

[A House of Cards](#) By DefinatelyStaying

Highly anticipated sequel to The Forbidden Room. Edward Cullen's life is a precariously built house of cards. What happens when two of the cards holding it up are now gone? Ex? -

AU/AH - GRAPHIC LEMON ALERT

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Disclaimer: *Obviously, I own nothing related to Twilight. This story is rated MA and is intended for adults over the age of 18. This is a graphic BDSM story- if that's not your thing, read with caution. If you're under 18, find your entertainment elsewhere.*

Chapter One – Lost

The soft light filtering through my bedroom window woke me. I looked around and noticed two things virtually simultaneously, I was naked and I was alone. As I rolled to check my bedside clock, the soreness brought with it a flood of memories from the previous night. Jasper's lips against mine, his face as we made love, and that feeling in my chest when I told him that I loved him. That feeling warmed me, it made me feel whole. That is, until I saw the time. He was gone. Last night had been our farewell, and he had left early this morning. I hurled my clock, the current bane of my existence, at the wall. It shattered on impact, further damage being inflicted by its not so subtle contact with the floor.

The ache in my chest grew as I lay in bed. It wasn't just my body that was naked; my soul had been laid bare as well. My throat burned as I watched the ceiling blankly. A sob broke through my sealed lips, and I could no longer contain my anguish at his absence. I rolled slowly, careful of my lingering discomfort and buried my face in the pillow. The catharsis continued until I was utterly spent. I don't know if the release lasted minutes, or hours but when it was over I was drained. I had just enough energy to roll back onto my side and fall asleep.

When I awoke again, it was dark and I heard a distant pounding. It certainly wasn't for me. I had no one. No one in the entire state of Washington cared enough about me to pound on my door. Within minutes, it had stopped anyway. I closed my eyes again, and contemplated getting up to use the bathroom when my bedroom door flew open. I blinked as the light from the hall burned my eyes and I saw a slight figure silhouetted there.

"What the fuck, Edward? I've been calling you for hours!" Alice yelled, and then softer, away from me she said. "No, Jasper he's here. He looks okay, I'll call you back." She waited briefly for his responses and then snapped her phone shut. I closed my eyes and rolled over onto my stomach, trying to deaden the sound of her voice. "You know I'm still your emergency contact at the hospital, right?" *Damn, I missed my shift. I just can't bring myself to fucking care.*

"Why are you here?" I asked, half into the pillow, surprised when my voice cracked. *God, I even sounded broken. Would there ever be a point in my life when I would just be fucking happy?*

"The hospital called me. I called you and didn't get an answer so I called Emmett for Jasper's cell. I didn't know he... Well, Jasper asked me to use the key under the porch to come and check on you." I felt her sit lightly on the bed beside me, and then she stroked my hair. "Did you two have some kind of fight?" She asked in a concerned whisper.

"No. He had a family obligation and had to move to Chicago. He left... He left this morning." I said softly, my heart breaking a little more on each word. "This won't happen again, Alice. I'll call the hospital tomorrow and take an indefinite leave."

"Do you want to talk about it?" She asked, now stroking my upper back. It felt nice, soothing. It reminded me of something, something I had surely buried. I pushed it away. I didn't know if I could voice my feelings right now. They were so raw, they tore at my insides. I wasn't used to feeling like this. I had been pushing everything down for so long, feeling numb for so long. They opened this fucking hole in me, and then just deserted me. I shook my head, and after a while she got up and left. I heard her starting to dial someone as she went out the door. I had a feeling I knew who that someone was.

I finally heard the front door close and decided to take care of a few things. The bathroom was first on the agenda, and then I headed downstairs. I didn't bother getting dressed, knowing that the curtains were all closed. I always kept the curtains closed; I didn't like people looking at me. It had been like that since I was a kid, since... Well, for a long time, anyway. After getting a glass of ice, I headed to my liquor cabinet and pulled out a bottle of very old, very expensive scotch. It was half-full, or was it half-empty? I hadn't needed this in a long time, but I needed it today. On the way back to my bedroom, I stopped on the second floor landing. It was like I couldn't go any further. I turned, and was in his room before I realized I had even moved. The stark emptiness of the room made my breath catch. It was almost like he'd never been here, like I had imagined him. I sat down on the carpet and rested my back against the wall. The scotch burned as it hit my throat. I didn't care. I needed the buzz, I needed the numb. After my third scotch, my mind drifted back to the first time I had ever seen Jasper.

I was nervous about taking on a boarder, but I was also sick of being alone. Bella said that maybe bringing a stranger into my home would help me to be more comfortable around people. Maybe it would even help me to make a few friends. Is that really what I wanted? I was comfortable being alone. As hard as it was, it was easier than being around people. I don't know what happened with Bella, she was just different – it had always been that way. She had become more than just my sub. This had never happened to me before. I had heard of Doms getting too close to their subs, but I never thought it would happen to me. I decided to let it run its course for now. It may be headed in a direction I can't go, but I can't stand the thought of never seeing her again.

The voice on the phone had been pleasant enough. His southern accent was strangely alluring - I found myself asking him inane questions just to listen to him speak. With his schedule and his plans, he seemed to be an excellent choice for a roommate. I waited for him in the front room, half watching out the window for his arrival. I couldn't pinpoint the exact reason for my edginess. I just put it down to meeting a new person. Then, I saw him. His soft blond hair was blowing gently in the soft breeze as he walked up the walk. His body was lean and muscular under his t-shirt and jeans. I had the insane thought that I wanted to run my hand over his chest. But, as cliché as it sounds, it was his eyes that I found the most captivating. They were the color of the ocean at midday, and just as warm. I couldn't help but smile as I opened the door. I didn't know then that I was opening that door to so much more than just my house.

* * *

I woke the next day cramped and freezing. Looking around, I saw that I was still in Jasper's... I was still in one of the spare bedrooms. Sitting half upright against the cold wall, I had woken exactly the same way I had the day before, the same way I probably would

every day – naked and alone. The bottle next to me was empty and the glass had tipped to the side spilling its contents on the carpeting. I barely spared it a glance as I stood up shakily. As I left the room and headed for the stairs, my eyes caught the door at the end of the hall. I couldn't even think about going in there. I was completely alienated from the room in the house that meant the most to me. The thought of collaring another sub turned my stomach. Or, maybe that was the alcohol. I got upstairs and made it in time to vomit in my bathroom. I wanted to take a shower, but I didn't think I could stand that long. I just needed for the room to stop spinning.

Making it to my dresser, I threw on the first t-shirt and sweats that I could find. I even put on socks, trying to warm myself up so that my hands would stop shaking. I was hoping it was from the cold. Crawling in bed, I grabbed my cell phone from the nightstand and checked the display. It was still on silent, and I had 40 missed calls – most of them from Jasper. I sighed. I was going to have to call him; I had known this since Alice came through my door. But I mean really, what was I going to say? *Oh yeah, Jasper, I can barely function now that you and Bella are gone. Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here...*

I decided to call the hospital first, that would be an easier call. Being that I was a total fucking coward, I called the automated system and patched into Dr. Patterson's voice mail. I left a message indicating that he should pull me from the rotation until further notice. It wasn't a hardship for the hospital, they had been looking to let someone go for a while, Patterson just didn't have the heart to fire the doctors with small children and I had the highest seniority. I didn't need the money, of course, I could have worked for free, I suppose. What I had really needed was just something to fill my days in order to make the time pass. One more day gone would be one less day that I would have to endure. Now, though, I felt like I had no purpose. Without that purpose, I would be unable to care for other people.

I considered getting another bottle of scotch before making the next call, but I didn't want him to worry. Yeah, like that was going to fucking happen. I grabbed my phone and held down the number 5 for speed dial. It rang just once before his voice was on the other end.

"Edward! Jesus Christ, I was just about to book a fucking flight and I'm not even there yet!" He yelled into the phone. Then he sighed. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, Jasper, I'm fine." I lied.

"I know you better than that, Edward. I remember what you were like after Bella left, I can only imagine what you're like." He said softly.

"Yeah, fucking throw that in my face. That helps, Jasper, thanks." I said sourly. "Look, I said I'm fine. I don't know why you fucking care anyway." I snapped the phone shut and threw it none too gently towards the bed. It bounced once in the center and then hit the wall and came to rest on the pillows. I slid down the wall, and banged my head against it hard. It hurt. Yes. It hurt. That's exactly what I needed. I needed the pain. I started to get up to call Alice and then stopped. She wouldn't do it for me. I just had this feeling that she would be opposed to my reasoning. I needed someone else, someone that would enjoy my bondage, my utter torment, my pain. Then it came to me in a bright flash of inspiration.

Jane.

Chapter Two – Revelations

"Fifteen..."

"Sixteen..."

"Seventeen..."

The knotted cord ripped into my back as the beating continued. This was just what I needed, the physical pain to make me forget about the emotional pain. It took me a couple of weeks to actually call Jane. I think the catalyst was the phone call with Jasper when he received the collars I'd had made for him. Bella had also decided to give him a little present. Herself. I played along, not wanting either of them to know the depth of my depression. I knew that's what it was now, full blown depression. After what I've gone through in my life, I think I'm entitled to it now.

They were together, and I was alone.

I felt something trickling down my back and I couldn't decide if it was sweat or blood. The implement and the force used to propel it were certainly enough to draw blood, but I couldn't know for sure. I didn't care. Thankfully she had me tied over a sawhorse so I didn't have to worry about holding myself up. I knew my legs wouldn't support me now, not after hours of being whipped like this. Finally, it stopped, and all I could feel in my back, buttocks, and legs was a cold, numb lack of sensation. I closed my eyes and rested my cheek against the wood. Alec and Jane were all about pain - they didn't believe in padding their equipment - the more uncomfortable the better.

My eyes flew open when I heard Alec's voice behind me. "The sight of you bare and whipped like this makes me so fucking hard..." Then, I felt his fingers in me... preparing me... I didn't have the strength to even try to stop him. No matter how loudly I was screaming 'no' in my head.

* * *

"No one has heard from him in a month, Alice. I don't give a fuck if he took the key from under the porch. I need to know that he's okay."

The voice was distant, detached from my reality. I wondered briefly if it was a hallucination. It couldn't be him, he was gone. Then, slowly, my bedroom door creaked open and I heard several sets of footsteps approaching. I didn't want to look, in case there was no one there.

"Oh my God." I heard someone whisper from somewhere in my room. I didn't move, I couldn't move.

"Edward, sweetheart, can you hear me?" A soft voice asked. *Bella*. How was Bella here? She was in Chicago, playing house.

"Please go away." I said leaving my face turned away into the pillow.

"Like hell we will, who did this to you?" A harsher voice asked. *Jasper*.

"Please go away." I repeated, not wanting to talk about what had happened to me. What I had let them do to me. I deserved every bit of it; I just didn't want to talk about it.

"Look at these." Jasper said in a low voice. "They are so deep. And whoever did it could not

have given him any aftercare."

"I know, and look at the larger welts – they're spaced at regular intervals. A knotted rope maybe?" Bella asked Alice. I figured she was asking Alice anyway. She knew me well enough to know that I wouldn't answer her question. I didn't want to talk about it.

"No, the cuts are too smooth, more like an electrical cord. It had to be something smooth, like it was sheathed." Alice said.

"Whatever it was, I'd like to wrap it around their fucking necks. Who would do this to him?" Jasper growled.

"I have a feeling I know. I knew they were jealous of Edward, but I didn't think they'd do this..." Alice said her tone bitter. Then, I heard her dialing. *No*. They were going to know. I tried to move, to stop her, but I couldn't. I had no strength. I had been in bed for a week, trying my damndest not to move. The pain tore through my back and legs; I whimpered softly, I couldn't stop myself.

"Jane, its Alice. Have you seen Edward lately?" She asked in a tone of forced calm. A pause, while she listened to the answer that I already knew. "What kind of a session?" Her voice was a little sharper now. I heard her gasp, but I doubt it would have been audible over the phone. "What do you mean 'then Alec had his fun'?" She half shrieked into the phone. "You know his hard lim..." She paused again. "I don't give a fuck if he didn't safe word; Aro is going to hear about this, you little bitch." She said, and then slammed her phone shut. No one spoke for a long time. The silence was deafening.

"Let's..." Jasper started in a broken whisper. "Let's..." He said again, his voice a little stronger. "Oh God, let's try to get him cleaned up." I felt his cool hand on my back and I winced. "His skin is so warm; these cuts may be starting to become infected. Alice, can you go start a lukewarm shower? Bella can you grab the first aid kit and some water?" I heard them both leave the room. Jasper took what sounded like a deep steadying breath and then pulled the sheet the rest of the way off. I heard a choked sob come from him as he worked slowly and diligently to lift me into a sitting position. As hard as he tried, and as careful as he was, he couldn't stop the pain. He helped me to sit on the side of the bed and I could see his face clearly for the first time. His hair was a little longer, but otherwise he hadn't changed at all. The shame of letting him see me like this flooded my mind, but it was countered by the warmth I saw in his eyes.

Bella returned quickly with the kit and Jasper pulled out a bottle of Ibuprofen and handed me three with the bottle of water she'd also brought. I took them willingly, thankfully. We sat on the edge of the bed for a long time while the pills did their job. Finally, I was able to stand and Jasper stripped down to his boxers and helped me into the shower. He washed my hair and my body carefully while I just stood there letting him. It was taking all of my strength to remain standing. Seeing him here with me, feeling his tender touch as he helped me, just brought back all of the feelings I was trying to suppress. I couldn't focus on the physical pain. I'd done it for nothing. It was never going to end. I put my head on Jasper's shoulder and he stopped. He ran his fingers through my hair lightly.

"Why won't God just let me die?" I asked him softly.

He didn't answer but finished up quickly and helped me back into my room. Alice and Bella had apparently changed the bedding because now the bed was made. After drying off most of the way, I lay back down on my bed and Jasper applied an antiseptic to my welts. They

didn't require any type of bandage because they were already closed, but cleaning them would certainly help. Finally, after days of being exhausted, I was able to fall into a somewhat comfortable sleep.

When I woke, I smelled food and my stomach snarled. I slowly got to my feet and stumbled to the dresser where I found a loose pair of shorts and a t-shirt. It took several tries to get them on, but finally I did. I made my way slowly to the stairs, taking even measured steps. Stretching my legs or my arms too far sent a screaming pain through my body that I didn't want to feel just now. One excruciating step at a time, I made my way down the stairs, leaning heavily on the railing. When I got to the kitchen doorway, I heard voices.

"...give a damn. We can't just leave him here." It was Jasper's voice, and the conviction with which he spoke made my heart a little lighter. He really did seem to care about me, about what happened to me.

"What about Jacob?" Bella asked softly. *Jacob? Who the hell was Jacob?*

"Our house is certainly big enough for all of us, Bella. If Jacob doesn't like it, he can move." Jasper said scornfully. "Is Jacob really more important to you than Edward?"

"Of course not, Jasper, but we have to think this through. We have to consider the possibilities first, not just go off half-cocked. What if Edward doesn't want to leave? Are you just going to kidnap him?" She asked acidly.

"Why don't you just ask Edward?" I suggested softly from the door. They all looked up, surprised to see me standing there. Bella ran to me and hugged me carefully. She pulled back just slightly, and put her small hand on my cheek.

"Edward, how are you feeling?" She asked softly, and stroked my cheek like I had done hers so many times before.

"Fabulous," I said, with wry humor. She smirked at me, and then became serious again. She looked back at Jasper and he nodded.

"Edward, would you come and stay with us for a little while? Please? We love you so much, and I can't stand to see you in pain like this. Maybe... Maybe a change would help - someplace where you're not alone." She hedged. Yeah, because seeing them happy and in love was going to help. But, she was right. I needed something. I needed some kind of change. I'd lived through so much worse than this. I nodded once, and she buried her face in my chest. This, to my relief, wasn't painful.

Jasper grabbed his cell phone and started to dial. After a minute he said "Jacob, its Jasper. We're going to have some furniture delivered to the house. We're going to be having a guest for a while. Would you have them set it up in that empty room on the third floor? The one above the playroom? Thanks, Jacob." He said, and then made another call to Emmett asking him and Rosalie to pick out a bedroom set and get the room ready.

"The playroom? Jacob is your sub, isn't he?" I asked Bella quietly, and she nodded. The jealousy, the feeling of betrayal washed through me and the pain of it took my breath away. I pulled away from Bella, and the sting must have been evident in my face. They had a sub. They had taken my subs away from me, and left me with nothing. I knew my feelings about it were irrational, but it just hurt so fucking much. I turned and headed slowly for the stairs. It's not like they couldn't catch me, but I found that I just no longer wanted to be in the

room – food or no food.

“Edward, please...” Bella said, her voice full of sorrow. “Please, stay and eat with us. You need to eat.”

“No.” I said flatly and began the long climb up to the third floor.

* * *

I was lying on my bed with my face pushed into a pillow when the door opened and I heard someone enter. I didn’t have the strength to look and see who it was, but from the aroma they brought with them, I knew they had food. Staying still, trying to feign sleep, I hoped they would just leave the tray and go. Of course, I wasn’t that lucky. I felt someone stroking my hair, and that one small affectionate gesture was just too much. Breaking into heavy sobs, I pushed my face deeper into the pillow trying to contain them.

“Shhhhhh... Angel, please don’t cry.” Jasper’s voice said softly just above my head. He continued to stroke my hair.

“D... Don’t call m... me that.” I said between broken sobs into the pillow. Finally, I was able to draw in a deep breath and get at least a partial hold on myself. “You called me that while we...” I closed my eyes, I couldn’t even say it. “FUCK!” I screamed into the pillow. “What do you want from me?!”

“I just brought you something to eat.” He said softly, and then hesitated before standing up. I heard him reposition whatever he’d brought with him, and then he walked toward the door. Sighing heavily, he closed the door and went downstairs. I laid there for a long time, until my tears finally stopped. Slowly, trying not to start the pain in my back and legs, I sat up on the side of the bed. I saw that he had brought in a small table and set up a plate and a carafe of wine. It was simple, and thoughtful.

I sighed and began to eat.

Chapter Three – Release

We stayed in the house for another few days while my back and legs started to heal – mostly through their care. Finally, Jacob called to let Jasper know that my new room was ready. *The invalid’s room was ready.* I thought caustically. Jasper and Bella stayed in the house with me, in Jasper’s room I presumed. What little time we spent together, we spent in awkward silence with them glancing between each other frequently. I felt like a terminal patient and they were waiting for me to die. Maybe I was. I certainly felt dead inside.

Alice had hired a caretaker for my house. He would look after things while I was staying with Jasper and Bella. I had nothing to do now, so I found myself with unlimited time for thinking. I tried to occupy my mind with mundane tasks, but everything eventually came back to my spiraling depression. I hated feeling like this. I’d rather go back to feeling nothing. The seething, festering self-loathing was so close to the surface now. It even pervaded my dreams. I could not get a good night’s sleep, which brought the lethargy to new heights.

Finally, it was time to go to Chicago. I had so many mixed feelings about going – fear, shame, resignation, and defeat were among the most prevalent. There were so many emotions that they swirled around in my head until I felt like I wanted to scream. I’d sit in

my room with the music dialed up so loud I couldn't hear myself. It was angry, rage filled music that caused the pictures on the walls to vibrate. Listening to it gave me the excuse to sing with it, at the top of my lungs – my own method of screaming without feeling like I'd lost my mind. It was a good release. It helped.

The routine at Bella and Jasper's house was the same. I spent the first several weeks holed up in 'my' room. At first, I tried the music trick, but I found that after a while it didn't work anymore. I don't know what had changed, but the need to be screaming subsided. Instead, I switched to meditation, trying to focus my mind. Today, however, I found myself distracted. I could not concentrate on my breathing because all my mind would focus on was the sounds coming from the room below. Jacob seemed to be getting a real workout. I could hear the sounds of the paddle and his cries clearly through the inadequate soundproofing. Apparently, they missed an area of the ceiling around the light fixture. The sounds tormented me, reminding me of my time with Jasper in my own playroom.

He looked as though he were going to faint as he stood naked in my playroom for the very first time. He was every bit as beautiful as I had imagined him to be. Everything from the sculptured lines of his chest to the soft curve of his buttocks drew me to him. I could not understand. I had never been attracted to a man before – never. I didn't want to be attracted to this one, but every time I looked at him something inside me felt... I can't describe it ... connected? In place? Like plugging in a lamp with the power switched on. There was electricity, there was light. I had to know what it meant.

I told him that we were here to assess his potential as a sub. We were really here to assuage my curiosity. As I stood behind him and watched him achieve a full erection, I thought maybe I had a similar effect on him. I explained the basics to him and gave him a safe word for the assessment. If he couldn't make it through without using it, there was no point to continue.

I paddled him soundly for coming into my playroom, and maybe a little for my attraction to him as well. He bore it surprisingly well, starting to confirm my suspicions that he was a natural submissive. Of course he was, because he was surely sent to torment me. I looked down at him when I'd finished and found that he was just as hard as I was. Paddling him, watching his skin redden, seeing his struggle, it made me fucking hard. It made me want to just drive into him right there on the leather ottoman he was thrown over. I wanted to feel his tight virgin ass around my cock. I knew he wasn't ready for that just yet, so I pulled him up before I was overcome by the temptation.

Instead, I dropped the panel on my pants and pushed my cock into his hot little mouth. He panicked a little at first, but I backed off and let him do things his own way. I didn't want to frighten him too much in our very first encounter, or maybe I did. If he used the safe word and left, I wouldn't have to deal with this again. I felt a twinge in the pit of my stomach at the thought of him leaving. I told him to look up at me. I wanted to see his face. God, it made me to fucking hot to watch him suck me - hotter than anyone else, even Bella. What the fuck does this mean?

Damn just thinking about being in his mouth was making me hard. The sounds from downstairs had lessened now, they were on to something else but I couldn't make out what it was. I slid my sleep pants down to my knees and began to stroke my aching cock. I lay back on the bed, letting my other hand drift up and pinch and pull each of my nipples. I'd roll first one, and then the other between my thumb and forefinger, remembering how it felt to have his lips there, his teeth. My back arched slightly in response to that jolt of need that flashed through my stomach. I turned my hand, with my thumb at the base of my cock

rather than at the head. I got a whole different sensation like this, like it was someone else's hand, or maybe *his* hand. My mind wandered back to that first time again.

I had him bound on the table, his legs in the air. He had to feel incredibly exposed in this position, good. That's how he made me feel just with his presence. As I looked into his face, I saw a tear fall down his cheek. That single drop provoked something in me, and I grabbed the warming lotion from a nearby table and began to stroke him. I knew that the more aroused he was, the easier the penetration would be for him. I didn't want to think just now about how I knew that, but instead focused on his pleasure. I stroked him with two hands, like I enjoyed, and hid a smirk when he tried to buck his hips up into my hand. I knew that he was ready, so I slid one hand down and started to prepare him for me. Then I heard his small whimper as I opened him up, and slid inside him. Fuck, he felt so good. I watched his face, knowing that it would be painful for him at first. He closed his eyes and locked his jaw, and I kept pushing forward until I was completely sheathed by him.

The memory of that feeling, that perfect feeling inside of him caused a low moan to escape me. I reached down with my other hand and stroked my balls, and then back nearly to my anus. My eyes closed and I concentrated – on the feeling of my own hands, the memory of him bound and spread as I fucked him, the look on his face as he came. My hips moved slightly against the motion of my hands. At once the image of him dropping from the table onto his knees and pressing his face against my thigh came unbidden into my mind - his willing act of submission. I pulled down lightly on my balls and came hard across my stomach. I tried to keep my cries quiet, but the release overwhelmed me. It wasn't just a physical release, but an emotional and mental release too. I wiped my semen from my chest with my discarded t-shirt and pulled my sleep pants back around my waist. Closing my eyes, I sank into the bed and felt that I could sleep. I slept better than I had in weeks.

When I awoke, I rolled over to see Jasper in a nearby chair watching me. I smiled at him, and his face brightened. Then I remembered why I was here, and sank back onto the pillow. He got up out of the chair and walked to the vacant side of the bed. Discarding his shoes, he climbed up into the bed next to me. He kissed me lightly on the forehead and then propped his head on his hand and looked at me.

"This is about more than just not having a sub, Edward." He said softly, and I nodded. I could have called any number of acquaintances and hooked up with another sub, but I didn't want to. Bella and Jasper had changed me. It just wasn't enough anymore. I needed something more. That type of relationship was something I enjoyed, but there had to be more to it than I was getting out of it. I thought about telling all of this to Jasper, but I felt that this was a journey I needed to make myself. Maybe getting it out, getting it into a form where I could study it would help.

"Is there a bookstore around here?" I asked him, thoughtfully. He cocked his head and looked at me with a puzzled expression, but nodded at once. "Good. I think I need a journal. I think that writing will help to purge some of these feelings into a form that I can use to analyze them." He leaned forward and pressed his free hand to my cheek.

"I think that is an excellent idea." He said softly and then pressed his lips to mine in a gentle kiss. That simple contact flared through me and I kissed him back enthusiastically. We broke apart a minute later, both of us panting slightly, and he chuckled.

"Get dressed, and we can head over there. I think I'd like to look around too." He said with a smile and got up off the bed.

As I stood in the shower a few minutes later, my mind was racing with the things that I wanted to put to paper. It wasn't going to just be a catalog of things that had happened to me, but just anything that came to mind really. More than once I'd thought about writing a book based on my experiences, wanting maybe to help others with their coping. First, I felt that I needed to help me. I wouldn't be able to tell anyone how to cope with trauma if I was unable to do so. It took Bella and Jasper coming into my life and then leaving to show me that I wasn't coping. I was merely masking my real feelings with a different kind of control. I had to learn to start dealing with my feelings, or I was never going to make it.

When I walked into the kitchen, I found a very different atmosphere than what I was used to. Bella and Jasper were sitting at the table laughing at some joke that Jacob had told. When they noticed me watching, Bella got up from the table and walked over to me. She wrapped her arms around me and kissed me lightly. When our lips parted, I kissed her on the forehead.

"I missed you, Edward." She said softly. I looked up and Jasper nodded in agreement. Then she tried unsuccessfully to hide the swipe across her eyes and continued. "Not just a journal, but you'll need a good pen too. A good pen that feels comfortable and flows can make all the difference. Jasper you should take him over to that place on Michigan. I'm sure they'd have what he needs."

With that, she ushered us out the door, and on the first step of my own journey to self-discovery.

A/N: Over 200 reviews for the second chapter so far, and I really appreciate your love and compassion for Edward. He has recognized now that he has hard work ahead of him if he wants to achieve his full potential. His journey will not be easy, but we will learn a lot about Edward along the way.

Chapter 4 Journal Entry: The Beginning

I have a feeling; deep down that this will help me. The way that I have been living my life since my abduction has not allowed me to deal with my trauma, it has only masked it. Only the patient care and determination shown by Bella and Jasper have made any kind of impact. They have cracked the mask that I wear day in and day out. They have found the terrified shell of a child underneath. However, Bella and Jasper cannot heal me. Only I will be able to enact the cathartic purge of the darkness to the light of day in order to dispel my demons. I neither look forward to nor can I shy away from the conclusions that I will draw about myself from this exercise. Whomever I have grown into, I must accept him and allow him to finally see the light of day. I'm just not entirely sure where to begin. I heard a song on the radio earlier that really resonated with me. Music has always been inspirational to me. It has a way of soothing or redirecting the rage that tends to build in my head. The song really put things into perspective for me and may offer me a direction in which to begin on my dark and desolate journey.

The song is My Immortal by Evanescence.

I'm so tired of being here, suppressed by all my childish fears

That line, more than any other sums up my life, such as it is, in a dozen words. There are days when I am just tired of living, tired of the lack of hope that I will ever be a whole man, and most of all tired of being trapped by the bastard that destroyed my life. I remember

very clearly the first time I actively thought of killing myself. Of course when I was young, and he would come into my room at night, I would wish for death – just to escape the pain and the feeling of his hot breath on my skin. It wasn't until I was older and could fully appreciate the consequences that I contemplated the method by which I would take my life. That first time, I was fourteen years old, and I wanted that year to be my last. In school I was an outcast, I never felt safe enough to confide in anyone or to make friends. I couldn't take the chance that any of the kids at school would find out what I was. It horrified me that they would find out what my afterschool activities consisted of. There was one girl, however, who tried to befriend me. One day she cornered me in the music room after class and tried to kiss me. It threw into sharp relief the fact that I would never be able to have a normal relationship with a girl. I was truly a freak of nature, and the only resolution I could come to was that I couldn't live like this. It had to stop.

He kept a gun in a lockbox under his bed; I knew where the key was. One night while he was at work, I took it out of the box. I loaded it. I held it to my head. The safety was off, and my finger was on the trigger when he came home early. When he saw me, he started to cry. He told me that he loved me, and that I was all he had in the world. He begged me to put the gun down. Why I didn't just turn it on him, I will never understand. Why I put it down, I only partially understand. Deep down, I knew I didn't want to die. I just couldn't think of any other way out. It was another two years before I finally found it. I thought about death hundreds of times in those two years, but never got up the will to try again. Like the child that I was, I held out the hope that I would find my escape. When I did, it started a whole different kind of nightmare.

I always thought that Elizabeth and Edward Masen, Sr. walked on water. They were the best parents I could have asked for, until I actually needed them. When I was finally returned to them, they had no idea how to deal with the disturbed, violent, damaged teenage boy their sweet child had become. The first time my father tried to wake me from one of my frequent nightmares, I accidentally broke his nose. I was so lost in what I thought was happening to me, that all I saw was a man that wanted to hurt me. By the time my mother was able to snap me out of it, his face was bloody. When I finally realized where I was, and what I had done, all I could do was sink into a corner of my room. I pulled my knees up to my chest and sobbed. I was so terrified that they would send me back. Somewhere inside of me, I knew that they loved me and that they would never ever let him have me again. I was so irrational those first few weeks, trying desperately to hold on to my world that was spinning out of control.

The next day they took me to my first shrink. He put me on a cocktail of meds that made me feel like a zombie, and then threw his racquet into the back of his BMW and went off to play tennis. He didn't give a damn about me. He was a golfing buddy of my dad, and wouldn't let it get around the club that Masen's son was a psychotic little freak. I have fleeting images of that time of my life. I remember lying in bed for hours, just staring at the ceiling. Because of the meds I couldn't concentrate on anything, they essentially rendered me catatonic. When I decided that I didn't want to be numb anymore, I started to hide the pills when my mother would bring them to me. I'd just pretend to be numb and lay in my bed. It was then that I realized that I wasn't alone. My mother would sit in my room with me while I lay in bed. She would read to me, or play guitar. Sometimes, when she thought I was asleep, she'd cry and beg me to forgive her for letting this happen to me. At other times, she'd ask God to please just let me have peace.

It was during those times, with my mother, that I blamed myself for the nightmare I had put us all through. If I had just stayed on the route I was supposed to take, none of this would have happened. My father would be proud of the son he had raised, not disgusted by

the freak raised by the pervert. My mother wouldn't look 10 years older than she was. She would smile when she looked at me, rather than looking at me with pity. And me? I'd be captain of the soccer team with a nice girlfriend and lots of friends. I'd be driving around in the convertible that my parents bought me for my last birthday. I'd be fumbling through groping a girl in the back seat while we kissed. I wouldn't be the boy who had more experience with blow jobs than any girl on campus. I wouldn't be the only virgin at school who required tests for sexually transmitted diseases. I wouldn't be the boy who got physically ill when he woke up with morning wood because sex was so horrifying to him.

Thankfully, my mother berated my father into letting me home school. I had been on the news so often lately that there wasn't a chance the kids I used to go to school with wouldn't know all of the details of my life. Because I spent all of my time alone, it didn't take me long to catch up on the work I needed to do to graduate. Graduating from high school seemed like such a normal teenage activity, yet it felt completely foreign to me. At that point, I was just living to turn 18 so that I could leave Chicago. Every time that my mother had talked me into leaving the house, either for dinner or even to a museum, I felt like people were staring at me. She tried to tell me that they weren't, but I knew that they could see my shame. It might as well have been branded across my forehead. I was the freak from the news. I was damaged. I had to escape, again. Would I spend the rest of my life running from this?

A few weeks after I was finally able to sleep through the night for the first time, I got notice from the DA that my abductor had accepted a plea. There would be no trial. For the first time in my whole fucking life, something had gone my way. I knew I couldn't get up in front of a room full of strangers and explain in detail what he had subjected me to. I couldn't go into detail about each act he had performed on me, and forced me to perform on him. Especially not with my father's shame and my mother's pity staring me in the face. The DA explained the terms of the deal to me, and to my parents. He assured me that the man would not see the light of day for a long time. The dark, wicked voice in my head whispered that he hoped the man would become someone's girlfriend and be taught a very valuable lesson in being repeatedly violated.

"Edward?" Bella's voice called as she opened my door. I was so engrossed in what I was doing; I hadn't even heard her knock. She came to stand behind me now that she saw I wasn't asleep. Her hand went to my hair, and she played with it affectionately. "Are you ready for dinner?" I closed my eyes and leaned into her touch. We had gone with a leather bound journal with smooth textured pages, and an engraved Mont Blanc pen. I marked my page, and closed the book setting it on the side table. I laid the pen on top of it, and looked up at Bella. Smiling softly, I took her other hand.

"Yes, I'm starving, actually. Should I come down now?" I asked, and she looked startled. I hadn't come down to dinner since I'd been here. For weeks either Jacob or Jasper had brought a tray up for me, and I had remained in my room. Companionship just wasn't something I had desired, or needed. Tonight, however, I wanted to be around Jasper and Bella. Opening up the wounds of my past had left me feeling vulnerable and alone. I knew that their presence would calm that feeling. They would no doubt ask how the writing was going, but they would never ask about the content. Bella especially knew that I would share with them what I felt comfortable, but that the rest would stay hidden away.

"Uhm, in about half an hour?" She said, and it came out as a question. I smiled at her, and her eyes welled with tears. She walked around to where I sat in the winged back chair, and sat down in my lap. Her arms wound around my neck, and she rested her head on my shoulder. I kissed her on top of the head and wrapped my arms around her waist. We sat

like that for nearly 20 minutes. We didn't speak, but I could feel her love and acceptance in her touch. She was glad that I was finally trying to find Edward Masen, Jr. I had thought that he had died when Edward Cullen was born, but I was wrong.

Edward Cullen isn't a real person; he is a fictional character that I made up with to deal with the nightmare that was my life.

Chapter Five – The Dream

Journal Entry: The Monster

There are certain times in my life that I hope are never covered by song lyrics.

Last night I had a dream, no doubt brought on by opening up and writing about that dark place in my head where the monster lives. In the dream, Jasper and I were in the playroom. At least intellectually, I knew it was Jasper, but he felt like a young boy. As we stood there, I was reminded of youth and innocence.

Without warning, I pushed him over one of the tables and drove myself into him. Unlike the real Jasper who had taken my assault with quiet acceptance, this boy Jasper cried out begging for his mother. He pleaded with me to stop, not to hurt him. His words were those that I used with my own attacker in the same pitifully weak voice of a boy in pain.

I woke up, drenched in sweat and shaking. I made it to the bathroom just in time to be sick. I had violated that boy with no more mercy or compassion than I had been shown.

No – it had been a dream.

But I had violated Jasper in a similar manner. I remember that day so vividly. It had been the day that I had looked into the mirror to see the monster behind my own eyes. I had still been reeling from the night before. I'd finally had a somewhat normal sexual experience with a woman and felt absolutely nothing from it. I had a physical release, but everything else was just ... numb. It may have been then that I realized that my attraction for Bella lay in her submission, not in that she was Bella. I thought that I had been in love with her. From all of the talks she and I'd had about "normal relationships" and "romantic love," I thought it described the image I got when I thought about her. She was my closest friend. She had opened something inside me that I thought was gone forever – my ability to get close to another person. I had never had a friend before, and that felt like what she had described as love.

Now, she was leaving me. She was leaving me with another man, a man that I was desperately attracted to despite all of my efforts to the contrary. I just felt that pull whenever he was in the room, hell whenever I thought about him. I didn't know if it was because he was Jasper, or because he was a man. That thought sickened and scared me. If I were gay, did that man know that? Could he see it? Did he think I wanted what he did to me? Or... Possibly even worse... Did he make me gay? I have never voiced this to anyone, or even contemplated it too closely because I don't want to know. But really, here in the confines of my journal, maybe I should ask. What makes someone gay? Are they born that way? Does something in their environment make them that way? When did my sexual identity form?

I had flown with breakneck speed through Seattle traffic, and then again through the airport to tell her that I figured out what she was talking about, at least in part. I wanted to

convince myself that I loved her because if I loved her then I must be attracted to women. The alternative had been too horrifying to me to even contemplate. Now, it seems, I need to think about it. It's a large part of my identity. How can I know who I am if I don't answer that basic fundamental question?

When I got back from the airport, I felt lost, hopeless. I walked upstairs, intending to go to my bedroom but found myself in the playroom instead. Pulling Bella's wrist cuff from my pocket, I sat on the floor and replayed the events from the last few days in my mind. Then, Jasper came in and sat beside me. I knew he was trying to comfort me, and I resented him for it. I didn't want to be comforted, particularly by him. The rage in me just continued to build until the need to dominate him, to show him who was in control, was paramount. I hurt him, and degraded him – hating myself for being excited by it. I knew it stemmed from the need to make him hurt like I was hurting, but it was wrong. Now – all I can see is that boy Jasper from my dream begging me to stop.

A knock sounded at my door. I called for whoever it was to come in as I made my way to the bathroom sink. I washed my tear stained face took a deep steadying breath as I dried it with a nearby hand towel. I turned around to see Jasper watching me. Our eyes met and he sighed. "It looks like the writing is going well today," he said, no doubt seeing my bloodshot eyes. Then, noticing that I was much farther in the journal than yesterday, I nodded.

"Bella asked me to come up and see what you wanted for lunch," he said softly, and when I looked away out the window, he put his hand on my cheek and brought my gaze back to him. "But we are going out instead." My eyes widened, and I began to shake my head. I didn't want to be around other people, especially after that dream. I didn't even feel human. How could I go into public and have a civilized conversation?

"We will wait for you downstairs. There is this great place I want to take you." With that, he strolled out of the room. I had no choice but to clean up and follow.

* * *

"No, this one is on me," I said, smiling. Jasper had been right, of course. I needed to get out. The three of us were telling jokes, and laughing and I felt better than I had in weeks. They had made sure that we were fairly isolated in the restaurant so that I felt more comfortable, and it was nice. For the first time in a long time, I didn't feel like people were gawking at me. I smacked Jasper's hand as I took the check. As I handed it back to the server with my card, my eye caught a red-haired woman a few tables over. Her green eyes were captivating as they locked with mine. She looked at me, and I watched her, both of us apparently reluctant to look away. The spell was broken a moment later when the server returned. I signed the slip quickly and nearly bolted for the door. I heard Bella and Jasper call out from behind me, but I didn't slow. I got outside, and the steel bands around my chest started to loosen. The panic that was threatening to engulf me just moments ago was lessening. Unfortunately, I hadn't been fast enough, and I felt a hand on my arm. I closed my eyes, and took a deep breath. Opening them again, I turned around to see the red haired woman.

"Edward?" She asked softly, and I looked down at her. She smiled up at me sadly. "Edward," she said again, but this time in an almost reverent whisper. Just then, Jasper and Bella came through the front door. Jasper, noting her hand on my arm, came and put himself between us. He turned to go, and pulled me along with him.

"Edward Masen." The woman said in a stern voice and I stopped.

"Darlin', you must be mistaken, his name is Cullen. We're from Washington State." Jasper said coolly, once again standing between us. This time, Bella joined him. I was frozen there.

"No, *darlin'*," she said emphasizing the endearment, "I think I know my own son." Then she turned to me.

"E.J., how long have you been in Chicago?" She asked sadly. E.J. – *God she hasn't called me that in so long*. It was always a joke in our family. Dad was the big E.S. – Edward Senior, and I was little Edward Junior, E.J. I blinked back the tears that threatened to consume me. That name was from a whole different lifetime to me. In that lifetime, I had been happy and safe.

"A while." I said quietly. She looked as though I'd slapped her. She sniffed once or twice and then nodded. "And these are you friends?"

"Yes. Mom, this is Jasper Whitlock," I indicated Jasper to my left. "This is Bella Swan." Then I looked at each of my shell shocked friends and said "This is my mother, Elizabeth Masen." I said, finally regaining some sense of composure. Bella recovered first and shook my mother's hand.

"It's very nice to meet you," she told my mom with a warm smile. My mother nodded back and looked back to me. Jasper stepped forward then and apologized. My mother waved him off, and then took my hand.

"How long are you going to be in town?" She asked, feigning a calm I knew she did not feel. It was killing her that we were in the same town and I'd never even called. She thought I was going to run now, to leave like I had when I was 18. I felt bad about that, but she didn't need to see me like I was. And I certainly had no interest in seeing my father.

"I don't know yet." I admitted. "I left my position at the hospital and am staying with Jasper and Bella until I figure out what I want to do." I didn't want to get into the reasoning behind the change, and thankfully she didn't push.

"Please, Edward." She said suddenly. "Come to brunch on Sunday?" I paled, I could feel it. "Bring your friends with you, they seem very nice... and protective."

"I... I don't know if I can do that." I said in a full out panic. I would be surrounded by my parents' friends. They were people that had known me before my life went to hell. They knew all about what happened to me.

"Please E.J., nearly everyone is out of town this weekend, it will be very small. I... I haven't seen you in so long," she nearly begged, still holding onto my hand. I looked up to Jasper and Bella, but they were going to leave this up to me, it seemed. I took a deep breath.

"Okay, mom," I said softly, not meeting her eye.

"Thank you," she said, and leaned forward very slowly, as if not to startle me, and kissed me on the cheek. "Come around noon, and we can talk for a while, just the two of us, before anyone arrives. If you don't feel comfortable, you can leave whenever you want. Okay?" I nodded, resigned to the fact that I would be going back to my boyhood home. I was resigned to the fact that I was going to have to see my father again. Was this going to be part of my self-imposed therapy? I really didn't want to engage every single one of my

ghosts in the same week, but I guess it was easier than prolonging the inevitable.

Her face clouded over, and she looked pensive for a moment. It was like she was struggling with some deep seated emotion. Finally, her face cleared and she suddenly looked determined. "I love you, Edward." She said and opened her arms to me, just like when I was a boy. I stepped forward slowly and hugged her. It felt nice. I didn't feel exactly the same as it had when I was little, but I felt a little of that warmth spread through me. It was like a repressed memory, my mother's love. I turned my head and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"I love you too, mom." I whispered into her hair.

Chapter: 6

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Journal Entry: Facing my Demons

Why had I agreed to go to brunch at my parents' house? Why? I don't like people. My parents aren't all that fond of me. Last, but certainly not least, I'll be shoe-horned back into being Edward Masen. I haven't been Edward Masen in so long; I don't even know who he is anymore. Okay, I can't think of anything else to write. I can't concentrate. I'm starting to panic at the thought of backyard brunch with the canapés, the false kindness, and the frenzied rush to leave and talk behind other peoples' backs. I know exactly what they'll be talking about after this luncheon.

I closed the journal. Trying to write today would be no good at all. My mind was racing; I felt so out of control, I ... I needed something to help me regain control. I walked down the stairs and saw that Jasper and Bella were alone in the kitchen. Bella was finishing up the dishes while Jasper sat at the table cutting lengths of what looked like clothesline. They both looked up as I entered, and Bella gave me a wide smile.

"How's the writing coming?" Jasper asked interestedly. He sat the knife he had been using on the table, and began to coil up the rope. When I didn't answer right away, he looked up into my face. I saw his face go from a smile to a look of concern in an instant. After being friends for so long, *even now that word sounded so foreign*, he read me well. "Sit with me, Edward." He pulled out the chair next to him and I sat down. I stared at the table until I felt his hand on my knee, rubbing it reassuringly. I looked at him, and he continued the soothing motion.

"If you are that worried about the thing with your parents, don't go." He suggested softly. "You can see them another time. I think it's selfish of your mother to invite you... No, guilt you into coming to a brunch with people you don't want to see." His face hardened, and his concern touched me. I put my hand on his, stopping his gesture. He held my hand for a few minutes, and we said nothing.

Bella came over to the table then. She didn't comment on our show of affection, but simply ran her fingers through my hair. I found it calming, and I closed my eyes to her touch. If

this is what it was to have friends who cared about me, I was grateful. I didn't feel alone anymore. I felt cared for, nurtured.

"Jasper and I are going to have a session with Jacob in a few minutes. Would you like to come up with us?" She asked tentatively. I looked up at her. They wanted to include me in their session with their sub. Jasper was nodding so they must have talked about the possibility already. They may have even talked to Jacob about it. I looked at Jasper, and he answered my silent question.

"Yes, we've talked about it. That type of relationship is something that helps you to stay in control. We knew that there would come a time when we would ask you to join in. Jacob is alright with it, maybe a little nervous. So, this first time, when you're in the room you can work with Bella or with me. One of us can sub for you, or... you can sub for one of us, depending on what you're looking for," he said. That left my head spinning. He wanted to sub for me, or me sub for him? I sat back and thought about what I wanted. I had been in control of our relationship for so long, was that how I wanted things to continue? Would it help me more to relinquish that control to someone I trusted, like Jasper? I didn't really want to answer that question tonight. There were too many variables, and I still felt so out of control.

"Uhm... Could I just watch this time?" I asked. I didn't want to play Dom or sub with him today. It had been weeks since I'd had any kind of interaction of that type. The memory of our last time together was still fresh, and raw in my mind. I didn't know what kind of emotions would be drawn to the surface if I made myself vulnerable to him in that way.

"Sure, Edward," Jasper said, smiling. We made our way upstairs to the playroom. I reminded myself to tell him about the soundproofing once we were done. I saw Jacob immediately upon entering the room. He was quietly on his knees on what looked like a Yoga pad in the center of the room. I liked the change it made to my own playroom. Bella and Jasper were good to Jacob, or they left him in this position for extended periods of time.

Jasper nodded to his left at the leather winged back chair, and I went to sit down. Chairs like this indicated to me that they were anticipating an audience when they worked with their sub, I was intrigued by that. I wanted to make sure to stay out of their way, and this location would give me a good vantage point. Jacob continued to look at a fixed spot on the floor while Jasper and Bella set up for their scene. He was tall and lean with chin length black hair. His body was sculpted, but not hard and he appeared to be in his late teens or very early twenties. The grace with which he held his position, the dignity was impressive given his age and relative inexperience. They had done a good job with him. I felt a certain pride in that.

It seemed that Bella would be in charge of this scene, because Jasper was simply helping her to set things up while she removed her clothing. Under the jeans and t-shirt she had entered the room in was a red leather bra and panties set. She was beautiful and glorious. I noticed that she wore no shoes. Bella was never one for heels, no matter how much they matched the outfit. She stood before the boy and put her finger under his chin. He looked up at her with reverence.

"Do you remember what you learned from our last session, Jacob?" She asked sternly and he nodded. "Answer me properly!" She nearly growled

"Yes, Mistress Bella," he said softly, trying not to look at me in his humiliation. It was apparent that he did not like being naked in front of me. He may have even resented Jasper

and Bella for sharing him with me like this. I had no intention of touching him, but it was amusing to watch him squirm.

"And you remember that you have a punishment due this session, because your tender skin earned you a reprieve last time?" She asked with a smirk.

"Yes, Mistress," he said solemnly.

"Good," she said turning around to look behind her. Apparently, she found what she was looking for. "Jacob, follow me." She walked over to a medium sized padded table, and he followed. "Stand." He stood up and she pushed him forward over the long edge of the table.

"Mistress, I..." He started, but then stopped immediately.

"What, Jacob?" She asked, but he just shook his head.

"Spread your legs," she told him, and he moved his feet apart slowly. "Wider. Yes, like that," she indicated when his thighs tensed with the effort of standing with such a wide stance. She knelt next to him and tied his ankle to a leg of the table, then moved to the other side and did the same. He was spread and naked and vulnerable. She went around to the other side of the table and looped another length of rope around his wrists – this she tied to a metal d-ring embedded in the floor. He was immobilized.

"That's my good boy." She said softly as she ran her hand slowly up the back of first one thigh then the other. He moaned softly as she rubbed his buttocks. "Do you like that?"

"Yes, Mistress." He said softly, turning his head to the side so that she could hear him. Then, he put his forehead back on the table. I knew he was doing everything he could to avoid looking at me. Bella went over to Jasper who handed her a wide leather paddle. Good, they were still working with beginner instruments. I'd have been worried if they had opted for a cane, or even a strap. I was proud of their progress. At least the boy was going to get off easy by having Bella paddle him instead of Jasper. He seemed to be struggling.

As Bella swung back to give him his first blow with the paddle, I started to become aroused. When it struck his tender skin, and he cried out, I realized that he wasn't getting a reprieve at all. Bella wielded that paddle just as hard as any man. I got up from the chair and looked at Jasper, he nodded. Walking around to the other side of the table, I was now able to see his anguish more clearly. His cries were more pronounced as the paddle struck him again and again. Bella stopped, and he lifted his head to look at her. His face was streaked with tears. He had a vulnerability that struck a chord in me. Unpretentious and unassuming, he lay naked across the table, beautiful in his subservience. I found myself wanting to run my fingers through his long soft hair to comfort him, but that wasn't my role here.

Jasper came forward then and stood before Jacob. He put his fingers in Jacob's hair and pulled his head up. "Open." He said sternly and then slid his hard cock into the boy's mouth. "That's it... You like that don't you, boy?" Jacob moaned, and Jasper pushed deeper into his throat. "Lick the head..." Jasper said, and his head fell back in pure pleasure, and the boy complied with his demand. "Fuck, you're getting so good, Jacob. You please your Master." He pumped his hips faster, and I noticed Bella go over to the back counter and pick up a plastic vibe. She grabbed the lube from side table on her way back to Jacob.

He whimpered softly around Jasper's cock as Bella prepared him, and then inserted the vibe. She stopped and waited for him to adjust to the size of the toy, and then turned it on.

When I looked back to his face, I noticed that Jasper was gripping his hair tightly; both of them had closed their eyes. My own cock was rock hard watching the scene play out before me. I adjusted myself in my jeans and then walked around to where Bella was slowly fucking Jacob with the vibe. The intermittent sound of buzzing mingled with his grunts of pleasure. Jasper stopped moving and groaned as he came inside of Jacob's mouth. Jacob leaned up slightly on his elbows and swallowed until Jasper was spent.

Bella had pulled out a low stool and added a strap around her waist and legs that she was affixing the vibrator to. When she was ready, she grasped tightly to Jacob's hips and thrust her hips forward. The sound he made was somewhere between a groan and a whimper as she filled him. She continued steadily thrusting, and I could hear the soft sound of her hips slapping against his reddened buttocks. Jasper came around to the other side and after applying lubricant to his hand, began to stroke Jacob's fully erect cock. Jacob whimpered and grunted in time with the thrusts, and I could tell he was close.

"Don't you cum until you're told boy, or you will be punished." Jasper told him, and Jacob locked his jaw and his eyes focused on a point on the floor as he concentrated on staving off his orgasm. I unbuttoned and unzipped my jeans to relieve a little of the pressure on my own raging erection. After a moment of watching her fucking him, I just gave up and pulled my cock free of my jeans, stroking myself. It was so different just watching, and not participating in the action. I found myself torn – I wanted to join in, but the moment was theirs. Jacob started to whimper, it was so drawn out that it was almost a whine. It wouldn't be long before he came, and he knew that if that happened he would displease his Master and Mistress.

"Very good, Jacob. Much better. Cum now," Jasper said affectionately, and it sounded as if it were something they had been working on. Apparently, Jacob hadn't mastered the concept as easily as Jasper and Bella. However, they were supportive of him, and they were teaching him. Jacob cried out as his orgasm hit and he pressed his head against the table, grunting and almost growling with the intensity of it. When his orgasm started to subside, Bella pulled the vibrator gently from him. They rubbed and stroked him as they untied him. They assured him that he had done very well and that they were pleased.

Then Bella told him to undress her, and his eyes lit up. His hands reverently removed her bra, letting it slide down her arms as her soft breasts were revealed. Then, he pulled her panties down her legs, letting his hands slide down her long legs as he did so. She pulled his face to her breast, and he kissed it gently before sucking the nipple into his mouth. Bella moaned and pulled him to the other breast. He was on his knees now, worshipping her body with his mouth.

Jasper grinned and looked at me. Then, he took my hand and led me back to the chair. Pushing me down into it, he pulled my jeans down to my ankles and then looked up into my face. His smirk was just... just... fucking hot as he leaned forward and wrapped his perfect lips around my cock. I strained in the chair not to just grab his head and fuck his mouth. He was doing this to alleviate my stress, to show his affection, and to please me – I would let him set the pace. He started by using his tongue up and down the length of my cock. I grabbed the arms of the chair, and let my head fall back resting against the soft leather. Bella came into my line of vision there and I watched her straddle over Jacob's face as he lay on the playroom floor. She was grinding herself into his eager mouth. Unbound, his hands grasped her buttocks and squeezed as she rode his sweet face. She was moaning wildly as he added his fingers to the onslaught of her soft sex.

The wickedly decadent feeling of his mouth brought my attention sharply back to Jasper.

From that moment, all I could concentrate on was his lips, his tongue, his teeth, and his hands as they worked my painfully hard cock. As his hands massaged my balls, I knew it had been far too long. It wasn't going to take long for him to make me cum. From the out of control sounds that Bella was making, it wouldn't take her long either. I let my hips find that natural rhythm as they came off the chair. I was so fucking close, I could just feel it building – like a rubber band about to snap. I moved my hips gently, fucking his sweet mouth.

I reached down and stroked his cheek, and he looked up at me. I cried out as Bella and I came together. She grunted and gasped as she came wildly on Jacob's handsome face. He held her steady, and prolonged her orgasm with his talented tongue. She cried out over and over as her orgasm consumed her. Jasper sucked me hard as I came, and I found my tension was being released right along with my semen. By the time he let me fall from his mouth, I felt relaxed - more relaxed than I had in weeks.

As he lay his head on my thigh, I ran my fingers through his soft blond hair and knew that I would be able to put my thoughts to paper now.

He knelt up and kissed me on the forehead, and I wrapped my arms around his shoulders.

"Thank you, I really needed that."

Chapter: 7 *Journal Entry: The Birth of Edward Cullen*

And if you have to leave, I wish that you would just leave

As my 18th birthday approached, I found myself feeling increasingly agitated. Fights with my parents became more frequent and generally ended up with me in my room like a caged animal, and my mother in the sitting room in tears. The situation in our house was deteriorating rapidly, and I knew that I had to get out. I applied to colleges as far away as I could find – not to escape my parents, but to get away from the stigma of being 'little Edward Masen'. I was accepted at several schools on the east coast, but it wasn't until I got the acceptance package from the school in Washington State that I felt any measure of hope. I wondered if being that far from the hustle and bustle of Chicago would allow me to escape recognition. I doubted it, but I could always hope.

When I informed my parents of my decision, my mother was understandably upset. She felt like she was losing me all over again. If she'd had her wish, I would have gone to the University of Chicago and lived at home. My father, however, took an unexpected but welcome approach. He took me into his office to talk. He told me that he was proud of my resilience and my strength. He was proud that I wanted to be a doctor, that I was "using my experience to help people". I just let him talk, it was easier than interrupting. Then, he said something that really caught my attention. He pulled up a site on his computer and showed me my investment portfolio. I didn't even know I had an investment portfolio. I was too young to really discuss it before my abduction, and now things had been so tense it had just never come up. I couldn't help but openly gape at the numbers.

He explained that when his parents had passed, that they left me, their only grandchild, a significant trust that I would inherit when I turned 18. My parents also held a separate college account for me. They had started it shortly after I was born, and continually added to it. They added to it even after I was abducted. They continued adding to it after I was found. They held out the hope that I would come home, and that I would be normal enough to go to college. I was pleased by their faith in me. The college account alone would insure

that I could be financially independent throughout college and medical school. I would be able to attend class without working, reducing the stress that would be put on me.

** * **

I graduated and turned 18 without much fanfare. I didn't have any friends, so there was no reason for a party. My parents bought me a car as my graduation gift, and I fell in love with it at once. My father had wanted something flashy, while my mother wanted something safe. They compromised on a beautiful silver Volvo. It was small, but well equipped. It was sleek and elegant – and it was mine. We spent that last afternoon together loading it up for my long drive to my new life. Of course, they had offered to drive me, fly me, or even walk with me to Washington – but I felt that this first step towards my independence should be taken alone.

It took several days of prearranged hotels, and prearranged calls with my mother to get to Washington State. During that time, I alternated between being scared and being excited. On one hand, I would have a shot at a new life, away from the horrors of my past. On the other I was nervous about what I would find when I arrived. Would the other students recognize my name? Would they question me? Would they shun me? What if my new roommate knew? Would he want to sleep in the same room with a guy that had been with another man? Would my history freak him out? How could I live with him if it did? But, I didn't want to live alone in an apartment off campus. As much as I hated being around people, they were now like a safety blanket that I could wrap myself in. If I were alone, he would find me. He would come into my room.

Then, the solution hit me. I would change my name. I didn't know what I would change it to, or how to go about doing it, but that was the solution. Maybe they would look at me and see that I was familiar for some reason, but without the name to connect it – I could be free. I called my father and explained my epiphany. Surprisingly he agreed with me, and emailed me the contact information of our family attorney. I pulled over for a while and called him. He took me through the process and assured me that when I reached Washington, he would fly out and accompany me to the local courthouse to file the paperwork. I felt ... relieved, light-hearted as I reached the Washington border. Now, all I had to decide on was a name.

There were names all around me, but nothing that felt right. I was going to have to be this person, this name – I wanted it to be something that I could live with. Finally, I gave up on the big advertisements. I didn't want to go with a more popular name, it would raise questions. I started looking at street signs.

Lake St. – Edward Lake?

Birch Ave. – Edward Birch?

Clark St. – Edward Clark?

Cullen Dr – Edward Cullen?

Yes, I liked that one. Edward Cullen. It didn't sound like I took it off of a street sign. It sounded, normal.

The dorms weren't accepting students until Monday, so I checked into a hotel near campus. I called our lawyer and let him know what I had decided. He said he already had a flight

booked and would be there this afternoon. I was surprised, but as he said, we needed to get it done and the change filed with the school before anyone even heard the name Masen. If anyone was able to connect the two, the change would be in vain. Even though he argued about it, I picked him up from the airport, and we made our way first to the courthouse and then to the college. He insisted on helping me with the school administration, which turned out to be a very good thing. They didn't think it was appropriate for an 18 year old boy to change his name. The woman obviously didn't recognize the name Masen. Finally we were ushered in to speak to the Dean of Students. He explained the situation to the dean while I stood staring blankly out of the window.

In the end, the Dean was sympathetic to my plight. He erased all mention of Edward Masen in their computer system and replaced it with Edward Cullen. He took my application and other paper files and locked them securely in his office. He also switched my roommate on the off chance that they would have seen my name before it was changed. He did everything he could to hide my identity. It gave me the impression that for whatever reason, he understood my need for normalcy.

When that first semester started, I was thrilled that I seemed to fade into the background. I kept my head down in class, I sat alone in the quad at lunch, and I even managed to get a roommate who kept to himself. For the first few months, everything was fine. But then, I started to notice groups of people hanging around together. I noticed couples holding hands while walking across campus. I was surrounded by people, but I felt so isolated. I didn't engage anyone because I figured I didn't have anything to offer. Why would they want to hang out with a guy who was just an empty shell? So, I threw myself into my classes and I excelled.

It wasn't until my third year that things started to change for me. One of my new suite mates, Tyler, was outgoing and charismatic. Surrounded by an air of confidence, he made friends easily, especially female friends. Thankfully, he never brought them back to the suite, but he talked about it frequently I thought maybe he was overstating things until he offered to hook me up with one of his friends. I was now 21, and felt like the only virgin on campus. Both of my suite mates had thought it was a joke when it came up, until I blushed and assured them that it wasn't. Tyler set me up with Jessica because he said she was a "sure thing". I was pretty sure that meant sex.

He arranged to stay with a frat buddy that night "just in case", and left a box of condoms by my bed, while my other suite mate looked on in mild concern. I was mortified. I decided, however, that I would at least try. I mean, it was sex – everyone did it. Well, normal people did it. I couldn't really put myself in the 'everyone' group. She was a nice girl, and I was able to talk to her at least on a superficial level. I had no real social skills, but she seemed to talk enough for the both of us, so I didn't really require any. After a simple dinner, we came back to my room. We sat down on the bed, looking awkwardly at each other, and that's when I started to panic. She took my hand and told me that she understood that I was frightened, and that was normal. It was almost like she could read my mind. When she leaned forward to kiss me, I just closed my eyes and froze.

Her lips were soft, and kissing her was very nice. She smelled like apples, not like the stale beer I was used to. Her body was soft instead of wiry, and she was yielding and compliant instead of insistent. She undressed in front of me, and I marveled at each new discovery as it was unveiled to me. She guided my hands. She taught me what to do. Then, she undressed me, and the realization of what I was about to do struck home. This would mark the end of his power over me.

She pushed me back onto the bed, and slid the condom down over my burgeoning erection. It seemed that she was ready, and I guess I was ready too. I wondered if intimacy would come later, because right now it just felt perfunctory. She straddled over my hips, and guided my hands to her breasts. She moaned softly as she sank down onto me, and I was inside of a woman for the very first time. Then, she began to move. It felt good, though some of the feeling was blocked by the condom. I looked up and saw that her eyes were closed. I rubbed her breasts like she had showed me. She moaned, and said "Yeah, just like that... You feel so good..." I froze. He had used those exact words with me. My erection waned, and I put my hands over my face, trying to calm my frantically beating heart.

"Oh honey, it's okay." She had told me quietly. "It happens." She had no idea that I wasn't just having normal erectile issues, that it was something else entirely. "Let try it this way." She said, and laid down on the bed, pulling me on top of her. I didn't know that I wanted to keep going. I felt like a freak telling her that I wanted to stop though. What guy is in the middle of sex and just says he doesn't feel like it anymore? So, I got on top and let her guide my partial erection into her again. This position made me feel more powerful, more in control. I liked that feeling. I kissed her, just to keep her from talking again and ruining it. As I moved my hips, I felt myself getting harder. Soon, I was back to a full erection, and she was moaning into my mouth. She whimpered and that something off in me.

I took her hands and pinned her wrists to the bed, driving down hard into her. She arched her back, pressing her breasts up into me. Oh yeah, I liked that. She was the one that was helpless now. She jerked her hips up to meet mine as I drove relentlessly, mercilessly into her. She grunted wildly in time with my thrusts as I continued to pin her to the bed. She thrashed, and rocked, but I held firm. Finally, her body tightened around me. I wasn't sure what was happening at first, but then she made sounds like those girls in the movies he made me watch, and I knew. She continued to writhe beneath me, but couldn't break my hold. That fucking turned me on even more. My grip on her wrists tightened and I fucked her as hard as I could. I couldn't even be bothered by the animalistic sounds I was making as I desperately sought, what? An orgasm? Redemption? Some sense of normalcy? I came with something akin to roar, it was a sound born of triumph as I emptied into the condom.

It was only then that I realized what I had done. Her eyes were wide when I looked down into them, and as I let go of her wrists, I saw deep red marks that would surely bruise. She assured me that she was alright, but dressed quickly and left all the same. I was sickened with myself, horrified at my abuse of her. She was only trying to help me. I knew then that I would never have a normal relationship with a woman. He had ruined me.

Tyler was not happy with me after that, so I had taken to spending my free time on the roof of our dorm. Thankfully, it appeared that the RAs didn't know that the lock was broken. I'm sure they would not approve, especially in my current state of mind. I spent hours just looking over at the 15 story drop, trying to will myself onto the ledge.

Then, with one essay, my life changed.

My psych professor had asked me to stay after class one afternoon. I was anxious to get back to the roof. I thought maybe today would be the day. The feeling was particularly strong after writing that fucking essay on trauma. We were supposed to interview someone in our lives that was coping with trauma. Well, I didn't have anyone in my life, and I was a walking fucking poster child for trauma. So, I wrote the paper, changing some key details, about myself. Now, he was calling me in to talk about it. I was sure I was going to fail, and that would just kill my GPA for medical school. So, I agreed to stay and talk to him.

"Edward, I wanted to talk to you about your interview subject." He said gently, sat in a chair in front of my desk. I nodded. He sighed. "How did you choose the name Cullen?"

I gaped at him. How the hell did he know? I figured there was no point in lying to him. "A street sign I saw as I came into town." I said, looking at the floor. He laughed, and said something about his family's love of affectation.

"I'm not going to tell anyone, Edward. I think I may be able to help you." He said, and I looked up, almost rolling my eyes.

"No one can help me." I said softly. "Shrinks, therapy, pills – they've tried. I am beyond the reach of help."

"No, Edward. I was talking about something a little less ... conventional." He said, and I could hear the smile in his voice. I was intrigued in spite of myself.

"But, Professor Cullen – I don't think I can be helped. I'm so damaged." I said, with a small bubble of hope starting to grow in my chest.

"Edward – call me Carlisle."

Chapter: 8 Journal Entry – Coping Mechanism

Cause your presence still lingers here and it won't leave me alone

Over the next few weeks, Professor Cullen, or Carlisle as I was to call him now, explained to me about the D/s community that he was a part of. He said that my reaction during my first time was normal given my trauma, and that he thought maybe a different type of coping mechanism was needed here because of the extreme nature of my abuse. We talked about hard lists, and soft lists and about different options that I had for starting in the community. He thought that pairing me with a female Domme would be better given my history, and we added men to my hard limits. For some reason, he felt that may not always be the case, even though I assured him that wouldn't change.

I wondered why, given my obvious need for control, he didn't want to start me off as a Dom. It seemed like a better fit for me, with what we had talked about. I didn't know if I could ... perform as a submissive. I was trying to gain control not be without control. He explained that in a relationship like that, a submissive had all of the control. He felt that was the best place for me to start, that maybe I shouldn't have responsibility over someone else for a while. This would help me learn to trust.

One night after Tyler had gone out; my other suite mate approached me. He said that he'd noticed I've been spending a lot of time with Carlisle Cullen. I nodded, wondering what he could possibly know. I knew that Carlisle would never divulge the content of our conversations; he was like my therapist now. One of the only therapists I had ever known that was truly trying to help me. He said that he also knew Carlisle, and that the professor had asked him to talk to me about being a submissive. I was astonished. Felix was shy and unassuming. He spoke softly, but with purpose. He told me about his Mistress, and about some of the things they did. Mostly, he talked about how it made him feel. He was so in touch with himself, so confident in his emotions. I wanted that. I wanted that so badly.

When Carlisle told me a few days later that he had secured me a place with a local Domme, I was nervous but excited. When he told me that she was also Felix's Domme, I felt...

comforted. I would not be alone; I would have someone to talk to about my experiences. For the first time ever in my life, I started to see daylight at the end of the tunnel.

My first meeting with Alice was certainly not what I had expected it to be. We met at a coffee shop outside of the normal student hang outs. It was quiet and comfortable, a perfect place to get to know someone, and that's exactly what she wanted to do. She wanted to get to know me. She said that different aspects of my personality would lend themselves to different types of things that we would do together. She was open, and very nice, but I felt awkward with her. I felt like a gangly teenage boy next to the prom queen. She had experience, stature in this lifestyle and I did not. After a while, she got what she needed and I was finally going to get started after weeks of education and preparation.

It took weeks of careful and patient sessions before she was able to penetrate me without causing me to burst into tears. All I could see and feel during those initial sessions was him. His presence lingered, and haunted me – never allowing me peace. She just kept stroking my hair and telling me that I was safe. I knew she had no idea what I had been through, but that Carlisle had told her to be gentle with me. She taught me to please her orally, which initially I didn't think I would want to do. Once I saw how I could please her no matter what position I was bound in, and even without the use of my hands, it became one of my favorite session moments with her. Within the first two weeks, I was devoted to her. I think it was because of the way she made me feel when she disciplined me. This was one area where she didn't need to be gentle. I welcomed the pain, I longed for it. When she paddled me, and eventually whipped or caned me, I could detach myself from my past and focus solely on it.

In my willing submission to another, I found my escape. I found my purpose.

"Edward?" Jasper asked as he knocked on my door frame. My door was open, but not wanting to startle me, he always knocked before he entered. I marked my page and looked up. "How are you?" I shrugged. I liked thinking back to those first few sessions with Alice. She had been so patient with me, and giving up that control was just what I needed. Jasper came into the room then, and knelt in front of my chair. "Bella and Jacob are out for the day, I thought maybe it would be a good time for us to do a session." He positioned himself between my legs, and pressed his lips to my ear "Please, Master Edward." He kissed my neck gently, and I closed my eyes, nodding. Pulling away slowly, he made to rise, but I stopped him.

"Jasper, I was wondering.. I thought maybe..." I stammered, feeling like an idiot. It shouldn't be this hard. He put his hand on the side of my face.

"What is it, Edward?" He asked, with genuine concern.

"I thought maybe it would help if I took a submissive role. I think maybe it would be best if you were in control." I told him. He put his other hand on my face and brought my lips to his.

"I would be honored." He said simply before his lips met mine. Then he stood up, still holding one of my hands. "I will get things set up, just come in when you're ready." I nodded and he left the room. I walked over to the bed and for the first time in nearly 5 years, I took off my clothes so that I could put myself in someone else's hands.

I walked naked into their playroom, and took my place on the mat in the center of the room where I had last seen Jacob. I knelt in subservience to Jasper with my fingers laced behind

my neck, and my eyes on the floor, waiting. I felt him come up behind me, and then his lips were at my ear. "You're already hard for me, I see. That's very good." I felt an involuntary shiver course through me with the sound of his voice. My nipples hardened, and that sensation shot right down my chest and into my stomach. He always made me so fucking hard.

"Yes, Sir." I said, my voice breathless and excited.

"I don't like that." He mused, walking around to stand in front of me. What didn't he like? I hadn't done anything wrong. "I don't like 'Sir'. I think you can earn the right to call me 'Master'. What do you think?" He asked, and grasped my hair, tilting my face up until I was looking at him.

"Yes, Sir." I repeated.

"Good boy." He said, releasing my hair. "You can start by removing my clothes." I removed my hands from the back of my neck and stood up. With trembling fingers I began to unbutton his shirt, kissing the exposed skin reverently with each open button. As my lips ghosted over the sculpted planes of his stomach, I felt his intake of breath as the muscles clenched. When all of the buttons were undone, I pulled the shirt off of his shoulders, my fingers tracing lines down his muscled arms as I knelt before him. I felt his fingers in my hair and heard his soft moan as I kissed his stomach with tender open mouthed kisses. My hands rested on his sides, pulling him closer to me. As my lips covered his navel, I reached down and unbuttoned his jeans. His fingers tightened in my hair as I pulled them down over his hips. My lips were on his thighs as I pushed his jeans to the floor allowing him to step out of them. I pressed my lips to his straining erection through his briefs. His hands were on my shoulders now, gripping tightly as I licked the head through the material. My fingers caressed the backs of his legs while I reached up for the waistband of his briefs. I pulled them down, watching his cock spring from its confinement as I relieved him of the garment.

I licked my lips, shocked at the driving need I felt to take him into my mouth. He pulled back, as if he were tempted by the same thought I was, and ordered me to follow him. He put his hands on my naked hips and turned me so that I was facing his bondage chair. It was the same type of chair that I had in my own playroom.

"Bend over the seat and put your hands on the back of the chair." He said low in my ear. I reached out and grasped the back of the chair, and he took two lengths of rope and tied my wrists into position. He left my legs unbound, but kicked my feet apart with his own. I knew he wouldn't whip me, not yet. My skin was still much too sensitive for that. I wondered idly what he had in mind. Then I felt his lips touch the back of my neck. I shivered, and they moved slowly across my shoulders. I felt him grazing my skin very lightly as he moved from side to side across my back, moving lower with each pass. It finally dawned on me that he was kissing the marks on my back. My heart swelled. But as he moved lower, over my buttocks, a new feeling rose in me. I gripped the wooden chair hard under my hands as his lips trailed down the backs of my thighs. When he started to come back up, and his lips pressed hard between my legs, I cried out. I couldn't help myself. His forehead pressed against my buttocks and he licked and kissed my balls from behind. My cock was aching now as he sucked them lightly.

"Please, Sir. Please... Please..." I cried incoherently, bending my knees to spread my legs wider apart, grinding myself against his face. Then, he pulled away and stood, pressing his lips to my ear.

"What is it that you want?" He asked, and his voice shot a current straight through to my cock as he continued to stroke between my legs with his hand.

"Please fuck me... Please... I want to cum for you..." I added the 'Sir' as an afterthought; any kind of 'if it pleases you' was just beyond me at this point. I couldn't think, my breathing was coming in wild gasps now. I watched him pick up a bottle of lube from a nearby shelf and then he nudged me slightly to the side. He ducked below my bound arms and sat in the chair. Opening the bottle, he poured a small amount on the tip of his cock, and began to stroke himself. I couldn't stop my hips from moving in time with his hand. I wanted him so fucking badly.

"Is this what you want?" He asked, rubbing the head of his cock just inches from my own.

"Yes... Sir, please..." I moaned, and then he helped me to climb up into the chair on his lap. My legs were over the arms of the chair, cruelly spread and my buttocks rested several inches above his thighs. I held on to the chair for leverage and waited. I felt his lubricated fingers slide into my anus. I stayed still, expecting him to withdraw them, but he didn't. He began to move them slowly in and out of me, and then with his other hand he stroked me with the same rhythm. I thought the wood under my hands would split as hard as I was holding on to it, but it didn't. The muscles in my arms strained as I used my grip to pump my hips into his hands. At once he stopped; he was apparently tired of teasing. Using one hand to grasp my hip and pull me down, he used the other to guide himself into me, impaling me on him. I whimpered softly as he entered me.

"Ride my cock." He said in a low strained voice, and I moved my hips slowly to obey. I rode him, using my grip on the chair, and my legs in order to achieve the momentum. He put both hands on my hips, guiding me, his thumbs rubbing soft circles into my skin. My head fell back as I concentrated on holding off my orgasm. I was pretty sure I wasn't going to make it, but I tried my best.

As he started to lift his hips and drive up into me, I desperately wished for the use of my hands. I wanted so badly to stroke myself. Why wasn't he doing that? Why wasn't he touching me? It was fucking maddening. I pulled at the ropes trying to get free, as I bounced ceaselessly on his cock.

"Fuck... yeah..." He grunted in a low voice. "I want you to cum, Edward." *Fuck, I wish I could!* Then I felt it, his hand stroking me as I continued to drive myself up and down on him. He was pumping me fast, trying to get me off. He must be close. Then, everything tensed, and that familiar feeling raced through me as my cock erupted onto his chest. He continued to stroke me, prolonging my orgasm until I cried and whimpered above him, pulling away from his hand. He put both hands back on my hips again and stopping my own motion, drove up into me again and again. His thrusts were hard and swift, and his fingers were tight on my skin.

Finally, he drove up into me and held my hips against his. He pumped a few more times as he filled my ass with a deep resonating groan. Then, his head came up and he leaned forward to kiss me hard, his hands still on my hips. I kissed him even as he moaned and panted into my mouth. It was so hot to see him lose control like that. Finally, he pulled back and pressed his forehead against mine. I could do nothing, but hold myself above him.

His lips found my ear and he murmured gently –

"I love how you make me feel."

These wounds won't seem to heal; this pain is just too real.

Felix and I spent the remainder of that year talking late into the night. We talked about what we were learning from Mistress Alice, about our sessions, and about things that we've seen that we'd like to try. It was a whole new world for me, a whole new set of experiences. I had finally found someplace where I belonged. I knew that Tyler thought us to be lovers, the way we were always closeted, but really it was just nice to finally have someone to talk to.

Felix and I tried to room together again the following year, but the assignments didn't work out that way. As we approached graduation, however I became thankful for that. Over the course of our time with Mistress Alice, Felix had developed a crush of sorts... on me. I heard him pressuring Alice a few times before sessions, trying to get her to let him be with me. I was just about to open the playroom door one day when I heard them arguing. Alice, of course, refused with no room for discussion. She said that it would violate our agreement, and that she would not do that – period. He argued that I was just scared and that he would be gentle with me. But, no doubt remembering how much effort and patience she expended at the start of my training, she felt certain that wasn't it. He continued to push, but thankfully she never gave in. I'm still not sure to this day what I would have done had she asked me to do it. As it was, I could see her disappointment. I knew it was something that she wanted of me as well.

I considered it carefully. It was something they both wanted; it was something I'd technically already done. My entire life I had been taught that sexual gratification was a way to win favor and rewards. Couldn't I just suck it up, and give in to what they wanted? She was able to penetrate me now with a toy – would it be so much different to be penetrated by Felix? Would I feel his breath on my neck? Would I hear his low animal grunts in my ear as he took me? I started to pant and panic at the thought of him violating me in that manner. I didn't think I could do it, at all. The toys took me back to that time enough. It took all of my concentration to keep myself in the present moment when she wanted to touch me like that. I had been terrified at first, but she had been patient and kind. I just couldn't believe the same of Felix, and I couldn't be comfortable with what he wanted. It would set back any progress that I had made, deep down I knew that it would. I would go back to the self-loathing, rage-filled boy that I had been before meeting Carlisle and Alice. I didn't ever want to be that scared little boy again.

Finally, after three years, I decided that the arrangement with Alice was no longer working for me. I liked Felix, I revered Mistress Alice, but the growing pressure of their expectations and subsequent disappointment strained our relationships. I found myself seeking Carlisle's advice. He had been monitoring my progress with Alice and knew all about my training. We talked for nearly two hours about my relationship with Alice, with Felix, and about what excited me about our sessions. We talked about how I handled certain aspects of my training. I liked being disciplined, but I also liked to discipline Felix. He desperately wanted me to follow up his whippings with a sexual session, but I just couldn't. Finally, Carlisle made a suggestion that intrigued me – he thought I should become a Dom.

And so I did.

I had a successful assessment, and of course Carlisle and Alice took me under their wing. They helped me set up my own playroom, and Carlisle even introduced me to my first long-term sub, Gianna. She had already been trained and was looking for a new Dom as hers

was moving out of state. She was bright, sweet, and wickedly funny. After my first year as her Dom, I was approached about training a new girl. It seemed that Garrett had found a new submissive, but didn't want to go through the hassle of training her. He wanted her already ready to serve him. I took her on. I taught her everything that Mistress Alice has taught me. I enlisted Gianna's help in her training, and we worked for a long time. Finally, I felt she was adequately prepared for her new role. She did very well in her assessment with Garrett, and he was very pleased. My reputation in the community had started to grow.

It wasn't until Gianna came to me and told me that she had to end our agreement that I realized my new dilemma. I had based my identity, my self-worth on my role as a Dom. After she left me, I would have no sub. To me, that meant no identity. It meant that I had no purpose. We fought for the entire last month of our agreement. I knew I couldn't stop her from leaving, but neither could I support her. She consistently sought my approval, but I found that I could not give it. It pained her that I was upset with her for leaving. She felt that if I cared for her, that I would encourage her to follow her dreams. What she never understood was that I cared for her in her role, but not as anything more. We weren't friends, we weren't lovers – we simply were.

I reached out to Carlisle and Alice in an effort to find a new sub. They knew of none that were available. It wasn't often that newcomers joined our community, and none of the other Dom/mes were looking to change their current agreements. Then Gianna told me of her roommate's interest. Bella became my salvation, more than I ever would have expected. When Gianna told me that her virgin roommate wanted an assessment, I almost laughed. What fucking good was a virgin sub going to do me? But, at this point, I was pretty desperate, so I agreed to meet with her. I would insist on sex as one of the requirements, she had to give it up eventually if she wanted to be my sexual submissive. I would be okay with having to wait for a little while. I guess.

As soon as I walked into the front room of my house, I knew I had found my new submissive. She was beautiful, and had a body just made to be bound and punished. The first time she bit her lip and blushed, I got hard. I wanted to take her up to the playroom right then and fuck her, but we had a lot to discuss. She had to be the one to decide. My decision was already made – or so I thought.

Bella turned out to be much too smart for her own good. Like any responsible person would, she decided to check me out before agreeing to anything. When she found out that Edward Cullen hadn't existed for more than a few years - that threw up a red flag for her. She checked public records and found my name change. A quick web search of "Edward A. Masen Jr" told her everything she wanted to know. It told her that I wasn't, in fact, a criminal as she may have suspected – but a victim.

If I hadn't been so determined to take her on, I might have dismissed her entirely. She handled it better than I ever thought she would. She told me that who I was before isn't who I am now, and she likes who I am now. My history wasn't an issue for her. She didn't mention it again, but once we became friends, she listened when I needed to talk about it. She became my sub, my friend, and my confidante. At the time, I wished she could become my lover as well. I wished that I was capable of that kind of relationship, that I was capable of it with her. Unfortunately, that just wasn't meant to be.

For the first few weeks with Bella, I was rather frustrated with our lack of sexual progress. I was waiting for her to come to me about what she wanted to do about her virginity. She knew that sexual intercourse was something I expected of her, but we had agreed that she could be with someone else for her first time if she so chose. She didn't. I was astonished

when she wanted it to be me. I was determined to make her first time a more fulfilling experience than mine was. I had already been quite a few of her firsts. I taught her how to perform oral sex, and fuck did I love letting her practice – she was an absolute natural. I induced her very first orgasm. I provided her with all of the sexual experiences and delights I could, short of that one final act. Then, she asked for that as well.

It took a little planning once she assured me that this was what she wanted. I didn't want to tie her down and throw her a quick fuck. This was important, and I wanted it to be a gratifying experience. I briefly considered taking her to my bed, but I felt as Carlisle had once suggested when I first became a Dom, that allowing a sub into my bed was blurring the lines a bit too much – so I needed an alternative. I set up the mats in the back of the playroom much like a bed. I laid out sheets, a comforter, and pillows – all in an effort to make her feel more comfortable. When she entered the playroom, she was nervous but determined. She walked straight back to where I stood near the mats. I stood before her in nothing but a pair of sweats – today wasn't the day for the paneled pants. Then, I pulled her to me. I held her for a long moment and felt her trembling. Pulling back I kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her neck, everything but her lips – that too blurred the lines of our relationship, at least for me.

I took my time with her and did all that I could to make the experience pleasant. She came hard against my lips as I pleased her, allowing her body to relax before I penetrated her. I tried to be gentle and caring, wiping away her tears after I broke through her innocence. I wouldn't have called it lovemaking, because there was really no love present. I cared for her because she was my sub. She cared for me as a person – but it wasn't romantic or flowery. She didn't orgasm that first time during sex. It was understandable, most women didn't. I certainly made up for that in subsequent sessions, however. I made her cum every time I fucked her after that because her pleasure was of the utmost importance to me. Because really, if you don't gain pleasure, gain sexual gratification from the experience then what's the point?

A strange thing started to happen with Bella now as my sub. I gained more confidence; I started to feel better about myself. This hadn't happened with Gianna. She didn't believe in me as Bella did. That really made all the difference in the world. By that point, I had accomplished so much. I was stronger and more secure. I took charge both in the playroom and outside of it. I was starting to become the man I wanted to be. Now if only I could draw from that experience, that strength – to get through brunch.

Chapter 10 – The Boy in the Box

"Are you sure you don't want us to come with you?" Bella asked softly, and put her hand on my chest. I shook my head. This was something I needed to do on my own. I was sick of being an emotional cripple. If I couldn't even deal with my own parents, how was I going to become a whole person? That's what I considered myself right now, a broken shell of a person. It was getting better slowly, with the writing, but I was still a long way off. I need to get things, if not better with my parents, at least manageable. For the last decade, we have been trading cards on holidays, and the occasional birthday phone call. I haven't been back to Chicago since I left for college, and they have never been to Washington. They didn't even come to my college graduation, though, now that I see things more clearly, I think they would have if I'd bothered to tell them about it.

"I have to do this on my own," I told her, and Jasper looked at me for a long moment and then nodded. Bella liked to coddle me, but Jasper knew that in order to get through things I had to start facing them. I think, beneath the surface, Jasper gets me on a level that Bella

doesn't. I've never felt that before, but then, I've never had friends before. Emotional connections were not something I ever had to deal with.

I picked up my token bottle of wine, remembering from my youth that a gift was customary when you've been invited to someone's home. I wasn't sure that really applied to your own parents, but it seemed like the right thing to do. I put on a jacket. I picked up my keys. I straightened a few pictures of Bella's parents on the table, knowing that I was stalling for time now. Then I took a deep breath and actually walked out the door. In no time at all, it seemed, I arrived at my parents' large home, and pulled into the drive.

It wasn't until my phone chirped indicating the text message that I realized I'd been sitting in the car, in my parents' driveway for more than fifteen minutes. *Great, they already think I'm crazy. Way to start the day out right.* The text was from Bella reminding me that I could come home whenever I wanted. Home. I felt more at home with Jasper and Bella than I had ever felt anywhere. That thought gave me the courage to get out of the car and face my demons.

I knocked on the door, and it opened slowly, almost like one of those horror flicks. Or was that just my imagination? Then, the door was fully open, and there stood both of my parents. Ten years had changed them greatly, and deep down, I felt like I was looking at strangers. I didn't really know them, and they didn't really know me. I handed the bottle of wine to my father as I entered. Rather than looking at me, he examined the bottle.

"You have excellent taste, Edward." He said softly, and I looked up. He looked different than I remembered. The Edward Masen I remembered was about 8 feet tall, his eyes were black, and he wore a permanent scowl. This man was about my height, with soft brown eyes and grey hair. He had a pleasant demeanor and shook my hand. He was nothing like the childish representation of him that I had created in my head. The constriction in my chest loosened as I realized that I had nothing to fear by being here. These people and their friends had no hold on me. I could either have some sort of relationship with them now, as adults, on equal footing, or I could choose not to. I was in control.

My mother hugged me, and then they led me down a hallway that seemed at least vaguely familiar. Just as I remembered, the hallway came out onto the sitting room. When we entered, I looked around and was startled to see pictures of me scattered around throughout the pictures of the rest of the family. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents littered the small space. On every surface there was at least one picture of me. I went to the piano and saw that there were several pictures of me here. The contrast between the happy child, and the self-loathing, brooding teenager sitting on the bench alone was staggering. In the first picture, the happy child played piano with his mother. They must have been playing something bright and cheery because it looked like they were laughing. In the second photo, the teenager sat on the bench alone, with his head down – his shoulders were slumped and he looked utterly defeated. This, more than anything else, brought home the reality of what things must have been like for my parents upon my return. Aside from the soft copper hair, and the green eyes, I was a completely different boy.

I felt a soft hand wrap around mine, and I looked down into my mother's face. It was the same face that I remembered from my childhood. She was the same woman that read to me, sang to me, and made me feel that warm glow inside. I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her to my chest. We embraced for several minutes, neither of us speaking, until she pulled away. She wiped her eyes surreptitiously, and pulled me to a nearby sofa. I looked around, but my father had left the room.

"He wanted to give me time with you first. He's never been able to express his emotions well, and said that today was too important to him to screw up," she said with a small smile. I thought about it, it wasn't anyone's birthday or anything. They said it was just a small brunch?

"Why is today so important, I didn't realize it was any sort of occasion?" I asked, curious. She looked at me like I was missing the obvious.

"Our son is back with us for the first time in over ten years, it's certainly an occasion," she said softly.

I sighed and looked out of the nearby window. "I'm sorry. It's just... It's hard for me to be here. In Washington, no one knows about Edward Masen, Jr. except the hospital administrator, Jasper, and Bella. They only know of him in the abstract. I put him in a box, and stuck the box on a shelf in the back of my closet. But lately... well, lately that box has been rattling. For the last 10 years, I've been living someone else's life, someone that I invented. Recently, something happened to crack the neatly cultivated façade of Edward Cullen. I just... I don't think I know who I am anymore," I finished, and looked at her. Her eyes were full of love and understanding. How had I denied myself her comfort for so long? Edward Cullen didn't have a mother; the boy in the box had a mother. Up until now, I hadn't wanted anything to do with the boy in the box.

She got up then, and walked to a bookcase to the left. Standing on her toes, she reached up and pulled down a book. It looked old, but well cared for. When she sat down with it in her lap, I saw that there was an engraved nameplate on the front that read *Edward Anthony Masen, Jr.*

"I wanted you to meet Edward Masen, Jr.," she said, and opened the book. It was filled with hundreds of pictures, captions, and little pieces of my childhood. I saw a lock of hair from my first haircut, a scrap from my first t-ball uniform, and a report card. It was weird seeing these tangible reminders of the child that I had been. She kept turning and I saw page after page of stuff I didn't think anyone would keep. Idly, I wondered if she just kept adding things after I had been taken, just to keep that tether to me. Abruptly, the book changed, and the young smiling boy went to that shell-shocked teenager again. The strange part is, that though the type and variety of memorabilia changed, the quantity did not. I saw a piece of music that I had written for one of my home school assignments, my acceptance letter into Washington State, and even a newspaper clipping from when I was found. I had been on the front page of most every local paper. Each story carried a banner headline and a picture of me in my mother's arms.

As we went through the book, she told me stories of my childhood. These were things that would have been ingrained if I'd heard about them consistently over the years like most children, but I had not. It surprised me how much of my life from birth to eight that I could not remember. It was simply gone from my head. When she got up to how my best childhood friend and I used to pretend to be paramedics, my father walked into the room again.

"Your mother must have gone through hundreds of washcloths because you said they made perfect bandages. You bandaged up the kids in the neighborhood, and all of their pets. I wasn't surprised at all when you decided to go into medicine," he said, chuckling. "Proudest day of my life was watching you walk across that stage."

"What?" I asked, and turned around. "You were there? Why didn't you say anything to me?"

"We figured if you'd wanted us there, you'd have invited us. But, we weren't about to miss out on one of the most important days of our son's life," he said, matter-of-factly as my mother turned the last page of the book. There, staring at me from the pages, was Edward Anthony Cullen, accepting his diploma. Next to it was the program they'd handed out and a tassel they had probably picked up at the bookstore. I was speechless.

"Well, let's get this cleared away," my father said, clearing his throat. "The others will be here shortly." I stood and handed him the book. He looked at me for just a moment before setting it on the couch and pulling me into a hug. I stiffened at first, but then hugged him back. He then gave me one of those awkward guy back pats and put the book back in its place. He was out of the room before I really had time to process what had just happened.

My mother pulled me down again to sit next to her on the couch. "We have a little time yet, would you tell me about your friends?" She asked tentatively, and to my surprise, I smiled.

"Bella... came into my life several years ago, and to be honest, she's been my first adult friend. I'd never had friends before her. She is patient and kind, reminding me almost daily that I'm a person worth befriending. She found out pretty early on about my past but has never shied away from it. She's always embraced me for the person I have become," I said, and my mother nodded, smiling.

"Jasper came into my life about two years ago, and has become my best friend. He makes me feel... almost normal. It's nice," I said, and my mother got a speculative look on her face.

"There's something bothering you, isn't there honey?" She asked softly, but astutely. I looked out the window. *Is this something that I can talk to her about?* How would she react to yet another damaged byproduct of my life? "Edward... Edward when you were growing up, all the little kids around you knew what they were going to be when they grew up because their parents set those expectations on them at a young age. One day, shortly before you were taken, you came to me and told me that your friend was upset. You said that his dad wouldn't let him be an ambulance driver when he grew up because he had to be a lawyer. It just about broke his heart. You asked me what I wanted you to be when you grew up. Do you remember what I said?" I shook my head. I didn't remember the conversation at all. I barely remembered the kid she was talking about. "I said that I wanted you to be happy. I still do, Edward. Whatever you think you can't tell me, I bet you'll find that you can."

I looked down at my hands, and then spoke quietly to them. "Jasper and I have been... intimate."

"Edward, look at me," she said, and the emotion in her voice was staggering. "It doesn't matter to me what your preferences are. It worries me that you care so much about this boy when he seems to be with someone else, but it doesn't worry me that you are attracted to men." I looked up at her then. "If that is what makes you happy, then your father and I are fine with it. I told him when I saw you the other day that I thought maybe you and your friend were closer than you appeared. We are both so proud of you, Edward. You survived something that I can't even imagine without crying, you achieved your goals, and you are coping the best you can with what happened to you. If that's what makes you happy, sweetheart, I think karma owes you one."

I thought about that for a minute. My parents weren't going to have a problem with me being gay. My friends weren't going to have a problem with me being gay. Why did I have such a problem with it? I suppose a better question would be – why was I putting off the inevitable? I knew that I was only attracted to women because of their willingness to submit to me. It didn't have anything to do with the fact that they were women. It was their vulnerability and submissiveness that I got off on. Jasper had shown me a whole new level of attraction when he walked up to my house that very first day. Okay, now I just had to say it. Out loud.

"I am attracted to men," I said, and then looked up to meet her gaze. Her face broke into a smile, and after a moment mine did too. It wasn't something that I'd wanted to happen, but acknowledging it, saying it, made me feel better than I ever thought it would.

Chapter 11 – The Elephant in the Flowers

"The guests will be arriving soon, Edward. Do you feel comfortable staying?" My mother asked me as we sat alongside each other on the opulent couch. I took a deep breath, and then looked at the decision objectively. These were people that knew about my past, they would look at me with pity in their eyes. Did I care about that anymore? Would a few hours of uncomfortable small talk be worth making my mother happy? I think it would, so I told her that I would stay. If I started to feel uncomfortable, I could always leave.

We stayed in the sitting room, listening to the guests arrive as the doorbell rang several times. She was letting me work up to going outside. She was letting them all get settled so that I wouldn't have to go through the introductions over and over. She was savoring her time with her son. For that, I was grateful. My father wandered by a few minutes later to tell her that everyone was here. After I assured her that I was ready, we walked together through the terrace doors into the backyard, into the lion's den.

"Everyone," my mother said, raising her voice to get people's attention. I guess she was going for the quick and less painful 'band-aid' method. "You all remember our son Edward? He's visiting and decided to come to brunch to say hello," she said with a smile, like there wasn't a 40 foot tall elephant standing next to her hydrangeas. I smiled weakly and waved, and headed quickly over to my father who held out a small measure of scotch. I took it thankfully, but then absently nursed it for a while. The throng of my parents' friends and their single daughters came over and started pleasantly dreary conversations. I assured the daughters that I wouldn't be in town long, and appeared to listen to their painfully dull shopping diatribes. It was only then that I noticed a guy hanging back away from the group. He was roughly my age, with longer, but well kempt blond hair, and almost haunted looking blue eyes. As I looked up, his eyes met mine and I smiled.

He made his way slowly through the other guests, and finally he stood in front of me shyly. "Hi Edward," he said softly.

"Hi," I replied, just as softly. I didn't know his name, so I couldn't use it. It felt like I should know his name, like I was missing something.

"It's Mike. You were my best friend until... well, until we were eight," he said, and it was painfully obvious that he was trying to avoid that elephant over by the flowers.

"We used to play paramedics?" I asked and his head shot up.

"You remember?" He asked hopefully, but I shook my head and his face fell. We sat down at

a nearby table.

"To be honest, I don't remember a lot of what my life was like before... Well, before I was eight. My mom and I were just looking through a scrapbook, and she was telling me about it. Did you go into law? My mom said that's the direction you were headed." I said, trying to make him feel more comfortable.

"Yes. I'm a junior partner at my father's firm," he said with something akin to pride. "I heard you became a doctor? Went up a few steps from a paramedic, didn't you?" He smiled, and that made me smile. We sat talking for a while about different aspects of our lives, not touching on the obvious topic until finally he brought it up.

"Edward. I'm sorry for what happened that day," he said, looking at the table. I gaped at him. "If I hadn't played sick that day... If I'd have been there, maybe.... Damn it, Edward you were my best friend, and I'm sorry, I'm so fucking sorry I let this happen to you."

"Mike, you didn't let anything happen to me. You were a little boy – did it ever occur to you that maybe he'd have taken you too? Then, there still would have been nothing you could do about it, and your life would have been ruined, just like mine was," I said, and stood up from the table. I didn't want to talk about this, especially not here in front of the garden club tea party. As I turned to leave, a couple of guys walked past the table and asked Mike if he'd finally found a boyfriend. I turned back around and saw that Mike was red-faced, and had also stood up to go.

"Mike," I said cautiously, and put my hand on his shoulder. Thankfully the guys that had tormented him were gone. He turned around, and his face was defiant.

"Yes, Edward. I'm gay," he said, almost petulantly. "And I think I've had about as much fun as I can stand today so I'll be going." He shrugged off my hand and started walking toward the house. I followed him. When we were almost to the front door, I look around to see that we were alone.

"Would you like to get together for dinner sometime?" I blurted out. I'm not sure what made me say it, but once it was out there I wasn't sorry that I had. He turned, and faced me with a hard expression.

"What, you think that's funny?" He asked, and then he must have seen something in my face because his face softened. "You're serious, aren't you? You mean like a date?" I nodded.

"I... I had no idea you were... I think I'd like that," he said gently.

"I think I would too. I've... I've never been on a date before," I stammered, and he smiled.

"I'd be honored to take you on your first date, Edward. May I have your phone?" He asked. I handed it to him, and he put his number in. Then I took his and did the same.

As he closed the door, my mother came out from around the corner and hugged me gently. "I'm so happy that the two of you were able to reconnect. You were inseparable when you were younger. And, well.. Mike's been very hard on himself since you were taken. He always felt like it was his fault. That's so much pressure for a child to bear." We were interrupted by a chirp from my cell phone. I checked it, and this time the text was from Jasper.

Need reinforcements? Shall we call in the cavalry?

I laughed, lighter and freer than I had in a very long time. My mother looked at me with a strange expression, and I showed her the phone. She smiled. I'd seen her smile more today than the entire two years I'd been here before I went off to college. It was refreshing. It made her look younger, more like the woman I remembered.

"Go, I'll make your excuses. You've put in enough time, just..." she said, but trailed off as she put her small hand to my face. "Don't wait so long to come home again, Edward. Please?" I saw the pain in her eyes as she thought about not seeing me again, and I put my hand over hers.

"How about I come to brunch every other Sunday while I'm in Chicago; even if it's just to hang out with you beforehand?" I asked, and her face lit up. "I can't guarantee that I'll want to stay, but we'll have some time together in any case."

"I'd like that, Edward. I know your father would too," she said kissing me softly on the cheek, and then walked me to the door. *I think I would like that too. My parents are different people now that I'm an adult, and I'd really like to get to know them better.*

The drive back to Bella and Jasper's took the same amount of time, but it seemed longer. Unlike the trip to my parents' house where I was dreading my arrival, and the trip took no time at all, I was anxious to get home. It was strange how little time it took for me to feel at home with them, even with their sub. It just felt right being with them, I couldn't explain it, even to myself.

I sat in the living room and talked to Bella and Jasper for about half an hour about my visit to my parents' house. They were both pleased that it went well. Before long, however, I felt the need to write about things for a while. They both understood immediately, and I headed upstairs and sat down at my desk. Opening my leather bound journal, which I found wickedly appropriate, I started to write.

Journal Entry: Self-Awareness

I am gay.

There is still some conflict in my head as to how or when it happened, but there is no escaping the inevitable conclusion. I feel an attraction for Jasper, I feel an attraction for Mike, but I don't feel that kind of encompassing pull towards Bella, nor did I feel it with any girl at the brunch. I have known for some time, but haven't let myself have that flash of realization until my mother told me that it was okay to have it. She helped me to discover that part of myself, and I think I'm grateful for it.

I guess the only real question that I have is how am I able to have sex with women if I'm attracted to men? Does that make me bisexual? I'm sure that there are others that have pondered this question; that actually gives me some comfort – maybe I'm not too far from the norm after all. I have to look at it from a relationship standpoint, I guess. Would I want any kind of long term relationship with a man? I think that I would. I could see myself being happy with scratch out a man. I could not, however, see myself in a long term relationship with a woman. I could see sex, maybe, but not anything resembling a romantic connection. Maybe the definition of sexuality lies in the intent. I'm beginning to wonder if there are absolute lines for sexuality anyway. Are people really 100% gay or 100% straight, or do we

all live somewhere in the middle?

I got a text from Mike asking me if Friday was okay. I agreed. I have my first date on Friday.

Bella and I will certainly have to have a long discussion on making small talk. I'm nervous about taking that first step towards a normal relationship. Should I tell him that I'm a Dom? Would he be in to that type of lifestyle? What if he isn't? What if he has a dominant personality too? How do people deal with all of these different factors in a relationship? Is it just because my life is so much more complicated?

I have a feeling it's about to become a lot more complicated.

"Edward?" Bella asked from the door. I looked up, and she entered. "Something else happened at the brunch too, didn't it? Something you don't want to talk about in front of Jasper?" She was wickedly astute. That was always one of the things I liked most about her. It was certainly one of the things that helped us to become friends. She always knew when I needed to talk, when I needed my friend Bella instead of my sub Bella. She sat down in the chair on the other side of the side table and pulled her legs up underneath her.

I sighed. "I have a date Friday," I said softly, and I heard her gasp. "I know. It can't surprise you any more than it does me."

"What's her name?" Bella asked, but from the inflection in her voice, I could tell that she had a pretty good idea it wasn't with a woman.

"Mike Newton," I said, and couldn't help the grin that accompanied it. I wasn't grinning at the fact that I had a date, or that the date was with a guy – but the fact that she knew me so fucking well.

"Maybe we should get Alice to come down and help you pick out something to wear." She said, and I actually laughed out loud. Get my former Domme to fly to Chicago to dress me for a date with a guy that I met at my parents' brunch.

Could my life get any more fucked up?

Chapter 12: First Date

"I doubt that you'll have trouble finding something to talk about, Edward. You are both intelligent, articulate professionals with a shared past," she said, and I knew my expression betrayed my nervousness. "Okay, if all else fails, try to steer clear of religion, politics, and well... sex. It might not be a good idea to tell him about our lifestyle on the first date. But, if it looks like it's going to go somewhere, you will have to tell him eventually." I nodded. I had already come to that conclusion, even though I didn't really expect the relationship to go anywhere. I wasn't even really sure what the "where" in "anywhere" consisted of.

"What time is 'golden boy' picking you up?" Jasper asked from the doorway. His voice was light with a measure of forced indifference. His face betrayed his annoyance.

"He'll be here at ten," I told him, wondering about his mood. He had been fine last night while I told him about the time with my parents before the brunch, and he laughed at me having to fend off women between appetizers, but when I told him about Mike – he suddenly became ... petulant. Bella was now looking at him with incredulity and a bit of

annoyance of her own.

"You need to be more supportive," she told him, and then sighed as she took his hand.

"We don't know anything about this guy, about his motivations for going out with Edward," he said sharply. "I just don't want to see all of the progress he's made wasted because he got hurt by some pretty boy. I mean, who goes on a date at ten o'clock on a Monday morning?" He asked scathingly to the room at large. "Doesn't 'golden boy' have a job?"

"First of all," I said, now utterly exasperated, "stop talking about me like I'm not standing right in front of you. That pisses me off." Bella grinned at me, and I continued. "Next, I asked him, he didn't ask me. I have no idea why he'd want to spend time with the damaged freak, but he does. I think I'm old enough to decide who to befriend, or who to... date. And lastly – he's a junior partner in a law firm, which for twenty-nine isn't too fucking shabby. He took the day off to spend with me. He's excited about finding his friend again. Is that so fucking awful?" He was looking at the floor now. I sighed and walked over to him. Resting my hands on his shoulders I said, "I appreciate that you're concerned about me." He looked up and for a moment I saw some other emotion flicker across his face, but then it was gone. "It means everything to me that you and Bella are here for me, supporting me – but I think... I think I *need* this." He nodded, obviously hearing the note of sincerity, the almost pleading tone in my voice.

"I should head in to the office. I'm sure they have something they want to put my face on today," he said with a resigned sigh. Since he had no real business training, Emmett was basically just using him as the firm's poster child. He didn't mind, he would do whatever was needed to help his father's firm. He was nearly halfway through his one year sentence now and was looking forward to getting his life back. He couldn't wait to get finish his graduate degree and start teaching. That was where he really wanted to be.

I watched him walk out, and again wondered why he felt he couldn't support me fully. Bella distracted me by asking me what I was going to wear. I laughed at that – louder and longer than I had in a long time. With all of the other potential disasters that could happen today – fashion wasn't all that high on my list. Bella smirked at me, and I told her I was just going to wear jeans and a t-shirt. We couldn't be going anywhere too fancy at ten am.

An hour later, I opened the door to find Mike standing unassumingly on the doorstep. The bright morning light glinted off of his unintentionally messy hair. He looked up and smiled a little shyly at me. I returned his smile, and it felt natural to me. It was unlike the forced smiles I generally used with people I didn't know well. I invited him in just as Bella stepped into the room. Mike looked a little awkward at first. Then Bella walked over and hugged him, introducing herself quietly. He smiled at her, thrilled to be so quickly accepted. It didn't seem to be something he was used to. I understood that completely. Just another thing we had in common. Maybe today wouldn't be as uncomfortable as I'd imagined.

"Ready?" I asked him, and he nodded. He held the door for me, and I was now officially on my very first date. When we reached his car, I noticed that it wasn't a car at all, but an open top jeep. Glad I'd decided to go with jeans and a t-shirt, I climbed in to the passenger seat while he held the door. Then, he climbed in to the driver's seat. He didn't start the jeep immediately, but looked at me instead. I smiled awkwardly.

He said, "I'm really glad you decided to come out with me today." He had been looking at my chest, but now, his eyes met mine and I saw the sincerity in them.

"I am too, Mike. I feel .. I don't know ... Comfortable with you. I don't feel that way around many people," I said, and he reached over and squeezed my hand, almost like he thought I was afraid to be touched. I squeezed his back and then settled back into the seat and put on my seat belt. "So, where are we going, or is it a surprise?" I hated surprises. I wondered briefly if he could read that in my expression. Apparently, he could, or he just didn't like surprises either.

"I thought we could go to the museum. It's open and relaxed," he said and his statement ended with an inflection that made it more of a question than a statement.

"I think that's a great idea. I haven't been to any of the museums since ..." I stopped dead. I promised myself that I wasn't going to talk about any of that today, that we'd just have a light day. "... for a very long time." I finished lamely. I guess it's fairly unrealistic, given our history together. I sighed and settled back as he started the jeep. We rode in fairly awkward silence for the twenty minute drive. Why couldn't I just talk to him, make small talk about the weather or something? It was a beautiful day, clear and blue and the lake looked serene off to the left as we made our way up Lake Shore Drive. When he bypassed the museum campus with the aquarium, planetarium and Field Museum I knew he must be planning on The Museum of Science and Industry. That was my favorite when I was a kid. *Wait.* I didn't remember much of my childhood where had that come from?

I pondered this idea as we pulled into the underground parking garage. When did they add a garage? He parked the jeep and we headed for the entrance. As we entered the big open area where people were buying tickets, I saw a huge train off to the left, and then a gift shop farther up. None of this looked familiar at all. I sighed. Maybe I wasn't having the epiphany I thought I was. He led me to a set of escalators and we headed up one floor where he showed his member ID and we walked right in. Then, he led me up another set of escalators and we were in the main part of the museum. I was struck speechless as I walked forward under the huge rotunda in the center of the hall. As I looked up to the domed ceiling, something occurred to me. I looked at Mike and he was smiling.

"Your mom used to bring us here. She felt bad about you not being able to go into science because you loved it so much, and as a compromise, she brought us here." I said, the sound of awe ringing in my voice.

"I thought being here might help you remember a little of when we were friends," he said, and held out his arm gesturing for me to lead the way. We went through the coal mine, which I remembered we loved when we were kids. We skipped the Fairy Castle, as all boys should, but got ice cream in Yesterday's Main Street. After going to lunch in the new cafeteria, we saw some of the new exhibits like the Farm Tech project, the renovations to the U505 submarine, and all the changes to the Henry Crown Space Center. Finally, we decided to go see one of the 3D omnimax shows. That projection system wasn't here then, and I found myself excited to see it. This was the best day I'd had in such a long time. For once, I felt completely normal.

We opted for the undersea adventure movie that neither of us really caught a name for. The movie was just seating when we got in line, so we were able to go right in. With the kids in school and most adults at work, the place was relatively empty. We found seats up near the top, away from the half a dozen other people in the theatre with us. Settling back in our seats, we waited just moments for the movie to start. It was incredible, almost like you were actually under water. The screen filled the whole domed ceiling. Even though my attention was otherwise occupied by the screen, I noticed that Mike kept rubbing his knee with the hand closest to me. His knee was bouncing, like he was jittery or nervous about

something. Without thinking, I reached over and put my hand on his. He stopped at once, but then linked my fingers with his. It felt... nice, almost natural. So, we stayed like that, just holding hands, and watched the movie.

When it was over, we dropped our hands as the lights came up. Feeling comfortable holding his hand in a dark theatre was one thing, but strolling through the museum hand in hand was something else entirely. When we got back to the main area of the museum, Mike pulled out the map from his back pocket and handed it to me.

"Is there anything else you'd like to see?" He asked, looking at his watch. "We still have a couple of hours before the museum closes." He didn't sound like he was ready for the day to end, and to be honest, neither was I. He made me feel normal – no history, no bondage, and no insanity – just two guys hanging out together. I don't think I'd ever had that with anyone else. Even with Jasper we talked about our D/s relationship, or how the journal was coming. With Mike, there was none of that.

"Shall we explore the balcony level? We haven't been up there yet." I asked, and he grinned. "We can take the yellow stairs over there to get up there." He headed for the stairs and I followed. We played with all of the little engines on the wall along the staircase. We turned the cranks and pressed the buttons, laughing. When we reached the landing, we walked around for a while and then spotted the one thing that I remembered most from coming here as a child. The walk-through heart. I found it fascinating, sure – but what we really liked was just to walk through it like a big artery filled clubhouse. Mike looked at me and I nodded, grinning. As we came up to it, I noticed that it was a lot smaller than I remembered. There was no one else around, in fact, I hadn't seen anyone else in the balcony. So, I only felt a little silly when I actually had to stoop just a bit to walk inside. Mike went first, and as we neared the center, he stopped. He turned around in the small space and looked at me. I watched him curiously, but then he took my hand in his again. He squeezed it lightly before leaning in towards me. I turned my head slightly to the right, as did he in anticipation. He hesitated just before his lips reached mine. I could feel his soft breath on my face, and to my utter shock, I wasn't unnerved by that. Acknowledging the uncertainty in his approach, I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his very gently. I felt his thumb graze my cheek as he cupped my face, and my fingers trailed lightly on his back. It was a very soft, but sweet kiss and I found myself wanting more. He must have too because he squeezed my hand just once, turned, and led me from the enclosure.

After we finished exploring the balcony, we headed back out to the jeep. As we walked through the garage, he took my hand. When we got to the jeep, he opened the door for me again, but before I got in, I leaned over and gave him a soft kiss on the cheek. I don't know what made me do it, but it was nice. We parked in the free lot in front of the museum and walked over to the beach. It was still a beautiful afternoon, and we were too early to head to dinner, but we didn't want this to end just yet. So, we took our shoes and socks off, and sat in the sand.

"When did you change your name to Cullen?" He asked me quietly. I glanced at him, wondering where he picked that up. It wasn't that I was surprised that he knew, just curious as to how he found out. He answered my unspoken question.

"That's how you entered it into my cell phone. I thought for a minute I didn't get your number." He looked down at my shirt, and then back up at me again. "I was disappointed for a minute at first, until I realized that was you - I didn't know an Edward Cullen."

"I changed it as I was starting my first year of college." I said, looking out over the waves,

as they made their way to shore. "I wanted a new name, a chance at a new life. I got the new name, but... For the first few years, I was still that scared little boy. It took a while for me to find my place."

"I know how that feels. I was always just 'Newton's kid'; I never had an identity of my own. It took me a long time to figure out who I was. Sometimes, I still don't know." He picked up a rock from the sand and threw it into the water. It's strange that we have so much in common, even though our lives were completely different. He had those same feelings of insecurity, of inadequacy that I did. Yet, he toughed it out, day by day, just like I did.

We sat in the sand and talked until well after sunset. We talked about our childhood, and about college. We talked about sports. We talked about our careers. We talked about his family, and mine – and finally about Jasper and Bella. I didn't fill him in on our entire situation, but I had a feeling that one day I would need to. It was strange how easy Mike was to talk to. I mean I'd known him since we were in kindergarten, but I hadn't seen him in nearly 20 years. We had grown into two completely different people, but that friendship, that connection was still there.

We were quiet again on the ride home. The mood felt... pensive, like we were on the edge of something. We pulled into the drive behind Jasper's car and he turned off the engine. Turning in his seat, he put his hand on my arm.

"Edward, I... I'd really like to see you again." He said and I put my finger under his chin to tilt his face up so that he looked at me.

"I'd like that too." I told him honestly. He smiled and asked if he could walk me up to the door. I almost chuckled at his antiquated request, but I agreed nonetheless.

We reached the porch, and he stood facing me, nervous, excited. I pulled him into my arms, one hand in his soft hair behind his neck, one at the small of his back. He put one hand on my cheek, and the other at my hip. We looked at each other for a moment before he leaned forward; tilting his head slightly and his lips met mine. This kiss started out much like the one in the one at the museum, but then it deepened. I didn't feel that all consuming wildfire burst through me like I did when I kissed Jasper, but I felt a nice warmth. This was something I could get used to, something safe and comfortable. Our mouths moved softly against each other, and then I felt his hard body press against mine. His chest, his hips, everything just melded against me, and I started to get hard.

Oh yeah, I could definitely work with this...

Chapter: 13 *Journal entry: Childhood Memories*

There's just too much that time cannot erase...

Mike and I are not the kids that we once were. The days of playing ambulance driver and racing little metal cars in the dirt are long gone. It's strange though how we continue to be compatible even though we've both changed so much. It's like an underlying current between us, almost like we were supposed to be friends. I felt so comfortable with him yesterday. But now, I have to wonder, is that really all we were meant to be? What are the odds that we would both turn out to be gay? What if, even before either of us needed it, fate was giving us a way to be happy? What if this was what Bella had been trying to explain to me? It wasn't exactly it, I knew that – but maybe this level of intimacy is all that I am capable of.

Mike and I made plans to see each other again on Friday. We were just going to hang out at his place for a movie, coupled with beer and pizza. During our talks, I had told him that I'm not overly comfortable around other people. So, he just wanted to keep it casual. He said that staying in was fine with him, then he'd have me all to himself. The playfulness in his voice was light, teasing – but the flirtation made me wonder what it would be like to have him naked on his knees, those innocent blue eyes gazing up at me through his soft blonde hair. He would be a sweet and affectionate lover, something that I was looking forward to. Even though my sexual needs were already being met with my sessions with Jasper, I had a feeling that with Mike it would be more about intimacy than gratification.

On Sunday, of course, we would be going to my parents' weekly brunch – together. My mother was thrilled that Mike and I reconnected and that I was keeping my word in coming to see her. She had called earlier to find out how the date had gone. I thought that it would feel odd having such a casual relationship with her, but instead I welcomed it. Her unconditional love and support was like a salve on my broken soul. It pains me to think that I denied myself and her, this connection for so long. It also pleased me that she approved of my relationship with Mike. She made sure to tell me that she had always liked him, and she was so thrilled that we were finding happiness in each other.

So, Bella approved, my mother approved, Mike was happy, and I was – well, warming to the idea, I supposed. But, there was some nagging thought in the back of my head that just would not be silent. It was like waking up with a song in your head. Even though you could not recall the lyrics, it was stuck there wheedling its way into your consciousness.

"Hi Jacob," I said with a soft smile as I walked into the kitchen. He was sitting at the table in just a pair of running shorts eating cereal. It was evident that he spent a good deal of time at the gym because his body was hard and lean under his flawless russet skin.

"Hey Edward," he replied with a grin. "How was your date?" I knew that he was asking out of polite concern. Jacob knew only that Jasper and Bella had flown out to Washington to be with me, and then brought me back to stay with them for a while. For all he knew, I could just be going through a bad break up. He knew nothing about my history, or my current emotional upheaval. I thought that his concern would annoy me, instead it touched me.

"It was really good," I said with genuine enthusiasm. "We're going to get together again on Friday night." I finished just as Jasper entered the room. He was already dressed for a session.

"I want you both in the room in thirty minutes." He said, rather sternly before grabbing a cup of coffee and leaving the room. Jacob and I looked at each other briefly before I shrugged. He went back to his cereal, while I grabbed a bagel and coffee and headed upstairs for a quick shower.

I didn't bother dressing before I walked down the stairs and into the playroom. It was odd to me that I felt so comfortable walking nude around someone else's house – but then I'd always felt comfortable with Jasper and Bella. When I entered the room, I saw Jacob already in position. I knew I still had about five minutes, but he must have recognized the tone in Jasper's voice and decided not to antagonize him further by making him wait. I joined Jacob on the floor in front of Jasper and assumed my pose. He took a few more minutes to set things up and then walked over to stand in front of Jacob.

"Greet your Master properly, Jacob." Jasper told him in a low voice, and Jacob immediately

moved forward on his knees to press his lips to Jasper's bare feet. His lips traveled slowly up Jasper's leather clad thighs. When he reached Jasper's pelvis, Jasper put his fingers in Jacob's long ebony hair and pulled his face hard against his crotch. Jasper's eyes closed, and his head dropped back as he rubbed his growing erection against the boy's face. I looked away. For some reason, that I could not readily identify, this bothered me.

The motion of Jacob standing caught my attention and I refocused my gaze on them. Jacob had moved past Jasper's chest now, and my heart clenched as I watched his lips press softly against Jasper's. His hand came up to trace the contours of the boy's face as their lips continued to meet eagerly. This time I didn't just avert my eyes, I actually turned my head so that I wouldn't have to watch their slight display of affection. For some reason, it made my insides burn, it made my eyes burn, it made my throat burn. I had never had such a feeling.

I was so lost in my own thoughts that the sound of Jasper's voice in front of me startled me. "Stand Edward," he said softly, and I did. I placed my hands behind my neck still reeling from the unexpected wave of emotion that had just threatened to drown me. He walked around behind me, and I could feel his soft breath on my neck as he leaned in close to me. Softly he whispered, "You don't like watching me kiss Jacob, do you?" He kissed my neck gently, as his lips moved up to my ear. A shiver ran through me.

"No." The word burst from me, almost as a soft cry.

"I didn't like watching you kiss that boy on my front porch last night either," he said in a low voice before grasping me by the upper arms and turning me to face him. His mouth was on mine before I could even process that I had turned. His arms went around me, and he pulled my body tightly against his. My arms went around his neck, almost unconsciously as our kiss deepened. Trapped between his clothed body and my naked one, my erection pulsed with the friction we created. His hands traced freely over my back, and it suddenly occurred to me that this was about more than just the session. He was trying to convey something with this kiss that he couldn't express aloud. Whatever it was, I so desperately wanted to return it. He pulled back slowly, both of us out of breath in our excitement. Our eyes met, and for the first time in a long time, he held my gaze. Then, he put his hands on the sides of my face and pulled me down to kiss my forehead. He never said a word before he turned to start the session.

"Follow me, both of you," he said, back to his dominating business-like tone. Jacob and I followed on our knees to the suspension frame. All of the rigging had been removed, so it was just an empty frame. Under the frame sat a low padded sawhorse length-wise so that it was parallel with the top of the frame. I looked at Jasper; I had never seen this kind of set up before. He just smirked at me. Fuck that smirk was sexy.

"I want each of you to stand at opposite ends of the horse and straddle over it," he said as he walked over to the back wall. Jacob and I each threw a leg over the horse, and stood waiting. We were about the same height, so there was a good 3-4 inches of space between our bodies and the horse if we both stood straight. Jasper came back a moment later with four sets of leather cuffs. He secured them around our wrists and ankles. Then, he attached the ring from the ankle cuffs to the legs of the saw horse and our wrists to the metal hooks in the top of the bondage frame. We were immobilized, naked, and at his mercy. He walked out of my line of vision, and I looked up at Jacob. His body, bound to the frame was beautifully stretched. He looked up, and catching my eye – he winked.

Jasper was back in just a moment and moved to stand next to Jacob. I saw that he carried

two realistic looking rubber dildos, each with suction cups at the base. One was slightly larger than the other. He took the larger of the two and stuck it to the horse beneath Jacob. Then, he applied lubricant to it and had Jacob slide himself down onto it. As I watched, Jacob's eyes closed and his body tensed. Then, it was my turn. He stood beside me and attached the dildo to the horse, and then instead of putting the lubricant on the toy, he slid his fingers gently inside of me. I rocked back slowly against his hand, closing my eyes. A low moan escaped me as he also stroked my cock. He worked me carefully, trying to get me to relax and then as I gave a low open mouthed groan, he pressed the tip of the dildo inside of me. I bent my knees and allowed it to go deeper, slowly, until it started to become uncomfortable and I stopped. He kissed me softly on the temple and stood back.

"I want you to ride those cocks, work yourselves on them, and show me how much you want it. If you do a good job, maybe I'll let you bring yourselves off." He leaned back against a nearby table, and I watched Jacob for a moment. I heard Jasper clear his throat, so I grabbed the top of the frame and began pulling myself up and down. Then, I could think about nothing but the feeling of bouncing on this fake cock. As I used my legs to control my movements, I felt my cock slapping against my stomach. I couldn't hold it, I couldn't stroke it, and the feeling was maddening. My eyes closed and a series of rhythmic whimpers and grunts escaped me as I lost myself to the moment. The only thing I had to control now was my own pleasure.

"Oh yeah... Fuck..." Jacob repeated, and I opened my eyes to watch him grind himself against the sawhorse, burying the dildo deeply. Jasper moved over to stand next to him again, and stroked the boy's straining erection as he continued to move. When he Jacob, it was in such a soft encouraging voice that I almost didn't catch it.

"That's it, Jacob," Jasper told him as he moved his hand up to stroke the boy's chest. "Let it go, let yourself feel it." I took his statement, and applied it myself. I could feel the smooth surface of the toy rubbing me, stimulating me. A fire was racing through my body. I moaned as Jasper made his way over to me next. He stood behind me, instead of beside me as he had with Jacob. He reached around me lightly, still allowing me to work myself on the toy. His fingers grazed my nipples, and then rubbed lightly over my stomach.

"You wish it were my cock inside you, don't you Edward?" He asked with a soft, raw edge to his voice. "You want me to bend you over one of these tables and just fuck you, don't you?" He pressed against me, and I could feel his ragingly hard cock press against me through his pants. "Do you feel that? Watching you like this makes me so fucking hard," I moaned loudly and let my head fall back onto his shoulder. His left hand remained on my stomach, rubbing in small concentric circles, but his other hand moved down and stroked me until I was bouncing feverishly on the fake cock, desperately trying to find my release.

He reached up then and unlocked my right wrist from the hook on the top of the frame. Placing his hand over mine on my cock, he stroked me with my own hand. I felt his fingers squeezing mine around my straining erection. I grunted rhythmically, losing myself in the feeling. He murmured softly in my ear that he wanted me to cum. Finally, my sounds became completely unrestrained just before he removed his hand and walked over to Jacob. I continued to stroke myself while Jasper released his right wrist as well. Jacob and I stroked ourselves hard and fast. Jasper just stood back and watched as we continued to work on the toys, and on our cocks. He was smiling. He was pleased. Good.

I watched as Jacob began to move his hand at least twice as fast as his hips moved against the sawhorse. He was paying particularly close attention to the head, stroking it hard and fast. As his breathing accelerated wildly, and his open mouthed whimpers got higher in

pitch, I knew he was close. I was too, not to put too fine a point on it. I reversed my grip so that my thumb and forefinger were nearer the base, and rode the fake cock beneath me so hard. I could feel the sweat trickling down from my temple and over my cheek. My body was on fire.

My head snapped up as Jacob cried out. He groaned and strained as his semen jetted from the end of his cock and onto the leather padding in front of him. A white film covered the front of his hand and he continued to pump the last vestiges of his orgasm onto the smooth surface. The erotic sight and cacophony of sound coming from him caused my orgasm to erupt through me as well. I had just enough time to turn my hand before I exploded over the soft padded leather as well. My semen mixed with his as I nearly screamed in my release. I let my head fall back and I closed my eyes tightly as each distinct wave of my orgasm crashed into me. I reveled in it.

Jasper came forward then and after a few swipes with a nearby towel, released us from our bonds. Just as we pulled ourselves from the horse, he ordered us to our knees before him. We complied immediately, and he removed the panel from the front of his pants, just as I had done so many times before with him. Jacob and I scrambled forward on our knees until we were just in front of him, our faces on either side of his beautifully hard erection.

"Please your Master," he said in a soft yet commanding tone. We both pressed forward, Jacob licking up one side of his shaft while I licked down the other. Above us, Jasper moaned. I closed my eyes and continued to run my tongue up and down the length of his shaft. When I reached the head, I felt something else and my eyes flew open. I gave him a wicked grin and then kissed Jacob again over the head of Jasper's hard cock. When Jasper saw what we were doing, his fingers tightened convulsively in my hair. I moaned and moved back to watch Jacob take Jasper into his mouth, and then I pressed my cheek against Jasper's inner thigh and ran my tongue between his legs. I opened my mouth, and sucked lightly on his balls, covering each with soft delicate strokes of my tongue. Jasper's legs were trembling now, and I smiled to myself. His hips started to move as he fucked Jacob's mouth. I moved around behind him, and ran my tongue over his clenching buttocks. He stopped moving at once, and allowed me to explore him more fully. I bit down gently between his buttocks and he thrust forward deep into Jacob's throat with a harsh groan, almost a growl as he came violently.

Once he caught his breath, our Master gave us permission to leave. Jacob stood and walked towards the front of the room while I hung back watching Jasper. He moved over to the back wall and stared unseeing out of the window. The light played across his face, and it struck me how beautiful he was.

I left then and headed downstairs to call Mike.

Chapter 14 – Jasper Whitlock

"Hi Edward," Mike answered jovially, and immediately, I smiled. His attitude on things was so different from what I was used to. I didn't know if Mike was naturally an upbeat person, or if he was just like that around me, but... I liked it.

"Hi Mike," I answered, trying to sound just as upbeat, but found that I couldn't. Jasper was closer to me than anyone and it bothered me that there was something bothering him that he didn't feel comfortable talking to me about. I mean I knew I had my problems, but that didn't mean that I wasn't here for him.

"What's up?" Mike asked, trying to remain upbeat. I knew he could hear something in my voice, but was giving me time to collect myself.

"I just...I like talking to you. There are just some things, right now...I can't..." I stammered, but I couldn't get the words out.

"Okay, well... Have you heard this one? A vampire, a werewolf, and a duck walk into a bar..." he started, but before he could say anything else I burst into laughter.

"There can't possibly be a punch line to that." I said - a smile on my face for the first time that day.

"Yeah, well... No there isn't. You'll have to give me a minute; I'm a lawyer, not a standup comic," he said, laughing. But then, he was serious again. "Edward, do you want to talk about it?" he asked, astutely. Something in my voice must have given me away. Did I want to talk about it? I didn't know Mike very well, but he already seemed like someone that I could count on. We talked for hours on our date, and I found him to be genuine and unassuming. He seemed like someone who could give sound, sane advice and have a different perspective on my alternative types of relationships. But, talking to him about Jasper would mean revealing more than I was comfortable with right now.

"I don't think so, not yet anyway," I said softly. He was quiet for a minute. I thought maybe I had offended him, but then he surprised me.

"It's okay, I understand," he said gently. "While I have you on the phone - what kind of beer did you want for Friday night?"

"I'll bring it with me. You're hosting, the least I can do is bring beer." I said, chuckling. We talked for about twenty minutes about beer and movies, making plans. I found myself looking forward to being with him for the evening. Maybe, if I played my cards right, I could find out more about him. Like...what he looks like without a shirt. My mind ran through the possibilities, and I smiled to myself. Then, I saw the book Jasper had leant me sitting next to my journal and I sighed. I sat down at my desk, opened my journal to where I had left off, and began to try to sort out my feelings about Jasper.

Journal Entry: Jasper Whitlock

When you cried, I'd wipe away all of your tears.

I wish I knew what's been bothering Jasper lately. In the playroom after our session tonight, he just sat staring out of the window, like something was weighing on him. Maybe they were putting too much stress on him at the office for his "no show" job. Maybe he was thinking about his parents. Now that I have somewhat reconnected with mine, he could be missing that relationship with his. Maybe he and Bella were having problems. I doubted this last theory, however, because Bella had not been showing the same kinds of stress indicators. If they were having problems, it would be weighing on her too. I hoped that he would talk to someone, to Bella or to me, about whatever it was before it caused a meltdown like the one he'd had after he received the letter from his parents.

I had taken Bella to dinner that night to celebrate her graduation. Not only was she my best friend, but I didn't want her to feel left out of the celebration. She had worked hard to get through her degree, without any support - she deserved to have her achievement recognized. It was important to me especially because she had no one else to celebrate with

– no family, no close friends, just me and Jasper. Once we were at dinner, we talked for a few minutes about random things. Then, she took the opportunity to press me, yet again, about making Jasper a Dom, so that she could be his sub. It's not that she wanted to leave me, but rather because she was in love with him. We talked about different possible scenarios that could result in their pairing, but to be honest, neither of us knew how Jasper felt about her. Bella got the impression that he was more interested in me than in her, but I didn't think that was the case. Jasper and I were merely Master and sub, that's all that we would ever be. I never stopped to analyze how I felt about her assertion at the time because even if I were interested in that type of relationship, I was still in denial about my sexuality. At that time, I had been trying so hard to convince myself that I was in love with Bella, that the idea of a relationship with Jasper had never entered my mind. Now, however, I never let my mind stray to that as a possibility because he is Bella's. Deep down, I think Jasper realizes that he is bisexual, though I've never heard him put himself directly into that category. I think that Jasper could be happy in a relationship with either a man or a woman. I wonder what would have happened if I'd figured myself out sooner. Now, he has Bella and I have Mike. That sounds so strange to me. I have Mike.

My heart broke at what we found upon arriving home from dinner, though. Jasper was in a full rage. He was destroying all of the possessions in his room. I could not even imagine what could have put him in such a state, but I just couldn't let him continue. It wasn't that I cared at all about the room, but I didn't want him to injure himself in the process. I put my hand in his shoulder, trying to get his attention but he just threw it off. He pulled over the bookcase next, and I marveled at the strength and ferocity of his rage. When he went for his laptop computer, I grabbed him around the arms and chest. He struggled violently to get loose. I told him that whatever it was, we would help him through it. He didn't have to do this; we would figure it out – whatever it was. It wasn't until I saw Bella pick up a letter and a check from the floor that Jasper slumped in my arms. Whatever he was upset about had to do with those two pieces of paper. Bella whispered the contents to me hurriedly, and I slid down the wall with Jasper, holding him against me. I stroked his hair, telling him that it would be alright, but to be honest, I had never seen someone so utterly defeated. Oh, what I wouldn't give for half an hour in my playroom with his stupid sister. I could think of several increasingly effective ways to teach her to keep her fucking mouth shut.

I remember my focus shifting then to the boy in my arms. There were no tears, but this was almost worse. He was just... numb. We sat there against the wall for nearly an hour. Bella sat down next to us and rubbed his back. He didn't move. He just sat with his head on my shoulder while I stroked his hair and his face, trying to soothe him. My heart had been racing, and I ached for him. I never knew until that point that I could feel compassion like that for another person. Usually, I didn't feel much of anything, I suppressed everything. This was too much to suppress. My sub, my friend, was in pain, and there wasn't a fucking thing I could do about it.

When you'd scream, I'd fight away all of your fears

No matter how long I happen to live, I will never forget the day of Jasper's parents' funeral. It was one of the worst days of my adult life. He had been quiet, brooding both at the funeral and on the way home. He never said a word to either me or Bella. It frightened me a little how calm he was. So, I was wholly unprepared to see him naked and bound to the iron working in the playroom when I went to look for him. When he begged me to whip him, I almost refused. The desperation and pain in his voice broke my heart. I knew what that felt like, and I knew the pain helped. I just wanted to help him; I wanted to take that pain from him. I would have done anything for him.

Bella sat on the floor near his feet and watched me with accusing eyes as I stood with the flogger in my hand. I'd selected the one that would do the least damage, and caused the least pain. Even if he was begging for it, I couldn't bring myself to really hurt him. After the first strike across his back, he told me again and again to hit him harder. It was soon after that he began to scream. They weren't screams of physical pain, though he was using that as an excuse. These were screams of pure unadulterated anguish. Tears streamed down my face as I continued in my task. His back was red now, as were his buttocks and thighs. It wouldn't be much longer before I drew blood. With one last heart wrenching cry from him, I threw the flogger to the floor and told him it was enough. I couldn't stand it anymore.

Bella was crying quietly on the floor when I asked her to help me move him to his room. After rubbing him down with a soothing ointment, I gave him a sedative. He needed to rest without the pain, physical or emotional. Bella stood next to me as I ran my fingers through his hair, waiting for the sedative to take effect. She noticed my tears, and wrapped her arms around me. I buried my face in her neck. When he was finally asleep, I sat at his beside and watched him. His face was calm and peaceful now. Bella flitted in and out of the room, bringing things that he would need. Eventually, she went down to the sitting room and fell asleep on the couch. That's where I found her when the doorbell rang.

As I swung the door open and caught a glimpse of her wild mane of blond hair, I saw red. I demanded to know what the fuck she was doing there. She was startled for a bit by the force of my anger, but then she regained her ground. I mentally added her to the growing list of people I didn't want to deal with as she forced her way inside. She demanded to know where her brother was, and I told her the truth, that he was sleeping. She stormed upstairs, but there was no way I was going to let her disturb him without a fight. With Bella right on my heels, I ran up the stairs after her. We argued in the hallway, our voices getting louder and louder until she accomplished her goal, and woke Jasper. I looked over at him, and he indicated that he wanted to talk to her. Bella was livid. She was still upset from the playroom, and I actually had to physically remove her from the hallway.

We sat downstairs on the couch, Bella in my lap as I tried to calm her. After the wedding, the letter and check from his parents, and now the heart wrenching experience in the playroom, she was ready to kill Rosalie. I'm not sure I would have stopped her. That is, until Rosalie actually came down the stairs. Her make-up was streaked like she had been crying, and she looked devastated. She apologized for her behavior, and walked quietly out the front door. I looked at Bella, and she jumped off of my lap and raced upstairs.

It was then that I realized just how much Jasper meant to me. Remembering those events and actually putting them into words just solidified the fact that I thought of him as someone that I cared for deeply. I knew then that I had to distance myself at least somewhat from him. I could not allow his powerful hold on me to continue. Listening to him pour his heart out was Bella's job, not mine. I had to play the hand that I was dealt.

I grabbed my keys and headed for the door. It was time to test this newfound attraction.

Chapter 15 – Golden Boy

"I'm glad you changed your mind on that talk," Mike said as he opened the door. I didn't give him a chance to continue. I stepped over the threshold and took his face in my hands. Walking him back just a step or two to the wall behind him, I trapped his body between mine and the wall. I kissed him hard, pressing my hips lightly against his in the process. He moaned softly into my mouth, and the sound went right through me. His arms wrapped around my waist and I found that I liked the way it felt.

"Where is your bedroom?" I asked him, moving my lips to neck. Mike pulled back slightly and stopped my advance. I looked at him curiously, but he just stroked my cheek.

"You're upset Edward. I don't know why, but this isn't the way to resolve it." Mike took my hand and led me to the couch in his living room. He sat down on the far side, with his back pressed against the arm and his leg along the back of the cushions. Pulling me down in front of him, he leaned me back into him and wrapped his arms around my waist. After a second of shy, awkward hesitation, I laid my head back on his chest.

"You don't have to tell me. Let's just stay like this for a while," he said, and I felt him rest his cheek on the top of my head. I couldn't ever remember being comforted like this by anyone other than my mother, and I didn't even remember that well. I lifted my arms, and placed them over his, our fingers entwining. I closed my eyes, and just enjoyed the feeling of being held by someone that cared about me. Now that my determination was waning, I was able to more objectively analyze my motives for coming here. I felt sick with myself for wanting to use him, to use our first time being intimate just to prove a point to myself. Maybe I didn't deserve anyone at all. I deserved to be alone.

"Mike, I'm sorry," I told him earnestly, turning slightly to look up at him.

"I'm not," he replied with a shrug. "It doesn't matter why you decided to come over here, Edward. I'm just really glad that you did." He tilted my face up just a bit and kissed me gently. "Look, I know that we're going to have a different set of challenges than other people, but I'm a big boy. I'm in this for as long as we can make each other happy. Okay?" I nodded. "Oh, and I promise – on Friday night, when you're not upset, if you still want to know where my bedroom is – I'll certainly show you. You are so fucking sexy." He kissed me deeply once more before pulling me back against his chest. I chuckled at him, and told him that I thought the same about him. We sat on the couch like that, just talking about nothing until the sun started to set.

"Mike, I will tell you what's up with me. I just can't right now. I am trying to come to terms with our relationship, and I just don't want to complicate things. Not yet," I told him, my eyes trying to implore him to understand. He nodded.

"When you're ready," he said softly, pulling his arms out from around me so that I could stand. I immediately missed their comfort.

* * *

"Edward, is everything okay?" Bella asked me the following afternoon as I helped her in the kitchen. She had me chopping random vegetables for a salad while she worked on the lasagna. I continued working and thought about my day yesterday, not only with Mike, but with Jasper. Was this something I could talk to Bella about? I wasn't sure I liked facing my emotions rather than suppressing them. I didn't like being able to talk to only certain people about certain things. Wasn't there someone I could tell everything too? Was that person Bella?

"I... I don't know where to start," I admitted. She put the pan in the oven, and then grabbed my hand. She pulled me over to the kitchen table, and we sat there looking at each other for a minute, and then everything just came tumbling out. "Yesterday, I was in a session with Jasper and I think I got jealous when he kissed Jacob. Then he told me that he was jealous when he saw me kiss Mike on the porch after our date. We got through the session,

and afterwards he just stood staring out the window like something was bothering him. When I got back to my room, I wrote in my journal for a while, and I have come to realize that being so close to Jasper isn't good for me. I went to Mike's to try to hook up with him. To prove to myself that I could have a normal relationship with someone else or even if it's just a normal sexual relationship, but Mike stopped me. He was so caring, and affectionate, I felt like a total dick for going over there with the sole purpose of fucking him. I feel so confused, Bella. I don't know what to do." I felt a tear fall, and wiped it away quickly. These feelings, these emotions, were too much for me right now.

Bella continued holding my hand. "I know that Jasper is having a problem keeping his jealousy in check. We actually sat and talked about it while you were out with Mike. But you can't let that sabotage a potentially fulfilling relationship you could have with Mike. Jasper will get past it, or he won't. You have to do what is going to make you happy. Does Mike make you happy? Well, so far, anyway..." She asked with a smile. I nodded. "Then you should pursue that, and let him care about you. Yearning for someone who's in love with someone else is the fastest way to a broken heart." She kissed me on the cheek, and got up to finish dinner.

I sat at the table, thinking about what she'd said. I didn't think I was 'yearning' for anyone, but then Bella has always known me better than I know myself. She apparently sees something in me that I cannot. About fifteen minutes later, Jasper walked in from work. He kissed Bella lightly before coming to sit at the table with me.

"Edward, I'm glad you're here, I wanted to ask you something," he said casually. I raised my eyebrows, but remained quiet, encouraging him to continue. I idly wondered if this had anything to do with the conversation Bella and I had just finished. I looked over at Bella, but she was still quietly working at the counter. "I thought maybe since you're here with us for a while, if you didn't mind, you could teach me about wax play?" That was just about the last thing I expected him to say. I looked at him dumbstruck for a minute.

"Sure Jasper, I can work with you on that," I told him, fairly relieved that the conversation hadn't steered back to its former emotional climate.

"Thanks," he said, smiling at me, and then he turned to Bella. "Do you trust me to do wax play with you while Edward supervises?" She nodded. Even if Jasper didn't have any experience with it, she trusted me completely. We talked for a while about exactly what we wanted to do, and if we wanted to include Jacob. Wax play wasn't on any of Jacob's lists, so Bella thought that having him watch the first time would be a good way to introduce him to it.

After dinner, Jacob finally came home from the library and we sent him up to the playroom. He was excited about playing with all of us again, and was in position when Bella, Jasper, and I entered the room. Jasper and I left our clothes on in order to administer the wax, but Bella removed hers. Jacob watched surreptitiously as Bella closed her eyes and ran her fingers through her hair. She put it up in a loose bun to keep it out of the way and then I bound her to the table face down while Jasper bound Jacob to the bondage chair. Bella loved being bound; she said that it made the experience so much more intense. I then gagged her with a wink, and handed her a panic button.

Jasper brought out the torch and a good sized pillar candle, and I noticed Jacob shift in his seat. I wondered if he was going to enjoy this as much as we were. As Jasper set the equipment on a nearby table, I rubbed Bella's buttocks as she lay over the table facing Jacob. I picked up a vibe from the shelf on the wall and began to tease her with it. I wanted

to make sure she was nice and aroused before we began.

As I ran the vibrator over her sensitive skin, she moaned almost non-stop. I looked over to see that Jacob was hard, and moving his hips in a very subtle rhythmic motion. He liked watching me tease Bella, something about that turned him on. I grinned to myself and slid the toy into her. Her open mouthed moan resounded through the room as I fucked her slowly with the vibe. I made sure to rub it against her clit each time I pulled it out. After a few minutes, she was trying to grind against my hand and grunting through the gag.

"We're ready," I told Jasper, and he ignited the torch. From the corner of my eye, I saw Jacob flinch at the noise. In a low voice, I instructed Jasper about how to get a good light flow of wax. Using too little was better than using too much, we didn't want to hurt her. We practiced for a few minutes, letting the wax spill into the ground until he felt comfortable. Then, he turned and positioned the candle over Bella. The wax drizzled across Bella's naked back and buttocks, and she screamed, more from the release and the surprise, than any real pain. There were tears on Jacob's face as he was frantically trying to get out of his bonds in the chair.

Jasper's attention was focused exactly where it should be, on what he was doing with Bella; therefore he hadn't noticed Jacob's distress. He didn't see Jacob struggling when he released another, but slightly heavier, stream of wax down the backs of Bella's thighs and she cried out again. She was biting down on the gag, and almost growling now. I had left the vibrator on low inside of her, so I knew she was starting to get close. The pleasure, coupled with the pain, would soon cause her to orgasm, but apparently Jacob was too distraught to notice.

"RED! Jesus Christ RED!! STOP IT! You're hurting her STOP! PLEASE!" He screamed, half sobbing.

I heard Bella's panic button go off. We untied her quickly, to see what was wrong and she ran to Jacob. Climbing into his lap, she tried to soothe him. She stroked his face, his hair, telling him that she was alright and to calm down. She kissed his forehead, and then released his arms from the chair. In an instant they were around her, holding her to his chest, cradling her.

Jacob murmured softly into her shoulder, almost too quietly for me to hear, "I couldn't let them hurt you like that, Bella I couldn't. Please, I can't... I can't..." She tried to explain once again that we weren't hurting her, but he was too upset to really listen to her right now. Then, to my complete incredulity, she promised him no more wax play. And then another thought struck me as I watched her in the boy's arms.

Bella had never used her safe word or a panic button before.

Not once.

Ever.

Chapter 16 – Friday Night Lights

Over the next couple of days, I watched Jacob and Bella. We had ended the session with Jacob's outburst the other night, but I wanted to see if there was anything between them. Not that I was an expert, but it just felt like there was something more going on with them. I wondered if Jasper had the same morbid curiosity regarding their behavior in the

playroom, or if it was just me. Jasper trusted Bella. So did I, for that matter. It was the boy I didn't trust. I threw on a nice t-shirt that Bella had picked out for tonight, and noticed that it was fairly snug against my body. I sighed and wondered if that was intentional. I wanted to be comfortable for whatever was going to happen tonight, so I donned my loose jeans over boxers, and ran my fingers through my hair. I wondered what Mike's expectations were for tonight. He looked fairly serious when he said he'd show me where his bedroom was. I couldn't help but smile at his grin as he said it.

I don't know what the societal norms are for this type of relationship. Do you sleep with someone on the first date? The second? The twelfth? I was so used to just having sex whenever the mood struck, I'd never thought about how it happened with traditional couples. Did hubby just come home and park one in the wife once a week out of habit? Is that how it will be with Mike? God, I hoped not. Maybe it would be a good idea for us to ... take a test drive sooner rather than later. I couldn't imagine myself being satisfied with bad or routine vanilla sex. This dating thing was complicated.

As I walked through the living room on my way out the front door, Jasper spoke from a nearby arm chair. "Have fun tonight with, golden boy," he said, not looking up from his book. I sighed. From my conversation with Bella, I now understood that Jasper was jealous of Mike, but she wasn't entirely clear on the reason. Was it because he thought Mike would be my new sub? He was initially upset when we had discussed Jasper no longer being my sub, and since I've been here he has called me 'Master Edward'. Jasper was my only male friend, the one man that I was closer to than anyone. Did he see Mike as a threat to that closeness? Jasper was driving a wedge between us now, however, not Mike. Jasper's attitude toward Mike, and sometimes toward me was growing tiresome. The other possibility, the one that had Jasper jealous because he felt Mike was a rival for my affection, was too upsetting for me to contemplate. I couldn't believe that were true because of how he and Bella supposedly felt about each other. Bella was my best friend; I would not hurt her like that... even if it were true.

I found myself wanting to spend more time out of the house.

"Thank you, Jasper," I said. Reaching the door, I turned the knob and chanced a glance at him. He was looking at me, and the expression on his face was heartbreaking. I took a deep breath and opened the door. When I walked through it, I didn't look back.

* * *

Mike opened the door for me, and I smiled at him holding up the beer for his inspection. I had been looking forward to tonight since my impromptu visit earlier this week. He was a good guy. He was someone I could see myself being comfortable with. I didn't feel the flash of hot flame that I felt for Jasper, but I didn't feel the cold shoulder either. With Mike, it was a pleasant, consistent warmth. When I stepped in, I was immediately caught off guard as Mike pressed me against the closing front door. It snapped shut behind me, and his mouth was on mine before I could even greet him. This time, it was my turn to moan at the urgency and need of his kiss. His soft lips melded with mine again and again as his arms encircled my waist. My arms went around his shoulders, almost of their own volition. My chest pressed hard against his, I could feel his racing heart. The warmth was heating up rather nicely. I wondered if he was still interested in showing me where his bedroom was.

When we finally broke apart, both of us panting slightly, he continued kissing my neck and murmured, "I've been thinking about you all week. I swear I've had to rub one out in the shower every morning. I just keep hearing your voice in my head asking where my

bedroom is, you sounded so fucking sexy.” He moaned softly, and his fingers entwined in my hair. “God, I want to be on my knees for you.” The longing, the sheer animalistic lust in his voice made my stomach flip, like missing a step going down stairs. It also made me hard – very hard. I’m sure he could feel it as he rubbed his hips into mine, I could certainly feel that he was hard. I wanted to growl in pure animalistic need. I fucking wanted him, in every way that I could think of. I had a pretty extensive imagination, but right then his offer of being on his knees for me sounded very promising.

Abruptly, he pulled back, as if it just occurred to him what was happening. “Edward, I am so sorry,” he said, looking down, completely embarrassed. “With everything that you went through... If I was your first date... I don’t even know if you’re ready for...” I stopped his frightened rambling by capturing his lips with my own. The kiss was light, and gentle. I wanted him to know that I appreciated his concern for me, however misplaced it might be. It wasn’t like I was a stranger to sex. After a moment, I let my kisses trail over his cheek and then to his ear. With my lips right against his ear, I murmured softly to him.

“I want to bury myself deep inside you. Is that what you want?” I asked him as I jerked my hips forward, letting him feel exactly what I wanted to bury in him. My growing erection pressed into his hip and his into mine. The atmosphere was charged with the mounting lust we both felt. I knelt quickly and set the six-pack on the floor. When I stood, he reached down and pulled up the hem of my t-shirt, we pulled apart slightly so that I could get it over my head. Running his hand slowly along my chest, he moaned softly.

“Yeah,” he replied very softly, in almost a whispered groan. I walked him backwards into the other room, our lips still meeting feverishly. I couldn’t see where we were going, but finally we made it to the couch. Our need was too great to make it any farther. I pulled his t-shirt over his head as he pushed me back to sit down heavily. He got to his knees, spreading my legs apart so that he could kneel between them. Then, he leaned forward and kissed me once again, but this kiss was different than the others we’d shared. This kiss was pure sexual need. I kissed him back with the same need, the same urgency. He broke the kiss and moved down my body slowly. Too slowly. I wanted to put my hands on his head and make him do what I wanted, but this wasn’t the time or place for that. I had to learn to control that side of my nature, at least until I knew what he wanted. I ran my fingers through his blonde hair, leaned back against the couch, and closed my eyes. As his soft lips ran gently over my stomach, it occurred to me how different this was. I didn’t have to monitor circulation or pain levels, I didn’t have to worry about not living up to someone’s expectations, and we were free to pleasure each other as we wished. Finally, for once, I didn’t feel the constant need to be in control or to be controlled. I just wanted to touch him and be touched by him.

I felt him unbuttoning my jeans, and then his lips were nuzzling the front of my boxers. My head pressed back into the cushion. God, that was nice. I could feel his warm breath through the cotton fabric, and the hairs on my arms stood on end. My fingers tightened in his hair as his lips pressed hard against my erection, still inside my boxers. I moaned, low and deep in my throat and then heard him chuckle as I lifted my hips up off the couch and jerked my jeans and boxers to my knees. Fuck, I wanted him to touch me, I was incredibly aroused and he hadn’t really done anything yet. Almost at once, he began placing soft kisses on the tops of my thighs, on the insides of my thighs, on the soft skin at my hip. Ugh! It was maddening. My cock, now freed of my clothes, bobbed before me in anticipation of his touch. And then he did touch me, he ran his soft warm tongue all the way up my shaft – base to tip, and I almost came. I had to suck in a breath and hold it just to fight the urge.

When his soft sweet mouth wrapped around the head of my cock, a wild animalistic sound ripped from my throat. The feeling was so intense. Why was it so intense? What the hell was he doing differently? The only other time in my life I'd felt this, felt so caught up in it, was the night before Jasper left. The night we... I pulled back quickly, and Mike looked up at me. Confusion, and a little hurt, touched his beautiful boyish features. I pushed forward on the couch until I was sitting on the edge, and I pulled him fiercely to me. With my arms around his shoulders, and my legs pressed into his sides, I crushed his body to mine, and even I could feel that I was slightly shaking. There was so much anxiety that night with Jasper that I hadn't really noticed. I had been more worried about what I was seeing in my head than what I was feeling in my chest, but I had felt it. I had felt something more that night, and I felt something more now.

"Are you okay?" He asked me, his voice a little higher pitched in his fear for me. I'm sure he thought I'd lost my mind. "We don't have to do this if you're not..."

"I feel it," I whispered in his ear. My eyes were tightly closed, and my forehead pressed into his bare shoulder.

"Feel what?" He whispered back, holding me tighter now.

"Emotion. Something behind the act - I never feel anything, it's just sex. With you, I feel... something. It's more than just sex." I told him excitedly. He pulled back from me and put his hand on my chest, looking into my face.

"I want you to feel it. I want you to feel it here," he said, pushing lightly on my chest. "That's where I feel it." I put my hand over his on my chest, and just looked at him for a moment. He stroked my face with his other hand and then leaned forward to kiss me gently. When he pulled back he had an impish grin on his face.

"What?" I asked him cautiously.

"Can I get back to blowing you now?" He asked, and I had to laugh as I nodded. I thought that things would be awkward now, but once again he made me feel at ease with his wonderfully wicked sense of humor. He pulled back slightly, kissing my chest where his hand had been. I kissed him on the top of the head, wanting to show him the same affection. Then moving back down to resume what he had been doing when I had my epiphany, I felt his soft lips on me again.

"Yes," I started in a breathless voice. "By all..." my voice was cut off by a deep moan as the head of my cock hit the back of his throat. "...means," I choked out. Damn, he was good. He began tilting his head back and forth, rotating his lips around the shaft as he let my cock slide in and out of his mouth. I gripped his shoulders tightly, trying not to buck up into his mouth. I moaned softly with each stroke of his perfect lips over my skin. He pulled back with each stroke and licked the head, running his tongue over every ridge, every groove. The rough of his tongue massaged my sensitive skin, and again I had to grit my teeth and lock my jaw against the urge to cum. Then one of his hands slid under me, and he stroked me. First, he tugged very lightly on my balls, and then reached farther to stroke the sensitive area just behind them. I was panting now, almost grunting, in pleasure at his touch.

When I felt the pressure building up, threatening my release into his mouth, I pulled him up into a standing position and unbuttoned his jeans. It was my turn to touch him. Pulling the jeans down to his knees I saw that he was nude beneath, and I pressed my lips against the

soft skin of his hip. With one hand stroking my desperately hard cock, I reached back between his legs, and put my hand on his soft buttocks, pulling him closer to me. I stroked his buttocks very lightly with my fingers, and wrapped my lips around his erection. I sucked him in the same long slow deep motions he had used with me. I took my time licking and stroking him. I made sure that every inch of his beautiful cock had been thoroughly covered by my eager tongue. With long strokes, I felt the changes in texture from top to bottom, from base to tip, from shaft to head. His hips moved slightly as he stood before me. His long fingers caressed my cheek.

"Edward, that feels so good. Oh God, I'm close... so close..." He moaned, and I pulled back. Without knowing his STD status, I wasn't taking any chances with Jasper or Bella's health. We should have talked about this, and we would, soon. We had a lot to discuss, it seemed. He took over with his hand, as I was doing. It was hot watching him stroke himself like that. He was still directly in front of me, standing between my knees. I looked up at him, and his eyes opened to meet mine. I found lust there, and something else, affection maybe? I reached up gently, and stroked his thigh, then between his thighs as he pumped a little faster. I reached up with my other hand and brushed his away, stroking him in the same rhythm as he had been. His hands balled up into fists, and his head dropped back.

"Oh.... Yeah...." He moaned softly, it was little more than a sigh, but made my stomach clench with a wild need. "Mmmmmmm.... Edward..." He cried as he gave in to that all encompassing need, and his cock throbbed in my hand. I felt his warm semen land on my chest, and rather than feeling debased by it, I felt aroused. He fell to his knees in front of me, and then bending further pressed his lips to my balls. I gripped my cock hard, turning my hand so that my thumb was nearer the base. I spread my legs wide, giving him better access to my body. It wasn't long before I had stroked myself to orgasm. That wickedly hot feeling shot through me, and I came in hard spurts over my chest and stomach, my semen mingling with his on my overheated skin. My cries surprised me, not only was Mike present in them, but God was as well. When I collapsed back against the back of the couch, spent, I sighed, content.

And then came the knock at the door.

"Fuck," Mike said, panting. "It must be 6:00, that's when I ordered the pizza for." He quickly reached down and pulled his jeans back up. "There is a bathroom right behind you, though I have to admit, you look so fucking sexy just like that." His eyes roamed my naked chest and he winked. I stood quickly, stepping out of my jeans, grabbed them, and headed for the bathroom. I had just pulled up my boxers, and was wiping down my chest when I heard a low voice from the other side of the wall.

"Hey Newton, am I ... interrupting?" The deep irritating voice asked with a condescending chuckle.

"Christ, man – just tell me how much it is." Mike said, sounding thoroughly annoyed. I put my shirt back on and was just about to step into my jeans when the guy at the door spoke again.

"You should keep your voice down when you're fucking Masen, Newton. The whole town knows he likes to get fucked by guys, especially older..." I rolled my eyes, what an idiot. Then I heard something slam into the other side of the wall. Foregoing my jeans, I ran out to see one of the guys from the brunch being pinned against the wall by Mike. His face was bloody, as Mike continued to hit him. It only took me a second to recover from my shock, as I grabbed Mike around the waist and pulled him off of the guy.

"Mike, it's okay. Baby, you need to calm down," I said, panting with the effort of trying to contain him. Suddenly, he stopped and looked at me. I didn't have time to process the sudden change in his demeanor. I just grabbed the \$20 from Mike's hand and threw it at the guy. He stepped over the pizza which had landed on the floor near the door. It was still right side up, amazingly enough. I slammed the door behind him and sighed, then turned to Mike. "Are you alright?" I asked, looking him over for injuries. He was still just looking at me.

"What?" I asked softly, brushing his hair out of his eyes.

"You called me 'baby'," he said softly, and I rolled my eyes.

"Come on, grab the beer," I said, a little awkwardly. He reached down for the six-pack I had set there earlier, and I picked up the pizza. We set dinner on a small table in the living room and I went to put my jeans back on while Mike set up the movie. We ate in comfortable silence, and then settled back on the couch to watch the movie.

"Edward?" Mike asked tentatively when I sat back down on the couch. I looked at him questioningly as I opened my second beer. "I... I liked that you called me that. He smiled shyly and I sat with my back against the couch.

"Well, then, come here, baby," I said softly, and pulled him back against my chest. He turned his head and I kissed his cheek, while I ran my hand over his stomach. It wasn't a sexual touch, but one to show him my affection. Mike lay back on my chest comfortably as the movie started, and I realized that it was nice to just hold someone like this. The previous feeling of sexual urgency was gone. It had been replaced by comfortable companionship. I kissed the top of his head, and he turned to capture my lips. We spent our whole evening that way, just talking and kissing.

I found myself looking forward to many more nights like this one.

Chapter 17 - Consultations

When I got home from Mike's, Jasper had already gone to bed. I was glad; I didn't need to face any harassment or interrogations from him tonight. I did, however, find Jacob and Bella huddled in the kitchen at the table. When I entered, their conversation abruptly stopped, and Bella greeted me brightly. She asked me how my evening had gone, and I started to tell her when Jacob excused himself for bed. He mentioned something about an exam in the morning, and wandered off. For that, I was thankful, as I started to tell Bella about the intimacy Mike and I had shared on the couch. For some reason, I didn't want to share that with Jacob, it felt like a betrayal of Mike's trust.

I omitted the part about the pizza guy; I didn't want Bella to get upset by what the guy had said about me. But, I told her about holding Mike as we watched the movie, and how it made me feel. She smiled, and said that she was glad. She also gave me a warning – now that things were becoming sexual between Mike and I, it was important to tell him about my lifestyle. It wasn't fair to Mike that I was in a sexual relationship with other people without discussing it with him. This was suddenly getting more complicated. How was I going to tell Mike that I was having sex with two other guys and a girl? But the sessions were helping me to keep things under control. I was calmer, and more focused, after a session with Jasper or Bella, or both. I could sit and write for hours, dissecting my emotions and coming to better terms with them. I was learning a lot about myself. I was learning a

lot about my different complex relationships. I was finding myself again, slowly. That would mean a better relationship with Mike down the road. He deserved to be with the best person that I could be for him, and for me.

Just then, my phone chirped indicating that I had a text message. I pulled it out of my pocket and checked the display, and as I did a smile crept onto my face. It didn't go unnoticed.

"I'm guessing it's not from your mom." Bella said, smirking at me. I rolled my eyes at her, and then just gave in to the urge and stuck my tongue out as well. She laughed, and I opened the text.

I can still feel you.

I wish you were here in bed with me.

My mouth fell open at his bold statement. We had only been dating for about a week, and he already wanted me in his bed next to him. I guess there was no real precedent for a relationship such as ours. There were no hard and fast rules. I thought I should probably feel uneasy that things were progressing at the pace they were, but I didn't. I didn't have any kind of frame of reference as to how these things should progress, so I decided not to stress about it. People got into and out of relationships every day, and I'm sure none of them followed the exact same timeline. I was just glad that things were going so well between us.

We'd had two dates, both of which were very successful. The museum, the beach, his house; they were all places that we had found a common ground in. We felt comfortable with each other, which is how I imagine a relationship should be. Lastly, and most importantly, I found that the dull ache that had settled in my chest the morning Jasper left was slowly starting to subside. It was being replaced with, not love – I didn't think it was that, but contentment.

I asked Bella what their plans were for tomorrow. She said that they were having a session with Jacob, trying to make him feel more comfortable after the wax play session. She asked if I wanted to join. I thought about it for a few minutes and decided that I didn't. Nor did I really want to listen to their session either. The company that did the sound proofing on the playroom was coming back to fix the light fixture next week, but until then, everything was clearly audible through my bedroom floor.

Then, inspiration struck me and I pulled out my cell phone.

"Texting Mike?" Bella asked with a smirk.

"No, actually, I thought maybe I'd take my mom to lunch." I said softly, with a hint of uncertainty in my voice. "Maybe she's busy, though. I should have called sooner." I frowned at my phone.

"Trust me, Edward. If she has other plans, she'll break them to go to lunch with you. You are so important to her. I know it would mean the world to her if you called and asked her to lunch. It's kind of late to call her now though," she said with a soft smile. She reached across the table and took my hand. "I'm so proud of you, Edward. The changes in you are evident. You seem, maybe not happier, but maybe more at ease with yourself?" I nodded. That's exactly what it was. I had let the boy out of the box and was getting to know him

again.

I changed into a loose pair of pajama pants, and climbed into bed. Grabbing my phone off of the night stand, I decided to answer Mike's text.

I would like that.

With you, I feel just like everyone else.

Lying back on the pillows, I thought about what brunch would be like on Sunday. I vaguely wondered if Mike would be as open with me there as he was everywhere else. I thought about how I would feel about that. Could I out us both by holding his hand in front of our parents' small minded friends? What if the guys from last week or the pizza guy showed up? I didn't want to make a scene. On the other hand, I had no issue with expressing my affection for him. I guess we would just play it by ear. Maybe I would talk to my mom about it if she came to lunch with me tomorrow.

* * *

Bella was dead right about my mother. While she didn't mention changing any plans, she was thrilled to hear from me and said she would love to have lunch with me. I got dressed in one of my nicer pairs of jeans and a light sweater. I want to go someplace casual with her, someplace we could talk without being overheard by one of her friends. As I walked her to my car, she suggested we go to D'Agostino's Pizza. I used to love that place when I was a kid. They had the best pizza, and it was a small intimate kind of place, a place her society friends would never set foot in. I grinned at her as I held the car door open, and she hesitated for just a moment before hugging me.

"What's that for?" I asked with a chuckle.

"I haven't seen you happy in a long time, I'd almost forgotten what your smile looked like," she said wistfully and sat down in the passenger seat of the Volvo. I knelt next to her, taking her hand and looked up at her.

"It's getting better. It's finally getting better." I told her softly, and she nodded. I thought I saw her wipe a tear from her eye as I closed the door, but I couldn't be sure. Since I hadn't been to the pizza place in so long, she had to give me directions to get there. I pulled into the lot behind the building and parked in one of the spaces marked for D'Agostino's customers. We walked side by side to the front of the building, and then once inside, requested a table for two. The place was empty for an early Saturday lunch, so we picked a table near the windows. The warm late spring sun felt nice as it streamed through the heavily advertised glass. When the waitress came, I picked up my menu, and looked at the offerings. As I reached the bottom of the first page, I dropped the menu.

"What is it, Edward?" My mother asked, suddenly concerned.

"Tater tots," I said softly, and she looked at me as if I'd lost my mind. "You used to bring me here when I was a kid; it was our secret because it wasn't classy enough for dad. He thought it was a dive. We used to have sausage pizza and tater tots. I've never been to another pizza place that served tater tots, so I had forgotten that until just now." She beamed at me. "I had the same thing the other day at the museum. I remembered that Mike's mom used to take us there because they wouldn't let him go into science as a career. I remembered the rotunda, and the heart. Being back here, allowing myself to think about

things, it's bringing my childhood – my real childhood, my happy childhood, back to me. That boy I told you about, he's starting to come out of the box."

"I'm glad, Edward. You don't know how much I've missed him," she said quietly and looked up just as the waitress came back. "Hi," she said to the girl. "We'd like a medium sausage and a basket of tater tots, please...."

Mom and I talked all through lunch and even through a couple of beers afterwards. I was surprised at how accepting and free my mother seemed to be. It seemed that everything she had been though during my lifetime had taught her not to take anything for granted – nothing – not even sausage pizza and greasy tater tots. So, I told her everything. I told her about Mike, and how he made me feel. I told her about Jasper, and how he made me feel. I told her about Jasper and Bella. I wanted to tell her about my suspicions regarding Bella and Jacob, but that would divulge a little more about my private life than I felt comfortable sharing with her. Telling your mom that you tied up your best friend and poured wax on her naked body just isn't adequate substance for a lunchtime conversation. She gave me a slightly different take on things than Bella had.

"You describe Mike as comfortable, and safe – but your passion lies in Jasper?" She asked in summary and I nodded. "And Jasper is jealous of Mike, while claiming to be in love with Bella?" I nodded again. "I think you need to talk to Jasper. You need to find out what's going on in his head. Safe and comfortable are good, Edward. Passion? Passion is better." Then to my utter astonishment, she winked at me. Was she saying what I thought she was saying? I should be with Jasper?

"What about Bella?" I asked incredulous. "Bella is my best friend, Mom; I can't just discount her feelings in the matter."

"If Jasper wants to be with you, she has two choices – to stay in a complacent loveless relationship, or to move on and let him move on. She cares for you Edward. The three of you owe it to yourselves to figure out what it is that you really want." She said earnestly. "But, if that happens, you need to be completely upfront with Mike. He deserves to know where your heart is, even if it isn't with him. Okay?" I nodded. Yet another conversation I needed to have with Mike. I sighed and she patted my hand.

On the way back to my parents' house, I thought about her advice. I knew that once Jasper and I had this conversation, everything would change. He would then be aware that I kind of had feelings for him. Bella would know how Jasper felt about me, and the guessing game that I'd been playing since I ended up in Chicago would be over. Then, there was Mike. Even if Jasper said that he wanted to remain with Bella, I would still have to tell Mike that Jasper would always be in my heart somewhere. As much as it hurt, I didn't know if I would ever feel that all encompassing love that Bella and Jasper kept telling me about. I didn't know if I even could feel it with either Mike *or* Jasper.

My one question right now was, *if* I could feel love like that – why hadn't it come over me yet? What the hell was it waiting for? If I were in love with Jasper, why couldn't I feel it when I looked at him? If I was starting to fall in love with Mike – why couldn't I feel that either?

Was I just emotionally void?

Chapter 18 - Reemergence

I avoided thinking about the conversation that I needed to have with most of the important people in my life. I didn't want to hurt Bella by telling Jasper my suspicions. I didn't want to risk losing Jasper by confronting him about his feelings. I didn't want to risk losing Mike because he found out that I'm a closet bondage freak. Instead, I got ready for the brunch. I wore a nice pair of jeans and a polo shirt – not exactly society chic, but it would get me through my parents' brunch with a minimum amount of fuss. Mike arrived a little early to pick me up. I was glad I had spent time with my mother yesterday at lunch; it would be less awkward for Mike if we didn't have a heart to heart talk while he hung out in the garden or something. I heard the doorbell sound downstairs, and was relieved when I heard Bella call that she would answer it. I finished getting ready and then headed downstairs. I was not amused by the sight before me in the front room.

Mike was sitting in an arm chair with Jasper standing above him. Jasper was scowling down at the man from a completely adversarial stance. Mike, however, didn't look the least bit upset or defensive. He just looked up expectantly at Jasper.

"What exactly is it that you want from Edward?" Jasper asked Mike coolly, and I thought about intervening, but found that my feet just wouldn't carry me in there. Honestly, I kind of wanted to hear his answers. What was Mike looking for in our relationship? Was he looking for forever? Was he just looking for a friend? Was he looking for love? Friends with benefits? Straight up sex? I didn't know the answer to any of these questions, I wondered if he did.

"My intentions towards Edward are none of your damn business," Mike said, standing up to look Jasper in the eye. I liked that Mike didn't back down from Jasper. "Look, I know that you care for him, probably more than you should." *What the fuck – is this a conspiracy? How many more people were going to jump on the 'Jasper loves you' bandwagon?* Jasper started to speak, but Mike cut him off. "But you have a girlfriend. What he needs right now is stability, and consistency – someone who will care about him all the time, not just when it's convenient. I care about him. I don't know where this is going, whether we'll be friends or more, but I won't hurt him. He's been hurt too much in his life already for me to let that happen." I walked into the room then, before Jasper had a chance to respond. I can't imagine it would have been kind.

"Ready?" I asked Mike, looking quickly between him and Jasper. Jasper looked away, not meeting my eyes. I could tell that he was upset. He sank down onto the couch next to Bella, who was looking at him sadly. I wasn't sure if she was embarrassed by his outburst with Mike, or just worried about him, as I was.

"Actually, I'd like to talk to you for a minute. Can we go up to your room?" Mike asked cautiously. I turned around and led him toward the stairs. As we passed the second floor landing, I noticed with relief that the playroom door was closed. At least that was one conversation I wouldn't need to have today. We reached my room and I closed the door behind him. We walked side by side to the bed and sat down. Then, he turned his body to face me, pulling one leg up between us.

"I want to apologize," he started, and my head snapped up.

"What would you have to apologize for?" I asked him incredulously. He had just laid it on the line standing up for me. Jasper can be fucking intimidating when he wants to be, and Mike just pretty much told him to go to hell. It showed me more than anything else that Mike really does care for me. What the hell could he be sorry for?

"I know that right now we are just friends," a sheepish grin crept onto his face and he continued. "Okay, maybe a little more than friends. I just didn't want you to think that I was trying to make decisions for you, or get between you and your friend. I know you care for him, and I just don't want to see you get hurt because he doesn't know what he wants." I had no idea how Mike could tell that about Jasper so fast. I knew he was intuitive – maybe it was in the way that I had spoken about Jasper. Did something that I said express that sentiment, was it the way I had described our relationship? I talked a lot about Jasper and Bella during my time with Mike. What else did I have to talk about? Jasper and Bella were a large part of my life, and Mike should know that upfront.

"I don't think you overstepped. To be honest, it felt good to hear you stand up for me like that. I like that you care about me. I care about you too," I told him honestly. No matter what direction this relationship took, I did care about him. He would always be my friend. I turned then, mimicking his position on the bed, pulling my knee up so that my leg was next to his. We were sitting almost cross-legged on the bed, but each of us still had one foot on the floor. He leaned toward me at the same time that I leaned toward him. Our lips met, softly in a sweet and gentle kiss that made me feel warm. Then, the kiss deepened. Playfully, he grabbed my shoulders and pushed me back on the bed. I laughed and wrapped my legs around his waist as he put his hands on either side of my shoulders. He kissed me again, moaning softly. I was starting to get aroused, and I was about to tell him we needed to head to the brunch when I heard my door open.

"Edward, Mike, I..." Jasper started, but then abruptly stopped when he saw our positioning. I knew what it must look like, even if we were only just messing around. All of the color drained from Jasper's face, and he gripped the doorknob so tightly that I thought it might be dislodged from the door. "I'm sorry I disturbed you," he choked out and then turned slamming the door behind him. The framed art that Bella had placed on the wall of my room rattled, but thankfully didn't fall.

"I am so sorry, Ed-," Mike started, but I silenced him with a kiss.

"This is his issue, not yours," I told him softly, releasing him from my hold so that he could stand. For a minute, I stood staring at the door that had just slammed shut. Mike put his hand on my shoulder, and I reached up, and grasped it in mine.

"We should get going," he said softly. I sighed, and then nodded. Suddenly, I didn't want to leave my room. What if we saw Jasper on the way out, what would I say to him? What if he still had that look, the one that made it appear as though someone had died? I didn't think I'd ever forget that look of pain, and loss – because I caused it. "It isn't your fault," Mike said gently, guessing my thoughts. I looked away, out of the window. He would not understand my relationship with Jasper. After a minute, he took my hand and we walked downstairs together. Thankfully, we met neither Jasper nor Bella before we were able to get out the front door.

He held the door of the jeep open, and I climbed in. More and more I was starting to really enjoy riding with the top down. I felt so free. Once he was in, we backed out of the drive. As he stopped to put the car into drive, I thought I heard a crash come from the house. I looked at Mike, he had heard it too. We sat there for a moment, idling in the road, but heard nothing else. He looked at me, one eyebrow raised in a silent question. I steeled myself, looking out the windshield and nodded. We drove away.

* * *

My mother was thrilled to see me standing on the doorstep holding Mike's hand when she answered. I knew that she thought that perhaps Mike was the wrong choice for me, but she was happy to see me content nonetheless. My father was simply shocked at the change in me. The last time I stood on his doorstep, I was skittish and scared. Now, I stood proudly next to Mike, our fingers entwined. My father beamed at me, and I smiled back a little shyly. They invited us in, and we sat on the couch in the front room, joking with my parents until the guests started to arrive. Then, I got nervous. How was I supposed to act with Mike? We hadn't made any kind of commitment yet. What we were? Were we friends? Were we more? Everyone knew us so introductions would be unnecessary, but what would I have introduced him as?

"Edward, baby, you need to relax," Mike said softly, rubbing soothing circles into the back of my hand with his thumb. "We don't have to tell anyone anything. I won't be affectionate if it bothers you, if you're worried about what people will think." I could tell that he was disappointed, but I also knew that he would go along with whatever I wanted.

"Actually, I was just thinking that I would be disappointed if you weren't," I said quietly. Looking over my shoulder quickly, he took my face in his hands. He kissed me, just three or four soft presses of his lips against mine.

"I would love nothing more," he said, smiling as he stood up, pulling me with him. We headed out into the back yard, still holding hands. A few people looked up and smiled, but for the most part, no one even blinked. I was astonished.

"They all know about me, so finding out we're together isn't much of a shock for them," he said shrugging, and leading me over to the buffet table. We got plates of food and sat at one of the tables in the back. A few people wandered over to say hi, but for the most part, we were left to ourselves. I looked over a few tables, and saw our pizza delivery boy. He was extraordinarily quiet with a laceration stitched on his lip, and a piece of tape on his broken nose. I heard a few people ask him what happened. He said he fell down someone's porch stairs on a delivery. I looked over at Mike, he was smirking.

"Guess it doesn't pay to flunk out of college," Mike said with a shrug, and dug in to the blackberry cobbler he'd picked up from the desert table. I chuckled, and was about to lick a small spot of cobbler filling from his lip when my phone chirped. I flipped open the phone, and read the message with my mouth agape:

Please meet me in the playroom at 9pm.

It was from Jasper, and there really was no way that this was going to end well.

"Everything okay?" Mike asked as I continued to stare at my phone. I looked up at him and shrugged, feigning an air of aloofness that I didn't feel.

"Yeah, Jasper wants to talk," I told him, somewhat truthfully. I'm sure we would talk. He didn't need to know the details. Okay, he did. I knew that he did, but I just didn't have the balls to talk to him about it. Not yet.

"That's probably a good thing," Mike said, and smiled warmly at me. His trembling hands were the only thing that gave away what he was really feeling. His fork dropped to the plate with a clatter. He was afraid. He was afraid that I was going to end our relationship before it really ever had a chance to get started. I reached over and stroked his cheek, and then took his hand. He calmed at once.

We were both unusually quiet throughout the rest of brunch, and headed out as soon as it was socially acceptable. I didn't want my mother to worry; she'd done enough of that in her life. I was a big boy, and I could handle my own problems. After we left the brunch, we headed to Mike's. I didn't want to go home yet. I didn't want to see Jasper before it was time for us to meet in the room. Mike and I played a few long and distracted rounds of Scrabble, which actually helped me to relax. Whatever it was that Jasper wanted, whether it was a session he wasn't going to get, or just a talk that we both knew we needed, the hour was rapidly approaching. I knew there was no way I was going to sub for Jasper while he was this upset, it would just lead us both someplace we didn't need to go. He didn't need the guilt that I still carried over losing control with him. As his friend, and as his former Dom, I wasn't going to let that happen to him.

Before I knew it, it was a quarter of nine, and Mike was driving me home. After we pulled into the drive, he kissed me softly in the Jeep. I felt the fear, the desperation in his kiss. Then, as I opened the door to get out, he grabbed my hand and pulled me to him. He kissed me fiercely. When we broke apart, I put my hand on his cheek and looked meaningfully into his eyes. I wanted to tell him not to worry, but I couldn't. I had no idea what lay in store for me once I entered that room.

I swung the door of the Jeep closed, and headed up to the porch. I still had five minutes. I watched Mike drive away, and then stood on the porch for a few more minutes to collect my thoughts. Steeling myself for whatever was coming, I turned and opened the door. I walked slowly towards the stairs and noticed a shattered clock in the front from as I passed. Even with slow measured steps, I was standing in front of the door to the playroom at exactly nine o'clock. Turning the knob, I walked in and thought for a moment that the room was empty – but then I saw him. He was kneeling in the center of the room, his hands behind his neck – and he was naked. To say that I was shocked was an understatement.

I walked to him slowly, and knelt right in front of him on the hardwood floor. He looked up at me, and his eyes were wild. His face was filled with uncontained emotion.

"Jasper?" I asked softly.

"Please..." he started, and his voice sounded so broken. "Please, I need Master Edward." My heart broke for him, and I placed a hand on his naked shoulder.

I had not been Master Edward for so long. It was almost as if I had given him up, but as I looked at my devoted servant kneeling before me, begging to serve me, I knew that Master Edward would not only emerge - but oblige.

Chapter 19 – Apogee

I stood before him, as he knelt naked and beautiful on the floor, and pulled my shirt off over my head. I ran my fingers through my hair absently, as his eyes rose to my naked chest. I bent quickly and removed my shoes and socks, so that only my jeans remained. Taking a step closer to him, I ran my fingers through his hair. He closed his eyes, and sighed. Then, I grasped his hair tightly and tilted his face to look up at me.

"I saw the clock downstairs. You threw a temper tantrum like a three year old boy when you saw me in his arms, didn't you?" I asked harshly and Jasper whimpered. "DIDN'T YOU?"

"Yes, Master Edward," he said softly, almost in a whisper. *Fuck, I loved the way that*

sounded. I loved the way it came off of his perfect lips.

"I think you should be punished, don't you?" I asked, raising one eyebrow in question.

"If it pleases you, Master Edward," he said, his voice gaining strength.

"Very good, you have not forgotten your training," I said, and let go of his hair, stroking it instead. He leaned into my touch, closing his eyes. "Stand," I told him quietly, and then led him over to the bondage frame where he had recently bound Jacob and me. "Hold on to that top bar, and do not let go." He reached up, having to stretch up on his toes to do so, and grabbed on to the bar. His legs were spread, as they should be. I left him stretched there, and headed to the back wall. It was organized slightly different than my own playroom, but I found a leather flogger easy enough. I returned to him at once. As I struck him, the sounds of the leather striking his skin and his soft grunts as the pain radiated through his back and buttocks, were like music to me.

He gave an open mouthed cry as I moved around to the front of his body and the flogger lightly slapped his hard cock. This release was exactly what he needed now. I knew it, I recognized it. I slapped lightly between his legs, and he unconsciously spread them wider. He welcomed the freedom from the anguish that was tormenting him, he was silently begging for it. When every inch of his pale skin that I could safely whip was pink and warm, he was sweating, panting from the effort of holding on to the bar. I told him to release the bar, and he nearly fell to his knees. Returning to the back wall, I found several lengths of rope and a metal bar.

When I returned, I had him fold his arms behind his back, each hand grabbing the opposite elbow where I bound them. I then bound his ankles to the spreader bar. I wrapped my arms around his stomach while helping him to his knees. I felt the muscles clench beneath my hands. Even after all this time, he was still so responsive to my touch. Once he was in position, and stable on his knees, I brought over the low leather ottoman. Grabbing a bottle of lube from a side table, I knelt behind him. I poured a generous amount over his straining erection, and then set the bottle on the ground next to me. I wrapped my fingers around his cock, and started to stroke him, forcing a low groan from his pursed lips. I ran my fingers over the head, over the shaft, between his legs. I stroked him softly and then harder until his hips moved slightly against the motion of my hand. I leaned forward, pressing my lips to his neck.

"That's right, it's my cock you want, isn't it?" I murmured softly, and he moaned. "You want me to fuck you, don't you?" He moved his hips harder against the motion of my hand. "Yes, I am your Master, and you want to please me. Don't you, *my* Jasper?" His breathing hitched, just once, and then he nodded silently. I pushed him forward over the ottoman. I picked up the lube from the floor next to me and slid my fingers into him. He hadn't been penetrated like this for several months, I was fairly certain, so I wanted to take it easy with him. After a moment, he began to push back into my fingers, grinding his hard cock into the soft leather. I knew then that he was ready. I stood quickly and shed my jeans, tossing them haphazardly to the side.

Using my hands to spread him open to me, I pressed the head of my cock into his small entrance. He tensed, and sucked in a breath. I stopped, waiting for him to relax before pushing forward again. I slid easily into him. He whimpered softly, and I moved a little more slowly. He spread his knees apart, as that's all he could do with the spreader bar between his ankles. I drove into him, holding his hips for leverage. I stopped deep inside of him, just feeling his muscles clench around me. Even now, he was still so fucking tight. I began to

thrust steadily into him, in a hard rhythm.

Then, for the first time ever in a session, I started to have *that* feeling. It was the feeling I'd had with Mike at his house, the feeling I'd had with Jasper the night before he left. It burned in my chest, and my fingers tightened convulsively into his soft skin. He uttered low, soft cries. They were almost whispers and I had to strain to catch them.

"Oh God..." He gasped softly, and I saw that his hands were balled into fists. "Please... Harder..." I gave him what he wanted, driving harder, deeper into him. "Yeah... yeah...." Then, he whispered "Edward..." and was pushing back into me. I didn't have the heart to chastise him, he sounded so broken. I simply stroked his hip, and his thigh, needing the comfort almost as much as he did. As his sounds became more pronounced, I felt my orgasm rapidly approaching. I couldn't believe it. I was going to cum. I don't think it had ever happened that fast before.

"Fuck... Jasper... I want you to cum... Come on, angel, cum hard," I cried, feeling everything in me starting to tighten, I sped up, chasing that feeling. The burning in my chest just made it that much more intense. Jasper was shaking under me, his legs trembling. He was stroking himself against the soft cushion of the ottoman with abandon. He fucked it as he would any willing sub, hard and fast. Finally, a wild cry tore from him, and he clenched around me. That was all it took. As my orgasm shot through me, I thrust hard into him in quick lithe movements. I shook from the intensity of it, nearly collapsing on top of him when it was over. I panted wildly, trying to catch my breath. Looking up, I saw that Jasper had turned his head to the side, resting it against the cool leather. I also noticed that his face was streaked with tears.

Quickly, I untied his legs. Moving up, I then untied each wrist. But before I could rub down his arms and legs, or administer any other kind of aftercare, he shot up and headed for the door. He bolted through the door before I could even call him back. I was shaken by his behavior. *Oh my God, had I hurt him? Why didn't he say word?* Then, another thought occurred to me. Maybe it wasn't a physical pain. I threw my jeans back on and cleaned up quickly, so I could go talk to him.

When I reached his room on the third floor, I saw that the door was barely cracked open. It was almost as if he had just flung it shut behind him as he fell through it – not quite getting it closed. I pushed it gently so as not to startle him and was about to say something when I saw him lying face-down on the bed, still nude. His face was buried in a pillow, his shoulders shaking.

I pressed my palm against the grainy surface of his bedroom door, and my heart ached.

I knew I was going to have to talk to him, and soon – but I needed to talk to Mike first. I was scared, for the first time in a very long time. What if I lost them both? Jasper was obviously upset, Mike wasn't into my lifestyle. What if they both ended up resenting me? What if they both cut me out of their lives, like the malignancy that I was? I found that I just couldn't work up the nerve to have those conversations yet. Trying to quell the panic that had suddenly taken root in my chest, I walked slowly down the hall to my room.

* * *

Journal Entry – Apogee

I have to write tonight, my mind, my emotions are in utter chaos. When I went into that

room tonight and saw him waiting on his knees for me, I thought my heart would stop. He was beautiful in his subservience, but then he was beautiful outside of it as well. And then there was that feeling; that feeling in my chest that has been recently happening to me more and more, I want to explore that. I know that it started the night before Jasper left for Chicago.

I had felt stupid making the request of him. I knew that it was going to be my last shot at finding that goddamn feeling that Bella had been talking about. If I was going to figure out what love was, there were only two people on the planet that could show me. I had already tried with one; this was my last change to try with the other. He understood. He took my hand and we went upstairs. He looked surprised when I bypassed the second floor and headed to my bedroom on the third. Carlisle had told me that certain things should be kept separated in this type of relationship. Tonight, I wanted to keep the BDSM aspect of our relationship separate from what we were about to do. I wanted this moment, this connection with him to be entirely separate from that. Tonight, we would just be Edward and Jasper, looking for intimacy with each other that we could find in no other place.

I took the lube out of the drawer so that once we started; we would not have to stop. I knew I wanted him to top, that for the first time in my life, I willingly wanted to be taken. That was a huge thing for me to do. It was not going to be easy. I tried to explain my reasoning to him, but it sounded feeble, even to my own ears. I was an emotional cripple, why did I think sex was going to fix that? I had wanted it, that feeling, so badly. I just didn't think that I had the ability. He took my face in his hands and kissed me. It wasn't like any other kiss we had shared. The fact that I had kissed him at all while he was my sub spoke volumes to my inability to remain in control with him. That kiss was deep, and spiritual. His fingers slid into my hair as I wrapped my arms around his waist. I remember feeling a rush of burning need for him as our lips moved against each others with a deep seated longing.

I loved the way I felt as he touched me. His caresses were gentle and sweet. I felt cared for ... nurtured. Fuck, I couldn't find the right word. No words seem adequate to describe the feeling. It was so goddamned infuriating. His hands, his mouth, worked my body perfectly, over my chest, and my stomach. By the time we were both naked, grinding against each other, I was more relaxed about what would happen. In fact, I was even a little eager. I still remember the feeling of his hot mouth around me; trying to help me loosen up, get me aroused so that he could more easily penetrate me.

And when he did penetrate me, I was back in my own personal nightmare. All of sudden, I was that little boy again. I was powerless. I was helpless. I was terrified of the monster. I was being held down, I was screaming, begging him to stop. My body felt like it was being split in two, it hurt so badly. I screamed again, this time for my mother, but no sound came out. So I just shook my head over and over. Then, I heard a voice. It was like an angel's voice. It was telling me that I was safe. I realized then that it wasn't real. I wasn't a child, lying on my stomach with my face pushed into a pillow to muffle my screams. I was safe, here, in Jasper's arms. My eyes opened, and unshed tears fell down my face. I felt mildly ashamed of them. I was a grown man, crying like a child. He tried to pull back, but I wouldn't let him. I used my legs to pull him to me and nodded to let him know I was okay.

He continued, slowly, stroking me as he did so. I looked up at him, and saw the raw emotion in his face. I threw my head back, the feelings overwhelming me. Suddenly, I felt like I was on fire. I felt warm all over – my chest, my stomach, everywhere. I cried out incoherently as my orgasm approached, I think I even told him that I loved him at one point. The last vestiges of the flash back were leaving me now, and I could concentrate on the sheer fucking pleasure coursing through me. I came hard into his hand, and he followed

almost immediately after. It was like an explosion of emotion through me, and I felt literally drained as a result.

He kissed me gently, and then made to get out of bed. I panicked and grabbed his arm. I wanted him to stay with me, but I couldn't get up the nerve to ask him. So, instead I just thanked him.

Then, he hit me with that fucking safe word. He couldn't just let things go, he had to end it.

I just felt fucking hollow – like he took everything with him- my heart, my mind, my very soul, when he walked out my bedroom door.

Once again, I was alone.

And I was broken.

Chapter 20 – Conversations

The next week was awkward, to say the least. Mike had been working long hours preparing a presentation for the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. They needed a team of attorneys on retainer due to some recent lawsuits they were facing. Mike's law firm was one of those up for consideration, and they would be a huge client for his firm to land. If Mike could land this one client, it would put him at the top of the list for full partner. This was important to him because he would have accomplished it on his own merit, not just because he was 'Newton's kid'. Throughout the week, we sent text messages back and forth, and he called to tell me that he was looking forward to seeing me the following week. The presentation was on Monday, and he would have to work through the weekend. We had made plans to get together Friday for our next date. Mike wanted to throw some steaks on the grill and just relax in his back yard. Jasper on the other hand was avoiding me. He had a beautiful, spacious home, but there was no way that we could continually miss each other like this entirely by coincidence. I had, however, seen a lot of Jacob and Bella. It seemed that they were always together. Not for the first time, I wished that I could talk to Jasper about my suspicions.

Between Mike's project, Bella's involvement with Jacob, and Jasper's avoidance, I found that I had a lot of alone time on my hands. Today, I was catching up on my email, and then I planned to write for awhile in my journal. I was still trying to decide how I was going to talk to Jasper and Mike about things that needed to be worked out. The problem was that, for the first time in a long time, I was scared. What if I lost them both? Jasper *and* Mike? It was evident that something was bothering Jasper, and it had to do with me. Mike wasn't aware of my lifestyle, I didn't even get the vibe that he would be interested. What if they both ended up resenting me? I found that I just couldn't cope with the possibility of either of those losses yet.

I stared at my screen for nearly fifteen minutes without actually seeing it. My mind replayed the images of my aborted intimacy with Mike; it replayed the images of my recent session with Jasper. I recalled with perfect clarity, the expression on Mike's face when I called him 'baby'. It was like a light had been lit inside of him, and that touched me. Then, I thought about seeing Jasper, lying broken on his bed. If he really did have feelings for me, if he wanted more than just my friendship, why hasn't he said anything? Did he think I was just too damaged to bother with? Why was he holding all of this pain inside? Was it for Bella's sake? For mine? I couldn't let him continue to be miserable, something had to change.

Bringing myself out of my reverie, I scanned through my inbox. Most of it was mundane, ads touting new products for companies that I'd ordered from, notifications for website updates, a change of email from a colleague, and a message from Alice. I opened one that first, a little nervous that it had to do with my house. When I scanned through the contents, I sighed. I think I'd rather it had to do with the house. Felix wanted to apply again to be my sub. I appreciated his enthusiasm, but it wasn't a relationship I wanted to enter into. First, because my life was complicated enough as it was, and second because he just didn't do it for me. I had to feel at least some kind of physical attraction to my subs, or I would not find the sexual gratification that I sought. Unfortunately, since I had approached Alice about collaring Jasper a couple of years ago, Felix had asked regularly to give him a chance. Now that I had no sub, he figured it was the perfect time. He was shockingly wrong about that.

I deleted most of the items in my inbox, checked a few RSS feeds, and finally shut down. Now I was officially bored. I didn't want to write in my journal yet; I didn't really have my thoughts organized. It had been days since my session with Jasper, and my mind was still a little chaotic. Right now I thought back to Jasper naked and writhing, too excited to contain himself. I started to become aroused. Yeah, this wasn't going to help. Or, maybe it would. I got up out of the desk chair, and moved over to my bed. Stripping off the t-shirt, shorts, and boxers I wore, I climbed naked to the center. I thought about Jasper as I began to rub my nipples, but I found that it hurt to think about him. So, I thought of Mike instead. I thought of his hands on me, his mouth. I rolled over to pull the lube from my bedside table, and glimpsed my cell phone sitting there. That gave me a wicked idea.

Opening it, I scrolled through my contacts until I found Mike's name. I chose to send a text message, and then typed:

Busy?

His response was almost immediate, like he had been waiting for me to text.

No, I'm free for about an hour. What's up?

Perfect. I opened the bottle, and poured a very small measure of lube into my left palm and began to stroke my cock until it pulsed in my hand. I didn't usually masturbate left-handed, but I would need my right hand free. I hit the camera key on my phone and took a picture of my hand on my erection and sent it to Mike. Laughing softly to myself, I settled back onto the pillows, spreading my legs wider. I stroked my cock down the shaft slowly to the base, and then let my hand continue to travel down between my legs. I was massaging my balls lightly when my phone chirped with an incoming text. I checked the display and there was a picture of Mike. He had unzipped his perfectly pressed black dress pants, and pulled his briefs down just enough to free his erection. He was grasping it tightly in the image. So, I took the phone and held it down between my legs to take a picture of my hand as it continued to massage between my legs. Then, I hit send. Less than sixty seconds later, my phone rang. I was laughing when I answered.

"You're trying to kill me, aren't you?" Mike asked breathlessly. "I went from stressed about my next meeting to unequivocally horny in seconds. It's enough to make my head spin. It was all I could do to get my office door locked."

"Unequivocally, eh?" I asked, amused.

"Undeniably," he moaned, and the sound made my stomach clench. I moved my hand back up and stroked myself harder. "I wish you were here. I want to ride you on my office chair,

or feel you bend me over my desk. I'd love to be naked and pressed against my floor to ceiling window overlooking the skyline. God, I just want to feel you." This time it was my turn to moan.

"I like the idea of you up against the window, your cock pressed against the cold glass as I fuck you from behind. That would be so fucking hot," I said in nearly a whisper as the scene played out in my mind. His legs spread, his palms on the glass, his head pushed back against my shoulder as he groaned.

"I can almost feel your fingers gripping my hips as you drive into me," he moaned, and I heard him change positions. The creak of the leather was audible through the phone and I imagined him settling back into the chair.

"No," I said, with the vision still clear in my mind. "My arms would be around you." I could almost hear the shifting of the image in his mind in the soft open mouthed groan that came through the phone to me. My name was discernable in that sound and I found that I liked that. I like that *a lot*. I heard him moving around on the other end of the phone, so I had to ask. "What are you doing?"

"I just stripped from the waist down," he sighed, a little out of breath.

"Describe it for me?"

He sighed softly, and then began with "I am in my leather office chair in just a shirt and tie. It's a white shirt with a blue and black tie." I could almost hear his smirk as he described what he was wearing. It was like a phone sex operator, I had to chuckle. "I have on a blue tooth wireless ear piece so that my hands are ... free. I'm stroking myself with my right hand, my thumb and forefinger grazing occasionally across the head of my cock. My left leg is over the arm of the chair, and ..." he stopped, as if he were embarrassed to continue.

"And what? Don't feel self-conscious, what you're telling me is fucking turning me on. Please... don't stop," I said softly, and heard him blow out a breath in one long sigh.

"My left hand is... beneath me, and I have my fingers inside of me, imagining that it's you. I'm ... fucking myself slowly as I stroke," he finished shyly.

My mind went absolutely wild with that image. Mike was sitting back in his chair so that his ass was only partially on the front of the chair, his leg over the arm. He was spread open, just for me. His head would be pressed back into the leather as he worked to get himself off with his fingers, with his hand. I gripped my cock tighter, concentrating on the end, stroking hard and fast.

"Close..." I moaned softly into the phone. "So fucking close..."

"I wish I were there, you could cum deep into my throat," he moaned, and that image flashed into my mind - Mike, on his knees in front of me, in the posture restraint. He was bound, helpless, and my fingers were tight in his hair as I fucked his mouth. He whimpered softly in my ear through the phone and that's all it took. My orgasm ripped through me, and I came, cursing and crying out as my semen pooled on my stomach.

"Please may I cum?" I heard as I started to recover, and I sat straight up in the bed.

"What did you say?" I asked him breathlessly.

"I said I'm going to... fucking ... uhhhhhhh... Edward..." he cried as he followed suit. He grunted and swore as he came. I idly wondered if he was messing up his pristine white shirt.

"Shit..." he panted, and I was brought back sharply to the conversation. Wondering what the fuck I just imagined would have to wait. I didn't want to give him any indication at how unsettled I was. "That was fun." I gave a breathless chuckle. "Though, I haven't had to dive for Kleenex in a long time. I have a change of clothes here, but still." My mind was still reeling. I could understand the fantasy – I mean, I was a Dom, that's what turned me on. But... what about mishearing him?

"That was fun," I said softly in agreement.

"I'm really looking forward to Friday night, Edward," Mike said, and I heard him moving around, probably redressing for his next meeting.

"I am too," I told him, honestly. I was looking forward to getting out the house just as much as I was looking forward to seeing him. "What time?"

"How about right after work? We can hang out by the pool until we're ready to start the grill, maybe have a little wine?" he asked tentatively.

"That sounds great, I'll be there about 5:30 then."

Chapter 21 – Consummation

"I'm glad they decided to go with your firm, you deserve the recognition," I chuckled, remembering his exuberant call on Monday afternoon. Apparently, the presentation went off without a hitch, and the board of directors for the Merc had made their decision earlier today. I pulled my trunks on, and sat back on his bed. In anticipation of returning here later, I had tossed my bag up near the pillows. He caught me checking him out as he finished changing, and raised an eyebrow at me, the beginning of a smile forming. I shrugged and stood up, following him out the door and through his house to the pool in his backyard. Mike jumped in first, and without further consideration I jumped in to the deep end. It felt fairly analogous. Mike already in the pool, and me jumping into the deep end – kind of like our relationship. I just hoped that I would be able to swim.

While Jasper's indoor pool was an extravagance that he and Bella used only on occasion, Mike had been a swimmer in high school and college. When he first told me about it, I was fascinated by his excitement on the subject. Apparently, this was something Mike loved, and was passionate about. Now, he was sharing it with me. It made me feel even worse for not telling him about my lifestyle.

The *lifestyle*.

Tonight, I would most likely be breaking one of my most fundamental rules. I would be engaging in a sexual relationship outside of my relationship with Jasper and Bella. It was a rule that I set with each and every sub I had ever collared, for their protection and mine. Although, this wasn't exactly the same because we had no formal agreement, no collars, but it just *felt* like I was breaking the agreement.

Mike broke me from my thoughts by swimming up beside me. Side by side, we swam

several lengths back and forth across the pool. Mike could have easily outpaced me, it's not like I spent a lot of time in a pool as a kid. Instead, he kept pace with me, more interested in proximity than competition. That's one of the things that I really liked about Mike, he didn't feel the need to constantly prove himself. We floated on our backs for a while in the late afternoon sun. It was nice to just relax with him, to have an unstructured evening where we could just be comfortable together.

That contentment came crashing to an end when I pushed up onto the side of the pool to get out. I heard Mike gasp behind me, so I quickly turned to sit on the edge of the pool and faced him. He jumped up beside me, his face anxious and troubled.

"Mike, what..." I began to ask, but he put his hands on my shoulders, and I felt them trembling faintly. He gently turned me so that I was facing away from him. I was mildly alarmed by his behavior until I felt his fingers gingerly touching my back – then, I understood. I knew my session with Jane had left scars; I just hadn't thought about it tonight when I took my shirt off. I thought back, wondering how he had not seen them before. During our intimacy on the couch, my back had been against the cushion. When I had got up and redressed, he was answering the door. Earlier, when I had changed into my trunks, I was facing him. When I'd jumped into the pool, he was already in. He'd never had the opportunity to see them – until now.

"Are they from...Did he..." he stammered, unable to even form the questions he wanted to ask. I knew what he wanted to know; he thought that my captor had tortured me. I had no doubt that he would be sickened and repulsed by the truth.

"No," I told him softly, turning around to him once again, but I just couldn't look him in the eye. I spoke quietly to my lap, "The pain it...it helps me to forget for awhile." We were silent for a long moment. Then, I felt his fingers under my chin. I looked up to meet his eyes, and found that they were wet. Somehow, I didn't think that was from the pool.

"There are better ways to forget, Edward," he said in almost a whisper and slowly got to his feet. I thought for a moment that he was leaving, but then he held out his hand to me. I took it without hesitation, thankful that he would offer it. He could have just called me a sick fuck and gone in the house. He led me through the back door and up the stairs to his room. My weary gaze followed him as he went to get towels. When he returned, he was nude but dry. He stood in front of me and pulled my trunks down slowly, watching my eyes as he did so. I stepped out of them and he tossed them to the side. While he continued to kneel in front of me, he dried my legs in long slow strokes. Next, he moved to my hips and my buttocks, being careful not to make his touches sexual. He rubbed down my back, my stomach, and my shoulders. Finally, he started to towel dry my hair.

He was so gentle, his touch full of the emotions he had not yet expressed to me. I felt ... loved. All of a sudden, it was too much. I reached up, grabbed the towel, and flung it to the floor. Taking him into my arms, I pressed my lips tightly against his – over and over. The guilt over the talk I kept postponing bubbled in my chest, but now was not the time. He wrapped his arms around my neck, and pressed his hard body against mine. I moaned into the ever deepening kiss. He pulled back slightly, still wrapped in my arms and pressed his lips to my neck.

"Make love to me, Edward," he whispered into my ear as he pulled me onto the bed. A shiver ran through me, and I nodded, turning so that I could capture his lips with mine once more. I reached quickly for my bag. I was kneeling in the middle of the bed. Facing away from me, Mike straddled me, his legs on the outside of mine. I rolled on a condom, and then

used the lube to get him ready. Taking a little of the excess, I stroked him and was rewarded with a lazy open mouthed groan as he reached back, and up to gently fist the hair at the back of my head. He pushed back slowly, and I held my cock steady with my hand allowing him to lower himself onto it. I felt the head of my cock gently penetrate him, and wrapped my other arm around his waist, pulling him to me. His head fell back on my shoulder as he began to move.

I released my cock and put my hand lightly on his chest. He put his other hand on my thigh. We were entwined; it was hot and raw in our need to connect with one another. It was futile in some respects because there were things about me that he may not ever understand, but it was effectual in others. That warmth radiated through my chest, that feeling that was always with me now, just under the surface. The need to connect was effectual because it fueled in me the desperate desire to never see that shocked and wounded expression on his face again. Finally, it forced me out of my dominant mode and into one of gentle affection. I stroked his chest as he continued to work himself on me. I turned my head and kissed his neck as my hand slid down his stomach slowly to wrap around his cock. I stroked him, listening to his moans, his cries and realized he was right. This was a better way to forget. His unspoken devotion to me filled in some of the cracks in my much abused soul.

I felt his muscles, in his stomach, in his ass, in his legs, clenching and releasing each time he drove himself onto me. Turning my head to the side, I kissed his cheek and he turned to capture my mouth with his. It was a wild, hungry kiss, his breathing uneven as he moaned into my mouth. I pulled back slightly and kissed his cheek again, then his neck. My hand on his cock moved harder, faster against his skin.

"Oh, God..." he moaned breathlessly. My lips moved to his ear.

"Does that feel good, baby?" I asked him, pressing my hand harder against his chest, pulling him tighter against me.

"Yeah..." he moaned softly, almost in a gasp. Then, he took his hand off of my thigh and wrapped it around mine. He squeezed his cock with my hand, and then moved our hands faster. I felt his body start to tighten, he was getting so close. That thought excited me even further, and I slid my other hand down from his chest to stroke between his widely splayed thighs. His movements on top of me became jerkier, losing rhythm as he got closer to his orgasm. Finally, I pulled my hand from between his legs and put it on his hips, stopping his motion. I pulled my other hand out from under his and put it on his other hip. Holding him tightly, I drove my cock up and into him. He cried out and continued to stroke himself as I fucked him. It wasn't long before his other hand tightened in my hair, almost painfully, as his head pushed back into my shoulder. I watched as his semen shot onto his hand, onto my thigh, and onto the bed. His grunts and cries became unintelligible as his orgasm ripped through him.

The way his body tightened and spasmed around my cock, coupled with his uncontrolled cries, brought me to that brink much faster than I thought possible. I held his hips steady in my hands, stroking his soft skin with my thumbs, grinding him back harder on me with every thrust. My head fell forward onto his shoulder as I held back trying to prolong the moment, hold off my impending orgasm, but I found I couldn't. I exploded inside the condom buried deep within him, moaning and swearing as I filled it. My whole body tightened, and I took my hands from his hips, wrapping my arms around his waist as I came so fucking hard.

We stayed like that, joined together for several minutes as we caught our breath. Then,

Mike collapsed onto the bed on his stomach. I chuckled and disposed of the condom into the wastebasket beside the bed. Then, I lay down next to him and opened my arms. He moved over to me and lightly lay his head on my chest. Turning his head slightly he kissed my bare chest, and then wrapped his arm around my middle. He sighed, content.

We lay in each other's arms for another hour or so. I found that when Mike suggested that we put on the steak on the grill, I was reluctant to leave his arms. When I told him this, he beamed, and then chuckled, pulling me to my feet. He walked over to his dresser to find something to wear. The sight of him walking naked across the room was beautiful to me. So, I got out of bed and followed. When he stopped to pull out a drawer, I wrapped my arms around his waist, and put my chin on his shoulder.

He relaxed back into me, and then I said softly "You were right, that was a much better way to forget."

Chapter 22 - Shattered

It had been three days since Mike and I made love, and now I was more confused than ever. Now that he'd seen the scars on my back, I had a suspicion that Mike might just be all right with my lifestyle. I didn't know how we would cope with some of the things that I still needed from that type of relationship, but it *seemed* that he would at least hear me out. That encouraged me to work up the confidence to talk to Jasper. With two hours until dinner, I assumed Jasper would be available for a talk. I went down to the kitchen where I found him and Bella at the kitchen table. An irrational anger clenched in my chest when I saw that she was in his lap and they were smiling and talking softly. With all that I suspected with my suspicions about her relationship with Jacob, how could she still lead Jasper on? When she pushed a lock of hair off his face and kissed his forehead, I cleared my throat to get their attention.

"Jasper, can we talk?" I asked in a low voice.

"I'll go start setting up," Bella told Jasper softly. Then she got off his lap, but continued to hold his hand until she was a few feet away. The adoring look on her face was making me a little nauseated. I stepped away as she passed, and her adoring look turned to one of surprise and question. My attention refocused on Jasper as I sat down at the table.

"Edward, we are just about to go into a session. Can we talk after? I know you're right, we do need to talk, but at least we'll be more relaxed," he said and his face broke into a soft smile. "I'd like for you to join us. Will you?" I thought about that for a minute. I didn't think it was a good idea for me to get further involved with Jasper until we had talked. Unfortunately, my mind was still chaotic and I knew that a session would help me focus to face what was coming. I nodded. He put his hand on my shoulder, and then I followed him upstairs.

When we entered the playroom, Jacob was already in position on the floor. I looked at Jasper, wondering what role he wanted me to play today. He gestured for me to join Jacob, so I stripped out of my clothes and assumed a submissive stance on the floor next to Jacob. I didn't look at him, nor did I look at Bella, who had positioned two sawhorses almost end to end near the center of the room. Jasper stood in front of Jacob, and stroked his soft hair.

"Greet your Master properly," he told the boy and Jacob kissed slowly up from Jasper's bare feet to as high as he could reach on Jasper's chest without standing. Jasper leaned forward and kissed Jacob on the forehead, telling him he had done well. Then, he moved over to

me. He stood directly in front of me, and rather than stroking my hair, he tilted my chin up. For a long moment, he looked into my face.

"Greet your Master properly, Edward," he said softly, and for the first time in a long time, I just wasn't into it. I thought about leaving, but wondered if maybe I could get some kind of release from the session anyway. I leaned forward and performed the same actions that Jacob had, only without the same level of adoration. The tasks felt perfunctory, automated. When I got to his chest, and didn't stretch any higher, I knew that Jasper noticed my lack of enthusiasm. He stood back for a moment, thinking, and then he fell into a harder Dom mode.

"Bella, Edward position yourselves on the sawhorses. Jacob helped me get them bound," Jasper said in a tight voice, and Bella just stared at him. Apparently, this is not the scene they had choreographed. He asked her if she was going to do as she was told, or if she was going to safe word again. She walked over to the horse on the left and started to bend over it from the long edge when Jasper stopped her. He lay her atop it so that her body was stretched along the padded top. He bound her ankles to the legs farthest from the other horse, and her wrists to the legs nearest it. Jacob gently pushed me over the other horse in a similar position so that Bella and I were just a few feet apart from each other, face to face. I didn't want to look at her, so I lay my cheek against the leather padded horse and just waited.

"Jacob," Jasper said from somewhere to my left, "you have been very good lately. Tonight I'm giving you your choice; would you like to warm up Edward or Bella?" I was surprised by his question. I was sure they had gone through several sessions without me, but I didn't realize that Jacob had progressed to this level yet. I was even more surprised by Jacob's answer.

"Edward," he said softly and his voice came from behind me.

"Very good," Jasper said, and by the tone of his voice, I could tell that he wasn't surprised. Then it dawned on me-Jacob would not want to hurt Bella, at all. He wouldn't be able to do it. Jasper knew. He must have suspected what I did about Jacob and Bella, and for some reason he wanted Jacob to work with me. Maybe after our session the other night, it was too much for him to work me himself. He had manipulated the boy into choosing me, and that made me uneasy.

Jacob chose a simple paddle, and I was thankful, it was one of the easiest implements to wield. As Jasper and Bella watched, Jacob paddled me soundly. I was surprised to find that, not only was I not aroused by it, I was not soothed nor calmed by it either. Instead it made me anxious. Keeping my eyes closed, I pressed my cheek into the leather, just waiting for it to be over. Jasper walked around me as I lay bound and helpless across the sawhorse. He was going to fuck me, I knew he was. I was prepared for it. After our last experience, I only hoped that I would be able to deal with it. I felt comfortable though, knowing that I could stop it if I needed to.

"Jacob, why isn't he hard?" Jasper asked the boy scathingly. "You are disappointing your Master, boy. You had better make him hard. Now." Immediately, I felt him move behind me. My hips were over the end of the horse, so my cock was dangling freely beneath me. Just before I lifted my head to see what he was doing, I felt his breath on the backs of my balls. My stomach twisted as he brought them into his mouth and sucked. Mike's face fled across my vision, and suddenly I felt terribly guilty. Here was yet another man I was letting touch me in a way that Mike thought only he did. As Jacob's mouth closed over my

now growing erection, I tried to force myself back into the moment. My fingers tightened convulsively around the ropes binding my hands to the horse. I turned my head and pressed my forehead to the cool leather. As he licked and stroked my cock, I moaned into the leather padding. Jacob was really getting good, but I still felt awkward about letting him touch me.

Then, I felt fingers preparing me. I steeled myself for what was coming. Jasper scissored his fingers, stretching me and I couldn't help but moan. Then I felt his big hand on my hip, and I lifted my head, bracing myself. It was then that I caught sight of Bella's frightened face. Her mouth was pulled into a grimace around her gag, but her eyes were wide. I turned my head sharply and saw Jasper standing to the side watching. Then, I distinctly felt myself being opened.

Jasper was going to let Jacob fuck me.

"NO!" I screamed, looking up at Jasper, thankful that Jacob hadn't thought to gag me as Jasper had Bella. "Don't you let him do this, Jasper. God DAMN IT, stop! Untie me! Now!" I yelled, and I felt Jacob hesitate behind me with his hand still on my hip. I could feel something touching my ass, and I knew it was his hard cock. He was just seconds away from violating me. Jasper was looking at me, and I realized that, I hadn't really safe worded. Unless I did, the scene wouldn't stop. I wracked my brain trying to remember the word we had agreed on, but I was so panicked that I couldn't. "I don't remember the fucking safe word!" I screamed, and then as my eyes filled with tears, my voice broke. "Please...Please don't let him do this, Jasper, please."

"Jacob, on your mat," Jasper said softly and hurried over to me. He quickly cut the ropes holding me to the horse. Fragments remained tied around my wrists and ankles as I fell hard onto the floor next to the horse. I stood up quickly and nearly sprinted to the front of the room.

"Edward..." Jasper said gently, but I ignored him, and grabbed the sweat pants I had worn before this whole nightmare had started.

"I don't understand, Edward. You're gay. I saw you on the bed with that guy, your legs wrapped around his waist. You let him fuck you. Why the hell did you safe word?" The last question came out in a slightly incredulous tone. I pulled my sweats up, and looked him in the face.

"Mike is a bottom, Jasper. The only person that I have ever *willingly* given myself to, is you," I spat at him, nearly sneering the word 'willingly'. I wanted him to know that what he had just done shattered my trust in him. It hurt me worse than he could have known. Ignoring him as he tried to call me back, I turned and opened the door. I was in a dead run by the time I reached the stairs. I didn't bother with a shirt, or even shoes, as I grabbed my keys and phone from the table next to the front door. I was in my car before he could even get down the stairs. Once again, I did what I do best – I ran.

Nearly twenty minutes later, I was sitting in my car in front of Mike's house. I was about to get out when I noticed there were still ropes my wrists. I sat there looking at them as the tears flowed. I reached into my pocket for my knife and realized I hadn't grabbed it. Frustrated, I slammed my hands against the steering wheel again and again. By the third or fourth hit, I was sobbing. I reached down, tearing at the knots, and finally they came loose. I got the ropes off my ankles as well, and the staggered up to his front porch. Mike answered the door immediately when I rang the bell, and was startled to find me sobbing

on his doorstep. Quickly, he stepped out and wrapped his arms around me.

"Edward, you're freezing," he said in a soft voice, rubbing my arms. I couldn't speak, I just pressed my face into his neck, trying to calm myself. He pulled me slowly into the house and kicked the door closed behind us. He didn't make any further attempts to move us, instead he just held me. I felt him stroking my hair, and my back. It was soothing, and within a few minutes the worst of the sobbing was over.

"I can't...It's too much...It's too fast...I..." I started, not sure of what I wanted to say. My emotions were still out of control. I felt panicked, overwhelmed. I thought Jasper cared about me, how could he do this?

"Shhhhhh... It's alright now. Whatever it is, we'll fix it, okay? Please, baby, please, just calm down," he said soothingly. God, I didn't deserve him. I was a fucking freak. He should be with someone normal, someone worthy. The thought, that he wouldn't be in my life when he learned the truth about tonight which made me start sobbing all over again. He held me for another few minutes until I was able to speak again.

"Can... Can I stay over? P... Please?" I asked him, the absolute broken sound of my own voice startled me.

"Always, Edward," Mike said gently, kissing my cheek. "You can always come to me, stay with me. Always." He reiterated, and pulled back to look at me. Once he was satisfied that the worst of it was over, he took my hand and led me up to the bedroom. Immediately, I crawled into the bed while he changed into sleep pants. He crawled in beside me and opened his arms and I moved closer to him to lay my head on his chest gratefully, feeling his arms close around me. The panicky feeling was starting to subside now. I whispered a soft word of thanks, and he kissed my head.

I desperately clung to him trying to stop my whole fucking world from spinning out of control.

Edward Cullen, the mask that I had worn, the one that had cracked and frayed and torn around the edges had finally broken.

Chapter 23 – The Calm Before the Storm

As I woke up, I started to realize that someone was holding me down. I kicked and struggled, trying to get out of their grasp, but I couldn't. The only thing that kept flashing into my mind over and over was that *he'd* found me. *He* was going to hurt me. *He* was going to break me. I couldn't live through that again. I flailed and kicked at my unseen attacker. My breath coming in wild heaving gasps I started to panic, my chest constricting, my closed eyes watering, when finally I heard a voice that broke through to me.

"Edward... Edward, it's all right, it's just me. Open your eyes." Jasper! It was just Jasper. My heart swelled and I opened my eyes to see Mike holding me in his arms. The instant flood of disappointment was followed quickly by guilt. I shouldn't be disappointed to be in Mike's arms as he cared about me a hell of a lot more about me than Jasper did. When my chest got tight just thinking about Jasper, I pushed him out of my mind, and found that I could at least breathe again. Taking a deep breath and looking up at Mike, I saw he was still watching me, somewhat alarmed.

"You stayed," I said softly. Jasper didn't stay to comfort me after he used me that night. He

couldn't get away from me fast enough. I woke up alone, broken. Mike didn't leave me. "I've never woken up with someone – for as long as I can remember, I've always been alone." I'd never had a girlfriend, I'd never slept all night with a sub; it really didn't seem like such a big deal to me. I didn't understand the purpose behind waking up with someone...until right now. It was good, and I felt safe and content in his arms. It was nice to be held, to be comforted by someone that cared about you. The warmth, the soft contact, the feeling of being wrapped securely in his arms; it made me feel safe – until I remembered why I was there. In a single instant, it all came crashing back down on me. Looking for comfort, I wrapped my arms tighter around Mike, and felt him respond in kind. I pressed my face into his chest, and lightly kissed his warm skin gratefully.

"Of course I stayed. You were so upset last night. I didn't want you to wake up alone." I could be content to lie here in bed with him all day, just like this, with him gently stroking my hair. It was...soothing. Finally, I became more cognizant of my surroundings. I was in Mike's bed after fleeing from someone that was supposed to care about me, from someone that wanted to hurt me in the worst way imaginable. Mike hadn't moved all night, he just held me instead he comforted me while I fought my demons, while I tamed my fear. That was an indescribable consolation.

"Thank you," I told him earnestly. Picking my head up off of his chest, I looked around, certain I must be keeping him from something. By the look of the sun coming through the windows; I'd been asleep for some time.

"Shouldn't you be at work?" I asked, scooting up a little to rest my head on his shoulder. I kissed his neck softly; he turned his head, kissed me, then smiled.

"There was no place more important for me to be this morning than right here," he said. "Unfortunately, as much as I would love to stay in bed with you all day, I do need to start getting ready. I have to fly to New York for a deposition." Contrary to his words, he pushed me back into the pillows and wrapped his arms around my waist. I moaned softly into his kiss as his body pressed against me. When we broke apart, I said those four words that everyone on earth hates to hear.

"Mike, we need to talk," I said quietly, and he dropped his head to my chest. He lay there quietly with his cheek on my bare skin. I wished that I could spare him this. He was going to be hurt, and he didn't deserve to be. After everything that he has done, everything that he has shown me, he didn't deserve to be hurt. We could not continue to move forward until he knew what he was getting into, until he knew exactly what kind of miscreant I really was. I would deserve it if he left me. Then, I would have lost them both. I deserved that too.

"I know," he sighed, running his fingers lightly over my stomach. "I have to be at the airport in a couple of hours, and I still have to shower and pack. It will have to wait until I get back, because I'm sure it's going to be long and sometimes stressful?" He finished with an inflection, and I nodded. He sighed.

"When will you be back?" I asked him, stroking his cheek absently with my fingers, not looking at him.

"Day after tomorrow, sometime late in the evening," he said quietly, then pushed up onto one elbow and looked into my face. "But listen, Edward, you don't have to go back. You can stay here while I'm gone. I'm sure you can wear my clothes. You don't ever have to go back...if you don't want to."

"Mike, I – " I started, but he stopped me. Damn it, I couldn't let him get in any deeper before he knew exactly what he was getting in to.

"Edward, you don't have to say anything now. Just take a few days and think about it. That house isn't healthy for you. I don't know the whole story as to why, but that's just my feeling." He played with the edge of the sheet lying on my chest. If I didn't know better, I'd think that he was absolutely fascinated by it, the texture, the color, the feel of it in his fingers. He was staring at it as if he were memorizing it.

"I love you, Edward." He said and then looked up to meet my eyes. I could feel that he meant every word. "So, just think about things and we'll talk when I get back, okay?" I pulled his face to mine and kissed him while the guilt threatened to strangle me. There was no way that I could give him what he wanted. I didn't know how to love. I didn't know how to be a boyfriend. Most of the time, I didn't know how to be a functioning fucking person.

"Yeah," I said, still reeling from his sudden admission. He gave me one last soft kiss and then got up and walked to the closet, pulling out a small rolling suitcase and a garment bag. I picked up my phone and walked over to the door to get out of the room and figure out what the hell I was going to do. Not for the first time, I wished I could talk to Bella. "Do you mind if I make us some coffee?" I asked.

"That would be great," he said and smiled a genuine and happy smile, which made the guilt just writhe in my stomach that much harder. I walked over to him and kissed him once more before going downstairs. It felt good being around someone who was so upbeat, it made me feel like maybe it could work out. Maybe he *would* understand.

In the kitchen, I found what I was looking for easily enough. Everything was in one cabinet above the machine – easy and straightforward. I imagined that's how life with Mike would be if I accepted his offer. After pressing the button on the coffeemaker, I sat lightly on one of the stools at the breakfast bar and flipped open my phone. I found that I had five voice mail messages so I checked the recent call list and saw that they were all from Jasper. I sighed and dialed my voice mail.

Edward? Edward I am so sorry. Please come home so we can talk?

Edward, we're all coming to look for you. Please just call one of us to let us know you're okay?

Edward, you're my best friend. His voice cracked slightly as he continued. *I didn't mean to hurt you, I made a mistake. Please come home. We are so worried about you.*

Edward, Jake just called and said your car is at Mike's. I'm so glad that you're safe and with someone that cares about you. I'll call you tomorrow.

Edward, (sigh) I was wrong. I was so wrong, and I am so sorry. After Bella screamed at me for nearly an hour last night, I felt so...I never even ... (breathing hitched) We had planned to put Bella and Jacob on the horses and let you work Bella. But I saw that you were so ... disconnected. I thought maybe it would better for you to work with the male sub. You haven't worked with Bella since you admitted you were gay. I thought maybe you weren't into it anymore. I thought you needed the release, and I get the best emotional release after a session that ... well ... that you take me in. I wanted to give that to you too. It freaked me out when you panicked like that. I thought I was doing the right thing for you. I

was so wrong. I am so bad at this. I'm stepping down as a Dom, Edward. Bella is going to handle Jacob until we can find someone else. I'm so sorry that I hurt you. I'm sorry that I failed you. I hated Mike so much because I thought he was going to hurt you. In the end, he helped you, and I'm the one that hurt you. I... Edward... please...

I put the phone down, sighing and immediately it rang again. I checked the caller ID and saw that it was Bella's cell phone. Letting it go to voice mail, I pulled a couple of mugs down and put them on a nearby bamboo tray with cream and sugar bowls. If I didn't already know that Mike was gay, the fact that he has cream and sugar bowls would have solidified it. It occurred to me that I had no idea how Mike took his coffee. Of course, I knew how Jasper and Bella took theirs, and I wondered momentarily if that was significant.

The beep of my cell phone indicated that I had yet another voicemail. I dialed in and listened to what she had to say –

Edward, I know what Jasper did was wrong and I'm not calling to defend him. He has been sitting in the corner of the playroom since the moment he knew you were safe. I don't think he'll move until he hears from you. He won't eat, he won't sleep. He's just heartbroken. I just think that if you understood his logic, flawed as it was, maybe you can somehow forgive him. He thought that since he was able to make love to you, that you didn't safe word with Alec, and that you bottomed for Mike – that you would be okay with it. You let Alice take him that first time, so you showed him that it's okay to let other people work with your subs. He figured since you were gay, you'd want to be with a guy and not me. I'm sorry that I didn't look up in time to see what was happening. I would have tried to stop the scene. Jasper was distracted and didn't hand me the buzzer, it was still in his hand. That is another sign to me that he should not be Dom'ing in the playroom right now. Please, just text him and come home when you're ready. We love you, and we all need to talk.

I poured the coffee into the two mugs that I had set out and put them on the tray. What Bella said made sense to me. God knows I've made mistakes. The one that will always haunt me was that night with Jasper after Bella left. I never wanted to hurt Jasper; I just let my emotions overrule my judgment. Was that the case here? He forgave me for that night. Jasper sounded so lost, so contrite in his messages. He never once tried to defend his actions, only to explain them. I'm sure that once Bella got through with him, he was horrified at what he had done. I picked up my phone and sent Jasper a text.

I'm okay. I just need to figure a few things out. Then, we need to talk. – E

I sat my phone down on the counter and picked up the tray. I didn't want to be tempted to answer it if he called and talk to him before I was ready. Balancing the tray, I went back upstairs to Mike's bedroom. When I opened the door, I heard the shower running and set the tray on a nearby table. I stood there for long moment trying to decide what I wanted to do. Then, I stripped off my sweats and walked into his adjacent bathroom. His back was to me, his head under the spray when I opened the shower door. I was sure he heard the click of the door by the tiny jerk of his head. He did not turn around to face me, but I could make out the small smile forming on his lips, showing his pleasure that I had decided to join him. Stepping in behind him, I wrapped my arms around him, absently stroking his stomach and chest with my fingers. They slid slowly over his wet skin and despite the warmth of the shower; he shivered and put his hands over mine.

Leaning forward, I put my head on his shoulder and kissed his neck. Just over the noise of the spray, I whispered "Do you have a little time?" I bit his neck gently and he moaned, his hands tensing around mine. Then, he released them and turned in my arms. His slick body

slid effortlessly against mine as he wrapped his arms around my shoulders. His stiffening cock touched mine as he moved. Then, he kissed my forehead.

"I don't want to – " he started, but I pressed my hips against his, feeling his erection pulse against me. It was ingrained in me now, I suppose – to solve my problems with sex. I learned a long time ago that sex is used to gain favor and approval. When you don't open your mouth and close your eyes fast enough, you get slapped in the face. You learn to do it faster. Eventually, you learn to do it without being told – it becomes reflexive, instinctive. You know what you have to do in order to gain favor instead of inviting pain. I wanted his favor.

"It feels to me like you do," I said with a smirk and pulled him to me for a long, wet kiss. He gasped into my mouth as our bodies wrapped around each other. The water cascaded over us, and his moan was barely audible over the sound of its spray. My hands strayed down from his back and over his ass, where I squeezed it, pulling him tighter against me. Yeah, I'd love to just have him just bend over and put his hands on the tile. His cries as I fucked him would sound very nice in here.

"I just meant that I don't want to upset you," he said softly and stroked my cheek. Now I felt like an ass, thinking about fucking him against the wall of the shower when he wanted to be caring. That burning in my chest had returned; that warmth that I felt with him. I was starting to like how that felt. *Yeah, but it's so much hotter with Jasper, it's more like an inferno than a warmth.* I sighed to myself, listening to my internal debate. It may be hotter with Jasper, but a fire like that eventually burns itself out. A strong, steady warmth could last for years.

"Being intimate with you," I said, holding him against my wet skin, "...it comforts me," I finished softly. Then, without warning, his lips came crashing into mine and I couldn't help but smile into the kiss. His hips ground into mine, and our cocks rubbed against each other making the hottest slick friction. Pulling away slightly, I saw Mike pick up a bottle of body wash and put a small drop onto his palm. When our lips came together again, he reached between us, taking both of our hard cocks between his soapy hands. Pushing them together, he stroked them at the same time. As his hands rubbed them, they also rubbed against each other. I moaned into the kiss, it was a guttural sound, deep and almost desperate with need.

I gently bucked my hips up into his hands, and my cock slid against his with more pressure. He closed his eyes briefly, continuing to stroke us. I thought back to that morning routine that I was happy about earlier, waking up in his arms and making coffee. I wondered if it would include this. I would love for it to include this. I dropped my head to his shoulder and whimpered loudly, encouraging him. I told him how fucking good it felt when he touched me, how much I liked being close to him like this.

He released our cocks with a low whine from me, and then took the body wash again. I loved that now I would smell like him. He started with my shoulders, and then my arms. My nipples hardened and I grasped his upper arms tightly as his fingers ghosted over my chest. Then, he reached down and washed my legs and my hips. He soaped up his hands again, and slid my cock in and out of his slick hands. I gasped at the feeling, pumping my hips into them.

"Yeah... Uhhhhhhh..." I moaned incoherently and felt his hands move to my hips as he turned me around. He placed my hands on the tiled wall in front of me, and then I felt him getting slowly to his knees behind me. He continued to stroke me as his other soapy hand

slid over my ass and the backs of my legs. Gently, his fingers moved up and down between my buttocks, letting me get used to him touching me. My moans reverberated off of the tile as his slick fingers penetrated me easily. He stopped there, allowed me to become acclimated to the feeling. Then, I bucked my hips, almost mindlessly fucking his hand. His touch was so very gentle as he massaged that sweet spot deep within me. All of a sudden, I felt empty as he stood quickly and grabbed the detachable shower head. The water felt nice as he rinsed me all over. It felt a little odd to let him take charge like this, but I found that I liked it. He turned off the second spray and I started to turn around, but he stopped me and I felt his hands on me again, spreading me open. The spray from the showerhead rained down into my widened eyes, and he pressed his lips against my sensitive skin, lightly biting. My breathing stopped, and my fingers fruitlessly tried to find purchase on the slick tile. I panicked a little at the thought of him taking me here in the shower, even though I had just fantasized about doing the same to him. But, he was still on his knees, his face pressed against my ass.

Then I felt...oh, God...he was...oh, fuck.

My knees went weak as I realized that he was probing me gently with his tongue. This was something that I had never done, and the sensation was just... He traced slow circles around the edge of my entrance, holding me open with his hands. When he moaned against my skin, the sound was muffled, but it pushed my arousal even higher. The feeling was incredible, and I couldn't censor the sounds that were coming from me. I tried again to grasp the tile before me, but instead I just lowered my head and allowed myself to enjoy his gentle touch as he stroked my balls as he teased me with his tongue; I couldn't stop myself from grabbing my cock and pumping hard.

The next thing I knew, he was fucking me with one of his fingers, and I was spraying the tile in front of me with semen. Panting, and crying out, trying not to fall to my fucking knees from the force of it. I pressed my forehead into the tile trying to calm myself when I felt him stand up behind me.

"Does that feel better?" Mike asked with a small smirk, and I turned and crushed my lips to his. I stopped just long enough to tell him that it was fucking incredible before I was kissing him again. Then, I kissed my way down to his chest.

"Edward, you don't have to - " he said, almost half-heartedly as my lips reached his stomach. He didn't want me to feel obligated to return the affection that he had just shown me, but he was so turned on that he couldn't put up much of an argument. He wanted it. He wanted it almost as much as I did.

"I want to," I said, as I pulled him forward. "God, do I want to," I finished just before his raging erection passed between my parted lips. Letting out a slow moan, I could feel my lips vibrate against his skin as I began to suck him in hard strokes. His fingers went to my hair, and I heard my name escape from his lips while I soaped up my hands as he had and then put one of his legs over my shoulder. After I soaped up his balls, and that soft patch of skin just behind them, I slid two fingers into him. He tried to move his hips, but couldn't manage it with his leg over my shoulder. To make it easier for him, I bobbed my head in time with my fingers inside of him. I was a fucking whiz at giving head. Pulling back so that only the head was in my mouth, I sucked hard and ran the rough of my tongue thoroughly over it. He groaned, his fingers tightening in my hair. Then, I opened my mouth wide and took in every inch of him. My lips pressed against the base of his cock, his head nudging the back of my throat. I sucked him deep and hard until the need to take a deeper breath forced me back to sucking and licking the head, all the while fucking him gently with my fingers.

"Edward, I'm close baby, you need to move..." Mike cried as his whole body tightened. But, knowing that the sexual part of my relationship with Bella and Jasper was over, and that Mike would never put me at risk, I wrapped both my arms around his hips and sucked hard. His muscles tightened under my fingers, and I felt his semen erupt from the end of his cock into my mouth.

We stayed in the shower, kissing and talking until the water ran cold. Then, we went back into his bedroom and he showed me where his clothes were so that I could use them over the next few days. I threw on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt and sat on the bed watching him finish up. For once in my life, I felt normal. I lay on the bed watching him pack; there were no expectations, no urgency – just a pending sense of loss. Then, I saw it as clear as day in my head; going to work at a hospital here in Chicago, and coming home to Mike every night. We would work effortlessly together in the kitchen; drink a glass of wine while things were cooking then we would relax in each others' arms on the couch in front of a movie, or make love in front of the fire. After, I would fall asleep in his arms each night, and wake up in them again each morning. I was broken from my thoughts when Mike opened a box on his dresser and brought something over to me. He set the small set of keys into my hand.

"These are my spare keys. Stay here for a couple of days and just think about where you want things to go. You can be alone here, without distractions. Okay?" he asked gently, and I nodded. "Whatever you decide, we will still be friends – always." I pulled him in to a hug. There were so many things that I wanted to tell him. All of a sudden, I didn't want him to go, but I knew that he had to. I had to be an adult, so I helped him put his bag in the Jeep and kissed him deeply.

"I'll see you in a few days," he said smiling, and pulled out of the drive. As I watched the Jeep disappear around the corner, I felt a sense of loss. I went back into Mike's house, what could be 'our' house if I just said yes, and I knew I had some serious thinking to do. I picked up my phone off the counter and sent a text to both Bella and Jasper, to let them know that I would be there tomorrow night. I vaguely noticed that I didn't use the word 'home'. Walking back through the house, I felt a bit stupid exploring when Mike wasn't here. There were his things, not mine. That set off the thought that I didn't really know him as well as I should. I didn't feel comfortable here without him. It saddened me.

I went into the kitchen and pulled out a bottle of wine. Finding some fruit in a nearby bowl, I made a pitcher of sangria. Drinking was probably not in my best interest right now, but the choices I had to face were just too much...the situation with Jasper, and Mike's admission and invitation. I just needed to take things one step at a time. At this point, alcohol seemed like a logical first step. I grabbed a glass, and carried the stuff out onto the deck and set it on one of the tables. Standing next to the pool, I drank my first glass quickly, and then stripped out of my clothes. The huge privacy fence surrounding the yard made me comfortable about being naked in his pool. After, refilling my empty glass, I lowered myself carefully into the shallow end, not spilling a drop. I was proud. Soon, not only that glass, but the next two were gone as well, and I floated on my back in the water for a while thinking about where I wanted my life to go. As I saw it, I had three options – stay with Mike, go back to Jasper and Bella, or return to Washington alone. The last choice was the easiest to rule out. I didn't want to be alone. Finally, for the first time in my life, I wasn't alone, and I didn't want to lose that. The first choice was the hardest. I cared about Mike. I couldn't say that I love him because that just doesn't connect in my head yet. The question was, was I with Mike just to appease my loneliness? Was I with him because Jasper was with Bella? That was so unfair to him, he deserves better than the half of myself that I could give him. He deserves to be loved, and needed by a whole person – not by me.

But I am inherently a selfish creature, and I didn't want to give up the comfort that he gives me. Christ, that sounded so fucking awful.

I deserved to end up alone.

Between the alcohol and the swimming, about an hour, later I was completely relaxed. Rather than sleeping on one of the lounge chairs and risk a nasty sunburn, I dried off, and put the mostly empty pitcher in the refrigerator. After heading up to Mike's bedroom to lie down for a while, I relaxed onto the bed and my head rested on his pillow. God, it smelled like him. My cock hardened. I was relaxed, drunk, and fairly turned on, so I thought about the shower that morning. Fuck, the things he had done to me in the shower that morning made me so hard. No one had ever done that for me before. Spreading my legs wide over his big, soft bed, I ran my hands over my chest, my legs, and my hips. I massaged my balls and used my other hand to stroke my cock as I closed my eyes and thought about what he would look like riding me. My hips would thrust up into his, causing him to bounce and buck on top of me with a look of sheer pleasure on his beautiful face as he moaned and writhed. But, as my cock jumped in my hand, and I felt my orgasm almost upon me, the vision changed. Suddenly, I was in the playroom, my playroom, and Jasper was riding me. His hands were bound over his head, which was thrown back, his cock erupting all over my ...

My world exploded as I came hard over my chest and stomach. As I lay there panting, wondering what the fuck just happened, the guilt seeped into my stomach like a dense fog. I'd just jacked off in Mike's bed thinking about Jasper. Could I get any more fucked up?

* * *

I fell asleep curled up naked on Mike's bed, and slept better than I had in a long time. Even though I'd fallen asleep in the early evening, I slept until morning. At 7:00am, my stomach and my bladder forced me from his very comfortable bed. I made it downstairs about ten minutes later and started coffee. This was starting to become a morning routine and I smiled to myself at the thought. Looking over, I saw that my phone was flashing – one new voicemail. Damn. I scrolled through the list of incoming calls and saw that it was from Mike. Pleased, I punched in my voicemail password and listened to the message. He was just telling me that he'd arrived safely, just like a couple would do. Then, he said that he missed me and that he loved thinking about me lying in his bed. That just made me feel guilty all over again. He ended with a simple, sweet, yet incredibly troubling "love you". It troubled me because I should be able to return that simple fucking sentiment, and yet, I couldn't – because I'm emotionally retarded.

I took my coffee into his office and rummaged through his desk until I found a simple legal pad and ball point pen. I wrote about how I felt about Mike – he's everything I could have asked for – loving, attentive, patient, kind, understanding, passionate, and inventive. He's safe; and comfortable and I know that I could see myself staying here with him forever. He'd never given any indication that he was into my lifestyle, but our shower yesterday proved that our sex life would be anything but mundane. Then, there was Jasper. Jasper was exciting, combustible, loyal, protective, jealous, and...taken. Jasper was everything that I should have stay far away from, but I couldn't. However, if circumstances were different, I could see myself staying with him forever. My third alternative was to just go it alone. I could head back to Washington and talk to Alice about taking Felix on as a sub. I could live my life without either Mike or Jasper, and not be forced to make that kind of heartbreaking decision. I just wished I could fucking figure it out already. I needed to talk to Jasper and Bella in a few hours, and I still had no idea what I wanted to say.

* * *

The entire way back to Jasper and Bella's house, I went over in my head what we needed to talk about. I would not sub for Jasper again, period. My trust in his judgment was lost. My sexual relationship with them was also over. To be honest, that thought scared the hell out of me. What if I did need *something* to clear the chaos in my mind? Would Mike's level of intimacy be enough – would his *love* be enough? It killed me to think that it wouldn't. I couldn't even stand to think about the look of disappointment that he would affix me with when he found out about my lifestyle. I pushed that out of my head for now. I needed to focus on the conversation that was about to take place.

All of the cars were in the drive, and the door was unlocked when I headed in. I looked around, but didn't see anyone in the living room, but heard a giggle from the kitchen, and decided to head in and say hi to Bella. Odds were, if she was in the kitchen, Jasper would be there too. That would save me from having to go looking for him. As I entered though the kitchen doorway, I was literally stopped in my tracks at the sight before me. Bella was kneeling on the kitchen floor in front of Jacob; his pants and briefs were around his knees, and Bella had his hard cock in her hand. This was well outside the boundaries of the playroom. This was wrong. She was going to hurt Jasper if she kept this up. Rage coursed through me.

"What the fuck is going on here?" I asked in a low, deadly voice. I wanted to yell it, scream it at them, but I didn't want Jasper to come down and walk in on this. How the fuck could she do this with Jasper right upstairs? How the fuck could she do this at all? How could she hurt him like this? Jacob spun to face me, his cock still hanging lewdly out of his clothes. His face was anxious, upset. Bella tossed something onto the table as Jacob jerked his pants up.

"Jacob, would you excuse us for a while? We can finish this later," Bella said calmly. What the fuck did she mean 'finish this later'? Did she have no shame at all? Jacob stood perfectly still, obviously unwilling to leave Bella alone with me as angry as I was. "It's okay Jake. Go upstairs, and I'll come and talk to you in a little while." I looked at Bella, incredulous. Finally, the guy took the hint and left the room, which was good, because I was starting to really want to break his fucking jaw. I knew it wasn't his fault; that Bella was the one taking advantage, but it still pissed me off.

As Jacob rounded the corner to head upstairs, Bella rounded on me. "What the hell is your problem, Edward?" she questioned in a low voice. How the hell could she ask me that? What was *my* problem?

"Oh, I don't know-you on your knees for that guy in Jasper's kitchen maybe? What would you have done if Jasper had walked in on you two instead of me? You're in the fucking kitchen, for God's sake," My voice low and harsh.

"I would have told him that I was measuring Jacob for a harness. We're looking for someone to take over his training, and we'll have people coming by. I thought a harness and leash were appropriate," she said in a scathing tone, and picked up the object she'd tossed on the table when I came in. It was a tape measure.

Okay, I felt kind of stupid now. Of course they would harness him to put him through his paces. That didn't alleviate my concerns about the other things I'd seen though, so I continued.

"Why did you save word that night with the wax? I have never once seen you save word. Ever. He wasn't in danger, you weren't in danger. Why did you stop the scene?" I asked her, not quite sure I wanted to hear the answer anymore. She looked at me like I'd lost my mind.

"He was screaming, Edward, or did you not notice? If I had been screaming like that in a scene – what would you have done? If you had been screaming like that, what would Alice have done? I had to calm him down. Thank God, I did too, because I was able to find out the reason he freaked out so badly," she said sighing. Then she sat down at the table. I stood where I was with my arms crossed, watching her. "I went to see Jacob after the session, and found him in his room, sobbing. I held him, trying to find out what made him so upset. Finally, he told me. When he was a young boy, his house burned to the ground. His mother was trapped inside, and his father tried to get in to save her. He listened to his mother screaming, and his father trying to reach her. In the end, his father was crippled and his mother died. When he saw the flames, and heard me screaming, it triggered something in him. You of all people should be able to understand that, Edward."

I did understand, all too well.

"Jacob feels comfortable with me, and we've been talking through things – just like you and I used to talk through things."

Then, she stood up from the table and walked over to me. I thought for a minute she was going to hug me, but she didn't. She pushed me hard into the refrigerator. Completely unprepared for the force of her blow, I almost fell to the floor. "I can't believe after all these years you would think that I would be capable of that, Edward!" Her eyes flashed with fury, and her face was flushed. "I have never ever been anything but faithful to you during our arrangement. *You* are the one who went out and found someone else to fuck while you were playing with us. *You fucking hypocrite.*"

"Hey, what is going on here?" Jasper asked as he ran into the room. "Jesus, Bella I heard you from all the way upstairs." He grabbed her around the waist, and pulled her back as she attempted to push me again. I stood there stunned. As she struggled to get out of Jasper's arms, I realized I had never seen Bella so angry.

"How could you think that about me? *You* are the one who let yourself get emotional with your sub. *You* are the one who took it outside the playroom. *You* are the one who hasn't told your little boy toy that you tie Jasper up and fuck him. *You* Edward, not me!" She yelled. I was completely shocked.

She was absolutely right.

I had just accused her of everything that I had done myself. Only she wasn't the one that was guilty of it, I was.

"Okay, I'm going to take Bella upstairs. Tomorrow, we're going to see that art exhibit that you and Bella wanted to see. I'd put it off, but tomorrow is the last day it will be there," Jasper said softly, still holding Bella firmly against his chest. "The three of us are going together. We need to find some way to reconnect with each other. We have been so close for so long, I can't stand the thought of losing that. Please. Then, we'll have dinner, come home and open a bottle of wine, and talk. *All of us. About everything.*"

"Bella, I – " I started, but she stopped me. When she looked up at me, the hurt in her eyes

was staggering, and I felt a sharp pang of guilt. This was my Bella, my best friend, and I had hurt her. All she had done was comfort the boy because of a horrible trauma he'd had to live through and I raked her over the coals for it. She was such a good person, and yet again – I was the monster. *I* was the one who was taking advantage of everyone that I knew. *I* was selfish. I didn't deserve any of them.

I don't think I'd ever hated myself more than I did in that moment.

"I don't want to talk to you right now, Edward. I love you, but I don't really like you right now," she twisted out of Jasper's arms and ran up the stairs. I heard her catch a sob as she reached the landing on the second floor. Jasper followed quickly behind her. I only hoped he would be able to comfort her.

I thought about calling Mike, but found that I just didn't have the heart. Bella was right about me, on every count. Everything that she had been holding back in order to not hurt me by confronting me about it came flooding over me in that moment. I couldn't sit and talk to Mike knowing that tomorrow night I could very well be alone. Jasper and I would talk, Bella and I would talk, and Mike and I would talk – and each one of them had every reason to just walk away from me.

They should.

I caused nothing but devastation and pain to everyone that came into contact with me. My parents, Jasper, Bella, and Mike – maybe they'd all just be better off if I went back to Washington alone.

I sat down at the table with my head in my hands.

Chapter 24 – The Storm

"We can drive over to my building and walk from the garage," Jasper said pensively. I knew that after the argument last night, he was trying to keep things light. After they had gone to bed last night, I sat up thinking until the early hours of the morning. I couldn't sleep; all I could do was replay the shocked and wounded expression on Bella's face over and over in my mind. She had been there for me for a very long time. Not once had she ever done anything to earn my behavior last night.

The short ride over to the garage was absolutely silent. Jasper didn't even bother turning on the radio. He just sat in the front seat with Bella, lightly holding her hand. Again, I was struck by a strong wave of loneliness at their casual affection. It was unnerving. I decided that I couldn't stand the silence anymore.

"Bella?" I asked softly, not sure exactly how I wanted to continue.

"Yes, Edward?" her tone wasn't exactly inviting.

"I... uhmmm..." I started. I wanted to tell her how sorry I was for doubting her. I wanted to tell her that she was still my best friend. I just ... couldn't. So, I switched topics quickly. "I got you a custom frame for your Masters' diploma. I've arranged with the school to send it to the framer. You should have it in about twelve weeks." She turned all the way around in her seat to look at me. The expression on her face told me that she thought I'd lost my mind.

"Thank you. That was very thoughtful," she said quietly before turning back around in the seat. The rest of the trip was met with silence. When we pulled into the garage, I noticed Jasper watching me in the mirror, but he didn't say anything.

After Jasper pulled the car into a space, I got out right next to Bella. I closed the door and turned to move so that she could walk past me. She grabbed my hand and I turned to face her, looking at the ground, too ashamed to meet her eye. Suddenly, she wrapped her arms around my waist, and put her head on my chest.

"I'm sorry that I yelled at you," she said softly into my shirt. I pulled back and tilted her chin up so that she was looking at me.

"You have no reason to be sorry, Bella. You were absolutely right. I am the one that is sorry. Can you forgive me?" I asked her gently. She stood on tiptoes and kissed my cheek.

"Of course I forgive you," a smile playing across her lips.

"Thank you, my Bella," I murmured softly into her ear, and then I caught myself. "Well, I guess I can't exactly call you 'my Bella' anymore now, can I?" I chuckled. She put her head on my chest again.

"You were my first Dom, Edward. In a way, I'll always be your Bella," she admitted as I held her tightly. When she pulled away, Jasper walked over and put his arms around me.

"I'm sorry, Edward," his voice was quiet and solemn. I thought back to his voicemails and how he had said that he was the one causing me pain, but by the look that was now on his face, I knew he was taking the pain on himself. I just hoped that after our talk tonight some of his pain would be gone. I couldn't stand to see him like that.

"You have forgiven me for my mistakes, Jasper. I forgive you for yours," I softly said, turning my head to press my face lightly against his skin. I felt Bella put her arm around me and saw her put the other around Jasper. We stood there, in the parking garage, just holding each other for a long moment. It felt good to be in their arms, for them to accept me into the circle again. The pain that I had seen in Jasper's face, it haunted me. In that moment, I think I would have done anything to take it from him. I laid my head on his shoulder and breathed in his scent, wanting so badly to kiss his neck. Then, I found myself again and moved back.

"Okay then," I cleared my throat. "Before we start to sing Cumbaya, let's go see this exhibit." Jasper and Bella laughed, and the somber mood was broken. We came out of the garage on to Michigan Avenue, just a few blocks from the Art Institute. We talked for the rest of the walk about where we would go to dinner. I noticed somewhere in the recesses of my mind that Jasper and Bella were no longer holding hands. I don't know why I found that significant, but I did. It was just another piece of information to file away for later review. Bella looked up and smiled at me, I grinned back at her - my mood now lightened by our interaction in the garage. Then, just as we reached the traffic light to cross over Michigan, Bella's cell phone rang.

"Oh! That must be Alice calling with an update on your house. She called last night and said she had to hire a new caretaker," Bella said as she dug around in her purse, and pulled out her cell phone. She seemed rather happy to hear from Alice, which I found odd considering their last interaction together. Alice can be a bit...wearing on the nerves. She hit the send button as she stepped off the curb to cross. The scream that was ripped from my throat did

nothing to stop her as it was drowned out by the sound of screeching tires as the cab driver saw her. Had she have been paying more attention, she might have noticed that the crossing sign was still red.

The cab driver just didn't see her in time.

Jasper and I watched in horrifying slow motion as Bella's legs were struck by the front of the cab. Her head crashed into the hood and then she rebounded and slumped to the ground. I was already in motion but was unable to prevent her head from slamming into the pavement. I got to her within seconds and after I allowed the first sob escaped me, my medical training kicked in and I began to assess her. I checked for a pulse, timed out her respiration, and tried to check her head and neck. Finally, my heart clenched when I realized how injured she was.

"Jasper!" I called over the screams and panicked cries of the crowd. He stood frozen, a look of horror on his face as Bella's blood began to spread over the top of her pink t-shirt. I noticed a police officer on his radio off to the side, and I prayed he was calling for help.

"JASPER!" I screamed, desperately now. The anguish in his eyes nearly took my breath away when he looked down into my face. "I NEED YOU!" Finally, he processed what I was saying and ran to Bella's other side. He fell to his knees and removed his jacket. The tears had to be clouding his vision, and they now streamed down his face. His shock was slowly giving way to grief. He laid the jacket over her chest and arms, covering her extremities which were starting to lose their warmth.

"Bella, baby, can you hear me?" He cried, his voice cracking. To my surprise, Bella opened her eyes.

"Jasper, apply pressure to the wound on her leg. Use this." I instructed, ripping off my sweatshirt. Throwing it at him, I removed my t-shirt as well and used it to apply pressure to her head wound. I knew at least one of her legs was broken, but my main concerns now were her head contusions and the bleeding. I pushed the sticky, matted hair out of her eyes. Both pupils appeared to be reactive to the light. That was the first good sign we'd had since she was struck. I wished silently for my medical bag.

"Can you hear me, Bella?" I asked her as the flashing lights of the ambulance washed across her pale face. Thankfully, because the cop was the one that called for help; they were here much faster than they would have been otherwise. This would at least give her a fighting chance.

"Jasper..." she said, so softly, I almost didn't hear her over the noise of the crowd, and the street traffic.

"He's right here, honey." I told her and Jasper leaned over so she could see his face. Briefly, I wondered if she could see the same fear, the same desperation there that I saw. Would it frighten her that he was so panicked? Of course, knowing Bella, she would find a way to comfort him rather than him comforting her.

"I'm here, darlin'." He said taking her hand between his, holding it tightly, willing his strength into her. I could almost hear him begging her silently to be okay, to hold on until help arrived.

"Love you," she said, and smiled up at him. I'm sure the blood the blood in her eyes was

making it difficult to see, so Jasper used my t-shirt to wipe it away. Bella's expression was pained, but somehow calm almost like she had already resigned herself.

"Don't you do that!" He growled at her. "Don't you say goodbye to me. I love you too, and you are going to be fine." He looked up at me, but I had no reassurances for him. Reading that in my face, he paled even further. I had no answers for him. It would depend on how badly her internal injuries were. Did she sustain damage to her torso? I didn't think so, but she could have one or more hematomas.

Just then, the crowd parted with the help of the officer on the scene, and the paramedics came through with a stretcher. I gave them all of the pertinent facts I had, and they stabilized her as well as they could on scene. She was pale, and bleeding heavily from her head and legs. I wished they could give her something for the pain, but she needed to be properly assessed first. My heart broke with the tears on her blood streaked face.

"Come on, doc. You can ride with us," one of the paramedics said to me. Instead, I shook my head and pushed Jasper forward. If she coded on route, I wanted her to be with him. It was him that she loved. Then, my heart clenched – if she *coded on route*. She couldn't code. *Please*, I thought desperately.

"He rides," I told him and he pulled Jasper along and into the bus. I caught one last look at Jasper's pale, frightened face as they closed the doors.

"Northwestern?" The cop asked from next to me, and handed me a Chicago PD t-shirt, throwing a gym bag into the back seat. I thanked him, and started looking around for a cab. "Come on, man, I'll take you over there. You did a good thing here. We'll follow the rig," he said and allowed me to climb into the front of the cruiser.

We pulled into the ambulance bay just minutes after they unloaded Bella. We watched them push her through the doors, and a shell-shocked Jasper was standing off to the side. He looked so lost, my heart ached for him. My heart ached for me too; I couldn't stand the thought of losing Bella. I couldn't think about that now. I grabbed Jasper by the arm and we made our way into the ER waiting room. I got Jasper seated and went to find an ER doctor. I didn't want to get in the way; I just wanted to provide Bella's history. Afterwards, I went back to the waiting room and found Jasper out in the garden on his cell phone. He was talking to Rosalie.

* * *

"Edward, it's been almost an hour," Rosalie said softly from the couch next to Jasper. She was being very quiet, and kind and I was thankful for that. Jasper was holding his head in his hands and she rubbed his back absently. "Shouldn't they have come out and told us something by now?"

"They're trying to stabilize her. Their priority is her, not us. When they can, they will..." I was cut off by the sound of my name.

"Dr. Cullen?" A voice asked from near the door. I launched myself out of my chair, and Jasper did the same.

"I'm Dr. Cullen," I told the nurse, and she asked me to follow her, informing me that the doctor would like to speak to me. As Jasper and I followed the nurse, I heard Rosalie in the background asking why the hell it was me they wanted to talk to. I assumed I was still

listed in Bella's medical file as her medical proxy. We were led into a small room in the ER where Bella was still lay, her bloody gauze littered the floor. They had finally stopped the bleeding, and she was now intubated. Jasper gasped when he saw her, and as his arm brushed against mine, I could feel him shaking.

"She has an epidural hematoma," The doctor said gravely, and my chest tightened. "We need to stop the bleeding and get it drained to relieve the pressure. Also, we need to determine the extent of the damage. When we come out, we will know much more about her condition and her chance of survival."

"So, she has to have surgery in order to relieve the pressure?" Jasper asked me and I nodded. "Is she going to be okay?" He was pale, and he was frightened. I couldn't lie to him. Lying to him now and giving him false hope would just make it worse. Her doctor had shown me the CT scans as soon as we came back, and her chances weren't good, but I just couldn't say it out loud. I shook my head. He choked out a sob and nodded. As I watched him, my heart broke - his face was so full of anguish and pain. I just wanted to hold him, to stroke his hair and tell him it would be okay - but this wasn't the place. One of the nurses and an orderly came to tell us that they were ready to take her to surgery and I would be allowed to see her in recovery. Jasper's silence surprised me, I had expected him to protest, but I realized he wanted to do what was best for Bella. I wanted what was best for Bella too - thankfully, it looked like she had very competent doctors. They would do their best for her. I couldn't bring myself to think about what would happen if they failed.

He left to go back to the waiting room; he wanted to tell his sister what was happening. I stayed with Bella, stroking her hair. They would shave it when they got her up to surgery. If it saved her life, I doubted that she'd mind.

"I don't know if you can hear me now, but before you go in there, I want to tell you that I love you Bella. You're my best friend, and I don't know that I can live without you. Please, please come back to us. You know it will kill him; you can't do that to him. Please, Bella." I begged as I felt a tear fall down my cheek. It wasn't fair that it had to be her. It should be me lying in that bed. She was sweet, and kind, and thoughtful. I was the monster.

The orderlies came in with a few nurses and they wheeled Bella out of the room. I took a deep breath to steady myself. I had to be strong for *her*. I had to be strong for *him*.

I had to be strong for *me*.

* * *

The surgery to relieve the hematoma in Bella's brain took six very long hours. Jasper was frantic by the time it was over. He and Rosalie had almost been literally climbing the walls by the time the surgeon came out to talk to us. He looked at us for a long time, and then told us that the surgery had been only partially successful. Part of her skull had been removed, and the pressure on her brain had been alleviated, but they were unable to repair some of the damage. Due to the fact that the brain swelled down through the bottom of the skull, it was not what they had hoped for. He said that we could come up to see her when she was out of recovery. He then pulled me off to the side.

"We were able to repair the epidural hematoma, but there was more damage to the brain than we had initially anticipated. She has a herniation of the brain through the bottom of the skull which has injured the brain stem, leaving her unable to breathe on her own. We will perform a blood flow analysis in the morning to determine the next course of action." I

let out a breath and nodded. It was about as bad as it could be. I didn't hold out much hope that she would make it through. I just didn't know what to tell Jasper.

I went up to her room, and he was sitting in a chair next to her bed. His hand was entwined with hers; his forehead pressed against their hands. Seeing them like that was so heart-wrenching that I almost didn't enter the room. Unfortunately, I had to.

"Jasper," I said softly, and he looked up.

"What did they say?" He asked, his face was so full of hope that it was almost physically painful to say these next words.

"It's not good. They weren't able to fix everything they needed to. They were able to stop the bleeding, but it may not help. They're going to do a test tomorrow to determine if she will be able to function on her own," I explained, and his hands started to tremble. He nodded. I didn't think he could take any more, so I stopped.

It was a long night, with just us in that room. Rosalie went home to get a change of clothes for Jasper. He told her just to stay at home; there wasn't anything anyone could do until morning. When the time came, they took Bella for the test that would determine whether or not she would live. Jasper kissed her forehead, which was now covered in bandages, and collapsed into a chair. We didn't bother playing cards, or even reading the paper. We just sat at opposite sides of her room waiting for her to come back. We waited for our worst fears to be confirmed.

They were.

They wheeled her back in and the doctor confirmed that she had no blood flow to the brain. He asked me if she had a living will, with any kind of instructions, and I informed him that she did not. We had talked about it, of course, when we had the conversation about her parents, but she hadn't documented it. Now, because of the results of the test, there was no other option than for her than to be taken off of life support. Jasper pushed me out of the way.

"NO!" He cried, and faced the doctor. "She has no family, she means everything to me. Can't we just talk about this before you just pull the..." Then he turned to me. "NO...I won't let you do this! Edward please... please don't do this. Don't KILL HER!" The words slapped me in the face.

Did he really think that's what this was? Did he really think that I could just end her life without any kind of forethought? Did he think that we could possibly take this course if there were any other option?

"What about her organs?" The doctor asked me, as if he hadn't heard Jasper. "Given her age, and her health, she is definitely a viable donor. Was there anything in her living will?" He asked hopefully, but I shook my head. "You should at least consider the option." I nodded.

"Can we have a moment?" I asked the doctor and he left us alone in the room.

"Edward, you can't do this," Jasper cried. He was calmer now, but only just. "You can't consider this as an option."

"Jasper, I have no choice. She put me in charge of medical decisions for her. I don't know why she didn't change that after she moved here to be with you, but she didn't. That makes it my responsibility." Then, I changed tactics, and lowered my voice. "She wouldn't want to live like this Jasper, you know that. She has no brain function. She is not going to recover. The only thing that we can do now is abide by her wishes. Now, she and I never talked about organ donation, only that she would not want to live like this, so I think you should decide about organ donation. She is a caring and loving person; I think that she would want it. But, that will be up to you." I said, and dropped into a chair, putting my hands over my face. Could I sign the papers that led to her death? She was my best friend, could I do that to her? But then, what kind of friend would I be if I didn't? It would be selfish of me to put my wishes, or *his* wishes over hers. Then the doctor came back a few minutes later with a clipboard and pen, I took them.

Jasper watched me, his face a mask of pure agony. As I signed the paper, giving them permission to end Bella's life, Jasper hit the floor on his knees, his face buried in his hands. On shaking legs, I stood and headed towards the door to give them time alone, but Jasper grabbed my hand as I walked by. I sat in the chair next to him, and he threw his arms around my waist, his face pressed against my abdomen. He was crying so hard I could barely understand him.

"I know it's best for her Edward, I just...Why couldn't it have been me? Why her?" He sobbed into my tear stained shirt as, what must have been, the organ procurement manager stepped in to the room.

"Please, leave them on the table there, I'll deal with them in a minute," I told him, and he did as I asked. I looked down at Jasper, and stroked his hair. "Can we let her help others, Jasper? You know she would have wanted that?" I continued to try to comfort him, knowing that there was nothing I could do to make this easier. He nodded. Leaving one hand on his soft hair, I leaned slightly and picked up the new clipboard. I signed my name quickly and threw it back on the table, taking Jasper in my arms. It would all be over soon.

Within the hour, they were ready for the harvesting. I was so glad they hadn't called it that in front of Jasper. He was having a hard enough time as it was. A surgical team came down to the room to prep her. Finally, the horrifying time came for her to be taken to surgery. Her organs would be removed, and sent to different parts of the country in order to try to save a dozen lives; giving those dozen or so people a whole new chance at life, while our lives were full of grief and loss. I kissed her forehead gently, telling her that I loved her and that I was so thankful she had come into my life. She had helped me in so many ways. I left the room, barely containing my sob as I rushed through the door, hearing Jasper as he began to talk to her. He looked haunted when he walked out of the room. We stood on opposite sides of the hall, waiting. Finally, they wheeled her out, past us and towards the operating room.

That would be the last time that we saw her alive.

* * *

I had given Jasper a sedative that I picked up at the hospital pharmacy with the help of Bella's ER physician. I knew that it would help him sleep, and not think about what was happening to Bella right now. I sat in the living room, waiting, wondering if she was still alive. It was the longest time in my life. He was asleep when the call came in from the hospital informing us that she was gone. The harvesting was a success, and all of her usable organs were now in transit.

My Bella was gone.

My best friend was dead.

I turned off my phone, swallowed one of the pills I had picked up for Jasper, and went upstairs to lie down. Not even bothering with the pretense of going to my own room, I walked into Jasper's. Discarding my shoes, I sat gently on the side of the bed so that I didn't disturb him. Then, I lay back on the pillows. He must have felt that he was no longer alone because he rolled over and planted his head on my shoulder. We clung to each other, desperate for any kind of comfort.

We found none.

When we awoke, we immediately began plans for her service. I knew, as did Jasper, that Rosalie would have taken care of the arrangements, but we wanted everything perfect for our Bella. Jasper held up surprisingly well as we picked out the perfect casket, the perfect flowers, and the perfect venue for her burial. Quiet moments were spent on her eulogy, and others were just spent in reflection. Since she had no family and few friends, it would be a very small, intimate gathering. After that first night, I slept in my own bed. I got the feeling that Jasper was starting to pull away from me. He was withdrawing more and more into himself, so I sent Jake to stay with a friend to keep him out of the way. I knew that he cared for Bella, but right now all I cared about was getting Jasper through this - getting me through this.

The pain of her loss was staggering.

Finally, just as we thought we would lose our minds, the day of her funeral was upon us. Jasper stood in the front with Rosalie, and I stood off to the side. Mike, who I finally remembered to call the day after Bella's death, stood quietly in the back with Jacob. He wanted to be there for me, but not upset Jasper. For that, I sincerely appreciated him. Jasper delivered a beautiful eulogy to a small crowd. He talked of her kindness, her generosity, and her love. Everything he said rang true to me, she had been such a beautiful person. The hole in my chest at her loss was ragged and deep. The pain of it took my breath away. The tears flowed relentlessly as we carried her to the hearse.

After the funeral, and after everyone had left our house, Jasper and I were finally alone. He just sat, alone in the corner of the sitting room gazing out the window. The pain, the lost, empty look crushed me as I watched him. It had been days since he'd slept and as I looked at him, I noticed that he was barely holding himself together. He was unshaven and his shaggy blond hair was just too long. I put my hand on his shoulder and he looked up. My sharp intake of breath went unnoticed, when his ice blue eyes met mine. The depth and razor sharp pain unmistakable in them eclipsed mine in comparison. I crushed him to me and was hit with a feeling so incredibly strong that for a moment, I couldn't breathe. There were aspects of it that I recognized easily - attraction.. lust... but, there were subtler aspects as well, and these weren't as readily identifiable - companionship, longing, and comfort. The only way I could describe that undercurrent of emotion, strangely, was 'home'.

Was this what they had been trying to explain to me?

Was this love?

Chapter 25 – Aftermath

"NOOOO! Bella, stop! PLEASE STOP!!"

His scream reverberated and echoed through the hall, through the empty rooms, and right down my spine. It was the third time this week he had screamed in his sleep, and just like the other two nights, my heart broke at the sound of it. I got up and adjusted my sleep pants, which had become twisted in the night – it seems that Jasper wasn't the only one not sleeping well. I padded barefoot down the hall, and stood in his doorway for a moment. I wanted to see if he had quieted, but he was still thrashing in the blankets. The other nights, I had shaken him awake and he looked up into my face before rolling away. I can't even pretend that it didn't hurt. Whether he was upset with me for the decisions I had to make for Bella, or for some other reason, my heart ached as he pulled farther and farther from me. All I wanted was to tell him that I loved him, now that I fully understood what that meant. It just didn't seem that now was the best time while he was so devastated with by guilt, and loss, and pain.

I stood next to his bed and looked down at him, so lost and alone. This time, I just couldn't stop myself from pulling back the blankets and curling up next to him. Lying on my side, I shook him hard and finally, he woke. When he looked up at me, his eyes filled with tears, and I saw everything I ever wanted out of life – right there. Then, as I reached for him, he rolled away and buried his face in the his pillow. I lay there, watching him, the sting of his rejection burning in my chest. As I pushed back the covers, and sat up to leave his bed, he rolled back to me and threw his arms around me, pressing his face into my chest. It broke my heart to see him like this, but horribly, some small part of me rejoiced at his need for my affection. Like a lost boy, he clung to me, and I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, holding him against my skin. Kissing the top of his head, I stroked his hair, trying to comfort him.

"What am I going to do, Edward? I don't know what to do..." he cried softly into my chest. I didn't answer. I *had no answer* for him. How was he supposed to live without Bella? So, I held him. I absorbed some of his grief and his loss through our contact, and my murmuring words of encouragement and love. Finally, he fell asleep, but I stayed up for a long time and thought about what would happen from here.

* * *

"Edward, you need to talk about it, you need to let it out," Mike said from behind me as I rested against him on his couch. Jasper had gone back to work today, hoping it would distract him, so I took the opportunity go to Mike's. This was the first time I had seen Mike since Bella's funeral when he had waited quietly in the back throughout the service and had given me one long, tight hug when it was over. After giving Jasper sincere condolences, he left, knowing that Jasper would need me. Mike always seemed to know what I needed without me telling him, and today was no exception. I needed to talk about it. I needed to get it out. It was like a poison, seeping through my veins, invading every corner of my conscious and subconscious mind, and it infuriated me.

"What do you want to know, Mike? You want to know how I can still feel her blood on my hands? I tried so hard to control her bleeding, but it was just...everywhere. I stood at that ER sink for what felt like hours washing, and I could still feel it. I CAN STILL FEEL IT!" I raged at him, knowing that none of this was his fault, but I was just so angry. I had held the anger inside since the moment that Bella had stepped off of that fucking curb, and I just couldn't contain it any longer. Mike's face was full of sympathy, of compassion, it dialed up the rage even futher. I didn't want his fucking sympathy.

"What else? You want to know that I wish with all my heart it had been me? Bella was beautiful, sweet, and kind. She was affectionate, and playful, snicker and caring. She always made sure that the people around her were cared for, that their needs were met, even before her own. She was selfless." I took a deep breath as the tears started to fall. "She was everything that I'm not. I am so fucking selfish. My best friend is dead, her life cut short in an instant, and all I can think about is what it means for me. What am I going to do without her? How am I supposed to get over this? I could really use her help with Jasper right now. He's still screaming in his sleep. It breaks my heart, how completely devastated he is right now." Mike tightened his arms around me, and I felt comforted. For the first time since this whole nightmare started, I felt some measure of comfort.

"God has his reasons for everything, Edward," he said softly in my ear, and I turned around completely to stare at him, completely incredulous.

"You can't possibly think that after everything that has happened to me in my life that I believe in God?" I asked him in a slightly mocking tone. "If there is a God, he is a sadistic..." I stopped, noticing the look of hurt and shock on his face. I wouldn't do that to him, mock something he obviously believed in. Pressing my face into his chest, and he held me. "I'm sorry, Mike – maybe this isn't the best time to talk to me." Stroking my hair, and just let me rest against his chest. I felt him take a few deep breaths, and then he spoke.

"I want you to tell me whatever you're feeling, whatever is on your mind, Edward. That is the only way this is going to work." He kissed the top of my head, and we just sat there, trying to comfort each other in something where neither of us had a hope of finding comfort. I knew I had to find my strength from somewhere, though. I needed to be there for Jasper. He wasn't holding up well under the weight of his grief. Yet again, last night, I saw Jasper sitting at the kitchen table trying hard not to fall asleep. He was doing just about anything he could now not to sleep, not to dream about the accident. The circles under his eyes were proof that he was succeeding, at least in part.

Other than trying not to sleep, Jasper appeared completely normal – everything he was feeling, he internalized. Jasper wasn't an overly emotional person, but I had expected some kind of reaction from him. It seemed that now he was running on autopilot. When reminded, he ate at regular intervals when reminded, and responded when spoken to, but you could see that he was just empty. All the light had gone out of his eyes, and he was hollow. I hadn't even seen him really cry since the funeral. It seemed at this point, he was beyond tears. As devastated as I was over Bella's death, I knew that Jasper had been hit so much harder by it. Then, I heard Jasper calling me from another room.

I left early so that I would be home before Jasper. Since Bella's death, he had become increasingly agitated and it didn't take much to set him off. Mike was a sore subject anyway, so I usually didn't chance even talking to him with Jasper around. I knew that this was unfair to Mike, and he deserved better, but right now I was just trying to keep a bad situation from getting worse. Unfortunately when I walked into the living room, however, Jasper was already sitting on the couch.

"What's up, Jasper?" I asked softly, sitting in a chair next to the couch. He looked at his hands, and the thought struck me that this conversation was not going to go well. He continued to sit there, unmoving. I considered prompting him, but it seemed he was having some kind of internal debate. Whether it was because he didn't want to tell me something, or he was unsure how to begin, I didn't know.

"I can't stay here," he . "I talked to Emmett this morning, and they're going to let me leave. They're going to release me from the one year I signed up for. I'm fucking useless to them now anyway. I want to go back to Washington." I gaped at him. It wasn't good for him to make such a big decision so soon after losing Bella.

"Jasper, maybe you should take a little time to – "

"NO," he said rather loudly, and my eyes widened. Then, he mastered himself again and continued. "Everything in this goddamned house reminds me of her, I have to get out of here. I can't fucking sleep. I can't *function*." He took a deep breath, and sighed. "I wanted to know is if I can stay at your house until I find something else."

He was leaving?

I was going to lose both of my best friends within fucking weeks of each other? I looked into his eyes, and saw they were wild. It was then that I realized he was barely keeping himself together. Maybe he was right, maybe getting out of here, away from the reminders, away from everything that focused his attention on Bella and her absence. It would be good to get him out of the house - but did he really need to leave the fucking state? I sighed, maybe that was what was best for him, what he needed. I nodded, and he visibly relaxed.

"I'll...I'll call Alice and tell her that you're coming," I softly murmured, standing to leave. I wanted to go upstairs to my room and lie on the bed and never move again. My heart was breaking at the thought of not seeing him every day. We had been through so much together, and now – at one of the darkest times of our lives, he was deserting me.

"Edward..." he started, grabbing my wrist as I started to walk past him. "I know that I have no right to ask you this. You're getting your life back on track here, and developing a better relationship with your parents. You are in a new relationship with Mike, and you looked to be pretty happy. I don't... I can't..." The anguish in his face made me reach out to him. He didn't hesitate this time, but pressed his face into my chest. I put one hand on his back, and the other in his hair, trying to calm him. Then, I heard his voice, muffled into my shirt. "Will you come with me?"

And with those five words, my choice was now laid out before me, almost as if it were in black and white. Mike or Jasper? Security or passion? Friendship or love? Stability or uncertainty? Happiness or the potential for true heartache?

Even if Mike and I weren't headed in a direction towards a real relationship, did I want to just leave him? He was really a good friend, and I was leaning on him hard right now. Did I want to leave my parents? My mother would be so upset, so disappointed, if I left now after we had really just started to get to know each other as adults, to connect with something more than just a superficial relationship. I had even started thinking about practicing here. My father had a few friends who could help to get me in with a local hospital; it would help me start feeling useful again.

Could I uproot my life again to leave with him?

"I need to think about it, Jasper. When were you planning to leave?" I asked him, not releasing him from my arms. I thought I felt my arms trembling under the weight of the decision I was now faced with.

I'm sure it would be one of the hardest of my life.

"In a few days," his reply was muffled into my chest.

Chapter: 26 Journal Entry – My Bella

You used to captivate me by your resonating light, now I'm bound by the life you left behind.

How could this happen? I have suffered so fucking much in my life, why take away my best friend now? Thoughts like that make me feel so selfish; I am such a horrible fucking person. But, if there is one place that I can feel selfish, that I can focus on me, it's in my head and in this journal. This journal is the one place I can be completely honest, and candid. It's the one place I never have to hide - not my lifestyle, not my past, not the fucking nightmares in my head.

Unfortunately, right now, I wish I could hide. I want to hide from myself, from the world, from this impossible decision I have to make, and from the staggering grief of losing Bella. She deserved to live her life, she worked hard for it. I'm the one that should have been cut down in my 'prime'. My 'prime' – what a fucking joke. I've never had a 'prime'. My life was over at eight-years old, I've just been existing ever since – a barren excuse for a man.

An empty shell.

The days that followed in the aftermath of Bella's death are like a blur to me now. I had nearly forgotten about the boy, Jacob, until he showed up at the house about a week after the funeral. He looked haggard, and worn out. I knew this couldn't be easy on him either. Bella was his friend, his collared relationship with his Doms had just imploded violently, and now he had to find a place to live. Knowing that it would mean a lot to Bella, I called Carlisle to see what I could do for Jacob.

We talked for nearly two hours.

It was good to get everything off my chest. He didn't have any advice about the romantic aspects of my relationships, but he was able to help with other things. He had a contact in the BDSM community here, a fellow psych professor named Leah, who agreed to either take Jacob on as a sub, or help him transition to a new Mistress. Jacob had always favored submitting to Bella, it was evident that he would prefer a female Dominant.

Calirise also let me know that after Alice had gone to Aro about Jane and Alec, they were ostracized by the community. Every member, all of the people that consider themselves my friends, contacted all of their associates in other groups and posted warning messages on all of their related boards, effectively cutting them off from being accepted in any other community. Any submissive who researched them before accepting a collar would know immediately that they were bad news. I felt better knowing that I wouldn't run into them if I decided to return to Washington with Jasper.

And there it was, we were back to the question at hand. Washington with Jasper or Chicago with Mike – it seems like everything in my life had come down to this.

Jasper wants me to move back to Washington with him. He asked me to go, not just suggested that I should. It was almost a fucking plea. Jasper needed me, but what about Mike? How would Bella advise me now? Should I follow the man in love with the ghost? Should I stay with the man who offers the more stable chance at happiness? After

everything that has happened to me in my life, I deserve a little fucking happiness. I could see myself staying with Mike, and being perfectly happy. But it would be wrong. I can't give myself to him like he deserves. He's a good guy, he needs someone that is going to appreciate that and give themselves to him fully - a true partner. I would always be in love with someone else. That isn't fair to Mike. At all.

What about Jasper?

Let's go about this logically – what are the pros and cons of the decision.

Going with Jasper – Pro: I'm in love with him, going to Washington will allow me to stay with him.

Con: He doesn't feel the same way about me. I would just be hurting myself by going with him. I would just be miserable watching him being miserable. Would I even be able to help him by going with him? Or would it just destroy us both?

Going with Jasper – Pro: I would be able to work at the hospital again.

Con: There are much better facilities, much larger hospitals in Chicago, where I would be of more use.

Going with Jasper – Pro: I would never have to see the revulsion, the disgust in Mike's face when he found out what I am.

Con: If I gave up that lifestyle, I could stay with Mike and be happy. I could have something resembling a normal life here.

Staying with Mike – Pro: Mike loves me, he wants me to move in with him which would mean staying here.

Con: Mike doesn't really even know me. He only sees what I let him see. He doesn't know what lurks underneath the surface. Jasper knows everything about me – the good, the not so good, and the truly horrific.

Staying with Mike – Pro: I'd get to stay here near my parents.

Con: My mother told me that passion is better. Deep down, I think she knows that I'm in love with Jasper. She would tell me to go with him, to give it a shot rather than settling for safe. Even though she and I are finally reforming that bond, finally becoming what we should have been, she would tell me to go – to live my life, but return for a visit at every opportunity.

Staying with Mike – Pro: I won't get my heart stomped on.

Con: I may not get my heart stomped on – things could change between Mike and me, and then I would be left alone. It wouldn't matter, though. My heart would be in Washington. My heart would be with Jasper.

Bella once told me something that gave me hope. The day Jasper had left Washington, after our night together, Bella called to tell me her idea for trying to get Jasper to collar her. She was going wrap herself up as a gift in his playroom.

'I know there are things I need to work out, but I think I can get Emmett to help me. He seemed like a good guy.' I remembered that she rambled on for a while after that as my life fell apart around me. I knew I could have talked to her about it, but she sounded so fucking happy. It was the first time I'd ever considered hanging up on her. Now, I'm glad I hadn't, but then I was just so upset after he left. On top of that, I was confused as to why I was so upset.

'I'm sure you two will be very happy together,' I hold her, trying to hold myself together. Without conscious thought, I had crossed my arms in front of me. It was odd for me to remember something like that now, but I had just felt so empty. They were both leaving me and would now be together, playing BDSM Barbie and Ken in their perfect little house, and their perfect little life.

'I don't know about that,' Bella had said, so quietly that I almost didn't hear.

'What do you mean?' I asked and sat down at the kitchen table with my head in my hands. I wasn't in the mood for her epiphany. I just wanted to crawl back in bed and stay there.

'I think Jasper would rather have you go with him to Chicago than me.' I remember being exasperated at that point, with little understanding as to why. I didn't say anything. There was nothing I could say.

'I think – ' she started, and then after a long pause, continued. *'I think Jasper is in love with you, Edward.'*

NO.

That couldn't be it, at all.

I wasn't gay – I couldn't be. I'd fucking kick his ass if he said anything like that to me. He would have to know that there was no future with me. I couldn't give him what he wanted. Even if I were ... gay, I'm not capable of that kind of romantic attachment. It would be a fucking waste of his time.

And there it was.

I remember the feeling of dread starting to life at her words, but then I really didn't understand why.

Now, I do.

The dread lifted until I heard him confess his feelings for her in his own playroom. Then, the dread, and everything else, came crashing down on top of me.

But what the fuck does this mean?

I thought back to what Bella had told me when we talked about Jasper just a few weeks ago. What was it that she had said? 'Yearning for someone who's in love with someone else is the fastest way to a broken heart'? Now, I have to wonder if she wasn't talking about herself.

That she was in love with someone who was in love with another. Even after all that time?

Then, I remembered how Jasper was when he showed up after my session with Jane. He was so passionate about helping me, so determined. When he cared for me physically – both during the shower and after, he was very ... loving. Bella had an infallible gift for reading people. Was she right about Jasper? What difference did it make now? He is obviously devastated over Bella's death. Whatever Bella thought about his feelings for me, they obviously changed into feelings for her. What kind of pain was I looking at if I went ahead and followed him to Washington?

Why would I do that to myself?

Because I'm in love with him.

I don't know what caused me to come to this conclusion when I did. It seems like it was always there within me, just below the surface. Watching Bella, my best friend, die in front of me, it blew apart the final remnant of that wall inside me. It stripped me, reducing me to my most primal self. I didn't think that was possible. But now, with nothing separating Edward Cullen from Edward Masen – the two have merged into a single man.

I was the boy on the milk carton.

I was the tortured soul.

I was the doctor.

I was the Master.

I am Edward Anthony Masen Cullen.

Now, I am all of them. Bella, more than anyone else, would have been proud of this development. She was the one who had encouraged me from the beginning to find that boy in the box, to find Edward Masen, the abomination that I had hidden so deep inside of myself that I hoped never to find him.

But now I have.

Now, he is a part of me – something that hasn't happened since college.

It's taken the weeks since Bella's death for me to realize this, to understand this. Since I haven't been spending time with Mike, and Jasper has been virtually silent, I have had a lot of time to analyze myself. I have finally found a single self. Now, I am just left with questions that I can't answer yet. Where do I go from here? Am I still the Dom? Am I still the doctor? Do I want to walk back into Edward Cullen's life? What will happen when I do?

I miss Bella so much.

I closed my journal and set the pen on top, steeling myself for what I was about to do. Taking a deep breath, I pushed away from my desk and stood up. Then, I walked through my bedroom door and down the hall to where he was. I could hear him moving and shifting things while I wrote in my journal. A few times, I think I even heard him throwing things. I knocked lightly on the doorframe and he looked up from the box he was packing, even though he could have just left everything here, and bought new stuff in Washington. It wasn't about the money though, he was trying to find something to occupy his mind until he could get out of here.

He looked fairly disheveled, his hair in his eyes, a light sheen of sweat on his face and arms from working so diligently. A look of hope passed across his face as his eyes met mine. I held his gaze for just a moment before I nodded, my silent indication that I would leave with him. He dropped the box he was holding and made his way over to me. I was fairly surprised when he threw himself at me, wrapping his arms around my shoulders and burying his face in my neck. Hesitantly, I wrapped my arms around his waist.

We stood like that for a long time.

Then I heard his soft murmur into the hollow of my throat.

"Thank you, Edward."

Chapter 27 – Heartbreak

"Hey," Mike said quietly as he closed the door, wrapping his arms around my waist as he kissed me softly just below the ear. I let him hold me for a long time while I worked up the courage to have this talk. He must have noticed that I was stalling, because he pulled back slowly to look at me.

"Edward, what is it?" he asked, far more gently than I deserved. I pulled him against me one last time, squeezing hard. Then, I met his eyes and wondered if I was about to lose my oldest friend.

"There's something I need to tell you," I said, my voice barely above a whisper. Then, I cleared my throat, steeling my resolve.

Why was I being such a fucking child about this? I'm leaving the state, he's my friend, and he has the right to know. I sighed softly. This is going to hurt him, and I don't want to be the one to do that. Although, he did say that no matter what I decided to do, he would always be my friend. He deserves so much more than just a postcard from Seattle.

Upon my admission, he paled, but let me into the living room. He tried to pull me down onto the couch with him, but I refused, wanting to stand. It just seemed easier to stand, to distance myself from the situation a little. I couldn't be wrapped in his embrace when I told him this, I just needed to do it and get it over with. When I looked down, I was startled to see the fear in his eyes. His body was tense, locked down, like he was waiting for some kind of attack.

I wished I could take it from him, the fear, the pain this would cause – but I couldn't. I had to just get through it.

"Mike, I'm going back to Washington," I said, and was immediately surprised by his lack of response. He looked almost *relieved*.

"Okay, I think maybe that's a good idea. You can get out of here for a while. You can get away from me, and away from him, you can have space to think things through."

I took a deep breath.

"No, Mike, it's Jasper who wants to go, and he wants me to go with him." As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I wished I hadn't said them. This was going to be so much

worse than I had feared. Recognition blazed in Mike's eyes, but he made a visible effort to keep his emotions in check. He balled his hands into fists at his sides, and took long deep breaths before he spoke.

"Why are you going with him?"

"I know we haven't really talked about this, but the reason I came to Chicago in the first place was because I was very depressed. Jasper and Bella had flown out to Washington to check on me, and asked me to stay with them because they were scared for me. If they hadn't, I don't know that I would be alive right now." His eyes widened, but he didn't interrupt. "Jasper is going through a rough time right now after losing Bella. I owe it to him, and to her, to be there for him – to help him as much as I can." I closed my eyes and took another deep breath.

I might as well go for broke. Opening my eyes again after a long pause, I looked directly into his face. "And...I want to go. I'm in love with him. I want to be where he is."

The anguish flashed across his face so intensely, it looked like someone had kicked him in the stomach. He looked away sharply from me, and I saw that he was fighting to keep his emotions in check. Finally, he looked back. He wasn't looking at me, but at the floor in front of me.

"How long?" he asked in a low, trembling voice.

How long? How long have I been in love with him? Years, I realized – but I needed to know that's what he meant.

"How long?" I prompted.

"Have you known!?" he said loudly, almost yelling.

"Since Bella's funeral. That's when I really understood what I was feeling." Relaxing back onto the couch, his tense posture loosened, his face contemplative.

"Edward, are you sure? Are you sure it's not just some knee-jerk reaction to losing Bella? You have had a real emotional time these last few weeks – maybe if you wait, just until you're thinking more clearly..." he trailed off. Something in my expression must have told him I didn't appreciate his rationalizations.

"God Damnit!" I growled, starting to pace. "It's taken my whole fucking life for me to figure out what falling in love even was. Don't fucking tell me that I screwed it up now. I love him, I can feel it." Putting my hand up to my chest, I continued, "The times Jasper and I have been together here in Chicago, I've felt it... HERE ... Every single time... No amount of time is going to – " I stopped dead at his expression. It was a look of pure rage. Then, it occurred to me what I'd said. I reached for him, but he jerked back, repulsed that I would even try.

"You've been fucking him while we were together?" He asked, and while his voice was low and steady, I noticed that his hands were shaking. Normally, his face was pale and open, but it was now tight and flushed; obviously furious. I couldn't lie to him, but I didn't think he needed the entire truth right now either, so I just nodded. "Since we made love?" I looked away, but nodded again.

He stood up then and he was trembling; but otherwise still for a long time. I didn't dare

approach him.

"Get out," he said finally, in a flat defeated tone.

"Mike, I – " I wanted to make things right, I couldn't stand knowing that I had hurt him.

"GET THE FUCK OUT!" He screamed at me and turned around, stalking up the stairs. After he got to the top, I heard his bedroom door slam, and then a thud followed by breaking glass. I closed my eyes at the sound. The force of the door slamming must have caused a picture in the hall to hit the floor.

So, I did what he wanted, and I let myself out.

As the door closed, I couldn't help but see that as metaphoric – the door closing on the last remnants of my childhood. I had just lost my best childhood friend.

* * *

When my mother opened the door, she could immediately tell that something was bothering me. Her brow furrowed, and she reached out as if to hug me, but rubbed my arm instead. We stood on the porch looking at each other for just a moment before she invited me in. I knew that she was waiting for me to open up to her, but I wasn't ready to talk about it yet. The pain of knowing that I would never hear his voice again, or see him smile, was just eating at me.

I can't believe I brought up my fucking sex life with Jasper.

I fuck up everything.

All I had to do was say that I was leaving, but I couldn't just do that. I had to hurt him, *and* in such a brutal way. I am a fucking idiot.

She led me into the sitting room and I sat down on the couch next to her. With my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, I just stared at the floor. I felt her rub my back with her small hand, trying to comfort me.

"Would you like to talk about it?" she asked softly and I briefly wondered if I shouldn't just go home. What if I screwed this up with her like I'd screwed it up with Mike? Could I make my own mother hate me? I certainly deserved it, but I had to risk it anyway. I couldn't *not* tell her.. Jasper wanted to leave in the next few days, and she needed to know.

"Mom, Jasper is not taking Bella's death well at all," I started, looking away from her. I couldn't see her face when I told her I was leaving. "He wants to go back to Washington, and he's asked me to go with him." She was quiet for a moment, and then with a deliberate motion reached over to hold my hand. I finally looked up at her.

"Do you love him, Edward?"

I nodded.

She squeezed my hand and then smiled. "Then I think you should go with him." My face must have betrayed my surprise, because she continued. "I saw that very first day outside the restaurant how much he cared for you, how he wanted to protect you from the world.

He cares about my son, and he makes my son happy – that’s all I could have asked for.” She moved closer and put her head on my shoulder, wrapping both of her arms around mine. “Just tell me that you boys will come back and visit once in a while?”

I pulled back just a little, just enough to extract from her embrace and pull her into a closer one. “I promise.”

“What about Mike?” She asked solemnly and I just shook my head. I wasn’t ready to talk about that yet and she understood. We sat there on the couch talking for a long time, talking about what might happen once Jasper and I got back to Washington, and about the likelihood of patching things up with Mike. We also talked about Bella. My parents had been at Bella’s funeral. They came to support me in a time that I needed them most, and it meant everything to me. It went a long way towards starting to repair our relationship – much farther than a few Sunday brunches.

As I got ready to leave, I asked her to say goodbye to my father for me, not that I didn’t want to see him, but he wouldn’t be home until late. She said that she would and pulled me in for one last hug. The tears in her eyes broke my heart, but she was right, my place was with Jasper. I didn’t know if I would ever be able to get him to see it that way, but I owed it to myself to try.

* * *

It had started to rain on my way home from my parents’ house. I loved the rain. It calmed me, soothed my nerves. It was exactly what I needed before I got home to face Jasper. He was having a hard enough time right now without my histrionics. When I got home, I walked past the kitchen where he was sitting the table and went upstairs. I sat in the bay window of my bedroom, with my head resting against the wall, just listening to it rain. The soft patter of the drops on the window was serene in its simplicity. The natural beauty of it contrasted sharply with the chaos in my head – the image of Mike’s tortured face in my mind as he screamed for me to leave. Hurting him was the very last thing I ever wanted to do. He had been such a good friend to me, supportive and caring.

He didn’t deserve to have his heart broken.

I did that.

My chest tightened, and my throat burned. Here, in the solace of my bedroom, alone in the dark – the tears fell silently. They fell for his pain, they fell for my fear, and they fell for the loss and the desperation we all felt in this moment.

A noise from the hall brought me out of my musings, and I turned to look. Jasper was standing there with his hands in his pockets, leaning against the wall. He was watching me with a look of such sadness, my heart skipped just a bit at the sight of it. He held my gaze for a long time, watching my tears as they quietly dampened my face. It looked like he wanted to say something, but he just dropped his eyes and turned away.

I pulled my knees up to my chest, resting my forehead on them, and waiting for the dawn.

Chapter 28 – Not According to Plan

As I left the volunteer clinic to head home, the last month weighed heavily on my mind. Even as emotionally retarded as I was, I knew it was too soon for our relationship to have

evolved into anything beyond friendship (or his grief and my support). The problem was that Jasper's emotional state seemed to be deteriorating.

When we first moved here, I would have described his emotional state to be upset but coping, now it was virtually non-existent. Just picking up where he left off, he had gone back to school to finish out his master's degree. It was like the last few years had never taken place. It was like he was trying to ignore that his relationship with Bella ever existed, like his arrangement with *me* never existed.

He went back to his bedroom on the second floor, and I stayed in mine on the third. As heartbreaking as it was to watch, I felt like I could do nothing to soothe his overwhelming grief.

I, on the other hand, had come back to Washington as a completely different person from when I'd left. Jasper and Bella had rescued me from myself. That broken, devastated soul devoid of hope had been replaced by one that had found love; that had *found* hope.

I held onto that light inside me during the dark times with Jasper. The worst of those times were when I looked into his eyes and saw the emptiness there. I understood that feeling all too well, empty, and dejected, like there is absolutely no reason for you to keep breathing. I never wanted for him to have to cope with that hollow, dead kind of existence.

Pulling out of the parking lot of the clinic, I sighed. There wasn't anything I could do about Jasper right now, but I wished he'd talk to me about it. Maybe if I knew exactly what was going on with him, I could help. Notwithstanding anything else that was happening in our lives, I was his friend. I looked up and noticed that one of the lights in the clinic sign was out. I'd have to have Jamie fix that tomorrow. When I came back to Washington, finding that I didn't have the same emotional baggage I'd had when I left, I called Dr. Patterson without any real hope of securing my previous position at the hospital. My emotional breakdown had left them shorthanded; other people had to cover for me in my abrupt departure. He surprised me though, by telling me about a free clinic where I could put my skills, and the fact that I don't need a salary, to good use. After I met with the director, and he was thrilled to give me some place to spend my free time – free time that I seemed to have a lot of now. The work helped to keep me grounded, and I found myself opening up and forming at least friendly relationships with the staff. I had mostly kept to myself while working at the hospital, but something in me had shifted. The change in my social habits gave me hope that maybe I was finally over that last hurdle in my recovery.

Now, if I could just help Jasper.

I pulled out my phone to see if he was interested in dinner. Maybe beer and a pizza would help relax things enough so we could talk. Usually, he just brought something home and ate in his room while he read. It's not unusual for me to go days without seeing him. Tonight I wanted to remedy that. I just... I wanted to see him.

"Yeah, Edward?" he answered in a dull monotone. God, he sounded tired. He sounded tired, and worn, and defeated, and my chest clenched a bit to hear it.

"Well, hello to you too," I said with a sigh.

"Hello, Edward. How is your day? Is it fan-fucking-tastic? Mine pretty well sucks," he spouted off, and I was taken aback. I think that was the most I'd heard him say in weeks. "Sorry." He sounded a little embarrassed by his outburst. "Did you need something?"

"I just wanted to know if you felt like some beer and pizza for dinner," I said softly, starting to regret dialing the phone. The silence on the other end wasn't helping that regret either. Finally, he spoke.

"I think that would be a fine idea. I'm leaving here in a few minutes, why don't you pick up a pizza and I'll get the booze?" he said, and it sounded like he perked up a bit. I was happy to hear it.

"Okay then, see you at home," I replied and after his acknowledgement, ended the call.

The conversation had made me hopeful. Maybe now he would let me in, let me know what was going on with him. I had a feeling it was now more than dealing with Bella's death, there was something else and it was killing me that I couldn't help him. Even emailing my mother didn't help, she said that he would come to me in his own time; I just hoped that time was tonight. It has been nearly two months since Bella's death. I needed to find a way to help him live again. Right now, he wasn't living.

He merely existed.

I called in a pizza on my way so that they could start on it, making it a large in the hope that it would last a while, and we would have an excuse to keep the conversation going. As I sat outside, waiting for the pizza place to finish it up, I went over a few conversation starters in my head. This was hard for me, as I wasn't used to having conversations with people. For the next twenty minutes, while I waited, I practiced and rehearsed what I would say to him. Finally, when my phone rang and I saw it was the pizza place, I was ready. I felt like I could have this conversation with him now. I stopped in to get the pizza and then got back in my car and headed home.

It was only a few minutes from the pizza place to our house, so within minutes I pulled up behind Jasper's car in the drive. Since I had to wait for the pizza, he'd probably been home for a while. I just hoped that he was still waiting for me in the kitchen, because I really wanted to talk to him. Balancing the pizza in my left hand, I opened the door. As I closed it behind me, I thought I heard Jasper's voice in the kitchen. I headed in there, but stopped dead in the doorway. Jasper was sitting at the table across from a full six-pack of beer, the pristine bottles unopened. In front of him, was a bottle of Jack and nearly half of it was already gone. Directly in front of him was a small shot glass, and a glass of what I could only assume was Coke.

Setting the pizza down on the table, I looked closely at Jasper. His eyes were heavy and a little bloodshot; his jaw a little slack.

I sighed.

So much for having a real conversation tonight – damn it.

I put a plate in front of him, placing a couple of slices onto it, but he ignored them completely, and kept drinking his drink. After my third slice and my first beer, his head fell onto his arms. As I watched, his eyes started to droop. I knew this would be my only chance to try and get him upstairs. There was little chance of me supporting his entire body weight up a flight of stairs. I had to get him to cooperate with me if I was ever going to make it.

"Okay, Jasper, how about if we get you to bed?" I asked, standing up. I'd leave the pizza and clean it up later, right now it was more important to take care of him.

"You want to go to bed with me?" he asked with a smirk, and for the first time in weeks, I felt that jolt of sexual need shoot through me. I couldn't help it, I grinned at him. He started to stand up, but swayed, overbalancing. I caught him before his head slammed into the table. Wrapping his arm around my shoulder, I supported him as we shuffled over to the stairs.

"Mmmmm... I like how you smell," he murmured and kissed my neck.

Fuck.

I was never going to get him upstairs if he kept coming on to me. I missed him so much, and wanted him so fucking badly. Grasping him tighter around the waist, we made it up the stairs slowly, taking them one at a time. Finally, I pushed open the door to his bedroom and pulled him inside. We fell onto his bed, and I slid down onto my knees on the floor to remove his shoes. He looked down at me, his eyes twinkling with the first light I'd seen in them in so fucking long.

"Hey, while you're down there..." he said, trailing off suggestively. I shifted, adjusting myself in my jeans, and finished taking off his shoes. Then I sat down on the bed next to him, and began to unbutton his shirt. He pulled me roughly to him, and without any kind of warning, kissed me hard. I was unprepared for the fierceness of his kiss and allowed myself to be pushed back onto the bed. Rolling us, I trapped him underneath me.

Somewhere in my mind, I felt a nagging suspicion that it would be wrong to allow him to continue. He was drunk; he wasn't responsible for his actions. Yet, it felt so good to be with him, to feel him touch me, kiss me. I stroked his face with my fingers as we lay kissing on the bed. My chest was close to bursting with that warm feeling, with my love for him. I moaned into the kiss, thoughts of stopping receding with the feeling of his hard body underneath me.

Breaking away from his perfect lips, I started to kiss down his neck. His head fell back to the pillow and I took my time going over every inch of his smooth skin. The glow in my chest had reached a fever pitch.

Should I tell him now?

He wouldn't remember anyway. Ugh, I just wanted to say it. It was right there. I moved my lips back up to his ear, but before I could get the words out, I heard his soft snoring in my ear. Pulling back to look, I realized that sure enough, he'd passed out. I sighed, and leaned back down over him, my lips just an inch from his ear.

"I love you, Jasper," I said softly, and pulled back, kissing his cheek gently as I moved. He was still sound asleep.

I sighed and removed his shirt and jeans, all of the urgency gone now. It took a lot of effort, but I finally got him laying down on the pillow. He lay on his back, snoring. As I watched him, it occurred to me that with the amount of alcohol he had consumed, he could vomit during the night and in that position, he could choke. I rolled him onto his side, pulling his knees up and pulled the blanket lightly over him. He smiled in his sleep, and my heart leapt. Watching him for a few minutes, I just cherished the peaceful look on his

relaxed features before turning to leave. I heard him shifting, and turned back around. He had returned to his back.

Twice more, I rolled him onto his side, and twice more he rolled back onto his back. There was no way I was going to leave him like that, take that kind of chance with him. I walked over to the desk and pulled his huge leather chair next to the bed, also grabbing the garbage can, just in case. I sat down in the chair, and put my legs on his bed, to watch him sleep. He looked so damned peaceful. I wished he'd tell me what was bothering him. All I wanted was to help him. He sighed in his sleep, his face turned slightly away from me now. I heard his voice, soft, but distinct, as he spoke to an unknown person in his dream.

"It has always been you."

Chapter 29 – Home Alone

When I woke the next morning, my back was stiff from sleeping in the chair. However, I still had my legs up on the bed, but now there was a blanket tucked around me. He must have covered me up when he got up. I wonder why I didn't hear his alarm go off. Shrugging off the blanket, I straightened up in the chair and the pain shot through my spine. Thank God I had the day off from the clinic; I was going to need it after a night of sleeping in this chair. Tossing the blanket onto the bed, I bent my knees to pull my legs down and was rewarded with a Charlie horse in my left calf.

My body ached as I walked down the two flights of stairs to the kitchen. When I came in through the door, I noticed that Jasper had cleared away the pizza and booze from last night. As I walked by, I saw the bottle of Jack, still half full, in the trash. Well, at least he was done with that. I threw together a quick breakfast of a bagel and coffee and went back upstairs. I had every intention of lying down and taking a nap when I saw my journal lying on the bedside table. I'd taken to bringing it in here rather than writing in my office because I felt more comfortable for some reason. My office was for work stuff, and Dom stuff, this was much more personal.

So, I sat back on my bed, propped up against the headboard. Positioning a pillow between my back and the wood, I took the pen from the table and opened my journal. There was something that had been weighing on me for a while, and I just wanted to get it out.

Journal Entry: Jealous Edward

Your face it haunts my once pleasant dreams. Your voice it chased away all the sanity in me.

I can't think of a better way to describe my current situation with Jasper than with those lyrics. He haunts me. The circles under his eyes, the way his hair seems to have gotten out of hand, the state of his clothes when he walks out the door, he's given up. He just doesn't care anymore. This goes so much deeper than Bella. Jasper has fallen into a full blown depression. I've never seen him like this. He wasn't this devastated when Rosalie walked in on us in the playroom, or when he received the check from his parents. He wasn't even this overwhelmed after the tragic death of his parents. Something else is going on with him, and I need to find out what it is.

As for chasing away my sanity, well that part was easy. I was fucking jealous. I was jealous of a dead girl. She had slept in his bed, she had made love with him, and she had his heart. Even now, in death, she had his heart. I think the first time I'd ever recognized jealousy as

a strong physical reaction was...oh, the boy. I had trained dozens of submissives, and played with countless different combinations, but seeing the affection Jasper showed that boy during his Dom training, that's when I really understood what jealousy was all about.

I had talked to Alice about borrowing one of her subs for Jasper's training. Of course, Felix immediately volunteered, practically begging Alice to send him. However, I got around that by telling Alice that Felix and Jasper had already played with Jasper as a sub. I wanted Jasper to interact with people that hadn't previously seen him in that position. That was partially true, but really, I just didn't want to deal with Felix. Once he found out that Jasper was transitioning into a Dom role, Felix had started fucking bugging me again about subbing for me. Alice had decided to bring little Michael instead.

I rolled my eyes at the pep talk she had given him when she dropped him off. Did he want her to stay? What the hell did he think we were going to do to him that she hadn't already done? After she left, I smirked as I saw him start to get hard looking at all of my equipment. I knew that I had more equipment than Alice had, just because of my obsession, my need for it. He looked around wide eyed for a few minutes and then Jasper told him to take off his clothes. Good. I wanted to see what Alice had brought us to play with. If I knew her, he was a little twink, but he'd have a big cock. She loved to watch them play with their cocks while she fucked them – the bigger the better. When I was her sub, I had jacked myself more than a few times with one of her toys in my ass. Just thinking about it made me hard.

The boy took off his clothes while Jasper and I did the same. When we were all naked, standing in the warm afternoon sun of the playroom, I checked out Michael. Yeah, he was a twink – smooth, boyish. I barely held in a groan when I looked at Jasper. Fuck, he was hot. He was looking at Michael, softly, affectionately. It made my insides burn a little. Then he walked up behind him, and spoke quietly to him. I couldn't hear what he said, but the boy's erection grew, and he whispered something back. I was starting to get annoyed by their display. Then, Jasper smiled at me over the boy's shoulder at me, it was such a sexy fucking grin, I couldn't help but wink back at him.

Jasper started teaching the kid how to give head, and I almost lost it. It was so fucking hot watching his soft, almost virginal, lips wrapping around Jasper's hard cock. The care and patience that Jasper showed the boy surprised me, and again, I felt that pang in my stomach, that jealous feeling. I pushed it down, and watched as Jasper's face started to tense, his voice strain as he continued to instruct the boy. It wasn't often that I got to stand back and watch Jasper when he was turned on like this. I couldn't deny that it was making me hard as fucking steel.

Jasper called my name, he wanted me to take over instructing the kid. I told the boy to turn around, open his mouth, and then I slid in my cock. Jasper grabbed a paddle, and a few other things that he'd need, catching the boy by surprise when the paddle landed on his tight little ass. I groaned as he yelped and whimpered around my cock in his mouth. Over and over Jasper paddled him, and the vibrations of his reaction to it around my cock were making me fucking crazy. Closing my eyes, I tried to hold out, but just remembering that look on Jasper's face from a few moments before drove me to the edge. When the boy whimpered again, I lost control and filled his hot little mouth with a groan.

Soon, Jasper had the boy up on his hands and knees and was deep in his tight little virgin hole. It was like my own personal gay porn, just watching them here in my playroom. The boy had resisted at first, but did not use his safe word. Now, I could see why. He was just as into it as Jasper was, thrusting his hips back as Jasper stroked him, whimpering each

time he was penetrated. Fuck, it was hot. Then, Jasper said something that just shattered my world. It wasn't that he had instructed the boy to cum, but...he had called him 'angel'. He called him my pet name for himself. I was fucking enraged. Unfortunately, it only got worse.

After the boy came on the hardwood floor beneath him, Jasper did something I never expected. He sat back on the floor and took the boy in his arms. I looked down and noticed the boy was crying. Jasper was petting him, holding him, calling him 'angel'.

Oh my God.

I was in love with him, even then.

That's why I was so upset when Jasper was affectionate with him. That's why I put them on the rocker, to punish Jasper for my insecurities. Then, when he kissed that boy, I lost all control. It didn't matter that the kid was there, it didn't matter that we were in the middle of a training session, I wanted Jasper right then. I wanted to show him who he fucking belonged to. He was mine. Pulling him off the machine, I pushed him to the floor, asking him if he thought that boy could satisfy him like I could. Then, I pulled his legs up and drove into him. While I took him, I kissed him hard. My only thought was to show him that he wanted me, and not that boy. As I kissed him, his body arched and he came hard against my stomach. That sound, that primal sound that he made as he came, forced me to drop my head to his shoulder. I could smell his arousal, feel the sweat on his skin as my own orgasm exploded through me. With that release, all of my anger, and my jealousy were gone – as if I had just marked him as mine and was satisfied in that. Then, I felt his soft sweet kiss on my neck. I kissed Jasper's forehead gently, reverently, and then moved my lips to his. Our lips met gingerly, tenderly as I stroked his cheek.

Fuck, why hadn't I known then that I loved him? When Alice came in a few minutes later, it was evident that she knew something was up. She fucking smirked at me as I pulled out of Jasper and stood up. Jasper and I started to clean up as the boy got dressed. Then, the stupid child asked if he could come back and play with Jasper again. I rolled my eyes and tossed the lube we'd used back into the bin.

Fuck, now I was hard, thinking about that afternoon with Jasper and the boy. Sighing, I put the placeholder ribbon to mark my page and closed my journal. I sat the book and the pen on my bedside table again and started to roll back, but opened the drawer in the table instead. I pulled out the bottle of lube I kept there, and laid it on the bed beside me. Since I was home alone, and already really fucking hard, I wanted to masturbate and get some kind of release. I hadn't had any kind of release in over two months, it just didn't feel right, but now I wanted it.

*I pulled my boxers down and off, and then my soft blue t-shirt, throwing them to the side of the bed so I could put them back on when I was finished. Now I was naked, and hard, lying in the middle of my bed. The image of Jasper underneath me came to mind, but as soon as it appeared there, it was gone. Groaning in frustration, I applied some of the lube to my hand and began to stroke. Then an image of Jasper on top of me came to mind. *That* night. He had my legs pulled up and he was taking me, slowly, gently. Shit, I was so fucking hard now. I stroked my hard cock with long movements, trying to time them with the memory of his thrusts into me. Oh God, it was good. My hips came up off the bed, seeking his, but finding only my hand. Fuck, I wanted to cum. I let my hand drift down over my stomach, lightly, spreading my legs wide across the bed. Feeling Mike's fingers inside me in the shower had made me cum so hard onto the shower wall. I wondered if...*

My right hand continued to stroke, while my left found its way between my legs. I massaged my balls lightly, my head falling back against the pillow with the sensation. Oh yeah...planting my feet onto the mattress, I let my knees fall open. Stopping just long enough to apply a little more lube to both of my hands, I rubbed it into my anus and the surrounding skin. A low moan escaped me as I ran my fingers around the sensitive entrance, and I stroked my cock harder. My hips came off the bed once again, pumping into my hand as, for the very first time, I slid my middle finger inside me. Whimper and groaning, I pushed it deeper into my body, and my finger found a tiny area there that caused my whole body to tense when I touched it. I rubbed my finger back and forth over it, stroking the head of my cock.

I couldn't contain the cries that were forced from me as I rocked back and forth against one hand as I fucked the other shamelessly. My head rolled back and forth on the pillow, driving back into it. Then, as I reversed my grip so that my thumb and forefinger were facing the base of my cock, everything started to tighten. Fuck, I was going to cum, it wasn't going to take any time at all. My forefinger slid inside me along side my middle finger almost without conscious thought.

My orgasm ripped through me with a force that took my breath away, my back arched and flexed as my cum hit my hip, my stomach, and even my chest, but I didn't stop. It felt so fucking good. I just let myself ride it, wave after wave. Even after, when my erection had started to subside, and I pulled my fingers from my body, I stroked myself gingerly.

I wondered idly what Jasper would think if he knew I had just cum, fantasizing about bottoming for him.

Chapter 30 – Unexpected

The sun was starting to set when I woke up again. I was still naked in the middle of my bed, the lube lying precariously close to my side; had I rolled over during my nap, I'd have been wearing it. I had swiped my t-shirt across my stomach and chest to clean up the mess before I fell asleep, but I still felt like I needed a shower. So, after five more minutes, I got up, tossing the lube back into the drawer, and went into the bathroom. It felt good to be back in my own room, in my own bathroom. Jasper's house was beautiful, but I felt more settled here. Even with the odd tension between us, I knew that this was where I belonged – because I was the master of this domicile.

The hot spray felt good, working through the kinks in my neck and back and by the time I was ready to turn the water off, I felt human again. I was still rather surprised by the fantasy I'd had earlier as I don't think I'd ever once fantasized about being taken by a man. Even when I had thought about other guys, I had always been the top. With Jasper, it seemed to be different.

It felt...liberating.

Of course, I would still classify myself undoubtedly as a top, but every once in a while, I could see myself bottoming for *him*. Well, assuming we ever had that kind of relationship again. Sighing softly, I grabbed a towel off of the rack. Jasper and I really needed to talk, if not about what's going on between us, then at least what's going on with him. Maybe tonight I'd make dinner for the two of us... and hide the wine.

It was nearly nine o'clock by the time Jasper finally came home. I didn't know if he was

avoiding me because of his behavior last night, or if he'd just been held up at school, but I suspected it was the former. Having given up on dinner hours before, just settling on a bowl of cereal, I had sat at the kitchen table and waited for him. It hurt that he'd stayed away. The house felt empty without him here.

Now, as he walked by, I called out to him.

"Jasper, can we talk?" I asked with more assurance than I felt.

"Edward, I'm really tired, can we talk later?" he replied quietly. I started to protest, but he really did look tired; his posture, his eyes, his slow gait, all made him look downright exhausted. I lowered my head and nodded, and heard him trudge up the stairs.

* * *

Journal Entry – Alone

But though you're still with me, I've been alone.

All alone.

Three weeks.

Two days.

It's been three weeks and two days since Jasper has spoken to me. That night of drunken kissing was all but forgotten now. He hadn't touched another drop of alcohol far as I knew, but he had avoided me as well. I couldn't deny that it hurt, the loneliness that I now felt. The one person in the world that I most wanted to talk to now acted like I didn't exist. I had no other friends. Mike hated me and with good reason. My Bella was gone. I had no one. That emptiness resonated through me. I felt it in every fiber of my being, and to be honest, it was exhausting. It was an effort just to try and stay positive in order to attempt to help him, even though I didn't think I was making any progress. I knew I couldn't help him if I was depressed too, however I was having a hard time keeping up that façade. Every instinct in me told me that I should just give up, just fold in on myself and go back to being that shell of a man.

That was something that I was fighting hard against.

I didn't want to be him anymore.

* * *

Until today, I had rarely seen Jasper, aside from fleeting glances as we passed in the house.

Today, I heard him well before I saw him.

As soon as I unlocked the door after coming home from my shift at the clinic, I heard low sobbing in the front room. Making my way in there quickly, I found Jasper on his knees, tears streaming down his tortured face. There was a torn box with packaging foam lying beside him, and he was holding some kind of frame. His hands were shaking as he held it, and his eyes were wild. He was rocking slightly as he looked at it, as if he were trying to comfort himself.

Oh, God...it was Bella's diploma.

Rosalie must have gotten it at Jasper's house and forwarded it. I walked over and picked up the shipping box, and sure enough, Bella's name and the Chicago address had been crossed out with Jasper's name and our Washington address to the side.

"Jasper – " I said softly. He started to shake his head. I knelt down beside him, afraid to even take the frame from him, must less touch him to comfort him.

"NO! It wasn't supposed to happen like this!" he screamed and pulled his arm back to throw the frame, but he caught himself before hurling it, instead allowing it to land safely on the couch. His fingers went to his soft, overgrown curls, and he closed his eyes tight. "It should have been me! I'm the fucking monster here!" He pitched forward onto his elbows, his fingers still in his hair. I had never seen him lose control like this.

Ever.

"She was a good girl, she didn't deserve this. She was just starting her life. Why this? Why now? I fucking hate myself so much. I can't...I don't..." He kept his head down through it all, screaming at the carpet. I knelt beside him, trying to pull him into my arms.

"NO! I don't deserve your fucking sympathy! Take me upstairs, Edward. Fucking beat me until I forget. I can't do this anymore, please Edward. PLEASE!?" He had a hysterical edge to his voice now. "I want to forget. Make me forget the blood, and the screams. Make me forget her limp broken body. Make me forget how fucking horrible I am. Make me forget how fucking badly I want it to be me, Edward, please!" His sobs were strained, almost choking now.

"Come on," I told him, taking his hand.

"Thank you," he choked out, getting to his feet.

"I'm not taking you to the playroom, Jasper. You should know by now that it doesn't work. I am living proof of that." He looked up at me wide-eyed, his panic was starting to show through his devastating grief.

"Then where – " he asked, the tears still streaking his face. Reaching out a hand, I gently wiped them away, and then pulled him to me, wrapping my arms tightly around him.

I whispered into his ear, "There are better ways to forget."

When I pulled away, he looked at the hand that I now held out to him, and I could tell that he was apprehensive, but he took it anyway. I led him up the stairs; his hand shaking slightly in mine as we rounded the second floor landing. I squeezed it tightly because I was scared too, my heart was on the line here, but I couldn't just watch him hurting like that. If I could make the pain go away, even for a little while, I would do that – no matter what the cost to me.

Just outside my bedroom door, I pulled him to me. He was looking at the floor, seemingly fighting with himself; his face sad, conflicted. I reached out and stroked it gently and his eyes, so full of pain, met mine and he seemed to decide something in that moment.

The doubt was replaced with resolve, and while the pain remained, it was balanced by longing. Keeping my eyes on his, I moved my face forward, tilting my head, very slowly, wanting to give him ample time to back away.

He didn't.

His lips met mine, and any doubts that I had vanished in an instant. Completely unprepared for its intensity, I whimpered softly into his kiss. His arms wrapped around my waist, and when I felt his strong hand running up my back underneath my t-shirt, I shivered. I reached behind me and turned the knob, opening my bedroom door and we moved as one into the room. As we neared the bed, we stopped, my fingers gripping his soft hair. I moaned breathlessly into the kiss, my body, my arousal completely out of control.

I started to lower myself onto the bed, and he came right with me, never breaking our connection. As my head came in contact with the pillow, he was on top of me, his hands on either side of me, holding his weight off of me. When I was settled back, I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, and felt his body press into mine. His arms went around me, under my shoulders, cradling me like I was the most important thing on earth to him.

God, I wish I were.

He broke our kiss, and his lips moving to my neck before he rested his face in the crook of my shoulder, just holding me. The intimacy of the moment shocked me, as I ran my fingers through the back of his hair affectionately. I didn't know where this was coming from, but I sure as hell didn't want it to end.

His lips moved down over my chest, kissing me through my t-shirt until he reached the bottom. I sat up slightly as he pulled the hem up, and then pulled the shirt over my head before tossing it haphazardly onto the floor. My back arched, and I pushed my hips up into him while he moaned softly trailing gentle wet kisses over my stomach, moving back up my chest. Through my jeans, I felt his hand ghost over my erection, but he made no other overt caresses. It seems he wanted to take his time with this, and I was more than willing to indulge him.

I would have given him anything.

A moan bubbled out of me as his soft sweet lips wrapped around one of my nipples and I traced the contours of his shoulders with my fingertips as his tongue flicked over my sensitive skin. I gasped as he nibbled and grazed me with his teeth. The feeling shot straight through me, and without even realizing it, I let my legs fall open and pushed myself closer to him. He groaned quietly, and moved over to repeat the technique on the other side. By the time he finished, it was all I could do to fist his t-shirt and get it over his head.

My body was on fire.

Back on top of me in an instant, his hard chest pressing against mine, I loved the feel of his soft skin under my fingers. The touch was different from our sessions, it was intimate, and it made me feel closer to him than I had ever been. The warmth in my chest grew exponentially the more he touched me, affectionately, lovingly. Tonight was a turning point in our relationship. No longer were we merely Master and sub, roommates, or even friends.

Tonight, we were lovers.

Even though I held out even the faintest hope that this would continue for the rest of our lives, if it didn't, I would hold onto this moment for as long as I could manage.

As his breathing accelerated and his arms tightened around me, I felt him push his hips, moving them slightly upwards, grinding his hard cock against mine. Even through the denim of our jeans, the friction made me push up into him seeking more; my head falling back as he once again pressed his lips to my throat. My breathless moan did not go unheard, and he pressed hard into me again. I pulled my legs up, wrapping them gingerly around him, and his fingers tightened on my shoulders. His head fell to my shoulder as he moved his hips harder, faster. I could hear his labored, uneven breathing just a few inches from my ear, muffled by my shoulder. Feeling the wet spot starting to form in my boxers from my over eager erection, I rolled us so that he was on his back and I was above him.

My lips reconnected with his, and I quickly pulled a pillow under his head to hold his head in place giving me better leverage to kiss him harder. At the sudden urgency, he gasped into my mouth, pushing up into me, grinding. As I kissed him, I reached down unbuttoning and unzipping his jeans, my mouth never leaving his. He whimpered softly as I slid my hand down into his jeans and pushed up into my hand as I stroked him gently.

God, he was so responsive.

It felt like he wanted this just as fucking badly as I did. Crawling slowly down his body, I placed soft strategically beneficial kisses all down his chest and abdomen and by the time I reached the top of his jeans, his hips were rolling up into my touch, and his breathing was labored. I grabbed the tops of his jeans and boxers and pulled them both down in one motion before taking them down his legs, and completely off, tossing them to the side, and then spread his legs across my fresh blue plaid comforter.

He looked so fucking beautiful nude and relaxed on my bed, the head of his hard cock hovering just inches from his navel, I couldn't help but want to taste. Placing my palms on either side of his waist, I ran my tongue firmly from the base of his cock up over the head. It was obvious from his grunting and bucking that he was eager, so I took the head into my mouth, sucking lightly. When I ran my tongue over it and stroked his shaft lightly with my fingers, he let out a long, deep, open mouthed sound that made me shiver in its unabashed need. As I took more of his cock into my mouth, I reached down and undid my own jeans, sliding my own clothes down to my knees. I stroked my cock as I sucked him, the deep resounding, moans causing my lips to vibrate against his skin. Almost immediately, he began to caress my hair.

I pulled away from him quickly, just long enough to grab condoms and lube from the bedside table and divest myself of my clothes. Jasper and I had never used a condom before during sex, but after having been with someone else I wasn't going to take that risk.

Not with him. Not ever.

I took him back into my mouth, and poured a small amount of lube onto my fingers. Sucking him deep into my throat, I rubbed the lube inside of him, moving my fingers gently in and out, and he began to move his hips in time with my hand, soon driving up into my mouth. Quickly, I got to my knees and rolled on the condom. I had every intention of making love to him just like this on his back, but it seemed that he had other ideas.

Jasper held up a pillow and pushed me back so that I was sitting with my back against the headboard supported by the pillow. Then, he straddled me, and the look of sheer desire that

stole over his face nearly made me cum before I was even inside of him. I held my cock steady as he sank onto it, groaning as it was gradually buried inside of him. When he paused for just a moment to adjust his legs, and I took that opportunity to wrap my arms around his waist and he took his hands off the headboard and put his arms around my shoulders.

We were as close as two people could possibly be.

And then, he kissed me as he started to move.

It was like nothing I had ever experienced. The intimacy, the sheer emotion, the feeling of his warm naked skin against mine, it took my breath away. He moved slowly, gracefully, on top of me and I held him, kissed him as we made love. It was one of the most heartfelt moments of my life. There was no way to downplay the impact that it had on me.

Jasper once told me that becoming my submissive had irrevocably altered his life. I never understood what he meant until right now. This night would irrevocably alter my life; I just hoped that it would not destroy it at the same time.

He now held my heart in his hands.

Much too soon, I felt my body start to tighten. My pants and whimpers became louder and more pronounced, as did his, so I reached down to begin stroking him, and his head fell back as his hands went to my thighs to keep his balance. I didn't know if our orgasms were simultaneous, or if I just wasn't fully aware of when his started, but in that instant, we were one person.

I was his.

We rode out the almost devastating pleasure with my head on his chest, and his lips against my hair. I held him tightly against me even after we were both spent. It felt like neither of us wanted to lose the connection we now felt with each other.

But all too soon, we did.

I tossed the condom into the bedside can, and lay down. To my surprise, Jasper lay down next to me and pulled the covers over us. Without hesitation, I opened my arms to him and he lay with his head against my shoulder.

I stroked his hair gently and, for the first time ever, fell asleep with the boy I loved in my arms.

Chapter 31 – Confessions

I woke slowly, my mind trying to process the events from last night. Was it a dream? The fact that I was naked on the opposite side of the bed from where I usually slept was a good indication that it wasn't. Still, I kept my eyes closed and reveled in the memory of our lovemaking. I just ... I couldn't face the dawn, not yet. If I opened my eyes, and he was gone – even if he was just making coffee, that one insignificant rejection would break my heart. In my wildest dreams, I had not conceived of what took place last night – and now, in the harsh light of day, I found that I did not want to face his regret.

Just as I had decided that maybe I could open my eyes after all, I felt a warm hand drift

over my bare stomach under the blanket. Jasper wrapped his arm awkwardly around my waist, and kissed me lightly on the shoulder. My eyes popped open, and I looked over at him to find he was watching me shyly. I held his gaze for a long time, neither of us speaking. Then, he smiled. It was sweet, and soft, and a little reticent. I smiled back, and it occurred to me that I really enjoyed waking up with him. His hair was a wild mass of blond waves and curls, and his unshaven face had a rugged quality. He looked older to me, for some reason as we lay here in the sunshine streaming through the windows.

"Hi," he said quietly, and pressed his lips to my shoulder again.

"Hi," I replied, still watching him, almost afraid of what was coming.

"I need to tell you something," he whispered. I nodded; not knowing what else to say. Moving up onto his elbow, his other arm still around my waist, his face was closer to mine. I could see the emotion in his eyes. "I don't know where to start," he admitted after a few minutes. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"Why don't you start at the beginning?" I suggested, somewhat confused. I had no idea what he was about to say, but if he was hedging like this, could it really be good?

"I am grateful that you took me on as a submissive, Edward. I am thankful that you brought me into this lifestyle. I loved being your submissive. I loved serving you, and meeting your sexual needs. But, it's just not enough for me anymore," he said quietly, and my body locked.

Oh God, he was leaving.

No.

No, God damn it, not now.

I started to speak, but he stopped me. "Please, let me just get this out." My breathing accelerated wildly, but I nodded.

"Over the time that you were my Master, we grew close. I also grew close with Bella. That night," he sighed softly, "that night before I left for Chicago, I thought I had so many things figured out. I was wrong. I knew then, but I just didn't think you were capable. Then you met Mike, and I got so scared."

"Jasper, I don't think I'm following," I admitted quietly, still more than a little confused. Looking up into my face, he said the one thing I never expected to hear.

"I'm in love with you, Edward."

My face must have registered my surprise, because he immediately started to hedge. "I know that you don't, or can't feel the same way about me, but I just needed you to know. It's been killing me for months not being able to tell you, but after last night, I thought maybe..." He was cut off by the force of my lips crashing into his as I rolled to my side, gripping him hard as he moaned softly when our lips met over and over again. When we finally broke apart, he looked up at me, hope welling in his eyes.

"You're wrong," I said softly, stroking his cheek with my fingertips. "I do love you. I have for a long time, I think; I just didn't realize what it was until recently. I didn't think that now

was the time to – “ I stopped, and pulled back just a little. The one thing that I needed to know nagged at the very forefront of my mind. “What about Bella, Jasper?”

He sighed, and again, I got the impression that he had aged in just the moments we’d been lying here. The overwhelming feeling of weariness that came from him now brought back my sadness. Jasper’s eyes became clouded with pain as he thought about Bella. My heart hurt, for him and for me. I had to wonder with that level of ache, if our love would be enough to sustain anything between us. *Our love* – that sounded so foreign, even just in my own head. He looked down now, clutching at the blanket. This was so hard. Taking a deep breath, he started to speak.

“Bella knew. Almost from the time that she came to live with me in Chicago, she knew how I felt about you. After you started seeing Mike, my jealousy was out of control. I tried to hide it from her, because I didn’t want to hurt her. My little emotional outburst when I opened my Bella-present just intensified her feelings for me. She was so important to both of us, I couldn’t hurt her like that. Once it was apparent that you and Mike were going somewhere, I just locked it away. Of course, she still saw it. I had no idea until we were in the ambulance just how transparent I was. She told me to let you love me. She said that we deserved to be happy, and she was sorry that she wasn’t going to be able to stay around and see it.” A tear slid down his face, and I wiped it away gently. “She was such an amazing, intelligent, caring woman. She didn’t deserve to be lied to. I lied to her when I told her that I loved her like that. I just... The thought of being in love with you scared me so badly. I didn’t know what that meant for me as a man then, what it meant for you. I am so fucking awful, Edward. I should have just told her the truth.” I pulled him hard against me, and just held him. We lay like that, just holding each other, for a long time – grieving. Of course Bella knew, she was the most intuitive person I knew. She knew I was in love with Jasper, and she knew Jasper was in love with me. Why the hell didn’t she ever say anything? Was she just trying to keep a hold on him? No. Bella wasn’t like that. She must not have said anything for the same reason I never said anything about her feelings for him, it wasn’t my place. If I wasn’t so emotionally retarded, we could all have talked about this months ago and saved so much pain. I just... I wasn’t ready then.

I closed my eyes and stroked his hair, and he ran his fingers over my chest, they were absent movements, filling the time in which we could think of nothing else to say. Our relationship had just transitioned into something completely different than what it had been. For the first time since I’d known him, I felt shy and awkward with him. It felt like we were going to have to get to know each other again, to discover each other again in a whole new way, and it scared me a little.

“Don’t you have class today?” I asked him, looking down at his sheepish expression.

“I am not interested in anything that requires me to move from this bed,” he said, and then he must have realized what he’d said. His eyes widened, and I chuckled at the look on his face.

“Fine by me,” I said, rolling on top of him. He moaned and then picked his head up off of the pillows to kiss me hard. “If I’m right in my scorekeeping, I’m pretty sure it’s your turn to make love to me.” His shocked expression caused me to grin widely as I leaned down once again to press my lips to his. My whole life I had solved my problems with sex.

This, however, wasn’t sex.

It was something much more, and it would allow us to start that process of getting to know

each other on a different level. I knew all of the physical aspects of his body, but now I wanted to know how those physical actions translated to making love. I looked forward to spending a lot of time learning everything there was to know about him. To that end, we made love for most of the afternoon, stopping to just lay in each others' arms and talk. For the very first time, I felt like I was ready to have a real relationship with someone. It was only fitting that someone should be Jasper. Things were still a little uncomfortable, a little awkward between us, like wearing a pair of shoes for the first time. It took a while for the laces to loosen, and the leather to stretch. But, like the shoes, I was confident that after a while, he and I would be the perfect fit.

"Come on, angel," I said as the sun started to fade through the bedroom curtain. "I'm starving. All of this sex has worked up my appetite." He laughed, and I joined in. The talk from earlier had taken so much weight off of our shoulders. We were free now – free of the fear, free of the guilt, and free of the aching loneliness.

"Edward, is there a reason why you call me that?" Jasper asked curiously, his lips moving gently over my chest. Incredibly, I started to get hard again. I stopped his movements, trying to concentrate on his question.

"I call you that because you are my angel, Jasper. You walked into my life when I was a broken, empty, shell and you saved me. You and Bella saved me from being that terrified little boy for the rest of my life. You have no idea how thankful I am to you, both of you." He moved up slightly in the bed and took my face in his hands. Leaning in slowly, he kissed me very softly.

"I'm glad," he said with a hint of a smile. "I love the man you've become."

"I... I think I like him too," I whispered and his grin widened. He kissed me deeply once again before getting up, and pulling me to my feet. With a wicked smirk, he pulled me into the bathroom, and turned on the shower. We were still both naked from our afternoon in bed, so when the water was warm enough, we got into the shower together. This was an entirely different experience from the last time we were in the shower together. During *that* shower, he was still trying to save me from myself. Now, we were free to explore each others' bodies under the guise of good hygiene. I ran my soapy hands along every subtle line of his flawless body, kneeling to get his legs and feet. He returned the favor, and we spent the better part of an hour just getting more acquainted.

To move things along, we dried and dressed ourselves, Jasper slipping down to his room wearing just a towel draped across those perfect fucking hips. In just a few minutes, we were ready to leave. We took the Volvo and decided on a nice Italian place that we both liked for dinner. I couldn't help but wonder if we were just two friends out for a meal, or if it was a date? What the hell is the definition of a date anyway?

As we drove, I noticed that he kept rubbing his pant leg with his left hand; in almost a nervous gesture, like he was thinking about something. Reaching over I lay my hand on top of his and he looked over at me. I was about to remove my hand when he smiled at me, a kind of sheepish grin and I had to wonder if that's what he had been thinking about, whether or not to reach over and take my hand. God, we were like two teenagers fumbling through a first date. So, I decided that's what this was - *our* first date.

"So, is this our first date?" I asked, still a little reserved. I just wanted to make sure, for some reason it felt important to know.

"Hell yeah," he smirked. "I already put out, the least you can do is buy me dinner."

Even though we were a little hesitant with each other, it was comfortable, much more comfortable than my first date with Mike. I had a confidence in my relationship with Jasper that I never had with Mike. I had known that one day Mike was going to learn the truth about me, about my lifestyle and walk away. Jasper knew everything about me, our lifestyle, my quirks, my faults, and he loved me anyway. That meant everything to me.

When we noticed that the parking lot was packed, Jasper looked over nervously, and asked if I wanted to go somewhere else. I couldn't imagine the source of his hesitation. I told him that if it was okay with him, I'd like to stay. He nodded and once we'd parked, leaned over to kiss me softly on the cheek. Looking at him curiously, I opened my door and then stepped out. He joined me at the back of the Volvo, and I noticed he had his hands in his pockets. A slight twinge of hurt flared within me, but I pushed it away.

Once inside, the hostess told us, between giggles, that it would be about twenty minutes. After she handed Jasper a vibrating disc, and we headed over to a corner of the waiting area to stand as all of the seating was taken. As we stood, with him slightly behind me, I ached to touch him. I felt him put something in the back pocket of my jeans, but when I turned to inquire, he just shook his head and I noticed that he had once again put his hands in his jeans pockets. It was almost like he didn't want to touch me, or hold my hand. Like, he didn't want that kind of intimacy, that affection with me. We stood there for nearly twenty minutes, neither of us speaking. I started to get worried that we had lost something now that we weren't in bed. Was that all our relationship was going to be? I thought love was more than ...

Then, I felt my ass start to vibrate.

It caught me so off guard that I actually swatted at my ass before I realized that he had put the restaurant pager in my pocket. I pulled it out and turned to look at him, he was trying very hard not to laugh, and his smirk was just fucking sexy. Not being able to help myself, I leaned forward and pecked him lightly on the lips. He looked surprised, but smiled widely. I just didn't get him. Turning, I walked over and handed the device to the hostess who looked like she'd lost her puppy. Not understanding why this perfect stranger would look so damned disappointed, I didn't say anything as she led us to a table in the back.

Sitting across from each other in the high booth, I put my hand on the table intending to reach across for his, but he left both of his hands in his lap. Frustrated, I picked up my menu. When the server came a few minutes later, we ordered a fondue and a bottle of wine. He winked at me and said he'd be back in a jiffy. I rolled my eyes and looked at Jasper, who was looking at me speculatively.

"Can I ask you something?" I blurted finally. He cocked his head to the side, and nodded slowly. "Are you embarrassed that you're out with me?" The look of shock on his face told me that I was completely off base in that particular observation. Shaking his head vehemently, he pulled his hands up onto the table, twisting his napkin between his fingers. "Then why have you kept your hands in your pockets and shied away from any kind of... any kind of affection with me? Is this not where you wanted our relationship to go?"

"You want me to?" His voice was full of surprise, and he stopped twisting his napkin. "Edward, I have done everything I could *not* to show you affection tonight. I kissed you in the car because I just couldn't help myself. Keeping my hands in my pockets has been so hard when all I want to do is hold your hand."

"Then why – "

"You don't like people looking at you; I've noticed that often since we became friends. What's more attention grabbing than two guys holding hands?" he asked with a shrug, and went back to playing with his napkin. It wasn't that he didn't want to be affectionate, he was just looking out for me, trying to make me feel more comfortable. That warmth in my chest returned to a slow hot burn as I looked at him. It was such a sweet gesture. To be honest, being with him, being focused on him, I hadn't even noticed anyone else. I didn't care what they were looking at.

I reached across the table and took his hand.

"I'll risk it." I said quietly.

Chapter 32 – Falling Into Place

After a wonderful dinner of chicken Florentine and a bottle of imported wine, Jasper and I left the restaurant and headed home. We didn't bother with any pretenses holding hands from the moment we stood up from the table until the moment we were through our own front door. The looks received varied between friendly, and not so much, but I didn't care. I'd been stared at all my life – at least now they were staring at me for a reason that made me happy, holding hands with the man I love, instead of a reason that shamed me.

We walked through the front door and took off our shoes. Then, we were at a loss. A few awkward glances were exchanged between us standing there in the living room just feet from each other before he said, "Would you like to read with me?"

I was surprised at his suggestion, I had assumed he would want to watch a movie, but considering neither of us enjoyed television much, this was a perfect idea.

"Do you mean like, read over your shoulder or lie with my head in your lap while you read to me?" I grinned, teasing him, pleased that the atmosphere had relaxed.

"No," he remarked with a smirk as he pulled his iPod from his book bag on a nearby table. "I downloaded a book the other day, and I thought maybe you'd like to read it with me," he answered almost self-deprecatingly.

"I'd love that," I told him honestly. It was an excuse to spend more time with him doing something that we both loved. "What is it about?" After straightening out his headphones, he finally handed me one of the ear pieces.

"The summary says 'Slash: Edward is an unabashed pleasure-seeker, one of the club kings of the Seattle gay community. One night at his favorite club, he meets an enigmatic man who rocks the world he has created. JxE AH AU Rated M for language and explicit lemonsplotions.' I'm not sure what a lemonsplotion is, but it sounds like fun." He patted the couch in front of him, and I sat down, leaning back into him. I put the ear bud in, and then rested my head back against his shoulder. As we listened to the narrator's voice coming from the iPod, he slid his arm around my waist. I moved my hand up to hold onto his, and we just stayed like that, listening. Every so often, he would kiss the top of my head, or lean forward to kiss my neck. It wasn't anything sexual, just loving. I closed my eyes, reveling in his touch. It was perfect, simply perfect to be in his arms like this and I wouldn't have traded it for anything. For the first time in a long time, I wasn't hurting.

It was nearly eleven by the time we got through the first few chapters, and I tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn. Chuckling, into my hair; he stopped his iPod and took my ear bud from me. With a soft kiss below my ear, he murmured "Time for bed..."

My heart rate climbed because I want to ask him to stay with me tonight, but I just can't find the words. Standing up, I head for the stairs, Jasper following me after tossing his iPod back into his bag. I walked slowly up the first flight of stairs, almost holding my breath as I round the landing.

When I did, he stayed right behind me.

My heart soared as he followed me to my room.

He wanted to stay with me, as much I wanted to stay with him.

"Oh, let me run downstairs and get a pair of pajama bottoms and brush my teeth, I'll be back in a few minutes?" He said, with an inquiring inflection, almost as if asking permission. It seems like he was just as unsure as I was, so I nodded and he smiled. I changed, and got ready for bed and by the time he walked back through my bedroom door; I was already under the covers – waiting for him.

I could absolutely get used to his.

Journal Entry – Conclusion

***When you cried, I'd wipe away all of your tears
When you'd scream, I'd fight away all of your fears
And I held your hand through all of these years
But you still have all of me.***

I have never really been one for sentiment. It's not something that has served me, or been of use to me in my life. I have never understood its purpose – until I fell in love. It was unexpected, tumultuous, and ultimately, the best thing that has ever happened to me. For the first time in my life, I feel like a whole person. Since Bella's diploma had arrived in the mail, it has been a little awkward, and a little stressful, but mostly, it has just been right. Jasper and I spent a lot of time talking, something we never used to do. It's almost like we both knew we needed to start getting to know each other on a completely different level.

Jasper explained his reasoning for being so distant after Bella's death. He felt like he had been stringing her along, keeping her from a real relationship while he tried to figure out what to do about me. He said he'd had feelings for me long before that last night in Washington. As we lay in the afterglow that night, he wanted to tell me but he was afraid. He didn't think that I could love him the same way that he loved me, or if he could even have a relationship with another man. He didn't know what his friends or his family would do if they found out about us and he was already having a difficult time with Rosalie, and what she had witnessed.

We also had draining, emotional conversation about the day Bella died. I told him how horrible I felt about the decisions I had made on Bella's behalf. It broke my heart to sign those forms and let Bella go, even though I knew it was what she would have wanted. Jasper agreed, and apologized for making it so much harder for me. I understood why he'd reacted the way he did. Perhaps if I hadn't been in control of the situation, the decision

maker, I would have reacted the same way he did. We didn't talk about the organ donation. I had made a point to find out where her donations had gone; not so much to what specific person, but where in the country, and the success rates. It seemed that only one of the recipient transplants was unsuccessful. That was a really good success rate, and I was pleased by the results.

The other hard conversation we had regarded Mike. That one was almost as hard as the conversation about Bella, but not quite. I told him, briefly, about my physical relationship with Mike. Jasper was intrigued about my experience in the shower and the smirk on his face told me he was filing that one away for future use. Then we talked about the emotional aspect of the relationship. How I wanted to love Mike, but something had always held me back. Now, I knew that it was my love for Jasper. Upset at how things had gone during our last talk, I wished there was a way for me to make amends, but I was honestly afraid of calling him and only making matters worse. There was nothing I could do, but wait and see if Mike's anger towards me dissipated. Maybe one day, we could try to repair our friendship. For right now, honestly, if I could only have one of them, I was happy to have Jasper.

That's exactly what I told mom in an email the other day. She emailed me to let me know that my abductor had been denied parole. I had never left a forwarding address with the prosecutors in Chicago, so they had sent the notification to my parents. This was the first time that he had been eligible for parole, and thankfully they didn't need me to go to the hearing, as they were confident that he would be denied. I'm not sure what it would have done to my recovery to be put in the same room with him again. The leering and sidelong glances alone might have been enough to send me into a hard tailspin.

I don't know what I'll do if he ever does get out.

Mom and I had emailed back and forth a few times about Jasper over the last few days. She was happy that it was working out. More than that, she was happy that I was happy. And, for the first time in over twenty years, I can honestly say that I am happy. She asked how things were going otherwise with my recovery. Was I making friends? Was I comfortable at work? How was Jasper feeling about things? It was almost like my first day in kindergarten. I had to laugh a little at the fact that I was nearly thirty and she was still in overprotective mom mode. I wondered if it was me, or if all mothers were as involved in their kids' lives. But, deep down, it felt really good to know that she cared so much about me, and that no matter what happened in my life, she would always be there for me.

I told her about some new friends that I had made at the clinic; Tori and Mark were the closest to me. Mark was the only other homosexual man that I knew, and I found his insight to be invaluable. He told us about some great clubs to check out, and places where we could be ourselves and still feel safe. There was a whole residential neighborhood in Seattle with bars, restaurants, and bookstores. Being new on the scene, he offered to take us out on the town one night with his boyfriend. The four of us were going to dinner and a club next weekend. It was the first social engagement either of us had been a part of in a long time and it made me feel normal. I think that one of the reasons that Jasper and I were hit so incredibly hard by Bella's death was our self-imposed isolation. If we'd had other friends, some kind of support system, we might have weathered it better. To remedy that, we were supposed to go out with Carlisle and Esme sometime next week as well. Carlisle knew of some new trendy restaurant owned by someone in our BDSM community. It had been so long since I'd felt like a part of that community, I felt almost embarrassed to go out in their midst, knowing that they were all aware of what I had let Jane and Alec do to me. Carlisle assured me that they all felt that Jane and Alec were at fault and not me. No one would mention it.

It was almost like now is the hour of our discontent. All of the things that had happened since I left for Chicago were being atoned for, and dealt with, except for Felix. He had taken care of my house while I was in Chicago, and I'm sure he wasn't prepared for me to come back in the company of another man. He had told Alice that he wanted to stay on and care for the house for me once I had returned. Apparently, he was devastated to know that Jasper had returned with me. I don't know how much he knew or suspected about my current relationship with Jasper, Alice and I had not yet spoken of it, but I'm sure he would not take it well. Carlisle was the only one in the community to know about my romantic affiliation with Jasper, as it would come as a shock to them because of my strict hard limit for men. In time, they would get over their surprise, and Jasper and I would return to our places within the group where we were both well respected.

I closed my journal, and set the pen aside. That was one part of our relationship that we had yet to discuss. I knew that he did not feel comfortable in a role as a Dom; that he preferred to sub. He said as much when we'd had our conversation in bed that he loved to serve me. I smirked as I took out my cell phone. Well, if that's what he wanted, I was about to give it to him. Typing in the message, I couldn't help but chuckle at what his reaction would be when he received it.

It's time to put your cuff back where it belongs.

Be on your knees for me in the playroom at 7:00

: 33

Mike Newton POV

The calendar on my Blackberry alerted me to the fact that today is Edward's birthday. I had programmed it into my phone that day on the beach, after the museum - our first date. My chest tightened a little at the memory. We had sat on that beach for hours just trying to get to know one another again. Well, *now* I know he was just letting me see the parts he wanted me to see. Apparently, I didn't really know him at all.

He had never let me in.

He had never opened up to me.

He had only finally reminded me when his birthday was after I'd tried for half an hour to get it out of him. I should have fucking seen this coming when he showed up on my doorstep barely dressed after coming from that house. Edward was gay, so I was confident Bella wasn't the reason he was barely dressed. It had to be Jasper. Of course, I hadn't press him to tell me, and looking back, maybe I should have. Maybe I should have found out what I was fucking getting myself into before I told him I that loved him.

I was such a fucking idiot.

I knew from that very first day at his mother's brunch that he was damaged. Fuck, we're all damaged, but obviously him more than most. I had thought that I could fix him. I had thought that I could make him happy. But, I had been wrong, on both counts. All I could do was give and give and give, and then get my heart broken. When he told me, well, let it slip, that he had been sleeping with Jasper while we were together, it hurt more than I could have imagined possible. I had never been in love before. It seems my first foray into

it was a complete disaster.

I would have given anything for him to say it was me that he was in love with.

At the brunch a few weeks ago, I heard that he and Jasper were just blissfully fucking happy. Edward was enjoying life, and was volunteering at some free clinic, but I never heard what Jasper was doing because Edward's mother stopped talking as soon as she saw me and gave me the horrific sympathetic smile reserved for losers. Every time someone smiled at me like that, I wanted to scream.

He should be with me. I was the better man. I was the one who was better for him.

But he's not, and I lost.

I picked up my wallet from the table near the door and pulled out the battered photograph I kept there,

The edges were worn from the amount of times I had taken it out of my wallet. Slowly, I let my thumb glide over his face. The sting was still fresh, even though it had been months since Edward had chosen Jasper over me. I loved this picture of us. His mother had taken it in her garden. Thinking back, I wondered now if she knew, even then, that I would need something to remember him by.

Grabbing my travel mug of coffee, I walked out the front door and to the Jeep. I had to meet with a guy over at the Mercantile Exchange; they had finally replaced that idiot Yorkie with some hotshot from Seattle. I really hoped this guy had more brains, Yorkie pretty much screwed the Merc, and we were having a hell of a time getting things settled. As it stood now, it looked like we were far from reaching a settlement and the case would go to trial. Once at trial, the decision was up to normal citizens without a strong understanding of the facts, completely at the mercy of lawyer spins and half-truths. There was no predicting which way it would go then. We had worked put in a lot of time and effort on this case, and I didn't want to see it blown by an incompetent trader.

I pulled into the garage using the pass that the Exchange had given me and found a spot near the door. Well, maybe today was finally looking up. God, I should be so lucky. Leaving my empty coffee cup in the cup holder, I grabbed my briefcase and headed towards the elevators.

It was then that I saw him.

He was trying, and failing, to balance a box on the back bumper of his car when it hit the ground and the contents went spilling over the cement floor behind his parking space. I hesitated, undecided between not wanting to be late and not leaving the man struggling with his boxes in the parking garage. Sighing, I put the strap of my case over my opposite shoulder so it wouldn't slip, and headed over to him. I picked up the fallen box, and started putting his stuff back into it haphazardly.

"Thanks, man, I appreciate it," he said in a deep, pleasant voice. I looked up, and his beautiful blue eyes were intense as they locked with mine, and in that brief moment, something passed between us. I couldn't quite define it, but all of a sudden, the temperature in the garage had jumped five degrees. In order to avoid meeting his eyes again, I focused on the stuff I was putting in the box. They were mostly personal items – awards from several prominent gay causes, promotional items, and a few pictures. One of

the awards was engraved.

"You're Jack Charles?" I asked in surprise, and he furrowed his brow and then nodded. "I'm Mike Newton, I'm with Newton, Stanley, and Crowley. You and I will be working fairly closely once you get settled." He sighed, and set down the box he was holding. I set my box on his trunk and looked at him curiously.

"It's nice to meet you, though now I'm sure you think I'm kind of an idiot," he remarked as he held out his hand for me to shake. When he took my hand, and I felt his warm bare skin against mine, I started to get aroused. I could feel something stirring in me that I hadn't felt in months. Not since Edward left.

"Please, call me Mike," I said holding onto his hand a beat longer than was really necessary. "And I don't think anything of the sort, it's an awkward box, it could've happen to anyone."

Together, we cleared up the rest of the contents, and I couldn't help but notice that he pulled off the corporate casual attire he was sporting very well, he looked beautifully put together. What the hell was wrong with me? Edward had tossed me to the side just a few months earlier, and besides, he is a *client*. Even if I weren't up for partner, I can't be messing around with a client. It's unethical, and I knew my firm at least had guidelines against fraternization with clients or vendors. I would do better to just concentrate on the work I came here to do.

The conversation changed to sports, mostly the Mariners and the Cubs, as we headed up in the elevator. He got off on the thirty-fifth floor with a shy smile, and I headed up to floor thirty-nine where the executive offices were.

It was time to go to work.

Chapter: 34 **Teaser from the final story in The Forbidden Room trilogy – Community Service:**

"Felix, how are you?" her voice cooed through the phone to me. I wasn't an idiot; I knew that she wanted something. They never did anything without a clear and specific purpose. Not only did she make my skin crawl, and I knew my Mistress didn't like her. That pretty much sealed the deal for me because I revered and trusted my Mistress.

"Fine," I replied curtly. What the fuck did she want?

"I have a proposition for you, I'd like your help." Yeah, that was likely.

"I don't really think – " I started, but she interrupted with the only response that would have made me listen.

"It's about Edward," I could hear her satisfied smirk even through the phone, but I didn't care. "I think I have a way for you to finally get what you've always wanted, Felix. What would you be willing to do in order to finally have Edward?"

"Anything, Jane."

Chapter: 35

Apogee (HoC Chapter 19) – JPOV

Someone who will care about him all the time?

What did that little prick know about it?

I was in love with the guy, *all the time*, not just when it's fucking convenient. It was threatening to destroy my whole life, I was going to crush Bella, disappoint Rosalie, and admit that I liked to fuck guys. All for what? A guy incapable of loving me back?

Golden boy hasn't been there for Edward in fucking years. He wasn't there to pick up the pieces; he wasn't there when Edward really needed him.

I was. Bella was.

Presumptuous little ass, I thought as he followed Edward up the stairs. Fuck, he was probably going to break up with him, and I couldn't stand to see him hurt like that. I knew the little bastard was going to hurt him. Bella tried to grab my arm, but I pulled out of her grasp, stewing about it, and headed up the stairs a few minutes later. I stood outside the door trying to gain my composure. Then, I heard laughing from behind the door. Things must not have been going too badly if they were laughing.

Maybe I should just apologize.

I sighed, and turned the knob.

The sight in front of me stopped me in my fucking tracks.

Edward was lying on his bed underneath Mike, his legs wrapped around the guy's waist.

They were kissing.

My words died in my throat. It hadn't occurred to me until that moment that Mike and Edward were having sex. From Edward's reaction to our...our night together- I wanted to call it lovemaking, but I doubted he would see it that way- the way it took him back to that horrible time in his life. Never would I have thought he would ever want to do bottom again. That night, I had tried to be as gentle as possible with him, to show him how much I cared about him.

It was all a sham.

This guy was fucking Edward; there was no other explanation for it.

I apologized for disturbing them, not paying a whole lot of attention to where I was headed; I stumbled back down the stairs, and made it to my study so that I wouldn't have to see them leave. More than anything, I hoped that Edward would come and talk to me before he left. I don't know why that small measure of comfort would have been so important to me. Maybe I wanted to know that I was as important to him as that little bastard he was with upstairs. Sitting in the leather office chair, I ran my fingers along the polished mahogany desk, not caring about any of it. It was the finest furniture money could buy, but it could have been a folding table for all I cared at that moment. The only thing that meant anything to me in the world was him, and he was about to walk out the door with another guy.

I heard the front door open and close. He was leaving – without a word. Why? Why did I do

this to myself? Had I turned into an emotional masochist as well as a physical one? I fucking hate this.

Grabbing the first thing my hands came across, I hurled the mantle clock out of the open study door where it exploded against the hallway wall. Bella came running up the hall to see what had happened, her face registering first shock, and then pain, at the clock lying in pieces on the hardwood floor. At first, I didn't understand. What fucking difference did it make? I had more money than God; I'd just buy another fucking clock.

"That clock belonged to my mother," she said softly, the tears falling silently now. All of a sudden, I felt sick. I took off at a dead run, barely making it past Bella and the clock in the hallway and out the back door before I threw up in the bushes.

I was a fucking monster.

Nothing in that moment could have prepared me for my own self-hatred. I got on my motorcycle and sped as fast as I could away from the house, towards the lake. Things like speed limits, or even stop signs didn't concern me. Weaving in and out of traffic like a man possessed, I finally made it to Navy Pier. Parking my bike on the sidewalk, not caring if it was towed or even stolen, I walked aimlessly along the bike path. Turning sharply to my left, I walked until I reached the end of the pavement at the water's edge. I sat down precariously, blissfully alone, and dangled my legs over the water below.

Bella had to know how I felt about Edward; I wasn't exactly the best at hiding my emotions. At some point, it would be too much. My deception was going to break her heart. Would she leave? Would she go back to New York? I couldn't stand the thought of that. Even though I didn't love her in the way she wanted, even though I didn't love her as much as I did Edward, I *did* love her.

I wanted the three of us to always be together.

However, with my feelings for Edward, his lack of feelings for me, and Mike now in the picture, I didn't see how that could ever happen.

I was being so fucking selfish.

If Edward could be happy with Mike, I should let him be happy. I'd made my choice. In a blind fucking panic, because I couldn't face the fact that I might be in love with another man, I couldn't face that I was in love with my Dom, but most of all, I couldn't face that I was in love with a guy that could never feel the same way about me. So, I had made a panicked declaration to Bella.

Bella loved me, I knew that.

I grabbed a hold of her love like a drowning man. After my parents, and after the falling out with Rosalie, I needed to know that someone gave a fuck about me. Now, I just didn't know what to do. It hurt so badly watching Edward with Mike, like a searing knife through my chest.

I could see it all playing out in my head. Edward and Mike at mommy's brunch, holding hands and playing the token gay couple. Edward would fake a laugh at their stupid jokes, all the while staring blindly at his watch begging time to speed up.

Edward deserved better.

He deserved better than to be paraded out like some circus animal for his parents' amusement. Mike didn't know Edward, Mike wouldn't understand that Edward didn't like that kind of attention. I sat quietly seeing Edward in my mind in front of the all of those people, how edgy he would be, how off balance.

I hated it.

No matter how I was feeling about Edward, my natural tendency was to protect him. It made my chest ache to think of him being uncomfortable like that. Grabbing my phone, I made a decision. It was now just past five and I had to talk to Bella first, so I figured I better make it later rather than earlier. Hitting the keys on my phone, I sent him a text asking him to meet me in the playroom at nine o'clock. A session would help him deal with his emotions after being with all of those people.

It was just after seven when I finally got back home, and my mind was on planning the session for Edward. It took a few minutes for me to realize that Bella was standing in the doorway, calmly watching me with red rimmed eyes. I looked down at the floor, away from her face, feeling the guilt eat at me.

"Jasper, this has to stop," she said softly, her voice almost pleading. "It's not healthy for you, or for him. He is trying to heal, to find some measure of peace. Mike is helping him. You *cannot* fly off the handle when you see them together, no matter what you may think of Mike. It's hurting them, and it's hurting us." Letting out a sharp huff, she turned. Before getting completely out of the room, she added, "by the way, my mother's clock is still in the hall. You'll need to do something with that."

I heard the front door slam as she left.

Staring at the empty doorway, my heart hammered in my chest. I was screwing this up so badly. I was letting them both down. Pretty soon, neither of them would be able to stand me. I'd be alone, and I would deserve every bit of it. Just as I deserved Bella's anger, I deserved Edward's indifference.

I waited, huddled on the floor of the playroom for the time to pass, but it refused. There were no clocks here, and the sun had already set. Nothing was discernable with respect to time; I may have been sitting here for minutes, or for hours. My eyes had traced over every piece of equipment here, imagining how best to utilize it with him. Finally, they landed on the ottoman. That piece had been a gift from Edward, and it was one of my favorites. He had used it with me, and we had both used it with Bella.

I was deceitful.

I was manipulative.

I was out of control.

Trying to quell the rising panic building in my chest, I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket to check the time. Oh God, it was just minutes before nine. The panic took over, there was no way I would be able to Dom him in a session.

More to the point, I wanted to be dominated by him.

I needed to serve him, please him. I needed the structure, the discipline. Stripping quickly, I made my decision in an instant. My knees had just hit the floor as I landed in my position when I heard the knob turn.

Slowly, almost excruciatingly slowly, he made his way to me and knelt on the floor to look at my face. I couldn't contain the overwhelming panic, the devastating need I felt for him. Trying not to let my voice crack, I begged him for Master Edward. We hadn't had these roles for months, but I needed to give myself over to him now.

I felt his fingers in my hair, and I relaxed, closing my eyes. His touch always had that effect on me; he excited me sexually, yes, but I felt safe and comfortable with him. Tilting my face up to look at him, he asked me about the clock. I answered in a whisper, ashamed of my outburst. Then, he asked me if I should be punished, and I wanted to beg him, but I knew my place. I knew the game.

"If it pleases you, Master Edward," I said, almost calm under his influence. He had me stand and hold onto the bondage frame, and when I was stretched, it felt good to exert myself. Spreading my legs wide, so that more weight was forced onto my arms, I was almost hanging. Listening to him move about the room, I waited.

Then, I felt the sting of the flogger and was grateful for it. He whipped me everywhere, my back, my ass, my thighs, and my cock. I presented each in turn, almost begging for him not to stop. Then all too soon, it was over.

Binding my hands behind my back, he then tied my ankles wide apart to a spreader bar. I suppressed any sound of surprise as he wrapped his arms around my waist. Oh God, I could have stayed in that moment for the rest of my life and been completely happy, even if I was bound. I wanted to let my head fall back on his shoulder, I wanted him to kiss me, and I wanted him to make love to me.

It was eating away at me, knowing that he wouldn't. It would all be about the domination, about the sex, but I would have to take what I could get. After helping me down to my knees, he grabbed that damned ottoman and set it in front of me. Sensing what he wanted, I almost lay down over it, but I'm so glad I didn't because he poured some of the silicone lube over my cock and began to stroke me.

Fuck.

I could feel him behind me, and I tried to hold back, to stay still, but I just couldn't. After a few minutes, I started pumping my cock shamelessly into his hand, and when I felt him kiss my neck and I nearly came.

His voice was low in my ear, the nearly painful need he had for me evident, as he asked me if I wanted him to fuck me. Telling me that he was my Master, he asked if I wanted to please him and I nearly missed that small miracle when he called me *his* Jasper. I wondered, as my breath caught, if he really understood how true that was, that I *was* his Jasper.

After pushing me over the ottoman, he lubed my ass. Again, I shamelessly moved my hips pushing back against his fingers as my slick cock rubbed against the leather. All I wanted out of life in that moment was for him to be inside me.

And then, he was.

As he slowly entered me, the realization that our arrangement would most likely end soon spread over my body like a hot, wet, blanket threatening to suffocate me. I would lose even these brief moments of intimacy with him. He would not see our sessions as intimate, but in my desperate need for him, that was the only way I could think of them.

After all, it wasn't me he wanted in his bed.

Our one night of love making was just a failed experiment. An experiment in which I'd found everything I had never wanted, and he found ... nothing. My throat burned as the tears that had been threatening to fall all day welled behind my closed lids; my emotions were always so much fucking stronger during these times when I opened myself to him – mind, body, and soul.

When I let his name escape, I was surprised when I received no admonishment for it. Whimpering again as he drove harder into me, I felt my orgasm rapidly approaching. The muscles in my legs began to tense, the burning, tingling feeling in my cock and my balls grew more pronounced. Edward made me feel things that no one else had made me feel during sex...ever. At first, I had thought it was the submission, then I feared that it was just because he was a man, but now I knew – it's because he was Edward, and one day I would never feel like this again. I would never be able to have this intimacy with him. The tears streamed down my face as I heard him give me permission to orgasm. Trembling now with soft sobs as I rubbed myself against the ottoman, I tried hard to obey him and when my orgasm tore through me, I cried out as I came. I not only heard, but also felt him follow quickly. Turning my head, resting my cheek against the cool leather, I tried to get a handle on my churning emotions.

I failed.

As soon as he released me from my bonds, I fled, taking the stairs to the third floor two at a time in my haste. I did not want him to see how truly upset I was. Surely, he would ask questions that I did not want to answer, or even questions to which I had no answers. Once in my room, I flung myself onto the bed and cried openly. I cried for Bella, because due to my cowardness, she would never truly find love. I tried for Edward because though he deserved it more than any of us, he was incapable of finding love.

Then, finally, I cried for me and my selfish squandering of Bella's love in a fruitless dream of ever having Edward's.

Chapter: 36

Bella's Death - BPOV

Staying mad at Edward just wasn't an option for me.

He was closer to me than anyone on earth, even closer to me than Jasper. In the years that Edward and I were together, he had become my mentor and my friend. I respected him more than anyone I knew. He was kind and considerate, brilliant, and funny.

Edward was having a hard time dealing with Jasper's jealousy of Mike's affection. He had never had any kind of experience dealing with these sorts of emotions, and he was frustrated.

Hell, to be perfectly honest, I was frustrated too. The situation with Jasper was aggravating, and I just wish he'd make a fucking decision already. I knew that Jasper was in love with Edward, but I also knew that he loved me.

He couldn't have it both ways, and it was making me insane to be strung along like this. It wasn't my place to tell Jasper or Edward how the other felt about him. That would be like Edward telling Jasper about my feelings. Edward and Jasper should be the ones to reveal their emotions. I've begged them both separately and together to just talk things out. I knew that I would lose Jasper in the end, but it was better than losing them both, like I would if things continued in this manner.

When Edward and I made up in the garage, I felt like a weight had been lifted from me. The only thing I had left to worry about, other than school and Jasper, was working with Alice to find a caretaker for Edward's house. It seems that Felix had taken to sleeping, well, among other things, in Edward's bed. The little fuck was creepy enough, but that was over the top. Even Alice was a little disturbed by his behavior. She and I had become much more friendly in our common goal of caring for Edward. My devotion to him, both in the playroom and out of it, had impressed her. After we started talking, we found that we had a lot in common. My phone rang, and I knew it must be Alice. She was interviewing a new caretaker this morning, and had said she'd let me know how it went.

I never even saw the cab.

I wasn't really aware that anything was wrong until I heard Edward screaming. Normally, he is so calm, so in control, that to hear him scream like that scared me more than the pain.

The pain itself was blinding, actually even a little bewildering. I didn't know how something could hurt that much. Then, Jasper was there, holding something against my head, his blond hair falling into his wet eyes. Someone was telling me that I would be okay, and I didn't have the strength to argue. Realistically, anything that hurt like this was probably not something that I would recover from.

In that moment, when my mind started to disconnect from the horror of my situation, I wondered if this was how my parents had died. Moreover, I wondered how soon I would see them.

Edward was giving frantic instructions to Jasper. I tried to speak, to tell them both that I loved them, but I just couldn't find my voice. I don't know if it was the fatigue, the pain, or the fear that kept me silent. It might have been the fear, because I was terrified – of the pain, of dying, of never seeing Edward and Jasper again. My body was already starting to feel cold, and there was so much blood. It was everywhere, on Jasper's hands, on Edward's. If I turned my head slightly, I could even see it pooling in the street.

Edward's panic scared me most of all.

The pain intensified as I felt myself being lifted onto a stretcher. I may have even screamed, I'm not sure, but when I was unable to see either Edward or Jasper, I panicked, and finally, I was able to cry out.

"Edward!" I tried to scream, but my voice sounded weak and pathetic, even in my own ears.

"It's okay sweetheart," a tall muscular EMT said in a soft, soothing voice. "He's coming, and

then we're going to take you to the hospital. We will take good care of you. Just try to stay calm." Wildly, I looked around as much as I could with my head strapped to the spinal board like this.

Finally, I caught sight of Jasper climbing into the ambulance with me, the tears falling on his beautiful face. My tears started to fall then too, thinking that this may be the last time that I saw him. He sat down as he took hold of my hand.

"Bella," he said softly, trying to fight the sob that was threatening to escape his heaving chest.

Suddenly, the lights in the ambulance dimmed. I looked at Jasper, but he hadn't noticed any change. No, not the lights, my eyes had dimmed. I had to tell him before it was too late because I had a feeling that if I closed my eyes, they would not reopen.

"Jasper," I said, as loud as I could, but it was still only a whisper.

"Shhhhh...Don't talk, sweetheart," Jasper implored, squeezing my hand, his other hand resting on my leg, as if he were trying to hold me here with him. He was trying so hard, but there was nothing he could do. The mere act of holding my leg, or my arm, or even draping his whole body over mine would not stop what was coming.

"I love you," I said, trying to make sure he knew. Then, I held up one finger to silence him. I had to get through this. "Edward loves you too. I know how you feel about him Jasper, and I'm telling you to let him love you." His face registered shock, and then shame.

I wanted to tell him that he had no reason to be ashamed, that I understood, but I felt so heavy.

I slumped back against the board.

I was so tired.

I could hear Jasper speaking, but I couldn't understand the words. I wanted to, so badly. It wasn't fair that after everything life had put me through, it could end like this. Even if Jasper and I weren't meant to be together, that didn't mean that everything should end for me. It pissed me off that I had just graduated from college, I had my whole life ahead of me, and one split second of lapsed judgment would be my downfall. There would be no wedding for me, no children. Almost as soon as it had come, the anger faded, leaving a hollow, empty feeling.

Then, my eyes closed.

Elizabeth POV

I sat in the booth, where I sat every single time our circle of ladies wanted to brunch. Generally, I tried to keep up with the conversation, but today I was inextricably distracted. My son, the boy I have loved his whole life, was sitting just ten feet from me for the first time in over a decade. We had seen him at his college graduation, of course, but stayed well in the shadows so we didn't ruin his special day. Not that you would have known it was special by watching him accepting his degree. He was like a machine that entire day, showing no excitement, no relief, no joy, just simply...existing. It tore at me that even after all the time that had passed, he still wasn't living. I thought being away from Chicago might

help, that's why I didn't really argue when he chose to go so far away for college. That was only reason I was able to stand him being gone from us again. In his sympathy for us, the dean of Edward's college sent us regular emails on his progress – both social and academic. Over the course of his time there, Edward was an excellent student, quiet but extraordinarily bright – but had no social interaction with others. He spent all of his time alone.

Now, he was here on some conference, apparently having lunch with a couple of co-workers. At least he's starting to interact socially with others. That's a step in the right direction. I watched him and his two companions unashamedly, and was confused by their interactions. The girl, a pretty brunette, kept putting her hand on Edward's as she laughed. I felt a small stab of jealousy at this unknown girl because I had never been allowed to touch Edward when he came back, not even to comfort him. I'd had to wait until he was completely out to stroke his hair while he was sleeping. So many times I sat watching, helpless, as he fought his demons while he dreamed.

I was thankful that I was sitting to his side and not his back so that I could at least see his profile. I don't know what he would have done if he'd seen me, but this way I could at least see him. When he turned to his male companion, the blond whose back was to me, I nearly looked away so he wouldn't catch me watching. Then, something caught my attention, and I just couldn't look away.

There was a light in Edward's eyes.

As he laughed at his friend's remark, I saw a shadow of the boy I had lost. It reminded me forcibly of the night we'd received the call that Edward had been found.

I hadn't slept in eight years. I couldn't sleep. My body just shut down periodically because it must, but I wouldn't have called it sleep. More often than not, I was closer to the waking dead. It was on one of those nights when I lay awake, Edward snoring beside me, that I tried to picture EJ in his baseball uniform. The panic built when I couldn't remember the finer details of the little red and white shirt that he wore. My panic had started to accelerate into hyperventilation when the phone rang. I looked over at the bedside table and saw that it was nearly two am.

Oh God. No. Please.

I reached for the phone, my hand shaking so badly that I nearly knocked it off the table. Edward's arm slid around my waist, as he asked if I wanted him to answer it. I brushed him off, and held the phone up to my ear.

"Hello?" I greeted, my voice trembling. Please, please don't tell me that he's dead, please. I can take anything but dead.

"Mrs. Elizabeth Masen?" the voice requested. He sounded young, and nervous. They wouldn't have put a rookie on the phone for a notification if he were dead, would they?

"This is Elizabeth Masen," I responded automatically, and then thought to add "is this about Edward?" Please, let him be alive.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and then without hesitation, knowing that I didn't want to drag it out of him, continued. "This is Officer Harris with the Chicago police, your son was found in Fleetwood, Colorado –" I couldn't stand it, so I interrupted him. He hadn't said your son's

body, but I needed to hear him say it.

"Is he alright?" I asked softly, my voice cracking on the last word.

"Yes, ma'am, he appears to be uninjured. He landed at O'Hare about twenty minutes ago, and is on his way to police headquarters."

"We will be there in fifteen minutes." I told him after getting the address, and began to push Edward out of bed. He looked at me like I'd lost my mind until I said the one thing he'd been waiting eight long years to hear – "Our Edward is coming home." After I relayed the content of the conversation, he didn't need any kind of prodding. We threw on the first things we could find, and raced down to the garage. Thankfully, Edward knew exactly where the police station was, and we were there in less than fifteen minutes. I don't think I'd ever seen Edward drive so fast. Most of the time he buried his feelings deep, but it was clear, in this instant, that he was desperate to see his boy.

The steps to the station were full of reporters and cameramen as we nearly flew up them. They were throwing questions at me left and right as we tried to push through them. I just wanted them to get out of the way so I could see my son. Finally, one soft spoken woman told me quietly that Edward wasn't there yet. The police escort from O'Hare was still a few minutes away. Ignoring the rude men trying to question us, I made my way back down to the center of the stairs, and waited. When the vultures around me realized that I wasn't going to speak, they quieted, until we saw the lights from the motorcade bringing Edward. I waited, not very patiently, for it to stop in front of the steps, and for them to open the back door. He got out slowly, his eyes darting around him like a cornered animal. Once he'd stepped out, one of the officers closed the door with a slam, and Edward jerked and looked back.

They led him up the stairs to me, and as he looked up I saw that my worst fears had been confirmed.

My son was dead.

The light in his eyes was gone, and he was merely just walking. I stifled a sob, ran down the few stairs still between us, throwing my arms around him. He stiffened, and tried to back away. All of the flashbulbs started going off, and that's how they got their perfect image of a boy and his mother reunited. They had no idea he was trying to wrestle his way out of my arms. We were led into the station where they wanted to question him about his abduction, and talk about how he'd escaped. My son was sitting off in the corner, not wanting to be with the rest of us at the table. He had his knees pulled up to his chest, trying to make himself as small as possible.

After a while, an elderly policewoman took me off to the side. "We didn't want to talk about this in front of your son, but you're going to need to take him for medical attention."

"They told us he was uninjured??" I asked, scared now.

"Your son was held by a sexual predator for nearly eight years. It is possible that he could have contracted something, or need other kinds of help..." she said knowingly.

And there it was.

My boy, my innocent eight year-old boy had been raped repeatedly for years.

Of course, I knew when I saw his eyes, but to have it laid out for me like that was unspeakably painful. And from there, the pain only got worse. They allowed Edward to stay huddled in the corner as he spoke in a frighteningly detached monotone about his rescue of the small boy his abductor had tried to force him to take. Edward wouldn't, or couldn't, say his name, but he said he couldn't let another boy's life be ruined. When they asked Edward about his own abuse, and he had refused to speak. No amount of coaxing, threatening, or even bargaining, would get him to talk about it in any way.

After two hours, I told them it was enough, that we wanted to get Edward home. Just after five in the morning, we walked out of the police station under guard with our son by our side. Soon, we were home, and EJ looked around curiously as we went through the foyer. It was like our home, his home, was a place he had visited, but didn't quite remember. As we wandered from room to room, just my son and me, Edward went upstairs to find him something to sleep in. He was afraid that his presence might startle EJ – that anything was liable to startle him right now. When we walked into the sitting room, something, hope maybe, flickered across my son's face as his eyes fell on his piano. In an instant, however, it was gone. He sat down at the bench and very tentatively, very delicately ran his fingers along the surface of each perfectly polished key. I made sure to keep this piano perfectly tuned and polished, waiting for this moment when my baby would come home. It almost looked as if we wanted to play, his fingers bent slightly, reflexively as he traced the lines of the keys.

I laid my hands on his shoulders, as I had done since he was old enough to sit at the piano. Tensing, he jerked forward away from me. He must have heard my quiet surprised gasp because without turning around he said very quietly, "I...I'm sorry. I just...I don't like to be touched."

It made me hate the bastard that took him that much more. What could he have done to my son that would cause him to flinch like that at his own mother's embrace?

Edward brought down an older pair of sleep pants and a T-shirt for EJ to sleep in and I brought them to his room. He was examining a model that he and little Mike Newton had built the summer before he had disappeared. When he saw me, he dropped it back onto the desk and apologized.

"Edward, honey, this is your room," I told him quietly, patiently. "Everything in here is yours." He nodded and took the pajamas into the bathroom to change. I went to the closet in the hall and grabbed an extra toothbrush and other toiletries and towels. When EJ opened the door in the too large clothes, he looked like a lost little boy, shell shocked, and terrified. I handed him the stuff I'd brought him from the closet, and he made quick work of cleaning up.

When he crawled into his bed, the sheets still covered in rocket ships and planets, I asked him if I could stay for a while. It looked like he wanted to argue, but finally just nodded and then rolled over with his back to me, pulling the covers almost over his head. As he sobbed and whimpered in his sleep, pleading for it to stop, it was the first time in my life that I wondered at just how much further my heart could break.

My Edward, the man that I hardly knew, now swatted his companion's hand away from the check with a laugh.

My Edward had laughed.

I don't even remember the last time I had seen, or heard, that. Then, as he turned to hand the check back to the server, our eyes locked. Recognition dawned in his eyes, the eyes that were alive with something again. As we continued to watch each other, I began to rise from the table. Then, one of the servers passed between us, and the connection was broken. He bolted for the door, as if he were terrified to be in the same room with me. Choking back tears, I ran after him and out of the corner of my eye saw his shocked friends follow. I didn't care about them; I didn't care about anything except the fact that I had caught up with him; my son was only feet from me.

Remembering that he didn't like to be touched, but seeing that he let his companions touch him, I laid a tentative hand on his arm. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, and then opening them again, looked at me. I tried not to feel rejected by his attitude, but it was hard.

"Edward?" I asked softly, and he looked down into my face. I smiled at him, just as his friends came barreling through the door, putting themselves between us. In a way, I was gratified that he had found such caring friends, but I wasn't going to let him leave without talking to me. So, when they began to pull him away, I put my foot down. I wasn't going to let them take him away, not now.

"Edward Masen," I said sternly, and he stopped, still looking at the ground. For a moment, in my heart, he was that scared little boy again. The blond haired man said that I was mistaken, that his name was Cullen and they were from out of state. That floored me, like I wouldn't know my own son. I told him as much, and then I turned to Edward and I wanted to ask him how he was, but the first question that popped out was how long he'd been here. How long had we been in the same city with no call, no visit? How much time had I lost with him?

"A while," he said in an expressionless voice, like he was just trying to forestall the inevitable.

Oh my God, he'd been living here. He'd come back to Chicago, and probably never even thought about coming to visit us. What kind of horrible mother was I that my own son runs from me, avoids me? I tried to control myself by moving the subject to his friends. Noticing how close they were, I wanted to know more about them. How had they gotten through to him when no one else ever had? The blond boy was Jasper, and the girl was Bella. They seemed very sweet, and the boy apologized for defending my Edward. He needn't have bothered. I took my son's hand and asked him how long he was going to be in town. He hedged for a moment and then admitted that he wasn't sure, that he was staying with his friends and that he had stopped being a doctor. There was something wrong, something terribly wrong, and I couldn't let him leave without securing some kind of promise that I would see him again. My heart ached at the thought that this would be the last time we saw each other.

Searching, trying to find something, anything, to get him to come to, I recalled Sunday brunch, maybe seeing his friend Mike would help, they had always been close as children. I blurted the invitation out, almost begging him to come, even telling him to bring his friends since he felt so comfortable with them. If they were there, and we sat them near the alcove in the back, he might be more comfortable. I would have done anything just to know that I could see him again. Finally, he agreed, and he called me mom.

It was everything I could do not to burst into tears.

Not knowing if he would call and cancel, I thought this might be my one shot to tell him how I felt-I had to make sure that he knew, above all else that I loved him. I loved him more than anything or anyone else in the world. His face softened and I held my arms out, just like I used to when he was a boy, and then he stepped forward slowly and wrapped his arms around me. Kissing me lightly on the cheek, he whispered that he loved me too.

He loved me.

He hadn't said that to me since before he was taken, and I had been waiting nearly twenty years to hear it.

I watched as he and his friends walked over to a little Volvo, and then I turned and found my car. I'd call later and explain to the ladies where I'd gone. Climbing into the driver's seat, I made it just long enough for the door to close before I started to sob. My little boy had come home.

My Edward, my EJ, had come home, finally, after all this time.

Even if he did not know it himself yet, for the first time since he was eight-years old, I had my son back.

Chapter: 38

Edward Safewording - Jasper POV

Edward has been so uptight lately; I wished he would talk about what's bothering him. I didn't know if he was having trouble with Mike, or if it was something else. He just seemed so unhappy, closed off. Bella and I had talked about this a few times. I figured she had a pretty good idea of what was wrong; she was just so intuitive like that. She could see right through me, I'm sure. We'd talked a few times about the session tonight, and I knew she was looking forward to it. It had been a long time since Edward had been Master Edward with her, and I know that she missed it. He was her first Dom, and was important in her life. Even though she was in love with me, she would still enjoy submitting to him tonight. Then, after the session, he and I would talk, as he wished. I didn't know what he wanted to discuss, but I'm sure whatever it was would be easier if we were both relaxed. Nothing relaxes you like a good, hard session. God, I loved my sessions with him when I was his sub. I had really started to miss that lately. I missed the emotional and physical release I always got submitting to him.

Then it struck me.

I could give that to him. I could give him that release.

We headed up to the playroom, and saw that Jacob was already positioned on the floor. He was a good sub, but Bella was really more into dominating him than I was. Edward had told me once that I was a natural submissive, now I really understood what he meant. He had trained me as a Dom, but really I wanted nothing more than to be naked and on my knees for him.. Edward looked over at me for direction and I indicated that I wanted him naked on the floor next to Jacob. If he was gay and bottoming for both me and Mike, what I had in mind shouldn't be an issue..

When Jacob and Edward were both naked and kneeling, I walked over to them and told

Jacob to greet me properly. Like an overly enthusiastic puppy, he did just that, kissing from my bare feet up my chest. He stretched, craning his neck to reach as high as he could. I told him he was very good, that he had pleased me. Then, I stood before Edward and told him the same thing. He was less than enthusiastic. Distracted, he kissed up to just above my stomach. I could tell that something else was on his mind, and considered stopping the session, but now more than ever I knew he needed that release.

I told Bella and Edward to position themselves on the saw horses, Bella looked at me surprised, as it was supposed to be her and Jacob on the horses. I asked her if she was going to safe word, or get on the horse, I wanted to get started. Helping her position herself so that she was facing the other horse, I asked Jacob which one he wanted to work. Figuring he would choose Bella, because it's not exactly a secret that he has a thing for her, I was surprised when he chose Edward. It dawned on me that Jacob could not wield the paddle against Bella. I should have seen that coming, but I didn't. A little peeved that I wouldn't be the one to give Edward his release, I nodded at Jacob. He went back and got a paddle to use on Edward, while I stayed with Bella and Edward. Then, as Bella and I watched, Jacob paddled Edward's sweet tender ass. I got hard watching. Then, I saw Edward's face as he rested it against the padding of the horse. He looked bored. No, not bored, as his face came into better view, I saw that he was anxious, not bored. His eyes were closed tightly, and he appeared to be grinding his teeth.

He needed to relax.

I told Jacob to get Edward hard, knowing from experience that it would be easier on him if he were aroused. Jacob looked at me for a long moment; I couldn't really discern the emotions that crossed his face. He got to his knees and went to work. Edward kept his head down, but as I watched his cock get hard, I knew he was enjoying Jacob's ministrations. I tossed Jacob the lube, and he started to prepare Edward.

Several things happened at once then.

Bella started squirming on her horse; it looked like she was trying to get out of her bonds. She had the buzzer; all she had to do was hit it if she wanted my attention. So, I kept watching Jacob and Edward. Jacob pressed his hard cock against the soft skin of Edward's ass, and Edward moaned, pulling his head up to look at me. When he saw me, his expression turned from surprise into blind panic in an instant. I could not understand it.

Then, he screamed.

The sound tore through me. Instantly, my heart started to pound in my ribcage. He sounded terrified. I couldn't do anything, but watch. He was screaming, begging me to stop Jacob. So panicked by the thought of bottoming for Jacob, he couldn't even remember his own safe word. The words came out almost like choked sobs as he started to hyperventilate. The tears in my eyes at the heartbreaking tone of his voice clouded my vision. I told Jacob to go to his mat so that Edward would calm, but he continued to panic. Finally, I went over and cut his bonds away, expecting him to stay still. Instead he fell off the horse in his effort to get away from me. Me. He ran to the front of the room and started to pull his pants on. I could not understand what was happening.

I told him that I didn't understand. He was gay; he wanted to be with men. Edward had bottomed for me, for Mike. Why the hell had he panicked like that? Then, he told me the one thing that made it all clear. He had never bottomed for anyone else, just me. It crushed me when he threw in the term 'willingly', making it devastatingly clear that he was lumping

me in with his abuser. He felt that what I had wanted Jacob to do was tantamount to what the monster had done to him.

I felt sick.

I tried to call him back, but he was gone.

I handed the knife to Jacob to let Bella loose, and headed for the stairs. By the time I'd reached the bottom, he was gone. He had gotten in his car and fled. He ran, from me. Looking down, I noticed that his shoes were still next to the door. In such a panic that he wouldn't even take the time to put on his shoes, I couldn't imagine what would happen to him. Could he even drive, upset as he was? If anything happened to Edward tonight, it would be entirely my fault. I would not be able to live with myself.

Slowly, I trudged back up the stairs to make sure that Jacob had released Bella. As soon as I walked into the room she came over to me. At first, I thought that she was trying to comfort me. Then, her hand came back and she slapped me across the face..

"How could you do that to him?" I fell to my knees as she screamed at me. "He was raped for eight years, and you think it's okay to just make Jacob have sex with him? Is this because of Mike? You wanted to get back at Edward because you're jealous? I never thought you would stoop to this. I thought you cared about Edward." She never took a breath as she screamed at me. I just sat there, on my knees, taking it all. She was absolutely right. I had just shattered Edward's trust in me, and most likely our friendship. Now, I had nothing. I had absolutely nothing.

"I'm going to go look for him," I said softly, and she pushed me back.

"You are going to stay right fucking here while Jacob and I look for him. The last thing he needs to see right now, is you!" she yelled. Pulling myself off the ground, I went to the back corner of the playroom, the same relative corner where I had found Edward in his own playroom when Bella left. I sank down against the wall, the tears finally falling.

My God, what had I done?

I pulled my phone out of my pocket and tried calling Edward. I was pretty sure he wouldn't answer, but I needed him to know that I was sorry, that I cared about him. Oh God, if anything happened to him. The fear and guilt writhed in my stomach as I hit the speed dial. His smooth voice came on as the voicemail picked up. The phone hadn't even rung. I listened to his soft melodic voice as he went through the standard greeting. Doctor Cullen sounded so calm and sweet on the phone. It was strange the things that you think about when your heart is breaking.

"Edward? Edward, I am so sorry. Please come home so we can talk?" I said into the phone without any real hope that he would. First and foremost, I just wanted him to know that I was sorry for my horrific error in judgment.

Nothing.

He didn't call back; Bella and Jacob didn't call to say that they had found him. Nothing.

As the minutes turned to an hour, I felt like someone was squeezing my chest. The panic was just paramount. I loved him so much, I had only wanted to help him, and now he would

hate me. He would never speak to me again. I called again, almost aching just to hear his voice.

"Edward, we're all coming to look for you," I said softly. It was a lie, of course, because I was grounded to the house and unable to look for him. "Please just call one of us to let us know you're okay." I practically begged into the phone. He wasn't going to call me, I knew that, but I just wished he call someone to let us know he wasn't in a ditch.

I put my forehead on my knees and covered my head with my arms. Rocking back and forth, I didn't let myself give in to the sobs that were threatening to burst from me. Please, let him be okay. This is my fault.

Then, my phone rang.

I opened it without looking at it.

"Hello?" I asked, my voice breaking. I didn't care who it was, as long as they had news about Edward.

"Jasper, it's Bella. Jacob just called and let me know that Edward is at Mike's. He saw his car in front of the house, but he wasn't in it. He must already be inside," she said, and her voice was flat. I could tell that she was relieved that they had found Edward, but now her rage would turn on me.

"Thank you, Bella," I said quietly, but she hung up without another word.

I called Edward again, this time for no other reason than just to hear his voice. "Edward, Jake just called and said your car is at Mike's. I'm so glad that you're safe and with someone that cares about you. I'll call you tomorrow." I dropped the phone onto the floor beside me, and started to sob in earnest. Now that I knew he was safe, I could focus on my own overwhelming grief. It could have been minutes or hours that I sat there. So absorbed in my own sorrow, I didn't hear the door open and was unaware that I was no longer alone until Bella stood before me.

"You are I are going to talk, now," she said, and I didn't even bother to wipe the tears away before I looked up at her. She sighed, and sat down on the floor next to me. "Jasper, this jealousy has to stop. You could have done irreparable harm to him tonight, just to assuage your own green fucking monster. He is my best friend; he is your best friend. How could you think that this would be okay? How could you think that he would be okay with being tied down and fucked by another guy? After everything he has been through, everything you have learned about him, you had to know that this would end badly. Were you trying to push him away? I don't understand you Jasper." I nodded. Everything that she had said was true. I explained to her why I had thought he was bottoming for Mike and my logic for everything else. As the explanation came out of my mouth, even I knew my logic was flawed.

When I was finished, she sighed. "I don't know what this is going to do to your friendship. I'm not sure he will be able to forgive." Standing up, she pushed my phone over to me with her foot. "You need to explain this to him and apologize. Oh, and from now on, I'm in charge in this room. We will transition Jacob to another Dom when we can, I think that you and I need to work on a few things."

Then, she walked out of the room, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

I tried to process everything. After this fiasco, Bella had to know about my feelings for Edward. Edward may not know, or understand, but I'm sure Bella did. I was also pretty sure I had just pushed Edward right into Mike's arms. He would never trust me again, and he shouldn't. My own girlfriend didn't trust me with a sub anymore. I had failed them, I had failed myself.

I picked up my phone again to make one last call to Edward.

I tried to explain everything, what I was feeling, how I only wanted to help him, and what Bella and I had talked about. Needing for him to understand, I told him that I was stepping down as a Dom, that I could not let my feelings or anything else get in the way of my judgment again. My sorrow, my fears, everything came out into that voicemail. It cut off just as I was begging for his forgiveness. I would have done anything in that moment for him not to hate me. I didn't care about the playroom or any of these games anymore. I just couldn't stand the thought that he hated me.

Then, I sat the phone down on the floor and waited. I had no intention of moving from that spot until I knew that the other half of my heart would be coming home.

A/N: This is also the auction chapter for Primrose Hill.

Chapter: 39

Jasper POV

When I walked naked into the playroom, where Edward had instructed me to be, my attention was drawn to the two bound boys. A bar was hanging from the suspension pulley, and one boy was bound by his wrists to each end by his wrist. Neither of them was really struggling, but they were both barefoot, clad in jeans and t-shirts, and blindfolded. It was then that I noticed Edward sitting on one of the nearby padded tables, waiting for me. He winked before walking over to stand next to the slighter boy on the left whose brown hair framed his face perfectly, and I found that I wanted to run my fingers through it, as Edward was doing. While he rubbed the front of the kid's jeans, he talked softly to him. Then, he moved over to the darker haired boy, and rubbed his nipples through his light t-shirt as he spoke to him. I couldn't hear what he told either boy, but when he moved back over to me, both had raging erections that were clearly visible through their denim.

"I have a present for you, angel," Edward said to me, his voice soft and seductive, his lips so close to my ear that his warm breath made me shiver slightly. "Their Mistresses said they could come and play with us for the afternoon. This one," he indicated the boy on the right, the a black haired boy, "came with instructions from his Mistress."

They were both beautiful, from what I could see of their faces behind the black leather blindfolds. Stepping forward to the thinner boy, I rubbed his chest through his t-shirt. The nipple piercings surprised me, but I kept running my hand over his chest. He relaxed slightly under my touch, so I leaned closer, putting my lips just an inch or so away from his ear.

"What is your name, boy?" I asked quietly. He inclined his face towards me, as if he were trying to see me through the blindfold covering his eyes.

"Nathan, Sir," he whispered. "Nate," he said quickly, correcting himself. Moving my hand up to his cheek, he pressed his face against my palm, but my smile went unseen as I backed away and moved to the other boy.

This one was slightly taller, with a stronger build. His black hair was short and straight, his complexion darker than the first boy. As I ran my fingers over the second boy's chest, he let his head fall slowly back and moaned.

Running my nose slowly up his neck, just barely touching his skin with my own, I murmured. "Tell me your name."

As he drew in a sharp breath, he pulled his hands forward only to be stopped by the cuffs. It looked like he wanted to touch me, but of course, he couldn't. While I waited for a response, I pinched and rolled his nipples under his t-shirt.

"Andrew, Sir," he said shyly.

Edward drew my attention back to the first boy. "This genius went onto the internet and talked about coming to play with us. He said we should 'make it good'," Master Edward said, whacking the boy's ass with a strap, punctuating each of the last three words. The boy cried out, and I told him to shut up. The denim was absorbing the fucking blows, just wait until we had him naked. We would make it so good; he might not be able to sit for a while.

"Strip the insolent one," Edward commanded as he went over to Andrew, speaking to him sweetly as I grabbed the collar of Nate's t-shirt with both hands. I pulled hard and heard not only a satisfying rip as the shirt tore down the middle, but also a surprised gasp from the still blindfolded boy. His now bare chest rose and fell rapidly. Next, I tore his shirt sleeves, destroying the t-shirt before it fell uselessly to the floor.

Then I noticed the tattoo.

A beautifully intricate design traversed the length of his torso along his right side from the top of the ribcage down into his jeans. Very slowly I traced the lines and curves of it with my finger, and he shivered. Reaching down, I unbuttoned and unzipped his jeans before jerking his remaining clothing down to his knees. His cock sprang up, bobbing lightly as I pushed the jeans and briefs the rest of the way down.

"Step out of them," I commanded, and he lifted his feet one at a time, freeing himself from his clothing. I grinned wickedly as he squirmed in his bondage, as if he could hide his charms from me.

He now stood naked before the Master.

Master Edward carried the leather flogger over to the naked boy and stood behind him. He winked at me before swinging the implement and striking the boy on the ass. Nate jerked, and emitted a low grunt as the pain radiated through his skin. The next three blows came in quick succession, and he was whimpering after the third. Andrew was trembling, assuming he would be next. When I went over to calm him, I touched his arms, and he jerked violently away from me.

"Shhhhh... It's alright, boy," I said quietly to him as I removed his blindfold. "Is that better?" Nodding slowly, he took a deep shaky breath, and this time, when I put my palm against his cheek, he leaned into it rather than away from it.

"That's it, no one is going to hurt you," I told him. "We are just going to have a little fun and then your Mistress will come to get you, okay?" He nodded again, this time with a little more enthusiasm. "You remember the safe word?" I asked, just to be sure.

"Yes, Sir,"

I turned around to watch Master Edward working Nate, his ass and upper back were now a nice shade of red, and he was hanging from his wrist restraints, shaking. Master had turned him so that Andrew and I could see better, and rubbed the boy's ass with his large hands. The boy moaned, and spread his legs apart, trying to get better footing.

"Get him down and strip him," Master Edward told me, indicating to Andrew while he started to untie Nate. I pulled the ropes binding the boy's wrists to the bar above his head, and he lowered his hands, still bound to each other. Surprisingly, he got slowly to his knees in front of me with a quiet, reverent, 'thank you, Sir' before kissing both of my bare feet. He held his hand up to me, and I untied them. Gratefully, he rubbed his wrists, still kneeling quietly on the floor. Learning over, I grasped the hem of his t-shirt and pulled it over his head revealing his tanned muscular chest. I had absolutely no doubt that he would be a beautiful sight nude, and I would find out soon enough.

"Andrew, stand and get naked for me," I told him in a stern voice. As he rose to do what he was told, my attention was caught by Nate, naked on his knees with his hands laced behind his neck. He was sucking Master Edward's cock, for all he was worth, as it drove in and out of his mouth. The combination of his soft moans and noisy sucking sounds made me fucking hard.

When I turned back to Andrew, he was naked, and standing off to the side. He was shifting his weight from one foot to the other, obviously at a loss as to what to do.

"See what your friend here is doing?" I asked him with a smirk, and he nodded. "I want you to do the same, on your knees, boy." Quickly, he knelt before me, and with his fingers laced behind his neck, he took my cock into his mouth with enthusiasm. The strained groan left my lips without any conscious thought as his tongue ran lightly over the sensitive head.

"Have you ever sucked cock before, boy?" I asked him, trying not to blow my fucking load. God damn, he was good. Moaning, he nodded very slightly. Well, that explained why my fucking balls were tingling after just a few minutes. My head fell back as I grabbed his short black hair, driving my cock deeper into his mouth. "Yeah, just like that, take it all," I groaned as he took me deeper. He sucked hard, almost as if he wanted to suck the cum right out of me. The flat, rough of his tongue pushed hard against my sensitive skin, just adding to the sensation. Just as Master Edward pulled out of his boy's mouth, I grasped Andrew's hair, and pulled him back. Thank God, or I would have cum right down his little throat.

"I want to see them suck each other," Master Edward said with a sly grin, and I waited to see exactly what he had in mind. He left Nate kneeling where he was and pulled over a low platform covered in leather, but didn't look padded. It was about four feet square by about two feet tall. He called for Nate to come to him, and crawling on his hands and knees, the boy complied quickly. Forcing the boy to lie on the platform, he then called for Andrew. He made Andrew get on all fours over Nate so that Andrew's legs were on either side of Nate's arms, and Andrew's arms were on either side of Nate's legs. Then, Master Edward bound them in that position. He tied Nate's wrists to Andrew's ankles and Nate's elbows to

Andrew's knees and then continued to do the same with Andrew's wrists and elbows. We stood back and watched as they struggled, but there was no point.

"Well, boys, are you waiting for an invitation? Suck the cock in front of you," Master Edward instructed harshly. Andrew responded first, capturing Nate's cock in his mouth. He bobbed his head back and forth, sucking the boy as Nate tried to do the same. Nate was having a hard time capturing Andrew's cock in his mouth without the use of his hands. Finally, I took pity on him, and directed the boy's cock into Nate's mouth. Then, Nate made up for his failure by sucking Andrew enthusiastically.

It was fucking hot to watch.

There was nothing either boy could do but obey, bobbing, and sucking as we stood back monitoring them. Then, Master Edward tossed me a condom and lube.

"This is your present, my Jasper," Master Edward said as he stroked my hard cock. "Which ass would you like?" I looked back to the boys, and decided that I did not want Master Edward to have to kneel to take one of the boys, so I chose the one lying on the platform, Nate. Master nodded and bid me to remove his clothes, which I did gratefully. As much as I liked watching these boys trying to serve him, he was my Master, and it was my job to fulfill his needs. Quickly taking off my own clothes, I knelt next to the boys, my aching cock in line with the boy's ass as he lay on the platform. Master Edward stood behind the other boy, putting his hands on Andrew's hips.

Forgoing my own pleasure for just a moment, I watched as my Master slid his hard cock into the sweet black haired boy. Master groaned but it was almost drown out by the boy as he whimpered around the hard cock in his mouth. After preparing my cock for the boy before me, I slid it up and down between his soft buttocks, the head grazing his tight little hole, getting him slick for me. Then, I pushed forward and felt my cock penetrate him, slowly entering his ass. He was hot, and tight, and it just felt so fucking good. Taking his slim hips in my hands, I found a nice rhythm, and fucked him hard. I loved to listen to his little grunts and cries around the other boy's cock in his mouth.

Master Edward and I fucked the boys hard, and delighted in their struggles.

Very soon, however, I felt that familiar feeling in the pit of my stomach, and I begged Master Edward for my orgasm. He stalled, making me wait, making me hold out until he was ready. I recited every professional team I could for every city I could think of as I worked to hold off my orgasm. Finally, Master Edward was ready.

"Cum hard for me Jasper, cum on that pretty boy's face," he said, his voice strained. His cry was more akin to a growl as he drove hard into Andrew and held himself there. The boys had stopped sucking each other, and I could hear their cries plainly as I drove my cock hard into Nate. My grunts were harsh and animalistic as I quickly pulled out and tore the condom from my cock. Pumping hard and fast, I looked down and saw that Andrew had closed his eyes. That was good, because before I could speak, my cum had begun to erupt from my cock and land on his face.

The hot erotic sounds that came from Master Edward just drove me on as I continued to pump my cock with my hands in the boy's face.

Finally, I was spent. I looked down and saw the thick white globs of semen on his nose and cheeks and smiled.

What a good boy.

Presenting my cock to him, Andrew opened his mouth and cleaned me, licking every inch before I pulled out again. I was most impressed with his subservience; I had to remember to congratulate his Mistress on his training.

Standing, I looked to Master Edward and he asked me to get something to clean them up. Just as I got to the door of the playroom, it opened, and two beautiful women walked in. The first, had shoulder length brown hair and beautiful eyes, dressed in a black skirt and thigh high black leather boots. The other was taller with short auburn hair and a kind smile. This one, the kinder one, must be Andrew's Mistress, I could tell by her quiet authority. She was the one who had given Master Edward, one of the best trainer Doms anywhere, instructions on how to care for her submissive. I respected her for that.

I nodded to the women as I passed and jogged to the bathroom. It didn't take me long, and I returned with two warm, wet washcloths, and two soft dry towels. The women were teasing Master Edward about getting their toys all dirty while he untied the boys from each other. Nate stood and walked to his Mistress, waiting quietly by her side. Andrew, on the other hand, stayed on his hands and knees and upon reaching his Mistress, kissed her feet which were exposed by her sandals. She took the wash cloth from me, and carefully wiped his face while the other Mistress simply took the other and handed it to Nate.

"Jasper?" Andrew's Mistress asked with a smile. "Could you hand me that lube near your feet?" I looked down and saw the bottle she had indicated and picked it up.

"Were you a good boy for Master Edward?" she asked Andrew as he knelt before her.

"Yes, Mistress Trish," he answered, and the respect and devotion to his Mistress obvious in his voice.

"Very good, Andrew," she said softly, pulling him to his feet. She grasped his hips lightly to turn him around. She poured a small amount of lube onto her hands, and wrapping her arms around his slim waist, she grasped his hard cock in her slick fingers. After realizing what Mistress Trish was doing, the other woman followed, taking the lube from Trish, and asking Nate if he had been a good boy as well.

"Yes, Mistress Beth," he said softly, looking quickly to Master Edward who nodded, chuckling. She poured a little lube on her hands, and wrapping her arms around his waist, began to stroke his cock as the other Mistress was doing.

Soon, the room was filled with deep moans, and soft whimpers from both boys as their Mistresses stroked their hard cocks. Andrew reached his peak first, begging his Mistress for permission to cum. She reached down with the hand not stroking his cock, and pulled lightly on his balls. He nearly whined, begging her again. Finally, she whispered something in his ear, and he cried out, his head falling back onto her shoulder. Increasing her pace, she stroked him hard as his hips moved to fuck her hand. Releasing his balls, she grasped his cock with both hands, and pumped him while twisting her palm over the head. When she moved her palm, he came with wild cries all over our hardwood floor. Semen pulsed out of his cock as she continued to pump him, his body shaking as the last traces of his orgasm faded, and after a long moment, she stopped stroking him.

Turning his head slightly to the side, he kissed her lightly on the cheek. "Thank you,

Mistress," he panted, burying his face in her neck. When I looked over, Nate had cum as well, and was kneeling at his Mistresses feet. His face was pressed against her bare thigh, and she was stroking his hair affectionately. I walked over and stood next to Master Edward who put his arm around my waist and kissed me lightly on the temple.

Mistress Trish looked at the other women who smiled. "Well, Beth, it looks like we're the only ones in the room who haven't had the opportunity to get off today," she said with a grin, leaning over to take Mistress Beth's face in her hands, kissing her deeply. Something in me stirred as I watched their tongues dance lightly as they kissed. It was so fucking erotic to watch two women like that. Fuck, it was almost enough to make me hard again.

Mistress Beth looked down at her submissive on the floor and asked, "Are you boys ready to go home and please your Mistresses? You aren't quite done with your service today."

Chapter: 40

Felix as the caretaker for Edward's house while he was in Chicago - Felix POV

"You know that this is an honor and a privilege," Mistress Alice commented as she unlocked Master Edward's home for me. As I looked around the spacious living room, awestruck, she took in my expression. "There is a bedroom on the second floor that you may sleep in, and there is also a den on that floor. Clean the house once a week, and keep everything in order. Unless you are cleaning, you are not allowed on the third floor, is that understood?"

I nodded, still overwhelmed at being in *his* house, with his things, until he returned. "If you cannot do this, Felix, I'm sure that Michael would jump at the chance." She was just goading me now because she knew that I fucking hated that little prick.

Master Edward had requested Michael to train that fucker Jasper to be a Dom. *Michael*, the name even sounded sneered in my head, had come back from his session with Master Edward boasting that he had gotten fucked by both of them. I could barely contain my rage until I returned to my room. Why is it that he was allowed Edward's cock? I had been devoted to Edward for as long as I could remember. Why couldn't I have been selected?

It was unbelievable to me that I was here, in his house, with no one else around. God, I could learn so much about him while he was in Chicago on vacation. Of course, I'd heard about the whole Jane and Alec nightmare, and knew he wasn't really on 'vacation', but I'm sure that's another story entirely. The point was I could learn to be everything he wanted me to be, just like I was with Mistress. My Mistress knew of my love for Edward, which is why she allowed me this special privilege, knowing that I would be lovingly devoted to each and every task.

Once Mistress finally left, I went exploring.

The kitchen was beautiful, but poorly equipped. That would change when Edward became my Master, because I was a wonderful cook, and would take pride in serving him in any way that I could. Mistress loved my cooking. I would have to teach Michael before I left. As much as I wanted to be Edward's, my Mistress deserved to be looked after properly as well, she was a beautiful Mistress whom I adored.

Finishing with the first floor quickly, I bypassed the second floor all together. That is where I would be spending a majority of my time anyway; I could explore that whenever I wanted.

With giddy anticipation, I entered Master Edward's bedroom.

It was beautiful, and uniquely Edward. The dark hardwood, the blue tones, the stark absence of anything truly personal, it rang true to the fact that everything that was truly Edward was down in that room on the second floor. This was just the place where he slept. Running my fingers over the polished surface of his dresser, I scanned the room trying to decide where to begin. Noticing that the closet door was tightly closed, I decided to start there. I opened the door, and immediately the scent of Edward was all around me. My erection which had begun as soon as I entered this room, throbbed as I was assaulted by his fragrance. Looking through his clothes, I found a soft cotton t-shirt, the exact color of Edward's eyes. Quickly, I pulled it from the hanger, and ripped off my own shirt. His shirt was a little big on me, but it felt perfect against my skin. I wrapped my arms around myself, and hugged the material to me. God, it felt like pure joy.

The smell coming from the t-shirt was good, but I bet his body wash would be even better. Carefully, I removed the t-shirt and draped it across a nearby chair. Removing the rest of my clothes, I walked naked into his bathroom, excited to see that all of his personal stuff was still there. Apparently, in their haste, Edward's servants didn't pack any of his things. That's why I would be so much better for him. I certainly would have taken care of that, and anything else he needed. Sighing, I turned on the tap and let the water warm up while thinking about what Edward would look like, naked and showering.

Once the shower was hot enough, I got in, and stood under the spray letting it wash away any traces of Mistress Alice's essence, wanting to belong completely to Master Edward now. I took down his shampoo and washed my hair thoroughly, and then washed my body with his body wash. The smell of him made me excited, almost giddy. My cock throbbed again, but I refrained from stroking myself off in here.

I wanted to wait until I could be in his bed.

Finishing up quickly, I grabbed a towel from the nearby rack and stepped out onto the bathroom rug. I dried my short hair, and the rest of my body, thoroughly as I could, and then wadded the towel in my hand. Taking a deep breath, inhaling the remnants of the scent infused steam, I walked back into his bedroom. I could not believe that I had this opportunity; I certainly wasn't going to waste it.

Pulling back Edward's blankets, I climbed naked between his sheets and lay down, letting the towel fall next to me. His bed was soft, and cool, and my cock throbbed to think that Edward was the last one to sleep here. Rolling onto my back, I let the covers rest just up to my knees as I spread them wide. I rubbed the insides of my thighs before moving my hands up over my hips, over my stomach to my chest. Rolling my nipples between my fingers, I thought about being on my knees for him. Ever since we were in college, I've wanted his cock in my mouth. Each time I had begged Mistress Alice, she reminded me of Edward's hard limits – but since he has a male sub, that must no longer apply. As soon as I saw the blond fucker in the playroom, all of my fantasies about Edward went through the roof. He could do anything he wanted with me, and I would be thankful for it. I would even be proud to wear his brand on my ass.

The thought of being branded by Edward drove a jolt of pure sexual need through me, and I grabbed my stiff cock, stroking it hard. Fuck, I wanted to be bound to the metal rack in his playroom, completely immobile while he stroked me.

Oh God, he wouldn't let me cum, but I would beg so fucking hard. I stroked my balls,

imagining his hands on me. Thrusting up into my hand, I knew it wouldn't be long now. Fuck, I wanted to feel him inside me.

Rolling over to his side table, I opened a few drawers until I found what I was looking for, figuring he must keep a little lube here, most of the guys I know do. Getting up on my hands and knees, I put a small amount of lube onto my fingers, and ran them lightly between my buttocks. As I grasped my cock with the other hand, I leaned forward, pressing my face right into his pillow. I turned my head slightly to the side in order to breathe just before I thrust my fingers into myself. Crying out, I imagined him thrusting deep into me as I fucked myself.

"Thank you, Master Edward," I moaned loudly, thrusting my cock into my hand. Stroking myself with slow subtle movements, I tried to make the fantasy last. I grunted and whimpered, almost able to feel his hips slapping against me, almost able to feel his legs pressing against the backs of my thighs. Of its own volition, my hand moved faster. Fuck, I wanted him to grab my hair and asked me how I liked his cock in my ass. I wanted him to tell me I was *his* little bitch now. Most of all, I wanted him to make me beg.

"Please, Master Edward please may I cum," I whined imploringly to my unseen Master. "I need to cum, Sir, please." The pressure was building; he needed to give me his permission.

Fuck, I needed to cum.

Suddenly, he pulled out, and I grabbed the towel and thrust it underneath me. Just seconds before I found my release, I heard him tell me to cum for him. He wanted to see me shoot my load all over his bed.

I came hard into the towel beneath me, crying his name over and over as each jet of semen landed on the coarse cloth.

Finally, I was spent.

Wiping my hands and my softening cock on the towel, I threw it onto the floor next to the bed and collapsed onto my stomach with my face still pressed against his pillow. As I rolled onto my back, I reached down and pulled the covers up over me.

The last thing I felt was Edward wrapping his arm around my waist before I fell asleep.

The End