also nice to hear it.” She held my hands. “I was thinking of the strategy of waiting until
after the Vicki trial and then they’re told the news of Alice. If you wanted to prolong their emotional turmoil, one of us could appear first and then mess with them and then the other will show up at the right time. Finally BAMMO! they find out the news that we’re together.”

“That’s absolutely evil, baby girl,” I said and kissed her. “I like that idea.”

“That was just the evil one. If you’re wanting to be less evil, you could always change that so we both appear together.”

Our quiet conversation was heard by all and we got many chuckles when she suggested the first plan.

“I don’t think I should prepare my responses either,” she continued. “I mean, if they say something that pisses you off or me off, I don’t want to act like the obedient girl they would have expected. I’m not her. Oh shit, what if I cuss too much! Will I offend any of you?”

A collective “No, Bella” and “No Isabella” was heard along with laughter.

“Thanks guys, sorry for interrupting the movie,” she said sheepishly.

“You’re not, if you were, I’d find a way to throw popcorn your way,” Peter quipped.

“So what do you think? Are these ideas too crazy?”

“I was thinking along the same lines, myself,” I replied and noticed her relief. “I think I’ll have an idea what they’ll say but I won’t prepare responses either. I think you have a good grasp of them. Look back at your memories both before I came back to your life and after. Don’t dwell on them though. Just have an idea what you might be getting into before you confront them.”

“That’s sort of like sparring. Building that foundation instead of going in blind.”

“See, that wasn’t funny thinking at all, was it?”
“No, it isn’t.” She smiled brilliantly. “Does this mean my body has adjusted to being a vampire now?”

“You’re doing much better than when you first woke up. Hell, you’re doing much better than you were a couple weeks ago!” I sent her my pride for her accomplishments.

“I’m proud of me too. I know I’m not done but it feels good knowing I’ve made some strides.”

“Both you and Gianna have,” Aro cut in just as the credits began to roll. “You both have a wonderful outlook on life. We’ve seen and have been vampires who were brooding and filled with anger. That is usually the norm. That Riley was probably what a typical newborn would be but we’re all proud of the two of you.”

I gathered all the emotions from everybody and sent them to Isabella. Her eyes began to well up with venom tears.

“I’m so happy to be a part of this family,” she said as she started to cry. She wasn’t upset by the kind words, I could feel she was overwhelmed and extremely happy.

“Hey, come on and grab your bottle,” I said as I helped her down from the truck. “Let’s go give a toast to the birthday boy.”

“Okay, let’s do that,” she said quietly and sent me her appreciation for changing the subject.

“Happy birthday, bro,” I said as I tapped my bottle against his. “Now, where’s your birthday speech?”

Peter rolled his eyes and then looked around as the rest of the group began to pay attention to us.

“Thank y’all for comin’ out here,” he began. “This was a wonderful surprise.” He looked over to Char and smiled. “Thank you, darlin’ for planning this and for the kick ass car. Was that why you made us get blankets?”

“Not really, but okay,” Char replied with a wink.
I began to send him some really sad vibes as he continued to speak. His voice was breaking slightly now and I looked over to Isabella and gave her a wink.

“... and yeah,” he continued. “I love all y’all so damn much.” He was nearly sobbing now and the group was starting to catch on as to why.

“God dammit, Jasper!” He took a couple deep breaths as I reined in the emotions. “You motherfucker!” He came right up to me before giving me a hug. “As messed up as that was, I’m glad you’re back. I know I said it before but I missed you all those years.”

Now it was my turn to get a little emotional as I hugged him back. My plan completely backfiring thanks to my brother’s words. “Thanks for never turning your back on me when I did to you and Char.”

Char and Isabella hugged us both. If we could cry, I bet all of us would and I was relieved when another nostalgic trailer started and we broke out of our emotional outburst.

Isabella and I walked back to the truck just as ‘Casablanca’ began. Instead of snuggling in the truck bed, Isabella grabbed the blankets and bottles of blood before walking over to a larger clearing and we watched the movie from there. Part way through the movie, a few others joined us and by the time the movie ended, our drive-in became a makeshift picnic.

Instead of movies, we ended up playing music from different eras and everybody began to mingle and dance. Everybody was in a great mood as night slowly turned to day and the party began to break up. The auto carriers were brought out and the classic cars were loaded up.

It was back to our normal routine of practicing with her shield the next few days before the Cullens’ arrival. I had a feeling we were all going to enjoy the normalcy before the drama began.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, it was a bit of a fluff chapter. But, y’all know that when that happens, it usually means there is something big happening soon.

I am not making any promises but I will try to post the next chapter over the weekend, before it hits December.
Thank you and for those in the US, have a safe and Happy Thanksgiving!

XO~ sushi
Chapter 93

Chapter Notes

SURPRISE!

I decided I needed a pick me up after my flooring attempt today. There was a HUGE learning curve and once I got the hang of it, I realized I had been at this stupid thing for 7 hours. Yeah, I think I’ve got it down though.

Hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving, for those who celebrate.

Thanks to all the reviews, I am going to break from the norm and not respond to them this time as I normally do. Instead, here is the next chapter.

I do need to add something about Alice - while her mind is creating these ‘adventures’ with her ‘sisters’, she’s pretty much vegging out. She’s not always like that...she does have moments of normalcy but sometimes, when she’s out of her routine, well...you’ll see.

I’m not SM, just like playing with her characters.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 92

Carlisle POV

“So all of you will be here soon?” Alice asked.

“Yes, all of us are leaving for Anchorage this afternoon,” Esme said. “Rose and Emmett just got back a few days ago but they’ve gone out hunting. Edward’s here though.”

“Hey Alice,” my son said. “How are things in Italy?”

“Oh it’s been great!” she exclaimed. “I just got back from a trip to Paris. I bought so much that it barely fit on the plane!”
I nodded as I began to notice she didn’t look as put together as usual. Edward’s head immediately snapped to attention at my thoughts.

“Oh, that sounds lovely my dear,” Esme cooed as she continued to talk to Alice.

*Edward, have you noticed too?*

He gave a quick nod and then motioned with his eyes to Esme before mouthing out ‘no.’

*Okay, we’ll be there soon and get to the bottom of this.*

We stopped our silent conversation to continue our regular chat with Alice and listened as she continued talking about shopping trips and her new lavish lifestyle.

**BPOV**

The past few days after Peter’s birthday celebration was a whirlwind. I insisted on working harder on my physical shield in case it was needed. Renata, once again, assured me that both Jasper and I would be protected under hers if mine failed but I didn’t want to put any undue burden on her. Jasper relented and in today’s session, convinced all the guards to attack him at once.

Although I knew it was planned, seeing him out there alone with some of the most talented guards, had me on edge. I wasn’t sure if my shield would defend him or not because I knew he wasn’t in serious danger. I watched for a few minutes as their ‘fighting’ intensified. It was starting to look real and I began to run towards the fray. I was ready to jump into it when I felt that part of my brain engage and I managed to throw the shield over him causing the guards to bounce off.

“Oh, now split up and attack both of us!” Jasper commanded while still in the bubble.

“Oh fuck,” I muttered as half of them moved to continue stalking Jasper while the other half turned and started running towards me.
The last time I had thrown my shield to protect Jasper, I was left vulnerable. I wasn’t sure if this was the same scenario so I crouched down and faced my attackers. The first one to reach me was Char and I quickly spun away from her and kicked her on the shoulder, knocking her over. It wasn’t just the females coming towards me either, I realized as I jumped up and leapfrogged over Heidi. There were some male guards coming after me as well. I tucked myself into a ball, rolling onto the floor and got ready to leg sweep Peter and Alec who were fast approaching.

Just as they moved closer, I felt some resistance and realized my shield was now split so both Jasper and I were covered.

“Oh shit, I did it,” I whispered excitedly to myself. I still moved to defend myself in case the shield dropped. “Don’t get cocky,” I thought and turned around so I made sure all my opponents knew I was still aware of them. I noticed they were now surrounding me, not able to move any closer than they were.

“Your shield split itself, Bella!” Renata exclaimed as she left the group attacking Jasper and ran over to me.

“That was awesome, baby girl!” Jasper yelled, still in his bubble.

“Thanks!” I said and smiled before closing my eyes while taking calming breaths. I felt my shield leave Jasper first and then me. “That was a weird feeling!”

“Here you go, little one,” Peter said as he handed me a blood bag and gave me a high five.

“Thank you Peter,” I said and sat down to drink my blood.

“So how did you convince Jasper to have the guys attack you as well?” he asked just as Jasper sat down next to me.

“It didn’t take a whole lot of convincing,” he replied as he pulled me onto his lap. “She reminded me of her memories of Emmett and you know how he is with no sense of personal space. There was a good chance he will come running up us once he were to realize we were alive. Well, probably more Isabella than me, so I wanted to make sure she was prepared, to be on the safe side.”
“Yeah, it’s either my shield or I kick his ass in front of everybody,” I added, in between sips. “While that would have been funny to see, I don’t think I’d be in the mood for fun and games. They are strangers to me and I don’t want people I don’t know coming too close.” I looked over to Jasper. “Besides, it’s one thing that they forgot about me, but Jasper was part of their family for decades and when he left, they just let him. That is what bothers me the most, he was there and you said he didn’t do a thing.”

“Hey, it’s okay, baby girl,” Jasper said. “We’ll both have our say soon enough.”

“That was a really good exercise,” Marcus said as the kings approached us. “Isabella, your fighting skills are definitely impressive.”

“Thank you. As much as I like having the knowledge to fight, I certainly hope that I will never have to use it.”

“That is a very mature thing to say for a young vampire,” Caius said. “So the three of us were thinking that maybe you two should go to Catacomb tonight or something. It might help you both take the edge off since they’re going to be here soon. You can even borrow our helicopter to Roma if you’d like.”

“Isabella, would you like to go out for dinner and dancin’ tonight?” Jasper asked as he took my hand.

I fluttered my eyelids and gave him a smile. “Why yes, Mr. Whitlock, I’d be delighted.” I looked over to Peter and Char. “Can they join us too?” I whispered.

“Yeah,” he replied. “Hey bro, you and Char want to join us tonight?”

“Well, we fed a couple nights ago to celebrate my birthday but we’ll join you for the ride over,” Peter said. “Besides, do you know how to fly the bird?”

“I’m sure I could learn, but good point,” Jasper replied. “Ready to head back home to change?”

We all said our goodbyes as the kings promised they’d let us know as soon as the Cullens arrived at the airport.
“We’ll also let you know when we should expect them,” Aro added. “We’ll most likely start with Victoria’s trial and proceed from there. In the meantime, we’re all going to do some shopping for the orphans.”

“Here,” Jasper said as he reached into his pocket, pulling out a handful of Euros. “We probably won’t be participating but can you use this towards the gifts?”

“Thank you, Jasper,” Aro replied. “We’ll definitely add this to our budget.”

A couple hours later, we were in the helicopter with Peter and Char. We probably could have left earlier but I was still riding a high from my new accomplishment and insisted on celebrating with Jasper.

“Hey, do you have any plans for Christmas this year?” I asked Peter and Char just as we flew over the walled city.

“Not this year,” Char replied. “Do y’all have plans?”

“The snow machines arrived yesterday so we’re going to have ourselves a snow day,” Jasper said.

“We’ll have a movie marathon too the night before with the ‘Lord of the Rings.’ I guess you could say we’re going to try for our own traditions. You’re more than welcome to join us,” I added.

“That sounds fun!” Char replied. “We can do that and then we’ll probably head up to do some skiing for a few days before your anniversary and birthday party.”

“Hmm, since you both like to ski and we both like to play in the snow, maybe we should buy some property in a mountain somewhere and have a couple houses built?”
“Wait! Is this the same Bella Swan Whitlock who always insisted on not spendin’ money?” Peter teased.

“Hahahah, you ass!” I blurted as Char smacked his arm. “Yeah, I was like that before, but I’m getting used to not having to worry about money. I still don’t want a fancy house though... simple but with a giant tub and shower and I’ll be happy.”

“You and I both,” Jasper replied as he kissed my ear. “I like that idea, know of any places?”

“We’ll scout around since we’re going to be staying in Europe this time.”

“Um, Bella,” Char began, “I don’t want to sound rude but you look a little too fancy for the Catacombs.”

I looked down at my high-heeled boots, frilly skirt and a black tanktop and shrugged. “Well, I’m just a poor tourist who didn’t realize I stumbled into a den of iniquity,” I drawled. “My husband and I are just visitin’ while on our honeymoon.”

“So that’s why you didn’t want me to look too grungy,” Jasper exclaimed and laughed looking at his low slung jeans, dark thermal shirt with a Zeppelin tee over it. “I suppose this does look too nice for that shithole.”

“Figure this way, we wouldn’t have to linger too long in order to find meals.”

“The first time Char and I went there, we saw a similarly dressed couple. I think they were tourists. Some of the riff-raff took them out back and they weren’t seen back again. My suggestion is after you find yourselves some meals, leave from the back and nobody will be any wiser to what happened. They’ll notice you but figure y’all got robbed or somethin’.”

“Okay,” I replied. “I also wanted to see if I could play a role. I thought if I could play dumb when the Cullens arrive, it would be more fun to see them make fools of themselves.”

“You sort of sound like the Volturi,” Jasper teased. “Alec told me a part of them realize that this meeting with them will mean a lot of the rumors they’ve fabricated over the centuries will be proven to be wrong. The kings are going to milk this as much as they can so he suggested when we make an appearance, we should be formal with them in the beginning.”
“I can do that,” I said and nodded. “Are they okay letting those rumors be proven wrong?”

“He explained with technology and all, sooner or later the truth was bound to come out. They would rather do this their own way versus having the Cullens discover on their own.”

“Okay folks, we’re here,” Peter interrupted as the copter landed on top of a building. “The area is just ahead of you where the warehouses are. We’ll be in the area, text us when you get back and maybe we’ll all go visit some of the ancient Roman sites before we head back. Oh, just let the bouncer know you’re friends with Demetri, they’ll let you in.”

“Oh I’d like that!” I exclaimed. “It shouldn’t take long since we probably look like good targets.” At least, I hoped it wouldn’t take too long.

Jasper helped me out of the helicopter and together, we ran towards Catacomb. We didn’t have to wait in line as we let the vampire bouncer know who we were. Once inside, we walked around observing the humans. This was only the second time I had been here as a vampire, the first only a few weeks after my change and we immediately went to the back area to find a drug deal.

This time, we took in the atmosphere. The loud bass was thumping and the swirls of colors from the light effects cast a strange glow with the club goers. There was a strong smell of alcohol and drugs - opiates, to be exact.

“Dance with me.” Jasper pulled me onto the dance floor along with the hundred or so writhing and sweaty bodies. “Use your peripheral vision to scan, we don’t want to make it too obvious we’re trying to lure our meals to us,” he whispered in my ear. “Just act like we’re a honeymooning couple, completely oblivious to what’s happening around the room.”

Before the music ended, a scantily clad woman began to dance around, trying to grind herself onto us. I looked over and gave her an innocent, doe-eyed smile. She reminded me of that girl at school - Mindy, who kept going after Jasper in the beginning, only this version was older and rougher. She also smelled as if she had been around several other folks and I didn’t think it was purely from dancing.

“Buonasera,” she greeted us and we replied with hellos.

“Oh, you’re Americans?”
“Yes,” Jasper drawled. “It’s our first time in Europe.”

“It’s our honeymoon,” I said, adding a drawl of my own.

“I’m Bianca and I am best friends with the owner,” she continued.

“I’m Mike and this is my wife, Jessica.”

I nearly laughed at our fake names and looked down as I leaned over to Jasper, hoping this motion would make me appear shy.

“You’re a lovely couple and Jessica, I love your skirt!” she cooed as she ran a finger down the fabric.

I looked over to Jasper. “Is she hitting on me?” I asked in vampire speed.

“Yeah, are you comfortable playing along? It’s an act of hers, I don’t feel strong lust coming from her and there’s something dark with her emotions. Besides, you and I both know it’s an outright lie about knowing the owners.”

I slowly looked up at Bianca and smiled before going onto my tip-toes to whisper something to Jasper, all the while looking at her. “Okay, I’ll play along just don’t get any ideas.” I said in vamp speed. “Mike, remember what we talked about? Maybe in Rome?” I added in a louder voice knowing that she would hear most of my question.

“I don’t know, you want to see if she will want to join us?” Jasper replied as Bianca moved closer to us.

“I couldn’t help but overhear,” she began. “If you’re both looking for a little fun, I’ve got a private area out back.”

“I don’t know...” I said and tried to act nervous. “I’ve never done anything like this before.”
“That’s okay, I’ll make sure you have fun,” she replied and began to twirl a strand of my hair.

“Both of us?” I asked innocently as she began to lead us towards the back room.

“Oh yes,” she replied and placed her hand on the small of my back.

As soon as we were in the darkened ‘catacomb’ in the back, she leaned herself back against the wall and continued to stare at us, looking like she was interested. I heard a heartbeat coming from one of the other spaces and gave Jasper a knowing look.

“Come over here, Jessica,” Bianca commanded as she reached for Jasper.

“Isabella, if you’re going to feed on her, you might want to do it soon. The other heartbeat is full of anger, lust and paranoia, not usually a good combination.”

“I will,” I replied as I reached my hand behind Bianca, acting as though I was about to kiss her.

She never screamed as I sank my teeth into her skin. She tasted funny, not necessarily drugs but there was something about her that wasn’t right. I spun around as I looked at Jasper, motioning him to join me.

He smiled as he moved closer, his hand holding mine as he fed from the other side of her neck. As her heart began to barely beat, I unlatched myself and let go. One pull later, Jasper dropped her on the ground.

“I hope you’re hungry because the other human’s coming,” he said as he quickly moved the body further back and then pulled me towards the darkness.

Heavy footsteps rounded a corner before a big man appeared.

“Where’s that bitch?” he snarled. “She better be fucking right now.” He continued to grumble around. “If she leaves, there’ll be hell to pay for all the smack I’ve given her.” There was a soft,
metallic click coming from the man’s direction.

Sure enough, the man entered the room with a switchblade in his hand. Jasper quickly grabbed him and slammed his body against the wall before we both fed from the guy. Once we were finished, he dragged the body over to the far wall so he could be dumped into the incinerator. The movement caused several watches and other valuable-looking pieces to from his pockets, onto the dirty floor.

“I bet he robs them after she lures them out here with her body.”

“Yeah,” I replied as I dragged Bianca over. “Gross, she still has fluids dripping down her legs.” I grimaced as I realized she also wasn’t wearing underwear. “Ugh, so nasty. I feel so dirty now.”

“Aww,” Jasper said after he took her body and dumped her into the wall opening. “For what it’s worth, you looked amazing out there.” He pulled me into his arms and kissed my lips. “A vampire siren.”

“Like I said earlier, don’t get any ideas,” I quipped as I wiped my hands onto my skirt. “When we get home, I’m burning these clothes.”

“I don’t blame you. I think she was diseased.” He took me by the hand and led me to the chain link fence surrounding the area.

“Was that what the funny taste was?” I asked as I jumped up to reach the top of the fence and gracefully kick my legs over.

“Yeah, I think she knew she was sick too. I wouldn’t be surprised if she purposely had sex with her victims so they’d catch whatever she had. It would explain those dark emotions of hers.”

We both jumped off the fence and I once again took his hand as we ran towards the copter.

“And that guy would rob her victims either during or after sex,” I said. “What a fucked up life.”

Less than a minute later, we were at the building. Peter and Char were walking arm in arm and we waved to them as we got close.
“Good feed?” Peter asked.

“Oh yeah,” Jasper explained as we followed our siblings down several streets. “And, she was a natural when she bit down. It was so precise. That was a wonderful improvement in control, baby girl.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “I think drinking the blood bags has helped me realize I need to not only be careful but take my time.”

As we rounded the corner, I could see the ancient ruins up ahead.

“Wow,” I whispered.

“Yeah,” Jasper replied. “It’s pretty amazing to see.”

The four of us were quiet as we walked around the area. While it was cool to see, it was also a little strange knowing the kings had seen all of this when it was brand new.

“What’s going on, baby girl,” Jasper whispered as we continued to walk around. I explained my thoughts and he nodded. “Hell, they probably saw it being built.”

“Exactly!” I continued to whisper as though I didn’t want to disturb the area but had to run my finger gently along the stone. “I’m trying to picture it but it is... wow.”

“Isn’t it funny that we want to whisper?” Char said. “I was like this the first time Peter brought us here and to this day, I still want to whisper as I explore the area.”

“I was only able to see this from afar, until now,” Jasper said as he headed towards the Coliseum. “Most of my time was spent shopping and then in the pitch black of night, I still wasn’t allowed to see this stuff because it was too dangerous.”

I tried to imagine the gladiator battles as we walked around the ancient stadium. We didn’t stay too
long especially knowing we’d be visiting somewhat regularly. Once we were all up in the copter, we were back to talking in normal voices.

“There’s Vatican City down below,” Peter said as he tilted the copter just slightly.

“Do they really have a huge library there? Like in the movie, The DaVinci Code?” I asked.

“Well, there is an archive but I don’t know all the details,” Char answered. “You might want to talk to someone like Alec. I bet he’d know.”

“Hell, I wouldn’t be surprised if he snuck in there at one time or another,” Peter replied.

“Somehow, that wouldn’t surprise me either,” I said and we all laughed.

A soft ping alerted us that there was an incoming text message.

“That was Aro,” Char said as she showed us the phone. “I guess he texted us so as not to disturb you two if you were still feeding.”

_Cullens are on their way. Just left Alaska airspace and will head to UK to refuel._

“Jasper! Fuck, I’m close!” I moaned as he continued to thrust me against the shower wall.

As soon as we landed the copter, we raced to the car and sped home. I was still feeling grossed out from that skanky chick and really wanted to clean myself. We also asked Peter and Char to come over in the morning so we could leave for Volterra together.
“Me too, baby girl,” he gritted out. “God, you feel so fuckin’ good.”

Before I could utter another word, my world exploded as I held onto Jasper. I was panting even though I didn’t need to and could almost feel my legs shaking. Jasper roared out my name sending waves of pleasure through me and I fell apart once more.

“I love you, Jasper,” I whispered against his lips.

“I love you, Isabella. Do you feel better now? Less dirty?”

“Well, a good kind of dirty after that shower,” I said with a grin. “That was a good meal but she was so nasty.”

“I know. I was a little grossed out too. Come on, let’s get dressed before my siblings come over and catch us butt ass naked.”

“You nervous?” Peter asked as Jasper tended to the fireplace.

“Not really. Like I said, I am going to, for the most part, play like I have no idea what’s going on. We’ve decided, depending on the way the conversation goes, one of us should confront them first before the other and then we both reveal we’re together, although that should be a given by then.” I winced as I realized I mentioned this only a few days ago. “Okay, maybe I am a little more nervous than I realized.”

“I won’t lie and say I’m not nervous, but curiosity is right up there too.” Jasper sat down on the couch and I rested my head on his shoulder. He looked over to Peter who was sitting on one of the chairs with Char on his lap. “We’ll figure it out but I like the idea of not showing up together even though it will draw everything out.”
“Well, we’ll be there the whole time if you need us,” Char said.

“I believe in the two of you. So does the Volturi. You two will be fine,” Peter added.

“Thanks guys, we both appreciate it. In the meantime, let’s just enjoy this. Baby girl, I think you might like it.” He pointed the remote and started playing a DVD.

We ended up watching a few episodes of the TV show, Rome. He reminded me that I had mentioned this show while I was still a human. After seeing the ancient ruins and then the first few episodes of the show, I was able to get a better idea of what the ancient world must have been like. Obviously, the writers also took on creative liberties, but it was fun to imagine it all the same.

Half way through the second disk Jasper’s phone buzzed with a message from Aro.

*On their way from the airport.*

“I guess we’ll watch the rest after,” I said as we got up.

“We’ll wait for you outside. I want to soak a little sun up before we head over,” Peter said as they headed down the stairs.

Since we were going to pretend we weren’t close to the Volturi at first, we both took extra time in getting dressed. I decided on a simple, charcoal colored dress with a wide neckline that would show off my bite mark in case the theory was correct about the Cullens being uncomfortable about scars.

“You look gorgeous,” Jasper whispered as he planted a kiss over my shoulder tattoo. “You know, they’ll be able to see this.” He traced the image with the pads of his fingertips, just like he did when I first got the design.

“They will realize I’m not the girl they knew,” I replied as I turned around and helped Jasper straighten his tie. “Do you want your sleeves rolled up?”
“Not right away,” he said. “You can help me right before though. Do you want to wear your rings? After the way you controlled your strength last night, you should be able to wear the real ones instead of the replicas.”

I looked down on my finger and shook my head. “As much as I want to, what if they piss me off and I lose control? I don’t want to break them. No, I’ll wear these but I’ll have you know, I’m determined to wear the real ones for our anniversary.”

“Yes ma’am!” Jasper replied. “You’ve only ruined one set of the replica rings so all in all, I think you’re doing a helluva job.” He held out his elbow. “Ready Mrs. Whitlock?”

“Why yes, Mr. Whitlock, I’m ready.”

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*We’re going to arrive through the lab entrance so they won’t catch our scents.*

I carefully texted the message to Alec as soon as the four of us hit the road. By the time I hit the send button, we were nearly there.

“It would have been so much faster if I called him.” I snorted. “I’m going to look at this positively though and acknowledge that I managed to send a text message without breaking anything.”

“I’m proud of you, Isabella.”

“I’m proud of me too.”

Peter and Char gave me high-fives as I set the phone back down. When we arrived, we grabbed the robes from the back and quickly threw them on before humans noticed we weren’t dressed for the chilly day.

“Hey guys,” Alec said as we walked into the lab. “Aro will be here in a minute. Peter and Char, you’ll be in the front today but keep your hoods up.”
“Sure. We’ll see you.”

“Peter. Charlotte,” Aro said as they walked by. “Ah, Jasper and Isabella, Demetri, Renata and Felix are bringing them in. Why don’t you both observe from behind the glass. If you whisper, they won’t hear you but you’d be able to see the trial from there.”

“Yeah, we’d like that,” Jasper replied as I nodded.

“We’ll regroup after Victoria so you can decide what to do then.”

Aro gave us the directions to the hidden room as we left the lab.

We watched, from the alcove, as the Chelsea, Renata, Peter and Char arrived in the throne room and stood near the front.

“We’ve got a procession going with the Cullens and Victoria,” Peter muttered and winked at us.

“My shield is up so you have no worries,” Renata whispered.

The kings appeared next with Caius’ throne set up front for the trial. The queens followed and stood next to the guards.

When the main double doors opened, Demetri escorted a group of vampires into the room. They were vaguely familiar, but I knew from my memories who they were exactly.

The first ones to follow were the parents, Carlisle and Esme. I could see from their faces they didn’t want to be there at all. Next was Rosalie, and I didn’t realize until now just how tall she was. Emmett followed and I glared at him as I recalled the cutesy nicknames he came up with.

“You okay?” Jasper whispered.
“Yeah, just some memories,” I replied and told him. “I bet Felix could kick his ass.”

“Baby girl, you probably could with your skills. He tends to fight like a newborn so the fancy footwork and moves we’ve all taught you? Yeah, you’d beat him.”

I mouthed my thanks as I saw the boy I once thought was the world. Seeing him now, I couldn’t imagine what I was thinking. All that high school drama in Phoenix and the rumors really did a number on me.

“Is it me or do they all look as though they’d rather be anywhere but here?”

“No, I’m getting that too. It’s as though we’ve inconvenienced them.”

“Dear Cullens!” Aro announced. “How nice of you to join us!”

“We really didn’t have a choice, did we, Aro?” Carlisle replied.

Aro waved his hand, almost dismissively. “Since our request, there have been some new developments that involve your family.” He stepped down the platform and moved to Carlisle, holding out his hand. He repeated the motion as he headed down the line.

“I see you’re missing a couple family members?”

“They’re dead,” Carlisle replied, abruptly. “Where’s Alice?”

“You’ll see her very soon, but first, there is a small matter to take care of.” He walked back to his throne. “Guards!”

The double doors opened once more and Alec led this procession with Victoria, followed by Felix and Jane. We could hear gasps from the Cullens as they realized who was in the room. As she walked past them, she turned and hissed before letting out a screech of pain.
“The nomad known as Victoria,” Caius began as soon as they were in front of the kings. “Do you know why you’re here on trial today?”

Victoria shook her head and stood up proudly. “I was captured for being reckless in changing humans.”

“That’s part of the reason,” Caius replied and gestured to the Cullens. “We understand you had plans to attack them?”

Needless, to say the Cullens were shocked at the news. Esme gasped out as Rosalie sneered even more.


“Mate for a mate,” Victoria replied with a sneer. “You killed my James and I had full intention of playing with your human pet. I had it all planned out - cutting her body up and drinking her blood repeatedly, prolonging her demise. I even sent Laurent out to find her but he never returned. I was left with an empty feeling as I wandered around, knowing I’d never avenge James.”

Jasper moved so he stood behind me and wrapped his arms around in a comforting hug, while resting his head on my shoulder.

“Are you okay, Isabella?” he whispered against my ear.

“It just took me by surprise. I remember that day... what Laurent said about showing mercy,” I explained. “He just wasn’t as explicit. I mean, I’m changed now so her plans don’t matter but it was still shocking to hear.” I placed my arms over his. “Thank you for saving me that day.”

“I think something’s about to happen,” Jasper said. “The kings’ emotions have changed slightly, there’s now a sense of deviousness coming from them.”

I nodded as we focused our attention back to the trial.

“Before we proceed with your change in plans, perhaps it would be wise to bring out the next
person of interest,” Caius replied.

Once again the double doors opened and Heidi was now escorting Alice.

Jasper softly chuckled as soon as we saw her. “She’s wearing the same, exact outfit as when she first arrived in Volterra.”

I shrugged. “I don’t get it? Why is that funny?”

“She always made it a point never to wear the same outfit twice...the same way. She’d mix and match or just get rid of stuff.”

“All she did was play with clothes? Doesn’t that get old at some point?”

“Well, you and I now know she’s not all there. Maybe that would explain things because those were the same thoughts that used to run through my head.”

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**Alice POV**

I walked proudly into the room knowing I was being summoned by the kings. It didn’t matter that it put a halt to my shopping trip with my new sisters, I was needed! Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my former family but I didn’t want to look over. I had to look proper and act like a queen.

*Wait! That... long, curly, red hair... what?!*

Victoria was here. Why?
Oh no, Edward can read thoughts!

Deflect attention!

Deflect attention!

Edward POV

“Deflect attention!”

Alice’s thoughts practically shouted at me as she walked by. It was disturbing to hear but not as much as hearing how she wanted to ignore her family. I didn’t understand what was going through her head.

“Just be cooperative. Maybe they’ll show mercy.” Victoria kept saying in her mind.

It had been frustrating so far not being able to read anybody’s thoughts until now. I wanted to get an idea what we should expect when we arrived, but I heard nothing.

Of course, the silence brought back memories of Bella which was probably why Aro saw them when he touched my hand.

I hated the idea of being in the dark and especially here in this dreaded castle.

Chapter End Notes
Deflect attention from the fact that you’ll have to wait until next week to see what happens next.

Thank you again readers, I truly appreciate your kind words. It makes me happy that you’re all reading this crazy long story.

Thanks to LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan - without them, this story probably would have looked like crap.

XO~sushi
Chapter 94

Chapter Notes

Can you believe it’s December already?

Thanks for all the reviews/favorites/alerts - I truly appreciate it. Thank you to LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan for working on the chapters to make it look pretty.

I’m not SM, just like to play with her characters - like in this one, I played around with a lesser known vampire in this chapter.

Ready? Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 93

JPOV

As soon as Alice appeared, I felt this overwhelming sense of panic coming from her. Eddie must have read her thoughts because his head snapped over to her immediately.

“What’s going on?” Isabella asked and I whispered to her the emotions I was getting.

“Order!” Caius commanded. “Now then, Victoria, can you please elaborate on your previous comment about alternative plans?”

“She confronted me!” Victoria said as she turned and pointed a finger at Alice. “She found me and said she knew I was after that human but the human was dead. She offered another proposition instead.”

Alice’s eyes grew wide as she heard the accusation and started moving her mouth like a fish gasping out of the water. The Cullens started to mutter and hiss at the redhead.

“Silence! Continue.”
“She told me where the Cullens were and that I could exact my revenge on them.”

“Lies! Alice would never do that!” Edward yelled.

Esme looked like she was on the verge of tears at this point and held onto Carlisle. Rose and Emmett were just staring back and forth at Victoria and Alice.

“Are you okay emotion wise?” Isabella asked.

“They’re full of angst right now as you could probably imagine,” I replied. “Don’t worry, I’m not letting it get to me.”

“Silence!” Caius yelled out once again. “Continue, nomad!”

“I started to change humans. I had never done it before but she said it was easy. She explained how the vampire she was with before once changed many successfully.”

There was more commotion coming from the Cullens and Caius had to settle things down once again.

“She sure dismissed you,” Isabella muttered.

“Don’t be jealous,” I whispered, sending her all of my love. “You’re the only one for me.”

“Me too,” she replied and sent me her emotions.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“I am,” she replied. “I thought it would be weird seeing them but I don’t feel anything for them.”

“Enough with the outbursts,” Caius ordered and stood up holding a folder. “So this led you to your
killing spree? There are reports of nearly three dozen missing people in the general area for the past 6 months. Would you have anything to do with that?"

“It was so hard to create a newborn, much less an army. Like I said, I got careless.”

“Careless is an understatement! The human authorities have found some of the bodies with their throats ripped apart. We’ve seen the crime scene photos, many of them looked like they had been mauled!”

“I know,” Victoria said and looked down. I could tell she was trying to show more remorse than what she actually felt. “The blood... it was so hard to control myself once I started.”

Carlisle let out a huff and began to feel smug. I could only guess he was feeling he was above it all, thanks to his complete control around blood.

I continued to give Isabella the emotions I was reading as the trial continued.

“You managed to successfully change one though?” Aro asked.

“I was able to create 5 in total but Riley was the only one to survive past a month. The others either tried to attack me or another newborn and were destroyed,” she explained.

“Yes, Riley Biers,” Caius continued as he flipped through the folder. “We had a trial a few days ago and then executed him.”

“He was innocent!” Carlisle exclaimed. “You heard her, she changed him so he was just a pawn in her scheme - one I don’t believe is entirely true.”

“Innocent?” Caius asked. “You don’t know who he was and yet immediately jump to his defense.” Caius moved right in front of Carlisle.

“He could have been reformed!” Carlisle argued.
“Did you know Riley Biers was accused of raping several women at a university over in Washington State? Did you know he was running from the law when she found him and turned him?” Caius’ voice was growing louder as he shook the folder in front of Carlisle. “Did you know when we captured him, we fed him blood on a regular basis to see if it would smooth out his newborn behavior? Did you know we wanted to see if he would show signs of being disciplined... of some sort of training but he continued to hold onto violence? Finally, did you know he held no remorse for his human crimes?”

If it was possible, Carlisle actually looked a little paler after hearing Caius’ diatribe. The kings were pissed at the attitude but at the same time, nobody in our family was shocked. If anything, there was more disdain toward the Cullens and their attitude of superiority.

“Perhaps you and your family would like to read these reports in your spare time,” Caius sneered as he returned back to his throne. “Now Victoria, you’ve already expressed an interest in having the Volturi show mercy by granting you a quick death. We can grant this but let’s see what the Cullens have to say first. They are, afterall, the target of this planned attack.”

“I... I can’t condone taking a life,” Carlisle began and then slumped his shoulders as he looked at the floor, resignation coming off of him in waves. “Be that as it may, given her horrific crimes... I... I will not object to your form of punishment.”

“Done,” Caius replied and nodded to Alec as he stepped down from the dais.

“Victoria, you are hereby sentenced to death. Do you have any last words?”

“No, sir,” she said.

“Very well, since you were cooperative, we’ll grant you mercy. Alec, if you will.”

Within seconds, Victoria’s face was blank and Caius once again faced the Cullens. “You can do the honors if you’d like.”

Every one of the Cullens shook their head and Caius shrugged and looked over to Demetri before giving some sort of hand signal. A side door opened and another Volturi member, dressed in a royal blue robe emerged and quickly decapitated Victoria. The vampire took immediately took Victoria’s body and left the room.
“Now then,” Caius continued. “Since the dirty work’s over, we’ll take a break and reconvene at midnight.”

“But wait!” Carlisle began only to be halted by Aro.

“As my brother said, we’ll reconvene at midnight. Right now we have other pressing matters,” Aro explained. “Heidi, visitors should be at the lobby now. Could you please escort them in?”

Heidi stepped forward and removed her robe, revealing a velvet dress that looked like she could have been a Santa helper. “Yes, your majesties, I’ll bring them in now.”

“Demetri and Felix will escort you back to your chambers,” Aro said as he stepped off the platform and walked over to Sulpicia. “The rest of the guards may join or meet back here at the appointed hour. You’re all dismissed.”

I watched as Jane and Chelsea escorted Alice out without any trouble.

“But...” Carlisle sputtered.

“No, we’ll continue later, Carlisle,” Aro said as the main double doors opened and the two guards began to wrangle the Cullens out.

The sounds of laughter and children began to echo in the corridor and the Cullens all stopped, looking at the kings in horror.

“You heard his majesty,” Felix grunted out. “This way.”

“But children!” Esme began.

“It is none of your concern,” Felix continued. “We will use force if necessary.”

“No, that’s fine,” Carlisle replied with obvious disgust. “Come on, family, let’s just wait in our chambers.”
As soon as they left we both breathed a sigh of relief and noticed Peter and Char waiting for us.

“Come on, we can hang out in the tower unless you’re comfortable being around the orphans,” Peter said.

“No, let’s just hang out in the tower,” Isabella replied. “I could use a blood bag.”

Felix, Heidi and Demetri were already in the tower when we arrived with some warmed blood bags already waiting for us.

“Y’all aren’t attending the party?” I asked as I traded fist bumps with the male guards.

“Felix and I are going back down now,” Heidi replied. “We wanted to top off beforehand though.”

“I might make an appearance towards the end,” Demetri said. “So, what did you think?”

I quickly gave them my observations on the Cullens during Victoria’s trial.

“I didn’t need a gift to see they did NOT want to be there,” Char muttered as she sat down next to Isabella. “Felix, did they give you any trouble as you escorted them out?”

“I think they were tempted until I told them I would use force. Aro anticipates that they’ll try to ‘rescue’ the children so he asked some of the more seasoned soldiers to watch over the guest quarters. The most senior of them was the one who executed Victoria. Kebi is her name and she is originally from Northern Africa. She’s been a soldier for nearly fifty years now and is nearly done serving for the Volturi.”

“She’s expressed an interest in becoming part of the guard but at the same time, she wants to go back to her homeland and spend some time first,” Demetri continued as Heidi and Felix left the room. “Char, Peter, are you planning on dropping by the party?”

“We hadn’t planned on it,” Peter said. “We’re not usually around many children so we don’t want
to take any chances.”

“Huh? What does that mean?” Isabella asked with confusion.

“Childrens’ blood sometimes smell sweeter, Isabella,” I explained. “As they reach adolescence, that begins to fade somewhat.”

“Oh,” she replied and shook her head. “I don’t want to be near that then. I don’t want that kind of temptation.”

“Don’t worry, Bella,” Demetri said. “Aro knows and fully understands. It took Heidi several decades before she was comfortable to be around young ones. That is why the queens didn’t push Gianna to join them either. They all understand. The reason why I asked Peter and Char if they were joining the party was to, aggravate the Cullens some more. You probably won’t even have to attend... just go to the ballroom for a few seconds after the party is over and you’ll immediately have the scent of the young humans on you.”

“Yeah,” Peter said with a shrug. “We could do that. Anything to get a rise from them.”

“Some of their expressions... wow, it was like you all smelled like bad cabbage or something,” Isabella quipped. “Were they always like that and I was either too naïve or blinded to see it?”

“I think subconsciously you recognized it because there were moments I could feel how much you were rebelling or wanted to rebel,” I explained. “If you were completely bamboozled by them, you probably wouldn’t have had those moments.”

“You’re too kind, Jasper,” she teased. “So we’ve got a couple more hours before we all meet back. Should we pop in a movie or something?”

“Yeah, we’ve got an advance copy of the latest Harry Potter movie. It isn’t going to be released for another couple weeks but Chelsea managed to find a way for us to have a copy.”

“Sure, we just spent the other day watching the first 4 movies,” I replied and pulled Isabella onto my lap. “Roll the movie.”
It was nearly midnight when Peter and Char headed down to the ballroom after Demetri sent a text message to let them know the kids had left.

“Ready, baby girl?”

“As I’ll ever be,” she replied as she got up.

When we got to the throne room, everybody was no longer wearing their robes.

“Are you two ready?” Aro asked before turning to motion towards the soldier, Kebi. “Jasper, Isabella, this is one of our most trusted soldiers, Kebi. I hope it’s okay but she’ll be just outside the alcove and will escort you to the side entrance when and if you’re ready.”

I was touched by his genuine concern and sent him my appreciation. “We both appreciate the support we’ve received from everybody. How was the party?”

“It was wonderful!” he exclaimed and waved Sulpicia over. “The children loved the set designs and the costumes.”

“Jane and Alec did a wonderful job with the planning,” Sulpicia said. “Everybody had an enjoyable time. Thank you for contributing towards the gifts, the children were very excited.” She gave Aro a quick peck on the cheek. “Well, since it is just a couple minutes before midnight, we should all take our places.”

“You two have got it,” Peter quipped as we headed to the back partitioned area.

The two of us introduced ourselves to Kebi as the kings sat down. Everybody stood in their same spots as earlier.

“Are Peter and Char okay showing they’re part of the Volturi?” Isabella asked with concern.
“I don’t think it’ll make a difference, to be honest,” I replied. “The Cullens always showed disdain towards them, even Esme would be friendly on the outside but it wasn’t genuine.” We both removed our robes and set them near the door.

The Cullens arrived along with a strong wave of disgust coming from them. They obviously had interpreted the actions of the Volturi a specific way, just as anticipated. They scanned the room and as soon as they spotted my siblings, I felt their recognition and disdain. There was some discomfort coming from Carlisle as well but I wasn’t sure if it was because the queens wore dresses with necklines that showed off their mating marks.

“Now for the next task on hand,” Aro began as the double doors opened and Alice was escorted into the throne room by Jane and Heidi.

Unlike earlier today, there was no shock and dismay coming from her or the Cullens.

“As you heard earlier, Alice Cullen was accused by the nomad of conspiring to attack her own family,” Aro announced. “I’ve already looked into this story but I am going to venture a guess that you’d rather hear the story from your own daughter?”

“Yes... well, you guessed correctly,” Carlisle replied. The Cullens were taken back by Aro’s offer and it showed on their face and in Carlisle’s voice.

“Very well,” Aro replied, nonchalantly. Unlike my former family, the Volturi were at complete ease so it was no surprise that they anticipated what Carlisle’s answer would have been. “Miss Cullen, can you explain why you sought out Victoria?”

“I was bored,” she explained, hesitantly, much to the dismay of the Cullens.

“No! This has to be a lie!” Edward blurted out as Esme started to sob.

I shook my head knowing the drama was most likely about to begin.

“Are you okay, Jasper?” Isabella whispered.
“Yeah,” I replied. “There are rare moments when I wish I didn’t have to bother with my gift. I think this will be one of those instances.”

“Let me try something. I don’t know if it’ll work.” She took my hands and pulled them around her waist. Within a few seconds, the scene in the throne room became less crisp as before.

“Your shield?”

She nodded. “Is it working? It doesn’t feel as strong as before, when I’m fighting.”

“No it’s there, I can still feel them but it’s not as intense. Thank you, baby girl.”

“Good, I’m glad it’s working. I wasn’t sure if it was possible but figured it was worth a shot.”

Aro held up his hands to silence the room. “Please continue, Miss Cullen. You said you were bored?”

“I was bored and figured this was a means to my goal,” she replied with a shrug.

I could see the Cullens were about to interrupt once again and apparently, so did Aro as he signalled for them to cease.

“Your goal?” he continued.

“I...” Alice began and stopped. She looked around and took a breath as she started to walk around in a circle. “I wanted to be a part of the Volturi. I wanted the power and the luxury... furs, haute couture... I wanted it all!” She continued orbiting around Jane and Heidi, repeating the story over and over as she waved her hands crazily into the air.

“What the...” Isabella began. “What is she doing?”

“Drop your shield for a few minutes, I can’t tell what’s going on exactly with her.”
It took less than a second before Isabella’s shield was retracted and another second before I could get a read on her emotions.

“Alice is pissed off but it’s almost maniacal.”

“Like violent?”

Before I was able to reply, we had our answer.

“YOU RUINED EVERYTHING!” Alice screamed as she continued her pacing. Instead of flailing her arms about, she was now grabbing her hair.

Everybody watching was in shock at her behavior.

“Alice Brandon Cullen!” Esme hissed out. “What is the meaning of this?”

“What?” she screeched. “The meaning? You ruined it! I thought I’d be able to be queen once you killed that human girl but no, you left her. Once Jazz drained her, it was time for me to take matters into my own hands. I set out to look for her and told her where to find you. She would attack and then I would settle here in Volterra as queen of all vampires. I saw it! I’m going to be queen of all vampires!”

“I see,” Aro replied with a nod as he tried to remain calm as he addressed Carlisle. “We can discuss this in greater detail if you’d like. We’ll move her back to her chambers.”

Carlisle nodded numbly, clearly shaken by his beloved daughter’s strange confession. “Yes, I’d like some answers.”

“Very well,” the king replied and nodded towards Heidi and Jane who quickly escorted Alice out of the room.

“What is the meaning of this, Aro? Is this one of your tricks?” Carlisle accused.
“It isn’t a trick. There is a high probability that your daughter is going insane.”

“I will not stand here and allow my family to be insulted -”

“This is not an insult!” Aro said as he flashed up to Carlisle. He pulled out a folder. “Do you see this? This is the research we’ve done on your precious Alice. She isn’t the same ‘girl’ that has lived with you for decades.”

“What are you talking about?” Carlisle asked, ignoring the pleas from his family to see the folder.

Aro gave Carlisle a general overview of the discoveries during the past few months. He didn’t go into great detail as he talked about the memories he saw as well as the research into her history. “It’s all in there if you want more,” he said and gave him the papers. “This is the first time she’s ever been this animated since arriving at Volterra.” Aro then talked about how Alice appeared catatonic most of the day but her mind was busy creating false memories.”

“How do I know what you’re saying is real?”

“Do what you will with the information. Test her yourself,” he said with a challenge. “I’d recommend that she remains at Volterra. We don’t know what her ultimate condition will be. It’s certainly up to you but she needs constant supervision.”

“My family and I will discuss this in great detail.”

“By all means,” Aro replied. “If you’d like, we can adjourn for an hour so you and your family can discuss the contents of the file?”

“An hour? Aro, certainly that isn’t enough time to discuss the fate of my daughter!”

“We’re not expecting you to make that decision within that time,” Aro shouted out his reply. “Discuss her health issues in private and then during your stay here, you can spend the time and decide what is in her best interest.”

Carlisle nodded as he gripped the folder like a lifeline. “If you’ll excuse us, we’d like to discuss
“Certainly. Felix, can you escort the Cullens out? We’ll meet back here in an hour.”

Carlisle POV

We followed Felix back to the guest quarters and I was looking forward to reading the so-called evidence that Aro handed to me. I wasn’t sure what was going on, to be honest. A part of me believed the idea of Alice going insane was nothing more than a fabrication on their part but we were all witness to her outburst earlier.

During their earlier break, Edward shared with us all her thoughts when she was escorted into the chamber. It sounded disjointed and I actually thought this was her way of hiding her thoughts from Edward. He assured me this wasn’t her ‘signature’ - she was more apt to use silly songs or shopping lists as a means of distraction, not an actual shopping scenario.

“We’ll be back in an hour,” Felix said once we were in the corridor.

“Carlisle, what’s going on?” Esme asked.

“Let’s all go discuss this in the room,” I replied as I opened my suite.

Once we were all in the sitting area, I opened up the folder and began to peruse the notes and reports.

“Edward, Alice is nearby, can you read her thoughts?”

“She’s back to thinking about shopping. Only this time, she’s in Barcelona, arm in arm with two of the queens,” he replied.
“Hmm,” I said as started to share some of the notes with the family.

“So she can’t see the future?” Emmett asked.

“No, I had doubts before she left,” I admitted. “I wasn’t sure but now, according to these notes, no. There is a report that says she wasn’t even fazed by a grand party held here, several months ago for the new queen.” For a brief second, I felt slighted that my family and I weren’t invited but quickly shook it off before Edward caught wind of my errant thought.

“Do you believe the reports?” Rose asked.

I explained to her what was going through my mind as we were being escorted back. “I really don’t know what to believe. There was a part of me that expected to see Alice with red eyes by the time we came here but we could see from the regular Skype sessions that wasn’t the case. Between the Volturi acting differently than when I first met them and now this Alice situation, I feel a little lost.”

My family nodded and muttered their agreement.

“I expected them to not show mercy. The fact that they didn’t allow that Riley person to serve them because of his history threw me off,” Rose said.

I flipped through another page. “They even have some surveillance footage available if we’re interested.” I came across an extensive report about her possible heritage. “They found something about her.”

After reading the report to my family, I looked at the attached DNA sample and noticed how extensive it had been mapped; clearly the work of vampires. “It looks like there is a really good probability, due to her heritage, that this thing with her brain is genetic.”

As much as I hated it, I had to admire the tenacity of the Volturi for their research ability. Even if I took this with a grain of salt, I could see they were very thorough and had access to resources.

“Do we believe them, Carlisle?” Edward asked.
“We need to be cautious but they are definitely not the same rulers I met centuries ago. Is there any change in Alice?”

Edward shook his head. “Now she’s on a commercial plane and she’s upset that it is summertime. What does it all mean?”

I shrugged. “It means we’ll need to figure out what is best for Alice, just like Aro said.” I sighed. “Come on, let’s get ready, our hour is up.”

Meanwhile, in the Throne Room -

JPOV

As soon as the Cullens left the throne room, Isabella and I emerged from the hidden alcove to chat with everybody. We were all shocked at Alice’s meltdown but agreed it couldn’t have worked out better that it occurred in front of the Cullens.

We spent the time talking about the possible reactions to the research Aro gave Carlisle. All of us agreeing that they will probably take some convincing.

“We’ve got camera footage if they want further proof,” Demetri said. “The most important thing is whether or not they’ll follow Aro’s advice and make sure she’s monitored on a constant basis.”

“You think they’ll bring her back with them?” I asked.

“Given what you’ve told us and what we’ve seen, I wouldn’t put it past them,” Caius replied.

“Do you think she’s prone to violence?” Isabella asked. “I mean she wanted someone to destroy the Cullens and then that crazy outburst today. It’s possible, right?”
“Anything is possible at this point, I suppose,” I added. “If they don’t believe everything in that folder and leave with her believing they’ll help her heal, what if it doesn’t? What if they let her out hunting and she has an episode? That will cause even more trouble.”

“If they’re smart, they’ll consider it,” Aro said. “Needless to say, we’ll be prepared if they choose otherwise.” Aro looked up and addressed the room. “We should take our places, they’ll be back shortly.”

“What’s left of the agenda?” Isabella asked.

Marcus chuckled. “I guess I get to lead the third part as I introduce the Cullens to the newest queen.” He looked over and winked at his mate.

“We’ll be in the back again,” I said and walked with Isabella back to the hidden area.

Less than a minute later, the Cullens came in but this time, there was little fanfare.

“Since you’re all here, we’d like to introduce you to the newest member of our family and my mate, Gianna,” Marcus announced.

Gianna stepped to the front of the group as Marcus quickly flashed to her side and escorted her to the Cullens.

“Hello,” she said greeting them. There was a hint of coldness in her voice - much different than when we were first introduced to her.

Marcus introduced the Cullens to her as she gave them nods. Isabella was amused by the actions, knowing very well what her friend was doing.

“I don’t understand, I thought Didyme was your lost mate?” Carlisle said. I couldn’t help but snort at his lack of tactfulness.
“She was never my true mate,” Marcus began. “It was just a story, a fabrication that took on a life of its own. Much like many rumors about the Volturi,” he quipped. “I met Gianna a few years ago when she began to work as our receptionist. I saw our connection immediately but she didn’t know about us, about who we are.” They both looked at each other and I could feel the love they shared. “We married a couple years later and just a few months ago, she changed so we could be together for eternity.”

“She was a human? I thought there were laws...” Carlisle began.

“The fact of the matter is, we don’t want *all* humans to know of our existence,” Aro cut in. “A mate, however, that is a different story and we do allow for exceptions. We wouldn’t deny a vampire from knowing their human mate if they choose to have a relationship. We’d want them to use discretion, obviously, but we would never separate them.”

“Like that young couple we met last spring,” Caius added. I knew immediately they were referring to us. “The young man was actually married to his human mate and they both came out here to let us know they had plans for her change.”

“I could see their bonds immediately,” Marcus said. “It was so strong. I could tell they were very much in love.”

“The Cullens, namely Rose and Edward are downright pissed at the idea of a human losing their life for a vampire,” I explained to Isabella. “The others are concerned and a little upset but those two... well, you know how they feel about humans.”

“Yeah, she was jealous and he was concerned about their soul,” she replied. “They don’t even know it is us the kings are referring to and they’re still pissed off? That’s a bit high and mighty -”

Rose huffed out loud, drawing everyone’s attention to her.

“Do you have something to say, madam?” Marcus asked. I didn’t need my gift to know he was not pleased with her outburst.

“No... yes I do,” Rose announced. “Why couldn’t she have a normal life? Why did you have to take her life away?”
“Rose!” Esme hissed. “Now isn’t the time!”

“No, I want to know why you took her life? Why couldn’t she live her life like a human should with kids and a husband?”

“This is bullshit!” Isabella exclaimed. “Is this how she was with my life?”

I nodded. “Like I said, she has a lot of issues.”

“Babe,” Emmett said as he held Rose around the waist. “Calm down, babe.”

“I can assure you, madam, this wasn’t something that was done without much discussion,” Gianna growled. “Not that it is any business of yours.”

“Rose, behave yourself!” Carlisle chastised, clearly embarrassed about the situation. He turned around and started to talk to his ‘children.’

“Jasper, I think this is time,” Isabella said. “I’m going out there.”

I knew immediately what she was talking about and pulled her into my arms. “Are you sure about this?”

“I am. They way they’re talking down about Gianna... that could be us, right there.”

“Okay, I love you. Don’t be surprised if you see me come out soon.”

“Oh I know,” she said and blew me a kiss just as Kebi opened the door.

I took a deep breath and continued to watch the scene before me. I knew Rose’s outburst really rankled Isabella and she was right. Everything Rose said just now about the queen was something she said back when we were in Forks. Everything she said applied to Isabella and I.
“Fine, Carlisle,” Rose muttered. “I just don’t understand why you’d give up all that to be a vampire?”

“Maybe she wanted to be with someone she loved and couldn’t live without!” Isabella burst out as she entered the throne room. She immediately executed a curtsy in front of the kings as they greeted her with smiles.

Since her back was still turned, they didn’t know who it was at first. I knew her scent had matured from the last time the Cullens saw her - the freesia scent of her youth had been replaced by a sensual lavender. Now that she was a vampire, the lavender notes merged with my vanilla and what she called the ‘bourbon notes’.

She turned and smiled at the queens before moving up to Marcus and Gianna, giving the young queen a hug.

“Bella!” Esme whispered out loud. Shock and recognition from the Cullens washed over me.

“Bella?” Emmett said and let go of Rose as he ran towards Isabella.

“Come on, baby girl, have your shield up,” I gritted out as I watched the scene unfold.

Just as he was within an arm’s length from her, he bounced back violently.

I breathed a sigh of relief.

Isabella whirled around to face them. She was very angry at them. “Oh, hello Cullens,” she said, spitting out the name as though it was poison. “I bet you’re surprised to see me.”


“Well, technically. I’m part of the undead,” she said with a shrug. “But yes, I wasn’t killed. Thanks for sending Charlie a sympathy card, by the way. He never saw it though, since he was the one who was killed.”
I couldn’t help but send my pride out to her. I always knew she was a force to be reckoned with when she was pissed off.

“Charlie died?” Esme repeated.

“Yes, he died in the line of duty,” she replied. “It was all over the media.”

“But Jasper... did he turn you into a vampire that day?” Carlisle asked.

“No. He didn’t turn me into a vampire that day. And you, back away from me,” she said as she glared at Emmett.

“But sis -”

“I’m not your sister. Get that straight,” Isabella said before looking at Carlisle and Esme. “And don’t get ideas that you’re my parents.”

Emmett looked absolutely forlorn as he walked back to Rose. I knew he really saw her as a sister but the fact that he left her never sat well in her eyes.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” Rose blurted out. “You know absolutely nothing! And you’re a vampire now? What are you, some sort of groupie?”

“I know nothing?” she replied and then snorted. “Oh, I am fully aware of how you treat family. How you leave them when the going gets tough. Isn’t that right, Eddie?”

“This was your Bella?” Aro asked, feigning shock. “What does she mean that you left her?”

“He left me in the woods, your majesty,” Isabella replied, her voice softening for the king. “He said I was a distraction and left me alone in the woods when he ran off.”
“Were you aware he was a vampire, Isabella?”

She nodded. “I was aware, and when he left, the entire family left as well.”

“You didn’t protect her?” Caius asked. “You brought her into our world but then left her to fend for herself?”

“It was too dangerous!” Eddie replied. “I left to save her.”

“Oh yes, you left to save me,” Isabella scoffed. “Little good that did when Laurent found me and told me about Victoria’s plans. How was that for saving, Eddie?”

“That is a serious misdeed, young Cullen,” Aro said.

“If you didn’t change that day, then it’s obvious you survived,” Eddie continued.

I shook my head. Didn’t he realize he was digging himself into a deeper hole?

“Yes, I did survive. My mate came and rescued me.”

“Your mate? I’m your mate!” Eddie announced. “Now that you’re a vampire, we can be together again! We can go to high school together. Carlisle and Esme would love to have you back with us. I’m sure Esme will fix us a nice room.”

“Oh gee, really?” Isabella exclaimed with complete sarcasm. “High school and living all together under the same roof? Wow, what an offer.”

I started to chuckle and while the Volturi looked stoic, they were amused by it all as well.

“Sorry, I’m going to have to decline the offer,” Isabella continued. “My husband and mate wouldn’t like the idea of me living with others. I wouldn’t like it either.”
“But I’m your mate!” Eddie shouted.

“No, there is no bond,” Marcus stated. “I can see bonds between Carlisle and Esme, Rosalie and Emmett but not you and Isabella.”

“But I loved her!” he continued.

I opened the door. “Kebi, I’m ready to go into the throne room.”

“Yes, Mr. Whitlock and good luck.”

I nodded once the door was opened and walked straight to Aro and Caius, giving them bows before walking over to Isabella.

“You don’t love her, Edward,” I said as I neared Isabella, slowing just slightly in case her shield wouldn’t allow me in. I felt it reshape around me and wrapped my arm around Isabella. “I don’t feel that emotion coming from you.”

“You’re together? You two?” He continued to shout like a child would over a broken toy. “I demand a trial!” Edward shouted. “He stole her from me!”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know...I’m evil for another dramatic ending. What did you think? Any predictions? Love to hear from y’all!

See you next week!

XO~ sushi
Chapter 95

Chapter Notes

Hello readers!

Here’s your next chapter...sorry for the ending of the last chapter. I figured the trial needed to be on its own. Thanks for all the R&Rs, alerts, and follows - truly appreciate it. Thank you to LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan for making this chapter and a countless others, pretty.

I’m not SM, I just like to play with her characters. Like this chapter, I tinkered with Eleazar’s history.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 94

BPOV

“I demand a trial!” Edward shouted. “He stole her from me!”

I couldn’t help but roll my eyes as soon as he said it. I was surprised at his audacity but at the same time, given the way the Cullens had been acting, I shouldn’t have been.

“You demand a trial?” Aro asked. “Because he stole her from you?”

“That’s right, I demand a trial!”

I glared at the Cullens before looking at Jasper. I sent him my love and quickly gave him a wink. At the same time, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Emmett and Esme starting to move towards us. I turned and crouched low, ready to attack as I checked to make sure my shield was still up. They stopped before they even reached the edge and I didn’t have to use Jasper’s gift to see they were upset by my defensive posture.

“I warned you before to back off,” I grumbled before turning my back at them and addressing Aro.
“It’s okay, if he wants a trial, he should be granted one.”

“Very well,” Aro said. “Young Edward, please explain to us why you want this trial? Why is Isabella so important to you?”

“She is my mate,” he simply said. “We were together and because it was too dangerous, I left her so she could lead a normal life.”

“You claim she’s your mate, but you left her alone after exposing her to our world?” Caius asked.

“It was too dangerous for her!” he explained. “I did the most honorable thing and left her. She wouldn’t be in danger anymore.”

“Obviously that wasn’t the case, was it? I mean, you just witnessed Victoria’s trial, she wasn’t safe from our world,” Caius continued.

“But it worked out. She’s a vampire now,” he continued.

I tried not to roll my eyes but it was difficult. Eddie’s reasoning wasn’t logical.

“And you believe she’d still choose you and your life over her current one?”

“I know her,” he replied and gave what looked like a smug smile.

Caius didn’t have any trouble rolling his eyes at the response. He shook his head and reached his hand out to Aro.

“Why can’t I read Jasper’s thoughts?” Eddie whined. “Who is protecting him?”

I almost snorted at his question and managed to keep a straight face while sending my amusement to Jasper. He returned his emotions and I was reassured by his confidence and love.
“You mentioned you know Isabella, describe her for us,” Marcus requested, ignoring his question.

“My Bella was quiet and shy,” Eddie began. “She was also a little stubborn. She used to drive around in a beat-up old pick-up truck and refused to allow me to get her a better vehicle. I would have gladly gotten her a BMW sedan or even a Mercedes but she always refused. She was a good student and we shared an interest in literature.” He paused and looked at me before pinching the bridge of his nose. “She isn’t the same person, no doubt that brother of mine had something to do with it - she’s more brash now. He must be manipulating her emotions. This isn’t exactly the same Bella I knew.”

If I was human, I probably would have been red with anger at this point. The way he described me made me sound like I was nothing more than a one-dimensional piece of paper.

“Jasper, same question. How would you describe Isabella?”

Jasper looked at me and smiled. “Isabella is a wonderful and caring woman who does not let her past history define her. When I first saw her again after those few months, the first thing I noticed was she was full of fire and wasn’t afraid to voice her opinion. She says that I saved her life that day, but to be honest, she saved me as well.” I squeezed his hand and sent him my feelings. “Then there are just the little things about her that I learned, like how she had to have a morning cup of coffee or else she would be cranky as hell. I learned that she liked dancing with me on our patio, under twinkle lights especially in the summertime.”

“You’re lying,” Eddie muttered. “She hated to dance.”

“Isabella, would you like to respond now or wait until later?” Aro asked.

“Sir, I’d like to address all his comments at the end, if I may,” I replied.

“Certainly. As for you, Jasper Whitlock, are you manipulating Isabella to behave differently or making things up like young Edward is accusing you of doing?” Aro asked.

“No sir, I’m not,” Jasper replied. “As far as making stuff up, it’s the truth. When it came to dancing, it wasn’t as though we became a regular Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, it was just moving along to music and sort of grew from there.”

“Thank you, Jasper. Edward, continuing on with the questions. You two were together and broke up? Were you ever drawn to return to her?” Marcus asked.
“Sometimes, the temptation was there to check, but I always managed to fight it. I ended up traveling down to South America a few times to get away.”

“This temptation?” Marcus asked. “Was there ever any pain associated with it?”

Eddie shrugged. “I know my family missed her and I missed her company but I made sure she got into a decent university and all. There was no pain though. I’m not sure why there would be?”

Marcus shook his head. “I was just wondering. Thank you, young Edward Cullen. Jasper, same question about to you regarding Isabella. Did you ever feel a pull?”

Jasper nodded. “When I left the Cullens, partly on my own and partly because I was basically told I wasn’t a part of the family, I did some soul searching, so to speak. I wanted to go back to her but after her birthday incident, I wanted to be sure I was in control of myself. Being away also allowed me to contemplate other choices. My sister, Char, explained to me one night as I sat up in a tree at their place that I always faced Forks. I wanted to go and it hurt right here.” He held his hand over his chest. “As tempted as I was, I knew there would be greater pain if I harmed her. It took me a few months before I was confident enough though.”

“I felt it too,” I blurted out. “As a human, I mean. It was never as strong as he described but I’d feel uneasy and restless when he’d go out hunting. Later, after we became even closer, I allowed him to taste my blood and it helped center us.”

The Cullens hissed at my revelation. I wasn’t surprised.

“You did what?!” Edward screeched. “He could have killed you and for what? So you could fornicate with him?”

Gianna stepped forward. “If I may comment?” Marcus nodded and she turned to address the Cullens. “Before we married, Marcus had some official business with his brothers and I stayed at the castle. I too, was restless until his return. Together, we discovered that my small offering of blood did put us both at ease when we were apart. It is something we shared with our mates and served nothing less than a bonding moment...which was also purely voluntary. When I met Bella, it was a relief to know someone who also had a vampire as their mate and to find we shared the same woes.”
I smiled at Gianna and mouthed my thanks. “She’s right, it wasn’t ever forced and it was never a
danger to my health, at the most a small spoonful was all we both needed.”

“This is highly unorthodox,” Carlisle said.

“Unorthodox? How so?” Aro asked. “We’re vampires, sometimes things just happen based on
instinct. We are not going to discuss the intimacies of mated couples. If this was how they shared
their bond and it was consensual, we don’t judge them.”

The tone of his voice put an end of any further comment from any of the Cullens.

“Earlier, you mentioned how your life would be if Isabella was back in your life,” Caius began.
“Are you sure that is what she wants?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?” Eddie asked. “She loves the family and they love her. Why wouldn’t she
want to live elsewhere? Don’t get me wrong, we’d travel and all but I know Carlisle and Esme
would always have a room for us.”

I tilted my head slightly to look over at the Cullens but really couldn’t read their faces. I squeezed
Jasper’s hand and looked at him before motioning with my eyes over to his former family. I sent
him uncertainly and he sent me what felt like indifference with just a hint of shock.

“Of course, she’ll have to change her diet,” Eddie continued. “That and she will need to work on
her demeanor. Maybe not being around him will do the trick.”

Now it was my turn to be shocked. “You wouldn’t accept me for me?” I asked.

“Bella,” he said. “This isn’t you, love.” I half expected him to pat my head as he scolded me.

“Jasper, what do you believe Isabella wants?” Caius asked.

“I know she’d like to finish her studies once she gains more control and she’s expressed an interest
in receiving her degree at Sam Houston,” Jasper replied. “Isabella’s got a thirst for knowledge and I
think she’d love to see the world. I’d love to travel with her and share her experiences. I also know
she’s got a strong sense of family and wherever we end up, we’ll visit often.”

I smiled at Jasper before taking a deep breath. “I’m ready to respond now.”

“Very well, Isabella,” Aro began. “You’ve heard young master Cullen accuse your behavior as not being your own; that you’re being manipulated. Would you like to clear the air, so to speak?”

“I know you all saw me a certain way when I first moved to Forks but I can assure you, that wasn’t the real me.” I was facing the Cullens - Esme and Emmett both looked sad while Rose continued to glare at me. Carlisle still looked nonchalant while Eddie looked like he was pouting. “You see, when you first met me, I was pretty much a shell of who I really was. That girl you met and fell for... whether it was for love or for the love of my blood, that wasn’t who I really was. I was shy and reserved because I was in a brand new environment. I had come from a high school in a large, metropolitan city to a high school in a small town. I also painfully insecure which was probably why I latched myself onto a boy and his family so soon. All I wanted to do was feel accepted.”

“Oh please, you were such a simpering fool,” Rosalie sneered.

“God, was she always such a bitch?” I asked rhetorically under my breath. I heard gasps from the Cullens’ direction which meant they probably heard it. I mentally shrugged off their indignation. “Yes, Rosalie, it was pretty pathetic of me back then,” I admitted as I stared straight at her. “Given what I had gone through the year before, there was good reason.” I purposely dangled the response at them knowing one of them would bite, giving me an opportunity to really say some things on my mind.

“So your mother remarried, big deal,” she continued, acting like she knew my story. “You could have just dated a human boy and who knows? Maybe you’d be having kids right now.”

“Not fucking likely,” I growled, earning more gasps from the puritanical Cullens. “Last I checked, you had to have a uterus to have kids.”

“You ruined her!” Eddie accused, pointing his finger at Jasper.

“Yes,” I replied and rolled my eyes. “The summer before I turned 16, Jasper was in Phoenix and magically transformed himself into a coyote, causing my mom to crash her car.” I looked over at Jasper and gave him a fake evil glare. “It’s all your fault, you transforming vampire for causing me the internal injuries.”
“My apologies, ma’am,” Jasper replied, looking contrite while sending me his feelings of pride. “I promise never to use magic again.”

“Any more dumbass remarks, Rosalie? I had to have my uterus removed as a result of my accident. All this before I turned 16. Do you really want to talk about your version of an ideal human life when I couldn’t have one? Do you?”

She looked down and didn’t reply even after I goaded her. Emmett and Esme both had that look of pity that I knew all too well and hated.

“You couldn’t have children? You still could have adopted. You didn’t have to be a vampire,” Eddie chastised.

“Shut up, Eddie! Accept the fact that none of that matters anymore!” I shouted. “As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted. When they met me, I was still not myself. It wasn’t until he abandoned me in the woods after my birthday that I began to snap out of things. Well, a couple weeks afterwards. I had to go through some form of teenage heartache first.” I shook my head and gave the kings a small smile. “Things started to look up for me after that. My dad and I became close, I grew more confident and that insecure girl started to fade into the background. I was once again stubborn, snarky, and little brash. I was also angry that the Cullens left after all their talk of family. To me, it seemed like when the going got tough for them, they left. That was proven a few months later.”

“Oh, how so?” Aro prompted.

I talked about Charlie’s funeral and how I visited the accident site a few days after. “That was where I found Laurent and he told me about Victoria. He said he’d give me mercy, unlike she would and was about to attack when Jasper came to save me. I’m guessing this was the vision Alice had because I was so distraught over being nearly killed that when I first saw Jasper and his eyes, I fell to my knees, ready to accept my fate.” I looked over at Jasper and smiled. “In a way I did because he saved me and we became friends... best friends before we began to date.”

“He was feeding on humans and you befriended him! How could you?” Eddie continued. “He was dangerous!”

“I would appreciate it if you didn’t speak to me or about me as though I was a child,” I snarled as I glared at him, wishing I had laser beam eyes. “As Jasper mentioned, he did go back to human
blood after a lot of contemplation. He wasn’t a danger to me, he knew his limitations. In fact, one night he saved me from a potential robbery. That was when he told me about mates.”

“And what did he say?” Marcus asked.

“We talked about how it was a bond and the different ways of approaching it,” I explained. “He could, if I chose to, watch over me for the rest of my life or, if we decided to pursue a relationship, I’d end up turning at some point. I learned about the pull he felt and how it pained him to not be near me.” I didn’t go into explicit detail as I continued. “The conversation didn’t stop after one discussion. No topic was ever considered taboo or too controversial to talk about.”

“He sounds like he treated you as an equal, would that be correct?” Marcus continued.

“You’re correct,” I said. “Even though vampires are stronger, faster and have better senses than humans, Jasper never made me feel inferior or insignificant. After he told me we were mates, he left the decision up to me as far as how to pursue things. When it came time to buy a house, we looked at what we both wanted and made the decision together. Even getting married, it was my idea to have a ceremony in Vegas.”

“Las Vegas?” Eddie interrupted once again. “You should have had a beautiful ceremony with flowers strewn on the ground, an orchestra playing, and your father escorting you.”

“Jesus! Are you even listening to what we’ve said?” I yelled. “My father is dead. Even if he had been alive, that was not my ideal wedding. It may be yours but not mine! And yes, we got married in Vegas, Peter and Char were there and we had fun. It didn’t need to be some pretentious, formal affair, it was what I was comfortable with and Jasper liked the idea as well.” I looked at the kings. “I think you can see from his outbursts just how he views equality. Even now, as a vampire, he still wants to treat me as a wayward child.”

“Were you ever coerced or pressured by Jasper in any way? For example, turning into a vampire?” Caius asked.

“Never. We discussed all the aspects for months before deciding it was going to be this year. We came out here during the spring to inform you all of our intent even though we didn’t have a date set in stone. There were a few things I needed to take care of before my change and once they were completed, we flew back out here. It was a decision we both made since I didn’t want to overburden Jasper in case I was an unruly newborn.”
“You’ve only changed recently?” Carlisle asked. “I would have guessed it you were nearing the end of your newborn phase. Your control is extraordinary.”

“I was changed a few hours before Gianna and that was before my birthday. As eager as Jasper and I were of me becoming immortal, we needed to make sure we were safe first.”

“Safe? You’re now a vampire and that savage turned you!” Eddie blurted. “Do you know what he has done in the past? He’s a monster!”

“Shut the fuck up, Eddie!” I growled, earning more gasps from Esme. I swear, if she could faint from my language, I bet she would have. “It was a mutual decision and even then, if I had chickened out at the last minute, he would have pushed the change back until I was comfortable.” I glared at the Cullens. “As far as all this talk about being a monster, I know about his past. As a human, I inadvertently walked out to see him in the middle of feeding and guess what? His demon recognized me as his mate. I also saw his maker and learned more of the atrocities he had to endure during his early life as a vampire. I know all this and accept him as he is, just as he accepts me for me. Yes, we both feed on humans and we’re not ashamed of it. He’s not this unruly, rabid vampire that you’re trying to paint him as being. He’s flawed like me and just like me, he’s a survivor. He’s my best friend, my lover, my mate and he’s my forever.”

“I love you, baby girl,” Jasper whispered against my ear and wrapped his arms around me, earning a small growl from that boy.

“Well, I’ve heard enough,” Aro said as he looked to his brothers. They both brought their hands out for him. “The three of us have come to a unanimous decision. Edward Cullen, we believe your accusations are unfounded. Furthermore, we are appalled by the fact that while you claimed Isabella was your mate, you still abandoned her when things didn’t go your way. The Cullens who have such regard for human life just abandoned one to fend for herself - would you have been happy if the fates kept Jasper from saving her? You left her in much more potential danger than she could have fathomed and yet you continue to claim she’s yours. She is not a possession for you to play with until you grow bored.”

“But -”

“I wasn’t done speaking,” Aro admonished. “You should feel fortunate that Jasper arrived when he did and rescued his mate. Otherwise, based on the crimes we saw with Victoria, you all would have been answering to more serious charges. As for you, Carlisle, I’m appalled by the behavior of your so-called children. Your daughter Rosalie has some deep seated issues when it comes to having eternal life, perhaps you did her a great disservice when you decided to save her.”
Rosalie’s eyes shot up and I could tell she was shocked by Aro’s words.

“No need to look at my brother like that, madam,” Caius said. “We all heard your diatribe and how you basically accused Isabella of things without even knowing the truth. As for you, young Edward, I would like to recommend that you learn not to rely on your ability so much. You think you know a lot, but as you were proven today, you really don’t and tend to make wild assumptions. Again Carlisle, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for allowing someone in your coven to become so spoiled. The boy thinks the world is his oyster. I hope today’s trial was one of many hard lessons you’ll face in your life.”

“As for the other two Cullens,” Aro continued. “You’re both eager to embrace Isabella but respect her desire for space. Jasper as well.”

“Now see here, Aro, they’re part of our family!” Carlisle shouted.

“Family? You still consider them family?” Aro replied as he stood from his chair. “From what I saw, you abandoned Isabella and it was confirmed by your son, Edward. I also saw how Jasper left the family and was asked by Edward to remove his Cullen crest - a mark that all your family members wear. These two had been forsaken by your family!” He turned to face us. “Isabella and Jasper, do you still feel like you’re a part of the Cullens?”

“No sirs, I don’t,” I replied. “They left me and I accepted the fact that I probably didn’t live up to their standards. When Jasper came back and he explained how he was told by Eddie to remove his Cullen crest without any argument from Esme and Emmett, that upset me. This was someone who lived as part of that family for decades and all of a sudden, they abandoned him!” I held onto Jasper’s hand. “What really pissed me off was how I remembered that night, every single one of them had dark eyes and Jasper’s weren’t at first until their bloodlust hit him.”

Once again, I heard gasps from the Cullens. I turned to see that most of them, except for Carlisle and Edward were looking at the floor.

“It didn’t matter though,” I continued. “He explained he was once again known as Jasper Whitlock with siblings who quickly welcomed me into their home and their lives. They are truly family just like you all have welcomed us into yours.”

“I wholeheartedly agree with Isabella’s comments,” Jasper said. “It was one thing to be asked to remove the Cullen crest, but to be told by the ever so perfect, Edward, was somethin’ else. He still, to this very day, blames me for that birthday party incident when Isabella concluded, on her very own, that I was trying to save her and not bite her.”
“Thank you, Jasper and Isabella,” Marcus said. “We all consider you family as well. Carlisle, I have to echo my both my brother’s sentiments at your family’s behavior. For me, it was like reliving the first time you visited us with your judgements.”

Jasper squeezed my hand and motioned over to the side. I nodded as we both walked over to the area where the rest of the Volturi guards were standing.

“Pardon me?” Carlisle asked.

“You heard me. The first time you arrived, you were so full of judgement because you believed that your diet choice was more superior. You looked at us with utter disdain and made false conclusions about members of our guard; our family. A part of us hoped that with time, your attitude changed, but it is obvious that it has manifested itself in certain members of your family.”

“I didn’t realize you were cognizant… because Didyme was killed… your mate.”

“As we hinted earlier, there are many things about us that we chose to keep from you. There were also many things we fabricated for your benefit.”

“No,” Carlisle said and shook his head. “Why would you do such a thing?”

“Why?” Aro repeated. “Simply because you already judged us as savages. There was no reasoning with you that we had humanity. We decided to use you and let you see what you wanted - you wanted us to be unruly, dangerous with zero regard for human life. For centuries we knew just how much you talked about us when those very rumors were challenged by visiting vampires. We didn’t exactly steer them away from the rumors but we never fed off of humans or children. In your eyes, red is evil while golden colored eyes aren’t. Surely, your daughter’s plight changed that slightly?”

“Just because we feed from the dregs of society and on specially treated, expired donation blood does not mean we are heartless. Those children you heard earlier? They were orphans that arrived for an annual holiday party. One we’ve been hosting for a few centuries now,” Caius explained. “They don’t have much in their lives and it is the least we can do to give them a holiday season to look forward to.”

Carlisle raised his eyebrows but kept his mouth shut.
“Oh don’t look so surprised,” Caius continued. “Surely red-eyed vampires who run our world are allowed to have philanthropic efforts.”

“But what about the rumors that you collect vampires with abilities?” Carlisle asked and immediately looked over to where Jasper and I were standing.

“Ah yes, you’re friends with Eleazar and his mate, Carmen,” Aro replied. “It was his interpretation but we decided not to correct him. When he arrived centuries ago, he was rather young and wished to serve the Volturi. I explained during a formal gathering he had to start out as a soldier as all my guards were but he wasn’t interested. Given his ability to detect gifts from vampires, he noticed Alec, Jane, Renata and Demetri all had special gifts. He concluded it was a grand design to steal all vampires who had some special gift.”

“So Jasper and Bella aren’t bound to you? And what of your interest in Alice? Or better yet, Edward?”

Aro sighed and shook his head, clearly letting his aggravation show. “As mentioned before, Jasper and Isabella are here on their own. They’re not obligated by any means to ‘serve’ the Volturi. We do, however, consider them a part of our family and as such, they’re always welcome. As far as your daughter Alice, we’re trying to understand her ailment and we’re getting close. We don’t have any interest other than its effect on vampires.” He looked over at Carlisle before his eyes landed on Edward. “With regard to your son, Edward, we have no interest. While you may believe a mind reader would be a valuable addition to the Volturi, we don’t believe he’s disciplined enough to become a soldier.”

“To be blunt,” Caius cut in, “he’s too spoiled. He wouldn’t be a good fit for us.”

“Did you ever question why you weren’t invited to Gianna’s coronation celebration?” Marcus asked and continued to speak before giving Carlisle a chance to respond. “Your family wasn’t invited because of the very reasons we just mentioned.” Marcus muttered something under his breath in what must have been an ancient language and then held his hand out for Aro.

Aro nodded and whispered to Caius who held his own hand out. “Renata, you don’t have to shield us.” He gave me a quick glance before sitting back down.

Renata nodded and must have dropped her shield as Eddie’s eyes began to bug out. I quickly looked up at Jasper, not knowing if I should do anything.
“I still can’t hear Jasper,” Edward whined as he stared at us.

“If you’re comfortable, I am too,” Jasper whispered and sent me love and confidence.

I closed my eyes and tried to ignore the sounds around me as I focused on my shield retracting. It took a couple tries, mainly because I kept feeling as though the Cullens were staring at me, before I was able to drop my physical shield. My mental shield continued to stay up.

“Wait, Bella’s a shield?” Eddie cried out. “And she’s practicing to fight?” He looked over at Aro. “You just said she wasn’t part of the guard, that you don’t collect gifted vampires.”

“He doesn’t collect vampires,” Jasper said and looked to me as though asking for permission. I nodded quickly. “You’re correct, Isabella is a shield but unlike Renata, she’s only able to shield the two of us and no one else.”

Eddie actually looked defeated at the news. “But the fighting, I saw it in their memories.” He pointed to the guards with disdain.

“It was my idea to learn,” I said. “I didn’t want to depend on Jasper’s skills, so I asked... well, more like insisted that I be taught. I’ve even sparred with the guards. Nobody is forcing me to fight. I felt like it was important for me and I had the support of my Jasper and my family.”

“Hell yeah, sis is a fighter!” Emmett shouted.

“Don’t they listen at all?” I asked under my breath.

“Obviously, they’re not,” Jasper whispered back. “He’s gonna try something.”

I don’t think any of the Cullens caught our conversation so I continued to act casually. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Emmett smiling and ignoring the glares from Rosalie. I took a breath and walked over to the guards, all the while never exposing my back to the Cullens.
Just as I anticipated, he started running towards me. I quickly turned and crouched low. The guards were moving around the room just in case their help was needed. I remembered Jasper’s words early on about Emmett’s fighting style, how he fought like a newborn and relied heavily on his brute strength.

It would have been a lie if I said I wasn’t slightly intimidated by this man coming straight towards me. I remained still as I calculated all the possible moves I could make given his size and his fighting style. It was only a split second before I jumped and leapfrogged over him. I quickly twisted my body so I could kick his shoulder, knocking him back a couple feet before he came towards me again.

“Lucky move,” he said smugly.

This time, I dove down and did almost a baseball slide so I was behind him. Immediately, I leapt up and spun so I landed a kick right between his shoulders, knocking him to the ground. I quickly grabbed his hair and pulled his head back to show him I could easily decapitate him.


“You best listen to her,” Jasper said as he helped me up. “She has learned to fight from the best and doesn’t fuck around. That goes for all of you,” he said as he looked at the Cullens. “You cannot try to manipulate us anymore with your guilt. If you want any iota of a chance that we’ll see you in a different light, y’all need to back off. Don’t try to force us into your family. That isn’t the way it works. Carlisle, I used to respect you and your ability to work in the medical profession with no issues on your control. I just can’t say that I admire you as a father figure or a coven leader. In all the decades I lived as part of the Cullen family, I had never seen such lack of respect for individuals as you’ve demonstrated tonight. You have not given us the common courtesy that you’d afford to strangers.”

Carlisle remained silent as Aro dismissed the meetings. The queens left, while the guards remained keeping an eye on the Cullens.

“Rose, you might be my sister and sometimes, we pretended to be twins but the shit you said to Gianna and Isabella…you were out of line,” Jasper growled out. “I know you went through some rough shit in your last moments as a human. I know your dreams were shattered but that is no fuckin’ way to talk to anybody like that. Know this, if I was able to rise above the shit I went through - the torture, mind-fucks, and trauma - in my early life, you can get over a lot of that bitterness and resentment.”
As we turned to walk out the side door, Edward moved quickly face us.

“Move Edward,” Jasper warned. “You don’t want me to speak my mind about your behavior. Just take what the kings said and think about it. My version is a lot more harshly worded.” He stepped aside to let us continue walking as we were received by the guards with hugs and praises.

“Come on, Jasper, let’s go home and wind down.”

“Yes ma’am, we sure as hell need it.”

Chapter End Notes

How did you like it? Was it worth the wait?

We’re nearing the end of the story… two more chapters after this one and then a (hopefully) long epilogue.

Thank you and see you next week! XO ~ sushi
Chapter 96

Chapter Notes

Here’s the next chapter! Sorry for the delay, things are just a little crazy this time of year.

Not SM - blah blah blah. :)

Not a whole lot to say here so I’ll see you at the bottom!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 95

Carlisle POV

After Jasper and Bella walked away, Aro waved us out of the room, dismissively. A couple guards followed us back to the guest area without a word and left us at the corridor.

“Carlisle, what’s happened to my children?” Esme asked, her eyes welling up with venom.

“Esme… all of you, sit down.” I gestured to the large sitting area in our suite.

Since seeing Jasper and Bella and then being admonished by the Volturi, I had to wonder if there was a hint of truth to what they were saying. Of course, I had to use the deep recesses of my mind so Edward was none the wiser. Had I spoiled my children? Were we now *persona non gratae* because of my actions as a young vampire?

I looked at each of my family members and tried to see things from an outsider’s perspective. As much as I hated to, I could see that Aro had a point. Rose had been out of line with her attitude and I hoped to address it soon.

“I think we need to just let Jasper and Bella go, Esme,” I said softly as I held her hand. “They made their decision and though it pains me to say it, Jasper has a point. We cannot force them to join our family.”
“You’re listening to him, Carlisle? How do you know Aro is correct?” Edward interjected. “Surely you saw the scars on Bella, Jasper’s a savage!”

I took a deep breath and uttered a quick prayer for patience in my head. I noticed her mating mark and listened to their story. After hearing Edward’s view, I realized she was never his mate because Marcus made an important point - Edward would have been hurt if he left her for so long. His urge to be close to her would not have stopped him from returning to Forks. As far as her bite mark and Edward’s comments, I was certainly grateful the few times Esme and I indulged in letting ourselves go, I chose to bite her neck - right over the mark that started her change so it wouldn’t draw any attention. For decades, I managed to avoid this conversation I was about to have with Edward.

“Edward, they’re mated,” I tried to explain as delicately as I could. “It’s what they do.” I opened up my mind again to add. *We can talk in private if you want to discuss it further.*

He quickly nodded and motioned with his eyes to the attached room.

“Excuse me for a moment,” I said, addressing my family as I got up. “We’ll be back momentarily.”

“Carlisle, I don’t understand by what you said. I thought I was her mate? What changed?”

To give us the illusion of privacy, I conducted much of the conversation from my head as I explained the fundamentals of being mated vampires. *I’m sorry I had never described such intimacies, I truly believed you would have realized once you found your own mate. It’s instinct, after all.* I watched as he nodded in understanding. “Based on what you just learned, do you think you were ever her mate?”

“Given what I know now, I don’t think so,” he said quietly. “What I don’t understand is why him? Why Jasper?”

“It doesn’t work like that, son,” I explained. “He felt that pull and once they saw each other again, it sounds like she felt some sort of pull too.”

“I still don’t like it,” he muttered. “Do you think that is why I couldn’t hear his thoughts either? Was it because of her? Once the Volturi shield was lifted, I saw some thoughts about how she protected him the first time they were here.”
“Oh really?”

I listened to the memory he saw of Jane using her gift on him. “I saw the vision of Bella running to him and then his agony stopped. I’m almost ashamed to say it, but I was jealous, she never let me in like that.”

“Why did you ask for the trial then?”

He shrugged his shoulder and looked down once again. “I thought if I could impress her like before, I could fix some things.”

“Fix? How?”

“Make her understand why I left...why we all left. I thought it would be easy…”

I shook my head, breaking him from his thoughts. *Easy to let her believe a trumped up version of why we left? How would that have explained Victoria? I clapped my hand on his shoulder. Son, I’m glad the opportunity wasn’t there. I think the Volturi would have had a field day with that story.*

“Yes, I know,” he replied with a grimace. “I really believed I was doing the right thing.”

“I believe you, son,” I said. “Come on, let’s go back to the family so we can discuss some things.”

“So we’re just letting them go? I’ll lose them as well as Alice?” Esme cried as soon as Edward and I emerged from the other room. She squeezed my hand and looked at me with great sorrow.

“No, we won’t let Alice go,” I said. “We can bring her back home with us. However, before we discuss Alice, we should talk about some things that occurred tonight.” I looked over at Rose and Emmett. “Rose, why did you attack Bella like you did? Not only that, but you showed disdain over one of the Volturi queens! They could have incarcerated you for that.”

“I couldn’t help it, Carlisle,” she said. “I just saw red when I realized they gave up their human lives to become vampires.”
“Rose, it isn’t our place to dictate what humans can and cannot do,” I chided as I reached for her hand. “It was ultimately their choice and if what they said was true, then it wasn’t a spur of the moment event.”

“But they had their whole lives ahead of them,” she continued.

“Remember when you found Emmett and how you didn’t want him to die? They probably felt the same way, only the queen and Bella weren’t injured. Had they been gravely harmed, would that have been the right situation to turn them?”

“I suppose,” she replied, reluctantly. “I still don’t think it was right, but I won’t say anything else about it. What Aro said? Was I really that bad?”

“Some of the things you said were harsh,” I admonished. “We just have to remember where we are. Now Emmett, why did you suddenly decide to attack Bella like that?” I was a little angry at his little show but at the same time, wondered if this was an indication that Esme and I somehow failed as parents.

“He said she was fighting,” he explained, pointing a finger at Edward before shrugging. “I don’t know, I thought it would be fun, you know, lighten the mood. I didn’t think she’d defend herself like that.”

I shook my head and pinched the bridge of my nose as I took in deep, calming breaths. “We must comport ourselves, better. We cannot go around behaving like we’re ill-mannered and crass. We’re supposed to be above that!” I didn’t plan on raising my voice but the scene kept replaying in my mind. “We need to keep a low profile and instead, we have now drawn the ire of the Volturi.”

“So what do we do?” Rose asked, looking contrite. “Is there a way to redeem ourselves?”

I paced around the room. “There might be a way,” I began. “We’ll have to stand united on this effort though.”

“Tell us, Carlisle,” Emmett said. “We can do it.”

“I’ll arrange to meet with the kings but here’s what we’ll do,” I said and told them my plan.
Meanwhile, as the Cullens were having their conversation...

JPOV

I was grateful that traffic was extremely light as we made our way out of Volterra. The confrontation with the Cullens was over. I knew Isabella and I needed to talk and could practically feel her curiosity buzzing as I shifted gears and headed towards our house.

“Well talk once we’re home, okay?” I said as I took her hand in mine.

“Preferably in our tub with some blood bags,” she replied, looking over at me with a smile.

“I like that idea,” I said. “It’s sort of become our thing.”

“Yes it has and I definitely prefer a big, fancy tub over having a mansion or luxury cars,” she quipped.

“What would be your dream tub?” I asked, happy that we were having a light hearted conversation.

“Hmm,” she began. “I would love a bath that has a wall full of windows and skylights. The tub has to be big enough for the two of us but we can just relax and enjoy the view of either the city or nature, with stars overhead. What is yours?”

“I like that idea, I would want a bathroom that extends to the outside so on a nice day or evening, we could bathe or shower outdoors. Obviously it would have to be completely private but could you imagine?”

“I’m picturing a tropical area with lush, greenery and the sounds of wildlife. So do we explore the world and find these places so we can possibly buy and build our vacation homes?”
“We could do that,” I said as I turned into our private drive. “I can’t wait to explore the world with you.”

“Me either,” she said and hopped out of the car as soon as I stopped, not waiting to help out. “Sorry, I’m just anxious to spend quiet time with you and just talk.”

“No sorrys,” I teased as I wrapped my arm around her waist. “How about I run upstairs and get the tub goin’ while you grab us some blood bags?”

“Deal!” she said as soon as we entered our house.

Moments later, we were sipping on blood bags while relaxing in the tub.

“Move forward a little so I can reach the faucet,” I said as I kept one arm around Isabella’s waist.

“Can I try to turn the water off instead?” she asked and I smiled, letting my arm slide to her thigh. “I’m picturing the dial,” she explained as she reached with her thumb and forefinger and slowly turned, causing the metal to groan softly as she shut off the hot water. “Whew! I’m glad I didn’t break it.” She leaned back to rest her body against my chest as she pulled my hands around her. “So are you okay, Jasper? Seeing the Cullens again must not have been easy.”

“No it wasn’t, but at the same time, it wasn’t as bad as it could have been,” I admitted. “A part of me thought I’d feel a sense of loss when I saw them, especially since they were a part of my life after the wars. Seeing the way they acted in front of the kings, well… a part of me felt ashamed I was even a part of their family at one point.”

“Sorry for running out of our observation area like that. The things Rosalie was saying to Gianna were really unfair.”

“I’m proud of you for saying something and standing up for your friend. All of the Volturi appreciated what you did out there,” I explained. “I have to admit though, I knew Rose was highly opinionated but she was out of line with what she was saying. Even Carlisle and Esme were taken back. They were all shocked to see the two of us, for what it’s worth.”

“I didn’t need your ability to see that. What about that big guy, Emmett? Other than his lack of respect for personal space, was he being malicious or what?”
I ran my fingers through her hair. “He wasn’t being mean. If anything he was being a dumbass for trying to attack a newborn vampire… in the Volturi castle, no less. I was really fuckin’ proud of you and your moves. You shocked the hell out of him when you were poised to decapitate him. If the Cullens could, they would have probably pissed themselves at that point.”

“I didn’t want to cause trouble,” she said as she pulled another blood bag from the hot water. “I warned him a couple times.”

“You did and showed restraint. A typical newborn wouldn’t have hesitated, even to those they were familiar with.”

“So were you nervous that I was going to confront him?”

“Not really, knowing his fighting style. Baby girl, you have been trained by some highly skilled soldiers and I was confident you were going to be okay. The only thing I was a little nervous about was your control and if you were going to actually follow through.” I shrugged. “It wasn’t on you, it was just an automatic reaction because of my past.”

“So if I was a typical, feral newborn I probably would have done more?” she asked and I nodded. “That means if I was a typical newborn, I could hurt you and that would be considered normal?”

“I guess normal might not be the most appropriate word,” I replied. “It would be an expected behavior. I don’t know if a young vampire would harm their mate…” I paused and shook my head. “I can’t say for sure but I’m just guessing it could happen if they were feral.”

“Yeah, I guess I could see that,” she said after putting some thought into the conversation. “How were the Volturi during this whole time?”

“The queens were incredulous over the Cullens’ behavior and the kings were too, to an extent. Like I said earlier, Rose’s harsh words really threw them off. I got the impression one of them would have intervened had you not burst into the room.”

“Okay, what was with Eddie and his trial? Were the Volturi shocked by his demand? Was he completely serious about wanting me back? Is he a threat to us?”
I reached over to grab a second blood bag. “He might have talked about how I stole you and how you were his mate, but he wasn’t talking like someone who was in love. It was, as though, you were…” I paused to think of the right word that wouldn’t hurt her feelings.

“Like I was a toy or some piece of property?” she asked.

“Yeah, something like that,” I replied and explained why I had hesitated.

She turned so she faced me and wrapped her arms around my neck. “Jasper, I sort of got that vibe long ago, you didn’t need to candy coat it for me but I do appreciate it. Was he really being serious about living with that family and all?”

“I didn’t get a vibe he was joking though the Volturi were quite amused. They weren’t expecting him to request a trial and they knew us, they decided to play him which was the reason for their questions.”

“Oh god, I was trying so hard not to laugh when he talked about going back to high school and living with his parents. But what he said about our wedding not being appropriate? I wanted to knock that smirk off his face. Then not listening about what happened to Charlie… that was… I was… UGH!”

I kissed her lips as I held her against me. “Shh, he’s an idiot, don’t let him bother you,” I whispered against her skin as I ran my hands up and down her back, tracing her spine with my fingertips.

“I know, I shouldn’t let his words get to me but it was just so disrespectful. Hell, the family as a whole were. I’m glad the kings said something to Carlisle. As much as they seem to pride themselves being around humans, they really don’t have a clue.”

“To be honest, I didn’t really know the difference until we became friends. The Cullens might live amongst humans but they’re acting… playing a role, if you will. You remember how they kept an arm’s length from actually interacting with students and all, don’t you?”

“A little.”

“They relied on Alice and Edward to help them integrate because of their gifts. Even then though, they stood out and were perceived as aloof or standoffish. It was different when I came back to
you. I didn’t have to act like I was more superior to humans - an attitude some of the Cullens took to heart.”

“You weren’t snobby, that was the biggest thing I noticed whenever we went out. You didn’t treat humans as though they were inferior. You interacted when you needed to but never looked like you treated them differently. Plus, you seemed to enjoy going to bars and casinos.”

I nodded. “I was more comfortable living a modest lifestyle with you. I didn’t feel like I had to put on airs like I had to when I lived with them. You know my past, I wasn’t born with a silver spoon. While I like nice things, I am more practical, just like you.”

“Even the Volturi act seem to have more humanity than the Cullens. Well, in certain aspects, like their view on family. Except they don’t seem to force everybody to fit in some sort of mold. At least, that was how I saw the Cullens after that birthday incident.”

“Well, you saw and heard what was required if you wanted to be a part of that family again,” I replied.

“Yeah, according to him, I had to change my diet and change my demeanor,” she said and made a face. “Family don’t put conditions on each other. Well, at least, they’re not supposed to. If we had chosen an animal diet but still made our way to Volterra, would the Volturi have looked down on us?”

“I don’t think so,” I responded. “It isn’t the diet that they judge, but rather the attitude. I could be wrong but the vibe I got with the kings was they really admired Carlisle when he first arrived at the castle. For a young vampire to take it upon himself to decide a diet that is completely foreign and against our nature was admirable but the way he approached it was wrong. Carlisle automatically judged them for partaking in their nature. I honestly don’t believe it is a matter of diet for the Volturi but rather, it is the attitude from Carlisle. I think deep down, they really wanted him to be a part of their family but he ostracized the Volturi, leaving a very bitter taste in their mouths.”

“Even the queens weren’t immune to Carlisle’s judgement back then. I guess in a way, he asked for it by shunning them the way he did. But hey, on a lighter note, at least we’ll never have to worry about accidentally running into them. I mean, we might at some point in the future but it wouldn’t be that first time meeting thing.”

I chuckled at her rambling. “It was a relief, baby girl. I finally had the opportunity to say some things to them that I needed to. Whatever happens now, we have at least got that out of the way. Come on, let’s get out of the tub and watch the sunrise from our bedroom.”
“But that won’t happen for about an hour or so.”

“Well, we’ll just have to occupy ourselves until then.”

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**Back at Volterra…**

**EPOV**

After Carlisle told us his idea, he rang up Aro and requested that we meet with him first thing in the morning. Aro agreed to meet but insisted that we meet in the afternoon, stating something about visiting the market square.

Rose and Emmett decided to spend some time in their own suite while Carlisle and Esme spent time in theirs. I left, giving them some privacy as I wandered around the halls at Volterra. I knew I wasn’t alone as I walked down the corridor; the guard’s thoughts were loud even though I didn’t understand her native tongue.

“Excuse me, am I allowed outside?” I asked after I made my second lap around the floor.

“You’re not prisoner here,” she replied, pointing to a set of double doors. “They open up to the lobby and from there, you can go into the market square. Some of the vendors are already setting up for the day so you will have to dress more appropriately for winter.”

I looked down and smirked, realizing I didn’t have a coat to wear. “Thank you, Miss -”

“Not Miss…My name is Kebi,” she replied.

I quickly tried to read her mind but all I saw was some sort of village out in the desert. I nodded to Kebi and quickly returned to my room so I could grab my overcoat before returning to the doors. As I went to the lobby area, I was assaulted by the lingering scent of a human. I immediately eyed a reception desk area, with a first aid kit under the table. Rosa, as the nameplate indicated, wasn’t in but I could tell she had been sitting there hours ago.
I shrugged off my thoughts and headed outside, bringing my coat collar up to appear I was chilled. I spotted a bench near a fountain and sat down as I thought about the past several hours.

I was shocked that Alice masterminded this attack on us. Clearly, based on her jumbled thoughts, she wasn’t herself and that was proven when I saw her file and read Carlisle’s mind. I wasn’t sure whether to be upset, disappointed, or sad by the revelation. Maybe I was a little bit of everything. I was hopeful though that things will turn for the better with Carlisle’s plan.

As for the whole idea of Bella, I was shocked seeing her. She was different though - more outspoken and too crass. At first I was excited to see her but she wasn’t human anymore and if I had to be honest, I guess I had to admit to myself some of that magic was gone. Besides, I didn’t like the way she sneered and called me ‘Eddie’. If I could get her back into my life; my family’s life and have things back as they were before we left, I probably would have fought harder for her hand.

However all that changed as I hadn’t expected this whole idea of mates, especially the way Carlisle explained it. Had Emmett explained it to me, I probably would have scoffed and doubted the validity of the information. I trusted Carlisle and given what he said, I realized we never had that bond. Sure, I was jealous - of all people, it was Jasper that was hers.

I was upset at first, but the fact Bella was not the same girl I knew, made things easier. I don’t think I would have been able to handle a foul-mouthed, newborn.

“You know, you shouldn’t scowl like that when you stare out,” a voice broke me out of my thoughts.

“Pardon me?” I asked, thrown off over the idea I didn’t hear her thoughts as she approached. I looked up at the hooded figure and realized it was Jane along with another guard, their shield.

Ah, that must have explained it.

“You were lost in your thoughts and was scowling. You’re lucky it is early and still dark because you would have scared some of the merchants.”
I shrugged. “Are you two following me?”

“Not really,” the shield replied. “Jane and I visit the market area on a regular basis, all of us at Volterra do. What are you doing out here?”

“Just thinking,” I replied curtly.

“Well, Aro told us we were meeting with your family later in the morning. I guess we’ll leave you to your thoughts,” Jane replied and turned back to talk to the other guard about buying gifts.

I stayed outside for another hour before returning to my room.

A few hours later

JPOV

“So what do you think the Cullens want with this meeting with the Volturi?” Isabella asked while looking at the passing scenery.

“Aro didn’t elaborate, as you saw on the text message. He just said Carlisle requested a meeting for today,” I replied, downshifting the gears as we drove through the village. “While you were getting dressed, I did send a message to Alec asking if he had any insight.”

“Oh? What did he say?”

“He said he was playing video games with Peter and Demetri and neither of them had a clue what it was about either. He was the one who asked if we could come over early to talk about the upcoming holiday.”

“It will be a good distraction.”
Once we arrived at Volterra, we took one of the side entrances into the castle. Char was there waiting and led us to the tower. We greeted everybody and sat down on one of the side chairs as we watched Peter, Demetri, Felix and Alec play some sort of video game.

“They’re in the middle of playing ‘Assassin’s Creed’. If you were here hours ago, you would have seen them play ‘Halo 3’,” Jane said as she sat down next to us. “Renata and I saw that Edward guy this morning.”

She then explained how they were walking in the town square and he was lost in thought.

“He had a scowl on his face and Jane told him he’d scare the humans,” Renata continued, laughing at the younger guard. “He left soon after, we wandered about and made sure there was surveillance on him, just in case.”

“So he just sat there and that’s it?” Isabella asked.

“With that look he had, we weren’t sure if he was going to go after the merchants, which was why Jane and I kept an eye on him. From a distance, of course. So obviously you heard that they want to meet with us all today.”

I nodded. “Any news on what to expect?”

“Nah, nothin’,” Peter replied as he manipulated his game console with lightning speed. “The kings actually came up here to let us know and while it won’t be as formal as it was yesterday, it won’t be a casual meeting all the same. They want to maintain that air of hierarchy.”

“Fair enough,” I said. “So a step down from formal means no robes?” I looked down at my jeans and button down, grateful I dressed up somewhat.

“No robes,” Jane answered. “Alec won’t change out of his ‘Thundercats’ t-shirt so you won’t need to worry. However, we will still be on alert. We just thought this would throw them off a little.”

She paused briefly. “So... did your ice machines arrive yet?”

“They should be here soon. Why?” I asked, noting some curiosity coming from her.
“I know you invited all of us over to your place but what about an alternate plan?” I gestured her to continue. “Alec and I were wondering if you’d like to move the celebration to the practice field. We could create a toboggan course -”

“Not really a toboggan course, it will be more like a luge track but we’ll use sleds,” Alec cut in. “We would ice it down so it will be a fast track.”

“Yeah, and we’ll use your snow machines to create a winter scene. When it comes time for the movie, we’d have a tented area and a big screen.”

“Wow, that sounds like a lot of fun,” Isabella said. “I’ve gone down in an inner-tube once, as a kid, visiting my dad. He took us out to the ski areas outside Seattle. I have some memories of being scared at first because as a kid, that hill looked really big. Jasper, can we?”

“I don’t see why not,” I replied. “I mean part of this time of year means being around family right?”

“So it’s a go?” Jane asked. “Oh, we don’t really do gifts. I got something for Alec this year but normally we donate money to various charities and causes.”

“Oh, that is a great idea,” Isabella said.

“At one time we gave elaborate gifts but it quickly got out of hand - almost like a contest to see who could outdo who,” Demetri said. “Alec even concocted a scheme to steal the Mona Lisa from the Louvre and that was when we realized how outrageous we were getting.”

“It was a couple years before she was actually taken by thieves,” Alec quipped. “It would have been an interesting adventure but yes, when Caius got wind of my idea, he wasn’t pleased. None of the kings were and that year, they declared an edict - all my gifts were forfeited and distributed to the poor. So in retaliation, and maybe even a little out of spite, I decided to do the same to the gifts I was going to give others.” He grinned mischievously. “The plan backfired when a few of the orphanages and charities wrote and thanked us for our generosity.”

“I like that there isn’t the pressure to get someone something grand,” I commented. “It was sort of the ‘outdo each other’ thing when I lived with the Cullens. Even though we’re not human, I do like the idea of helping others. It sort of makes up for the bad people we feed off of in order to
“We feel the same way.” Heidi said as she appeared by the stairwell. “We’re going to meet in about a half an hour.” She walked over to Felix and watched the video game for a few minutes.

“We’re finishing up,” Alec said. “Were you working with Gianna this whole time?”

“Since the morning. I was with her in the ballroom, working on her footwork. It seems Sulpicia and Athenodora were there too and commented they were interested in learning some basic fighting skills in the new year.”

We filled Heidi in on the holiday plans as the guys finished their game. A few minutes later, we all walked towards the throne room to wait for the meeting with the Cullens.

Chapter End Notes

So what is going to happen now? Any ideas?

Thank you readers for all your support. There is one more chapter before the epilogue (which will be posted sometime in January - the epilogue, that is).

Many thanks to all those who helped with this story - JamesRamsey, JaspersWoman and DarkNNerdy helped out tremendously in the beginning. AlexisDanaan has been betaing this bad boy pretty much since the beginning too and thank you LetsJustDance for helping out with prereading about half way through. I couldn’t have done it without this wonderful group of women.

So I’ll post the final chapter next week. For those who celebrate, have a very Merry Christmas!

XO ~sushi
Chapter 97

Chapter Notes

Hello! Hope you are enjoying the holidays. :)

My goal for this story was to complete this before the start of the new year. I guess in a ways, I have achieved that because here is the last full chapter. There is an epilogue which will be long and I hope to post that in January before I click the complete button.

I’ll save my thank yous until the bottom.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 96

BPOV

As soon as we all walked into the throne room, we were greeted warmly by the kings and queens. They were all dressed casually with Gianna still in yoga pants and a long-sleeve workout shirt.

“Jasper and Bella are going to join us in our holiday celebration!” Jane announced excitedly.

“That is wonderful news!” Marcus replied. “Did Jane tell you we don’t exactly celebrate Christmas but rather, the winter solstice? We’ll actually begin that evening and the celebrations won’t end until a few days after. This gives everybody a chance to enjoy the festivities without making it into a religious holiday. There is no obligation to stay the entire time - you’re free to come and go as you please. Most of us do that.”

“It sounds like a wonderful time,” I said. “I really like the idea of giving to charities instead of gifts.”

“Did you hear how the tradition started?” Marcus asked and I nodded. “After Alec’s antics and the subsequent reactions from the different charities, a couple other guards decided wanted the same thing. It caught on rather quickly. It might sound strange... perhaps even a touch ironic but for all the death we’ve caused from feeding on humans, a part of us embraced the idea of giving back this
time of year.”

I could see the pride he had for his family and Jasper must have felt it as he turned towards us and wrapped his arm around my waist.

“Should we prepare ourselves for their arrival?” Jasper asked.

“No, as long as we’re not revealing anything secretive, we’re okay,” Aro replied. “Besides, I know Carlisle thinks we’re all about the pomp and circumstance so why not throw off his game by being the opposite.”

“That’s a good strategy. Should we be concerned about the reason he’s calling the meeting?” Jasper continued.

“I don’t believe so,” Aro replied. “I am fairly certain the meeting has to do with Alice. Of course, that isn’t to say we won’t be on alert if anything were to occur. The chances are slim though, especially given the fact the guards are trained to kill.”

Jasper smiled and looked over at me. “That little demonstration from Isabella yesterday… well let’s just say if they were human, there would have been some clean-up duty required.”

The whole room laughed at Jasper’s comment before going back to their conversations. Alec and Afton were planning the luge track while Jane started to plan out the movie tent. Gianna was with the other queens as they talked about upcoming training plans with Heidi and Chelsea.

“Will the Cullens be invited to this winter celebration?” I asked Aro.

“Well, if they’re still around and if they don’t behave like they did earlier, we could extend an invitation. They are, afterall, guests…but only if,” he replied and gestured out towards the main double doors.

“They’re on their way,” Jasper whispered as he pulled me into his arms. “I can feel a new set of emotions coming this direction.”
“Anything we need to be concerned about?” Caius asked.

Jasper shook his head. “No, they’re determined so I guess y’all just need to be prepared for whatever they want.” He guided me towards the side of the room as we all slowly migrated to our spots.

Less than a minute later, the main doors opened and in walked the Cullens. I could see from their faces, they were a little taken back by the scene. I was sure they had anticipated a formal meeting instead of the casual atmosphere.

“Um, Aro?” Carlisle began once they in the middle of the room.

“You requested a meeting, so what is it about?” Aro replied in a tone that made sure the Cullens knew they had inconvenienced the kings.

“We’re here about Alice.”

Caius gestured impatiently for Carlisle to get to the point, causing Esme to move closer to Carlisle.

“I discussed it with the family and we have decided to bring her home.”

“I see,” Aro said. “And you’re all prepared to make sure she’s monitored all the time?”

“She’s our daughter, Aro,” Carlisle replied, his jaw practically ticking with irritation. “She’s not a prisoner.”

“Dear Carlisle, I had never implied that your daughter is a prisoner. I’m simply stating, based on her actions, that she is a danger to society. Furthermore, our research shows the high probability her instability is genetic.”

“We’ll handle it,” Carlisle stated emphatically.

“Very well. Let’s just be clear on one thing though. If we hear that you’ve disregarded our
suggestion, there will be repercussions.” Aro glared at the Cullens. “Your entire family will be subject to punishment,” he warned.

Carlisle looked as if he was about to respond.

“It would behoove you all to remember you’ve broken a law for bringing a human into our world. The circumstances worked to your favor but nonetheless, the law was broken all the same,” Caius warned. “We are not known to give second chances.”

The Cullens nodded and looked at Carlisle as he continued to speak on behalf of the family. “We’ll leave in a matter of hours. I think it would be best if we chartered our own plane back.”

“Very well,” Aro replied. “We’ll have our servants start packing her personal belongings.” He turned to look at his guards. “Chelsea, will you and Heidi prepare to release Miss Cullen to her family?”

I noted his emphasis on the word and guessed he was going to have the compulsion removed from Alice.

As soon as the two guards left, Aro called an end to the meeting and the Cullens left the throne room without another word.

An hour later, a disgruntled looking Alice was escorted out of Volterra along with the Cullens. They must have been able to find an airplane nearby to take them back to Alaska. We were all in front of the castle, wearing winter coats, as Demetri and Renata loaded the cars to take them to the airport.

“Enjoy the holidays Carlisle,” Aro said as he patted his shoulder. “Please heed the advice in her file.”

As they left, none of the Cullens said a word to anybody. The closest thing to an acknowledgement was a teary eyed look Esme sent to Jasper and I as she got in the car. The rest, it seemed, chose to ignore us altogether.

After the cars left, Aro motioned us all back in, quickly reading Marcus and Caius’ thoughts. “I’ve got them monitored through the entire trip. The chartered plane is one of Marcus’ side ventures.”
They won’t know of the connection since humans run the day to day operations.”

“It gives us a chance to test new aircraft,” Marcus replied nonchalantly. “Each airplane is equipped with surveillance, but we’ve never really had a need for them… that is, until today. I’ll make sure they’re monitored for any incidents. I don’t want my crew harmed during the flight.”

“Do you anticipate any trouble from them?” Jasper asked.

“We’re more concerned with Miss Cullen especially after her outburst the other day,” Aro explained. “When I touched Carlisle, I saw he was bound and determined to prove us wrong. He truly believes he can cure Alice by providing her with a loving family.”

“I’m not a medical person, but that doesn’t seem to make sense,” I commented and looked at Jasper with confusion. “If she was human, her brain would be deteriorating and having a loving family doesn’t sound like it would be a cure.”

“While he’s not completely skeptical of her ailment, he has doubts and believes our diagnosis has been exaggerated.”

“But that doesn’t explain her behavior,” Alec said as the guards approached us.

“He’s going to try to prove us wrong… it is the same thing he’s always done; attempt to prove he’s better than us. I’m not surprised if I had to be honest. We’ll make sure none of the humans are in any danger.” Aro looked around the lobby and smiled. “Let’s get ready for the winter celebration instead of being cooped up here waiting for bad news. Afton, I’ll need you to set up the portable surveillance station.”

Afton nodded and went to the elevators to the lab.
After a day of building the luge track, we were ready to celebrate the holidays with our new family. Demetri had taken the initiative to contact the shipping company and moved the delivery of our snow machines to Volterra.

We continued monitoring the airplane as the Cullens headed back home. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, however, when the plane landed in the UK for fuel, the Cullens decided to spend a few days in one of their country homes. Jasper said it was a house located in the forested area so it wasn’t much of a surprise they wanted to spend time and feed.

To be safe, Aro contacted Santiago to see if he was able to spy on the Cullens until they left European airspace. Luckily, he had finished his train trip and was relaxing in the English countryside for a few days before joining the Volturi for the winter celebration.

“Jasper look!” I pointed to the scene in front of us. “It really looks like a winter wonderland!”

“It sure does. They did one helluva job after we left. It looks like we landed in Antarctica.”

“Have you ever been there?” I asked out of curiosity.

“Nah, there was never a desire to go there since hunting was slim and it was so desolate. I do want to one day… I don’t know, it sounds weird but I want to say that I’ve visited all the continents.”

“It’s not weird. We could go there just to say we’ve been. Would you have had to eat whale or something?”

“Oh god no,” he replied with a shudder. “I mean, I guess if you needed to feed you could, but I’ve never had marine animals before.”

I started to laugh as I imagined latching onto a blue whale or something and had to share with Jasper after he gave me a funny look.

After we got out of the car, we greeted the Volturi and listened to the screaming coming from the top of the cliff.
“That’s Jane and Alec on the track. They’ve been sliding down nonstop,” Renata said as I gave her a hug.

“They’re going nearly 100 miles per hour - pretty damn impressive for a luge track.” Peter said as we approached him.

“Where’s Char?” I asked, looking around.

“She’s about to go down,” he said and pointed. “I wanted to wait for you two before we all ran up. Grab yourselves either an inner tube or one of those sled things.”

A few minutes later, I sat down on one of the inner tubes and pushed myself down the track. It was fast and while I wasn’t scared, I still screamed and laughed. It was thrilling and I was glad I wasn’t a human anymore because I knew it would have been too much for me to handle if I was.

When I reached the bottom, I looked up to see Jasper sliding down without a sled. He actually looked like one of those luge racers the way he kept his body still as it twisted and turned down the track.

“Wow, that was fun!” he exclaimed as he landed at the bottom.

“I want to try it your way,” I said as we walked back up the hill.

A few more slides later, we decided to walk towards the movie tent and check it out.

“Hi Bella and Jasper!” Gianna came up and gave me a hug before shaking hands with Jasper. “Do you like the tent? It was my idea and Jane helped. After the party, most of the rugs and cushions will decorate our private quarters.”

“It’s beautiful and really exotic,” I said as I looked around. “How did you come up with this idea?”

“Part of the idea came from Marcus’ heritage… well, sort of. After I learned of vampires, he told me a little about his history and I automatically pictured Ancient Egypt and movies like ‘Cleopatra’ or ‘Lawrence of Arabia’. Even though I’ve now seen paintings and drawings from their early years
as vampires, those images still stick in my mind. I wanted to try my hands at decorating with this party first before I decorate our rooms and I think I managed to make it look cozy, yet elegant. I want to look like a fantasy bedouin tent.”

“I like it,” Jasper said. “It looks comfortable and even though some of the fabrics look really expensive, I noticed the cushions were more durable. I think everybody will enjoy watching movies in here.”

Gianna grinned and said most of the guards that have already come into the tent have said similar and I could see she was excited and a little relieved.

“Movies will start soon, I want to try the giant slide first,” she said and ran off towards the luge track.

The celebration was nothing like Jasper and I imagined it to be. Everybody was so casual. If they weren't flying down the luge track, they were gathered in the movie tent. We sat through a couple movies before heading home for some alone time.

“I never expected a holiday celebration like this,” Jasper quipped as we headed back towards the training fields, several hours later. “With the Cullens, there was the grand Christmas tree followed by elaborate presents. Of course, we'd all have to wear clothes chosen by Alice and they all had to coordinate.”

“Oh? What was the worse thing you had to wear?” I asked. I couldn't help it after seeing the look of disgust coming from him.

“Hard to say. I think it is a tie between all of us wearing matching sweaters or pajamas.”

I laughed as I imagined them all wearing the same thing. “Was it to be funny? Do you have pictures?”

“God woman, even if I did, I would have burned them all,” he all but growled out. “Promise me we would never do stupid shit like that. And no, it wasn’t done on purpose to be funny. They took it pretty seriously.”

“How about ugly Christmas sweaters? I bet Peter and Char would be game to join up.”
He laughed. “Yeah I could see Peter looking for the most obnoxious one. In fact, he'd make it a mission.”

Once we arrived at the training field, we noticed immediately the atmosphere had changed. There was a tension in the air as the Volturi gathered outside the movie tent.

“We received some news,” Aro announced as we approached the crowd. “There had been an incident regarding the Cullens. We've ordered them to return to Volterra immediately. Right now, they're under escort.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“The idiots took her out to feed and she had another episode. They're lucky they were in a remote area, far from human eyes and ears. It didn't take much effort for Santiago to witness it all.”

“Yeah, before y'all arrived, Demetri said Santi was able to record a clip of the incident on his phone,” Peter said. “We were waiting for you two to show up before showing it. Come on, we've set up the movie tent to play it on the big screen.”

“No!” Alice's unmistakable screeching began. “Where am I? I'm supposed to be shopping! You've kidnapped me!”

A grainy image appeared and quickly focused on a small figure stomping about.

It was was similar to her meltdown in the castle only this time, the Cullens were in an open field. We saw one of them, probably Esme, approach Alice but was quickly swatted away. The rest of the family were just standing there, not doing anything. Then, there was more screaming from her.

“Santiago said it went on for nearly 10 minutes before he finally went up to Carlisle,” Caius explained. “The man was clearly defeated and the family left without incident. Well, except for Miss Cullen. Luckily, Santi was quick on his toes and managed to convince her that he was there for her bidding. Her attitude changed quickly and he managed to escort her into a transport vehicle.”
“As soon as he got on the road towards the nearest airfield, he contacted us. We've dispatched some soldiers. They should reach the aircraft within the hour,” Aro continued. “Unfortunately, it means we'll need to cut today's celebrations short for today.”

Hours later, once we received word that the airplane landed in Italy, we all left the party and went back to business. Jasper and I decided to ride with Peter and Char, since they wanted to swing back to their place and grab their robes. We thought it was a good idea as well.

“I don’t think this will be a pleasant meeting,” Jasper said as the four of us headed back towards Volterra. “Nobody seemed pleased that the celebrations were interrupted by the Cullens, not that I blame them. Aro gave them some sound advice and somehow, things got fucked up and they could have exposed our kind to humans. Could you imagine if that outburst occurred out in Forks or anywhere close to a town?”

I shook my head as my brain started picturing bad scenarios. “I can’t help but be curious as to their excuse,” I admitted. “They won’t get killed, will they?”

“I don’t know, to be honest,” Jasper said. “There will be punishments doled out to them but I don’t know the severity.”

As soon as we entered Volterra, he added, “I guess we’ll all soon find out.”

Unlike the first few meetings, the Cullens were escorted by soldiers as they entered the throne room. I noticed immediately that Alice wasn’t with her family but rather, she was led in by a pair of soldiers and directed to stand aside from the rest of the Cullens.
“Carlisle, fancy seeing you and your family back so soon,” Aro announced with great sarcasm.

“It seems we made a serious error,” Carlisle whispered, looking clearly defeated.

The rest of the Cullens were smart enough to keep their eyes downcast and their mouths shut.

“So, what happened?” Aro continued, clearly giving Carlisle an opportunity to speak before scrying out the truth.

“We… I,” he choked out. “I thought we could go hunting as a family. As a bonding opportunity. I… I truly believed if we supported Alice and made her feel like family again, she’d revert back to her old self.” He swallowed hard and sighed. “I was mistaken.”

“Mistaken,” Aro repeated. “You do realize what happened could have exposed not just your family but our kind to humans. It would appear you did not heed my advice now would it?”

“I thought we could minimize some of her symptoms if we used hunting as a bonding moment, like old times.”

Aro was clearly exasperated. Had he been human, I could almost imagine his head hurting from Carlisle’s explanation. “Miss Cullen, do you have anything to say?”

Alice looked up at the kings and smiled. “I’ve enjoyed shopping at Bond Street with the other queens today. Can I now be excused to my chambers?”

If looks could kill, the Cullens would have been nothing but ashes from Aro’s look. He quickly nodded to the soldiers and they escorted Alice back to her room. “As you were saying?”

“I…” Carlisle began and then threw his arms up. “Alright!” he shouted. She’ll stay here. Is that what you want?”

“It wasn’t a matter of what we wanted, Carlisle. Surely you, a man in the medical profession,
should understand this was what you would have called, medical advice. Thanks to your arrogance, you believed you could prove us wrong and it backfired. And now you’re agreeing to let her stay? I ought to deny your request and have Miss Alice stay with you permanently but seeing as she’s unpredictable and you’re unwilling to recognize the potential dangers, we’ll allow her to remain in Volterra. Just remember this - your so-called daughter is not a toy that can be returned because it is broken. We’ll take her in as we did before, however, since you chose not to heed our advice, we have no choice but to punish you.”

Before Carlisle could respond, Aro stood up. “Please remain here while my brothers and I confer on the appropriate punishment.” The other kings followed suit and left the room.

Nobody moved as we waited for the kings to return. The Cullens were scared and I didn’t need a special gift to see it. I imagined I’d be too, if I was in their situation. I was just about to start imagining different scenarios when the side door opened and the kings returned.

“Kebi, can you come up here for a moment?” Caius said as the three sat down on their thrones.

The soldier approached them and they all began speaking in what must have been Kebi’s native language.

“Thank you Kebi,” Aro said as he motioned for the soldier over to the side. “You’ve been a tremendous help and I think once you finish this small task we’ll be asking of you, you can be a permanent member of the guards and a member of our family.”

“It would be an honor, your majesties,” Kebi replied. “Thank you so much for your generosity.”

“Cullens, please step forward,” Aro ordered and waited until they followed his request. “Before we get to your punishment, please keep in mind that we have sentenced vampires to death for violating lesser rules than the ones you’ve broken. That being said, we’ll first address the issue of the very transgressions that have brought you all here today.”

I could almost see the Cullens pale with Aro’s words.

“You allowed one of your family members to lose control and potentially expose our kind to humans,” Aro continued. Granted you were in a remote area but the potential was there. You will all be subject to punishment for your actions or, as the case may be, lack thereof.” All three kings glared at the Cullens. “The next thing we need to address is how you’ve all decided to abandon
your idea of caring for your so-called daughter and instead, you’ve returned her to our custody. In other words, you all realized you couldn’t handle her so you decided to bring her back. While this in itself isn’t a crime, what you’ve done seems inhumane.”

“If I may continue,” Marcus said, earning a nod from Aro. “Carlisle, we debated on how to punish you and your family. As Aro said, we’ve sentenced vampires to death for less. The three of us debated and decided that because image is important to you as the Cullens, we’d take that away from you.” It appeared Carlisle was about to say something but Marcus raised his hand, halting him. “Please, don’t try to deny it, whether you see it or not, your image in human society is very important. You’re a prominent doctor who, along with his wife, has adopted grown children. You all drive expensive vehicles and live in a fancy house. So we decided to change that.”

“What?” Carlisle exclaimed.

“Yes, we’ve decided your punishment would entail changing your image,” Caius replied, an almost malicious smile on his face. “At the first of the year, we’ll seize your properties, all of them and your assets will be frozen. In addition, you and your family will be relocated to Kebi’s village for the next decade. There, you’ll be the doctor and you’ll help her people who are suffering from a plight that has caused them to become blind. You’ll treat them and try to help them as much as possible. The children will require basic schooling. You, as a family will help the village by teaching them basic skills so they don’t have to depend on others.”

Although the Cullens remained silent, they all had a similar look of horror.

“Your initial sentence is 10 years. During this decade, we will send you regular missives regarding your daughter’s health status,” Aro said as he moved closer to the seemingly frozen vampires. “Be warned, if we receive reports that you or your family have shirked in your duties, we’ll adjust your sentence accordingly.”

“B...but my job at the hospital,” Carlisle stuttered.

“That is why we’ve given you until January First to get your affairs in order. If you aren’t back at Volterra before midnight, we’ll have no choice but to impose more traditional punishments, if you understand my meaning.”

“No, we’ll all be here. We’ll go now if that’s alright. I need to resign from the hospital and then we’ll prepare for our adventure. Based on the language spoken, I take it we’re heading to the African continent?” Carlisle asked.
“You’re correct,” Aro answered. “Kebi’s village is located in a very remote area in northern Africa. Over the years, due to the negligent dumping of mining chemicals into nearby water, the people have begun to lose their sight, some of the children have been born with their eyelids fused shut - completely blind to the world. During her stint as one of our soldiers, Kebi has used her salary to help her people the only way she knew possible. There has been government-type aid sent to the area but due to the volatile conditions in the area, both due to politics and the mountainous terrain, help has been sporadic… that is, until you take residence there.”

“Be warned, we will be aware of your activities. Any attempt to escape or break out of your sentence will be considered an act of mutiny, punishable by death,” Caius added as he continued to glare at the Cullens. “Are we clear?”

Carlisle whispered “yes”, while the rest nodded.

“Very well, you are dismissed and we shall see you on New Year’s Day,” Marcus said and waved them off. “Demetri and Renata, please escort the Cullens to the airport. I’ll radio ahead to have a plane fueled and ready to take them back to Alaska. The rest of you, I’m sorry that our celebration was interrupted but we can continue once everybody’s back.”

We all nodded just as the cars pulled away, the Cullens never looking back.

New Year’s Eve

“Happy anniversary and happy birthday, Jasper!” the group cheered just as Jasper and I arrived at the club.

“You guys really got the ‘Casino Royale’ theme down pat,” Jasper said as we greeted our Volturi family.

“This is a beautiful party,” I added.
“You gave us the casino idea when you told us about your Vegas wedding,” Heidi replied with a smile. “The party downstairs is completely sold out and even after we released more tickets a couple days ago.”

I looked out the tinted windows to the club below. Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves with alcohol while they gambled on various casino games. “Are they really playing with money?”

“Not really,” Demetri answered. “They buy chips and those with the most chips at the end of the night will win a prize. All the money will go to the various orphanages so they have funds to provide the children with birthday presents.”

“After you both said in lieu of gifts, you wanted to donate to various charities, we thought we should extend the idea to the party as well. We’ll still make a hefty profit tonight with all the food and drinks,” Renata explained. “Oh here is our check to your organization, Bella.”

I took the envelope from her hand and carefully opened it, revealing a six-figured check to the Charlie Swan Foundation.

“Oh you guys,” I began as venom tears began to well in my eyes. Jasper was immediately by my side. “This is wonderful, we can bring more kids to the summer camp this next year. We can also award more scholarships!”

“You’re doing a great thing, honoring your father like that,” Marcus said as blood was being served in champagne glasses. “To Jasper and Isabella, may you both have many happy lifetimes together.”

If I could still blush, I bet I would have been red with all the attention. “I actually have a gift for you, Jasper,” I said and looked over to Char who pulled out a small gift box. “Here.”

Jasper shook the box and heard the soft rattling before undoing the bow. “What…” he began and held up a key.

“It’s your bike! I had them ship it here for you.”

“Thank you, baby girl,” he said with a kiss on my lips. “I can’t wait to cruise along the winding
roads. You know, you can probably get a bike of your own now.”

“Let’s wait until I am more comfortable driving,” I quipped. “I’m still afraid I’ll break the steering wheel off. Soon though, I do want to try riding a motorcycle on my own again now that I’m more durable.”

“Before we all go downstairs to gamble, I have a little something for you, Isabella,” Jasper said as he took a hold of my hand and slipped off my silver rings, replacing them with my real ones as he repeated his vows to me.

“I love you so much Jasper,” I whispered as he pulled me into his arms.

“And I love you, my Isabella.”

Our family cheered once again.

“Come on, let’s enjoy what’s left of this year and celebrate 2008,” Aro announced as he pulled his phone out. “We’re in for a treat too, the Cullens have just boarded a chartered flight bound for Italy.”

We all cheered again before heading downstairs to play. We were all well fed so being around the happy and intoxicated humans didn’t bother me. We had a fun night, taking breaks to head back upstairs for some quiet time or more refreshments.

As the night wore on, the party became more and more lively. Even though the gambling wasn’t exactly real in terms of winning actual money, there were folks who took it seriously, especially at the baccarat and poker tables. Alec and Jane, despite their youthful appearance, were having fun playing roulette while I staked a spot at the craps table with Renata and Char.

“Ten! Nine! Eight!” The entire nightclub shouted as the clock approached midnight. “Three! Two! One! Happy new year!” Confetti rained down on the club. There were plenty of noise makers and slurred conversations before ‘Auld Lang Syne’ began to play.

“Happy new year, Jasper,” I whispered against his lips.
“Happy new year, Isabella. Here’s to a less drama filled 2008,” he replied.

A chorus of “I’ll drink to that” sounded around the room as our vampire family looked at us and grinned.

I couldn’t agree more. The year had been full of wonderful changes - being married to Jasper, my change to become a vampire, and being a part of a wonderful and sometimes quirky new vampire family. With the good, there was also some drama with Maria and then Alice with her harebrained scheme and her medical issue. It came to no surprise the Cullens ended up making an appearance and causing trouble. As I reflected back on the year, I too, hoped for a calm year or better yet, several years.

“You okay, baby girl?” Jasper asked as he wrapped his arms around me.

“Never better,” I replied and then explained what I was thinking of moments before.

I looked around the nightclub, spotting my family as Jasper and I swayed to the music. I had no doubt there would be future situations we’d have to face, whether it be as a couple or as a member of the Volturi, but in that moment I wanted to enjoy a drama-free life and move past my newborn stage.

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:
A HUGE THANK YOU to all you readers who have followed this story. At times, I never thought it would end. I’ve enjoyed writing this story for you all and thank you for indulging me.

LetsJustDance and AlexisDanaan have worked their butts off on making this story make sense and look decent. :) If it weren’t for them, I think most of my writing wouldn’t make sense.

As I said, I have an epilogue left and it is a bit long. It’s written but needs to be prettied up before I can post it. If all goes well, it should be sometime in January.

Have a happy happy new year! Be safe and thank you again! XO ~sushi
Surprise! Here it is. I know I didn’t reply back to the reviews from the last chapter but I thought you all would rather get to reading this epilogue.

I’ll leave this note short and just add that I’m not SM - just like to play with her characters.

See you at the bottom!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Four Months Later

JPOV

“Jasper! Isabella!” Aro greeted. “I’m glad you’re stopping by before journeying back to the States. I was just about to brief everyone here on the Kebi situation.”

When the Cullens were sent to Kebi’s village, she met up with them in order to show them around her village and introduce them to her people. She was scheduled to return to Volterra to be trained as part of the guard but had not returned.

Isabella and I entered the throne room and quickly greeted the rest of our family. Really, it had only been a few hours since we gathered at the nightclub where they threw a ‘going away’ party for us.

“Kebi is staying in her village for an indefinite amount of time,” Aro announced. “When Sulpicia and I visited the village last week, we noticed that she’s really determined to help her people. And while she won’t admit it, she fancies young Edward Cullen.”

“Edward?” I asked and Aro chuckled.

“They’re not mates and so far, there isn’t a romance brewing. She just finds him interesting.”

“How are the rest of them adjusting to a simpler way of life?” Demetri asked.

Aro shrugged. “Carlisle is in his element helping the villagers with immunizations and basic medical services. At night, he has been researching ways to not only clean up the water, but preventing chemicals from being dumped and polluting the area. The women spend their time tutoring the children. The other one, the one mated to the blonde, he has been helping the men with hunting. Young Edward doesn’t have a specific niche like the others but he’ll spend his time helping everybody.”

“And his demeanor?” I asked out of curiosity, not really able to picture Edward, let alone the others, in a remote, primitive village.

“He seems to be adjusting. Of course, I didn’t spend time talking to them but from my observations
and from what Kebi has reported, they’re all adjusting. I think we all made the right decision to send them away from society for a while,” Aro replied. “Jasper and Isabella, are you completely packed for your trip?”

“We packed a few things,” Isabella replied. “We decided not to completely close out the house since we have every intention of returning. In the meantime, Peter and Char can stay there so you can have your country home again.”

“They don’t have to move,” Aro said and then smiled. “Sulpicia is eager to work on the gardens now that the weather is warming up again.”

“That’s why we decided to head back to Texas. We finally found a company to move our existing house to my family land and we’ve also hired a construction company to build a house on the empty plot,” I explained. “Rather than keep the land empty in Huntsville, we plan to sell it after a new house is built. The land didn’t mean as much to us as the house itself which is why we wanted to move it.”

“After it’s moved, we’re going to fix it up to vampire standards. I thought it would be another good way to learn control.” Isabella added. “Plus, I really want to see Texas through vampire eyes.”

“If you need anything, let us know. We’ll be happy to come out and help,” Demetri offered. “If you can, plan on coming back in the winter. I think we’ll have my place ready for some remodeling. The human tenants currently living in that building will have new places to live by then.”

“That sounds good,” I said and clapped him on the back. “We’ll definitely be back.”

July 2008

JPOV

“Try again,” I said as Isabella pulled apart an origami crane made of that tissue wrapping paper.

“I did it!” she exclaimed as she held up the wrinkled paper. “And look, no tears!”

I pulled her into my arms. “I think you have a good sense of control now, baby girl. I think we can officially move you out of that so-called, newborn phase.”

“I’m glad Gianna and Marcus told us about this exercise. We both moved out of that phase today.”

“You miss them. I can feel it.”

Isabella gave me a sheepish smile. “Yeah, I mean I love it out here with the blue skies and now with our newly renovated house on your family land, it’s wonderful! But you’re right, I do miss the convenience of seeing them whenever we want. Don’t get me wrong, I love spending alone time with you…”

“No, I know what you mean,” I said as I sent her reassurance and pulled her into my arms. I stared at the running creek for a few seconds. “I miss the camaraderie, too.”

“Knowing we’ll be back later this year helps. Can we explore America for a bit before we go back?”
“Sure, you ready for a road trip?”

“Oh yeah, can we stop in Forks so I can say ‘hi’ to my dad?”

“Sure, we’ll go to Forks when it is dark to draw less attention, if you’d like. You should know, I’ll never say no to that.”

“I love you, Jasper.”

“I love you, Isabella,” I whispered moments later.

She wrapped her hand behind my neck and pulled me into a heated kiss.

October 2008
Volterra
JPOV

“I’m glad you’re all here,” Caius addressed us after we greeted the others. “There’s a rumor regarding your maker, Jasper.”

“Oh?” I replied, noticing his concern and steeled myself for whatever news was to come.

“A lone vampire was overheard at Catacomb, bragging about the discovery of some hidden journals of Maria’s.”

“Yes,” Demetri said with a nod. “I was guarding near the door while the twins were feeding when he came in and started talking on his phone. Thanks to Alec, we brought him back and Aro scried the truth out of him.”

I looked over at the king and he gave a slight nod.

“Obviously we confiscated the phone and discovered he was talking to his human consort about his plan to conquer the same area once occupied by Maria. He promised this young woman a vampire life by his side as well.”

“In all the years I spent in her camp, I didn’t realize she kept journals, though she was arrogant enough to do so. Is there a danger? Has the evidence been confiscated?”

“We just learned of the news the day before yesterday,” Aro explained. “I saw memories that he’s already attempted to build an army but they’re hidden somewhere deep in Mexico. While we don’t wish to impose, we’d like your assistance in leading the expedition to find the vampires and the cache of journals.”

I looked over at Isabella and noticed the determination coming from her.

“Bro, we’re coming too, it won’t just be you two,” Peter said, giving me a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

I nodded. “We will both help out. I know of some areas near the old camps where we can look.”

“Felix and I will be there as well as the twins,” Heidi said.
“You can show us your place when we’re done!” Jane quipped. “Did you bring your robes and Volturi emblems?”

“I packed them for us,” Isabella replied. “I wasn’t sure if we’d need them so I hesitated but I’m glad I didn’t leave them in Texas.”

“If everybody’s ready, we can get you to the airfield within a couple hours,” Caius said. “Please keep us informed. We will keep Raul in the dungeons.”

“And what of the girl?” I asked.

“We have her in the guest wing of the castle. The vampire who cooked for Gianna is still with us and has prepared meals for her,” Marcus answered. “So far, Carla has been a well-behaved guest with an interesting story. It seems she isn’t truly enamored by the young vampire, Raul. He, according to her, is nothing more than a means to an end.”

“The poor girl was born with a bad heart. We can hear it skipping several times a minute. In addition to her congenital heart condition, her mother’s side of the family has a long history of cancer. The odds of her living past her thirtieth year are slim. When she met Raul and learned of his secret, she knew she could either die at his hands or, if he had enough control, she would awaken a vampire.”

~A few days later~

“Jasper, you and Peter are familiar with these lands, correct?” Demetri asked.

I nodded and gestured over to the jagged cliffs up ahead. “The camp moved a few times but we were always in sight of that mountain range - the *Sierra Madre Occidental*. It’s a little different now than over a century ago…some of the waterways have been dammed up for the humans but yeah, that was a familiar landmark.”

“I’d say, the journals are nearby,” Peter said as he tapped his head. “It won’t tell me where but I think if we work together, we can find either the rogue vampires or the journals.”

I nodded. “I agree though we should narrow our search…it is nearly a thousand miles across, afterall.”

After running a couple hundred miles, we came across an area that had a faint smell of vampires so we decided to split up and search the general vicinity. We relied on hand signals and made sure our Volturi emblems were on us, in case we needed help at any time.

We worked as a team to search each mountain from top to bottom. Isabella and I climbed up to one of the mountain tops and noticed a cave-like structure that was practically hidden amongst the rocks. I sniffed the air and there were no lingering hints of vampire so we squeezed inside.

“Jasper, look,” Isabella whispered as she held up a pale, blue ruffle piece of fabric.

I flashed over to her and touched the delicate fabric. “I think it was Maria’s. It looks like a dress she often wore during my first few years in her camp.”

“So we’re close?”

“I think we’re on the right track. I don’t think the journals would be here. Or if they were, not the whole collection. She was very smart and wouldn’t reveal all her tricks at once.”
A thorough search came up with nothing so we left to search the rest of the mountain before moving to the next.

A birdlike whistle sounded just as we were descending. “Char,” I mouthed out and took her hand as we raced over to where my siblings were.

The Volturi were already there when we arrived and Peter held up a dusty book. He quickly flipped through the pages and immediately, I recognized the calligraphy-like handwriting. I nodded as Peter put the book in a leather satchel.

“It was in that mountain. There was a hidden cave,” Char explained as she pointed. “We didn’t check the mountain next to it.”

“We came up with nothing,” Alec said and I showed them the piece of fabric Isabella found.

“Let’s split up and search. Even from here, it looks like there would be a lot of nooks and crannies,” Peter remarked.

He was correct and there was also a faint, lingering scent of vampire so we knew we were on the right track.

Isabella halted in front of me and stared at a fallen rock. I was just about to pass her when she grabbed my arm and shook her head.

“It seems off,” she whispered and began to lift it off the ground.

The ground revealed a small, carefully carved recess that held a book - another of Maria’s journals.

I sent her my pride and kissed the side of her head as we headed down.

“I’ll catch up with you. I’m going to help Jane if that’s okay,” she said.

“Sure, I’ll go find Alec. Be careful and don’t hesitate to use the signal if needed.”

She nodded and scrambled to an upper ledge where Jane was.

~*~*~*~

BPOV

Jane and I were now on the back end of the mountain, ready to rejoin the group. Our search was not quite successful and we were ready to search another mountain as we started our descent.

“Well, aren’t you two tasty things,” a male voice sneered.

It was strange since neither one of us smelled another vampire.

“Surprised to see me?” he continued as he jumped in front of us.

I clasped my hand over my chest to show my surprise, which I definitely was, and in doing so, I made sure to press the homing signal.

Jane and I stood closer. I could see from my peripheral vision that she looked scared so I acted the same. Inside though, I was calculating his body size and knew, if we needed to, we could take him on.
“Who… who are you?” I stuttered on purpose.

“Oh, you must be new. I’m Paul and I bet you two will be lots of fun.”

If I could, I would have thrown up from his creepy stares but kept my face from showing any signs of disgust.

“We were trying to find some shelter…you know, from the sun.” I pointed to the brightening sky. I checked to make sure my shield was firmly around me in case he moved closer.

“We could keep each other company,” Paul continued.

Jasper’s concern hit me and I let out a sigh of relief knowing that he was near. Jane must have interpreted the same thing because the next instant, Paul was writhing in pain.

When everybody showed up, Jasper punched Paul hard enough to crack the vampire’s jaw before nodding to Alec who quickly used his gift.

“We found more books but it seems you found yourselves a creep,” Peter joked.

“He didn’t really know who we were, with our robes,” Jane replied. “Luckily, Bella was on the same page and we played dumb. He didn’t have a scent though. That’s how he caught us by surprise.”

“He didn’t have any emotional signature either,” Jasper said. “That must be his gift. I’m not sure how he learned about his gift but after last year’s incident with that Riley newborn, nothing surprises me anymore.”

“Good job, we’ll radio Aro and let him know we’re bringing a suspect back. He’ll most likely send the soldiers to our coordinates and have them do the reconnaissance from here,” Demetri explained. “As soon as they arrive, we’ll head back to Volterra.”

“Okay, Isabella and I will fly back with y’all,” Jasper said as he pulled me into his arms.

~*~*~*~

A couple days later, during Paul’s trial, we learned that he was considered the guardian of the journals and he worked with a couple accomplices. We had recovered almost all of the books and the rest were uncovered by the Volturi soldiers. The books, along with Paul’s partners in crime, were brought back to Volterra.

Caius wanted to destroy them at first but later decided to keep them in the archives so they can be studied later.

As for the three rogue vampires, they were defiant during their trial and threatened the kings, which resulted in their execution. Hours after, one of the servants found Carla unconscious in her chamber. A letter explained that her health had taken a turn for the worse and even if she chose to become a vampire, she was afraid her heart wouldn’t be strong enough for her to complete the transition.
December 2009

JPOV

“Okay, pretend you’re a cat when you land,” I whispered to Isabella.

She nodded. “Like a cat and if I can’t make the jump in one go, it’s okay to grab onto the metal beam but I need to mind my strength,” she repeated the instructions I gave her earlier in the evening. “But Jasper, what if I bend it? I really don’t want to ruin the Eiffel Tower!”

“Shh.” I sent her reassurance and wrapped my arm around her waist, bringing her against me. “You’ll be fine. I’ll be with you the entire time.”

Isabella took a deep breath and looked at the top of the tower. “Let’s do this.”

I let her jump first and saw her grab one of the horizontal beams about half way up the tower. She swung herself up gracefully and waited for me. I jumped up after her and grabbed the same beam with one hand before I lifted myself up to stand next to her.

“I think I want to climb onto the uppermost deck and see the view as a human would first,” she said while looking up.

“Okay, I’m right behind you.”

When we landed on the third deck, we walked around as I pointed out some of the city landmarks before we climbed up to the very top of the historic structure.

“This is so pretty even though the city is asleep,” Isabella exclaimed excitedly. “This is so cool, Jasper. How many times have you gone up here?”

“It is beautiful and I’ve only viewed the city from up here once...it was in the early 60s. It was a family trip and after watching a show at Moulin Rouge, the Cullens went hunting. I had a slip only weeks before so my regimen was to gorge myself with animal blood. I had fed earlier that day so I was allowed to skip the trip and decided to climb up here for a few hours.”

“It’s peaceful up here.”

“Very much so,” I replied. “I did get chastised for wandering around the city on my own though.” I let out a scoff and shook my head. “I was still fairly new to the family so I thought it was my punishment was fitting. Little did I know it would escalate from there.”

“Hey, enough of that,” Isabella chided. “Think positive thoughts. You’re in a good place now and so am I.”

“Yes ma’am. So where would you like to go for our next adventure?”

“I picked this time, it’s your turn for the next trip,” she said.

“How about the Mayan pyramids?”

“Mr. Whitlock, you’ve got yourself a date!”
“Isabella, there’s a letter for you,” I said as soon as I was near the house.

She rushed by quickly and grabbed the envelope before I had a chance to walk in the door.

“Excited?” I asked as I followed her outside to our patio.

“Yes I am!” she exclaimed as she tore the envelope open and waved around the contents. “My diploma!”

“Congratulations, baby girl, you’re now a college graduate!”

She traced the embossed lettering with her fingertips. “I’m a college graduate!” she whispered. “Dad would have been so proud.”

She sighed wistfully and smiled at me. “You’ve got the same envelope too, is that your diploma?”

“I suppose it is.” I grinned and flipped the envelope over a couple times.

“Open it!”

“You sure?” I teased and received a glare in return.

“Well if you’re not going to open it, I will.”

Seeing how excited she was, I slowly ripped the envelope and looked at my degree. Even though I had received a few in my past, this meant a little more to me. It was the first time I was able to receive a degree on a subject of my choice. It was also an accelerated course we completed together, thanks to the help from our Volturi family. They were able to convince the university that we were studying abroad and whatever administrative details that were needed. The guards, having studied various subjects through the years, helped us with our studies and proctored our exams.

Technically, we could have graduated a year after Isabella’s change but we didn’t want to arouse any suspicion so we travelled in between ‘our studies’.

“We should hang them in our library here,” Isabella said, breaking me out of my thoughts.

“Here and not our house in Texas?”

“We seem to be here a few more months more than Texas,” she said with a shrug. “Plus, we did most of our studies here.

“We can do anything you want,” I said with a wink. “I think we should go out and celebrate. Any ideas?”

“Since we’re college grads, let’s go to the club and celebrate with everybody. Then maybe afterwards, we can run down to Catacomb for a meal.”

“I’ll call them up right now.”
You guys need to watch this show!” Jane exclaimed as soon as we arrived at the guard tower at Volterra.

“What? What’s going on?” I asked and laughed as I hugged and greeted everybody.

Jasper and I sat down just as a show began. I really wasn’t paying attention at first though.

“Whoa! That guy looks like Caius! Or a human version. What is this?”

“It’s a show about vampires,” Jane explained. “The guy there, is named Klaus and he’s a hybrid.”

“A what?” Jasper asked.

“He’s half vampire and half werewolf!” Jane continued. She started to laugh almost uncontrollably. “You should have seen Caius’ face when he heard that last night. He was so mad at Marcus.”

“Yeah, this show was Marcus’ idea and he had Chelsea compel some human television people to produce this show. Later, he found this actor and got them to hire him to play the role. They’ve been watching it off and on and this episode aired last night,” Alec explained. “Even from up here in the tower, we could hear Caius threatening to destroy Marcus’ wing of the castle for creating the hybrid idea.”

“Oh, it was hilarious!” Heidi quipped. “You know how Caius feels about werewolves. The queens thought it was funny too which was likely the reason nothing was destroyed.”

“Where was Aro in all this?” I asked.

“He kept saying he was ‘Team Switzerland’ and then spent the evening watching the show up here. He kept saying how uncanny it was that the actor looked so much like Caius,” Jane continued. “I think he was happy to see Marcus in a good mood. While he wasn’t a stony figure wrought with grief as most people believed, he was the most serious one for centuries. I guess you could say, it wasn’t until Gianna arrived that he woke up.”

“Actually it was close to a millenia,” Demetri corrected. “We would have never seen that type of behavior if he hadn’t found his other half.”

“I sort of know the feeling, myself,” Jasper quipped as the show continued after the commercial break.

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August 2011

I sat at my desk just as Isabella requested. I could hear her pattering around the closet and from her mischevious emotions, I knew she was up to something.

“I’m sorry Professor Whitlock for being tardy.”

If I could drool, I probably would have as Isabella hurried into our library. My jeans felt extremely
tight as I saw she was wearing a very short skirt and looked very much like a naughty school girl. I remembered this was one of the costumes she had bought years ago for Gianna’s coronation ball.

“Miss Swan,” I said sternly, quickly catching on her game. “You’re more than just tardy. Class ended an hour ago.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, giving me a wide-eyed, innocent look as she started to play with the hem of her extremely short skirt. “I… I was at the library doing homework.”

I shook my head and rested my elbows on the desktop. “Miss Swan, one of the student’s parents saw you at the mall earlier today. It didn’t look like you were studying.”

“I’m sorry, professor,” she replied and leaned forward giving me a view down her shirt that was way too small for her. “Is there a way I can make up for missing class?” She started to draw circles on the table.

“I don’t know, Miss Swan. This isn’t the first time you’ve been caught skipping class and as a result, your grades are falling.”

“Surely there is something I can do? I’d do anything, Professor Whitlock.”

I tried to look as though I was contemplating the offer. Isabella’s arousal was building and I could tell she was enjoying this little game.

“I think the first thing we need to address is your lie about being at the library.”

“I said I was sorry,” she said and added a pout.

“Not good enough. I’m afraid another punishment is in order.” I gestured with my finger for her to come closer. “Brace your hands on my desk and bend forward.”

As soon as she got into position, I rose from my seat. I was eager to move this game forward so we could both enjoy ourselves. I growled as I saw her long, trim legs and her ass barely covered by her uniform. Without giving her any further instructions, I smacked her ass - not enough to hurt her but had she been human, she would have had an instant bruise.

“Oh!” she exclaimed and I could hear a soft moan coming from her lips.

It was more than obvious that my naughty little temptress of a wife was enjoying herself. I gave her another little tap and this time, her moan was a little louder.

“Are you sorry for fibbing now?”

“Yes! Please, Professor Whitlock, I’ll do anything to avoid failing class,” she panted out and started to rub herself against me. “Anything!”

I reached under her skirt and pulled her panties off. She was wet and I could feel my eyes darkening. I was finding it harder to stay in that professor role as I traced my finger along her bare sex. I stood up and spun her so she was now facing me. I grabbed her small blouse and tore it off, sending tiny buttons all over the floor. Her eyes darkened and she started panting. She reached up grabbing my shirt and copied me, sending more plastic buttons skidding across the floor.

“Jasper,” she moaned out and I could see she was no longer the naughty student, but Isabella, my minx of a wife.
I pulled her closer to me and hooked her leg around my hip before pressing her down to the desk. We shared a heated kiss as she fumbled to undo my jeans. Once I was free, I simply lifted her skirt and thrust into her.

I alternated my motions from slow to fast, gentle and hard - earning growls and moans of pleasure from her lips. I nibbled on her neck, right over her first bite mark and she wrapped her legs around me even tighter.

“More…please,” she pleaded.

It didn’t take long before I sent her over the edge. I stripped us of the rest of our clothes and still sheathed inside of her, I lay down in front of the fireplace with her on top. Soon, she set a frantic pace and I couldn’t hold back. I started to caress her body to send her over the edge with me. One more kiss and then I sank my teeth along her collarbone just as she bit into my neck.

“That was fun,” she whispered as she drew random designs on my skin with her finger. “I started to lose it when you spanked me though.”

I chuckled as I ran my fingers through her hair. “I didn’t want you to get upset over it so I tapped you a little harder than if you were a human.”

“I liked it. I’ve been wanting to wear the outfit for a while but at the time, I had to control my strength. As time went on, I wanted to make the outfit more, um… interesting. Luckily I found a couple bras that I had left here in Texas.”

“Yeah, I can see how the change really enhanced your body,” I growled out and pulled her so she was laying on top of me. “I love you, Isabella.”

“And I love you, Jasper… my naughty professor.”

February 2012

BPOV

“Hello Isabella and Jasper!” Aro greeted via webcam. “How is your Teotihuacan adventure?”

“It’s wonderful, obviously we’re only there at night but we’ve gotten a chance to sneak into the interior,” I replied.

“I sent you some video we took while inside,” Jasper added. “How are things in Volterra?”

“Nothing new here but we have news about the Cullens,” Aro said. “Carlisle’s endless campaign to bring awareness of the village’s health situation has finally gained some attention. The World Health Organization is going to airlift some medicine and then later in the year, they’re planning to send a couple of health workers to assist him.”

“Kebi must be relieved,” I said. “Will the nearby mining stop?”

Aro shrugged. “It won’t stop but they’ve changed the chemicals and it isn’t as invasive. Still, it will take a couple of generations, at the very least, before the evidence is completely erased in the
environment and the humans. The medicine might help treat the symptoms but won’t eliminate the chemicals since they remain in the bloodstream.”

“But that’s not the only reason we decided to Skype with you,” Marcus said just as he entered the computer screen. “That young one, Edward... he is enamored with a young woman from a nearby village.”

“Nearby? So not Kebi’s village?” I asked, confused.

“Neighboring village, they’re upstream from the mines so they’re not affected. He must have ran into her during a hunt or something,” Marcus continued. “According to Kebi, they’re close and the girl, Ife, whose grandfather is chieftain, is hinting at marriage.”

“Does she know that he’s not human?” Jasper asked.

Marcus shook his head. “No, Kebi has observed the girl from afar and she believes Edward is extremely shy. Kebi said the girl isn’t bothered by the cooler skin but is more concerned about all the clothing he wears, you know, to hide his skin from the sun. They’re none the wiser.”

I wondered to myself if he would change this girl and my emotions caught Jasper’s attention. I explained my thoughts to him and the Volturi as well.

“We won’t stop him if that’s what he wishes and if she agrees, of course. He would still have make sure she knows the rules.

“If she’s someone he’d like to spend forever with,” I began. “I hope he finds the courage to change her.”

June 2013
JPOV

“Hey bro,” I greeted as I gave Peter a one-armed hug. “How was the island?”

“Char and I relaxed on the beach for what felt like days,” he said and grinned. “You know, you should spend a few days there since y’all are headin’ to Egypt.”

I nodded as we walked around the town square at Volterra. “I will do just that. She loves our adventure trips.”

“I know, Char and I love the postcards you send us. You don’t have to, but you know the missus... she loves that sort of thing. I bet the two are talkin’ about us right now.”

I chuckled as we neared the main entrance of the castle. “Yeah, Isabella was excited y’all were on the way. We’re finding ourselves out here more and more.”

“I hear you. Where we have to be careful around humans, out here, we don’t have to worry about that,” Peter remarked. “Any news on Eddie and his girl?”

“There’s been no news other than what we told you from last year.”

My phone alerted me to a text and I looked at the message. “There’s something going on, we’re
supposed to meet up at the conservatory.”

Minutes later, we were there and greeted the Volturi.

“Thank you all for coming. Whitlocks, welcome back!” Aro exclaimed. “There are a couple of developments. The first is Miss Cullen.”

I looked at Isabella as she grabbed my hand. “I hope she didn’t have another outburst,” she whispered.

“She’s stopped feeding on blood. It’s been nearly a fortnight,” Aro continued.

“She must be desicating by now,” Sulpicia said.

“She’s got a lot of bruising under her eyes,” Aro said. “I’ve dispatched Kebi to inform the Cullens. I suggested that I could fortify her blood with some human - not enough to turn her eyes but it might encourage her to feed.”

“Is she in any pain?” Isabella asked.

Aro shook his head. “She’s locked in her mind and hasn’t snapped out of it. We got a sample of her venom and the barbed growths have increased.”

“Do you think he’ll object? Carlisle, I mean?” I asked.

“To be honest, I don’t know,” Aro said. “The other news is the young girl who was betrothed to Edward has taken ill. When I spoke to Kebi last week, Ife had caught some sort of viral infection and Carlisle had not been successful in treating her.”

“She is betrothed to the young Cullen boy, is she not?” Caius asked. “Why doesn’t he simply change her?”

“That is a topic the Cullens have been discussing for several evenings now,” Aro continued. “The family is in favor of changing her but the boy isn’t. He holds steadfast that he doesn’t want to tarnish her in any way.”

“So he will let this girl die?” Heidi exclaimed. “That makes no sense. I just don’t understand him.”

“From the little interaction I’ve seen, I would have to say he doesn’t deserve that sort of happiness and will destroy any such relationship when and if the opportunity arises,” Marcus stated. “Unless he’s happy and comfortable with himself, he’ll have a difficult time in moving past it.”

“That would explain why he did what he did,” Isabella muttered with a roll of her eyes. “Isn’t there something that can be done? If this is his M.O., what would happen to the next gal? What if they weren’t able to get over him as quickly as I did? What if they became completely catatonic and thought it was all their fault? That sort of thing can damage a person.”

“She has a point,” I said as I held onto Isabella’s hand. “Granted he might not find another so-called love for a while, but one of these days he could hurt someone and put them in a situation they can’t get out of. All his talk about souls and the damned doesn’t mean much when his actions could potentially harm a young life.”

“You both have excellent points,” Aro said. “I’ll make sure Kebi sets the computer up for us to speak when she relays my message to Carlisle. Enjoy the rest of your day, I’ll keep you all apprised of news.”
“Good morning Jasper and Isabella.” Marcus was waiting for us at the lobby when we arrived. “Kebi is bringing Carlisle to the communications center. The rest of the family are following so we decided to gather you all as well. We’ll be meeting in the large conference room.”

“We’ll be starting the call soon,” Aro announced as we walked into the room.

Everybody was curious about the phone call and how Carlisle would react to the human blood suggestion. We were also curious about the girl, Ife, and if Eddie would change her. My guess was aligned with Marcus’ theory. I was almost willing to bet he would let the girl die a natural death, rather than change her.

The giant flat screen monitor was switched on and within minutes, the static was replaced by a grainy Kebi.

“Greetings, your majesties,” she said. “I apologize for the bad connection. We’re experiencing heavy rains. Doctor Carlisle is here with me and his family are also in the tent.”

The kings returned the greeting before Aro took over. “Carlisle, the reason why we contacted you is we have a situation with your daughter, Alice.”

“A situation? What happened?” Carlisle asked as the Cullens gathered closer to the computer.

Aro explained how Alice had stopped drinking blood and how venom samples showed an increase of the growths.

“You’ve tried everything?”

“Short of forcing her to drink, we’ve tried nearly everything,” Aro replied.

“Nearly?”

“We were curious if a small amount of human blood mixed into her animal blood would help. It won’t change her eye color or cure her but it might tempt her to drink.”

Carlisle shook his head and I was surprised the rest of the Cullens were silent.

“Kebi, did you get the email we sent you earlier? You can show the Cullens the time-elapsed video we included. Carlisle, this is footage of your daughter. As you will see, she appears to be in a catatonic state but her mind is still creating adventures.”

A few minutes later Carlisle nodded, a look of defeat in his eyes. In the background, we could see Esme and Rose silently sobbing.

“Yes, please help her. I cannot lose another daughter,” he pleaded.

“Ife?” Marcus asked and Carlisle gave a nod. “I thought she was betrothed to your son? Didn’t she want to be changed?”

“We all would have liked to but Edward…” Carlisle replied and turned to look at his family. “She never knew of our supernatural status and how we could have saved her.”

“Taking her soul isn’t saving,” Edward muttered.

Inside the conference room, many of us were rolling our eyes now and across from me, Heidi was
sliding some money over to Peter - apparently he had won some sort of wager.

“We knew he wouldn’t, we just had a pool of when,” Peter explained after putting the call temporarily on mute.

Isabella was shaking her head and I could see she was trying not to laugh. We all knew it wasn’t a funny matter - seeing a loved one suffering, but Eddie’s way of justifying things was funny in a very sad sort of way.

Aro wasn’t amused and quickly admonished the Cullens and Eddie for playing with humans in such a manner. He brought up everything Isabella made about how his decision could ruin a young girl or her family because of his so-called ideals.

“Isabella brought up a good point about adolescents and how sometimes, they’re easily swayed into believing they’re not good enough,” Aro continued. “Being a strong individual, she managed to overcome your words when you abandoned her. I have seen her memory and you should be ashamed. When you love someone and they love you back, there is a strong sense of trust. What you did, with your lies, was you broke that trust.”

“But…” Eddie began.

“You did it again with this Ife girl. You were betrothed to her. Were you going to follow through had she not taken ill?” Marcus asked. “Or, would you have given her some excuse that you were no good for her or she was no longer good for you?”

“What my brothers are trying to point out is your actions, while you think will save a human, could very well damage them far more than you realize,” Caius added. “I want you to think long and hard about your past and present actions. Surely, you’re an intelligent boy, you should have the knowledge to change your views for the future.”

“We’ll update you on Alice’s progress through Kebi,” Aro said. “Take heed of our advice, young Cullen. As parents, I would suggest you help guide your son into making better choices in the future, Carlisle.”

Before any of the Cullens could respond, Aro ended the call.

“I don’t think they’ll take heed,” he admitted. “While we admire the boy for his need to hold onto his convictions, we don’t think he’ll ever want to change.”

“I think you’re right,” Marcus said with a sigh. “If we are able to change through the ages, he’s able to. The problem is, I don’t think he wants to. It goes back to that whole self-destruction theory from yesterday.”

“The Cullens are quite a bunch,” Gianna chimed in. “They try to present themselves as being perfect but it seems to do nothing more than highlight their flaws.”

“There is one redeeming thing though,” Aro said. “That tall, blonde one, Rose… the one who spoke out so rudely. According to Kebi, she was one of Ife’s champions. She nearly ripped off the boy’s arm one night during a heated discussion about changing her.” He looked over to me. “Jasper, I’d like to think some of the harsh words you said to her years ago has hit home and I would hope this is a sign she’s making an effort to move past her demons.”

“Let’s hope so,” I said.
It appears that the small amount of human blood is helping. She’s drinking blood, though less than she used to. Carlisle has been informed.

I read the text message from Aro out to Isabella.

“Good, I couldn’t imagine refusing blood would be an easy way to die,” she said as I eased the controls on the plane.

“You don’t actually die. Once your body has taken on that bruising color, it will slowly start to turn grey. Your movements slow and you almost become stone-like,” I explained. “I have been starved for over a couple months before but never got to that slow-moving stage. One of the soldiers had tried to undermine Maria and she starved him for months before she entombed him inside a mountain. When she unearthed the area years later, the vampire couldn’t move. She gave him a drop of blood so he could focus on her and his emotions came back before she tore him up and destroyed him.”

“I guess nothing about that evil woman should surprise me,” she muttered. “Are we nearly to Egypt?”

“Well, we have to be a little creative about where we land due to some political unrest in that part of the country. We’ll be swimming in the dead of night to Egypt. From there, we’ll run to the Valley of the Kings so we can see all the ancient sites.”

“We’re sneaking into the Pyramid of Giza, right?”

“We can if we’re extra careful. I want to sneak into King Tut’s tomb.”

“I love these adventures!” she exclaimed. “Much more interesting than shopping trips and stuff.”

“Definitely, I knew I’d enjoy exploring the world with you.”

“I can’t believe you’re actually wanting a party,” Jasper teased as he wrapped his arms around me.

“It isn’t everyday that I am celebrating 30 years on earth. Besides, it is simple, a movie night under the stars with our family. Thank you for helping me set it up.”

“You’re welcome, you told me that was the only present you wanted this year so I obliged.”

I turned to kiss Jasper just as a loud rumble neared our farmhouse.

“Hmm, someone’s coming but I don’t recognize the car,” I said as the noise grew louder and
closer.

“Let’s go look, maybe they’re lost,” Jasper suggested and took my hand as we walked towards the front of our house.

We stood there and watched as an old, dark blue truck drove onto our driveway. At first, I was nervous that humans found us but as the vehicle got closer, I realized Peter and Char were inside waving at us.

“Is this one of his new toys?” I wondered out loud.

Jasper shrugged. “I don’t know. He likes all kinds of cars so I wouldn’t put it past him.”

“Happy birthday, sis!” Peter drawled out after he cut off the engine.

“Thanks!” I replied and caught the keys he just threw at me. “What’s this? You got me a car?”

“More than that,” Char replied as she pulled something out of the glove box.

“Guys, what’s goin’ on?” Jasper asked. “You two are up to something. I can feel it.”

“Let’s talk out in your patio,” Peter said.

Once we got settled, Char passed me a large envelope and told me not to open it yet.

“So the truck, it’s a fine piece of American steel isn’t she?” Peter remarked as he put his arm around Char. “You can open the envelope now and maybe it will make sense.”

With Jasper looking over my shoulder, I pulled out some official looking papers from the envelope and began to read. The first piece of paper was the title. It described the truck as a 1953 Chevrolet and I was now the owner. There were several pages that looked like a title search and I began to scan the various names who owned the car before me. One of them was a nighttime talk show host known for collecting cars. I nearly skipped the rest of the pages when my eye caught the name - SAM ULEY.

“Holy shit! This was my truck?” I exclaimed as I jumped up.

Peter nodded.

“No way! This… wow!”

I was astounded and suddenly overcome with emotion. This was the truck my dad bought for me when I first arrived at Forks. I remembered having to sign over the title to Sam when he drove the Blazer out to me.

Jasper immediately held me and sent me all his love and affection.

“I really don’t know what to say,” I whispered a minute later. “I want to say more than thank you because this is such a wonderful gift!”

“Your reaction is enough, little one,” Peter replied. “I got a hunch to go to a car show and talked Heidi and Felix into joining us. While we were there, I found this little beaut and remembered Jasper tellin’ us about your red truck. Well, I quickly took the VIN down and did a search that night and found out it was one in the same - only it now has a newer engine and obviously there has been some body work done because she’s flawless.”
“Peter, you’re drooling,” Char whispered and wiped his chin. “We told them our news and Heidi insisted we get the truck for your upcoming birthday. It isn’t just a gift from the two of us, it became a gift from all of us to you.”

“I want to keep this truck for a long, long time. We don’t have to drive it around too much, right?”

“No, we’ll only take it out on special occasions if that’s what you want, baby girl,” Jasper said. “That was a wonderful gift, Peter.” He walked over and gave him a high five as I gave them both hugs.

“I’ll thank everybody else tonight when they arrive.”

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**November 2017**  
**JPOV**

“It’s been nearly a month and even increasing the amount of human blood hasn’t tempted her to feed,” Aro explained during the web call to the Cullens. “Today, we even tried to give her a blood bag with pure human blood but nothing.”

Carlisle shook his head as he pulled Esme closer. “So her illness has taken over?”

“It appears so,” Aro replied. “Her mind is not creating as many memories as before either.”

“Aro, can you please grant us mercy and let us see her, possibly for the last time?” Carlisle pleaded.

“You want her life to end?” Aro asked, clearly surprised by the request.

“Possibly - I just think if her quality of life is greatly affected, we have to make some tough decisions. We’d like to say our goodbyes to her in person though.”

“Give us a moment,” Aro said and stepped aside to confer with his brothers.

As the brothers discussed the situation, the Cullens waited in front of the computer. They were clearly distraught over the news.

“We’re prepared to grant you an early release,” Aro said. “All of you will make your way back to Volterra post haste. After you’re all ready to enter the human world again, we’ll give you back your Alaska house. You’ll continue to be monitored on a regular basis.”

“Thank you,” Carlisle said. “Thank you for allowing us to say goodbye to her.”

~A week later~

“Hey guys,” Alec said as we entered the lab. “Jane said the Cullens landed in Italy.”

It had taken a few days for Carlisle to prep the doctors that were being brought into the village. The World Health Organization finally recognized that there needed to be some long term medical care given and created a makeshift clinic until a permanent one was built.

“What are you studying now, Alec?” I asked.
“I managed to extract some of the growths and I’m trying to replicate them in the lab.”

“Why? Isn’t that dangerous?” Isabella asked.

“It’s being done under very controlled and precise conditions. I’m just curious about them since they’re now proven to affect vampires. I want to understand its potential and if it could pose a threat to us or to our kind? Alec shook his head and gestured to a glassed room. “Obviously, I want to see if it can be used for the good of either mankind or vampirekind but in order to do so, I need to understand it first.”

“Can we help in any way?” I asked knowing Isabella was eager to help.

“Sure, I could use the company.”

The Cullens arrived a few hours later and immediately went to visit with Alice. By this time, she was catatonic. Isabella and I passed by her door about an hour before my former family arrived and I didn’t feel any emotions coming from her.

“No emotions whatsoever?” Isabella asked as we walked around the market square.

“Nothing. It’s a little unnerving since I knew she never used to be that still.”

“Will you miss her?”

“No. I explained that she was once someone I considered a good friend but that girl is gone. A part of me will always be grateful to her for bringing me to the Cullens which eventually led to meeting you but that is all. The Alice that planned the futile attack on her own family and the Alice that lies in her zombie state is not the same person I knew. What about you? She was once someone you considered a friend and a sister.”

“I think I’m in the same boat as you,” she replied. “While she often expressed her concern about decisions and all, there were times when she was a little pushy on her decisions. I don’t want to badmouth her especially since these are probably her last days on earth. After that whole birthday incident and everybody leaving, I no longer looked at her as a sister and friend. I wouldn’t have forgiven her easily, either. The Bella they knew was a bit of a pushover and you know I wasn’t much of one when you returned.”

“No ma’am, you weren’t.”

“Having said that,” she continued. “It isn’t like I am happy the Cullens are losing someone they consider family. I feel bad for them but not to the point I’d want us to join them. Does that make sense?”

I nodded. “It makes a lot of sense. So, do you want to go back to the lab or go home?”

“Let’s go home and maybe spend a few days there. I don’t want to run into the Cullens. This is their time to say their goodbyes to a family member and I would feel better if we gave them their space.”

~*~*~*~

BPOV
Two days later, Aro sent us a text to let us know Alice was gone. I never asked the details of her death but was told Alec’s gift helped to numb any pain she would have felt. Her ashes were given to Carlisle and we heard the family spread them under a Douglas Fir out in the Alaskan wilderness.

The Cullens were forever changed after the incident. As a family, they learned to heal with the help of each other. Carlisle continued to practice medicine but no longer worked the long, tedious hours in hospitals. He spent time working in underdeveloped countries, much like he did when the family was sentenced to Africa. We were surprised to hear Emmett and Rose often joined him and Esme, as well.

Out of all the Cullens, Edward appeared to have changed the least. While he no longer attended high school on a regular basis, he still believed the whole idea of vampires not having a soul. He took Marcus’ advice but twisted it in his own martyr way. He became aloof and never allowed himself to fall in love or even be enamored by anybody - human or vampire. He still lived with the Cullens but preferred a hermit life outside the family.

The Volturi continued to keep watch over them for the next few centuries.

Jasper and I continued to divide our time between our house in Texas and the one in Italy. We also continued to travel a lot. Life was always an adventure in some shape or form. Whether it was crawling through ancient tunnels or diving down to the Marianas Trench - Jasper had to make damn sure there were no sharks nearby. We even set foot in Antarctica and carved our initials in an ice cave below a crevasse.

We continued to work in the lab, assisting Alec. In 2024, he was able to isolate the DNA combination that caused our skin to sparkle. Using a synthetic version of the barbed growths from Alice’s venom, he managed to create a serum that eliminated the sparkle with zero side effects. For the first time, we were all able to enjoy the sunlight amongst the human world. To celebrate, the kings took the queens to an exclusive resort in Tahiti where they became beachcombers for the entire summer.

Jasper and I visited Hawaii for the very first time and we both learned to surf. We met up with Peter and Char while we were in Maui and they showed us a new house they purchased. Jasper and I thought the property was huge and dubbed it ‘the Compound’ because it contained several guest houses. It became a popular hangout for us but we never considered it one of our permanent residences.

My human life officially ended as many of my friends grew old and passed on. I had continued to keep in touch with them but we never met face to face again. My old friend Jacob lived well into his 90s and was a proud great-grandfather when he passed.

In 2030, Renee and Phil had another daughter and became a tabloid sensation for having had a child when she was in her 60s. I continued to receive the occasional, random email from her but we never had a real conversation. I never felt the need to visit her or her new family and probably wouldn’t have found out about the daughter if I hadn’t seen the tabloid littering a parking lot.
We watched the images of war from the castle tower. Humans, on the verge of destroying their planet had become extremely violent and were now creating wars to destroy each other. Those that weren’t participating in the destruction were frantically building sustainable cities in the rest of the solar system.

A few years ago, Alec and I created a synthetic blood that tasted exactly like the real thing and satisfied our thirst. We, for the most part were sustaining ourselves purely on the bottled stuff as we realized what little humans remained had to be protected in case they wiped themselves out.

It was scary to watch and for months, it appeared the human race was coming to an end. Many vampires were destroyed as a result, having refused our offer of the new, bottled blood. The Cullens had to change their diets somewhat. Large animals were becoming increasingly scarce and they were now scouring for rabbits and squirrels. Surprisingly, they did take up our offer of the bottled blood but we knew they were limiting themselves on it so their eyes wouldn’t change color.

Little did they know, the surprising side effect of drinking the blood regularly was we all slowly regained the color of our human eyes. Mine were just now leaving the purple stage and I could see the grey color mixing with the blue. It was a bit disturbing at first but we all grew accustomed to it and looked forward to just another way of integrating ourselves into the human world if needed.

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2789

BPOV

I sat overlooking the water as the sun was setting.

“There you are,” Jasper whispered as he sat down next to me. “Are you excited about the morning?”

“Am I ever!” I exclaimed. “If I was human, I wouldn’t be able to sleep. I can’t believe we’re going to travel through the solar system!”

“I know, me too.” He let out a chuckle. “Peter and Char are excited, too.”

“Yeah, they want to visit Mars first. I have no preference, I just want to enjoy the trip.”

“We’ve got enough blood to last us through our journey.”

“It’s one helluva way to celebrate having been on earth for nearly a millennia.”

“Yeah it is, I never imagined we’d have flying cars and colonies in outer space.”

“I never thought we as vampires would ever be accepted into the human world.”

“A lot has changed over the centuries,” he replied. “I’m glad, no matter what, you’re here.

“Me too, Jasper, me too.”

Chapter End Notes
NOTES:
Well there it is. I hope you all enjoyed the snippets.

I had a fun time writing this story and sharing it with y’all. Thank you for your continued support and all the reviews, favorites, alerts. I really appreciated it all. The story couldn’t have happened if it weren’t for the wonderful AlexisDanaan and LetsJustDance for working on the majority of the story. I’ll get this story ready for PDF and will add one final “chapter” if you want a copy - hopefully by this weekend.

Thanks again and let me know what you thought of it!

XO ~sushi
Chapter 99

PDF Update

It took more time than I anticipated to format the doc before I could make into a PDF but I have 2 versions – a regular font one and one that should work for eReaders.

I now found a couple homes for them - Perusing the Shelves and a FB group called Fic Corral. Enjoy and happy reading!

XOXO

sushi

End Notes

NOTES: So I’ll be adding this story a few chapters at a time just because it is a HUGE story. Eventually, I’ll get to real time here, bear with me. Thank you for your support. ~ sushi.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!