

Better Think Twice

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Better Think Twice by **tickledpinkstamper**

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Summary: Too much alcohol and a couple of drunken encounters at different times with different people normally doesn't make for twins. Or does it? Better Think Twice

1. Chapter 1

So, I've now crossed over to the dark side. I hope you enjoy my first attempt at this, writing thing.

I know and I know you know who owns Twilight and all the wonder within the bindings. Yes, that's right the 'Divine Mrs. M' and no I'm not talking about Bette. Although she is also wonderful.

I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my wonderful Beta Dollybigmomma. Thank you for making my baby flow you're the best.

I'm reposting because my wonderful beta has fixed the story and has added some new stuff to make it better for you, thanks Dolly!

Now without further ado I give you 'Better Think Twice' enjoy!

Chapter 1

Blue Ribbons and Ponytails

BPOV

I couldn't believe I let those two so-called friends of mine talk me into this.

Making me over was their idea of helping. It was my idea of stupid. I would never have chosen to wear this outfit on my own. Especially these very tight skinny low-rise dark denim jeans that I was sure I would need an extra set hands to help peel them off of me. I just prayed I didn't have to go to the bathroom while shrink-wrapped in them. Then there was the shirt that I let the 'brain trust' talk me into, if that was what you wanted to call it. A shimmery midnight blue halter top that was cut so low I feared for my ladies and their exposure. Topping off the outfit from hell was the almost five inch silver heels. I was so going down tonight... I could see it now, another holiday visiting the local ER. I'd have to remind myself to just stay on the same barstool until I could make my escape from my own personal hell. I was suddenly questioning my friend's motives, not to mention their sanity.

I guess I should have been trying to find an upside to tonight. Hmm. Nope, there just wasn't anything good about it. After all the torture the two Tweedles put me through, they had the nerve to dump me here where I'd have to fight off all of these grabby hands. Just so they could go and suck face and dry hump, I mean dance, with their boyfriends. I didn't care if it was Valentine's Day; they dragged me out tonight kicking and screaming so they should not have abandoned me! Argh!

At least I wouldn't have to put up with my psycho admirer tonight, the one guy I would love to never see again. Oh, crap. I spoke too soon. You'd think after being shot down for the last five years that he'd get a clue that he didn't have a snowball's chance in hell with me.

"BELLAAAA!"

Every time he saw me he, used the same damn annoying screechy greeting. Why he seemed to think he was Brando incarnate I didn't know. What a douche...

I fixed my best fake smile before I turned to face the boy wonder. Yep, that was what he was, a boy. I swore he could give Peter Pan a run for his money. I wished he were a 'lost boy' and would get lost.

"Hey, Mike, I didn't know you were going to be here tonight," I said trying to hide my grimace.

"Well, I was...ah... at lunch today with Eric and Tyler. They mentioned that they had a friend that might be here tonight and that she may or may not have a date for the night."

If you hadn't figured it out yet, that would be me. Me and my sadly pathetic, boring life. Yeah, me.

"Then Jess and Lauren came over and invited me, so here I am," he droned on. I tried not to roll my eyes at what he'd just said. You would have to be stupid not to see the obvious set up attempt. Dee and Dumb seemed to think I needed a man in my life.

I wanted one, just not 'Skippy'. That was what I named him on my first day at Forks High, the start of the second half of junior year. This guy followed me around the rest of high school, reminding me of a big slobbery yellow lab. I cringed when I heard he had decided to go to UDub as well, pretty much guaranteeing a continuation of his loyal tail wagging.

"Yeah, well, it was nice seeing you, Mike, enjoy your night." I tried, really I did. But 'Skippy' here, I mean Mike, wouldn't back down.

"Come on, Bells," he whined and gave me a pouty face.

Ugh, did he seriously think that shit was sexy?

I hated when he called me that. It was a nickname only Charlie had the right to call me; after all, he was the only family I had left now.

Flashback to Christmas break, junior year of high school...

I loved Christmas break and this year was going to be wonderful. Renee had been going non-stop since Phil asked her to marry him. Don't get me wrong, Phil was a great guy. A little on the young side, but, hey, he made my mom happy. We exchanged gifts early, Mom and Phil giving me an engraved gift set of silver accessories that had a beautiful pen, a calculator in a pretty case, a business card holder which I giggled at, and a matching key chain with my initials on one side and a sweet inscription from Mom and Phil on the other. They wanted me to have something I could use when I was a successful business woman. Phil also included a key to their new house in Florida, telling me I would always be welcome there. I cried at the sweetness of his words.

So after the wedding, I was going to be whisked away to California to spend the latter half of my Christmas break with Charlie, who was my dad. It was going

to be a very quiet week, thank goodness. I was a lot like Charlie; we were a duo of mimes, not very verbal communicators. So, there I sat in a rental car with Charlie, heading to our hotel room that would serve as home base for the next ten days. Time sure flew when you were trying to stay vertical and dry. At least this year I didn't end up in the local ER. Had I mentioned I was the world's biggest klutz?

It was now New Years Eve and I was watching the ball drop when Charlie walked into the room looking white as a ghost and he dropped the phone.

"Bells, I...I need to tell you something."

I could see by the look in his eyes that this was not going to be good.

"Dad, what's going on?"

"Bells, sweetie, it's...it's your mom and Phil."

"What about them, Dad?"

"Sweetheart, they were on the way back to their hotel for the night when they were hit head on by a drunk driver. I'm so sorry, honey, they died on impact."

I looked into my dad's eyes and that was the last thing I saw before the darkness overtook me.

End flashback

I shook myself from those dark memories of my young life before I caused myself to spiral into another depression. I was just now realizing I had agreed to have a drink with "Skippy" because I had no real backbone of my own. Add to that my too nice for my own good personality and you had me, the human doormat. The worst part of all of this was that I found out I was a lightweight. It seemed I really couldn't hold my liquor and after two shots of...something, I didn't know what I'd been drinking, I was now well on my way to a drunken stupor. So naturally, I kept throwing them back. Hey, don't judge me...loveless, remember? The night quickly became a blur of faces, laughter and a lot of other stuff I would never remember.

Stupid cupid.

Ugh...somebody needed to make the room stop spinning, please. I promised myself never ever to drink again. Okay, maybe not ever...but I sure as hell wouldn't touch the stuff again without a backup plan.

I very slowly opened my right eye... then my left. Okay, this wasn't so bad, but why couldn't I move my legs? I tried again and still nothing. I turned my head to the left and OH. MY. HELL. I was not alone in my bed. Wait, I wasn't in my bed. It looked like a hotel, a very nice hotel, and holy crap. Now I knew why my legs wouldn't move; because Rip Van Winkle lying next to me was pinning me down, and he was out cold with a pillow over his head. Crap, crap, CRAP!

I had to get out of here. Slowly, I was able to free my legs and finally could slink my way off of the bed and onto the floor. It was then that I noticed I was butt-naked, sore and bruised. Aw, shit! This couldn't be good. I wished I could remember what all happened last night, or I should be saying this morning.

I looked around and started gathering my clothes and redressing as fast as possible so I could make my get-away and get on with my walk of shame. I was so embarrassed. I had slept with a strange man and didn't even know his name. If he woke up and saw me, he would probably offer to pay me. As I snuck away, I made sure to take one long last look at what I could see of the man still asleep in the bed, wishing I could at least see his face; the face of the man that I was pretty sure had de-flowered me from the feel of...things.

Yep, that was right. I was a virgin.

'Was' being the operative word here.

Six Years later...

"Esme, let's go, we're going to be late if you don't get a move on, baby girl."

"Mommy, I can't find my ribbons."

"I have them in my hands, now come on and let me get your hair done, sweetie."

I looked up and my eyes met the sweetest child that was ever born, and you would never know by the healthy glow and perfect size of her that she came into the world way too early and only weighing a little under four pounds. She was my little miracle.

She was wearing the cutest pale blue dress with intricate smocking around the bodice with delicate lazy daisies embroidered along it. I looked down to her tiny feet and what else would you expect to see but the sweetest pair of baby blue leather Mary Janes and white bobby socks. To top off the perfect first day of school outfit was her pure white cashmere sweater with the tiny pearl buttons. I couldn't help but think that my child was born in the wrong era. She looked like she stepped right out of a 1950's movie.

The weird thing was, since she'd turned three, she insisted on choosing her own wardrobe. She very sweetly informed me I had no sense of style. I had style; it was just a more laid back kind of style. And my beautiful jewel refused to wear anything I chose for her. It only hurt my mommy pride for a few months. The truth was, she really did have a fabulous sense of style and impeccable taste for a child her age.

"Okay, Mommy, I'm coming," I heard her call out from her bedroom. I couldn't believe it had been over six years now. Wow, how time had flown.

Flashback to Spring break, senior year of college...

I didn't know what was wrong with me. I hadn't been able to keep much of anything down lately and I was pretty much always tired nowadays, which annoyed Jess and Lauren to no end, as they had wanted me to go with them to California on spring break. Not happening after the last time I went out with Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb. My roommate, Angela, thought I should go see my doctor instead, but I thought I just needed a break from all the stress of school.

This was my last semester here at UDub and classes were giving me a run for my money. I still had no idea what I was going to do with my English degree once I graduated in a couple of months. I guess I could always keep going for my masters. At least then I would be able to teach.

My alarm went off at the butt crack of dawn; ugh...I was so not a morning person. When I sat up, I had to lay down again really fast...whoa, that sucked...the room was spinning out of control now and it had me praying for the ride to come to a complete stop. Finally, I jumped up and ran as fast as my legs would go and made it to the toilet just in the nick of time.

Okay, maybe Angela was right and I needed to see my doctor.

Five hours later, I was looking at my doctor as if she'd lost her ever-loving mind. There was just no way I'd gotten pregnant on my maiden voyage. I still couldn't even remember it! How would I ever tell Charlie? I was so screwed...

Later that night, I was sitting on the worn out couch in Charlie's little living room, lost in thought. How the hell was I going to tell my dad that I was going to have a baby? Worse yet, how was I going to tell him I didn't even know whom the father was?

So, after I'd nearly gnawed my bottom lip off, I turned to see my dad trying not to look at me out of the corner of his eye.

"Dad, I uh...I need to tell you something. Just please, let me get it all out before you say anything, okay?"

"Sure, kiddo. Is everything okay?" he asked me, doing that little moustache wiggle he always did to get me to relax.

"No, but it will be after I get this off my chest, I hope."

So, before I could chicken out, I just let it all out and then broke down in uncontrollable sobs. I was not sure how long I sat there having my mini breakdown. All I remembered was being lifted up off of the couch and engulfed in the arms of my daddy. He was there, rocking back and forth as I soaked one of his numerous flannel shirts.

After I was all out of tears, he cleared his throat and gave me the most comforting daddy smile he had to offer.

"Well, kiddo, it is what it is. You can't live in the past, Bells. What's done is done; now let's get ready for my new grandbaby."

That was just how Charlie was and it was exactly what I needed to get through my difficult pregnancy. I graduated college a couple of months later and then moved back home with Charlie.

I started having some minor problems, but the baby was okay. However, I was put on bed rest until about my seventh month, when complications caused me to go into preterm labor that my doctor was unable to stop.

So, on September 16th, we welcomed my beautiful, tiny daughter into the world. She was two months early and had been running late every day since.

End Flashback

"Esmeralda Jane Swan! Come on, we need to be out the door and in the car in five minutes!"

I heard her little feet as she made her way down to the living room. There she was; my beautiful jewel. I tied her favorite blue ribbons into her ponytails and we were out the door and on our way to her first day of kindergarten.

As we made our way to school, I looked in the rearview mirror at her and wondered what her father was like. It was hard not to imagine a handsome man; I mean, come on, one look at Esme and you could tell she had a god for a father. She had the most perfect features and a voice like an angel. I was sure she'd gotten her bronze hair and green eyes from him as well. She looked absolutely nothing like me, with my mousey brown hair and boring brown eyes. The only traits she got from me were my shyness and my ability to blush on command.

"Are you ready for the biggest adventure of your life, baby girl?"

When our eyes meet in the mirror she had tears in hers.

"What's wrong, my jewel? You know there's nothing to be afraid of, right?"

She didn't answer me, just nodded her head yes.

"Remember, baby, you already know your teacher and you really enjoyed meeting her, right? Now you get to make friends with fifteen other boys and girls in your class."

She still wasn't talking as we pulled up to the school. We parked and got out of the car and she clung to my left leg as if she was a koala bear. I got her into the classroom and saw that I was not alone in the zoo. At least she wasn't crying like the little boy by the door, poor thing.

Miss Hale walked over and got down to her level and welcomed her to the class. She whispered something and Esme lit up like a Christmas tree. She let go of my leg and told me goodbye and walked over to the rainbow rug and sat down. Just like that. I stood in awe of Miss Hale; the woman had some kind of magic and I thought she needed to share it with parents the world over.

I said my goodbyes to them both and headed back home to start my first day without my little jewel.

I spent my morning trying not to miss my Esme so much. It was too quiet around here so I put the home movies of my baby in the DVR, made a cup of tea and sat down with my laptop perched on top of a pillow on my legs and got down to writing the next big American novel. I chuckled at my own joke; right, the next big American children's book was more like it. I'd made quite the household name of myself. While I was trying not to go stir-crazy being put on mandatory bed rest during my pregnancy, I started writing a series of stories for Esme. It was meant to be for her eyes only. However, my sneaky friend and now agent, Angela, sent them to a few publishers and as the old saying went, the rest was history, or in my case, children's fantasy.

I worked on my newest story outline and surprised myself when I realized I'd gotten a lot farther than I thought I would when my cell phone alarm alerted me that it was time go pick up Esme.

I hopped into my black Audi coupe and inhaled deeply, ahhh...I loved the scent of fine leather. It sure beat the smell of peppermint and old man, which was what my 'Beast' smelled like. As much as I loved my truck, I was not really sad to see her being towed away after she gave up on this life, may she rest in peace.

When I got to the school, I saw Esme playing on the jungle gym with a little girl wearing overalls and a big floppy hat, laughing up a storm. After a few minutes, my sweet girl looked up and saw me and turned to her little friend and said she would see her tomorrow.

On the ride home she talked non-stop about her new friend, Elizabeth. I looked at her and wondered where my shy little girl had gone. She looked radiant as she told me that we needed to go and buy more blue hair ribbon.

"Why?" I asked her, and she began a long story about how she gave Elizabeth one of hers because she only had a daddy and he didn't know how to make pretty bows. Then she pulled 'the face' on me. The one with the lip that she knew I couldn't resist. Where she'd gotten that, I'd never know.

So, here we were at the fabric store picking out a rainbow of ribbons for my daughter and her new best friend, Elizabeth.

EPOV

When I moved to Seattle eight years ago for medical school, I never thought I would one day be trying to put ponytails in a Tasmanian devil's hair. Only my little devil looked exactly like me with the same bronze hair and green eyes.

"Not so tight, Daddy, you're making my eyes hurt."

"Sorry, princess, Daddy's not very good at this, is he?"

"That's okay, Daddy, you try," she patted my hand to try and make me feel better.

I looked at my little girl's sweet face and willed the tears to wait until I was alone. Oh, how wished her mother were still around. Hell, I wished my mother were still around.

Today was another first for me. My little princess was going to school for the first time. Elizabeth Ann Masen. That was right; I named her after my mother. How could I not? She came into my life so soon after my mom left me.

My mom, Elizabeth Masen, was a great mother and would have been an even greater grandmother. If only she wasn't taken from our life so soon.

Flashback to Christmas six years ago...

I decided to go home for the holidays for a much needed vacation and to see my mom. The next six years were going to be a nightmare. I was in my first year of med school and then I had my residency. When I was done with that, I would be joining my uncle's practice. So I really needed this time to recharge myself.

Today was Christmas day and I got to spend it with my best girl, my mom. She had been my best friend all my life, and she made sure I never felt the loss of my father. Edward Masen Sr. was a brilliant lawyer and the love of my mother's life. Someday I hoped to have that kind of all consuming love. My father was taken swiftly from this earth; however, my mother lingered in pain. Her cancer had spread throughout her body and she was tired and ready to be with my father again.

She refused to let me come home and take care of her, so my aunt, her younger sister, had been here for the last three months to help her and be with her until the end.

So, I came home to Chicago for the holidays and to say goodbye to my best girl.

Elizabeth Masen passed away in her sleep two days later.

The evening after I laid my mom to rest, I met up with some friends from school and before I knew it we were having a nice old fashion Irish wake for Elizabeth Masen, and she would have loved it.

I could hear her now saying, "Teddy, please don't mourn my death. Celebrate my life, and don't forget to embrace life to its fullest."

I did just that. I shared all of my mother's life with my friends. I remembered even cutting loose and having a number of shots of whiskey in memory of both my parents.

What I didn't remember doing, though, was hooking up with a past girlfriend, Juliet. She was a beautiful petite brunette with a kind heart and a sweet disposition.

Juliet was a girl I thought I could marry one day. Only problem was, she didn't love me like that. She was kind enough to let me down easy and a great friendship grew from it.

At least I could say I cared for my daughter's mother. Juliet was so outgoing and she embraced life to the fullest.

That was why when her parents showed up on my doorstep the following fall with a tiny pink bundle in their arms, I was shocked. My dear friend Juliet had died during childbirth, bringing my princess into the world. Elizabeth Ann Masen was born on September 16th, and Juliet didn't even get the chance to see or hold her before she left our daughter's life. She did, however, leave me with a letter saying she was sorry for never letting me know I was going to be a father, and asking me to name our daughter after my mother. So that was what I did, I named her in honor of both my mother and Juliet herself.

End Flashback

"Are you ready to have the best day of your life, princess?" I asked, giving her the cheesiest grin I had.

"Oh, I can't wait, Daddy, I'm going to meet my forever best friend today, I just know it," she beamed back at me.

Just like her mother, my princess was so outgoing and self-assured. I really hoped she made a good friend today. She could use another little girl in her life. I'd tried hard to be both a daddy and mommy for her but I knew she was missing out on the finer points. Like how to make perfect ponytails and help picking out the right dresses.

Unfortunately for both of us, I had yet to master either skill. For now, it was just easier for me to dress her in overalls, t-shirts and her favorite red chucks. So here we were, getting ready to head out the door, but not before she grabbed that god-awful big red floppy hat that she insisted on wearing all summer long, much to my cousin's chagrin and my pleasure. I loved seeing my baby assert herself.

We barely made it into the classroom before the bell rang and her teacher gave me a knowing smirk. Elizabeth was oblivious to my plight and dropped her bag at the coat hooks and skipped and twirled over to the rug. I couldn't help but feel like I'd been dismissed by my five year old.

I'd taken the week off so I could help Elizabeth adjust to school life. So after I got back into my car I decided to run as many errands as I could before my phone alarm went off letting me know it was time to get my princess from school.

I spent the day doing as much as I could, and just as I put my dry cleaning into my car, my phone went off. Finally, it was time to get my baby.

When I entered the schoolyard and looked around for Elizabeth, I saw her hanging upside down on the jungle gym. She dropped to the ground and ran over to me as soon as she saw me. I noticed a new addition to her hair, a pale ice blue ribbon.

"Hi, baby girl, how was your first day?"

"Oh, Daddy, I had so much fun and I have a new best friend! I told you I would get one today. See she gave me my hair ribbon and the teacher tied the pretty bow for us. Then she said, 'There, now you two match'. Only we didn't because I was wearing overalls and she had on a pretty blue dress. Daddy, I want a pretty blue dress, too. Please, Daddy, can we get me a pretty blue dress and pretty blue shoes just like my best friend's?" She said all of that without taking a breath, amazingly enough.

I looked in the mirror and wondered where my little tomboy had gone. I also realized I was out of my fashion comfort zone. I needed to enlist some help and I knew just who to call.

I was brought back to the real world when my daughter asked if I'd heard a word she was saying. She then harrumphed when I couldn't repeat a single word back.

So, she started all over at the beginning. This time I made sure to listen to every word she said.

"And her name is so beautiful, Daddy."

"What's her name, princess?"

"It's really long, Daddy. It's Esmeralda Jane Swan, but she told me I get to call her Esme. That's so cool she has the same name as Nana. Don't you think that's cool, Daddy?"

"Yes, baby, that's a lovely name."

A/N:

So yeah, that was my first and I hope you enjoyed it

I have the next chapter ready for you all. Chapter 3

is in the hands of my wonderful beta.

I hope you've enjoyed it so far, let me know what

you think.

Thanks!

tickledpink

2. Chapter 2

I still own nothing it all belongs to SM.

Thanks again to my awesome beta Dollybigmomma!

Enjoy!

Chapter 2

Hurricane Alice

EPOV

The first week of school seemed to fly by and I was now sitting at my aunt and uncle's kitchen table trying not to pull my hair out. I should have known better than to unleash the beast, aka my sweet little cousin, Mary Alice Cullen Whitlock. A few words of advice; don't, and I repeat, don't ever call her Mary or Little.

I made that mistake once and, well, let me say she lived up to the saying, 'Big things come in small packages'.

She had been known to take out bigger men than me and I was well over six foot to her barely five. I watched her take down my college roommate, Emmett McCarty, all six and a half feet of him. He was on his knees in less than a minute tops...all because he threatened to go after her shoe collection. A word to the wise; don't mess with the 'Choo's'...her words, not mine.

So, here I was on a quest to make my baby happy and right now she needed a blue dress and shoes to match. I would never deny her anything as long as she was happy. That didn't mean I spoiled her rotten, though. She had never asked for a thing in her short little life and so when she couldn't stop talking about the blue dress and shoes, I knew it meant something to her. So here I sat with two women who had identical Cheshire cat grins plastered across their faces, just waiting for me to spill the beans. God, I needed a beer.

"So, I was thinking, with Elizabeth's birthday in just two weeks, we had better get started on the party plans. I know I said I just wanted it to be family, but I was thinking maybe instead of a small family party, how about we invite her kindergarten class this year? I mean, you only turn six once and she's never asked for a thing in her life."

Oh. My. Hell! I thought my ears were going to start bleeding from the high-pitched squeals that came from both of their mouths. I was sure they could wake the dead with the sounds that just came from them. As it turned out, they managed to wake up Alice and Jasper's twins, Brandon and Hayden, who up until just a few minutes ago were very happy sleeping six month olds. They both smiled these days with identical toothless grins. But not for long, as those two little buggers made a sport of gnawing on whatever they could get their mouths on, and most of the time it was my fingers. However, one time my ear was almost taken off. Well, not taken off exactly, but there was a lot of drool involved with the attack. I was not sure which one did it, because I still couldn't tell them apart to save my soul. Both had their mother's jet-black hair and their father's cerulean blue eyes. I'd thought about using a magic marker to put a number '1' and '2' on their foreheads. Hey, it would save us all the confusion around here and besides, it washed off...eventually.

After we got the boys calmed down and happy once again, the dynamic duo began to rattle off party plans. I just sat back and nodded my head and agreed to whatever they deemed suitable for sixteen rambunctious five & six year olds. I was so grateful for the help; I would have just bought cake, ice cream and balloons and called it golden.

After the party of the year was planned out, and to perfection I might add... Alice's words not mine...I needed to ask the fashion guru for some help. I took a deep breath and dove in head first.

"Alice,?"

I had to say it fast and all at once to get it out before I changed my mind. And, to my surprise, she understood me. Of course, I was speaking Alice's native tongue when I spoke 'shopping'. After all, everybody knew the mall was her mother ship.

When I looked up at her because I didn't get the reaction I was sure would come, she was not in front of me. Well, she was in front of me; she was just passed out cold on the floor. I stared at the pixie, not sure what to do. She had never been this still in all her twenty six years. I started to worry that she had hit her head just as she came around and she had tears in her eyes. She attacked me with a parade of thanks. "You don't know how long I've waited for this day, Edward."

She was wrong. I did know and it was very hard for me to admit defeat when it came to caring for Elizabeth. I had always done everything on my own. It was just that I would see that my child's happiness came before my own foolish pride.

"Oh, Edward, I know just where to go." She grabbed my daughter and twirled her around while chanting, "Lizzie Lizard, we're going to have so much fun!"

Argh, I hated that stupid nickname. I should ban Emmett from our lives. Why he had to pin a silly name to everybody was beyond me.

"Alice, you need to wait and take a couple of deep breaths and try to focus. Elizabeth has a certain dress in mind. I need you to promise me you'll listen to her on this one. I want her to have the dress she wants, and not just any old dress will do I'm afraid. Do you think you can follow these simple rules?"

"Fine," she huffed as she stood next to me akimbo style with a pout on her mouth.

Thank god my baby girl didn't use that face on me or I would no longer have control in our family. I rolled my eyes at Alice and raised an eyebrow at her antics, trying not to laugh at my pixie-like cousin.

After Elizabeth described in detail what the dress, shoes and socks looked like, as well as the soft white sweater, Alice, Esme and my daughter left on the

perfect dress quest. I sure hoped they were able to find what she wanted. If not, maybe I could ask 'Little' Esme's mother where she found this perfect outfit.

The next two weeks zoomed by and Elizabeth had been bouncing off the walls around here. Alice and Esme found the dress, but not until they had to admit defeat and get in contact with 'Little' Esme's mother. As it turned out, we didn't even need to leave the house to get what we wanted; it was from a specialty catalog company that was based on the east coast. We were able to put a rush on the order, and Alice being Alice, she outdid herself again. She picked out enough cute dresses and accessories to outfit my daughter for a month and we wouldn't even repeat a single ensemble. Imagine my surprise when my baby girl's face lit up as she opened the boxes with my cousin. We'd created a girly little monster, I thought to myself. It turned out that 'Little' Esme had almost all of the same dresses.

It was now the morning of the party and the dynamic duo had already texted me a dozen times. Why, I didn't know. My only job was to make sure my baby girl was fed and bathed before we headed over to Esme and Carlisle's house at ten o'clock for them to get her ready.

We had to change the party around just a bit. It seemed Elizabeth and her new BFF had the same birthday in common, go figure. So, after Alice 'convinced' Mama Swan to just combine the celebration, we were back on track.

I made my way up to Elizabeth's room and pushed the door open softly and just took in the sight before me. My little girl was sound asleep on her tummy up in the middle of her big white bed, and she had the cutest little face. Her mouth pouted when she slept and she snored softly, but still she snored. I sat on the floor next to her bed and just watched in fascination as she came back to the land of the living. I couldn't help the grin that overtook my face as she returned my smile with one of her own. I'd been told that she was my 'mini me' when she smiled that crooked grin.

"Happy birthday, princess," I said kissing her cheek.

"Morning, Daddy," she giggled through a big yawn.

"Are you ready for today? What do you think you'd like for breakfast?" I saw the twinkle in her eyes; I really didn't have to ask her this question, but I loved hearing her pronounce certain words her own way.

"Can I have stawbeaweess rolled in flat pamcakes, Daddy? Oh, and can I have yummy whip cream?"

She stuck her bottom lip out and gave me the most adorable eyes. She was obviously hanging around Alice too much. She'd never pulled a pouty face on me before. I'd have to limit her Alice time if she kept up with this.

"Sure, baby girl."

I made my way downstairs and wondered why I even had the huge unused kitchen as I walked to the refrigerator and pulled out everything for breakfast. I couldn't even boil water, let alone cook. In fact, if Esme wasn't around, I was certain I would need to hire a cook. Thank god Elizabeth was a creature of habit and wanted the same thing for her birthday breakfast every year; strawberry crepes with fresh whipped cream. Thanks to my aunt, all I had to do was assemble them and watch my little doll smile as she devoured them.

After breakfast and her bath, we headed over to Esme and Carlisle's house for the party. I was sure it would be a day for the record books.

BPOV

Life for Esme and myself had been fairly boring for the last couple of weeks. I was so grateful that we were a drama free household. I really did have the world's sweetest child. At least I thought I did. She had begun to assert herself in areas that I never thought I would have to deal with...

Flashback

"Esmeralda Jane Swan, please do not stomp your foot at me. I said no and that's my final word on this subject."

It seemed little Miss Esme wanted to make every little girl she met into her own image. I just never knew my child could be so fashion crazy at such a young age.

It all started with the ribbons she insisted we buy for Elizabeth. Because she said, and I was quoting my five year old here, "She doesn't even have a mommy of her own, she needs our help, mommy."

How could I resist that logic, or face, for that matter? I couldn't and I would challenge anyone out there to try. So here I was at the furniture store, looking at vanity tables and mirrors. This was what my sweet child wanted to give her new BFF, Elizabeth, for her birthday. I knew it was a pretty pricey gift for a five year old, but my baby really wanted Elizabeth to have this vanity to match her bedroom and nothing I said seemed to change her mind. She even went as far as to say she would give up her own presents this year if I would please let her give this one thing to her friend. So, here I was deciding on the white finished piece with the four drawers and waterfall front. It came with a seat that Esme insisted we get in the blue-checked fabric. She also picked out the round beveled mirror. It had a very retro 1950's feel to it. Again, I thought, I really did give birth to an old soul. We paid for our purchase and set up delivery. Please, don't let her daddy be upset at the gift, I prayed.

End Flashback

I was sitting here trying to wake up my baby girl so that we were not late for the double birthday celebration that I didn't even get to plan. Oh, whom was I kidding? My idea of a party was cake, ice cream and balloons. We would still get to have that party tomorrow with my family and friends. I decided Esme needed her own day with my dad and all of her 'uncles' from La Push. This would be the first year they had to come to our place. As much as I loved my dad and the guys and our trips home, I figured it was time they made that god-awful drive for a change.

"Esme, my jewel, wake up, baby."

I gave her butterfly kisses on the apple of her cheek and she started to softly giggle.

“Hey, baby, happy birthday.”

She sat up fast and straight as a board. It was very comical and reminded me of a cartoon character as she jumped out of bed and ran out of her room. I just sat there waiting for her to come back and attack in...1...2...3. And here she came.

“Morning...kiss...Mommy...kiss...and...kiss...thank you!”

She was just too cute when she got like this.

“Esme, baby, what do you want to wear for the party today?”

She didn’t even take a minute to decide. She walked straight into her closet and picked out the same dress she wore on the first day of school. She looked over at me and gave me a crooked grin and I wondered what she was up to.

“Okay, baby, what would you like me to fix for breakfast?”

She stood there thinking with her little index finger on her chin. I raised an eyebrow at her and tried not to smile at her antics.

“I would love to have cheesy eggs and toasted muffins please, Mommy.”

I walked into my little galley kitchen and got out all of the ingredients for cheesy scrambled eggs, English muffins with strawberry jam and fresh squeezed orange juice. Just as I plated our breakfast, my child walked into the kitchen, fully clothed, sat down and began to eat daintily. She never got a drop on her; it had always amazed me how she seemed to repel messes.

After we were done with breakfast, I fixed her hair; two curly ponytails like every day, making sure not to forget the matching hair ribbons as well. I looked at the clock and could see that it was almost eleven o’clock. We needed to leave if we wanted to be on time; after all, she was one of the guests of honor. I couldn’t believe I’d let a perfect stranger plan and host my child’s birthday party. What was I thinking?

Flashback

“Hello?” I said answering the unknown number.

“Mrs. Swan, please.”

“It’s Miss Swan, and you’re speaking with her.”

“Oh, yes, Miss Swan, my name is Alice Whitlock and I’m calling on behalf of my cousin, Edward Masen.” I wondered what this had to do with me. “Anyway, as I was saying, my cousin’s daughter, Elizabeth, is in the same class as your daughter and has not stopped talking about her or the beautiful blue dress she owns.” Well, it was a lovely dress. “I’ve gone to every little girl’s dress shop in and around Seattle and I just can’t seem to locate this perfect dress.” She wasn’t going to find it on this coast. “So, anyway, I was hoping you could share the secret location of where you found this perfect dress? You would make a certain little girl even happier than she already is.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to be the reason Elizabeth is sad.” So, I told her I shopped on-line for all of Esme’s clothes and I thought I heard her gasp, strangely enough. But who could blame me? Shopping sucked, and shopping with a five year old was so not my idea of a good time, either.

Before we hung up, I found that I had somehow given Alice and her mother carte blanche to combine the girl’s birthday parties since they shared the same birthday.

I hoped this didn’t come back and bite me in my ass.

End Flashback

After we cleaned up from breakfast, we climbed into the car and I plugged in the address Alice gave me into the GPS and headed out. I hoped we had the correct address because this place was huge. I just stood there, trying to pick my chin up off of the ground and looked up at the biggest house I had ever been about to enter in my life. I remembered they called them mini mansions, and this one was stunning. It was white with tall columns and dark blue shutters, and a brick walkway that led up to the front porch where a pair of old southern style rocking chairs flanked a table with an enormous fern on it. Esme and I made our way to the front door and were just about to knock when a very small, pixie like woman came out and embraced me.

Okay.

The pixie introduced herself as one Alice Whitlock.

“It’s so nice to finally meet you, Miss Swan,” she said in a melodic voice.

“Please, call me Bella.”

When I turned to introduce Esme to her, I heard her gasp. I tried not to think too much about that and pressed forward.

“Alice, I’d like you to meet my daughter, Esmeralda. She likes to go by Esme, though.”

“Hi, Esme, I’m so happy to meet you,” Alice greeted my daughter with wide eyes before hugging her once, then again.

Esme ducked her head and whispered hello, a bit overwhelmed by Alice’s odd enthusiasm.

I kid you not, Alice was bouncing so fast and hard that I thought she might start to ricochet off the walls like a pinball machine. She invited us in and the inside of the house was just as magnificent as the outside. I thought I'd seen this house in a magazine recently. If not, it certainly needed to be.

"Bella, these are my parents, Carlisle and Esme Cullen." My eyes almost bugged out of their sockets, and I must have looked like a cartoon to these people as I gawked at how beautiful they were.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Cullen," I said when I had finally found my voice again.

"Oh, please, call us Carlisle and Esme. And who do we have here"?

Esme bent down to greet my daughter, who stepped out from behind me and put out her tiny hand and said in her soft voice, "I'm Esmeralda Jane Swan, but you can call me Esme."

I looked over at Alice and she was still looking like the Energizer bunny, but now I wondered if she wasn't on crack. Esme, the elder, looked about ready to join Alice with the bouncing as she looked closely at my daughter, blinking rapidly.

She took 'Little' Esme's hand and said, "It's a pleasure to meet you, sweetheart." My daughter ducked her head down, blushed and said thank you. We were then passed from one family member to the next as they hugged us and shared whimsical looks at each other as they marveled at my daughter. Really...weird.

Just when I thought I'd gotten a handle on myself, I heard giggles and then saw a blur of blue run past me and tackle my daughter with a hug. I tried to make heads or tails of the ball of little girls rolling around on the floor, but it was hard to determine which one was mine.

I heard the most enthralling voice then and looked up to see who had produced such a wonderful sound. When I did, my breath caught as I came face to face the most beautiful man who was staring back at me, and in that moment my ability to speak left my body again. Not just because of his beauty, but it was more than that. Oh, so much more. I didn't know how, but somehow I was looking into my daughter's face. He had the same green eyes, the same crooked grin and perfect nose, and most definitely the same crazy bronze hair. He gave me a smirk and winked at me.

All I saw after that was darkness.

A/N:

So yeah, I total need to remember the notes before and after each chapter.

I hoped you enjoyed it as much as I did writing it.

Are you ready for some party planning ala' Alice, I know I'm looking forward to it.

Thanks for you time,

tickledpink

3. Chapter 3

Again, I don't own Twilight it belongs to SM. I do however own a Yorkiepool named Oliver... that is until my daughter takes him with her when she moves out.

I cannot sing her praises enough, my beta it the best. Thank you Dollybigmama four doing you magic so fast, you amaze me!

Chapter 3

Do I know you?

EPOV

We arrived at Esme and Carlisle's house right on time and again I was ordered by my cousin to get my child upstairs and dressed for the party. Then she told us to stay put until the other guest of honor arrived. And that was what we were doing right now.

"Thank you for my pretty dress and shoes, Daddy. I love them so much. Will you help me get dressed, Daddy? I want to look pretty for my party." She was speaking so fast I had a hard time understanding her. Note to self: limit her sugar intake and the time she spent with Alice.

I found a note telling me the order in which I should dress her. I had to roll my eyes at the fact that my cousin believed I was inept at dressing my child. I mean, how hard could it be for cripe's sake? It was a little girl's dress.

Huh...who knew they made silky under things for little girls. Well, I could tell you, I certainly didn't. Not sure how I felt about that, either. Everything looked...complicated. Damn, now I was going to have to eat my words. It turned out I was a clueless daddy when it came to this girly stuff and I had a feeling that it wouldn't be my last time, either.

I looked over at my child who was vibrating so much I was sure she would register a 6.0 on the Richter scale. After a few minutes of 'Earthquake Elizabeth', who was now reduced to small aftershocks, I finally began to dress my child.

"Oh, Daddy, everything is soooo pretty and soft!" she cooed to me as she reverently touched all the pieces lying out on the bed. I got the distinct feeling that t-shirts and overalls weren't going to cut it anymore. I dressed her in the order of my outline courtesy of Alice; ruffled panties...check, flouncy slip...finally check (we, or rather I got her head and arm stuck in the same opening. Argh!). Socks...check, shoes...check (freaking tiny buckles), dress...check (again, freaking tiny buttons).

Now for the last part of my torture; the hair. You'd think I could manage two simple ponytails. Just as I was getting ready to fail at 'Ponytails 101' again, my Aunt Esme poked her head into the room.

"How's our birthday girls coming along?" she asked as she stepped into the room. She eyed the hair paraphernalia in my hands and the desperate look on my face and patted my arm gently as she took it from me. Elizabeth had perched herself on the bench at the foot of the bed smiling sweetly at us.

"Honey, do you mind if I fix you hair for you?" she asked. Whew, I dodged that bullet. Thank you, Aunt Esme!

I sat back and watched as my baby girl sat perfectly still for my aunt. Huh. Why was it when I tried to do her hair she never held her head still? Oh well, that didn't matter anymore as I looked at her smiling so radiantly.

Just as Esme tied her ribbons in her hair, we heard Alice squeal. "Oh, that must be your friend, honey. Let me go down and check." She pointed at me, "You wait five minutes and then bring down our guest of honor."

I saluted her, "Yes, ma'am." She walked out of the room shaking her head at me and mumbling something I couldn't quite make out. I looked over at my baby girl and sighed. "Princess, you look so beautiful." Another sigh escaped me and she looked up at me with unquestionable love in her eyes.

"I love you so much, Daddy," she said with tears in her eyes.

"Hey, baby girl, what's with the tears, sweetheart?" I picked her up and sat her on my lap, making sure to catch all of her tears. She took a couple of deep breaths to calm herself down and gave me a smile that was about a mile wide.

"Can you tell Daddy what made you cry?" I asked her.

"Oh, Daddy, I'm so sorry for crying like a little baby. I'm not a baby anymore. I'm this many now." She held up six cute little fingers in front of my face, making me smile.

"See, Daddy? I get to use both my hands to show how old I am now. That means I'm a BIG girl now," she smiled smugly at me.

"Yes, you are a big girl now. So, big girl, can you tell me why you were crying? It makes me sad to see you cry and I want to make you smile always."

She looked at me with a sad but determined look on her sweet angelic face. "Daddy, you know I love you, right?" I nodded yes. "Well, I just don't want to hurt your feelings." I wondered why my feelings would be hurt as I looked into her suddenly serious green eyes. I gave her a look that told her to keep going. "Daddy, I have a new best friend now and I just don't want you to be sad about not being my only best friend anymore." I couldn't help the smile that broke out. "I mean, you're great at being a daddy, but I need a girl to do girl stuff with." I had to cover my mouth now to keep my laughter under control. "You'll always be my best daddy, but Esme is my very best friend."

"I understand, sweetheart. I won't be sad, okay? You'll always be my baby girl, Elizabeth. Nothing can ever change that. I love you, my angel." She threw her arms around my neck and kissed my cheek as I hugged her to me. She would always be the most precious thing in my world.

I looked at my watch and realized it had been more than ten minutes since Esme me left the room. "Well, birthday girl, let's go meet your new best friend, shall

we?”

We stopped at the stairs landing when I heard a soft musical voice thanking my aunt for all the hard work and party planning. Elizabeth’s hand left mine then and she was nothing more than a blue blur and sweet giggles as she collided with another little blue blur. I couldn’t help but laugh at my child’s antics. Yeah, way too much Alice time.

As I turned to introduce myself to ‘Mama Swan’ I couldn’t help the sudden sense of déjà vu that came over me. Just as my eyes meet hers and I gave her a smirk and a subtle wink, she passed out cold. If I hadn’t been a little panicked, I would have taken a moment to pat myself on the back for making beautiful Mama Swan swoon over me.

Thank goodness I had quick reflexes and was able to catch her before she hit the floor. Scooping her up, I laid her down gently on the sofa and went into doctor mode. Carlisle was right next to me, ready to do what was needed. “She’s okay, she just fainted. I’m sure she’ll come to any minute.” Just as I said this I noticed a little blue blur hop past me.

“Mommy? Mommy, oh please, you have to wake up...please don’t die, Mommy!” She started to cry, so I did what anyone would do. I scooped her up and cradled her to me as she cried into my shirt. Elizabeth was right there trying to sooth her distraught friend. I gently cooed my reassurance to the child that her mommy was just sleeping and would wake up soon. And because my child was who she was, she blurted out, “So, she’s like Sleeping Beauty, Daddy? You should just kiss her and wake her up.”

I heard snickers from the adults in the room and then Alice chimed in. “Yeah, kiss her, Prince Charming. I’m sure that’ll do the trick.”

Just then, ‘Little’ Esme giggled and said, “Silly Miss Alice, Prince Charming is Snow White’s prince. Prince Phillip kisses Sleeping Beauty to wake her up.” I gave Alice a smirk telling her she had just been schooled by a six year old. She just smiled sweetly at ‘Little’ Esme, looking at her adoringly.

“Esme, sweetheart, your mommy is going to be just fine, I’m sure of it.” I felt her nodding and then heard a soft okay from her. I lifted her face up gently to wipe away her tears. As I did this I felt the air leave my lungs and had to fight myself not to faint and join her mother in lala land. I did a double take and looked at my child standing next to us with her hand on her friend’s back, rubbing it to help her calm down. I kept going back and forth between their faces. I was pretty sure I needed to get my prescription checked; I’d never seen double before. Both girls were now giggling at me and I was sure I looked like a fish opening and closing my mouth. After I’d caught enough flies, I set Esme down and told her and Elizabeth to sit down in the chair opposite the sofa. They did as I asked, moving like synchronized swimmers. Strange. I needed to get ‘Mama Swan’ back to the land of the living so I could figure out why she had a carbon copy of my child.

A few minutes later, ‘Mama Swan’ came around. She looked at me with wide questioning eyes. “Where’s Esme?” she squeaked out. I pointed to the chair where both girls were sitting and I’d be damned if “Mama Swan” didn’t do the same double take I had done earlier.

“Mommy, I’m so glad that you woke up, I thought you died. Please don’t scare me like that again,” Esme said as she climbed into her mother’s lap.

Mother and daughter were consoling each other when I felt my child climb into my lap and sigh. She only got like this when she was worried about things. Thank goodness for Alice, she was able to put an end to the drama.

“Well, how about I take the birthday girls outside and show them the party tent.” Yes, Alice rented a tent so we could have the party outside. I was sure sixteen sugar-crazed five and six year olds and white sofas had a lot to do with that decision.

“Yeah,” both birthday girls yelled in unison, sounding just alike.

After the girls headed outside I turned to ‘Mama Swan’ and introduced myself. “Hello, I’m Edward Masen, and you’re Mrs. Swan?”

“It’s Miss Swan, but please, call me Bella, and it’s nice meet you, Mr. Masen.” She smiled and ducked her head down.

“Please, call me Edward, Bella.” Taking her hand in mine I brought it up to my mouth and kissed it softly. She ducked her head again, but this time she blushed the loveliest shade of pink. I heard a throat clearing across the room and saw Jasper with a knowing smirk on his face. I shook my head, telling him not to go there.

“Well, how about we check out what the Pixie has created for our daughters?” I suggested and she blushed again, curiously. I offered her my arm and what do you know, she flushed pink again.

We made our way out to the party tent and I was blown away by what I saw. It was a fairytale setting covered in ivy and soft delicate blue, white and pale yellow flowers. Hanging from the roof of the tent was at least fifty fairies with wings that resembled butterflies and dragonflies. Ribbons and fabric as sheer as Gossamer was draped over the table and chairs. There was a rectangular table and miniature chairs made for a child’s body, and I noticed only sixteen chairs around it, seven on each side and then two special chairs sitting side by side at the head, kind of like thrones. The table was set with fine china, silverware, crystal stemware and a linen tablecloth and napkins. I shook my head, thinking Alice had gone a little overboard, considering they were just young kids. Running down the center of the table was more fabric and ribbon. Tucked around that was more of the blossoms and an array of tiny jars with battery operated tea lights in them. They reminded me of catching fireflies as a child. Each place setting had a miniature topiary with a hand written place card tied to it. On the other side of the tent were the grown up tables. At the back of the tent I saw a small stage and couldn’t help but wonder what Alice had planned for today. The gift table was at the entrance of the tent. Huh...how did I miss that? It was already covered with gifts and our partygoers had yet to arrive. That was when I noticed a huge gift sitting next to the table. Curiosity got the better of me so I took a peek at the tag. Oh. My. Gosh! It was from Esme and Bella Swan and I really felt stupid about my gift choice for Esme now. Alice called us all to attention

“Okay, our guests are due to arrive any minute now.” She was interrupted by the chime of the doorbell. “They’re here!” she squealed.

Over the next twenty minutes, the front door never shut. All decked out in their Sunday best, the party guests were like a holiday parade from the front door all the way to the tent. The girls mingled and greeted all of their guests, all while holding hands. It seemed they were inseparable.

“They do that at every recess and when we have free time in the classroom, too.” I looked up to see Ms. Hale watching the guests of honor fondly.

"It's strange, the connection they have with each other. It was instantaneous for them. They just sat down next to each other on day one and each reached out to the other and intertwined their hands and smiled at one another." She looked over at them and then continued speaking, "Do you believe in past lives or a pre-existence, Mr. Masen? I certainly do now after meeting these two, Sir. They seem like two souls that belong together. Or maybe one that was split and only complete when with the other. I've never seen anything like it."

And with that she left me to ponder her words.

The party was in full swing now; the food was served by a wait staff that was dressed as fairies. We feasted on finger sandwiches and teacakes. Instead of one big birthday cake, each guest was served cupcakes. I believed Alice had them shipped from some bakery in Utah. Best damn cupcake I'd ever had. I'd have to get the info from Alice, as I saw an addiction developing.

After singing happy birthday, twice, we went to the back of the tent to enjoy the entertainment Alice had planned for us. Music started to play as the curtains opened. It was a marionette puppet show of Thumbelina, Elizabeth's favorite story, and it seemed to be Esme and her mama's as well. The look of pure joy on all three of their faces was priceless. When the show was over, the children gathered around the gift table to finish off the festivities.

We witnessed a lot of oohs and ahhs as each gift was opened. There were dollies and jewelry and footballs, oh my...what the heck? I looked over at my friend, Emmett, and he just shrugged his shoulders and grinned, making his dimples show. I couldn't help but smile at his idea of a proper girl's gift.

We were down to the final two gifts and I was not really sure what Bella would think about our gift.

Flashback

"We've been here for over an hour, Elizabeth. Do you even see what you want, baby? Maybe if you tell me what it is, we can ask the nice lady for help."

"Okay, Daddy, it has to be a necklace, you know the kind that opens up and you put a picture in it?" I nodded my head yes. So, she wanted to give her a locket. I wondered out loud if six year olds even wore them. She gave me the 'duh, Daddy' look and I called the sales person over. Now we were getting somewhere.

We spent the next hour or so looking and opening all the lockets they had for little girls. Still nothing and my child wandered away with deflated hopes. Just as I was ready to throw in the towel she started to bounce her happy bounce.

"Daddy, this is it! This is the one just like in the picture. I need this one, please," she told the sales person.

I gasped as I looked at the locket that I'd seen before and willed my tears to not fall.

"We'll take this one and we'd like it gift wrapped, please," I requested of the sales person.

"Certainly, Sir, would you like anything engraved on the back?"

"Daddy, what's engraved mean?" Elizabeth asked.

"Well, sweetie, that's when they write on it with a special pen. Kind of like signing a card," I tried to explain to her.

She tapped her chin thinking for a few moments and then told us she knew what she wanted them to engrave. She beckoned the lady to get closer and then whispered what she wanted it to say.

"So, baby, what did you have them engrave on it?"

"I'm not telling 'cause it's a secret, Daddy. Promise me you won't peek at it?" I smiled at her and nodded yes.

We were told it would take a couple of hours for the engraving, so we decide to get a bite to eat. Two and a half hours later my daughter had the biggest smile on her face as we walked out of the store with an aqua blue box wrapped with a white bow around it.

End Flashback

Elizabeth handed the gift to Esme and they seemed to be in their own little bubble. Huh... I guess that was what Ms. Hale was talking about. It was strangely beautiful.

"Oh, Beth, thank you so much! I love it and I love you!" I snapped my head up at her declaration of love and the new nickname.

"You're welcome, Mae, I love you, too." Again with the head snapping, and then I heard my aunt gasp and saw her wiping traitorous tears from her cheeks.

"Open it, Mae. See, it has a picture of Daddy and me in it, and this side is for you and your mommy. This way we're all together, forever." She whispered the last word. I watched as they interlocked their pinky fingers and I couldn't help but look at my cousin. She gave me an all-knowing head nod, and I could see my aunt trembling with emotion, pressing her fingers over her lips, trying to control herself.

"My turn! My turn! Open my gift, Beth," Esme pleaded.

As we made our way over to this behemoth of a gift, I felt a set of eyes on me. Then I heard Bella apologize for the gift. It turned out Esme would not be swayed in her gift choice, either. I knew exactly what she meant. I had a daughter just as stubborn as hers. I was pulled from our conversation by the sweetest sound I had ever heard. My child was over the moon at her final gift.

"Mae, I love it! It has a place for all of my hair ribbons. Thank you so much!" Elizabeth said as they hugged each other.

"You're welcome, Beth. I have one in my room, too, and I love to sit at it so my mommy can do my hair," Esme replied quietly.

I looked up and saw Bella blush and mouth 'sorry'. I didn't know what she had to be sorry for; my child obviously loved the gift. I wondered what it was she gave her.

Holy crap, was that a dresser?

"No, it's a vanity. You know, we women love to sit at them and do our hair and make-up." There went that blush again.

"Crap, did I say that out loud? I think I said that out loud as well, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did, to both," Bella snickered at me. "I really am sorry for the gift choice." I had to stop her on that train of thought.

"Bella, it's fine, really. Look at how happy our daughters are. I wouldn't ever want to take that away from them."

"Okay then, the same goes for you."

"Okay," I agreed.

All of the guests had finally left and I was on the hunt for my child, who was uncharacteristically quiet. It worried me, because a quite child usually meant a mischievous child. After looking on the main floor I headed up to Alice's old room. I was stopped in my tracks by the sight in front of me. Both girls were out cold on the bed, but it was the way they were embracing each other that caught me off guard. I heard someone sigh next to me.

"I'm honestly not sure which one is mine," Bella sighed again.

"I know, and I hate to wake them up. I know Elizabeth wore herself out and I'm pretty sure the same thing goes for Esme. Why don't we let them have their nap and we can talk and get to know each other better." I held out my hand for her to take and we left our girls to slumber.

I took her out to the solarium in hopes of avoiding my nosey family. "So, Bella, tell me about yourself."

And so she did. She told me everything, except about Esme's father. It seemed that subject was off limits. I guess I needed to gain her trust for that info. I did, however, learn that she was twenty six, a graduate from UDub with an English degree that went unused because she had fallen into the world of children's literature. She had written a series of published children's books. She was an only child; her father was retired from the Forks Police Department where he was the chief for twenty years. Now he spent his time fishing and watching sports. I had to hold back my tears as she told me the tragic tale of her mother and step-dad's deaths.

I found we had a lot of the same interests in music and books, and a love for the arts. I also found out that she donated a portion of her book sales to charity. She loved to cook, bake and enjoyed anything creative. She disliked fish, and the reason behind that was simple; she had eaten enough of them in her lifetime to grow gills. She was allergic to shellfish so it helped to stay away from fish in general. She hated to shop and did the majority of her shopping on line, that way she didn't have to battle crowds and tantrums, both from Esme and herself.

I looked at my watch and realized we had been talking for over three hours.

"Wow, I think we should check on the girls. It's been three hours. I'm not sure how long Esme will nap, but Elizabeth can sleep her day away if I let her."

We got up and were headed towards the stairs when we heard giggling coming from the kitchen.

"Hey, Daddy, we're making dinner with Nana. Do you want to see?" Elizabeth smiled up at me.

Both girls had aprons on and were diligently finger rolling the gnocchi off of forks. Bella's eyes lit up when she saw what they were making. She grabbed two more aprons, tossing one at me before heading over to the sink to wash her hands. Before I could bow out, she looked at me and said, "Come on, Masen, it's just a little potato dough, you can't mess it up." I started to defend myself when my sweet child guffawed loudly and said, "Oh, yes he can, we had to throw away all our pans." Now it was my turn to blush.

The kitchen erupted in laughter; my daughter was the loudest out of the bunch. 'Little' Esme covered her mouth and softly giggled at my misfortune in the kitchen. "You think that's funny, little miss?" I reach over and tickled her on the side of her neck just below her ear and she started to giggle louder. "Daddy, be careful or you're going to make her tinkle." I looked at my daughter. Did she just say tinkle? Yep, definitely too much Alice time.

Between the four of us, the gnocchi got finished and we helped the girls clean up the mess. Aunt Esme put the finishing touches on dinner and we all sat down at the kitchen table. I was told to sit next to Bella because Elizabeth wanted to sit next to 'Little' Esme and that was that...again, way too much time with Alice.

Dinner was wonderful, the company was great, the conversation was never ending and it ended all too soon for me. We cleared the table and Carlisle said he was on clean up because we did the cooking. So, we headed out to gather the girls and head home.

When I found 'Thing 1' and 'Thing 2', they had their heads together in a conspiratorial whisper. "Hey, what are you two planning over there?" Yep, conspiracy, they had a guilty look about them. "Nothing," they both said fast and in unison. Yeah, right, I thought. I knew that look. I did grow up with Alice, after all. I could smell a plot a mile away.

"Mr. Edward, do you think Elizabeth could sleep at my house sometimes?" 'Little' Esme batted her eyes at me and then blushed just like her mother.

"Well, sweetheart, we would have to ask your mommy first."

"Oh, okay," and she ran off to find her mother. She came back pulling Bella by the hand.

"Edward, I don't mind if you're all right with it. Let's set up a time for them to have a sleep over," she said to me.

We planned for next Friday to get the girls together. Elizabeth and I walked them out to their car, but before she could leave I made sure to get her phone number.

Waving goodbye, I couldn't help but feel like something major was about to change in our lives.

Aunt Esme's POV

The locket Elizabeth gave to Esme was beautiful and the words she uttered along with it were...well, I just didn't have words for them.

I knew I needed to get hold of my emotions before they got the best of me.

After everybody left, I made sure my house was righted and locked up for the night. Making my way to my studio, I sat at my desk to ponder over that locket again.

Flashback

"Mae, is that you?" I heard my sister call out in a whispered breathy voice.

"Yeah, it's me, Beth, I'm right here," I gently squeezed her frail cold hand.

It was hard watching my big sister fade away before my eyes, but that was what I was doing. I'd been doing this for the past two and a half years now. I made a promise to her years ago and not just any promise, but a pinky promise...which was unbreakable.

"Oh, Mae, I'm glad you're here, I want to give you something. I need you to hold onto it until the right time. Go over and fetch my box from my dresser. You know, the one Daddy gave me." Yes, I did know, I thought to myself.

"I still have mine as well, Beth. Do you remember the fuss we made because Momma wouldn't let us have them?"

"Yes, and I remember Daddy sneaking off to get them for us anyway. Momma was so mad at him; he slept on the couch in his office for two nights."

I returned to her side with the box in my hands.

"Open it for me, Mae...Ahhh, there it is. Do you remember when you gave this to me?"

"Of course I do. I was six and you were ten going on twenty. I had saved every cent I earned to 'pay' for it. I remember walking into Tiffany's with Daddy and searching for what felt like hours just to find the right one. And when we did, I sat my piggy bank on the floor and asked the salesman for a hammer. Daddy looked at me and said, 'It's okay, Mae. I'll pay for it and when we get home I'll get the money from your piggy bank.'" I snickered at the memory.

"You know, years later I found my old bank in the bottom drawer of Daddy's desk, so I took a hammer to it and do you know how much I had in that piggy?" She shook her head no.

"A whopping \$7.62, that's what I had in there." I shook my head and smiled. "So, yeah, I really paid for it, huh?"

"Mae, remember what you said when you gave it to me?" Yes, I remembered.

"I said, 'See, Beth, it has a place for you and me in it, now I can always be with you.'"

"And then I said, 'Forever, Mae,'" she said with a shaky voice. I could tell she was getting tired.

"Mae, I want you to keep my box and locket safe until the right girl comes into Teddy's life. You'll know who she is when it happens, and make sure you share the stories about both gifts with her." I nodded my head at her. I was too afraid to speak. I didn't want to break down in front of her again.

She kissed my cheek and thanked me. It was the last favor she ever asked of me.

End flashback

So here I sat looking at a Rosewood box with an inlay of Thumbelina on the lid, with a Tiffany locket inside, identical to the one my niece had given my little 'namesake' today.

I looked up and smiled as I whispered, "I found her, Beth..."

A/N:

I was thinking that it's time for Bella, what say you. Who do you think Esme found?

Yes, Sweet Tooth Fairy is real... man now I want a cupcake. An orange one with orange frosting and sprinkles, Yum!

Thanks for reading,

tickledpink

4. Chapter 4

So yeah like always I don't own Twilight that would be Mrs. Meyers. But I do own some pretty awesome fabric in the quilt stash and I know how to use it.

Lets give it up for my amazing beta extraordinaire Dollybigmomma. She really rocks the beta world people.

Chapter 4

Birthdays and Bedtime Stories

BPOV

Well, this sucked. One minute I was watching my child roll around in a blue blur with who I'd assumed was Elizabeth. Then my focus was on green eyes, bronze hair, a smirk and a wink. Then nothing but total blackness... I wasn't sure how long I was out. I was fairly sure it wasn't long; at least I hoped it wasn't. However long it was, though, it was making my baby upset. I could hear the soft snuffles of my child as I came around and I heard that wonderful voice again as he cooed comforting words to my baby.

My first thoughts as I came around were of my baby. "Where's Esme?" I asked and he pointed over to the chair across from me. I did a comical double take. I was pretty sure I didn't hit my head on the way down the rabbit hole. I had to be in 'Wonderland' because I was now looking at two identical little girls; one had to be an exact copy of my daughter, but I couldn't tell which one was which. It was as if she'd been cloned or something and now I was really confused.

As I started to form my questions as to why I was seeing two of Esme, I heard Alice say she wanted to show off the tent. Tent? What kind of party did she have planned for them? I had a feeling it was going to be some more big production.

I was still trying to get my bearings when I heard the birthday girls yell out their agreement to Alice's suggestion. I looked around, blinking my eyes at the other adults in the room, and then my eyes landed on that face again. I was pretty sure I'd seen him before... I just wished I could remember from where. I was brought out of my musing when I heard him introduce himself to me. He took my hand in his, bringing it up to his mouth and placed soft gentle kisses on the back of it. I had to will myself to not swoon in front of this man; it was bad enough my face was now on fire, stupid traitorous blush.

After our introduction, he offered me a hand and we ventured out to the 'Tent'.

What the hell did Alice do?

I had never seen anything like this before and I prayed I never had to again. Oh, my heavens! Over the top much? Based on what I was looking at now, I'd bet her wedding was an epic production like an old Hollywood musical. I had to remember to bite my tongue to keep the snarky comments to myself. I couldn't help but think how drastic this party was from what I had planned for tomorrow's party. I was so glad that Esme was a very easy child to please, most of the time.

The 'Tent' was a dreamlike fairyland and the smiles and giggles from the girls were undeniably the sweetest sounds any parent could ever want to hear.

The party was a huge success; I only hoped the gift from us was as successful. I watched Elizabeth give her gift to Esme and she was glowing with pride at her gift choice. When Esme opened up the aqua blue box that was tied with a white ribbon I knew immediately this gift came from Tiffany's, and chances were Edward paid way too much for my child's gift. I'd allow it this once because hell, I let my child talk me into a major piece of furniture for Elizabeth.

"Oh, Beth, I love it!" Both girls were hugging each other now. Elizabeth was showing Esme how it opened up and already had a picture of her and her daddy in it and that it had a place for one of Esme and myself. I didn't hear all of what was said between them, but I thought I heard the word 'forever'.

Esme then had Elizabeth open her gift and it was a major hit. I then heard thank you and I believe she even called my child Mae. Well, I guessed they'd given each other nicknames and I couldn't help but think it was adorable.

After all the party guest had left, I gathered up my jewel's gifts and stowed them in the trunk of my car and went in search of my daughter. What I saw before me was incredible; they were both asleep on a mountain of satin pillows in the middle of a monster of a bed. They looked like they could be a couple of angels from a Botticelli painting, intertwined in an embrace as they lay dreaming.

"I'm honestly not sure which one is mine," I whispered to Edward and he somehow talked me into letting them nap. We agreed to use the time to get better acquainted.

We spent the next three hours getting to know each other. He told me he was a doctor, a pediatrician to be precise, and he'd just joined his uncle's practice. The reasoning for going into private practice instead of working in a hospital was so he could give Elizabeth a normal home life. Well, as normal as any single parent could give. I could totally understand his reasoning and couldn't help but admire him for his dedication to his child. Most men in his position would be out there trolling for a momma for his child to relieve his own burden. We discovered we had a lot in common; our likes and dislikes seemed to mirror each other. I found out he played the piano, guitar and a mean kazoo. Although he hadn't picked up a kazoo since he was twelve. For some reason this last bit of information made him blush. I found out he couldn't cook, not even boil water.

"The ironic thing is, my house came with a huge state of the art kitchen and the only appliance I can use is my microwave," he said as he blushed again. I couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy about this man's kitchen and I told him so, as my love of cooking and tiny antiquated kitchen left me wanting.

"Well, you'll just have to come over sometime and break the manufacture's seal on the rest of the appliances." He gave me that smirk and then another wink. Oh, this man was swoon worthy and I was sure he knew it as well.

"I just might take you up on that. I'm sure we can break the 'seal' on your unused equipment," I replied with a coy smile, willing my blush not to give me away. I saw his eyes go wide before he schooled his face, trying not to give himself away. I couldn't believe I was flirting with this man, a man I'd just met...

or had I? The sense of déjà vu as I looked at him was unsettling.

Our conversation turned to the girls and I quickly steered the subject away from Esme's father. I mean, I was pretty sure I was looking right at him, but not knowing for certain who fathered my child's was embarrassing. Yeah, that was so not a first time conversation subject. 'So, Edward, I'm almost 99.9% positive that you're my baby daddy. Where were you Valentine's Day seven years ago?' No, I didn't think so; not going to drop that bomb on him just yet. I was going to have to give some thought as to how I was going to share that little nugget with him.. Right now I had to get out of here so I could think.

As we headed towards the stairs to check on the girls, we heard them giggling from the kitchen. I was pretty sure Esme had her hands in whatever dish was being made. She loved helping me cook and was never one to shy away from different foods like a lot of kids her age.

I was right. She was helping finger roll gnocchi off of a fork. So I smiled and dived in to help my baby. I loved gnocchi. Yum! I tossed Edward an apron and he looked lost, so I made a comment that it was not that difficult and sweet little Elizabeth told me otherwise. This caused the room to ignite with laughter at Edward's expense. I turned to see my baby being tickled by him and I couldn't help but think this was what every little girl needed; a daddy. I promised myself soon that I would tell him I suspected he was her daddy and hopefully we could figure everything out.

Dinner was wonderful but now we really needed to leave before I spilled the beans. I just needed some time to think. I also needed to get through party number two tomorrow. We were saying our goodbyes as the girls were head to head in a conspiracy, which turned out that they wanted to have a sleep over. We agreed and made plans to call and set it up. Esme and I headed out to the car and got all buckled in. As I looked in my rearview mirror at my child, I saw Edward still standing there as I drove away.

I didn't get much in the way of sleep that night, what with the baby daddy drama I had going on in my head and the fact that I stayed up way too late doing food prep in my tiny kitchen. I wished this tiny condo had a bigger kitchen and I couldn't stop blushing as I was thinking of Edward's kitchen and the seal I would like to break. I shook my head at the nerve I had to flirt with him. I never flirted; I tried to avoid the opposite sex as much as possible. Look what happened the last time I interacted with a man. I mean, I had my first kiss and lost my V-card and I couldn't even remember if I liked it or if I was any good at either one. But now, one wink and I was all but ready to go for round two. Well, not all the way with round two, but I sure would have liked to kiss that man.

"Mommy, when does Grampy get here? Is he bringing Jakey and Seffie with him? How are we going to get Pops up all the stairs?" Esme rattled question after question at me.

"Esme, Grampy will be here at one o'clock. Yes, Jake and Seth are coming with him, as well as Embry, Quil, Sam and Emily. Jake will help bring Pops and his wheelchair upstairs, so you don't need to worry about that, okay?"

"Okay, Mommy. What do you think I should wear today?" she asked with a knowing smile. She knew I was no good at this; after all, she told me over and over how jeans and t-shirts were not fashion forward.

"I don't know, baby. Why don't you choose while Mommy gets set up for the party?" I kissed her on top of her head and she ran off to her closet; the same closet that made our decision to buy the condo a foregone conclusion. Her closet was almost as big as the master suite's closet. This thing had a floor plan like the children's department at Macy's. All of her clothes were hung by season and then organized by color and then by formal or everyday wear. She had organizers for everything from hair accessories to underclothes. I cringed when I thought about her shoe collection. I was sure if I let her and they came in her size, she would have a collection of Jimmy Choo's, no joke; the child loved her shoes.

"Esme, why don't you take a bath first and then decide what you want to wear, sweetie?" I called to her.

"Okay, Mommy! Can I have bubbles please?"

"Sure, baby. I'll go start the water for you." I started the water and poured in a capful of her orange blossom scented organic bubble bath. She came skipping into the bathroom and quickly got into the tub.

She lay back and sank into the water, sighing and declared, "This is the life." It boggled my mind where she came up with this stuff and I had to chuckle at her... too cute.

"Baby, did you have fun yesterday?"

"Oh, Mommy, I had a wonderful time. Miss Alice made it a perfect party. That's how I want all of my parties..." She stopped herself mid-sentence and looked up with unshed tears and a quivering bottom lip.

"Hey, baby, why are you crying?" She didn't answer me; instead she started to sob.

"Esme, baby, you can tell me anything, you know that, right?" She nodded her head yes.

"Oh, Mommy, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to make you sad." Why would she think I was sad? I thought over what she said before she started to cry. Oh, my baby, she thought I was upset about the difference in the parties, my sweet caring child.

"Esmeralda Jane, you listen me, baby. I'm not sad or even mad at you. It was a wonderful party. Don't feel bad for enjoying your birthday, Esme. Do you hear me, baby girl?" I watched her as a small smile crept up her face.

"What was your favorite thing about yesterday, baby?" I asked and she looked wistfully up towards the ceiling and sighed.

"I loved the puppets, Mommy. Thumbelina is my favorite story ever. But my very favorite part was getting my locket from Beth." And here came that smile again.

I had to admit, the gift was very sweet and perfect for a six year old. What bothered me about it was where it came from; Tiffany's. Heck, I was an adult and my nicest jewelry was the small sapphire earrings Charlie gave me when Esme was born. This was a two inch sterling silver Heart Key locket and chain. I

couldn't help myself; I looked it up online before I went to bed last night. It had a four hundred dollars price tag! I was just not sure if I wanted her to ever wear it out of this house. They even had it engraved, so we had no choice but to except it. It read, 'My Mae, I love you forever, Your Beth'. It really was perfect. Besides, I really shouldn't complain about price after what I let Esme talk me into giving Elizabeth. I mean who gave large pieces of furniture that cost just as much? Yeah, that would be me...the pushover.

I let her stay in the water until it cooled and she started to prune. "Well, my jewel, I think you're clean, don't you?" She didn't even fuss; she just reached her hands out and I wrapped a towel around her. She dried off and headed to her room to get dressed. I left her to it and went find myself something to wear from my lack luster wardrobe...ahhh, jeans, t-shirt and my very worn out chucks, perfect. I finished off my look with a messy bun and strawberry chap stick.

Esme came out a few minutes later dressed in one of her more contemporary dresses. This one was a sleeveless fleece bubble dress with front pleats at the neck, back button closure and three bands of different fabric around the bottom of the skirt (polka dot, hounds tooth and solid black) and a black sweater knit bolero that tied in the front. She added a pair of white legging tights with white dots on them, and finished off the look with black Mary Jane's.

"Mommy, can you please help me fix my hair?"

"Sure, baby, let's go get that done." I followed her back to her room and watched as she sat in front of her vanity mirror. "Okay, baby, what would you like me to do with your hair?"

"I want to keep it down please," she said and I nodded my head and started brushing her hair and watched it curl up naturally.

"Now, what would you like done next, baby?"

"Could you make curls around your fingers like the other day?"

"Sure, baby." I loved running my fingers through her hair. It was so soft and it curled so easily; just a quick twist around my finger and viola, perfect ringlets. I slid on her black headband and she was good to go. Kissing the top of her head, I looked at her in her mirror and asked, "Is that all you need from me, baby?"

"Just one more thing, Mommy." She reached over and picked up the box the locket was in and smiled serenely at it. "Can you put this on me? I want to show it to Grampy." I fastened it around her neck and watched as her serene smile turned into a mega watt smile.

"Thank you, Mommy." She turned around and wrapped her arms around my waist and hugged me tightly.

"You're welcome, my jewel. Now let's go get ready for our guests."

Three hours later we were knee deep in Italian food being kept warm in the oven for our guests. The food count stood at three lasagnas, two trays of cheese tortellini, four loaves of garlic bread, one Caesar Salad waiting to be tossed and an Italian Cream Cake for dessert, yum! Esme wanted Italian and I aimed to please the birthday girl. Besides, I secretly hoped all the pasta and cheese would fill the bottomless pits those guys called stomachs. As we were setting the last of the silverware out the doorbell chimed and I had to race Esme to the door. I'd been working on stranger danger for the past few years and she usually remembered, but today she was preoccupied. I set the stepstool in front of the door so she could look out the peephole.

"Who is it, please?" she said to our visitors.

I heard a falsetto male voice reply, "Little pig, little pig, let me in." That had to be Seth; that was the only story he liked to tell her. He thought the 'Big Bad Wolf' was unjustly vilified and given the chance, he would re-write all stories that painted the wolf as a bad guy. I couldn't help myself as I rolled my eyes at his antics and Esme giggled at him.

Seth was the first one through the door and swooped my baby up into the air, making her soft giggles turn into peals of laughter. She turned to him and batted her eyelashes at him, the little flirt. 'Seth' was her second word, but it was more like 'Seffie' and the kid lapped it up, even though the rest of the guys teased him relentlessly about the nickname.

"Hey, beautiful, how's my best girl today? Did you have a great party yesterday? What did you get?" he said all of that with his ever-present smile.

"I got a lot of dollies from my school friends, Miss Alice gave me some dresses and girl stuff, I got a football from Uncle Em and then Elizabeth, my best friend, gave me this. She showed off her Tiffany locket to the entire room and they all ohhed and ahned. After she regaled the room with the gifts she received and all the party fanfare, I heard a chorus of guys asking when they could eat.

The food was a success and it vanished right before my eyes, and when I heard Emily comment about a swarm of locust I lost it and busted out laughing.

The guys drew straws for clean-up duty. It used to be a coin toss but rumor had it someone was using a double sided cheat coin. What a bunch of animals! This pack really needed some leadership.

With the clean up complete, the guys ran out to their cars for Esme's gifts. Charlie gave her the pinkest fishing pole I'd ever seen. The 'uncles' gave her a handmade two-story dollhouse fully outfitted. Billy and Jake's gift was a set of hand carved decorative hair combs with an abalone flower inlay design. Sam and Emily's gift was a certificate for a butterfly garden that would arrive in the spring. I couldn't wait until that garden came to life, literally. My gift was a memory quilt of her first six years. I used her baby dresses for the hand appliquéd ball gown designs in twelve separate squares and pictures of her on the background fabric, with an alternating crown and dancing slippers design for the border. My inspiration for the quilt was a memory of my mom telling me the story of the twelve dancing princess when I was a little girl.

Flashback:

"Bella, what story would you like me to tell you tonight, baby?" my mom asked with a glimmer of hope in her eyes that it wouldn't be the same as always. However, if Renee knew one thing about me, it would be that I didn't like change of any kind. I was like a vampire frozen in time, and it took a life-altering

event to change me. Like when Charlie and Renee got divorced, and again when we moved all the way to Arizona. I missed my daddy and all the cool weather and green trees. It was too hot here and the trees were not very green here. I loved the color green; it was my favorite color.

“Well, baby, what will it be tonight? ‘Thumbelina’? ‘The Ugly Ducking’? Or...oh, I know, how about ‘The Swan Princess’?”

I shook my head no and smiled at her as I slid my favorite book out from under my pillow towards her.

She sighed and said, “Again? I’ve read this book so many times, baby, you know I don’t need to even look at it anymore.” But she did and like always she showed me the pictures, and like always, I let her “read” it to me even though I’d been reading on my own for a year now. I loved watching her as she looked up from the pages and smiled at me.

She kissed me goodnight and turned to leave my room. “Mommy?” I called out to her.

“Yes, baby?” she answered.

“I love you, Mommy. You’re my best friend forever, Mommy,” I said to her.

She smiled again and said, “As you are mine, Isabella, as you are mine, forever.” I drifted off to sleep with that smile in my dreams and her words in my heart. Both of which I was sure I would treasure forever.

End Flashback

Esme was, as always, very thankful for all of her gifts and made sure to thank each person with hugs and kisses. But, I could see her fading fast and knew she wouldn’t last much longer. So we said our goodbyes and promised to do this again soon, and then my house was silent once again and life could get back to normal.

That was until the phone rang...

A/N:

I’m having the time of my life writing this story and I hope you all are enjoying reading it as well.

I have to agree with Bella the ‘Twelve Dancing Princesses’ is a wonderful fairytale. My daughter was in musical production of it back in high school... I laughed my head off, ahh good times. And yes I have that same quilt pattern in my stash, shush don’t tell my husband. It’s bad enough I now have to sneak my quilt contraband in without his knowledge, Hahaha!

I would love to hear from you,

tickledpink

5. Chapter 5

I still own nothing! That's my story and I'm sticking to it. If I haven't said it enough, Dollybigmamma is a beta queen!

Chapter 5

Pixie Dust and Puppy dog tails

BPOV

I was so tired after our guests left that I was tempted to fall into my bed fully clothed. I would have done it if I hadn't had a six year old to tend to. After locking up for the night, I walked into the living room to the sweetest sight ever. Esme was sound asleep on one of our overstuffed twin red checkered print sofas. My living room was so small that they were the only things that fit in here in an L-shape layout along with a small oval coffee table. Above the one sofa I hung a leaded glass windowpane I rescued from the roadside. All they needed was some TLC and a fresh coat of paint. The table looked perfect sitting on top of the braided rug my Gran made for me out of my old clothing. On the opposite wall was the armoire from my mom's house that I now used to house our electronics and movie collection. This was what I grew up with, what brought me comfort. It was homey and lived in; some would call it 'Shabby Chic'... I called it perfect.

I picked my baby up off the sofa and carried her to her bedroom. I tried not to wake her as I slipped her out of her clothes and into her favorite pale blue nightie, reminding myself to remove her locket from around her neck and setting it on her vanity along with her gift from Billy and Jake. I looked over at my daughter one last time and quietly closed the door. I made my way over to the phone to listen to the messages I had missed while putting Esme to bed.

I had four new messages.

First message, "Yeah...um, this Edward, Edward Masen, Elizabeth's father. I was calling to set up a time for the girls to get together. So...um...give me a call back when you get a chance..." Oh, man, I was hoping I'd have more time to figure this out. I'd just call him in a few days and give myself some time to get my head on straight.

Second message, "Hey, B, I'm so sorry I missed the party, tell my girl I love her and we'll have to get together when I get back from Paris. It's wonderful by the way and so is Ben. I've got to go; Ben's calling me. Kiss my girl for me and I'll talk to you soon, Bye." I couldn't believe Ben surprised Angela with a Paris honeymoon, lucky woman.

Third message, "Hello, Bella, this is Alice Whitlock and I'm calling to set up a lunch date with you. I just have a feeling we're going to get along famously. Give me a call back. Looking forward to it! Bye, Bella." Wow, that girl needed to cut caffeine and sugar out of her diet. It sounded like she said all of that in one breath.

Fourth message, "Bellaaa!" Ugh, Mike...delete. I couldn't believe he was still hanging around me. I thought for sure he would have stopped once the news of my pregnancy broke. But no, he was still the ever-faithful lapdog. I really needed to change my number. Nah, that would just have him on my doorstep. It was easier to ignore him over the phone.

I just couldn't deal with these people right now. I'd return calls in the morning; well, not all of them. Edward could wait for a few days, and I was most definitely not calling 'Skippy' back. Man, I needed a bath and a long uninterrupted night's sleep.

"Mommy, Mommy...Mommy, wake up, it's time to get up now." My little doll smiled at me as I tried to pull the pillow over my head. I hated Mondays... nothing good happened on Mondays.

"Alright, I'm up, little miss bossy." I yawned and stretched, getting out of bed. "What would you like for breakfast, baby?" Another yawn escaped from me; hey, I couldn't help it if I was not a morning person.

"Just cereal and fruit, please." Always so polite she was.

I shuffled my way toward the kitchen praying I remembered to set the timer on my coffee maker...yes, thank you. I grabbed my jumbo mug that had the phrase 'World's Best Mommy' on it. After getting my daily caffeine fix I poured a bowl of cereal and cut up a banana for Esme. "Esme, sweetie, come eat please."

After we completed our morning routine we made our way out to the car; yep, we were running late again... did I mention how much I hated Mondays?

I dropped Esme off at school and decided to run some errands and do a quick shop at Whole Foods. I loved my daughter, but I'd been enjoying my childfree trips to the grocery store. I'd been able to save around fifteen dollars on my weekly bills. It might not have seemed like a lot, but it added up. Plus, I was able to limit her sugar cereal consumption drastically. I knew how those marketers worked it, putting the 'fun' cereals on the lower shelves right in my child's line of sight. So now that I shopped without my baby, my pantry had never looked healthier.

I knew better than to read my list and walk at the same time. Because had I been paying attention, as I went around the corner to the next aisle, I would have turned right around and high-tailed it out of there. Instead, I ran straight into one Alice Whitlock and sons. Did I already mention I really hated Mondays?

"Bella! I'm so glad I bumped into you; did you get my message I left? I thought maybe you hadn't gotten it yet and then I thought that you were avoiding me. But Jazz said you're not that kind of person. So I figured you must be a really busy person and haven't had a chance to call me back." My goodness, the tiny woman just kept going and I knew if I waited her out I would find an opening, but she just kept going.

"I hoped Esme enjoyed Saturday? She's just the sweetest little girl only second to our Elizabeth, that is. Speaking of Elizabeth, a little birdie mentioned that she was going to have a slumber party with your sweet daughter? Is that true? Because if it is, I have a great idea, we can make it a double slumber with E&E and you and me. Oh, my gosh that rhymes! I'm a poet and didn't know it," she snorted and laughed at her own joke. I really needed to get her to stop talking so I could get out of this 'double slumber' thing she had envisioned for us.

“Alice, Alice, please, if you’ll let me get in on this conversation... do you ever stop and take a breath?” I asked her and she gave me a duh look. “Alice, I’m sorry, I planned to return your call after I picked up Esme from school. I had a really busy weekend with having two parties to contend with; we were so spent after my family left last night, we both just fell into bed from exhaustion.” I gave her a pleading look, hoping she would buy my excuse.

“Well, how about we go get some coffee and plan a slumber party?” All I could seem to think was. ‘Really, Alice, do you need more caffeine in your system?’ I got a mental picture of her going super nova on me and I couldn’t hide my giggles fast enough.

“Um...Alice, I have to get my groceries home before my ice cream melts; maybe some other time?” I started to head towards the checkout hoping she got my hint.

“Well, I wouldn’t want your Phish Food to suffer a meltdown. So, how about I grab us a couple of coffees and meet you at your place? Just give me your address and I’ll be right over,” she looked up at me smugly. Crap.

I knew when I’d been beat, so I threw in my metaphorical towel and admitted defeat to myself. “Sure, Alice, I’ll see you in few minutes.” She squealed at me as I acquiesced to her suggestion and I just shook my head at her, silly pixie.

After paying for my groceries I headed toward my condo to prepare for Alice’s invasion. I was pretty sure it was going to be more than my home she invaded. She looked like she was on a mission, a recon mission at that. As I finished putting away my perishables, I heard a staccato knock at my door and I was pretty sure it was the ‘Whitlock’ invasion. I took a peek out and sure enough she was at my doorstep with a cardboard cup holder and four drinks. I had to do a double take because she had one baby in a snuggle sack strapped to her chest and the other one in a baby backpack. I opened my door and smiled at her ingenuity. After we freed the boys from their captivity and had them entertained on a blanket with toys, we just stared at each other.

Alice was the first to break the silence. “Well, I didn’t know which you preferred, so I picked up an assortment of drinks. We have herbal tea, black coffee, iced passion lemonade and a chocolate Frappuccino. I grabbed the coffee in hopes to keep her away from more caffeine. “I’m glad you chose the coffee, otherwise I would have just tossed it out. I never touch caffeine; it makes me all jittery and unfocused.” I just stood there gap mouthed and shook my head at this info as I realized she was just naturally that hyper, poor Jasper.

Despite my initial fears, I was having a really pleasant visit with Alice, Brandon and Hayden. Those two boys had the sweetest smiles and both were so calm. I wondered if they got that trait from their father. If so, then that was how he was able to deal with the pint size whirling dervish.

Alice and the boys hung out until my phone alarm went off reminding me to pick up Esme. “Well, Alice, it’s that time again. I’ll give you a call after I look over my calendar and we can make plans then.” I grabbed my purse and keys and helped her carry one of the babies to her car and my jaw dropped to my knees. This little woman had a Hummer, but the thing that stunned me was it was tricked out as if it was on ‘Pimp My Ride’ or something. Hey, don’t judge, Xzibit made it worth watching.

I just couldn’t seem to stop myself from blurting out my thoughts. “Alice, how in the hell do you get into that beast of a car?”

“Bella, sweetie, it’s simple,” she said then pushed a button on her key fob. A step came out from the running board and she grinned and did a game show hostess flourish pointing it out. She climbed into the back seat and I passed her one baby after the other so she could get them in their car seats. We said our goodbyes and headed our separate ways.

I got to the school later than usual and found Esme waiting in the classroom with Miss Hale reading a book. “Hey, I’m sorry I’m late. Are you ready to go, my jewel?” I asked and she nodded yes.

“Miss Swan, may I speak with you before you go?” Aw, man, why did I feel like I was in trouble?

“Sure, Miss Hale, what would you like to talk about?” I replied.

“Please, call me Rose,” she said with a smile.

“Alright, Rose, but only if you call me Bella,” I bargained.

“Fair enough, Bella,” she said. “Well, I wanted to tell you I really enjoyed myself on Saturday. It was nice seeing all of my students so well behaved and so smartly dressed. Although your Esme is always well put together; she’s such a proper little girl.” I smiled at her assessment of my jewel.

I nod my head in agreement and looked over at my child, watching her as she organized the books by size. It made me wonder if she was developing some form of OCD. Rose brought me out of my thoughts as she cleared her throat.

“The other reason I wanted to meet with you was because Esme shared with the class today that her mommy is a writer and well, I knew I recognized your name from somewhere. I just wanted to say your books are absolutely delightful. I was hoping you would be available next Monday to come and read one of your books during story time? I know the children would be so thrilled for this once in a lifetime opportunity. I mean, it’s not every day you get to hear how the author intended their story to be read.”

“Rose, I would love to read to the class; in fact, I have a new book that’s scheduled for release soon. Let me see what I can work out with my agent and publishing house. It would be fun to share my latest adventure with the class.” I had to smile at her stunned reaction.

“Oh, Bella, that would be wonderful and I’m looking forward to it,” she replied.

“It’ll be my pleasure, Rose. Now I think I should be getting Esme home for lunch. I’ll be in touch with you soon.”

Well, my Monday was looking up I thought to myself as we made our way home, and then I saw the bane of my existence standing at my door wagging his metaphorical tail at me... shit, shit, SHIT!

I quickly schooled my face and picked my child up to use as a human shield. Yeah, I know, bad mommy. “Hey, Mike, what brings you here?” Please, please tell me it was not me I silently prayed...

“I guess you didn’t get my message that I left you,” he pouted. “Well, like I said in my message, I know a certain little lady just turned six and I wanted to give my best girl a present.” Ugh, why me... why?

Ever since my pregnancy became public knowledge, ‘Skippy’ here had laid claim to it. I mean, just because we shared a few drinks on that fateful night did not mean we dipped or tripped the light fantastic, or dipped anything else for that matter. But he seemed to think being at the same place and my lack of memory was reason enough to claim parentage. Despite the fact that *my* child looked nothing like him; hell, she was nothing like me, either.

“I’m sorry, Mike, we were really busy this weekend with *family*,” I said, putting the emphasis on the word family, hoping he got it, but knew he wouldn’t.

I unlocked my door and to no big surprise he just followed right behind me like the lapdog he was. He sat down in my living room with a present on his lap and a huge smile on his face. As hard as I tried, I couldn’t be mad at him when he clearly adored my little jewel.

“Skippy!” I heard my child say and I smiled at that. Esme had been calling Mike that all her life and he thought it was her special nickname for him. Little did he know that it was all my ranting one day years ago after one of his many surprise visits that garnered him that nickname.

“What do you have in the box, Skippy?” she sweetly asked.

Mike sat up straighter and eyed me. “Well, doll face, it’s a present for you. It’s not every day my cutie pie turns six, now is it?” Her eyes lit up when he told her this.

“Go ahead and open it, baby.” Yeah, let’s see what was going to the donation drop off this year. Mike always gave her clothes and they were always way to small for her. But Esme, being the sweet child that she was, just smiled and thanked him for the gift.

“Oh, my goodness, Mommy! Look what Skippy gave me!” she squealed. Oh, hell no no no no no! I was going to kill him! I wondered how many years I would get? This was every parent’s unapproved nightmare. Well, shit, this was one gift I couldn’t shove in the drop off bin. I smiled at her through my tightly clenched jaw and tried not to hiss at ‘Skippy’ for giving my daughter a freaking’ puppy.

That was right; he gave her a damn puppy!

It was the one item that had been on her wish list for the past four years.

I looked at him and saw the smug smile he had plastered on his face and I wished I could wipe it right off. It was going to break her heart when I had to make her give it back.

Damn you, Mike Newton!

“Esme, baby, remember when we talked about the reasons why we can’t have a puppy?” I tried to gently remind her and it was breaking my heart as I watched her smile fade.

“Why can’t she keep it?” Mike asked.

“Well, Mike, if you had told me your intention to give her a puppy, I could have informed you of the fact that I have terrible allergies and this situation could have been avoided.”

“I’m sorry, Bella. I guess I should have asked first, but I couldn’t resist when I saw her in the window at ‘Snips n’ Tails’. She’s just...well, look at her...”

Yeah, I could see what he meant but that still didn’t change things. “Mike, if I wasn’t so allergic to animals, I wouldn’t even think twice about her.” He then interrupted my ranting.

“Bella, I understand, but that’s not an issue here for you, because she’s hypoallergenic,” he said pointing at the puppy that was licking all over Esme’s face. “That means she’s sneeze free,” he said gleefully.

“Well, what kind of dog is she? She sure is a cute little thing and I hope she doesn’t get too big.” And just like that we were now the proud owners of a six week old miniature Yorkshire Terrier who was being cradled gently by my daughter in her woobie; the same woobie that I had to fight tooth and nail over once a week to keep it clean.

“Well, Mike, I really need to get Esme her lunch and down for a nap so thanks for dropping by with the *gift*. Esme, come say goodbye and thank Mike for the puppy.” I was all but frog-marching Mike out the door.

“Thank you, Skippy, for Miss Alice, I really, really love her,” she said sweetly and hugged the puppy once again. Huh, Miss Alice? I wondered, why that name?

“You’re so welcome, cutie pie. I’m just glad to make you smile,” he beamed down at her with his own smile.

I shut the door fast to avoid the hug he tried to give me and scrubbed my hands over my face.

I really did hate Mondays!

A/N:

I know, you’re thinking, really? Miss Alice? What kind of name is that for a puppy? But really, people, don’t you just picture Alice as a tiny, yippy little dog with a bow in her hair: I know I do!

I really am happy sharing my story with you all. I've started chapter six and can't wait to share it with you as well.

I have a few questions for you:

Should I include part of Bella's new book in a future chapter? Or should I make it an outtake? Do you enjoy the multiple pov's? I would love to hear from you, and don't forget to give Dollybigmomma a big high five for a job well done!

Thanks for reading my lil' story, I know you guys are out there because I've gotten over 200 hits.

Now you need to work on leaving reviews ;)

tickledpink

6. Chapter 6

All, I repeat all Twilight Characters belong to SM. I'm just borrowing them for a bit, I'll give them back, I promise. Well, maybe I could keep Edward. Do you think she would notice?

Once again, people, give it up for the beta extraordinaire, Dollybigmomma!

Chapter 6

520 and 9... Magic Numbers

EPOV

It had been over a week since I left Bella that message and she'd yet to call me back. I thought she was avoiding me, but I couldn't for the life of me figure out why. I mean, I thought we hit it off fairly well and heaven knew the girls adored each other. I just didn't get it!

"Edward, why don't you just call her back? I'm sure it just slipped her mind. I mean, when I ran into her at the store last week she did mention how life was really hectic for her right now," Alice sighed and suggested to me.

"I know, Ali Cat, it just feels like she's avoiding me, you know?"

"Well, yes I do, Teddy, but seriously, get over yourself and just call her again. Elizabeth is about to slip into a depression here and mopes around while waiting for her 'Mae'. For heavens sake, throw the girls a bone," she pointed her finger and ranted at me.

I pinched the bridge of my nose between my thumb and index finger as I tried not to go off on Alice. "Fine, Alice, I'll call after I get Elizabeth in bed tonight, happy now?"

She stuck her tongue out at me and said, "Yes, very," and then shot me another tongue flash.

"I'll see you later, Ali Cat, and thanks for listening to me." I gave her a hug as I walked her to the door. She turned and had a serious look on her face now. "What, Ali? What did I do now?" I asked pleading.

"Teddy, when you do finally get to meet up with her again and I know you will," she tapped at her temple, "Please just keep an open mind and don't interrupt her, just listen. I know it'll be worth it for all of you."

"Sure, midget, now get out of my house and go tend to your men folk, woman," I teased her and again she stuck her tongue out at me. She was so much fun to mess with!

I was getting hungry, so I went and poked my head into Elizabeth's room to see what she would like for dinner. "Hey, Princess, how would you like to go get a bite to eat?" I asked as I walked into her bedroom, finding her brushing her hair while sitting at the vanity table 'Mae' gave to her.

She turned around to answer me and my heart nearly broke into a million pieces from the sad look on her face. I inwardly sighed. I really needed to dog Bella Swan until she caved to the sleep over for the girls. "So, what do you say to dinner, baby?"

"Do I get to choose? Because I don't want fast food anymore, Nana says it's bad for you and I don't want to have bad stuff in my tummy," she said giving me a stern look, which reminded me of my mother.

"Sure, where would you like to go?" I asked her even though I already knew the answer.

"I think we should go to Five Spot, Daddy, and after we eat our dinner can we get the '520' for desert?" she asked sweetly.

"Well, that sounds like the best plan ever, baby. Let's go, I'm starving." I patted my stomach, which made her giggle. It was nice to see her happy again.

We headed out to Five Spot, which was in our Queen Anne neighborhood, so it took us about ten minutes to get there and find a parking space. I pulled into the space next to a really nice Audi Coupe. Five Spot was very family friendly and had a great dessert menu. We got out of my 'soccer mom mobile' as Emmett liked to refer to my Volvo. I said who cared; it was one of the safest cars out there. Hello, child to think about...

Walking into Five's with Elizabeth holding my hand, whom should we run into but Esme and Mama Swan. The girls now resembled clinging vines as they wrapped each other into a very tight hug. You'd think that they hadn't seen each other in ages. "Bella, wow, small world isn't it? We live in the neighborhood and this is Elizabeth's favorite place to eat. As you know, I can't cook and my aunt has been under the weather this week, so I'm on my own..." Man, I needed to get a handle on my rambling mouth, she was going to think I was an idiot, I just knew it. "So, yeah, as I was saying, small world, huh?"

"Yes, it is a small world, and to answer the question you asked during your soliloquy, we also live in the neighborhood. But this is our first time here. I've heard nothing but positive things about the restaurant and well, I promised Esme a 'bought' meal, as she likes to call them. Well, now's my chance to give my baby girl what she wants." She blushed, and why, I didn't know.

"Hey, I have a great idea, why don't you two join Elizabeth and me for dinner?" It looked like she was thinking of a way to get out of my invitation, but I had the 'Wonder Twins' on my side. There was no way in hell those two were going to be pulled apart anytime soon. She looked down at the girls who were lost to the outside world and smiled at them fondly.

"Sure, that would be lovely, but we go Dutch or we are out of here," she replied with a look that said, 'I dare you to challenge me'. I loved a challenge.

"Great, then let's get a table. I'm starved." I tried not to smirk at her as I walked up to the hostess stand. "Table for four, please." I made sure we got a table because I was certain the girls would want to sit next to each other.

After we got ourselves situated, the waitress made her way over to the table. She had that valley girl look about her; fake tan, big fake boobs, overly whitened teeth and severely bleached blonde hair...blech. That look did nothing for me, I preferred brunettes. I'd bet she even said 'like'... like, a lot.

She walked over to our table with that look I was used to; the man-eater look, swaying her non-existent hips and trying to look all seductive like. I mean, come on, I was sitting at a table with two little girls and a woman who, for all she knew, could be my wife and mother of said little girls.

"Hi, my name is Lauren and I'll be, like, your server tonight. Can I like start you off with, like, some appetizers?" she said with a nasally voice.

"Lauren Mallory, is that you?" Bella asked her.

"OH, MY GOSH! Bella Swan? I can't believe it's you! You look...really, like, good! And look, even after you had twins! I heard you were, like, preggo but, like, you had twins! Wow!" She turned towards me and lowered her voice trying to sound sultry. "And, like, who are you?" uh...yuck.

Bella jumped in before I could answer her. "Lauren, this is Edward Masen and *his* daughter, Elizabeth. She's in the same class as *my* daughter, Esme." The valley girl was straining her pea sized brain to grasp the current information. That's right, VG, 2+2=4 and guess what? C- A-T spells cat, I wanted to scream at her.

She was thinking so hard I feared she might hurt herself. "Like, are you sure? Because they really do look like twins, and I know twins, because I did, like, see Angela's brother's twins, like, once, you know." I couldn't believe she said all that with a straight face.

Bella cringed every time VG referred to the girls as 'twins'. It did make you wonder how two people could look so much alike and not have any genetic connection. I had heard it said we all had a twin out there somewhere. Maybe Esme was Elizabeth's 'twin' somehow. Hey, it could happen.

"No, Lauren, they're not twins and if you wouldn't mind, we would really like to order so we can get these two feed, please," she said all of that with a fake smile.

"Sure thing, like, what can I get for you?" Finally, I thought to myself, I really was starving.

I told Bella to go first, so she ordered fried green tomatoes that had been fried in bacon drippings. Yum...bacon. She then ordered the brisket with mashers & gravy for herself. We agreed to have the girls split an order of three cheese ravioli, because it was too much for one little girl to eat. For myself I order the Satchmo's red beans & rice and we stayed with water for our drinks. "Alright, I'll get that, like, out soon. Let me know if, like, I can get you, like, anything else."

Thank heavens she was finally gone.

"Well, Bella, it seems now would be a good time to plan that sleep over, what say you?"

"Yeah, sorry about not getting back to you right away. I had a family gathering that Sunday and then I've been working on setting up a book reading at the girl's school. Life's been pretty crazy for Esme and me this past week."

Just as I started to say no problem, 'VG' brought out our drinks and appetizer. I'd always been afraid to try the fried green tomatoes, but these were out of this world. I guess everything really was better with bacon.

I watched as Bella dug into the tomatoes, trying hard to convince Elizabeth to take at least one bite. I looked over and watched Esme daintily eat one without any prodding from her mom. The child was getting so much pleasure from the food that Elizabeth decided to try a bite, but just one she said, holding up one finger. She hummed in satisfaction along with the two other ladies at the table and asked for another one. "I'm so proud of you for trying something new, baby," I told her.

While waiting for our meals to come, I tried making small talk to help keep the awkward silence at bay. "So, you're going to be reading to the whole school?" I asked.

"What? Oh, heaven no, just the four kindergarten classes. Sixty students is much more manageable than three-hundred and sixty."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. It still boggles my mind how Miss Hale can handle all of them at the same time, when I only have Elizabeth to give me a run for my money all on her own."

"Well, yes, being a single parent at times can be quite daunting, but don't you think they're worth it in the end? I don't know what I would do or who I'd be if Esme was not in my life." She looked at her daughter and smiled.

"Please don't get me wrong," I nodded my head towards Elizabeth, "She's my greatest accomplishment. I just wish I'd done things differently, you know?" She nodded her head that she understood where I was coming from.

Just as I started to ask her what her new book was about, Lauren 'VG' showed up with our food. "Okay, here you go, enjoy your meal and just let me know if, like, I can get you anything else." We thanked her and tucked into our meals. The time for conversation was put on the back burner for now. The food was delicious as always and it was really nice having adult company for a change.

"That was wonderful, but I'm stuffed," Bella proclaimed patting her stomach lightly.

Elizabeth piped in. "I'm not. Daddy and me are going to get the 520. Oh, it's so gooeey and yu-u-uuu-mmy, right, Daddy? Miss Bella, is it alright if I share some with Mae?" she asked while laying on the Masen charm.

"Sure thing, sweetie, and just so you know, Esme is a dessert hog," she told her with a wink.

"Mommy, I'm not a hog, I'm a little girl," Esme stated with a huff and folded her arms over her chest. That was the first time I'd seen this child act, well, like a normal six year old.

“It’s okay, Mae, I’ll love you no matter what you are, forever, remember?” Elizabeth hugged her friend fiercely.

“Do you promise, Beth? I mean, really promise, like pinky promise?”

“Yes, just like that.” And then they linked pinkies and smiled at each other.

I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw Bella wipe away a tear and choke back a tiny sob.

“Well, how about we get that dessert ordered so we can all be hogs?” I got the attention of VG and placed our order for one 520 Floating Dessert and four spoons. Bella just quirked her eyebrow up and shook her head at my enthusiasm for said dessert. I mean, how could I not be excited over the best creation in the world? This dessert was pure heaven; a chocolate waffle bridge on Almond Roca pontoons in a lake of chocolate sauce with raspberry ice cream, topped with whipped cream and granola. Yu-u-uuu-mmy, just like Elizabeth said.

“Oh, my heck, what did you order, Edward?” she asked with a stunned look.

The girls picked up their spoons and before we dived into the yummy goodness of chocolate bliss, I laid out the usual ground rules to sharing a dessert; stay in your desert quadrant and under no circumstance are you to ever cross over into another hog’s territory.

Bella snorted and rolled her eyes at my silliness. “You think I’m joking? This is serious stuff here, Bella. I don’t joke about chocolate...ever,” I said trying not to burst out laughing at my silly rant.

After my small tyrannical episode, we dug into the gooey goodness and all you could hear was moaning and spoons clanking on the plate. We finish up and while we waited for the check I turned to Bella and asked when we could get the girls together. We set up a definite day and time for next Saturday. When the check came, I had a hard time getting Bella to let me pay for all of it. After I pouted for a few minutes, she caved. Yes, no one could resist the Masen pout. We walked out to the parking lot with the girls in front of us hand in hand. It turned out we parked next to each other. It was hard to pull the girls apart, but we managed it, only after telling them about the upcoming sleep over. I just sat in my car and sighed; it was a great evening.

BPOV

Oh, my heavens, what were the chances I’d bump into ‘the baby daddy’ at dinner? I knew my luck wouldn’t hold out for long. Once the girls saw each other it was a foregone conclusion that we would be dining with them tonight. The worst part of the night was when our waitress showed up. Now I knew fate hated me. It was none other than one of the ‘Tweedles’. That was right; had it not been for her and her ever faithful side kick, Jessica, I would have never gone out that night seven years ago. But then I thought about never being given my most prized possession, my daughter, Esme. Even though I told Lauren that the girls were not twins, she was just too dense to get it. I just prayed that Edward didn’t dwell on the fact that our daughters were each other’s doppelganger.

After a wonderful meal and what would have to be the best dessert I had ever tasted, we said our goodbyes, but not before setting a definite time for the girls to have their sleep over.

Man, this evening’s encounter was way too close for my comfort. I really was going to tell him; I’d put it off long enough. He deserved to know, the girls deserved it and most of all, Esme deserved to have her daddy in her life; something I never thought I would be able to give her.

So, when Edward brought Elizabeth over next weekend I would make a point to set up a time to talk with him so I could hopefully rest easier at night. That gave me nine days to work out my ‘So, guess what, Edward? You’re my baby’s baby daddy’ speech.

Well, to quote from one of my favorite movies “... it’s nine. And that’s a magic number.”

A/N:

Wow, you guys are awesome! I have over 500 hits and several of you have put me on favorite and alerts. I love checking out my stats and seeing all the different countries being represented by you all, it reminds me of the medals count during the Olympics. I cheer each time a new country joins in on my happiness.

Did you enjoy the return of one of the “Tweedles”? I sure did.

Yes, Five Spot is a real restaurant in Seattle and yes, that was all from the menu.

Who out there can tell me what movie the quote is from?

Next up: Bella tells all, unless she chickens out again... insert evil laugh here ;)

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

tickledpink

7. Chapter 7

Yet again, I do not own any Twilight characters that would be SM. I do, however, love to play with them from time to time.

Dollybigmomma, you are my beta 'rock'!

Chapter 7

Fairytales and a Prelude to a Kiss

BPOV

Well, my nine days were moving at light speed. Why was it when you had all the time in the world, life moved as slowly as the tortoise, but when you had things to get done...zip, you were like the hare. I just hoped this was one race I could win.

I kept myself pretty busy, what with the book reading to get ready for and let's not forget I now had a puppy to keep from pooping everywhere. Miss Alice really was a sweet puppy and Esme just adored her. I thought for sure she would have wanted to bring her for show and tell. But she said she wanted to keep her a secret until Elizabeth saw her first. I loved how my child thought sometimes.

Getting what I wanted from my publishers was an easy task. It also helped that Angela, my agent extraordinaire, was back in town and worked the voodoo that she did so well. All I needed to do was sign a few papers and we were good to go.

That was what I was doing on day one of my countdown, meeting Angela for lunch at my favorite café. I loved that they had patio seating, because the weather had been unseasonably warm for early October and also because I had Miss Alice that I now got to drag everywhere. I just couldn't bring myself to put her in the crate. I mean, she was just a baby after all. So, I got to carry her around in a designer doggie carrier. And not just any dog carrier, but a 3-in-1 Deluxe Pink Plaid Pet Stroller/Carrier/Car Seat. I knew it was a little over the top, but it was a really cute stroller and Esme loved taking Miss Alice out for walks in it. Now that we had Miss Alice, Esme had become a puppy accessory-shopping fiend. I made the mistake of going to the pet store for puppy food and came out with a butt load of stuff. Did I really need the pink puppy playpen or the hooded pink rain slicker and matching boots? No, but Esme was so cute when she reminded me that now Miss Alice and her both had matching slickers. I just couldn't help myself and folded like a cheap card table.

As I walked up to the café I saw Angela sitting outside. "Oh, my word, Bella! What are you pushing a stroller for? Are you tending someone's baby now?" And because my life sucked, Miss Alice decided to start yipping, loudly.

Angela jumped at the sound and I just buried my face in my hands waiting for the laughter.

"Bella, please tell me that's not what I think it is?" she asked through her fit of laughter.

"Well, I don't know, Angela, why don't you tell me what you think it is?" I huffed trying to feign anger at her outburst but failed miserably when I busted out in my own laughter.

"Oh, my, were did you get that, that... what is it anyway, B?"

"Well, my fine friend, this is Miss Alice, a Yorkshire terrier that that mutt, Skippy, gave to Esme for her birthday. And before you ask, she's hypoallergenic, which means she's 'sneeze free' according to said mutt," I said with all the righteous indignation I could muster.

"Well, she is cute, I give Skippy that much. At least it's not some toddler dress like last year, that's sure to save you a trip to the drop off bin."

"Yes, well, enough time on the douche also know as Mike Newton. Tell me all about Paris! Did you even see the sights or was it just you in a suite for two weeks?" I smirked knowing what her answer was going to be. She jumped right in and just like that, the topic of Skippy the dog whisperer was forgotten.

We spent the next hour and a half catching up on all the things that had happened since the wedding. However, I chose to keep Edward a secret...for now. After we played catch up, we got down to business.

"Angela, I'm so glad you got back when you did. It was bad enough that I had to work with the harpy to make this book reading happen." I shuddered at the thought of more contact with Ms. Denali.

Ms. Denali was the executive editor over the children's literature division at my publishing house. Why, I wasn't sure. I was fairly certain she hated children and would like to grind their little bones like the witch in Hansel and Gretel. I'd been lucky that Angela had dealt with her most of the time. Having had the pleasure of meeting her once in person when I signed on with them years ago was enough. She reminded me of that character Meryl Streep portrayed in 'The Devil Wears Prada' except that Ms. Denali made her look like an angel.

I was sure many years ago she was a stunning woman, but time had not been good to her. Her once strawberry blonde hair was now grey, and not the flattering grey. Hers was more like gunship grey, which made her complexion morbidly chalky. Add to that her apparent need to wear hooker red lipstick and she looked like the undead. I shuddered just thinking about her.

My alarm went off as Angela and I said our goodbyes. I packed Miss Alice up and headed over to the school to pick up Esme. When I got there, Miss Hale flagged me down and I informed her that everything was set for the book reading. We confirmed the time for Friday at one-thirty, which meant school on Friday would be a combined morning and afternoon class. She then asked if it was all right to invite the room parents to help with keeping the children in line. I agreed that it would be very helpful to have a few more sets of eyes and helping hands.

Tuesday came and went way too fast. Wednesday, my box from the publishing house came and I spent my time sorting out the contents of said box. Thursday, I signed copies of my book and made mouse shaped bookmarks with Esme's help.

It was now Friday morning and my sweet daughter and I were taking Miss Alice for a spin in her buggy and a final potty stop before we needed to go to school. After we set the puppy playpen up on a plastic drop cloth, yeah, let's just say I learned my lesson and leave it at that, I locked up and headed over to school to wow their little minds.

After getting Esme out of the car, we made our way to the trunk to retrieve my surprise for the children and headed into her classroom. I loved kindergarten, with all the different centers that the children got to use. Besides the obvious reading center, I always loved the play area. It seemed Miss Hale had the same love, as this set up was wonderful. She had a play kitchen with replicas of 1950's appliances, cookware and even pretend food. The living room had a sofa, rocking chair and a cradle with twin baby dolls in it. On the wall she had different dress-up outfits hanging from pegs. It brought back so many good memories of my own school days. It also reminded me of my mom's classroom. *No, don't go there right now, Bella.* I needed to stop thinking about the past and get ready for today.

"Where would you like me to set up?" I asked Miss Hale.

"I was thinking the children could sit on the rug and I'll have you use my rocking chair to read from. We'll need to move the tables against the walls to fit all four classes in here. I'm sorry to say that my mentor will be unable to be with us today. You would have enjoyed meeting her, she's been teaching forever. As a matter of fact, she was my kindergarten teacher. But this will sadly be her last year; she's retiring after thirty-five years of teaching. Well, I was hoping the sub would show up early today so we could have this already set up for you," she rambled on happily.

"Knock, knock, I just got the note from Mrs. Underwood that we'll be combining classes today for a special activity?" I heard the sub say as she walked into the room.

"That's correct. You'll need to have the children in line at a quarter of one. I'm sure Mrs. U told you this in her notes and that we'll be having help from our room parents as well, Miss..." Miss Hale said in a very authoritative voice.

"Yes, she did, and I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce myself, I'm Ms. Stanley."

I snapped my head up from my box and lo and behold, it was my other 'Tweedle'. Well, now I guess I knew which one was Dee. I guess that made Lauren... Dum; and after her inability to grasp that the girls were in fact not twins, yeah, she would be Dum.

I cleared my throat and that was when Dee looked over at me and squealed like a Piccolo Pete when she realized whom I was. "Hi, Jessica, I see you finally chose your major?" I said to her and tried not to smirk.

"Bella? Oh, my goodness! You look great! Are you a Room Mom here? I take it you kept the baby because, well, you're here." I tried not to let her words get to me.

"Actually, I'm here to read my newest book to the children and yes, I did keep my daughter." I tipped my head in Esme's direction. "So, how long have you been teaching?" I asked trying to keep my smile in place.

"Well, I've been subbing for four years now. It's been fun and all but not what I really want for my life." I couldn't stop myself; I had to know what it was she really wanted in her life, so I asked.

"Well, I thought for sure I would have married Eric, but when he dropped out of med school, I dropped him. I was so not going to get myself stuck with a nobody, you know what I'm saying?" Yeah, what she was saying was that she was a gold digger I smirked to myself. Go, Eric. He dodged a bullet on that one.

"Well, it's been nice talking with you, Jessica, but it's almost time for the children to arrive so I think I should let you go and get your students."

"Oh, my goodness, is it already that time?" She grimaced and turned to leave the classroom. "Oh, sorry, silly me," I heard her say to someone.

"It's not a problem, Miss," the man replied in a soft velvety voice. I knew that voice; that was the same voice from my many recent dreams. "Yes, I'm here to help in my daughter's classroom today." I quietly walked over to hear the exchange between Jessica and *my* Edward. What? No, he was not my Edward, what was I thinking? "No, I'm not married," Edward replied. 'Run, Edward, Run! And whatever you do don't tell her you're a doctor,' I mentally chanted. "It was nice meeting you..."

"Oh, I'm sorry, how silly of me. It's Jessica, Jessica Stanley, and you are..." I heard her ask all breathy.

"I'm Dr. Masen, Elizabeth's dad." *Nooooo, you silly man! You never give your occupation to the man-eater during hunting season!* I thought as I slapped my hand over my forehead. *It's all over now, she has you in her sites, you foolish man.*

Watching Jessica work her 'seduction mojo' was like watching an episode of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom where the lioness was on the hunt. "It was, um...nice meeting you, Miss Stanley." And just like that the beautiful gazelle escaped from his predator.

I scurried away from the door, not wanting to be caught eavesdropping.

"Hey, Edward, I didn't know you were a room parent?"

"Yeah, I thought it was a good way to keep up with what goes on around here." He smiled at me, and it was that really cute crooked smile at that. "So, is there anything I can help with?"

"I'm not sure; you should ask Miss Hale what still needs to be done."

"Will do," he said with another smile as he walked away. Sigh.

We got the room set up just as the other parents showed up. Miss Hale and Jessica brought in sixty very excited five and six year olds and it took a few

minutes to settle them in.

Miss Hale stood in front of my audience and began. “Welcome, everyone, it’s so nice to see all of you here for this special opportunity. I want to first thank all of our wonderful room parents for coming. I would also like to thank Miss Swan for her willingness to share her newest book with us. Boys and girls, I expect you to show her the same respect you show for Mrs. U and myself. So, with that said, please help me welcome Miss Isabella Marie Swan.” All of the children clapped as I walked to the front of the room.

I took my seat in the rocking chair and said a few words to the children before I began...

In the far away land of Evermore there lived the kindly Queen Grace and her five beautiful daughters.

Princess Scarlett was the oldest daughter who had eyes as red as rubies.

Princess Jade was the second daughter with eyes deep and green like the forest.

The third Princess was named Azura because her eyes were the deepest ocean blue.

Princess number four was Violet whose eyes reminded Queen Grace of her favorite purple flowers.

But of all the princesses, the youngest and the smallest was Opal. Princess Opal was very special. For you see, she had eyes not just of one color; no, her eyes had every color of the rainbow...

As I continued to read the story, I looked up from my book and the looks on all the children’s faces spoke volumes to me; it was going to be a hit. I continued to read and my audience was captivated as I read to them of Opal’s adventure.

...That was when Opal heard a deep voice speaking softly.

“Don’t be afraid, little one, I mean you no harm,” the voice said.

“Who are you? Please come out so I can see you?” squeaked Opal.

“Try not to be afraid of what you see, my child,” a trembling voice replied.

“I will try my very best to do as you ask, kind Sir.”

The next thing that Opal saw was a pair of bright green eyes, a wet pink nose and long twitchy whiskers. She tried not to let her voice sound as scared as she was.

“You’re a c-c-cat, are you not?” she asked.

“Yes,” he purred nervously.

I heard a collective gasp from the room and smiled. This was what made me happy to share my imagination with children. It was wonderful to watch them as their eyes lit up at the pictures of the adventure being told to them. I read the rest of the story, leaving them with a little cliffhanger sure to have them clamoring at their parent’s feet to get to the bookstore to purchase the next book in the series.

...Opal held on tight to the magic amulet and jumped...

As I closed the book, the children started to talk about Opal and where her magic amulet would take her next.

Miss Hale stood and reclaimed control over the children. “Boys and girls, let’s thank Miss Swan for her time and her wonderful story.” I then heard a collective ‘Thank you, Miss Swan’.

“You’re very welcome, boys and girls. It was my pleasure to share it with all of you. I have a gift for you as well,” I told them.

With the adult’s help, we passed out the bookmarks Esme and I made along with a copy of my newest book.

“Wow, boys and girls what a wonderful gift this is. What do you have to say to Miss Swan?” Miss Hale addressed the children.

Once again I received a loud group thank you and applause.

I’d never had a book reading go so well; the smiles from the children as they stood to leave were fantastic. I stood at the door and watched them file out to their waiting parents. As I turned to gather my things I was met with the captivating green-eyed Dr. Edward Masen.

“Bella, that was one of the most intriguing fairytales I’ve heard in quite awhile. And I’m not just saying that to win brownie points. You had every single person ensnared in your tale. Wow, just, wow.” And cue my stupid blush.

“Thank you, Edward; it’s always nerve wracking with the first reading. I usually read them to Esme but I wanted this one to be a surprise for her,” I blushed again. “Edward, I was hoping to get a chance to talk with you about something. What would you say to having an early dinner on Sunday when you come to pick up Elizabeth?” *Please say yes, please say yes...*

“That sounds like a plan, what time should I be over? I wouldn’t want to have you keep Elizabeth all day long.”

“Come over at four o’clock, and I’m sure those two can keep each other busy while we talk,” I tipped my head in the direction the girls were playing.

“Great, Bella, I look forward to dinner. Oh, I almost forgot, Alice will be bringing Elizabeth with her tomorrow. But if you need anything, you still have my

number, right?"

"Yep," I say popping the *P*.

"Okay, I'll see you on Sunday at four. Elizabeth, say goodbye to Esme, we need to go, baby."

When we got home, Miss Alice was jumping around so much it was hard to get hold of the little rat. I gave up and just left her for Esme to deal with. We spent the rest of the day playing with the puppy and watching a movie.

With my child fed and bathed, I snuggled next to her on one of our sofas. "Esme, do you want to sleep out here tomorrow in sleeping bags or do you want to sleep in your room?"

"Can Beth and I share my bed, Mommy? You and Miss Alice the person can sleep on the air mattress in my room, too, if you want." She smiled at me and just like that I was thinking about Edward.

"Sure, baby, if that's what you want. I'm sure Miss Alice the person wouldn't mind. Now, what kind of food do you want serve your guests tomorrow night?" I asked her.

After deciding on a menu of homemade baked Macaroni & Cheese with roasted vegetable medley and chocolate silk pie for dessert, we then planned our events for the evening; Esme was a very thorough planner. That was when it hit me; my child was just like Alice and her mother...it was genetic. A shiver ran down my spine as I realized it was just going to get worse with age.

When I woke up from another steamy dream featuring Edward Masen and his captivating gaze, I just shook my head at my subconscious. I was pretty sure he would never want to see me again after tomorrow night. I just hoped he could accept Esme as his and not take Elizabeth away from her.

"Morning, Mommy, its slumber party day! Hurry, Mommy, we haven't got all day," she proclaimed frantically.

"Esme, we have..." I looked over at my alarm clock and groaned; it was only seven-thirty and it was Saturday, "...eight hours before our guests get here. Why don't you climb in and snuggle with me for a little bit?" I pleaded with her.

"Mommy, we're burning daylight here," she stated with frustration.

"Where on earth did you hear that from?" What a funny child.

"Seffie and Jakey say it all the time to Grampy." I'd have to talk to those two about showing respect to their elders.

"Well, I'm not ready to get up yet, baby. Can I at least get another hour before you run me ragged?" I begged her, because, hey, I was a tired mommy and I really didn't want to go to the store with her. It really had been nice not grocery shopping with her lately.

"Fine, Mommy, one hour, but no more," she said, all the while she was snuggling down under my quilt. Bless my baby!

Man, time sure flew, and now we were at Whole Foods getting everything on our list for tonight. Hell, since we were already here, I figured we might as well pick up everything for tomorrow's dinner as well. We finished our shopping and dashed home, getting everything set up and ready for our company.

Esme and I finished making the pie and refrigerated it so it could set-up. Just as we finished, the doorbell chimed.

When we opened the door, we found both Elizabeth and Alice bouncing just like Miss Alice did when we came home. The girls glommed onto each other and headed straight to Esme's room.

"Alice, please come in," I said sweetly.

"I know I've been here before, Bella, but I love the way you've decorated. Did you hire a designer? If you did, who are they? Maybe I know them?" Again, no breath intake with that round of questions; how did she not pass out?

"No, Alice, I didn't hire help. As a matter of fact, I rescued a few things from the trash down the street. The sofas I purchased but the other things are family heirlooms. Thank you, I'm glad you like it. Now, can a give you the fifty-cent tour?"

"Really, the trash? I wonder which pieces were orphans? Oh, I can't wait to tell Mom about your talent for design. It's what we do, you know; 'Cullen-Whitlock Interiors' is Mom and I. Well, we're partners and yes, I would love a tour."

I showed her to my small eat in kitchen/dining area, the powder room, and my bedroom with the same shabby chic décor as my living room. I was lucky to find an old off-white wrought iron bed frame at a yard sale. My side tables were an old distressed antique vanity that had been cut apart. My prairie style dark oak rocking chair from my childhood bedroom sat in the corner with one of the baby quilts I had made for Esme draped over the back. My Gran's antique dresser and mirror sat proudly to the side, and to top off the look, a patchwork quilt made with 1930's reproduction fabrics was draped over the foot of my bed. The only thing out of place in my room was the playpen in the corner belonging to Miss Alice, who decided that now was a good time to make her presence known.

"Oh, my gosh, who is this? You didn't have her the last time I came over, did you?" she asked as Miss Alice started to bounce.

"No, I didn't have her then. She was a gift for Esme's birthday." *From a friend who likes to overstep his boundaries* I said the last part under my breath. "I think I'll let Esme tell you her name and why." I gave her my best Cheshire grin and headed over to Esme's room.

"Now, here we come to the final stop on our tour, ladies." I addressed the two Alice's' and opened the door to 'Evermore'. Yep, Esme was as always my

inspiration in all things.

Two of the walls were painted like the inside of a medieval castle, only with softer, lighter colors. The wall adjacent to her window had a faux panoramic view of the 'kingdom' to finish off the castle theme. Esme chose the Disney Princess Vanity and dresser, and the Disney Princess Carriage full sized bed.

"Oh, my, I'm in every little girl's dream bedroom. Where did you find a pumpkin inspired bed? Now I wish I had a little girl, too," she pouted.

"Miss Alice!" Esme ran over to me and scooped her puppy from my arms. "Oh, Miss Alice, I want you to meet my best friend." She walked over to Elizabeth and held out her puppy. I tried to keep the smirk off my face as Miss Alice the person realized the puppy shared her name.

"Did I hear correctly? Did she really name the, the dog after me?" she whispered her questions and all I could do was nod yes. I was afraid I might bust out in laughter if I spoke.

"Why don't you tell Miss Alice why you named your puppy after her, Esme honey?" I asked trying to keep a straight face.

"Oh, Miss Alice, she squeals!" Both Alice and the dog turned and looked at my child when they heard their name and that was it, I lost it and fell to the floor in a fit of laughter.

"Are you finished now, chuckles the clown? I'd like to hear her reason for giving me a namesake," Alice said with a straight face. "Go ahead, baby, tell me why?"

"Well, she's small like you, she bounces when she's happy, and she likes to talk a lot. But the most important reason is because she has S-T-Y-L-E, style." And I was on the floor again.

When I looked over at Alice to see her reaction, she just smiled fondly at my baby. Apparently, Alice was flattered beyond words.

We headed out to the kitchen with the girls in tow. Dinner was a big hit. Elizabeth said my 'roni' cheese was way better than her daddy's was. I didn't doubt that after the story she told us about the burnt pans. We cleaned up from dinner and decided to take Miss Alice for a walk in her buggy and Alice the person nearly wet herself from excitement over the damn thing. I had a feeling if she could, Alice would buy herself a dog just for the accessories.

The dog had been 'walked', and the girls were bathed and dressed for bed. We put on the Project Runway Marathon I Tivo'd for Esme. Alice dragged out her mani/pedi case and we settled down for 'girl time'. This was good. I could handle this. At least we wouldn't be playing 'truth or dare' or heaven forbid, 'would you rather'.

Alice was one smart cookie. She only brought one collection from her OPI nail polish war chest. It was the Shrek collection and it was loud. I chose one of the quieter colors, a light blue called 'What's with the Attitude'? Alice went with a bright blue 'Ogre-the-Top' which I thought fitting. The girls chose the purple of course, 'Funky Dunkey', too cute. After we got our 'Shrek' on as Alice aptly named it, we decided we needed to watch the movie. I knew the girls wouldn't make it through the movie, so it was no surprise when I checked my watch and saw that they didn't even make it past nine-thirty. After we tucked them in for the night, Alice decided to play twenty questions with me.

"Well, Bella, how about we get to know each other better?"

"Sure, Alice, but I reserve the right not to answer questions that are too personal, okay?" I bargained.

"Fair enough. Now, where were you born?"

"Forks, and you?" I asked keeping my answer short.

"Paris, my mom and dad were on their honeymoon and when she kept getting ill my dad had a 'duh' moment and took her to a local doctor. Turns out she was really pregnant with me, around five months actually, and the doctor suggested they head back to the states to be on the safe side. They didn't want to cut their three-month trip short so they decided to stay. Well, I showed them. My mom went into premature labor and the doctor put her on bed rest for the duration. So that's how I was born in Paris, France." I wondered if she was an uh-oh baby?

We kept in the safe question zone, thank goodness. I found out she and Jasper married right out of high school, they were sweethearts. She got her degree in design and had been working with her mom for five years and loved it. Jasper was a History professor at UDub "He's a nerd, but a damn sexy one at that," she said with a grin.

The more time I spent with her, the more I really liked her. I just had to look past her larger than life personality and see the person within.

"Alright I'm taking off the kid gloves, Bella." Crap, she was going to ask about Esme's father. "Tell me what you think of my cousin, Edward?"

"What?" I sputtered. "What about him?"

"You know, do you find him attractive? Would you like to go out on a date with him? Because I could set something up for you, if you want it that is?" She was watching to see if I'd give myself away.

"Well, I think Edward is a very nice man, a wonderful doctor and I'd bet he's a pretty good cousin. And I would have to be blind not to notice how handsome he is." I was quiet for a moment to let her stew. "Anyway, I don't think I need any help with a set-up to see him again." I left it at that to keep her guessing. "Alice, it's going on midnight and I'm pretty sure those two girls in the other room will be up before the sun. If you don't mind sharing a bed, you're welcome to the left side of mine; if not, I'll pull out the air mattress for you, it's up to you," I told her.

"I don't mind the left side, Bella," she answered with a smile.

I did my nightly routine and dropped into bed. It had been a fun day but I was wiped. I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

Beth and Mae's POV

"Shhh, don't wake them, Mae. My daddy says Ali is not a morning person."

"Mommy doesn't like mornings either, Beth."

"Well, hurry and get Miss Alice before we wake them, Mae."

"Beth, do you think your daddy likes my mommy?"

"I hope so. Do you think your mommy likes my daddy, Mae?"

"Mommy is really shy, you know, like Alistair from school. Except she doesn't cry when Grampy leaves her like Al does when his mommy drops him off at the door. I'm kind of shy like that, too, Beth."

"Well, how can we make her not shy anymore, Mae?"

"I'm not sure, Beth, but maybe Miss Alice the person can help."

BPOV

Wow. Alice slept like the dead. I would have never guessed. I hadn't heard a peep from the girls yet; I knew they were awake, though, because Miss Alice had been sprung from her playpen. I quietly got up and went to check on them. They weren't in the bedroom, so they must have been in the living room. I was right, and they were too cute for words. They had made themselves breakfast; un-toasted Pop-Tarts and milk. I knew it wasn't particularly healthy but I had to feed my inner child sometimes.

I jumped when my phone went off. Crap.

"Hello?" I answered in a whisper and headed into the kitchen for some coffee.

"Hello, did I wake you, Bella?" It was Edward

"No, I'm up; I just didn't want the girls to see me yet."

"Why? What's going on? I hope Elizabeth is behaving herself?"

"Edward, she's a perfect angel, don't worry so much. I was just watching them share a breakfast that they got for themselves. It was so sweet; they each broke their Pop-Tart in half and gave each other their other half."

"What? Pop-Tarts? Is that what you call nutritious, Bella?" I could hear the smile in his voice.

"Well, no, I don't, doctor. It's one of the few 'junk foods' I keep in my pantry." I hoped he knew I was playing with him. "So, what can I do for you this morning, Edward?"

"I just wanted to let you know that Alice is not, I repeat, not a morning person and you shouldn't expect to see her up before ten o'clock. It's not pretty if you wake her, and I'm afraid you'd never want to be around my family or me again. Also, I texted her to let her know she can leave Elizabeth with you and I'll pick her up later. I didn't mention our dinner plans because when Alice smells 'blood' she's like a shark and it's a feeding frenzy. Again, I would like to continue our budding friendship and the girl's friendship as well." He sounded, dare I think, hopeful?

"Not a problem, Edward. I'll see you at four."

"Sure thing, Bella. Should I bring something?"

"No, I have everything and this way dinner is on me," I chuckled at that.

"Whatever you say. I'll see you at four then. Bye."

After I ended my call with Edward, I turned around and was met with twin crooked grins.

"Hey, babies, what are you two up to?"

"Nothing," they said in unison.

"Okay, do you girls want me to cook you something more for breakfast?" They shook their heads no. "Well, why don't you two go get dressed and we can take Miss Alice out for a walk?" They both ran off to get ready and I hopped in the shower for the quickest shower in history.

Our morning flew by way too fast. Alice kissed both girls on the head and hugged me goodbye with a promise that the next time we did this it would be at her place. I quickly agreed because I needed to her to hurry up and go so I could have some alone time to work out my 'baby daddy' speech in my head. Thank goodness the girls were both low maintenance and they entertained each other.

It's now three o'clock and I'd prepared all the food for dinner. I just had to wait until Edward got here to put the finishing touches on it.

I was standing in my closet wrapped in my robe while I listened to two six year olds debate on my basic black dress or my dark blue knee length sweater dress. I hoped the blue dress won. It was my favorite and I could wear my new boots with it.

The two pint sized ‘fashionistas’ both agreed on the blue dress. Esme because she thought like I did and loved my boots, the little shoe hound. Elizabeth wanted the blue dress because it was her daddy’s favorite color. I liked the way she thought.

The doorbell chimed at exactly four o’clock on the dot.

Show time.

Opening the door, I was left breathless. Edward was in dark jeans and a dark blue button down shirt. The sleeves were rolled up a couple of times and he left the top two buttons undone. To quote my two new favorite people:

‘YU-U-UUU-MMY!’

The man did not come empty handed. He brought flowers, and not just one bouquet; he had three of them. This man was a keeper, I just hoped and prayed after tonight’s news he would let me keep him.

“Wow, flowers, I’ve never gotten flowers before,” I told him and blushed.

“Then you’re dating the wrong guys.” Uh...date? Was that what he was hoping for?

“Daddy, you’re here!” Elizabeth hugged him around his legs.

“Yes, and these are for you, baby.” He handed her a small nosegay of pale pink roses. Turning to my child he said, “Miss Esme, these are for you, beautiful.” Again, another pink nosegay, what an old-fashion floral arrangement, from the Victorian era I believed. “And these are for you.” He handed me a large floral arrangement of beautiful pink orchids.

“Thank you, Edward, they’re stunning.” I also knew the meaning of pink orchids and that made me blush a deep red. Man, I could feel the heat radiating off of me. I set the flowers on my coffee table.

“Well, dinner is almost done, I hope you like fondue? I thought the girls would enjoy the hands on meal.”

“I love fondue. Alice and I go to the Melting Pot every once in a while,” he said giving me that grin.

“Well, if you’ve had fondue before, I’m sure you know the proper ‘Fondue Etiquette’ then?”

“There’s etiquette for fondue?” he asked with wide eyes and I couldn’t help but laugh at his expression.

The girls sat on one side and that left the seat next to me open for Edward.

Our first course was the cheese fondue, a simple recipe that blended Gruyere and Emmentaler cheese. I Googled the recipe. For dipping we had cubed French bread, bite sized cooked chicken, roasted fingerling potatoes, broccoli florets that I cooked for two minutes, and granny smith apple slices. Because we were dining with the girls, I chose hot cider to drink instead of wine.

“Now, before we start eating, let me tell you the rules to eating fondue.” I couldn’t help myself. I smiled at Edward, because this reminded me of his ‘520’ rules from last week. “Okay, this is how it works:

Rule #1- Don’t touch the fondue fork with your mouth.

Rule #2- Don’t double dip.

Rule #3- Don’t dip with your fingers.

Rule #4- Don’t lose your food in the pot while dipping it. It’s an old tradition that if a girl drops her food in the pot she has to kiss the person next to her.” When I said this, both girls looked at each other and winked. I looked to see if Edward saw their exchange, but he just smiled and winked at me. “Okay, dig in.”

If I didn’t know any better, I would think that all three of them were purposefully making my food fall into the pot. I’d had to kiss Edward three times now. The cheese fondue was a success and now we had moved on to the good stuff; chocolate. For this we had strawberries, bananas, angel food cake and marshmallows. I paid closer attention to my fork this time and I was now certain our little darlings were sabotaging the dipping process. This time Edward’s fork was missing his marshmallow. He just looked at me, leaned over and kissed me on the mouth.

What the hell, was that his tongue?

“Sorry, you had a little chocolate right there, I couldn’t let it go to waste,” he said pointing to my lip and winked at me. I heard the girls giggle quietly across from us.

“Sure, no problem, I know how you feel about chocolate.”

With dinner done and the girls in Esme’s room, we went into the living room to be more comfortable. Well, at least Edward could be more comfortable, I was sweating bullets here.

Well, here goes nothing...

A/N: I know, please don’t hate me, but I really wanted to devote a whole chapter to the BIG reveal. Hey, I gave you a kiss, didn’t I? That has to count for something.

I hope you enjoyed the part with Bella's book reading. That was actually excerpts from one of my original children's stories. I'm hoping to have my talented design student daughter illustrate it for me someday for publication.

So, do you agree with B that Jessica is smarter than Lauren is?

Now, I don't want to toot my own horn...Oh, who am I kidding, yes I do. I cranked this chapter out in one day so I could get you guys what you really wanted; the baby daddy speech.

How many of you think Edward will faint?

Again, thank you all for reading and for the wonderful reviews! Keep 'em coming!

tickledpink

8. Chapter 8

I still own nothing, nada, zero, zip, zilch, and bubkes.

Just a reminder that the first chapter to the companion story ‘A Mother’s Wish’ is now up.

Also I wanted to thank my beta Dollybigmomma for all that she does for me.

Chapter 8

I think I may be crazy...

EPOV

When I signed up to be a room parent I thought all I would have to do was provide the classroom with extra tissues and hand sanitizer when they ran out of supplies. So when I got the call from the head mom of room K-2, I was ready, willing and able to run out to Costco and purchase enough tissue and sanitizer to keep all the germs at bay. Man, I loved buying in bulk. It saved me from the weekly trips to the local grocery store, which was where most man-hunters hung out, lurking in the produce section as their unsuspecting prey grazed through the treacherous territory looking for healthy foods. I shuddered at the memory of my last encounter with the redheaded predator and that was why it was warehouse shopping for me, period.

But sadly, that was not what they needed. My mission was simple; they needed able bodies to help keep the children in line when Bella Swan came to read her newest book for all four classes. I was in; they had me when Bella’s name was mentioned. Ever since we shared a table at Five’s last week, I’d been trying to come up with ways to see her again. Yeah, I knew our daughters were BFF’s, but that was just all kinds of wrong to use their innocent friendship to try and further my not so innocent obsession with Bella.

I just couldn’t seem to shake the feeling that we’d met before. I was pretty sure it would have been hard to forget her, and I was sure it would come back to me sooner or later.

As I turned the corner heading for room K-2, I was met by one of the worst kind of man-hunters known to the human male; the female version of Peter Pan. You know; the kind that never grew up. They always dressed in pink, wore hooker heels and skirts that were so short they practically went up to their belly buttons. But what gave them away was the fact that they seemed to revert to speaking like a child. I tried my best to keep her tentacles off of me, and at one point I was so desperate I contemplated using Elizabeth as a human shield from the she-devil. I know, I know, bad daddy.

I didn’t have to use my child after all; she gave me an easy escape. “Daddy, come on, I don’t want to miss the story Miss Bella is going to read today.” Yes, thank you, baby. I’d have to pick up something nice to thank my daughter for saving my kiester just now.

We walk into the classroom and Elizabeth spotted Esme stacking chairs and went to help her. I smiled as I thought, if all little girls were like those two, I wouldn’t mind having a few more running around my house.

And speaking of people I wouldn’t mind running around my house, I turned and came face to face with the object of my recent nightly dreams. Beautiful. We had a short conversation and then I went off to get my assignment from Miss Hale, all the while wishing there was something she had wanted me to do for her. I could think of a few things.

We finally got all the kids into the room and settled, and then Bella began to read her story. As she read, she was doing more than just reading to her audience. She was captivating their little minds and building their imaginations as she wove her tale of adventure. Every man, woman and child was caught in her spell. Well, not all of them. It turned out the pink clad man-eater was the sub for room K-1 and she was making goo-goo eyes at me...uh, yuck.

When the book reading was over I helped the other parents put the classes back together. Bella was at the door thanking the children as they walked out of the room. Well, it was now or never, I told myself, heading over towards her. I complimented her on the book and then she shocked me when she invited Elizabeth and me to Sunday dinner. Hey, I was not going to lie, I was on it ‘like white on rice’. We agreed on a time and I gathered my child and headed towards my car.

I hit the button on my key fob to unlock my car and that was when I heard the man-eater calling to me. “Yoo-hoo! Dr. Masen!” Man, I had to get out of there and fast.

“Elizabeth honey, I need you to get into the car quickly, baby,” I was pleading with her.

“Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo! Dr. Masen! Wait for me!” I stealthily glanced in my rear view mirror, trying to judge how close she was and praying I had time. Aw, man, she had taken her hooker heels off and now she was running through the parked cars. I started my car and peeled out of the parking lot like a movie stuntman.

“Daddy, I’m not even in my seat yet. You know you’re breaking the law and Mae’s grampy will have to put you in his jail, right, Daddy?” she questioned me with a puzzled look on her face.

“Baby, I’m sorry, it was wrong for Daddy to start driving before you had your buckle on.”

“Just don’t do it again, Mister, or I’ll have to tell Nana on you,” she pointed her little finger at me, looking just like my mother again.

After I got Elizabeth tucked into bed, I headed to my piano to try and unwind. Thinking of the past encounters with the Swans, I relaxed and lost myself to a new composition. I was overwhelmed with visions of duel sweet smiles, rosy cheeks and bouncing bronze curls. Then the soft sounds of tinkling notes that invoked visions of Esme and Elizabeth giggling as they rolled around my aunt’s living room floor the day of the party. I sighed as I trailed off, not knowing where the next note should take me. I was brought out of my vision of the girls when my phone started playing ‘She’s a Maniac’ by Hall & Oates.

“Hey, Alice, what can I do for you?”

“Not much, I just wanted to confirm the pick up time for tomorrow. So, I’ll be over earlier to pack her bag so don’t worry about a thing.”

"Thanks, Ali, I'll see you tomorrow."

"You're welcome, Teddy, later." She made a kissing sound and hung up.

Tiny hands on both sides of my face woke me up. "Morning, Daddy," she smiled at me.

"Morning, baby, are you excited for tonight?"

She nodded her head so fast it looked like it could fall off. I could tell if I didn't keep her busy today she was going to drive me crazy.

"Elizabeth, how about we go out to Pops and see if he'll let us ride Felix today?" I watched as her eyes got as big as saucers.

"Really, Daddy? I love Felix; he's so pretty and soft. Daddy, can we bring him some apples?" I smiled and nodded my head yes.

I picked up my phone and scrolled down to the W's and hit dial. "Whitlock Farms," a female voice answered.

"Hey, Char, how is everything?"

"Life is great. We have a few new additions since your last visit. A trio that was saved from, well, I'll let him tell you the story. When are you coming for a visit?"

"Well, that's why I'm calling. Is Felix still with you guys?"

"He sure is. I think his size intimidates people. Well, except your little Lizzie that is."

"If it's alright with you, I'd like to bring Elizabeth down so she can ride for a bit today?"

"Edward, you know you two are always welcome around here. I'll have Felix ready for you. See you in a bit, okay?"

"Sounds like a plan. Thanks, Char."

The first time I met Jasper's parents, Peter and Charlotte Whitlock, was when they opened their rescue farm fifteen years ago. My mother wanted to offer the children at our summer camps the opportunity to ride horses; not many inner city kids even knew what a horse looked like in real life. She believed it could teach a troubled youth how to love and trust others unconditionally if they had to be responsible for caring for another living creature; something both the horse and child were neglecting to receive. So we'd been partnered with the Whitlock's to give both a second chance.

Every time I drove up the long tree lined road and saw the sprawling farm I was amazed that this existed so close to Seattle. The lush rolling green pastures and white split rail fence made me think of the time Ma and I went to the Kentucky Derby. The farms in the Lexington area were breathtaking. I looked out my side window and saw Char riding Felix; she did this so he was more docile for Elizabeth; not that he would bring harm to her, he just got excited when she visited.

"Elizabeth, look out the window," I pointed to my left so she knew which window.

"Felix! Oh, Daddy! Please hurry," she begged.

Peter was waiting for us at the barn. "My word, is that my Lizzie?" he asked in his very distinctive Texas drawl.

"Pops!" she yelled as she jumped out of the car. "Oh, Pops, I missed you so much," she told him as she hugged him hard.

Just as he sat her down, Char walked up with Felix in tow. "Well, Miss Lizzie, how about you and I take Felix for a ride?" Elizabeth smiled and took the lead from her. That Bunyan-esque creature loved my child.

"Come on, Edward, I want to introduce the trio to you," Peter said as he headed inside the barn.

Peter started to introduce the newcomers, "This is Marcus." I looked in the stall and saw a short stocky muscularly built roan with dark mane and tail about fifteen hands high. He looked sad, dare I say even bored.

"Next we have Caius. Don't get too close; he's a biter."

I could tell just by the look in his eyes that he was mean. He had the same build as Marcus, but he was a lighter roan with light mane and tail, also about fifteen hands high.

Caius and Marcus were Italian Draught horses, hard working animals, usually with a very gentle temperament, Peter told me.

"Now this fine gentleman is Aro, cocky bastard." He was a magnificent seventeen hands high, dark bay with a black tail and mane. I wondered why he was here; he certainly was a fine piece of horseflesh.

"Peter, why are they here? They look to be imperfect health to me."

"Well, our vet, Kate, heard a rumor about an illegal meat processing plant and with the help of local authorities they were able to shut them down before they could harm the trio."

"How did he get his hands on them?"

"From what we've been able to gather, the owner just grew tired of Aro. It seems like he was too high strung to do what he was bred for. He's an Italian

Trotter and he just didn't want to turn over his reins so to speak to his trainer. Apparently, he likes to be in command of everyone around him."

I looked back at the black beauty and if I didn't know any better I would have sworn he was trying to figure out what I was thinking.

"Now, the other two were getting too old so instead of putting them out to pasture they were sold," he told me. How sad for such beautiful creatures to be mistreated like that.

"Daddy, I had so much fun riding Felix. Can I bring Mae the next time we come? I just know she would love to ride him." She was looking a little too much like Alice right now, which reminded me we needed to get going.

"We'll have to ask Miss Bella about bringing Esme with us sometime." I made sure not to say next time, because I was not a stupid man and I learned that lesson the hard way.

We said our thanks and goodbyes to the Whitlock's and made our way back home.

Alice pulled up right as we got out of the car. "You're early. Don't go changing your M.O. on me," I teased.

"Yeah, well, haven't you heard it's a woman's prerogative to change her mind?" she answered me back.

After getting Elizabeth's bag packed I barely got a hug goodbye as they ran out of my house.

Well, now what? It was not as if this was my first night without my child, she was always having girly nights with Alice and my aunt. I decided to work out and after that order some takeout. I could always hang out with the Whitlock men. I was sure Jazz could use a second set of hands tonight.

Jasper was so happy to see me he had tears in his eyes. Turned out the dynamic duo was cutting more teeth and this time it was not a pleasant experience.

When I went to bed I found myself thinking what it would be like to have a couple more kids. Then I thought, what would it be like if I had more kids with Bella?

It was no surprise that when I woke up, it was to an image of a very pregnant Bella. After all, I went to sleep with both babies and Bella on my mind.

After a nice long shower and a call to see how Elizabeth was doing, I decided to tackle my in-box and work on some things for the summer camp program.

When it was time to go, I changed into the first thing I grabbed and headed to the flower shop. Remembering what my mother taught me, 'Edward, always bring a woman flowers,' so that was what I was doing.

When Bella opened the door, I had only one thought; beautiful.

Dinner was so much fun. I was pretty sure the girls kept making Bella's food fall into the pot because every time she did, she would kiss me and the girls would giggle. Then when she had that tiny drop of chocolate on her bottom lip, I couldn't stop myself. Her lips, they were so soft and warm and I really wished it had been a real kiss.

Sitting in her living room felt natural to me, but she looked like she was going to pass out. She finally broke the silence. "Edward, there's just no easy way to say this. Don't you...I mean, has it ever crossed...shit, this is harder than I thought it would be." She was making no sense whatsoever.

"Bella, whatever it is, please just spit it out."

"Okay, well here's the thing...do you think it's kind of strange that our daughters look so much alike, I mean, really alike?"

"What are you trying to say, Bella?" What was she trying to say? Was she going to claim that Esme was what...my child?

"The thing is, Edward, I never saw his face...or at least I don't remember seeing his face...and you can't deny she does have a lot of your features..."

Oh. My. Hell. She did think that I was her baby daddy. This could not be happening. I needed to get my child and get the hell out of here.

"I'm so sorry, Bella, but yeah..." I didn't even finish my sentence. I just needed Elizabeth so we could get as far away from here as possible. I quickly got up and went to get my daughter, leaving Bella looking after me confused.

Walking into the bedroom to collect my child, I was nearly brought to my knees by the sight before me. Two identical sets of green eyes looked up from the puzzle they were putting together. I then received two crooked grins, exactly like mine. No no no, this couldn't be, there was no way I slept with two different women around the same time.

"Elizabeth, we need to be going. Get your stuff and say thank you to Esme."

"Do we have to leave already?" she pouted.

"Yes, now let's go, baby."

"Okay, Daddy. Bye, Mae, I'll see you at school tomorrow and thank you for the slumber party. Oh, and hug Miss Alice bye for me."

"You're welcome, Beth, I'll see you at school."

I practically dragged Elizabeth to the front door I was in such a hurry to get out of there. I opened the door and looked over at Bella one last time before I walked out. She hadn't moved a muscle and she just looked lost.

Just as I closed the door, I heard a quiet sob.

A/N:

Please don't hate me too much. I can promise you one thing we will have a HEA. I just can't promise the journey will trouble free. I believe we must have opposition in all things 'you can never know the good if you've never known the bad.'

Who do you think is going to be as mad as a hornet and at whom?

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

tickledpink

9. Chapter 9

Stephanie Meyer owns it all! I just borrow from time to time.

In case I haven't said it enough, I have the world's best Beta! Dollybigmomma, take a bow please!

Chapter 9

I think he thinks I may be crazy

BPOV

I couldn't believe he just left; he didn't even let me finish. He just gathered Elizabeth and high-tailed it out of here like he was on fire.

What was I thinking? Just...Argh! *Stupid, that's what you are, Bella!*... 'She looks so much like you and I didn't even see his face.' What was he supposed to think? Crap, I would have run as fast if not faster to get away from my kind of crazy, too.

Oh, my poor Esme. How was this going to affect her and Elizabeth's friendship? It was as if she knew I was thinking about her, as she had just walked into the room.

"Mommy, why are you crying? Did you hurt yourself again, Mommy? Do I need to call Grampy to take you to the doctors? Mommy, please, please tell me what's wrong?" I just lost it all over again as my little girl ran her tiny hands over my face making sure I was fine.

"I'm fine, sweetheart, I just hit my baby toe on the table," I said as the first thing that came to my mind. I wished it were as small as my toe. If it were just my toe, I could ice it and move forward, but this mess I made for myself was much bigger than a baby toe.

"Mommy, why did Dr. Edward need to take Beth home so soon? I miss her. We were going to play dress up and then dress Miss Alice as our baby. I told Beth she could push the buggy when we went to walk Miss Alice. Oh, Mommy, we really need to take Miss Alice out before she potties on the floor again."

"Sure, baby, go get your shoes and coat on and after the park we can stop at the video store and pick out a movie to watch if you want." I watched my little girl run to get her things and I took a deep breath, determined to stop crying before I really upset her.

The walk to the park helped clear my mind and brought my focus back to what mattered most and that was Esme's happiness and well being.

The video store was a bust; nothing seemed to strike her fancy. So we went home and played a few rounds of Candy Land before heading to bed.

Over the next two weeks following my screwed up revelation to Edward, life went back to normal for the most part. The girls continued to grow their friendship at school, but it was getting harder to find excuses for not getting together for play dates.

As the month of October slipped away, so did my Esme's ever present smile. I thought for sure she would be bouncing off the walls with excitement for the upcoming holiday. However, she grew quiet, choosing to spend much of her free time alone in her room, showing little interest in anything that used to make her happy.

I was shocked when I asked her if she wanted to get her costume for Halloween and she just shrugged her shoulders at me. I had no idea what to do anymore. I was sure all the costumes had already been picked over and I was pretty sure she would never allow me to recycle last year's costume. Esme just turned and walked slowly back to her room with her head down and shoulders slumped.

I was never more grateful for Alice the person calling me than right at that moment. "Hello, Bella, so what's going on with you and my cousin?"

"Hello to you, too, Alice, and there's nothing going on between Edward and myself," I said shortly, trying not to get angry with her.

"Yeah, that's the same line of bull he's trying to sell and I'm not buying it. But that's not why I called. I was hoping that Esme was still without a costume?" How did she know that? "If she is, I have the perfect costume for her and if you don't mind, we can drop it off. I'm already in your area and I would love to see you two. I really miss both of you." I could hear the hope in her voice; crap, I'd never be able to put one over on her.

"Sure, Alice, come on over."

"Great, now open your door. My arms are about to fall off."

What the hell? She'd been at my door this whole time? She knew I'd cave, sneaky pixie. I opened the door and yep, she was knee deep in shopping bags. But she was not alone; she had Elizabeth in tow with just as many bags as Alice.

"Well, come in, you two. Can I get you something to drink, or a snack maybe?" The whole time, I watched Elizabeth as she looked around longingly. I was sure she was looking for Esme. "Elizabeth, why don't you go say hello to Esme? She's in her room, baby." She smiled at me with her father's grin and ran off down the hall.

"Alice, does Edward know you're here?" I was sure if he knew, he would have tried to keep her away from 'Crazy Bella'.

"No, I told him we were going shopping for costumes and stuff. So, what is Esme going to dress up as this year?" she asked with a sly smile on her face.

"I don't know, Alice, she hasn't been acting like herself lately. I'm really starting to worry about her."

"Well, I have an idea that'll help cheer her up. Why don't you let her come trick or treating with Elizabeth and me tomorrow night? And since it's a Friday, she can sleep over as well."

"That's very kind of you to think of her, but I never take her out trick or treating." Alice started to argue with me, but I held my hand up, telling her to let me explain. "Alice, we always go to the mall and participate in the activities there. That way she's safe and out of the cold weather, plus I don't have to worry about the sugar high from too much candy." She gave me a look of disbelief.

"She's never been door to door? That's just... so sad, Bella."

"Why? Because I want to keep her safe from potential dangers? I think it's the most responsible thing I can do for her." I folded my arms over my chest and huffed out my frustration. "Alice, I think I need to tell you more about my child so you'll understand where I'm coming from."

"Okay, Bella, lay it on me."

So I told her all about my pregnancy with Esme, about her being born very much a preemie and all of her many illnesses since her birth. I left out who I thought her father might be, though. "So you see, it's not like I'm trying to be a party pooper, I just know what will happen if she's out in the fall night air. She may look perfectly healthy, but she does have problems fighting off illnesses. As it is, she's exposed to way too many germs every day she walks into her classroom," I sighed.

"Alright, I can see your point. So, how about we go with you two instead?" She was looking at me with those eyes. Aw, crap...

"That sounds great, Alice, but won't Edward want to take Elizabeth out?"

"No, Edward and Daddy volunteered to work in the ER tomorrow night. You know all the crazies come out on 'All Hallows Eve' every year. They always need extra doctors."

"Well, it sounds like a plan then, Alice. Now, why don't you show me the costume?" And she did just that. "Oh, my gosh, they're going to be so cute! Okay, who's who?"

"Does it really matter, Bella? I think we should let them pick, don't you?" Why not, I thought. "Well, I should get her home so she can spend some time with Edward."

"Esme, it's time to say goodbye. Elizabeth needs to go home now," I called to the girls. They came into the living room holding onto each other for dear life, saying a teary goodbye.

I heard a snuffle and turned to see my child with her face pressed against the window watching her friend drive away.

"Hey, baby, you know you get to see her tomorrow at school, right? Oh, and I have a couple of surprises for you," I smiled at her just waiting for her curiosity to kick in.

"I know, Mommy. Now what's my surprise?" she asked while hopping around me.

"Well, the first surprise is that Miss Alice brought you a costume, and the second one is Elizabeth and Miss Alice are going to be coming with us to the mall after school tomorrow." I was still not sure on the sleep over.

I was pretty sure only dogs could hear the high pitched sounds of joy coming from her as she danced off to her room for the night.

Morning came all too soon and I was brought out of my peaceful slumber by the rapid staccato knocking of none other than Alice. Why she was at my door at six-thirty in the morning with Elizabeth in tow was a mystery to me.

I opened the door and just motioned for them to come inside, closing the door behind them. I turned to her and asked, "Alice, what the He...H. E. double hockey sticks are you doing at my door before I've even had my coffee?"

"Well, Edward asked me if I would drop Lizzie at school because he had an early morning meeting and then I thought it would be cute if the girls arrived at school together because of their costumes," she stated as she went through the bags she had left the night before. Alice's enthusiasm at this hour was amazing, but I needed coffee before I could show too much enthusiasm of my own.

After getting both girls ready for their first school parade, both Alice and I took a ton of pictures. They were just too cute in the matching red unitards and fake fur blue wigs. That was right; Alice dressed them up as Thing One and Thing Two. She didn't stop with the girls, though; I was now in a Cat in the Hat costume. But it was Alice's costume that had me questioning her sanity. I didn't know where she found it but she was in a carnation pink fish suit inside of a clear vinyl fishbowl.

"Alice, where on earth did you find a fish and fishbowl costume?"

"This is more than a fish costume; it's a one of a kind Alice original 'Karlos K. Krinkelbein' costume," she stated with a duh expression.

"Um, Alice, who is Karlos K. Krinkelbein?"

"He happens to be the fish in the Cat in the Hat. Duh, Bella, and you call yourself a children's author." As she said this her eyebrows disappeared into her hairline with the apparent shock at my lack of literary knowledge.

"Alice, I know there's a fish in the book, but I'm pretty sure his name wasn't given to us."

"I know that, Bella, sheesh. I didn't want to be called just 'Fish' all day so I Googled it and found a reference to his name on Wikipedia. So for today, my name is 'Karlos K. Krinkelbein' but you can call me 'Mr. Krinkelbein' or 'Mr. K.'" I just shook my head at her and walked away.

After ten minutes of trying to get Alice and her fish bowl behind her steering wheel, she finally admitted defeat and let me drive.

Walking into the classroom seemed to take forever because Alice kept bumping into things. I didn't know why, it was not as if the fishbowl wasn't transparent.

Miss Hale was thrilled that we dressed up and asked us to lead off the parade. I was leery, but Alice was, well, Alice. So at just past nine o'clock, Mr. Krinkelbein, Thing One, Thing Two and a very sullen Cat in the Hat led the annual fall festival kick off parade.

The rest of the day's events went off without a hitch. We had a blast at the mall and of course, Alice managed to sneak in some shopping. But as the time got closer for me to hand my child over to Alice for the night, I was having serious separation anxiety. This was going to be the first night I'd been away from her, ever. It took a lot of coaxing and promises to call from Esme, not to mention her happy radiant smile, for me to finally let her go.

I think I stood by my car for at least thirty minutes after Alice drove off with my reason for living.

"Bella?"

"Oh, hey, Miss...Rose, I didn't see you there."

"Are you okay? You look kinda lost," she asked with a concerned half smile.

"Oh, I'm sorry; it's just that Alice invited Esme over for a sleepover and..." I trailed off again lost in my thoughts of my baby.

"Let me guess, this is the first time you've let her out of your sight, except for school?" I woodenly nodded my head yes. "Well, it sounds like you're in need of a distraction tonight. Come on and follow me. I know just the thing."

So, I followed her back to her place. Wow, she lived in Lake Union in a floating house. I never would have guessed.

"Rose, this place is great." I needed to watch my step, with my luck I'd fall in the water.

"I know. It was a graduation present from my parents. But I know better; it was a 'we hope this helps you catch a man' gift. They seem to think being a schoolteacher means I'll never find the 'right' man. And by their definition of right I mean a man who makes seven figures or more."

Listening to her talk about her parents made me think of my own and I'd never been more grateful for Charlie's laid back approach to parenting. I mean, he made sure I was always taken care of; it was just that he didn't put a lot of pressure on me. He had never once made me feel like a failure for my life choices.

As I looked around her main living area I was amazed at how big it looked. It was a beautiful open floor plan with a combined living, dining and kitchen area with white cabinets, stainless steel appliances, granite countertops and a breakfast bar. Hardwood floors graced the main living area, and a gas fireplace, white sofa and twin striped chairs fit perfectly. She chose a simple elegant color palette of white, black and celery green. But the focal point of the room was the wall-to-wall windows and French doors that opened up to the deck.

"So, how about I mix us up a pitcher of margaritas and you can tell me what's on your mind."

After my fourth margarita I was ready to spill the proverbially beans. And spill I did, I left no bean unturned. She gave me a smirk after I finished my life story.

"I knew it! I just knew those two had to share the same genetics. It's not just genetics they share, though, Bella; they seem to be in tune with each other's bodies. Like they're in the same gravitational orbit, one moves and the other moves in the exact same way. They also talk in unison and seem to share a non-verbal form of communication. I've never seen two children more connected, even twins. It's kind of spooky to watch, but most of the time it's simply magical."

I snorted very un-lady like. "Well, magical or not, I still have the Edward baby daddy problem. How in the hell am I going to get him to listen to me long enough so I can explain everything?"

"I don't know yet, I'll have to think about it. But in the meantime, what are my chances of you helping me meet Emmett McCarty?" she wiggled her perfectly manicured eyebrows at me.

"I would love to help you out, Rose, but he's not my friend, he's Edward's." She was pouting at me now. Man, not the pout, I was a sucker for pouty faces. "Well, I could always ask Alice, she lives for this crap...I mean stuff." And her smile was back. I was the friend bomb or maybe I was just bombed. Meh... either way I was da bomb, baby! Yeah, margaritas were a good distraction...

Oh. My. Hell! Someone needed to stop the room from spinning. This right here was the reason I did not get drunk. Well, that was not the only reason. The number one reason was due home any minute now and I needed to get my act together. Argh. Just as I found a couple of Advil and chased them down with a cup of black coffee, I heard Alice's patented staccato knock at my door.

"Shush, Alice," I whispered as I opened the door and Esme walked in carrying more than she left with. "Where is Thing One?" I asked while pressing my fingers to my temples.

"Edward came by after breakfast and picked her up." She was smirking at me now. "What happened to you last night? Did you go on a bender?"

"Blame Rose Hale and her magical margaritas, and no, not a bender, I just let loose for a change." I turned and walked into my living room and sat down to rest my pounding head. "Oh, by the way, I told Rose you might be able to help her out with a guy thing." OH, MY GOSH! She was squealing now and my head was about to explode. "Alice, please, my head, have some mercy here."

"Oh, my, I'm sorry, Bella. I just get so excited sometimes that I can't help myself." Really? Just sometimes? I thought to myself.

"That's perfectly fine, Alice, just try and do it quieter. Now, do you want to know who Miss Hale has the hots for or not?" She just nodded her head really fast

but remained mute.

“Well, it’s one Emmett McCarty, that’s who. I told Rose I would give you her numbers so you two could plot till your heart’s content.”

After Alice left, I went and checked on Esme. She must have had a late night because she was sound asleep. I slipped under the covers next to my beautiful daughter and was asleep before I knew it.

EPOV

As October turned to November I couldn’t stop thinking about Bella and her deluded notion that I was Esme’s father. I was pretty sure I would have remembered sleeping with someone as beautiful as her. I mean yeah, I wasn’t always stone cold sober during my college days. But there was just no way I could be Esme’s father. I was in Chicago when she would have been conceived, the same as with Elizabeth. It just didn’t add up. Then I had to wonder if maybe they were actual twins and maybe Juliet’s parent thought it would be easier for me to deal with only one child, so they gave the other up for adoption. I went as far as to prove that theory by hiring a private investigator by the name of J. Jenks. It didn’t take him long to have all of the information back. Elizabeth was definitely a single birth, but due to the HIPPA laws, I was unable to access Esme’s records. So I was still left with the evidence that Bella had to be one taco shy of a combination plate.

A/N: I know, I’ve jumped ahead in the story; I just don’t think I need to give you a day-by-day accounting. I want you to use your imaginations! Heck, you can even share some of them with me and maybe I’ll use your idea or thoughts in the future. One of my faithful reviewers, Flora73, mentioned the twins/adoption angle, thank you for sharing.

If you haven’t already, you should put me on alert, because BIG things are going to happen in the next three or four chapters!

Thanks for reading now don’t forget to leave me some love and review, people ;)

tickledpink

10. Chapter 10

I owe nothing, but I would like to give thanks to Mrs. S Meyers for her wonderful characters that I get to play with in my little ol' story.

I would also like to thank the world's best beta Dollybigmomma for her never-ending help and support.

I'm sorry for not getting the chapter to you sooner, but I was caught up in a wonderful intriguing story and couldn't stop reading. If you haven't read it yet you should check out 'Awakening by jazsq' It's not finished yet but well worth the wait.

Chapter 10

Give Thanks

Part 1

EPOV

It was now Thanksgiving and life had been relatively quiet for Elizabeth and myself. We had plans to join my family for dinner tonight at Alice and Jasper's new house. Alice had been going non-stop since they moved in three weeks ago. This would be my first visit since they finished the interior.

Elizabeth and I spent the morning just lounging around watching the Macy's Parade and having a simple breakfast of Pop-tarts and milk. Ever since her sleep over at Bella's she'd begged for Pop-tarts. However, she only ever ate one from the twin package though. When I asked her why, she gave me a sad look and said that the other one was Mae's and would always pack it away in a sandwich bag with a pink post-it note tucked in as well. I had a peek at the last one before she put it in her little backpack. It was an outline of a heart with two simply words 'Sidster Foebtr' in red crayon. After witnessing her unadulterated love for her best friend I started to think I needed to find a way to fix the situation with Bella Swan. I'd have to get some advice tonight from my aunt on the matter.

The parade was now over and I was dreading getting dressed for the formal dinner Alice had planned for us. I was used to dressing nice for holidays but Alice wanted everybody in his or her 'Very Sunday Best'. Because Alice was, well, Alice. All I had to do was get my baby and I dressed in the outfits she chose for us. Easier said than done.

I unzipped the garment bag that was hanging on my closet door to find a dark charcoal grey suit, white dress shirt with thin grey stripes, a light blue silk necktie, black dress shoes and silver cufflinks. Knowing Alice, I was sure it was all designer labels that I could care less about. I got myself dressed and then I check on Elizabeth to see how she was coming along. I had to stop myself from laughing when I heard my child huffing at how silly it was to have to wear fancy panties and tight shoes just to eat dinner. I totally agreed with her, it was a bit much for a family get-together, but just try and tell that to Alice.

"Daddy, why do I need to wear a slip? It's not like everybody is going to see it, it's just going to be under my dress."

"I know, baby, but I'm sure Ali has her reasons as to why you need it. Do you need me to help you get dressed?" She just nodded her head yes and handed me her clothes.

After fighting with the monstrosity that Alice called a slip and all the tiny buttons and buckles, I was finished with Elizabeth and she was an angel in her outfit. It was a light blue and black floral taffeta A-line dress with capped sleeves and a black velvet sash at the waist. White lace trimmed ankle socks, black patent leather shoes and a black bowed hair band completed the ensemble.

Before we headed out the door I bundled her up in her dark grey wool coat and hat. The last thing I needed was a sick child since the weather had taken a turn and we were hit by a record cold snap.

Elizabeth chattered away in the back seat as we headed over to Alice's and I was so lost in the driving zone I didn't hear her question.

"What, baby? Daddy was busy driving."

"Daddy, I said I need to see Santa soon so he can have time to bring me my present. Oh, Daddy, you weren't listening again, you need to listen better," she scolded me while wagging her finger at me.

"Sorry, baby, I'll try harder this time. Now, what are you going to ask for?"

"Well, I only want one thing and I can only tell Santa about it. Can we go see him soon, Daddy?" Ugh, mall Santa's. Maybe I could get Alice to take her when she took the twins.

"How about I see when Ali and the boys are going and you can go with them?"

"I guess, Daddy, but Ali always makes me try on shoes when we go to the mall," she pouted.

"Well, maybe Nana can take you instead?" I tried to make it sound like that was a better solution.

"Well, at least Nana lets me pick out my shoes," she huffed and folded her arms over her chest.

We pulled up to the house and I was still in awe of the beauty of it. They were able to recreate the feel of a Tuscan countryside villa in their Seattle suburban neighborhood. Alice's inspiration was their honeymoon to the Italian region of Tuscany. I was sure the inside was just as breathtaking as the exterior.

Alice was at the back passenger door before I even got the car in park. She scooped my child up and whisked her away without even a backwards glance at me. I just shook my head at her antics, because that was all you could do when it came to Alice.

As I walked into their foyer I was immediately transported to another place and time. She really was a gifted designer; her brand new home had the look and

feel of a centuries old villa. The warm rich colors and the antique furnishings really added to the feel of an old world dwelling.

I followed the noise which led me to the hub of activity, the kitchen... ahhh, the aroma of herbs and spices and the happy singing of my aunt reminded me of my mother and how she would always have soft jazz playing in the background whenever she cooked. She used to say that it made the dish that much tastier, because she was happy and carefree as she poured all of her love into our meals and not just the special occasion meals.

"Happy Thanksgiving everybody!" I was met with a round of welcoming hugs and kisses from my aunt and cousin.

"Where's my girl?" Esme asked.

"You'd have to ask Ali, she ran away with her before I could get the car parked."

"Mary Alice!" was all Esme needed to say.

"I'm sorry, I just had a surprise for her and I couldn't wait any longer," Alice batted her eyes and tried to feign innocence.

After Alice's faux repentance, I made my way out to the great room and joined the men folk in watching a football game.

"Hey, Eddie, 'bout time you got here."

"Emmett, how many times do you have to be told not to call me that?" He just smiled and shrugged his massive shoulders.

I turned and greeted the rest of the room. "Uncle Carlisle, Peter, Jazz, and Miss Hale, it's a pleasure to see you. I was unaware you would be joining us today."

"Alice was kind enough to extend an invitation after she found out I was spending my holiday alone."

"Well, we can't have that now, can we? I take it you've already met everyone?"

She nodded just as Alice came in and announced that dinner was served, and so we all made our way to the massive table that was formally set for ten. I got Elizabeth set in her booster seat on my right and took my seat between her and Jazz who was at the head of the table. Emmett was across from me, with Miss Hale to his left. Then Peter and Char sat with one twin in her lap, and Alice was at the end of the table. Esme was seated to Alice's left holding the other twin and Carlisle was in between Esme and Elizabeth.

Before we blessed the food we went around the table and said what we were thankful for. The adults all seemed to be grateful for family, friends and good health.

I turned to Elizabeth and asked her what she was grateful for.

"I'm thankful for Daddy, my Nana and Pawpaw, Ali, Jazzy, Brandon, Hayden, Char and Pops, Uncle Em, my teacher, Miss Hale, Felix, Miss Bella, Miss Alice and most of all, *my* Mae."

My heart ached when she said the last person and it only confirmed that I needed to fix the situation with Bella. "That was very nice, sweetie, but who is Miss Alice?"

"Oh, Daddy, she's the cutest little puppy in the whole wide world and Mae and I got to put bows in her hair and she has pink boots and a pink jacket just like Mae's."

I looked over and noticed Alice with a smug smile on her face as Elizabeth told us all about her namesake.

When Elizabeth was finished, we held hands and bowed our heads while Carlisle said the blessing.

"Our Father in Heaven, we give thanks for the pleasure of gathering together for this occasion. We give thanks for this food prepared by loving hands. We give thanks for life, the freedom to enjoy it and all other blessings. As we partake of this food, we pray for health and strength to carry on and try to live as you would have us. This we ask in the name of Christ, Amen."

"Amen," was echoed around the table.

"As always, thank you for that wonderful blessing, Carlisle. Even though this is my table, you would honor me my carving this magnificent turkey that was so beautifully prepared for us," Jasper, always the consummate southern gentleman, asked as he handed over the carving knife and fork to his father-in-law.

Dinner was wonderful as always, the conversation was lively and varied, and before we knew it, the meal was coming to an end. As was the custom in the family, those who cooked got a pass in the clean up. After a quick game of rock, paper, scissors we assigned the kitchen duties. I was on clearing and trash, Jazz got the job of leftover allocations, which meant he got to find the storage containers and fridge space. Emmett, the lucky duck, got to hand wash all the dishes because they couldn't go through the dishwasher. Alice was afraid they might get chipped or be left with spots. Carlisle and Peter teamed up to dry and put away. After I finished my job, I went and sought out my aunt for some much needed advice.

"Aunt Esme, can I talk to you about something?"

"Sure, Teddy, pull up a chair. What can I help you with?"

So I told her everything that had been going on in my life for the past two months, including my shocking conversation with Bella. She didn't interrupt; she just soaked it all up like a sponge. Once I was done spilling my story, she looked at me sternly, making me swallow hard.

"Edward, are you telling me that you just walked out on them? You left without hearing the whole story? And based on this incomplete knowledge, you made a decision that not only affects you, but a child that may possibly be yours as well? Was that what you were taught by your mother, Edward? Did you learn this

tactic in twelve years of medical school, to act without having examined all the facts?" All I could do was shake my head no.

"Teddy, I know your head is telling you that this just doesn't add up. But what does your heart tell you when you look at those two little girls?" She was right; I knew there had to be a logical explanation as to why Esme Swan looked like she could be my Elizabeth's twin.

"I guess I screwed up, huh?"

She just smiled. "Well, young man, what are you going to do about it now?"

"I guess I need to meet with Mama Swan and hear her out."

"That sounds like a good place to start."

A/N:

Well, all I can say is it's about time Edward removed his head from his... well, you know where he's had it lately.

I'm in the process of creating a blog so I can post extras for you to enjoy.

I also want a banner for my story. Any volunteers?

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

tickledpink

11. Chapter 11

I still own nothing and Stephanie Meyers is a genius.

You know who else is a genius? That's right, my beta, Dollybigmomma.

I tried to get this done sooner but I was suffering with a massive splitting headache for two days. It hurt to open my eyes and look at the computer screen. But fear not, it's been downgraded to a low thumping headache...

Well, I hope you enjoy the new chapter!

Chapter 11

Give Thanks

part 2

BPOV

Since becoming fast friend with Alice, I had been subjected to more spur of the moment shopping trips than you could shake a stick at. As much as I tried to protest them, she would just give me those eyes and I was done for. More often than not, Rose would tag along on our Saturday adventures, where she and Alice would plot the seduction of one Emmett McCarty. The poor guy would never know what hit him.

It was on the most recent excursion that Alice, Rose and my child somehow talked me into the outfit I was now wearing for Thanksgiving dinner. It was a tight grey cowl neck sweater dress that fell about four inches above my knees, black tights, dark grey suede fringed boots, and a black belt. The outfit was finished off with a red jade oval ring; red leather satchel bag and red gummy bear fishhook earrings that Esme was very adamant about buying. Completing the look, I pulled my hair into a high ponytail with a black clasp.

One positive thing about shopping with Alice was that she had become Esme's shopping buddy and I no longer felt the pressure to help pick out the perfect outfit. That baton had been passed to Alice and I was more than happy to relinquish it. With that being said, Alice had been molding my daughter into her little mini me. Esme's once sweet soft little girl dresses were now being slowly replaced with a more edgy style. Her outfit for today was a black and red plaid pleated drop waist jumper with two black leather buckle closures at the left hip, a red turtleneck and red wool tights. The thing that really gave her that edgier look was the black leather boots and biker jacket Rose and Alice talked her into. Her ensemble was finished off with the locket and a black grosgrain braided hair band.

Dinner this year was going to be spent down at La Push with the entire Quileute community. Charlie, Esme and myself would be the only non-Native Americans at this celebration. Seth and Jake joked that it was going to be like a reenactment of the first Thanksgiving. I guess that would make us Swans the pilgrims.

After getting Esme and myself ready, we headed downstairs to Charlie's kitchen table to pack up the dozen pies we had made the day before, only to find my dad with a knife in his hand ready to cut into a pumpkin pie.

I clear my throat and he jumped a couple of feet in the air and ducked his head at being caught with his preverbal hand in the cookie jar. I raised one eyebrow at him while shaking my head at his boyish actions.

We packed the pies and the other baked goodies into the trunk of my car and headed out to La Push for dinner. Esme talked non-stop about how she and Seth were going to go down to the beach and check out the tide pools. I just smiled at her knowing that she had that little boy wrapped around her little finger.

We finally arrived at the community center where the dinner would take place. It was truly a thing of wonder how all these families got together and celebrated, not just this holiday but also every other holiday and major event that the little nation deemed important. They always treated each person's lives with respect and in doing so had created a very tight knit community.

Before I even got my key out of the ignition, the wolves descended on my daughter and she squealed with delight. "My goodness, look at you, Birdie, you look so cute in your jacket. Those are cool boots, too," Seth told my daughter as he planted her on one of his massive shoulders and walked into the center, making sure to duck as they went in.

I hadn't heard that nickname in quite some time. I thought she would be spared the embarrassment of a moniker, but I guess it could have been worse.

Flashback

I couldn't believe I was a mom now; I had someone who depended on me for everything. I was so lost in my thoughts of my very tiny daughter who was in the NICU at UW Medical Center that I didn't even hear the La Push invasion as they entered my room.

"Wow, Bella, you're a mommy now. When do we get to see the little bird?" Seth asked with a cute little wolfy grin.

"Seth, for the last time, you cannot and will not call my child a bird. She has a very beautiful name, one I've spent the last five months choosing," I harrumphed as I crossed my arms over my chest like a petulant child...Argh, hormones!

"Well then, Bells, enlighten us, what's little girl Swan's name?" Jake asked as he plopped in the chair next to my bed.

"Her name is Esmeralda Jane Swan. Esmeralda means jewel or emerald, Jane means gracious. If you must call her by a nickname, you can shorten her name to Esme. Now, who wants to walk down with me and get a look at my jewel?"

The looks on the nurses' faces as the big burly boys from La Push all crowded around the window of the NICU to get their first glimpse of my baby was

comical.

After I scrubbed and suit up to enter the nursery I was met by Esme's nurse. "My goodness, she has quite the fan club, doesn't she? They gave me a fright when the crowded the window," Nurse Betty stated.

"Yes, they do take a while to get used to, but they're just a harmless pack of adoptive uncles for my little girl, and they're a fiercely loyal bunch. So, how is she doing today? Would it be alright if I turned her so the boys can get a peek at her?"

"She's doing so much better today, her doctor is optimistic that she'll be able to breathe on her own soon, and yes, why don't you sit down while I turn her around for her debut." She patted me on my hand and helped me get settled into the rocking chair.

As I watched the megawatt smiles cross over my seven friends faces, I knew I would never have to worry about my baby feeling unwanted. She had captured the hearts of every boy from La Push and I was sure they would not be her last.

As we went back to my room the guys were debating her name once again and Seth finally looked up at me and grinned. "Sorry, Bella, but we, all of us, feel she needs a proper name; one that represents her rare beauty and fits with her last name." I cocked one eyebrow at him, telling him to get on with it. "Her name will now and forever be known as 'Little Red Bird' among the people of La Push," he stated smugly.

"Little Red Bird?" I smiled at the sweet name they had bestowed upon her. "Why?"

"Well, Little because she's so tiny, Red because of that unusual hair color and Bird, well, because she's a Swan. But I think she'll always be my Birdie," Seth smiled as he explained this to me.

End Flashback

Dinner was one massive potluck; the food was laid out on long banquet tables along three of the long walls. Table after table was piled with salmon, venison, wild turkeys, stews, fish fry, roasted vegetables, soups, salads, fruits, at least a dozen different types of breads and oh, the desserts! Yum!

But before the hungry crowd could dig in, Billy Black led the gathering in a prayer of thanks.

"We return thanks to our mother, the earth, which sustains us. We return thanks to the rivers and streams, which supply us with water. We return thanks to all herbs, which furnish medicines for the cure of our diseases. We return thanks to the moon and stars, which have given to us their light when the sun was gone. We return thanks to the sun that has looked upon the earth with a beneficent eye. Lastly, we return thanks to the Great Spirit, in whom is embodied all goodness, and who directs all things for the good of Her children."

After the blessing was said, the children were served and then the elderly were taken care of. The boys just stood and waited for word to descend on the food. It was funny watching them, looking to their wives and mothers eagerly for permission to plate up, and when they got it, it was like a swarm of locusts. But the women were used to this and they had an unlimited supply of food. It was like when the food just appeared on the tables at Hogwarts. The day was filled with good food, fun and family.

"Mommy, can I go down to the tide pools with Seffie, Claire and Quil now?"

I looked up at Seth and he had that adorable smile he used to get his way on his face. Who was I to say no to that face? "Sure, baby, but you listen to Seth and wear your jacket, please."

"Oh, thank you, Mommy! Wait, I need to have mommy keep my locket safe. I don't want ever lose it." She runs back to me and I remove the locket and place it in my bag. "Okay I'm ready now come on, Seffie, let's go find Peach." She grabbed Seth's hand and pulled her massive lap dog to the door. I watched as he zipped up her jacket and again hoisted her up on his shoulders. Quil had little Claire on his shoulder as well and they started to sing 'Just Keep Swimming' as they walked out of the building. I just shook my head at the power those two little girls had over those two gentle giants.

I was having a wonderful time with Sue, Emily, Kim and Leah as we sat around a quilt frame tying a quilt for Old Quil's upcoming ninetieth birthday celebration when I heard the one thing that no parent ever wanted to hear.

Seth came crashing into the building and was frantically ordering people around. "Somebody bring some blankets and towels! Somebody please, I need something to stop the bleeding!"

I was frozen in my seat and all I could think was please, God, please, not Esme.

Before I could make my body move to find out if it was my child that was injured, I heard Charlie yelling, "Bells! Come on, honey, we need to get her to the hospital, now!"

That was the last thing I remembered clearly as I fell into the abyss...

A/N: I know, I'm a bad person and I want all of you to know I agonized over doing this to Little Esme but have faith.

Billy's prayer is from an adaptation of an Iroquois Thanksgiving Prayer.

I have a few rec's for you guys:

Singularity by Openhome - it's about Alice and what she went through before she found Jasper. When you finish that one read the sequel, Coalescence, both are well worth your time.

Isle of Dreams by Savannavansmutsmut - you will laugh your head off!

Parachute by KitsuShel – yeah, what can I say but wonderful.

Catalyst by Bronzehairedgirl620 - as always, well written, she's wonderful.

Rebel Without A Cause by Miss Alex - one word: perfect.

And my new favorite, Earth Angel by labellaleigh - it's only a few chapters in and I have been captured.

On another note, I have a link to my blog on my profile, so make sure to check it out.

Thank you for reading and for those of you who review it really makes me happy when you do!

tickledpink

12. Chapter 12

I still own nothing, drat... but hey, a girl can dream can't she?

People, if you haven't figured it out yet, I wouldn't be here without the wonderful talents of my beta, Dollybigmomma; you make my story sing! Thank you!

Chapter 12

Bless This Little Child, Lord

Lord, look down from heaven above

And touch this special child with love.

Protect and guide this little one

'till each and every day is done.

Remind us often that it's true;

This little life is a gift from you.

A miracle you've sent our way,

Lord, bless this little child today.

Author Unknown

BPOV

I didn't remember getting into the car.

I didn't remember walking into the Emergency Room.

I didn't remember any of the chaos that came before Dr. Gerandy came out to the waiting room looking at Charlie and then looking at me with those eyes. You know those eyes that doctors have, the eyes that give nothing away. I looked at him and said a silent prayer that he would have some good news for me.

'Please, Dear Lord; she has to be all right. I can't lose my baby, my reason for living.'

"Bella, Charlie, we were able to stop the bleeding. As with any head wound, it looked worse than it was. She has eight stitches at her hairline that should fade with time. Now we're working on getting her body temperature back up. From what I understand she was only in the water for less than ten minutes, correct?"

"Yes, as soon as I noticed she'd fallen in, I jumped in before the current could pull her further out," Seth replied with a pained expression on his boyishly young face.

I look over at Seth and knew I needed to ease his pain. It wasn't his fault; it was an accident. Hell, I'd fallen into the water more times than I cared to count.

"Seth, please stop beating yourself up. This could have happened to anybody. I'm just glad that you were there and acted fast." He nodded his head, but still had that tortured look in his eyes.

"Well, as soon as we get her temperature up, I want to transfer her to Seattle Children's. I'll feel better with her there. I've already made the arrangements to have her air lifted. Bella, you can accompany her. Dr. Cullen will be waiting for her; he'll be taking over her case."

I looked at Dr. Gerandy as he told us this. "Dr. Carlisle Cullen?"

"Yes, do you know him? He's a dear friend of mine, a wonderful physician, very gifted. He'll take good care of you both. Well, I'm going to check on Esme and I'll be back with her paperwork soon."

I was still in a fog as everyone around me made plans to get to Seattle. Charlie would be going back to his house and packing Esme's things and mine before he drove my Audi back for me. Dr. Gerandy returned with the flight nurse and we head back to the trauma room to transport my baby to the helipad. The flight to Seattle Children's went by in a flash. I was so lost as I watched Esme breathe with the help of the oxygen mask and listened to all of the monitors beeping as they reminded me my child was still alive.

Dr. Cullen and two nurses were at the helipad of Seattle Children's to meet us. The flight nurse relayed a bunch of medical mumbo jumbo to them and we made our way over to the elevator. After Dr. Cullen accessed Esme, he turned to me and offered me a warm compassionate smile and with it, some of my fears were alleviated.

"Bella, it's good to see you again, I'm just sorry it has to be like this."

"Thank you, Dr. Cullen, I agree with you on that. So how is she doing now? Is she going to be alright?"

"First, please call me Carlisle, and I'll have to examine her more thoroughly to give you a complete diagnosis. Let's get her settled and I'll have one of the

nurses show you to the waiting room,” he said as he gave me a fatherly pat on my hand.

I’d been pacing the length of the waiting room for the last half hour when I heard a familiar voice. “Bella?” I looked up and saw the face of my new best friend and noticed she was not alone.

“Alice, Rose, what are you two doing here?”

“Oh, Bella, Daddy called and said you were here and asked if I could come and sit with you while you wait. What happened, Bella? Where’s Esme?”

I tried to hold back the tears but it was no use, the floodgates busted open and I just broke down. Before I could hit the floor in a heaping, sobbing mess, I was being led to the hard plastic chairs by both of my new friends. I didn’t know how long I cried, but I was pretty sure I ruined the sweater Alice was wearing by my constant waterfall of tears and snot...ugh. I was such a freaking mess.

“Oh, Alice, I’m sorry, I’ve ruined your sweater,” I mumbled as Rose passed me some tissues.

“Pssh, never mind about the sweater, Bella, do you think you can tell me what happened now? Take your time, honey.”

So I told them how one minute Esme was playing by the tide pools and then the next minute she was being violently tossed around by the rough ocean water as Seth fought to keep her from drowning while being pulled out by the current. Without saying a word, I was once again engulfed in the comforting arms of my two new best friends.

“I’m sure Daddy is doing everything in his power to make sure she’ll be just fine,” Alice told me as she wiped away at her own tears.

“Thank you, Alice; I’m sure he’s doing a wonderful job with her. Um...Alice, it’s not that I don’t trust you or anything, but where is Miss Alice right now?”

“Oh, Bella, I’m sorry, I didn’t even think to tell you how she is. Well, I hope you don’t mind but I asked Edward if he wouldn’t mind watching her. It’s just that with the twins and all I didn’t think Jazz could handle anything else. But don’t worry; Elizabeth was so excited to get the chance to take care of Miss Alice. It was so cute watching her act like a little momma hen when she told Edward not to forget the playpen.”

I couldn’t help but smile at her joy when she told me this. “That’s fine, Alice. I’ll try and work out an arrangement for her as soon as possible.”

“You’ll do no such thing. Elizabeth is more than happy to puppy sit for *her Mae*. Besides, Edward could use the practice with the puppy, I’m thinking about getting one for Elizabeth for Christmas this year.” As she said this, she started to laugh again.

I was brought back to my reality when Carlisle walked into the room.

“Well, Bella, I’m happy to say that Esme is now breathing without the oxygen and her temperate is back to normal. I would like to keep her at least through the weekend, though. I want to watch her lungs to make sure she doesn’t start to develop pneumonia.”

I just nodded my head as I thought of all the times in the past six years that I’d had to worry about her lungs. Out of all the things that could have been wrong with my baby when she was born preterm, her lungs were the only thing that her doctor was concerned about. Each year during flu and cold season, I watched her like a hawk and we always avoided places and people that could infect her. School had been hard for me to give in to. I was going to home school her until Charlie talked some sense into me. He point blank said that I couldn’t keep her living in a bubble. What kind of life was that, for a child to have to live her life as an outsider? So I tucked my fears away and bit the bullet and had been on pins and needles ever since.

How ironic that she got hurt on my watch.

“Bella, stop!” I looked up to find Rose giving me her best teacher face. You know, the one that says, ‘Yeah, I can read your thoughts and you can just cut the crap’. “This is not your fault, Bella. You’re a wonderful mom. It was just a fluke accident and it could have happened to anyone. We need to be thankful that she was saved before it could have gotten worse.”

“You’re right, Rose. I guess it’s just hard to accept things I have no control over.”

“That’s just it, Bella; you need to have faith that all things can and will be fine. Now, how about we go see that little angel of yours, okay?” She stood and squared her shoulders and quirked an eyebrow at me, giving me a withering look when I didn’t make a move to stand. I immediately was on my feet. Now I understood how she could command a room full of kindergartners without the use of a cattle prod.

When we walked into the room and I saw her tiny body in that big bed, I was nearly brought to my knees in agony at what could have happened. But Rose and Alice kept a tight hold on me and deposited me in the chair next to her bed. Then they both stepped back to allow me some time with her to myself.

“Well, my jewel, you seem to always know how to get my heart beating fast. Momma’s right here, baby. You just rest and get better for me. We all miss your pretty little smile, baby, and I can’t wait to see those beautiful green eyes of yours. Guess who came to see you, baby? Miss Alice the person and Miss Hale are here. They’re both right here with mommy and are so happy that you’re going to be just fine. Now don’t you worry about Miss Alice, she’s at Elizabeth’s house with her daddy. They’re going to take really good care of her until the doctor says you can come home. Oh yeah, Grampy, Seth, Jake and all the rest of your boys are going to be here real soon.”

I didn’t know how long I sat there just watching my baby sleep, but it must have been a few hours because the room was slowly being filled up with all our friends and family.

“Wow, Dad, did you break a few traffic laws to get here so fast?”

He didn’t even bother looking guilty; he just shrugged his shoulders and came over to kiss Esme on the forehead. Seth placed himself at the other side of her bed and just stared at her with unshed tears in his swollen red eyes. I decided I needed a break and turned to leave the room when I heard his heart wrenching sobs as he starts to beg *his Birdie* for forgiveness.

“Wow, Bella, who are all of these people?” Alice asked with her eyes bulging out of her head.

“They, Alice, are her entourage, and she’s had them all wrapped around her little finger since the day she was born. As a matter of fact, that tall sentinel at the side of her bed is my future son-in-law.” Again, her eyes started to resemble a cartoon character. “At least that’s what Little Miss Thing 2 tells me.”

When I stepped back into the room, the nurse was shooing the pack out the door. She had no such luck with Seth; I had a feeling he’d given all who tried to extricate him from his post the stink-eye. After a few words of warning from the nurse about what she would tolerate, she relented and let Seth stay in the room.

Over the next few days, Carlisle was ever vigilant with Esme’s care and he was cautiously optimistic that she would be right as rain in a few more days. He was willing to release her on Sunday as long as I made an appointment to have her follow-up visit within the next week. When I told him we were in between pediatricians right now he scoffed at me and informed me he would be taking over her care permanently. Okay, I guess we now had a new doctor. Seth still refused to leave Esme’s side. I was pretty sure if he could, he would try and move in with us.

After we had all of the discharge info from the nurse and Esme cradled securely in Seth’s arms because he refused to put her down in the wheelchair, we made our way down to the lobby where Charlie was waiting for us along with the rest of the pack. They all said their goodbyes to us and we loaded Esme into my car. It was hard but I managed to get them to agree to let me go home without them. I’d swear I could hear Seth keening with distress as he was forcibly being led away from my car. I sighed and looked at my child in the rear-view mirror and asked her if she was ready to go home. She just nodded her head softly.

We’d been home for a couple of hours now and Esme still wasn’t talking or really moving for that matter, and she was still so pale. Carlisle had said she would be fine, but my mommy senses were tingling. I was just hoping she didn’t start to retreat inward. She was already a shy little thing to begin with; I made a mental note to ask Carlisle about PTSD at her follow up this week.

Just as I was getting ready to see if she was hungry, the doorbell chimed. Without even looking, I opened the door and was surprised by who was standing right in front of me...

A/N:

So, do you wonder who was at the door? I know who you all are hoping for; let me know who you think it could be.

I have a few more rec’s for you all:

***Across the Universes* by Fantasy Mother - it’s two Edwards for the price of one, yum!**

***Remember Me* by isakassees - it promises to be just as wonderful as TINML.**

***Through the Flames* by Sparkling Twilight - how can you go wrong with fireman Edward?**

***The Ransom of Little Deer* by Blueroan - I cry at every chapter, her Carlisle is so heartwarming it’s a must read.**

I want to thank all of you for reading my story and for those of you who take time to review, take a big bow. I love writing this for all of your enjoyment!

tickledpink

13. Chapter 13

Yet again, I still own nothing but my undying devotion to Stephanie Meyer for her wonderful imagination. My gratitude to my wonderful beta, Dollybigmomma, and a humbled heartfelt thanks to all of you for reading my story.

Chapter 13

Pink Purgatory

EPOV

Spending time with my family was as always wonderful. The talk I had with my Aunt, not so wonderful. There was nothing like being called on the carpet for your own rude behavior. I would be the first to admit it wasn't one of my finest moments. I guess my excuse would be that Bella caught me off guard with her notion that I was Esme's father. I was a fairly intelligent man and I was certain that she was mistaken in her mind that we had slept together. The timing was just impossible. But I promised my Aunt that I would hear her out for the girl's sake.

When I walked into Alice's great room, I was stopped in my tracks as I watched my baby giggling at some overgrown hairy rat that was bouncing all over the place. I didn't know why but it reminded me of my cousin with all of that hyperactive energy it possessed.

"Who's your little friend, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, Daddy, this is Miss Alice, Mae's puppy. Isn't she soooo cute? I wish I had my own puppy." I looked up and gave Alice a 'what are you up to' look.

"Well, she is pretty cute, but why is she here and not with Esme and her mommy?"

"I'm puppy sitting while they went home for the holiday weekend. It seems her dad is just a big scaredy-cat when it comes to small dogs. So I told her I would watch my namesake for them until they get back on Sunday," Alice informed me.

After a few minutes I realized it was a little too quiet around here. Looking around, I noticed that Emmett and Rose were missing from our gathering. As if she could read my mind, Alice informed me that they were out walking in her garden, 'getting to know each other better'.

Just as Rose and Emmett walked into the room, Carlisle's pager went off. *Ahh, the life of a doctor* I thought to myself and watched as his face showed signs of distress. He then looked over at Elizabeth and I noticed a look of sorrow in his eyes before he finished the call. I made my way over to him and waited to inquire as to what was going on. He motioned for Esme and me to follow him out of earshot of the rest of the family.

"That was Dr. Gerandy from Forks hospital, he and I met at a conference years ago. The reason he called is he has a patient he's transferring into my care. It seems the child was injured in a fall into the water down at La Push beach and he's managed to stabilize her enough but he would feel better if she was at a facility that can give her the attention she needs. Forks Hospital is just not equipped or staffed for long term care; it's more like a clinic than a hospital."

I could tell by how he was rambling that there was more to this case than being under equipped and under staffed.

"Carlisle, what are you not telling us? Do you need me to go with you? When will the child arrive at Seattle Children's?"

"No, Edward, you should stay here. I'm sure I can handle the case. It's just...I wanted you to know in case she takes a turn for the worse." She. The child was female. Okay. But I wondered why I needed to be informed, and then it hit me, the look he gave Elizabeth.

"Are you saying it's Esme Swan?" I heard a gasp from behind me and turned to see Alice with tears in her eyes. "Ali Cat, please don't cry, we don't have all the facts yet, it could be nothing." She wiped at her tears and latched onto me as if her life depended on me.

After talking about the situation, it was decided that Alice and Rose would head over to the hospital to be with Bella while they waited for her family to arrive. Alice looked at me as if she was up to something and it had my spidey senses on overdrive. It turned out my feelings were correct.

"Edward, I think it would be best if you and Lizzie take Miss Alice home with you." I started to head her off at the pass on this train of thought, but she silenced me with her best glare. "I know what you're about to say, so save it. I just don't think it would be easy for Jazz to watch the boys and a puppy, too. Besides, Miss Alice knows Lizzie and I'm sure Lizzie would do anything for *her Mae*."

And just like that, I was trapped. She knew what she was doing when she used the term '*her Mae*'. So I was now being ordered by my six year old to not forget the puppy playpen.

As we made our way back home, I tried not to think of the what-ifs. Yeah, that was a losing battle in and of itself. Being a doctor, I knew Esme was not out of the woods yet. She could have a myriad of complications that could still come to pass. All we could do was wait and see. I was sure praying couldn't hurt, either.

Oh, my hell, I never knew a tiny puppy would need so much stuff. My living room looked like a pet store. Not just your average pet store, either, but a pink pampered puppy boutique. I was sure my cousin was to blame for this madness in some way. Bella just didn't strike me as the type of person that would purchase a zebra print chaise lounge for a dog. Yep, I was sure that had Alice written all over it.

Carlisle called with more information on Esme's accident and to update me on her prognosis. I knew it might be considered a HIPPA violation but I needed to be informed for Elizabeth's sake. I'd been thinking a lot about what this might do to my baby if Esme took a turn for the worse.

This had been the longest weekend of my life and I was so looking forward to Sunday when I could get that little yappy, tinkling fur ball out of my house. Unfortunately, I could tell by my Elizabeth's actions that she would not settle until I let her have her own Miss Alice. Crap.

“Elizabeth, you understand that Miss Alice will be going home today, right?”

“I know, Daddy, she belongs to Mae. I’m just her babysitter her while Mae and Miss Bella stay at her Grampy’s house.”

The more I thought about the things Bella believed, the more I didn’t care; I just wanted my baby happy and being with Esme Swan made my child over the moon. So where did that leave Bella and me? Well, I guess if she wanted to talk to me after the way I had treated her, then I would listen to her before I rushed to judgment.

I was brought out of my inner dialog when I heard Elizabeth’s gentle chastisement of Miss Alice. “Miss Alice, that was not a very nice thing to do. Daddy, I think you need to buy another pair of work shoes.” Ah, crap, that puppy had made quick work of my favorite slippers, my running shoes and now my perfectly broken in leather loafers.

Before I could ring that little rat’s neck, my phone rang. I smiled as I thought to myself, ‘Saved by the bell, Miss Alice.’ “Hello?” I answered a bit gruffly.

“Hello to you, too, dear cousin. What’s the matter with you? Did the dog eat your homework?”

“Alice, please tell me you’re calling to arrange a puppy pick-up time. Because if that rat eats anymore of my shoes, I’m not sure you’ll have a puppy to return to the Swan’s.”

“Oh, Teddy, you’re always such the dramatic one. I’m sure that sweet little puppy did no such thing. I mean, I didn’t have any trouble with her at all. How did she get to your shoes when she was in her playpen?”

“Well, Alice, I forgot all about the dam playpen. Do you know how much stuff I had to cart in? I mean really, why do you need a baby monitor for a dog?” I was now beyond pissed; I just wanted that yipping fur ball out of my house.

“Well, never fear, dear cousin, your time in puppy purgatory is coming to an end. Daddy has informed me that Esme has been released this morning and she’s doing much better. I’m sure the Swan’s would love to have their baby back.”

Yes! Now how was I going to get my child to give the damn rat back?

A/N: I know it’s short and a bit late. So here’s my sob story; my oldest child has been working nights and I drew the short straw with taxi service. So instead of getting rudely woken up at 0’Early I chose to turn my days and nights around with him. Well, let’s just say my writing time is few and far. I can’t write in the middle of the night with my brain as tired as it is right now. But fear not, his shift is changing this Sunday so I’m sure I will get back to my norm soon.

I have a few more rec’s for you:

***Days Like This* by Soft Ragoo - how can you go wrong with daddyward, he’s also a doctor, I have two words; ‘he’s perfect’**

***With All My Strength* by Rhi Aeffyll. - It’s a different story of how the Cullen’s came to be and I love it.**

So that’s two more of my favorite stories for you to read and enjoy.

Thanks for the reviews and for those of you who put me on your favorites and alerts, mmmwuah, here’s a big kiss!

tickledpink

14. Chapter 14

Disclaimer: Better Think Twice is a work of fanfiction. All character names and locations associated with Twilight belong to Stephanie Meyer and her publishing company Little Brown. In no way do I make any profit from this story, and no copyright infringement is intended.

I'm reposting Chapters 1-13 you might want to go back and re-read what my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma as added to them. It will make things that happen in this chapter easier for you to understand.

Speaking of this chapter I am only responsible for the very beginning. My beta did me a huge favor with the hard stuff, it is all her. I only gave her a very rough outline and a tiny look into Bella's POV.

I know my A/N are long but I wanted you all to be aware of Dolly's wonderful talent. Oh and to tell you you're going to need tissues lots and lots of tissues!

Chapter 14

You know what they say about 'assuming'...

BPOV

Why couldn't I ever have a moment's peace in my life? I'd already told everyone I would call when we got settled back in. Who on earth could be so impatient that they had to lean on my doorbell? All I wanted right now was to spend some time with Esme and try to get past the crapcake that was my life at this moment.

Without thinking or looking out the peephole, I opened up my door and crap, it was the cherry to go on top of my crapcake. "Shit," I mumbled under my breath. "Hey, Mike, what are you doing here?"

"Well, I've been calling you all weekend. Why didn't you answer? I was starting to get worried about my little doll." I tried not to roll my eyes at his delusional claim on my child as he just brushed past me and waltzed into my home without invitation. "I don't see why you keep denying the fact that I'm the best father you're going to find for my little doll."

I swore my life couldn't get any worse than this right now. But, hey, it was my life so why was I not surprised to hear the clearing of a throat right behind me. I turned around and was met with a pair of vivid green eyes.

"I'm sorry; I guess I should have called first. I just thought Esme would be missing her puppy and I was hoping to get a chance to clear the air," Edward said uncomfortably.

But because my life was so craptastical, just as I tried to find my voice that seemed to have abandoned me at the moment, I heard the whining voice of the bane of my existence.

"Bella, baby, where did you go? I thought we were finally going to talk about how better your life would be if I finally took on the role of daddy?" I was going to wring his non-existent neck. Who did he think he was to lay claim on my child and worse, how was I going to explain that to the man standing in front of me who seemed to be trying not to erupt like Mt. Saint Helen's right now? "Bella, who is this guy and why does he have his hands on my doll, baby?"

"Mike, I think you need to leave, right now," I all but sneered at him and restrained myself from removing him from my house by force.

"Fine, I'll go but this is far from over, Bella. One of these days you're going to realize you need me." He tried to put his hands on me and I pushed them off and stepped away. His feeble attempt to mark me as his territory made me want to punch his lights out.

After Mike stomped off like the oversized child that he was, I turned to Edward and realized that Elizabeth was no longer at his side.

"She went to return Miss Alice to her owner." He then mumbled something under his breath that sounded like a prayer of thanks. "By the way, how is Esme doing? My father said she was fine but they were concerned about her lungs at one point?"

"Yes, we've always been a bit guarded about them ever since she was born. Coming into the world a couple of months premature didn't help her case, either," I said quickly, trying to muddle through the uncomfortable awkwardness as we stood there in the doorway. "Would you like to come in? Maybe stay awhile so the girls can play?" I offered.

"Seeing as how Elizabeth has been going on about Esme all morning, I don't see how I can possibly refuse," he said with a cool clip to his voice. Wonderful.

Edward followed me into the living room and sat down on the other sofa, folding his hands in his lap and staring at them without saying another word. For a full three minutes. I just sat there looking at him. He had said he wanted to clear the air, but he seemed at a loss for where to start so I decided to throw things open.

"So, you said you wanted to clear things up. That's probably a good idea given our daughters seem to be inseparable."

He nodded. "Yes, they do. But we need to come to an understanding of the truth here, Bella," he said running his hand roughly through his hair. He looked like he was trying not to get angry and it was making me on edge as well. He took a deep breath and then leveled me with his cold gaze. "We need to establish something first. I don't know whom you slept with, but it couldn't have been me. I don't go around picking up drunken girls in bars for anonymous one night stands. I just don't do that sort of thing." His tone was insulting, as was his insinuation.

"I don't do that sort of thing, either, Edward. Nor had I ever drank like I did the night Esme was conceived. I was dragged out by a couple of girlfriends that night. It was Valentine's Day of all days. They ended up ditching me for their boyfriends and left me to defend myself from the bar sharks and to find my own way back home. I was alone in a sea of couples and I guess I was feeling a little sorry for myself. Then Mike, the horribly annoying guy you just saw, showed

up and started pestering me again, so I tried to drown him out and drown my loneliness at the same time. I guess that wasn't the most brilliant thing to do given my low tolerance for alcohol. The next thing I remember, I was waking up nude in a strange bed and laying next to...a stranger...at Hotel 1000. I was embarrassed by my condition and my appearance. It was certainly not one of my finest moments."

"And you never actually saw the face of this guy you slept with?" he asked incredulously. His judgmental tone was starting to piss me off. "Maybe you should have hung around long enough to have at least gotten an introduction."

"I was a shy, inexperienced virgin up until that point. I had never really even dated before then so I was vulnerable and an easy target. All I know was that I was somewhat traumatized when I took stock of myself and felt the bruises and soreness and realized what had happened. I didn't even remember losing my virginity, Edward!" I snapped back at him. "I had never been in that situation before and had no idea what morning after protocol was. I still don't know," I said looking down at my wringing hands, feeling my face flame red with anger and embarrassment. "That one time was the only time I'd ever had sex before, and I've never been with another man again since that night so that's obviously just not something I go around doing, even now."

"That still doesn't make me the one. All you have to go on is the fact that our children look similar to each other. It doesn't put me at the scene."

"Edward, they're more than just similar in appearance. They're like identical twins, not only in looks, but also in how they interact. Their connection is deeper than just friendship."

He was glaring at me now as if he didn't believe me and was fighting to keep his voice down. "Bella, there's just no way. We never slept together. I don't just go around having random hook ups, either, and I especially wouldn't do it with a woman who would. I've never been to Hotel 1000, so me being Esme's father just isn't possible. I'm certain I'd never seen you before the day of their birthday party. Other than the fact that our daughters resemble each other, there's no evidence that Esme is my child so I suggest that you look elsewhere for your sperm donor. You'll find no easy source of unwarranted child support from me."

The way he was looking down at me and sneering at me, as if I was some whore that stood on a street corner passing my body around to whoever made me an offer for the right amount made me both angry and ashamed all over again. I wanted to slap him and hide from him all at the same time.

"Edward..." I started but he abruptly cut me off.

"No, Ms. Swan, you obviously need to be looking elsewhere for your mark. Perhaps you should consider the offer that Mike guy just made you. It's probably the best you're going to get," he said and stood up to leave. I stood up and faced him toe to toe. I was furious now. He had no right to take that self righteous tone with me. Alice had explained to me about Elizabeth's origins and he had done no better than I had when she was conceived. I'd be damned if I was going to let him make me feel ashamed one second longer. Esme and I both deserved so much better than some hypocrite like him.

"I don't want a damn dime from you and I never did. I do perfectly fine providing for my child's financial needs all by myself. All I ever wanted for my daughter was to know the love and guidance of a father in her life. Someone who could show her by example how a man is supposed to love and treat a woman. I see you're not the man I thought you were so you're obviously not who I would want for that sacred position. Even if I did find out you were her father now, Mr. Masen, you're no longer welcome in our lives. Please feel free to leave my home immediately."

He stalked out of the living room coming back seconds later with a crying Elizabeth in tow, my little Esme clinging to her hand desperately and crying as he practically dragged his daughter to the front door. "Good evening, Ms. Swan," he said curtly and pulled Elizabeth with him out the door before slamming it too hard behind him. The look on my jewel's face as she pressed her face to the window and watched them drive away was so broken and my heart hurt as I cried with her. Today, Edward Masen made me hope for the first time since I'd met him that he truly was not her father.

EPOV

I drove home quickly, fighting the rage building inside of me. Did Bella take me for a fool? She claimed she wasn't looking for anything, but I fully expected a court order for a paternity test and her to try and lay claim to my family's fortune and an absurd amount of undeserved child support. It was impossible for me to be Esme's father. The timing was completely off and I wouldn't have just hooked up with some inebriated girl in a bar like that. I had been raised better than that and would never do something that would shame myself or my family in such a way. Ms. Swan was obviously delusional if she thought I was going to fall for whatever game it was she was playing.

I looked into the back seat and was struck by the devastated face of my daughter. "Hey, princess, you doing okay back there?" No response. "You know, Christmas is coming up soon, do you want to go shopping for Ali and Aunt Esme's gifts?" Again, no response.

"Look, Elizabeth, I know you're upset with me for leaving Mae's house so quickly, but we really needed to go, honey." Still no response. I had a feeling I was going to be getting the silent treatment for a while.

We made it home and my daughter stormed into the house and into her room, slamming the door. I thought about calling her out on her behavior, but I had dragged her away from her beloved friend rather abruptly. She was too young to understand what was going on between Ms. Swan and myself so I decided to cut her some slack. I stood outside my daughter's bedroom door, listening to her crying.

"Elizabeth, can I come in, baby?"

"NO."

"I know you're angry, Lizzie, and I'm sorry for the way we left Mae's, but...I love you, honey. It's time to get ready for bed." I didn't know what else to say to her. She could be as stubborn as Alice could sometimes so this would likely go on for a while.

The rest of the week went on in like fashion, my princess barely speaking to me. For a six year old, she was brutal sometimes. When I asked her about her Mae, she would just look at me and tears would well up in her eyes and she would shake her head, looking devastated. I blamed Ms. Swan for this and by the following Friday, I was even more pissed off at her than I was Sunday evening.

"Mae went home sick today," Elizabeth finally said when we were on our way home from dinner. I glanced back at her tear stained face and tried to ask her a few questions, but she would just shrug in response, her face drawn with worry for her friend. I was starting to worry about my daughter because she was barely eating and cried out in her sleep at night for Esme. When we got home, she did what had become her routine. She ran to her room and shut the door, refusing to talk to me. This was getting old in a hurry.

I went into the den and made my way behind the bar, pulling out a bottle of brandy and a glass. I didn't drink very often, but my confrontations with Ms. Swan and my daughter's week of moodiness had left me irritated and in need of some serious relaxation. Two drinks and a half hour later, I went to check on Elizabeth. She had already climbed into bed and was sound asleep again, but I could see fresh tear stains still on her cheek. She didn't even bother to tell me goodnight again. I guess I deserved that. I kissed her forehead and quietly closed her door. I would have to do something to pull her out of this soon.

I went back to the den and poured myself another drink, taking the bottle with me as I wandered down to my office and settled down in my large leather chair, allowing myself to think about what Bella had said. I'd spent the entire week mulling over everything she claimed and it still didn't make sense to me. She'd claimed to have conceived Esme on a night when she had gone out with her friends. On Valentine's Day. I did the math and it just didn't add up. If both our girls' birthdays were the same, they would have both been conceived in December. I was in Chicago then with my mother, so there was no way I was anywhere near her here in Seattle in December. However, she did mention something about Esme being a preemie and having lung problems from birth. It was still early enough in the evening to make a call, so I picked up the phone and called Carlisle.

"Hello, Edward, what can I do for you?" Carlisle asked through a yawn.

"Hey, sorry to call so late, but I had a question. Elizabeth and I returned Esme's puppy last weekend and Bella and I had an interesting little...chat."

"Hmm, that sounds kind of ominous, Edward. Is there anything the matter? Was Esme alright?"

"Well, that's kind of what I had a question about, Carlisle. Bella mentioned something about Esme having been born prematurely. I was wondering if you could tell me how premature she was, if that information hasn't been made privileged by her mother, that is."

"No, she not enforced any special restrictions, Son. Esme Swan was born approximately eight weeks preterm with moderate to serious hypoplasia. She's been hospitalized off and on since birth for related lung and breathing maladies as a result. Was there a reason you needed to know her history?" Carlisle asked, but I was already lost in the math again.

"Just curiosity mostly, Carlisle. Thanks for filling me in," I said absently and we said our goodbyes with plans for lunch one day next week. I poured myself another drink and leaned back again thinking. If Esme was born two months prematurely in September, then conception in February was likely. But that still didn't mean anything to me. Seven years ago in February, I had already entered medical school here in Seattle and my mother had just passed away two months prior. I couldn't even imagine myself being in the mood at that point.

I drained my glass and filled it again. This woman had some nerve. I figured I might as well get my ducks lined up and get ready for her attack which surely would be coming any time now. I knew I would be cleared by a DNA matching test, but my lawyer would want to be thorough and would need whatever proof I had to substantiate that I had not been anywhere near that damn hotel she claimed she and whomever this guy that she'd screwed had stayed. Back then, I only used my one credit card that was linked to my bank account since that was where my trust fund allotments were being transferred.

I got up and not so gracefully plopped myself down on the floor and dug into the bottom drawer of my file cabinet where I kept my old tax files, looking for my bank statements for the year in question. That year was still within the seven recommended years for holding onto financial records, so I found the one for the month of February and tossed it up onto my desk and slammed the file drawer shut, congratulating myself for my excellent organizational and record keeping skills. Slamming the drawer probably wasn't such a good idea because it caused the stuff on top of the cabinet to shift. I guess I didn't know my own strength. The little wooden box I kept odd and end mementos and junk in rattled in protest before clattering to the floor beside me, spilling its contents. I raked everything up with unsteady hands, dumping it back into the box. Something shiny had bounced noisily underneath the desk and caught my attention. I crawled around to fish it out. It was a nice sterling silver key chain with four keys on it, the kind sometimes given as part of a gift set.

I climbed back up into my chair and sat down again, dangling and spinning the attached small rectangular silver ornament from my fingers while holding the keys, watching how it reflected the light. My eyes finally focused on it, revealing very fancy cursive engraving on both sides. On the front was the initials 'IMS' and on the back, the words 'From Renee and Phil with Love'. Who the hell was IMS or Renee and Phil, and why did I have their keys?

I was very drunk by this point, but as I stared at the keys in my hand trying to remember where I got them or why I even had them, I had vague flashes of memory. They weren't clear memories mostly, more like viewing something through a thick fog, but then part of it came to me very clearly. Something I had forgotten because it was so unpleasant and I didn't want to remember.

It was cold, the beginning of spring semester. I was in medical school. We had just started shadowing a doctor in the oncology wing that morning. It turned out to be a bad day, a horrible day; a little girl passed away while we were there in the room. They'd done everything they could to save her, but even with all of modern medicine's miracles, they were unable to stop the cancer that consumed her brain and spinal column. I remembered that she was only three.

I reached up and felt tears running down my face, just like they had that day. I almost gave up my dreams of being a doctor that day. If it hadn't been for my friend and fellow student, Eric, I would have quit that day. Too bad he did end up quitting later on. He would have been a good doctor, I thought.

This was where things began to get a little fuzzy. I remembered agreeing to meet Eric and another buddy of his for a drink, which was something I never did, but after the day we'd had, I just wanted to be with people for a while. Both of us were ready to put that day behind us. For some reason, though, he didn't show up. I remembered the place being noisy, and lots of the couples there were all over each other. It was some kind of theme night at this club he'd picked.

I finished my drink and stumbled into my bedroom with the key ring still clutched in my hand, piling up on my bed without even bothering to get undressed. That night began playing through my head again, and as I faded off into an inebriated stupor, I began remembering parts of the rest of the night.

Flashback

What a day from hell. If I fell apart as badly as I had today every time I lost a patient, I was going to make a crappy doctor. Eric had suggested this club as a way to drown our nerves for a while, so I had hopped a cab down here to meet them. He and his buddy were a no show, though, and I was getting tired of

drunken girls trying to drag me off my barstool so they could grind on me on the dance floor. I was about to get up and call myself a cab when I noticed a girl slumped over on the bar a couple of stools down from me, her beautiful pale bare shoulders shaking like she was crying. She tried to stand up, but the shoes she was wearing looked like stilts, and she was going down. She'd obviously been drinking as well.

"Easy there," I said as I managed to reach out and catch her before she fell. She was so warm in my arms and when she looked up at me, I was suddenly mesmerized as we stood there for a moment just staring at each other. I had a thing for petite brunettes and this girl was small, but she was apparently fiercely independent because she righted herself and thanked me, and then turned to walk away, where she immediately stumbled again, landing squarely on her rear. She burst out crying.

"I'm going to kill those two!" she growled and jerked the offending silver shoes off her feet, throwing them at the bar rail. One bounced away and the other one lodged over the top of the rail, looking like Cinderella had made a drunken escape. "I'm never listening to the Tweedle twins again!" she spat and scrambled shakily to her feet. Her long wavy chestnut hair swirled around her shoulders as she swayed in front of me. "Thanks for the help. Sorry for acting like such a brat but I've had a really crappy night. I never wanted to be here in the first place and I just want to get out of here before he comes back." About that time, a smarmy looking guy came up to the girl, trying to put his arms around her.

"What part of no don't you understand, moron? I've been telling you no for years and you still keep trying. Just leave me be for heaven sakes!" She went to push away from the guy but he wrapped himself around her tighter, making her angrier.

"You know you really want me, baby. Fight me all you want, but one of these days you know you're going to need me."

"When hell freezes over!" she snarled and managed to jerk herself from his grasp, falling squarely into my arms again. "Go away, Skippy!" she yelled at him. He reached for her again and I tucked her behind me, staring the guy down. He was just a bully and backed up as I glared at him.

"I believe the lady said no. Get lost." The jerk straightened up and strutted away as if he hadn't just been dismissed. What a douche. The tiny brunette slipped out from behind me, tears sliding down her cheeks.

"I should probably be nicer to him. He's tried to get me to go out with him since high school but he's always just so creepy, creeped me out too much. Dating him would be like dating that creepy relative no one ever talked about. Creepy!" She was watching after Mr. Creepy with the widest, saddest brown eyes I had ever seen. Even after the guy practically tried to drag her off, she was still concerned with being nice. She had already had a few drinks as well, which was obvious by how many times she said creepy.

She sat back down at the bar and ordered another rum and coke. "Hey, let me buy you a drink for saving me. It's the least I could do." She looked so lost that I couldn't say no.

Two hours later, we had enjoyed several more drinks and both of us were leaning into each other. We had told each other a little about ourselves, though I didn't remember most of what she said, just that she was alone and lonely, she had lost her mom a few years ago but still mourned her terribly, and she had never had a boyfriend before and it was difficult for her to watch all the couples at the club knowing she was going home alone. I told her about watching the little girl die of cancer, unable to hold back the tears and sobs that finally escaped. I told her about watching my mother die just two months prior and she started crying, too. She was crying for both of us having lost our moms. She moved to my side of the booth and wrapped herself around me tightly, stroking my hair and whispering comforting words and praising my courage for becoming a doctor so I could help try to save lives while I soaked her bare shoulder. I appreciated her kind words and sweet comfort. She really was a nice girl. We indulged in a few more drinks, both of us becoming quite inebriated. It was closing time, so she stood up and tried to wriggle her feet back into those horrible shoes but they had apparently swollen and the shoes wouldn't go on.

"Damn it, now I'm going to have to walk home barefoot," she mumbled. There was no way she was walking home alone barefoot in February in the middle of a cold Seattle night.

"Hey, share a cab with me. It's too cold out to be walking and besides, you don't want to be on the streets alone at this hour," I said and she reluctantly nodded. I had the bartender call us a cab, and carried her out, climbing into the cab with her in my arms, her shoes dangling from her fingers. She gave the driver her address, which was just a few blocks away. She snuggled into my chest and I rested my head on top of hers, my arms wrapped securely around her the whole way. I walked her to her door, only to see a red scarf tied around the doorknob and we could hear loud noises coming from inside.

"Oh, no, they're doing it on the dining room table again. My roommate, Angela, is such a lucky girl. Ben worships her," she said longingly. By the sounds coming from inside her apartment, I'd say Ben was busy being quite devoted at the moment. "Well, this will go on until about lunch time tomorrow, so I'm going to have to find a hotel. I'm cold, I'm drunk and I just want to go to bed," she moaned. The sound she made was kind of hot and way she said 'go to bed' went straight to my nether regions. It had been a few weeks, and I was a guy after all. I helped her back to the elevator and we leaned on each other as we made it back out to the cab. She was a nice girl and was having a really bad night all around. There were tears streaming from her beautiful brown eyes and it made me want to protect her; to make her feel better.

I told the driver to take us to the closest nice hotel and she began to protest but I cut her off. "It's no problem. Let's just get you a room so you can get some sleep and get past this day. It's no biggie."

I recognized the neighborhood. My apartment building was a couple of blocks over, so I paid the driver after he dropped us off in front of a very nice hotel. We made it inside and I booked her a room. I went with her up in the elevator to make sure she made it into her room safely, and when she opened the door, she turned to me. "Would you like to come in and get some water or something before you walk home, maybe sober up a little? You look about as sober as me at the moment, which isn't very." I nodded and followed her inside.

I remembered her climbing up in the middle of the big king sized bed, and then bursting out crying out of exhaustion and frustration with her night. She had been so sweet earlier in the evening to comfort me, so I climbed up next to her, intent on returning the favor. As I held her while she cried, she snuggled into me, apologizing for being so emotional.

"It's okay to feel, to hurt even, it lets us know we're alive," I told her. She looked up at me with those deep warm chocolate eyes and I was lost in them. I leaned in and placed a soft, gentle kiss on her lips. She was trembling and began breathing heavily as she pressed her lips back firmly to mine. I remembered she'd said she had never had a boyfriend before, so I knew she had to be a virgin. I should have taken it slowly with her, been soft and considerate, but things

began to escalate rapidly from there and the next thing I knew, she was trembling violently, sobbing and gasping for breath as I became the first man to ever breach her threshold of innocence. It all happened so fast that I didn't even remember removing our clothes. We were so drunk. She just wrapped herself around me and held on through the pain I was inflicting and allowed me to continue without a complaint, her trembling and sobbing lasting for several minutes after I finished. I was fairly large and she was so small, there was no question that I had hurt her. I was such an ass and being so drunk, I doubted that I was gentle.

The next thing I remember was waking up alone in bed with a throbbing headache and a sour stomach. I was still too drunk to function, so I pulled on my clothes and got ready to go check out. I spotted something shiny on the floor under the edge of the bed and picked it up. It was her keys. All she'd had with her in her pocket was a little pouch with her license, a credit card and a small wad of cash, and her keys.

I realized then in my drunken state that I'd never asked her for her name or told her mine. I had no idea who she was and I wished I had gotten her number or something. She was really special and I had wanted to see her again. In the short time we'd spent together, I had felt an incredibly close connection with this girl. More so than I ever had with another woman, and I had hoped to get a chance to explore a relationship with her. I'd obviously taken her virginity judging by the way she felt and by the stains left on the sheets and I desperately needed to apologize for my ungentlemanly behavior and beg for another chance to start again, properly this time.

My memories of the prior night were quickly being overshadowed, however, by the pounding in my head and my churning stomach, so I pocketed her keys and made my way down to check out. I hailed a cab, still too drunk to walk the streets, and made my way home, climbing into bed and passing out again, allowing the memories of that night to slip away from my mind.

End Flashback

I had quickly forgotten all about that night in my hung over state the next day, and then reality took over as medical school consumed my life while I still grieved for my mother, followed by the arrival of my daughter, Elizabeth. I had simply forgotten, until now. The sound of Elizabeth's screams woke me up the rest of the way and I shot bolt upright, running to her bedroom. She was screaming for Mae again, begging for her in her nightmare not to die and leave her alone, just like she had all week. I got her calmed down and back to sleep before I returned to my office.

I sat down and pulled the key ring from my pocket, looking at it in my hand. *IMS.* Ms. Hale had introduced Bella as Isabella Marie Swan the day she'd read her latest book to the kindergartners. I laid the key ring down and picked up the bank statement, unfolding it with trembling fingers. Half way down the list of charges I'd made that month was one I'd never paid attention to before when I'd received the statement in the mail seven years ago February. It was a charge for \$593.38. The transaction description read that it was for a Grande Luxe City Room...at Hotel 1000.

Oh, my god...it was all true.

A/N:

Well people did my beta do right by you? I know she did right by me. I told you she was extraordinary and I was 100% correct. Thank You Dolly for this wonderful chapter I can't say it enough.

People like I said in the be ginning you need to go back and re-read chapters 1-13 Dolly has added some very important info in them.

My recs for this week are what I refer as the 'Reading Series' by ChoicesHP

Reading Twilight

Reading New Moon

Reading Eclipse

Reading Breaking Dawn

And when you finish those read her very own sequel Eternal Sunrise. I know you will enjoy her take on what the Cullen's think and do while reading the four books they received.

Thank you all for the reviews and reading Better Think Twice. Don't forget to check out my Blog for all the things that inspire me. While you're there sign-up as a follower if you like or leave me a message.

tickledpink

15. Chapter 15

I still own nothing Ms. Meyers owns Twilight, but Mae and Beth are all mine.

I know I tell you all the time I have the world's best beta, but it bears repeating. Dollybigmomma you are more than just a beta you are my very own 'soul sister'

Chapter 15

Esme's Plight

*Baby mine, don't you cry
Baby mine, dry your eyes
Rest your head close to my heart
Never to part, baby of mine
Little one when you play
Don't you mind what you say
Let those eyes sparkle and shine
Never a tear, baby of mine
If they knew sweet little you
They'd end up loving you, too
All those same people who scold you
What they'd give just for
The right to hold you
From your head to your toes
You're not much, goodness knows
But you're so precious to me
Cute as can be, baby of mine*

This chapter is between Beth and Mae after Miss Alice is returned and then the week that follows after Edward made an ass out of himself.

MPOV

I was so happy to be back in my own room. It was so pretty, just like one of the pictures momma had in her storybook. It was so colorful here, not like that ugly cold hospital room that Beth's Pawpaw made me sleep in. I was so scared when I woke up after I fell into the ocean. Momma said that I was a very lucky little girl and that my Seffie saved my life.

Seffie stayed with momma and me at the hospital and he was trying to be brave when he had to say goodbye to me today. Momma promised him that she would call him tomorrow after I woke up.

Momma and I didn't even get to take our shoes off before somebody was ringing the doorbell. I didn't want to talk to people so I ran to my room and climbed on my bed with my dolly. I loved her so much, she was so soft and squishy and she played a song when you turned her key on her back. My Gran gave her to me before she went to heaven to see my Nana Renee.

"Mae, are you awake? Look, I brought Miss Alice back for you. Daddy and I took really good care of her while you were at your Grampy's house. Did you have fun at the beach?" It was my Beth!

"Beth! Oh, my gosh, Beth, I missed you so much. I love you forever, my Beth. Thank you for taking care of Miss Alice for me and I did go to the ocean. But I don't ever want to go back, ever."

"Why not, Mae? I love the ocean. Did you not find Peach like we talked about?"

"No, didn't your Pawpaw tell you that I fell into the ocean and almost died? My Seffie saved me before the water filled my body up. I was in the hospital all weekend because the doctors wanted to make sure I could breathe without the hose in my nose."

"No, Pawpaw didn't tell me, did my daddy know you were in the hospital?"

"I don't know, Beth, but your Pawpaw was very nice to me and made me feel better. Beth, can I tell you a secret? It's something that happened to me."

"Yes, Mae, you can tell me anything."

"You know when I was still asleep before the doctors made me better? Well, my Nana Renee was with me and she was singing to me. Then I had a lot of people come and visit me, I got to see my Gran, Granddad Phil, oh, and you know who else came to see me?"

"Who, Mae?"

"I met a nice man and a lady. The lady had green eyes and red hair just like us and the man looked kind of like your daddy. The lady told me to tell you she loves us and she's so proud to be our grandma. What do you think she meant, Beth?"

"I don't know, Mae, did she tell you her name?"

"Yes, she said her name was Elizabeth, just like yours."

Just as Beth and I started to play with Miss Alice, her daddy came in my room and made her leave. He looked at me and he did not look like he was happy at

all. I ran after Beth, grabbing her hand and trying to hold on to her before her daddy pulled her out of my house. I went to watch her daddy put her in the car and then he looked up to my window and shook his head at me before getting in and driving away. He looked so sad.

I just went to my room and tried not to cry too loud as I fell asleep. I knew it made momma sad and worried when I cried.

When I woke up, I was surprised that I was in momma's bed. I never slept in there; I was a big girl now. Besides, momma always woke me up because she talked in her sleep.

I didn't want to wake momma up so I went in the living room to watch cartoons, but I saw a movie on the table so I started to watch it instead. At first I was not happy because it was not a princess movie and I was going to turn it off but then I heard my Grampy's voice. He was laughing at a little girl as she tried to dance on her toes. He would laugh and then smile and say, "Bells, you're going to be the prettiest ballerina on the stage. Come here and give daddy a hug, baby, so you and mommy can get going." Oh, my gosh, that little girl was my momma. The next voice I heard was my momma and she was crying about a fish dying and then I heard Nana Renee's voice trying to make her happy. She was singing the same song to momma that she sang to me after I fell in the ocean. I didn't know momma had a movie of my Nana. I was so happy I got to see her again and hear her sing.

I start singing with her and just as the song ended, momma walked into the room.

"Morning, baby, do you want me to make you breakfast?"

I just nodded my head and walked into the kitchen and sat at the table to wait for my food. Momma made me a warm bowl of oatmeal with a banana cut up in it, yum.

When I was finished with my breakfast I got dressed to take Miss Alice for a walk.

"Momma, hurry up and get ready, Miss Alice needs to go potty before she makes a mess on the floor."

"Okay, baby, make sure you have your warm boots and remember to grab your hat and gloves."

"Okay."

I didn't get to go to school today because Beth's Pawpaw told momma that I should take it easy. He didn't want me to have trouble breathing. I didn't want to tell him that I was already having trouble with breathing. I knew momma would be worried and then she would make me stay in the house and keep me in my bed. Yuck.

After taking Miss Alice on her walk, we came back home and I got to call Grampy and then Seffie. I could tell that Seffie was crying because he was making a sniffing noises and he sounded like he had a cold. Before he hung up he asked to talk with momma, so I gave her the phone and went to watch the movie with Nana in it again.

I think I fell asleep watching the movie because now it was kind of dark outside. When I looked around I could see momma typing on her computer. She looked sad so I asked her if we could have smiley face pancakes for dinner. They always made me smile happily so they were sure to work for momma.

Momma made the best pancakes, but her smiley face pancakes were special. She only made them for days that were special and when I was sad. My pancake had green grapes for eyes, sausage eyebrows, a cherry for the nose and whip cream for the mouth. Momma's has chocolate chips eyes, a cherry nose, whip cream eyebrows and an orange slice for the mouth.

When we were finished eating our pancakes, momma let me take a bubble bath and then she read me a story before I fell asleep again.

I woke up in momma's bed again and she was still asleep and she looked really sad so I tried not to wake her up. I let Miss Alice out of her playpen and played with her in my room until momma came in and had me get ready for school. Yay!

I really missed school and my Beth, so I hurried to get dressed but I had to try and remember if I ran it would hurt to breathe and if momma found out she would make me stay home again. I didn't want to miss seeing Beth so I had to be careful.

When momma and me walked into the classroom, my Beth ran to me and hugged me like I was going to disappear or something. Then she whispered in my ear how much she missed me and she was so glad I got to come back to school. I just hugged her back real hard and we started to giggle at how silly we were.

Momma told Miss Hale I was not allowed to go outside until the doctors said so. I was sad because I wouldn't get to play with Beth at recess time and I had to try not to cry because crying made it hard to breathe.

Miss Hale said that was fine and that Beth could stay with me so I wouldn't be alone. I could tell today was going to be a great day, that was until I heard momma say I had a doctor's appointment tomorrow and I wouldn't be at school until later.

School was so much fun today; we learned how to spell new words and that the letter 'C' was a thief. Teacher told us it used both 'K and S' sometimes. I thought that was funny and couldn't wait to tell momma about it. After recess we got to have music and teacher played the piano for us. I wanted to learn how to play so bad because it sounded so pretty. Maybe I would ask Santa for a piano for Christmas.

Now that school was out I had to say goodbye to Beth, and momma took me home and it was just like always. She made me lunch and then we watched a movie. But I was really too tired to stay awake for the whole time and I fell asleep.

Momma woke me up and we took Miss Alice out really quick because it was getting really cold outside and momma didn't want me to catch a chill. Momma let me help with dinner and we made taquitos and guacamole. I got to mash the avocados while momma rolled the taquitos. I loved helping momma cook; it

was so much fun.

When I woke up I found myself in momma's bed again and I didn't know why or how I got there. I didn't remember waking up and coming in here, I wished I knew how I got here.

At my doctor's visit I tried hard not to cry when Beth's Pawpaw told momma I needed to have some test run and they would need to use a needle to check my blood, and I hated needles.

As we walked out the door I heard Dr. Edward's voice and turned around to see him watching momma and me walk out. I didn't know why momma and him wouldn't let Beth and me play together anymore. It made me sad.

It was Friday now and I got to go to school, but it really was getting harder for me to breathe right. I wanted to tell momma but I didn't want to miss seeing Beth again. School was so much fun and we got to sing again, but I couldn't sing because my chest hurt really badly now and I really needed my momma.

Miss Hale saw that I wasn't singing and asked me if I was okay. I couldn't seem to catch my breath to answer her so I just shook my head no. Before I knew what was happening to me, momma was at my school and we were now in the car.

Momma didn't take me home; she drove us to the hospital and Beth's Pawpaw met us at the doors. He started to ask momma about what happened and they brought me to a room and momma helped me change into a hospital gown. Then a nurse came in and put a mask on my nose and mouth. Beth's Pawpaw then told my momma and me I was going to have to stay in the hospital for a while. Maybe that wouldn't be such a bad idea because I was not feeling very good now and breathing was really hard. It was kind of starting to scare me but I didn't cry because I didn't want to worry momma.

Momma sat down in the chair and tried to not cry, but her eyes were red and I thought I saw her wipe a tear away. I guess she was worried anyway.

A/N: Oh. My. Heck! Writing a six year old's POV was taxing and I'm not sure if I ever want to do it again. But I thought she needed to share her week with you.

Thank you all for reading and reviewing!

tickledpink

16. Chapter 16

I think I've said it a few times now, I don't own anything!

Thanks to my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma and her wonderful red pen!

Chapter 16

Aftermath

BPOV

As I stared at my baby sobbing at the window, watching her break into a million pieces, I was more than ready to give Edward Masen a swift kick in the pants, in the front no less. Like I said before, he had some nerve talking to me as if I was a...a common whore. As that thought hit me again, I couldn't hold back the sobs. I would never judge another person for the choices they made in their life. Esme was the best thing that had ever happened to me. I could never imagine my life without her. She was the reason I got out of bed in the morning, my entire reason for breathing and right now that reason was getting her pure little heart ripped out.

"Esme, baby, please look at me." Nothing. She just continued to stare out that damn window as her other half was being torn from her.

"Sweetheart, I know you miss Elizabeth but you know you'll get to see her soon, right?" Still nothing. Damn you, Edward Masen!

After what seemed like an eternity, I was able to get her away from the window. "Hey, how about a nice warm bubble bath in my tub? What do you say to that?" Still nothing, she just walked away and crawled into her bed. Before I knew it, she was sound asleep with her baby doll in her arms and tear stains on her little cheeks. Great, now it looked like I had more to worry about than just PTSD. Feeling defeated, I returned to lock up the house and prayed the night would bring me some peace.

I was woken up to a blood-curdling scream and I bolted out of my bed and down the hall to Esme's room. When I opened her door, I was met with a horrifying sight, as my daughter was thrashing around in her bed, dripping in sweat from her nightmare. I was able to calm her down and got her changed into dry pajamas. I went to put her back to bed when she started to shake and cling to me. "Shhh, it's alright, baby, do you want to sleep with momma?" She was still not talking so I just carried her into my room and curled up with her as she fell back to sleep.

Just as I was about to drift off to sleep I heard her whisper, "Stay, Beth, stay," and I was broken all over again.

When the sun peaked through my curtains, I realized it was later in the morning. I looked over and saw that it was after eleven and I really needed to get up and start my day. Esme was staying home for another day, so I figured I would work on cheering her up some.

I seemed to be out of it still because I didn't immediately notice that Esme was no longer in my room. I walked over to her room and peeked in only to find it empty. My heart started to race as an irrational fear gripped me that something had happened to her. I raced through the house praying that she was alright, only to be stopped in my tracks by my mother's voice. 'Isabella, baby, please don't cry. You know it was an accident, sweetheart. I know you didn't kill her. She just got sick and had to go to heaven. No, baby, don't cry; we can get you another... Shhh, it's alright.' What the hell? Why was I hearing my mother trying to calm me down? I then heard a small voice answer her. 'I don't want another fish, Mommy, I want Buttercup.'

That was when I realized I was listening to one of the many home movies my mother had of me. I walked into the living room and the sight before me almost brought me to my knees. Esme was standing in front of the TV with her hand on my mother's image and smiling at her and whispering something that I hadn't heard in many years.

*Baby mine, don't you cry
Baby mine, dry your eyes
Rest your head close to my heart
Never to part, baby of mine
Little one when you play
Don't you mind what you say
Let those eyes sparkle and shine
Never a tear, baby of mine
If they knew sweet little you
They'd end up loving you too
All those same people who scold you
What they'd give just for
The right to hold you
From your head to your toes
You're not much, goodness knows
But you're so precious to me
Cute as can be, baby of mine*

I had never sung that lullaby to Esme. I couldn't. It was just too hard on me to remember my mother's beautiful face, as she would hold me and sing it to me whenever I was ill or frightened. All of a sudden, I was covered in goose bumps as I watched the eerie yet comforting scene before me.

Hearing my mother's voice after all these years was so surreal. I didn't know how Esme found that DVD. I thought I had put all of them away on the top shelf, I was sure it was left down by my dad or one of my many house guest this past weekend.

After making breakfast for the both of us, I called Charlie and I was right; they'd pulled out the DVD to have a couple of laughs at my constant state of

calamity. Charlie apologized for not putting it back then asked to speak to his grandbaby. After Esme told him she was fine and she would see him soon we called Seth. That was a call that I could have done without. The poor kid was in a constant state of near hysterics. I think I needed to talk to Sue about getting him someone to talk with about his 'guilt'. Esme told Seth that she loved him and he finally calmed down enough to hang up.

The rest of the day we were pretty lazy, so it didn't surprise me when we both fell asleep on the sofas.

Tuesday morning was upon us before I knew what had happened. Esme was so excited to go back to school and I was sure it was mostly because of Elizabeth. It was nice to see their identical smiles for a change.

Her follow up with Carlisle was pretty straightforward. He ran some more tests on her and wanted to get a blood count as well. When that was done he let us go with some preventative meds and my promise to call if anything changed with her.

As the week passed, she was doing okay, but not great. She would wake up each night screaming and I would just scoop her up and bring her to bed with me. If this didn't change I was going to need to find someone for us to talk to. I feared that the stress of her nightmares was wearing on her, as she became lethargic and pale.

Friday morning she was not looking too hot. The momma bear in me said keep her home. But I also wanted to change the worrywart in myself. So when I receive a call from Rose a couple of hours later, I was kicking myself for my decision to let her go to school this morning.

On the drive to the hospital, I called Carlisle and he said he would meet us at the ER. Esme was having a very hard time breathing now and all I could think was please, God, let her be okay.

Carlisle's POV

I had a feeling it would only be a matter of time before Bella Swan would be giving me a call. I just wished I had some good news for her.

At the follow up appointment, Esme had tried really hard not to give too much away, but I was suspicious about her behavior. I had feared she would take a turn for the worse, but the child was stubborn and refused to admit to what she was truly feeling. Nothing was showing up at that point, so the only thing I could do was send her home with antibiotics and a warning for her to take it easy. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough.

I listened to her lungs now and was not happy with the crackling sound I was hearing. Given her rocky, early start in life, I wanted to run some tests on her to rule out a few things. My biggest fear was that she was developing pneumonia and that could open up a whole new can of worms.

Well, it looked like we were now in the thick of things as I gazed down at Esme's fevered form. She was struggling badly now and had turned gravely ill and I could only pray that I was not too late...

A/N:

Well, people, it's going to get worse before it gets better, I'm sorry for that and what Esme has to go through to get her HEA. Trust me, there will be one!

I just want to thank all of you for reading and reviewing. I am always moved by the fact that you all really like my story.

I know it would not be as great without my beta, Dollybigmomma!

Thanks,

tickledpink

17. Chapter 17

People I still own noting Twilight related that is all Stephanie Meyers universe. I do however enjoy making her characters bend to my will!

Sorry for the delay but you are in for another treat. My wonderful beta Dollybigmomma is responsible for the majority of the chapter. It's like we share the same mind and all I have to do is type a few words and she fills in all of my blanks, it's magic!

TISSUE WARNING!

Chapter 17

A Physician's Prayer

Lord, Thou Great Physician, I kneel before Thee. Since every good and perfect gift must come from Thee:

I Pray

Give skill to my hand, clear vision to my mind, kindness and sympathy to my heart. Give me singleness of purpose, strength to lift at least a part of the burden of my suffering fellow men, and a true realization of the rare privilege that is mine. Take from my heart all guile and worldliness, that with the simple faith of a child I may rely on Thee.

Amen

Author Unknown

Carlisle's POV

I wished I had better news for Bella Swan but so far all my findings were pointing me in the same direction and that was a direction that would be neither quick nor painless to treat. Little Esme's condition had continued to deteriorate, as she was racked with fever and chills last night and I was becoming increasingly concerned that what was going on with her was moving beyond what simple pills could treat. I had my suspicions and I hoped I was wrong.

"Good morning, beautiful," I said as I entered her room. "How are you feeling, Esme?"

"Good," she said so softly that I almost didn't hear her reply. It sounded like she was still struggling to breathe and her throat was raw. Not good.

I motioned for Bella to give me a moment of her time out in the hall. She joined me after she reassured Esme that she would only be on the other side of the door and would return quickly. By the stance she was taking, I could see she was battling to remain strong for her child.

"Bella, we're going to need to run a few more tests," I said and she studied my face carefully trying to read me.

"Okay, so what's going on?" Bella asked nervously.

"Well, it looks like Esme is fighting a case of influenza, probably caught at school, but what complicates things is that her lungs are still inflamed from having aspirated sea water. There are also a few other things we need to rule out," I tried to reassure. I didn't want to mention the word Leukemia until I had ruled it out. No need to send her into a tailspin just yet.

"But there is something more specific you're concerned about, I can see it in your eyes."

"Well, due to her history with frequent infections I'm concerned about her white blood cells. We'll need to draw more blood to check the levels of each type of blood cell. We'll be doing what is called a CBC, or complete blood count."

"So, what is an acceptable CBC?"

"Well, a normal range for a child Esme's age would be in the 4.0-5.2 RBC and 5.5-15.5 WBC. We'll do the CBC and wait on the results before doing the more invasive test."

"Which is?"

"Bella, I need you to try and remain calm when I tell you this, please try not to jump to the wrong conclusions. If she has an abnormal CBC, I'll need to do a bone marrow aspiration and biopsy to rule out or confirm my suspicions. Let's try not to think about that right now, though, we'll cross that bridge when we need to." She nodded her head meekly and walked back into the room.

I decided to draw Esme's blood sample myself. The poor little dear did not need any more stress than she'd already had. "Okay, you're all done now and because you're such a brave girl you can take two prizes from the basket." It was always fun to watch children choose from the basket. Most dove right in, scattering the contents before they decided. Little Esme very gently lifted an item out and turned it over in her hand before she set it aside and pulled out the second one. I was not surprised when she picked out identical bracelets.

"Thank you for not hurting me with the needle and for my prizes, Dr. Cullen," she whispered.

"You're very welcome, sweetheart, now why don't you try and rest. I'll be back and check on you in a little while." I gave Bella a knowing look and left to personally run the tests.

My heart sank as the results were revealed. Little Esme was developing Neutropenia. Her white blood cell count was extremely abnormal and she didn't have enough white blood cells to help her fight off the infections attacking her body. I suspected all the illnesses she'd had over the years had weakened her bone marrow's ability to produce the protective cells. But thankfully there was no indication of Leukemia. We were going to have to proceed with the bone marrow

aspiration and possibly a transplant. Until then, I would need to have Esme quarantined to prevent any additional infections from being introduced and damaging her tiny body any further.

With test result in my hand, I decided that I needed a few minutes to collect my thoughts, so I headed to the one place that helped me center myself, the nursery. Being in the presence of all those innocent babies and knowing that they were our closest connection to God brought me much-needed peace. I was so lost in thought that I didn't even see my wife and Elizabeth walk up.

"Hi, Pawpaw, Nana and me came to see the babies. Are you looking at all the babies, too? Do you and Daddy take care of them? Oh, look at that one, she looks so sad. Do you think she wants her mommy and daddy?" In true Lizzie fashion, she kept talking a mile a minute.

I gave my wife a quick kiss. "Hey, beautiful, what brings you and her here today?"

"Well, somebody overheard her daddy talking about a certain someone being here and would not take no for an answer. So, Edward and I came down, hoping to talk a certain doctor into a much needed visit for one of his patients."

Before I could ask where my nephew was, he walked in. "I'm glad to see you, Son, I could really use your advice on things." Looking down at Lizzie quickly, he got my hint and we quietly slipped away.

"What's up, Carlisle?"

"Well, I'm working on a diagnosis for Esme Swan and I just came from the lab. I wanted to run some tests personally and I also needed them ASAP. Edward, they're not good, the poor child is developing Neutropenia." I heard a heavy sigh. "You know what this means, right?"

"I know, Carlisle, but don't you think it'll keep her spirits up to be able to see Elizabeth before you quarantine her?"

"I suppose you're right, but she'll need to be suited up in sterile gear before she goes in. Lizzie may be healthy but you know how kids are both magnets and broadcasters of germs," I said and Edward nodded.

"Well, hot damn, did the old man just admit to me being right for a change?" he smirked at me.

"You know, nobody likes a smart ass, Edward."

"Ohhh, Pawpaw, you said a bad word." I looked up at my wife and nephew; both were trying to hold back their laughter.

"I'm sorry about that, Lizzie, can you ever forgive me?"

"Sure, Pawpaw, at least you're not as bad as Uncle Em."

"Lizzie, a little birdie tells me you're here to visit a friend? How about I take you to her room?" She just smiled really big and nodded her head yes.

We stopped at the nurse's station so I could tell Esme's nurse that she would be under quarantine as of now. "Lizzie, before you go visit Esme, you need to wash your hands really good and wear special clothes to keep her from getting sicker, okay?"

Edward showed her how to clean her hands and then helped her into a gown, hat and mask. We decided it would be best if her Aunt Esme accompanied her. So, after the three of us were all scrubbed and covered from head to toe, we were good to go. We made our way down to little Esme's room and Lizzie was about to burst with excitement.

"Hey, beautiful, are you feeling up to a couple of visitors?"

"Yes, but why are you covering your face, Dr. Cullen?"

"Well, I just wanted to keep all of the germs away from my favorite patient so she can get better. So, from now on until I say so, everybody that comes in here will need to dress just like me. Is that okay with you, Miss Esme?" She just nodded her head.

"Is it ok with you if I bring in a very excited little girl with green eyes to visit you?" When she heard who I had waiting for her she squealed as loudly as her illness would allow and was so excited that her bed was vibrating.

As I turned to leave the room, I was met with Bella's worried soulful brown eyes. I motioned for her to follow me out into the hall. I noticed Edward was nowhere to be found. I was hoping for his help with telling Bella about the follow up procedures we would be doing over the next few days.

My heart was lifted as soon as I heard the sweet giggles coming from the room just as the door closed.

Aunt Esme's POV

I had never seen two happier, yet still somehow sad, little girls. The bond that they shared was as strong, if not stronger, than the one I shared with my dear sister. Not wanting to intrude on their reunion, I made sure to stay off to the side of the room, turning towards the window to give them some privacy.

"Oh, Beth, I missed you so much!" little Esme wheezed and started crying, which made her start an almost spastic coughing spell. "Did your Pawpaw make you wear this mask?" she managed to ask between more shuddering coughing.

"Shhh...Mae, you need to not cry because it makes you cough and then it'll be harder for you to breathe," Elizabeth demanded.

Elizabeth was just like her grandmother, always so bossy. I could recall more than once during our childhood that my Beth told me how it was going to be.

Flashback

"Beth, I'm not sure this is such a good idea, what if the boat sinks? If we get our clothes wet, Mommy will be so mad at us, I don't like it when she's mad."

"Stop being such a scaredy-cat, Mae. I won't let anything happen to you. Now help me with the blanket and get in the boat so I can push off."

After Beth had us out far enough we both carefully lay down on the blanket and looked up to watch the clouds go by. We were having so much fun searching the clouds for shapes that we didn't notice the oars had slipped out of the holders and sank to the bottom of the pond.

Later when we had to walk past Mommy soaking wet, because Beth insisted we both needed to tow the boat back to shore, I ducked my head down but Beth held hers high. She refused to accept the shame Mommy was always so eager to try and instill in us.

End Flashback

I was brought out of my memories by Elizabeth's sudden gasp.

"Mae, you think she was the same lady that came last time? And she had the same name as me? Who do you think she was?" Elizabeth whispered a little too loudly.

"I think she was your Nana, Beth, and she came to hold me just like my Nana Renee did when I almost drowned. Remember last time, when she said she was our grandma? Oh, Beth, your Nana Elizabeth is so beautiful and her eyes are so green, just like ours. She even smelled pretty, like roses and orange blossoms."

"Mae, do you really think they came down from heaven to keep you safe until Pawpaw could fix you up?"

"I think so, Beth. And the man that was with her that looked like your daddy came back again, too, and he called me his little pumpkin and told me he loved me. I liked them, Beth."

Hearing Esme describe my brother-in-law and sister to Lizzie left me with goose bumps. She even got Elizabeth's perfume scent correct. I had to fight the sob that was trying to escape me. All of the sudden, I was overcome with a warm peaceful feeling and the distinct scent of roses and orange blossoms.

I knew then that my beloved Elizabeth and Edward Sr. were here, watching over little Esme.

Carlisle's POV

After leaving my wife and niece to visit with little Esme, I went in search of Bella Swan. The head nurse at the main station said she had gone down to the cafeteria. I asked Edward to join me but he begged out, claiming he had a patient he needed to check on. He wasn't fooling anyone. He was avoiding Bella and I could tell that something major was brewing between the two of them. He needed to get over it and fix whatever the matter was because his daughter and hers were near inseparable and needed them to behave like the adults they supposedly were.

I found Bella sitting alone at a table in the back corner of the cafeteria staring blankly into a cup of tea. It looked like she had been crying, and what I had to tell her was certainly not going to help anything. She caught sight of me making my way to her table and her eyes searched my face desperately, looking for an end to her child's nightmare. Unfortunately, the news I had for her would only take her deeper. She must have seen that reflected in my eyes, as she folded in on herself and was sobbing by the time I sat down next to her and wrapped my arms around her.

"I'm so sorry, Bella," I said as she clung to me. "I wanted to be able to tell you that a few days of rest and some antibiotics would clear this up, but it's going to take some time and hard work," I said quietly, patting her back. She finally pulled herself together and dried her eyes.

"So, what's the matter with my baby girl?" she finally managed.

"The tests I ran indicate that Esme is suffering from a condition known as Neutropenia. It's a condition where her white blood cells are inadequate to fight infection, allowing illnesses to occur more frequently. Unfortunately, they will continue to occur and be more severe as time goes on if left untreated." I went on to explain in layman's terms what was happening with her daughter.

"Since Esme was born prematurely, that left her already susceptible to illness, especially in her lungs, and she's had a number of serious illnesses over her short six year life span. Her little body has put up a valiant fight, but her bone marrow where the white blood cells are produced has been weakened due to the near constant assault of infections over the years. We'll need to do the bone marrow aspiration to assess the level of damage."

Bella's head was in her hands and her shoulders shook with heartbroken sobs. "I've tried so hard to keep her well, but I've failed her," Bella cried. "She's the only thing I live for in this world, Carlisle, I can't lose her," she said desperately. My Esme was coming into the cafeteria with Lizzie and Edward in tow, and when she saw Bella's distress, she immediately came to her and wrapped her up in her arms. Lizzie stood next to Bella patting her arm and Edward...just stood there.

"You haven't failed her, dear. This is just one of those things that can happen sometimes. We're going to give her the very best care possible and do everything within our power to see that she recovers quickly. In the meantime, Bella, you need to be asking family members to come in and be tested for a possible bone marrow match. Chances are very high that Esme is going to need a bone marrow transplant."

A/N

People I just want you to know that this has been an extremely hard for me to make Esme ill. My beta has been my rock and she is the one responsibly for all the medical mumbo jumbo, I would have been lost without her. Thank you Dolly!

Thank you one and all for the reviews and for adding me on your favorites and alerts. It makes me so happy that sometimes I'm moved to tears.

tickledpink

18. Chapter 18

I do not own Twilight, but I do own a very new laptop, thanks to my DH. Oh and a new, well new to me Dodge Durango.

I want to thank those of you who reviewed and for the wonderful words of praise for my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma!

Now on with the show, folks and don't forget you tissues!

Chapter 18

Physician, Heal Thyself

EPOV

When Elizabeth overheard Alice mention she was puppy sitting again because Esme was going to have to stay in the hospital, I thought my heart was going to shatter into a million pieces. The heart-wrenching look on my daughter's face said everything; she needed to see her Mae.

When we arrived at the hospital, I knew I needed to track down Carlisle first. It was going to take a few minutes so I sent Elizabeth with my aunt to go look at the babies. I was able to find out what floor Esme Swan was on and went off to see if I could locate my uncle. The nurses tried as always to flirt with me and as always, I ignored them. I was able to find out that Carlisle was personally running labs on Esme, so I headed down to the lab.

The technician said that I had just missed him and that he looked torn up about the results of the tests he'd just ran. I knew if Carlisle and if he had gotten negative results back, he was going to want and think about them. He would go and try to center his thoughts. I knew of only one place in this hospital where he would go to do that, the nursery.

Sure enough, there he was and my baby girl was hanging on his leg as he gave my aunt a gentle kiss. When he looked up, we made eye contact and I knew he was not a very happy telling me about the results, we decided Elizabeth would visit Esme. I helped her get sterile and geared up for her visit. After she and Aunt Esme went into the room, I high tailed it out of there. Yeah, I knew it made me sound like a chicken shit, but I didn't think Bella Swan would want me around when she found out how sick her child really was. Her child, my child...Oh, God, my child was really sick. Suddenly, so was I.

I made it to the men's room just in the nick of time. What kind of man was I? For that matter, what kind of father was I? I made my way over to Esme's room and quietly entered. Aunt Esme was looking out the window with tears in her eyes, but she had a serene look on her face. I peeked around the privacy curtain and the sight before me was bittersweet. My babies were clinging to each other as if their lives depended upon one another. I had to fight the sob that was trying to escape me, but the girls heard me and both looked at me with the same smiling eyes. Oh, God, how did I not believe it before? They looked like identical twins for heaven's sake!

"Daddy, where have you been? Did you get lost in your own hospital?"

"No, baby, I didn't get lost, I stopped at the bathroom first. Besides, I knew you would want to see Esme first. Did you girls enjoy your visit with each other?"

"Oh, yes, Dr. Edward, Beth and me are sharing stories."

"Look, Daddy, Mae gave me a bracelet. She got it from Pawpaw for being a good girl when he poked a needle in her."

"I see, it's very pretty, did you say thank you?" She gave me a duh look. "Elizabeth, I know you want to stay but Esme needs her rest to get better. It's time for you to say goodbye, I'm sure you'll see her again soon."

As hard as it was to separate the girls, it was harder for me to walk away from my sick child. I just wanted to pick her up in my arms and take away all of her pain and leaving Esme's room, we decided to go to the cafeteria and get an ice cream. I didn't expect to see Bella; well, I was hoping I wouldn't see her just yet. I wanted to talk to Carlisle and Esme before I had to face the mother of my child. Yeah, I was pretty sure she was telling me the truth after all.

When I overheard Carlisle mention the need to have her family tested for the bone marrow transplant, I knew I would be one of the first in line for that test. This was one of the reasons I needed to talk to my aunt and uncle. I was having an internal debate with myself and not paying attention to the people around me, and that was how I found myself in between a rock and a hard place.

Elizabeth, as usual, was paying very close attention to the adult conversation and she picked up on our worry and concern for Esme. I needed to get her out of there before she said something to make the situation even more said our goodbyes to Bella and headed over to my aunt and uncle's house to have a 'talk'. The car ride over was very somber, Elizabeth was not her usual chatty self.

"Baby, are you okay back there? You want to talk about things?"

"Daddy, is Esme going to die?" Oh, God, please help me say the right things.

"Why would you think that, baby?" Stall; that was the ultimate parental strategy.

"Well, because she has angels with her all the time now and I know angels come from heaven. Do you think they're here to take her back with them?"

Umm, yeah, how do you answer that one? Fortunately, we were now at Esme and Carlisle's and maybe I could stall her for a little while longer.

Thankfully I was given a reprieve when Alice came to greet us with Miss Alice in tow. She gave me a smug look and passed the devil dog over to my daughter.

"What are you doing here, Alice?"

"Well, Mom called before they left the hospital and said you might be in need of a distraction for Lizzie. So I thought what better distraction than a puppy," she flashed that smug face again.

Before we had a chance to go head to head, Carlisle's black Mercedes pulled up the drive. All of the sudden, I felt like a child caught with my hand in the cookie jar. What I needed to tell them was not only kind of embarrassing, but it affected them, too.

Once inside, I had Lizzie take the puppy out in the back yard to potty so I could talk without her hearing. This was a conversation she and I would need to have one on one and on her level. My resolve was starting to crumble as I looked at the rest of my family member's expectant faces as I sat them down to for a talk. I could really have used a shot of liquid courage right now, but I promised myself I would not try and hide behind alcohol ever again.

"Edward, Son, what has you so distracted lately? You know you can tell us anything, right?" I swallowed back my nerves and began telling them the tale behind the whole strange turn of events.

After I was finished, I looked at my family and was met with three very different faces. Alice was stunned and speechless, not a very easy thing to achieve with her. Esme was on the verge of tears, but they looked to be very happy tears. And Carlisle was, as always, very reserved in his reaction, although I thought I sensed a bit of relief from him.

"Well, say something?" That was all it took to break them out of their individual stupors.

Alice was the first to speak. "How could you keep this from me for so long, Teddy? I thought we were supposed to share things with each other."

"Edward, I'm happy that you're finally able to admit and accept Esme as your child. What are you planning to do now?" As always, my sweet aunt was the voice of reason.

"Son, does this mean you're planning on getting tested to see if you're a match? I think it would be prudent if we also tested Lizzie, Alice and Esme. I was so worried that Bella and Charlie would be the only family and that we were only going to have a 50/50 chance finding a match." Always the doctor, I thought.

"Daddy, what are you talking about, what test? What exactly is wrong with Esme Swan?" Alice asked worried.

Alice was now pacing the floor with her hands on her looked to me and I just nodded my head, telling him to proceed. When he was finished, both Alice and Esme had agreed to get tested. In fact, we had a hard time telling them they had to wait until the morning. When the Cullen women set their minds to something, there was no stopping them.

The conversation came to an end when Elizabeth walked into the room. Crap, I could tell by the look on her face that my time was now up and she wanted her answers to the 'Angel' question.

"Daddy, you never told me if the angels were here to take Mae to heaven with them?" Before I could say anything, Esme gasped and started to cry. Shit.

"Baby, why is it you think angels are going to take Esme to heaven?"

"Daddy, it's because they're with her all the time now. They all come and sing to her and hold her when she's sad. She even told me they know me and are very happy to be my grandma and grandpa." I didn't know what to say; I was stunned.

My aunt cleared her throat to speak. "Lizzie, who is it exactly that visits with Esme?"

"Well, her Nana Renee and Granddad Phil came to stay with her when she was in the water. Then another angel with green eyes and hair like ours came. Oh, and a nice man was with her."

"Sweetie, did Esme tell you their names?"

"Yes, she said that the lady was named Elizabeth just like me and the man's name was Ed. Oh, and Elizabeth smelled like roses and orange blossoms." Before anyone had the chance to respond we heard a thud.

Alice had passed out cold.

A/N:

So please don't hate me for the cliff hanger. My beta and I both agree this is a good place to end the chapter.

Now that Edward has seen the error of his ways do you think Bella will ever forgive him?

Who do you think should be Esme's match, Edward? Elizabeth? Or should it be someone else?

Thank you all for reading and the reviews!

tickledpink

19. Chapter 19

I still don't own a thing, but I love playing with the Cullen's. I need to think my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma for getting this back to me so quick. Sorry it's later then I intended it to be. Would you believe my real life had the nerve to get in my way.

Chapter 19

Acceptance

BPOV

I sat on pins and needles in the waiting area for what felt like hours as Carlisle performed the procedure. They had just brought my baby into recovery from having had the bone marrow aspiration and I was allowed to sit with her until Carlisle came back a while later with the grimmest look on his face yet as he motioned for me to follow him out of recovery.

When Carlisle gave me the results from the latest test, I was devastated. My sweet little girl was even sicker than I could have imagined. I was pretty sure I zoned out as he started to lay out her treatment plan. All I could think about was bone marrow transplants and possible matches. When he asked if my father would be willing to get tested, I automatically thought of Edward. Would he still be as hostile if he knew my child needed help? Help I was almost 99.9% sure he was eligible to provide her.

"Bella, I hate to bring this up, but what about Esme's biological father? Is he or any of his family a part of her life? Would he be willing to get tested?" Carlisle asked.

Well, that was a can of worms I really didn't want to be responsible for opening right now. As much as Edward Masen infuriated me, I knew it was not my place to 'out' him to his family. It did give me a semblance of hope that we just might find a match for Esme, however. We now had three more people to test. I knew there was a fourth person possible, but I would never think about having Elizabeth do it.

I was so lost within myself that I failed to see Elizabeth walk up to Carlisle and give him a hug. "Pawpaw, is Mae really, really sick?" she asked with a timid voice.

"Yes, Lizzie, Esme is very sick but I'm going to do everything in my power to help her get better. Do you understand?"

As I watched this sweet child being reassured by her pawpaw that her best friend was being taken care of, I could feel eyes on me. I was afraid to look up and see his face. The face that I was sure held nothing but contempt for me. When he left a few minutes later, I was not surprised that he didn't even utter a single word to me. What did surprise me was that when I chanced a quick glance at him, he looked devastated.

After saying goodbye to Esme and Carlisle, I made my way back upstairs. They were getting ready to move my jewel back into her room, and so I went there to wait. I was not surprised in the least to find the hospital room was over flowing with her 'uncles'.

"Hey, Bells, I hope you don't mind but the guys wouldn't let me come alone."

"That's perfectly fine with me, Dad. I knew you didn't stand a chance trying to sneak past this bunch." As I came into the room I noticed they all stood around Esme's bed. As soon as the nurses brought her in and had her settled, each one of the boys had a hand on her. Seth and Jake stood at the head of the bed like sentinels.

"I see the nurse made you all suit up." It was amusing to see these giant young men sporting yellow paper gowns that looked about ready to burst at the seams.

"Yes, she did, but she wouldn't tell us why? What's going on with my grandbaby, Bells?"

And in that moment I lost it. I became my daddy's little girl as he held me in his lap while I tearfully explained what all had happened with Esme and what was yet to come. Charlie immediately agreed to be tested for the bone marrow match, as did all the guys.

"She'll be okay, Bells. She's a tough little cookie and a fighter, always has been. You'll see; she's going to be just fine." I so wanted to believe my daddy right then. I had to; the alternative was unthinkable.

There was no way I could go on without my reason for living.

EPOV

Carlisle carried Alice to the couch and he was pretty sure she had fainted from shock. Hearing Elizabeth describe my parents, right down to my mother's favorite scent of orange blossoms and roses was very shock worthy. It would be nice to think that my parents were able to comfort my child when I lacked the male fortitude (and I meant balls) to do so myself.

Once Alice came back to the land of the living, we sat down as a family and discussed all of Esme's options. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was getting tested. I was prepared for both Alice and Aunt Esme's willingness to do so as well. What threw me for a loop was my sweet baby girl and her vehement stance on the need to get tested along with us. She didn't understand everything we talked about, but she knew her Mae was sick and she needed to help make her better.

"Elizabeth, I know you want to do what you can to help, but I'm sure we'll be able to find a match for her. You can help Esme by visiting her and keeping her happy," I tried to talk my stubborn child into a different direction.

"Elizabeth, how would you like to go see if Felix is up for a visit tomorrow? Maybe Uncle Jazz can take you out to the farm for the day."

"No, Daddy, I want Pawpaw to test me, too."

"Baby, you don't need to do that, Pawpaw and I will do everything we can to find Esme a match."

With the look Carlisle was giving me, I knew I was not going to be in agreement with what he had to say on the matter.

"Lizzie, why don't you take Miss Alice up to the playroom so she can run around for a little bit?"

"Okay, Pawpaw, but I still want to help Mae," she stubbornly declared before she left the room. The minute she was out of earshot, Carlisle started.

"Edward?"

"NO!"

"Edward, please listen to me before you dismiss the idea all together."

"Carlisle, I can't put her through that pain, please understand."

"Edward, Son, if Elizabeth were the one sick, wouldn't you want to try whatever you could to help her?"

"Carlisle, you're asking me to do something I would never ask of another parent."

"What is it you're asking, Carlisle?"

"I'm asking our nephew to help save his other child's life, Esme dear."

"Carlisle, do you really think it's going to come down to using Elizabeth as a donor? I was hoping we would be able to find a match amongst the five adults," Esme asked.

"Well, yes, I was hoping that we could, but I believe we all should get tested...even those of us that are not blood related. It's just that we'll have a better chance of a match with direct family. Edward and Bella are our best hope, but Lizzie might match as well. If it turns out we can't find a match with one of the adults, I would hate to have to waste more time testing Lizzie later when I could have already done it at the same time."

"It makes sense, Teddy. Let Daddy test Lizzie. We would only use her as a last resort."

I couldn't argue with my family anymore. I just hung my head in defeat. I knew this was the right choice to make, but how could I cause one child pain just to ease the suffering of the other? I sighed in defeat.

"Fine."

A/N:

I'm going to try and keep up with my updates, but my life is kind of hectic right now. Older sister drama to deal with, holiday shopping and trips to the post office so my married daughter receives her gifts before the 25th, it takes a while to get stuff to Ireland. Then if that's not enough my husband expects me to look for a new house and pack and move before the first of the year, oh joy!

I want to thank all of you for reading and reviewing my story. You are the reason I continue to right this puppy. I'm still working on 'A Mothers Wish' but I'm going to hold off on publishing it until I have this finished.

I'm also working on a period piece set in the late 1800's, but I'm hoping to have BTT finished before I even think about my newest work.

Thanks,

tickledpink

20. Chapter 20

I still do not own a thing, but I do owe my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma a big thanks for her unwavering support with BTT.

She really is the wind beneath my writing wings... to corny?

Chapter 20

Redemption

EPOV

After getting Elizabeth home and down for the night, I went to my office and pulled out the engraved silver key ring from my desk's top drawer. I sat there staring at it, remembering the night I acquired it all over again, with much greater clarity this time. Bella had been extraordinary that night, and memories of her body next to mine as we unknowingly created our daughter played over and over behind my heavy eyelids.

At some point, I must have fallen asleep because I woke with a kink in my neck and a pounding headache. The pain in my neck and head was nowhere near as acute as the pain that had taken up residency in my heart, a very heavy heart. I was no longer torn about what needed to be done. I was going to talk to Bella one way or the other. I slipped the key ring into my pocket and went to wake my sleeping beauty.

"Elizabeth, sweetheart, come on, we need to get moving if you want Uncle Jazz to take you to see Felix this afternoon."

"Daddy, I told you last night at Nana's that I wanted to help Mae. Please, Daddy, let me help my Mae." She was now crying and it was breaking my heart all over again.

"Elizabeth, please don't cry, baby."

"Please, Daddy, Mae needs me."

"Baby, I know you want to help her and you can, I promise. Let's go see Pawpaw and have him run the test on you. Then if he says it's okay, you can have a quick visit with Esme before Uncle Jazz takes you out to the farm."

"Oh, thank you, Daddy, thank you so much."

The drive to the hospital was uneventful and gave me a few minutes to think about how this testing and the possible outcome would affect Elizabeth's future and mine. As much as I wanted to find a match for Esme, I was praying it would not be Elizabeth. The pain she would have to endure, both physical and mental, was so much to ask of a little girl.

"Daddy, after my test, do I still get to see Mae? Will I have to wear the mask again? I don't like that mask. Mae can't see my face when I have the mask on. I want her to see my smile so she knows she's safe and I'm happy to be with her."

"Elizabeth, you need to always wear the mask when you visit Esme because we don't want the bad germs to make her sicker. Besides, your mouth isn't the only part of your face that smiles. I'm sure she'll see the smile that twinkles in your eyes just as much."

Before I knew it, I was putting my car into park and looking at the hospital while a huge lump formed in my throat.

"Well, baby, let's go see Pawpaw and get your test over with."

We made our way to the elevators and up to the third floor where Carlisle had his office. As we stepped off the elevator and down the hall to his office, the large number of people in the reception area stopped me in my tracks. I noticed the majority of them were of Native American decent and all of them had sorrowful expressions on their faces. The one face that stood out the most was an older man with a mustache that reminded me of a seventies porn stash. However, he was not of Native American decent, but was still a part of this group of men. He seemed familiar to me, I was sure I'd seen his face before; I just couldn't put my finger on it.

Before I could stop her, Elizabeth ran up to the older gentleman and hugged him with all her might.

"Oh, I'm so glad to finally meet you, are you here so my Pawpaw can give you a test for Mae also? Me, Daddy, Nana and Ali are all going to be tested so we can help Mae get better, too."

The man's face was so full of emotions it was hard to read all of them. First was the shock I was sure of having a strange child cling to his leg. He looked like he had seen a ghost or something and then he wiped at his face quickly to hide the tears that had escaped. Looking down at my daughter, he gave her a soft, gentle smile and I was once again stumped as to where I had seen this man before.

"Well, hello there, little one," he gently removed her from his leg and patted her head as he acknowledged her.

"I'm so sorry; it seems Elizabeth believes she knows you. Elizabeth, sweetie, you can't go around hugging strangers like that."

"Daddy, he's not a stranger, he's Mae's Grampy, right?"

As soon as Elizabeth made her declaration, I looked at the gentleman again. He looked at me and then at Elizabeth several times before he looked at me one final time and his features became hard.

Crap, this had to be Bella's father, Chief Swan, and I was sure he could put one and one together and come out with the obvious answer that he had come face to face with his grandchild's birth father. Like I said before, crap.

But before he could confront me on my connection with Esme, the office door opened and Bella Swan was standing in front of me with a deer in the headlights expression on her face.

“Good morning, Miss Bella, how is Mae doing today? Can I go see her as soon as Pawpaw gives me my test, please?”

The word test seemed to break the trance Bella was under as she looked at me then my daughter and a look of anger flashed across her face before she could school her emotions.

“Esme is doing better this morning and I’m sure she would love to have you visit her today, Elizabeth.” Again, I receive that look.

Carlisle stepped out of his office but before I could make my escape, Bella grabbed hold of my arm and asked if I had a few minutes.

“Edward, what does she mean test? Why is she being tested?”

Before she could ask another question, I held up the silver key ring and her face went ashen. She looked like she was about to faint so I helped her over to the chairs in the private family room.

“Bella, I’m so sorry I didn’t believe you when you tried to tell me months ago, it just didn’t add up at the time. Please, can you ever forgive me for being a stubborn, arrogant ass?”

“Where did you find this? I thought I would never see it again.”

“Well, you must have dropped it in our room at Hotel 1000 sometime during that night seven years ago. I found it under the edge of the bed, but had no clue what your name was, so I had no way of returning it. For some reason, I kept it all these years, hoping I might find you again someday. I felt like we had a connection that night, that maybe there was something there, something special. I had wanted to go out with you again and, I don’t know, maybe try something together, but I never saw you again.”

She took the key ring into her hands and traced over the engraved letters on the front. “My mom and step dad gave this to me for Christmas in a fancy silver desk set, right before they died. I was heartbroken when I lost it. Thank you for returning it,” she said quietly. After a moment, she asked in a small voice, “So, it really did happen then?”

“Yeah, it did. She’s mine, Bella. She’s my baby girl, too.”

A/N:

I know it’s a little short Hannah, but you need to live with it my daughter. I will try to make the next one longer just for you baby girl... BIG KISS!

A BIG thanks to my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma for making this chapter complete for me. I loved how she helps to tie ends together for our enjoyment.

Chapter 21 will be a little late as well bit hopefully I will get back on track soon.

Moving in the winter sucks big time and we got hit by a major snow storm, yeah me.

Thanks for your patience’s with me.

tickledpink

21. Chapter 21

I do not own Twilight or any of the characters associated in the series. I do own Mae and Beth though and a wonderful electronic die cut machine and a huge self healing cutting mat to create wonderful scrapbooks and fabulous quilts, thanks to my DH.

People I know I say it all the time but I have a wonderful beta and would never be able to do this without her. I love ya, Dollybigmomma, you are my rock!

Chapter 21

Moving Forward

BPOV

Well, I certainly did not expect to see Edward Masen when I opened Dr. Cullen's office door this morning. Seeing the anguished look on his face and the puzzled one on my dad's spoke volumes to me about how insane things were about to get.

At first, I wasn't sure what was going on, but when Elizabeth went with Carlisle to get 'her test' as she put it, I knew that I would have a lot to explain to Charlie and soon.

But first, I needed to speak with Edward.

I went to question him about why his daughter was here getting tested, and he just held up something I never thought I would see again; my silver key ring, which was proof that we had known each other previously, since I had lost that key ring the night I conceived Esme. And then he confirmed what I knew all along. Esme was his daughter, too.

I just looked at him with my mouth hanging open catching flies. I couldn't believe this was happening, and right in front of my dad, my very confused and apparently very angry dad.

"Bells, what in the world is going on? Why does his daughter look like a carbon copy of Esme?"

"Please, Dad, just give me a few minutes and then I'll explain everything."

"Fine, but you'll be telling me everything before the day is up," he stated with a firm look on his face.

"Thank you, Daddy, I promise you'll have your explanation before you leave here." He then turned and walked back toward Esme's room. But not before he gave Edward the stink-eye.

I'd managed to buy myself a little more time before I had to divulge Edward's paternity to my father. I just hoped he took this news as well as he did when I told him about being pregnant with Esme.

With my temporary reprieve from Charlie, I looked over at Edward and motioned for him to follow me so we could talk in a more private setting.

"Edward, what did Elizabeth mean 'her test'? You can't be seriously thinking about letting her donate? I can't and won't put her through this."

"Bella, I've tried to get her to change her mind. But she's a Masen and the one annoying family trait that she inherited was my stubbornness. I don't think she'll be needed with all the other family members getting tested. She just wanted the chance to help her Mae, and who am I to deny her that? I could never live with myself if it turned out Elizabeth was Esme's match and we were too late to do anything about it."

I just sighed and hung my head in agreement.

"Bella, I want you to know that I'm going to do whatever it takes to help our little girl get better. As soon as Jasper picks up Elizabeth, I'll be going to the lab along with Aunt Esme and Alice so we can all be tested as well. Also, Carlisle will be performing a paternity test, even though I'm one hundred percent certain I'm her father."

"Edward, please know that I don't expect you to all of the sudden become Esme's father. But I couldn't in good conscience keep her from you. You have the right to be in her life and I think we need to come to some sort of agreement about that."

"Bella, I might not have known about her until recently, but she is my child and I want to be a part of her life. Please say you'll forgive me for being a horse's ass. Please allow me to have Esme in Elizabeth's life and mine. Let's work together and give our daughters the happiest and healthiest childhood possibly."

"That would be wonderful, Edward, more than I had even hoped for."

Before we could continue our conversation, Elizabeth came running toward Edward and attached herself to his leg.

"Daddy, I'm finished with my test, Pawpaw said I did a great job. Can I go see Mae now?"

Edward looked at me for permission before giving her an answer.

With a simply nod of my head, we were heading down the hall to Esme's room with a very happy and excited Elizabeth. When we turned the corner, however, we came to a halt as we came face to face with my angry father and all of the guys from the rez, who stood up to full height, eyeing Edward murderously.

Charlie's POV

I was pacing the hall outside of Dr. Cullen's office waiting for Bella to give me an update on Esme's condition when my morning started getting stranger by the minute, as I was accosted by a little giggly girl that looked exactly like my sweet grandbaby.

"I'm sorry; she forgets the 'stranger danger' rule sometimes. Elizabeth, you just can't go around hugging people," a man said to her, whom I assumed was his child. The same child that was explaining how I was not a stranger and that I was Mae's Grampy.

Just as I got ready to ask how she knew Esme, Bella walked out of the office and her eyes fell on the man with my grandbaby's features.

Now, I'd been a cop for over thirty years and my detective skills were just as good if not better than they had always been. I tried to confront Bella about things and she shut me down with a promise to explain everything later. Well, I was going to hold her to that. That was for sure.

Dr. Cullen took the little one with him to the lab and motioned for the boys and me to follow him. When we got to the lab, he told us all about the test we were there for. Even though the guys really had a slim chance of matching with Esme, they still wanted to be tested. The little girl, Elizabeth, was going on and on about how her Mae was lucky to have so many uncles and how she had her Uncle Jazz and Em even though Em was really not her uncle, but her daddy's best friend.

Again, I was struck by the uncanny resemblance she had to my grandbaby. Not just her physical appearance, but also her mannerisms as well as her ability to talk non-stop. Both Seth and Jake seemed to have come to the same conclusion.

One by one, we were taken back to the lab for our turn at the needle. Then Dr. Cullen escorted little Elizabeth back and my 'spidey senses' were tingly as I watched that sweet child smile Esme's crooked smile and wave to all of us as the door closed.

"Charlie, is it just me or is Elizabeth a dead ringer for Birdie?" Seth questioned.

"Yeah, what's up with that?" the rest of the guys asked.

"I'm not sure but I'm sure as hell going to find out," I said and huffed out of the room and made my way down to Esme's room.

As I walked into the room, I was taken aback by the peaceful look on Esme's face as she slumbered. It broke my heart knowing that she didn't understand why she was here and the potentially life threatening illness she was having to battle.

Time passed slowly while I waited for my answers. Which only served to tick me off even more. Then each time the door opened and another one of the guys returned to the room, I was pretty much sitting on a powder keg of emotions. I didn't do well with things out of my control and most especially when my daughter and grandbaby were part of the situation.

"*Grampy, where's momma?*" my sweet girl asked with a quivering bottom lip and unshed tears in her eyes.

"Hey, baby, she's talking with your doctor right now and will be here as soon as she can."

"Hey, Birdie, how are you feeling this morning? Look what I found at the Gift Shop." Esme's eyes sparkled with excitement when Seth mentions 'gift shop' as he handed her a white box with a pale blue bow on top of it.

As Esme started to open the box, all of the guys gathered around her to see her reaction to the gift. The room was suddenly filled with giggles as little Elizabeth made her way up Esme's bed. It was like seeing double and listening to things in stereo.

Both girls hugged each other as if they hadn't seen each other in a very long time.

"*Oh, Beth, I just knew you would come back and see me today.*"

"I told you I would be back, Mae."

"*Look, Beth, my Seffie gave me a present. Do you want to help open it with me?*"

"Yes, please! Umm, Mae, which one is Seffie? They all look the same, because they're sooo big."

The room erupted in laughter at Elizabeth's remarks and she tucked her head down bashfully.

"Well, are you going to open your gift so we can see what you got, baby?" Bella came in the room with that young man who looked around all sketchy like. Trying not to make eye contact with any of us.

"*Oh, I almost forgot.*" She then opened the box very slowly so the package wouldn't tear. "*Oh, Seffie, thank you so much, I love it. Look, Beth, it's Clara and she plays music. Momma, make the music play, please.*"

Bella turned the key at the bottom of the base and the music that tumbled out of it was so sweet and enchanting. It reminded me of Esme when she giggled and of Bella when she would smile at me as a little girl. I tried to hide the tear that wanted to escape before the guys saw it and never let me live it down.

"Esme, what do you say to Seth for the wonderful gift?"

"*Thank you, Seffie, for Clara, I love her. Someday I want to dance just like her.*" The look on Seth's face was one of pure joy. It always amazed me to witness the bond that he had with Esme.

"And you will, Birdie, just like her."

When I looked towards Bella, I noticed her looking at Elizabeth's father from the corner of her eye. So I did the only thing I could think of.

“Hi, I’m Chief Swan and you are?” I noticed him squirm a little when I held out my hand.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Sir. I’m Edward Masen, Elizabeth’s father.”

“Dad, why don’t you and I step out for a few minutes so we can talk?” I was still gripping his hand as Bella pulled me towards the door.

When we left the room, Edward followed us and I noticed he looked a bit on the green side. I watch as he visibly swallowed hard and took a deep breath to calm himself down.

“Daddy, why don’t we find a place where we won’t be disturbed?” I could have sworn I heard her say under her breath ‘so you can’t make a scene’.

“Bells, why don’t you just spit it out, no more beating around the bush?”

She took a deep calming breath and delved into her story.

“Well, Daddy, there’s just no reason to spin a fantastical story here. The long and short of it is that we,” she motioned between her and Edward, “Well, we’re more than one hundred percent sure that Edward is Esme’s biological father.”

I swore that you could hear a pin drop in the room and I think I was doing a pretty fair impression of a big mouth bass. I didn’t know why this news stunned me; I mean you had to be pretty blind to not see the resemblance between father and daughters. Those two little girls not only had his hair and eye color, but they both had that crooked grin he was sporting right.

“Chief Swan, you have my word that if I had known of Esme’s existence before now, I would have made every effort to be a part of her life.”

“Well, Edward, I certainly hope for your sake that you intend to do right by my girls. Because I can promise you, I know how to make anything look like an accident.”

With that, I turned and headed back towards Esme’s room.

A/N:

Well, I know it’s been almost two weeks between updates and I’m truly sorry for that. RL is still in my way, but it’s getting better.

I’m in my new place now, but the unpacking is going slower than I want. It’s really hard to fit all my sewing and scrap booking stuff into my bedroom. I really miss the craft room L

O.K. enough of my sob story, you all keep your fingers crossed that I can get back on schedule or at least maintain this one.

Thanks for all your reviews, they make me happy to read and respond to each of you.

tickledpink

22. Chapter 22

I own nothing in the Twilight universe, sigh. I do, however, own a few sleepless nights in front of my laptop trying to finish this chapter for all of you wonderful readers out there.

Thanks, Dollybigmomma, for sticking with me. You're a wonderful beta without whom I would flounder about in this sea of fan fiction.

Chapter 22

Daddy's Little Girl

EPOV

Coming face to face with Chief Swan was very intimidating to say the least. I could see that he would do whatever it took to ensure his daughter and granddaughter's happiness. I was almost certain he would have no problem disposing of my body. That was not some idle threat he left me with, it was a promise.

"Edward, he really is all bark and no bite." I gave Bella a look that stated I knew otherwise. "Alright, maybe a little bite." She then started to laugh at my expense.

"Bella, I know darned well he means business, because if the shoe was on the other foot and this was Elizabeth or Esme, I would crucify the guy, and don't think I wouldn't. Those two girls in that room are my life now and I'll always treat them the same."

I didn't think she believed me, but Esme was now and forever my baby girl.

After Jasper collected Elizabeth, I went down to the lab so Carlisle could draw my blood for both tests. I was praying that I would be a match for Esme. I prayed that it would be me so Elizabeth wouldn't have to endure even the smallest amount of pain and discomfort.

"Edward, have you thought about what you and Bella are going to tell the girls?" I could see the look of concern in Carlisle's eyes.

"What do you think we should tell them? They already seem to have formed an unbreakable bond. I don't think it'll make a bit of difference to them one way or the other. I mean, how does one go about telling a six year old she has a sister?"

"Well, I think this is something you and Bella need to agree upon, and I think it should be done soon, before one of the adults lets it slip. You know this is going to be hard on Alice to keep her tongue from wagging. She really loves little Esme just as much as Lizzie and I'll be the first to go on record as saying my sweet daughter has never kept a secret in her life."

"Thanks for the advice, I think I'll see if Bella can spare a few minutes for me. Oh, when do you think the results will be ready?"

"Soon, I'll put a rush on them. We should know no later than tomorrow and we can start preparing Esme for the transplant."

"Thank you for doing this, Carlisle, it means everything to me."

After leaving the lab, I made my way up to the third floor, but before I stepped into the elevator, I noticed a display in the gift shop window. Knowing that Esme would be going through chemo or radiation treatments soon to prepare for the BMT (Bone Marrow Transplant), she would not be able to have anything in her room that could carry germs and possibly attack her already weakened immune system. I made my purchase and I was on my way.

Exiting the elevator, I noticed that the behemoths also known as the boys from the rez were nowhere in sight, so I took my chance and knocked on Esme's door.

"Hey there, baby girl, how are you feeling?" I asked her before even thinking about what I'd just said. I gave Bella a quick glance and noticed that she had a small smile on her face and I relaxed a little more.

"*Doctor Edward, when is Beth coming back? I miss her so much, where did she go anyway?*" Esme asked with the cutest pout I had ever seen. More devastating than even Elizabeth and Alice combined. I might as well hand over my man card right now because between both girls and Bella, I would never have my way again.

"Well, Elizabeth went with her Uncle Jasper for the day so I could stay here and help make you feel better. I'll make sure she comes by before you go to sleep tonight, okay?" She just nodded her head at me.

"I brought you something; do you want it now?" This seemed to peak her interest as she nodded her head yes.

"*Oh, yes please.*" She was so excited that she was vibrating just like Alice. It made my heart ache that I had been so blind that I was unable to really see just how many Masen characteristics she had inherited.

"*Oh, my goodness! Look, Momma, it's a little Miss Alice. Thank you so much for her; Dr. Edward, I'll treasure her always,*" she vowed as she cradled the four inch porcelain replica of that furry rat that they called a dog.

"You're very welcome, Esme. I know it must be hard not being able to have her with you, so when I saw this in the window display, I knew exactly who needed to have it," I told her as I gave her a wink and watched her face take on that beautiful glow just like her mother.

When I looked up from my last statement, I was met with said glow by none other than Bella, and again, only one thought entered my mind. '*Beautiful.*' I was brought out of my musing by the sound of feet shuffling as her father entered the room. When he saw me sitting next to his grandchild, he frowned and had to

school his murderous features before both Esme and Bella noticed them.

“Grampy, look at what Dr. Edward gave me, isn’t she lovely? Now I won’t miss my Miss Alice as much.” The look on the stern Swan patriarch was soon morphed into one of adoration for the sick little girl.

Before he could comment on the gift, Uncle Carlisle entered the room. “Bella, can I have a minute of your time please?” She nodded and turned to leave the room with him, and he motioned for me to follow.

We went into one of the family rooms, where most of the time nothing but bad news was delivered. All I could do was hope and pray that we would not become one of those tragic families. Yeah, I knew most people would think it too soon to lay claim on both Swan girls, but they had come to mean so much to me in such a short time.

“Bella, I hope you don’t mind that I asked Edward to be here as we go over the results of the tests. I was able to pull a few strings and get them pushed to the front of the line down in the lab. Normally, these things can take weeks, but if you’re in with the right technicians, favors aren’t so hard to call in,” he offered. Both Bella and I had the same tense look on our faces.

“Okay, well first, the paternity results are conclusive beyond a doubt, indicating that you, Edward, are indeed Esme’s biological father.”

I couldn’t help but notice the shaky breath I let out when he said this. Then the feelings of joy and sadness both hit me at the same time. Joy because she was truly my child and sadness at both the lost time and the fact that she was indeed a very sick little girl...my little girl.

“What about the other results? Carlisle, were you able to find a donor match?” Bella asked anxiously.

Both Bella and I looked at him with tears and hope in our eyes that the search was successful.

“Well, as you know, Bella, our best bet for a match lay with either yourself, Edward or Elizabeth, and it seems that lady luck was on our side and we have a candidate. Esme’s donor match is indeed one of you.”

A/N: I know, I know, I’ve kept you waiting for this so long and I’ve got the nerve to leave you with another cliffy. Would you believe me if I said I was sorry? Well, I am. Sort of.

Don’t give up on me, people. I was suffering from a small case of writer’s block and I still haven’t finished my unpacking. It seems I’m having a hard time concentrating with so many things to focus on. My husband gave me some sage advice in the form of a question. “How do you eat an Elephant? One bite at a time.” So I’m trying to have my elephant and eat it, too, but I have a small stomach here, people. Hang in there!

tickledpink

23. Chapter 23

Here I am, people! I did not abandon you all or my story. Sorry for the delay but RL happened. See the A/N at the end if you want an explanation to my absence... it's a good one.

I do not own anything related to Twilight, well, except my own collection of books and DVD's.

Let's give a big round of applause to my wonderful beta, Dollybigmomma, for her wonderful insight into my mind. She completes my writing. It's like we're one big brain, kind of like those super hero kids that combine to make one awesome super hero.

Chapter 23

A Perfect Match

CPOV

Thank god I was in my office when I read over the lab result on the possible donors for Esme because the strangled sob that escaped me would have called into question my professional image in front of my co-workers.

The results were wonderful, an answer to so many prayers. Our little girl now had a fighting chance to overcome this illness. With the results in hand and a song in my heart, I made my way over to her room to tell her parents the news. That's right, parents; I knew Edward was her father just by looking at him. I mean a person would have to be blind not to see it. She was a carbon copy of my little niece, who also inherited her father's and his mother's unique hair coloring.

Walking into the room, I was met with the sweetest smile and soft laughter from Bella. But that was short lived when she noticed me as I walked into the room.

"How's my favorite patient doing?" I adored how Esme's entire face lit up whenever you asked her a question. It seemed that was something she inherited from her mother and it was just as stunning on her as well. This sweet child was the perfect combination of both her parents.

"Oh, Dr. Cullen, look at what Dr. Edward gave me. See, it's my very own Miss Alice to keep with me here in my room since I can't have my real puppy because I'm too sick," Esme said with a tiny pout on her face that nearly broke my heart.

"Wow, she sure is pretty, but not as pretty as you." She beamed the most radiant smile with the new compliment that both Bella and Edward released a sigh of contentment as they watched the earlier pout turn into a megawatt smile.

"Esme, do you think I can borrow your mom and Dr. Edward for a few minutes?" She just nodded her head as she continued to play with the porcelain figurine of what I assumed represented her puppy, Miss Alice.

Both Edward and Bella exchanged a weary glance at one another as I led them down the hall to one of the family rooms. I really didn't think they wanted the world to know about the results just yet.

"Well, I'll get right to it. Edward, to put it bluntly, you're Esme's father." Just like that, tell it like it is, rip that metaphorical Band-Aid right off. "Now, on to the more urgent results. It seems you have a choice to make, and let me tell you that I'm so glad we have multiply matches it turns out. I was surprised that neither you nor Bella was a match. However, we do have a few choices. Both Charlie and Esme are matches, but not perfect matches for her. We do have another match, however, and this one is a near perfect match. I believe it's our best chance at a successful transplant." The different emotions that registered on their faces as I gave them the results was amazing; first fear, then sadness, and then finally, a glimmer of hope. "I know you both were hoping to be a match, but as it turns out, Elizabeth is our best chance at success." Their looks of hope turned to ones of pain with that simple sentence.

The room was filled with a deafening silence as these two newly connected parents digested all that was given to them. Then out of nowhere, a soft keening sound started to fill the room as Bella collapsed to the floor, rocking back and forth while shaking her head no. Without a word, Edward reached down and picked her up into his embrace and carried her over to the couch, trying to calm her down. All I heard was her repeating a soft no. At this point, I decided to leave them alone so they could work this out between them.

Once again, I found myself standing in front of the nursery window looking down at all of those sweet new spirits. I knew it was hard for most people to not question their faith in the good Lord above at a time like this. But I found that this was exactly when my faith in God was solidified. I'd been asked more than once how I, a man of science, could have such faith in a being I couldn't physically see, and I just told them it was because of my faith in the Lord that I knew all things were possible.

When you looked at the big picture, you could see how our Father in Heaven played a part in all of this. Call it fate, divine providence, or destiny, but this was how it was always meant to be. I mean seriously, what were the chances that Edward could father two daughters in the same year with two different women and have said daughters turn out to be near perfect replicas of each other. Then they met on the first day of school and one of the two just happened to have been born preterm on the same day as the other, causing her to develop a long term condition that would eventually need the other to help save her life. That was why I had faith.

"Carlisle?" When I turned, I was met with those stunning green eyes that I fell in love with so many years ago; my Esme. She saw the distraught look on my face and pulled me into a near bone crushing embrace. I broke down and silently sobbed into her neck.

EPOV

When Carlisle read us the paternity results, I was ecstatic. I now had proof that she was my baby girl. But my joy was short lived as we listened to the devastating news that neither one of us was a match. Both Charlie and my Aunt Esme were a semi match, but not our best chance for success. Elizabeth was

going to be our saving grace and I knew that I was going to have a hell of a time convincing Bella of that fact. I knew as a father it was going to be hard to watch her go through the extraction of her bone marrow. But the physician in me understood that this was a fairly simple cut and dry procedure for her. Esme was the one that had to undergo radiation and chemo to kill off the remaining white blood cells to get her ready for the transplant. Not to mention the near lock down of her room from future visitors. We would not be able to take a chance on her catching a bug, as she would have no way to fight off infection without her white blood cells. I was brought out of my internal musing when I noticed Bella has fallen to the floor and was softly crying and repeating no over and over again.

I gently picked Bella up and carried her over to the couch, waiting for her to come around. She just kept shaking her head and whispering no over and over.

"Bella, please calm down and listen to me for just a few minutes." Nothing

"Bella?" Still nothing

"Sweetie, you need to calm down and just hear me out. Everything is going to be fine. This is exactly what we were hoping for, that we would find a match so quickly. I know you think Elizabeth is going to be in harm's way, but it's truly a very simple procedure for her."

"Oh, Edward, are you sure? I never wanted to think of using her if we could've found anyone else. She's just so little and it's not fair of me to ask this of you. I mean, we're talking about sticking a needle in your child to help save mine. How can I ask that of you, of any parent for that matter?"

"WHAT? Now you need to listen to me and you listen good. That's my child, too, that's lying sick in that room, and I'll do everything in my power to save her. Really, Bella, do you think so little of me that I could let any child continue to be sick, let alone my own flesh and blood? I know we just found out that I'm her father, but really, Bella, how could you think so little of me?"

I stared her down, daring her to contradict my last statement. She didn't say a word, just hung her head in defeat. After what seemed like an eternity, I heard her softly sniffing and she gave me a tiny nod of her head, letting me know she had accepted this course of treatment. With that situation under control, we needed to broach the subject of my parental rights to my child.

"Bella, I think we need to talk about the paternity results and what we're going to do about our daughters."

A/N:

I'll bet you didn't see that coming now did you? I must apologize for my lack of updates. RL is kicking my tush right now... I've been painting my new home, one room every weekend. Boy, are my arms sore, but that's nothing compared to the injury I inflicted on myself a few weeks ago. I was cutting up an orange and I cut the tip of my left thumb off. It's now flat on one side and I'm still not able to use it to type. It's still kind of tender from my Edward Scissor Hand moment.

I know I say reviews don't matter but hey, I'm only human and every once in a while I need to have my ego stroked. I need some validation here, people. Too much? Did I come off whiney and a tad bit needy?

How do you see Esme and Elizabeth taking the news that they're really sisters after all? Should I have them find out before or after the BMT?

Oh well, I hope you enjoyed the chapter. I'll try not to keep you in limbo land for too long again.

Thanks to all of you who read and review, you make my world go round!

Tickledpink

24. Chapter 24

I do not own a thing; the genius of Twilight belongs to SM. I only play in her world from time to time and my beta, Dollybigmomma, is my rock!

Sorry about the confusion with the update, but I'm having way too many 'Blonde Moments' and I noticed a typo so I needed to fix it... Arrgh!

On another note my wonderful beta has saved me yet again. She fixed some more of my mistakes and then tweaked the ending a little. I love it, what do you think?

Now I'm not going to bore you with my sob story of RL, so without further ado, here's the next chappy.

Chapter 24

The Ties That Bind

BPOV

When everything was said and done, I knew that Edward was right. It seemed the bond Esme and Elizabeth shared went way beyond that of just mere friendship. Their connection was even deeper than the DNA that bound them as sisters. They needed each other to survive; it was almost like that twin connection you heard people talk about. They might have been born from different mothers and thousands of miles apart, but their connection to each other was like a gravitational pull, an alignment of the cosmos so to speak. After all, what were the chances that we would live in the same state, the same city... heck, even the same neighborhood for that matter. Add to that the fact that we had even enrolled them in the same kindergarten class and the odds against it all being coincidence were astronomical. That sisterly bond was pulling them together, tighter and tighter until it was locked firmly in place.

This final connection, this undeniable link that their need for each other had formed, was not just a figment of one's imagination. Esme needed Elizabeth to live, and I was not just talking about living, I was talking about her very survival. Elizabeth was vital to it.

"Bella, please tell me what you're thinking. I feel like I'm going insane here. What is it that has you so quiet?"

"I'm sorry, please forgive my silence, the last thing I want is for you to think I was ignoring you. It's just finally clicked in this addled brain of mine that our daughters have always been connected to each other and not even space and time can break that connection."

After a lot of crying from me and pouting on Edward's part, we decided it was going to be easier to tell the girls at the same time. Due to Esme's low WBC, we had to pull some strings and cash in a few favors from the nursing staff to allow Elizabeth in Esme's room.

So here we were, with both girls looking at us and smiling like the Cheshire Cat. You did not have to see their little mouths to know that they had ear to ear grins plastered on those angelic faces.

"Baby, Dr. Edward and I wanted to tell you both something wonderful. Do you remember when Elizabeth's PawPaw used that needle to take some of your blood?"

"Oh, Mommy it hurt so bad, please don't let him do it again," she begged me while tears ran down her face.

I fought back my own tears as I sat there watching my child being comforted by her sister. Her sister. The word sounded so foreign to me. The one thing I thought I would never be able to give her, a sibling, was now a reality. I knew I would most likely never marry. Esme was my life and I would devote my life to making hers perfect. I just prayed that this news we were about to tell her was not going to damage her for life.

When I looked over at Edward, I noticed he had unshed tears in his eyes. He gave me a subtle nod of his head, telling me he would take it from there. At that moment, my heart grew to include him as well as his sweet child. I knew I could never and would never think a cruel word about him again.

I closed my eyes, willing myself the courage not to break down and sob. When he started talking, it was as if his voice calmed me.

EPOV

I knew Bella was never going to make it through this, so I decided to man up and take over. Hell, I was their father for crying out loud. And just like that, cue the butterflies. That thought hit me like a ton of bricks. 'Their father'. Shit, I could not mess this up. I had already made a few mistakes when it came to my newest child and her mother, I really couldn't afford anymore right now.

Well, Edward, here goes nothing.

"Esme, what your mommy's trying to tell you is that Dr. Carlisle used your blood to run a lot of different test on you, sweetie. He needed it to find out what was making you sick because that's how he can help you get well again. Do you understand?" She just nodded her head yes, so I continued with my task.

"Sweetheart, he also took some blood from your mommy, me, and Elizabeth." She looked at all of us as we showed her our own bandages and began to frown.

"Why?" was all she managed to get out before she started to cry.

"Shhh, Mae, it didn't hurt at all, see? I'm all better. PawPaw is going to make you feel better, too. Please don't cry, Sister, you'll see, won't she, Daddy?"

Come on, Masen; fix this fast before you have three inconsolable females on your hands.

"Elizabeth is right, sweetie, it didn't hurt at all." She seemed to respond to the fact that Elizabeth was not hurting more than anything. Amazing, their bond was

so strong it was spooky at times.

“Esme, Elizabeth...” They both looked at me at the same time, freaky, “Girls, not only did PawPaw find out what’s wrong with Esme, he found a way to make her better. You see, sweetheart, you have a problem in your blood and Dr. C is going to make it better. But he needed to find someone whose blood would work with yours. And you know what? He found someone who matches you perfectly.”

“Who, Daddy, who?”

“Well, sweetie, it just so happens that it turned out to be you.” Silence and then a high pitched shrill filled the air.

“See, Mae, I told you my PawPaw would make it all better. Oh, Mae, I love you so much!”

My heart did a little flip as I heard my child’s declaration of love for her sister. It made the rest of my news a tad bit easier to deliver.

“Girls, PawPaw also ran a different test, one that would check to see if I was Esme’s daddy.” Both of their heads snapped up and I was met with identical sets of green eyes, both identical to my own. How could I not have seen it? I was still stunned by my stupidity. I was brought out of my musing by a throat clearing and turned to see Carlisle enter the room.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’ll come back later.” He turned to leave the room, but Elizabeth stopped him.

“Wait, PawPaw! Please tell me daddy’s telling me the truth. Please...is it really true that Mae’s my sister?”

Carlisle looked over at Bella and me and we both gave him small smiles of encouragement. Yeah, I knew it was kind of cowardly on our parts, but cut us some slack here; it was a strange situation for all of us.

After Carlisle confirmed that I was indeed Esme’s father, the girls squealed so loud I feared we would all be kicked out of the room. But what happened next floored me and rendered Bella speechless.

“Now that you’re Mae’s real daddy, when are you and Miss Bella going to get married so I can have a mommy? Then Mae can come and live in my room. Oh, Daddy, I can’t wait until I get to have her with me forever!”

Two little sets of expectant green eyes bored into Bella and I, anticipating an affirmative answer right then. Bella’s expression of complete shock I was sure mirrored my own, and her cheeks were flushed bright red. We had just gotten to the point of speaking civilly to each other, never mind acting like a real couple. How did we explain to two six year olds that even though we had gotten close enough at one time to create one of them, in order to commit to something as serious and life-changing as getting married, we at least needed to fall in love first and have talked about marriage and agreed on it?

It was times like this I wished I had God on speed dial!

A/N:

Sorry I’ve taken so long to get this chapter updated. My RL was kicking my butt...but now I’m back and hoping I will get back on track.

I want you all to know this story means a lot to me and I intend to finish it not just for myself, but for all of you.

Now show me some love, people, and push that little button on the bottom and make my day! ;-)

tickledpink

25. Chapter 25

Chapter 25

Hope

I'm so sorry about the delay, but if you're interested in the reason my sorry excuse is at the bottom of the chapter.

As always I own nothing, but I do enjoy the time I spend in her world.

Many thanks to my wonderful beta Dollybigmomma, people she is the reason my story is so seamless, thanks Dolly!

You might need a tissue for part of this chapter, I know I did.

EDWARD

With the mini-drama of Esme's paternity over with, Carlisle was able to explain to both my daughters how he was going to make Esme better. I had never been more grateful for my uncle than I was at this moment.

He had always gone out of his way and his field of expertise to make life easier for others. He sure made my beautiful mother's last days with us as pain-free as possible, making sure not only her physical pain was managed, but her emotional pain was dealt with as well. As only he could do, he gave her not only the strength to deal with the cancer, but he was also my rock throughout her years of suffering.

I had been truly blessed, and speaking of blessings, my daughters were both out of danger and on the road to recovery, although Esme's would take a bit longer.

Flashback

"Pawpaw, are you sure my blood is the same as Mae's?"

"Well, Miss Elizabeth, not only am I one hundred percent sure, but your daddy has made sure my tests were all correct. Now, why don't you let your Nana take you down to my office for a little bit so I can talk to Esme's mommy about things? I'm sure if you're a really good, quiet girl on the way down, your Nana will let you pick out a treasure from the treasure chest."

"Oh, can I really, Nana?" She was really trying to hold herself still, but we all knew it was an impossible feat for Miss Elizabeth Ann Masen.

"Sure, baby, why don't you say goodbye to your daddy first."

"Bye, Daddy, make sure you keep Mae safe for me. Oh, and give her a big kiss and hug when she wakes up. I love you, too, Daddy, so much." She waved as she walked away hand in hand with my aunt.

I turned to address Carlisle, but stopped short when I noticed the tears in Bella's eyes.

"Hey, beautiful, why the..." Before I could finish my question, Bella had attached herself around my waist and proceeded to soak my shirt.

"I'm just scared, Edward."

"Hey, it's going to be alright. We have a much better chance of beating this now."

"I know, but they're both in for some pain along the way, and the chemo is going to be so harsh on Esme. I hate that our babies will be hurting at all. That thought just kills me."

"Me, too, but...I'm here for you, Bella, if you'll let me be. We'll get through this together."

And we did. The administration of the chemo was rough and Esme's condition took a turn for the worse for a while. It was touch and go a few times, but our daughter was a fighter. There were many sleepless, tearful nights as we clung to each other and watched our baby girl's struggle to survive. She was so weak and small, so helpless. I vowed to God then and there to never let her down again and always be the father she needed, and hopefully, Bella would let me be there for her, too.

When it came time for the transplant, Bella and I prayed together, along with the rest of our families in one giant prayer session, asking for God's grace on our children's behalves. I knew from the peace I felt after we were done that our girls would be fine.

End Flashback

So here we were, waiting for Esme's test results to see how her little body had responded to the transplant. In all my life, I had never been so nervous before. Our lives would change with just one little piece of paper and I hoped and prayed it would be for the better.

"Edward...hello, paging Dr. Masen...Edward!"

Ouch, what the hell! "Did you just pinch me?"

"Yeah, I've been trying to get your attention for the past ten minutes. Where did you go just now?"

"I'm sorry, Bella, please forgive me?" I looked directly into her beautiful chocolate eyes and tried with all my macho might to not burst into tears. I knew she

was trying to be strong for Esme, and if I let my emotions get the best of me, it would definitely open the flood gates for her as well.

“Hey now, you remember what we promised each other?” she asked as she softly cupped my face with both of her hands.

“I know, but it’s just that I started to think about all the times I missed out on her little life and it just mushroomed from there. I’m going to make you a promise right here and now, Bella. I will never, and I mean *never*, be absent from our daughter’s life again. I want to be a part of everything she goes through, and I mean it. And when Carlisle comes through those doors and tells us the news, good or not so good, well, be prepared for a lot of changes, because I intend to make you both a part of mine and Elizabeth’s lives.”

I heard a tiny gasp leave Bella’s mouth, and when I looked at her face, I could see her blush before she had the chance to hide it from me. Before I could shove my other foot into my mouth, I heard a throat clearing and I jerked my head up to see the smirk my uncle had plastered on his face.

CARLISLE

I knew it was wrong to listen in on a private conversation, but my heart told me to wait and let him get this out of his system. His aunt and I had suspected for quite some time now that Edward was falling in love with Bella. We discussed it again this morning at breakfast and decided that if he didn’t act on his feelings soon, we would just have to meddle into his love life, after little Esme was in the clear and on the road to recovery. So I knew the sooner I gave them the good news, the sooner we could stir things up a bit.

“Sorry to interrupt, but I know you’re both waiting on pins and needles for the results. Well, I’m very pleased to inform you that the transplant appears to have been a huge success. Esme is now on the mend and her WBC is almost back to normal. So it looks like the transplant was the right answer, but you know as well as I do, Edward, that she’ll still need to wear the face mask until she’s back to one hundred percent.”

As I watched both of them shed tears of joy, I knew that they were going to be fine.

“Well, I think we need to go let a couple of little girls know the good news. Not to mention the rest of the family who have taken up residency in the waiting room.”

As we walked down the hall toward Esme’s room, I noticed that both of them had smiles on their faces and they were as close as they could possibly get without one of them wrapping themselves around the other’s body. When we entered the room, they continued with the contact as they made their way over to the bed. I was brought out of my observation by the sweet sound of two giggling little girls, as they had also noticed the joined hands of their parents.

BELLA

I could feel my face flaming and I knew it was bright red, even without seeing or touching it. Edward’s words were so passionate. I knew he meant it all, every last word. I could only hope that he was truly committed to our Esme. She had never really lacked for a father figure, as she had my dad and all of her uncles from the reservation, but I knew it wasn’t the same. Hopefully, Edward’s presence in her life would be a good thing. I knew we both wanted what was best for her, regardless of our own issues. As her mother, I knew my wants and needs were secondary to hers, and so I would make sure she was happy. My child had and always would come first in my life.

I knew most people looked at my daughter as a mistake, but I had never seen her that way. She had brought so much love and happiness into my life, and now she had added an entire family to the line-up. Edward Masen and his daughter, Elizabeth, were so ensconced into our lives that it would be painful if we ever had to part from them. Since the moment I had met Elizabeth, I had begun to love her as my own and wanted her in our lives as much for myself as for Esme. It was so obvious even to a perfect stranger that those two little girls were joined at the hip, and now she was a part of my heart as well. Now that Edward had accepted and embraced the role of father to my little Jewel, our lives would never be the same.

It had been obvious from our first meeting that Edward and I had some kind of connection and it had just continued to strengthen with each passing day we spent together. Now, as I looked into Edward’s eyes, something clicked into place and I couldn’t help but smile. I wasn’t sure what it was, but I think by his answering smile and tightening of his hand on mine that just maybe, he had felt it, too.

AN:

I am so sorry you have all been put on my back burner. But real life was not going away no matter how hard I tried. If you remember I took up knitting for making my Christmas gifts this year and then my daughter decided that she needed me to knit a shawl for a friends wedding so I was going crazy knitting a 65 inch mohair shawl in less then two week. Well I’m proud to say I did it, but my hands paid the price from all my knitting and typing was not going to happen. So now that my hands and my mind have recouped I am feeling now is the time to get back in the swing of things.

Look for BIG changes for our little family.

TickledPink

26. Chapter 26

I do not own anything related to Twilight, well, except my own copies of the books and my DVD's. As always, let's give a big high five to my beta, Dollybigmomma, for all of her help. Thank you all for sticking around for my little story. I hope you enjoy reading this chapter as much I enjoyed writing it.

Chapter 26

This is the House that Love Built

BPOV

With all of the drama surrounding Esme's illness, we totally forgot about Christmas. I knew that in the grand scheme of things, a holiday was the last thing that should have been on mine or anyone else's mind for that matter. But let's be honest here, we were talking about two little girls, the same little girls that had a major upheaval in their very young lives. If anyone deserved a proper Christmas, it was them.

So with the majority of our battle behind us, I sat here with my laptop, searching for the answer to my problem as I watched over our two sleeping angels.

"Hey, beautiful, what's so captivating on your laptop that you failed to notice me waving at you for the last five minutes?"

"Oh, Edward, I'm sorry, I guess I zoned out while thinking about all we've been through, and I've been trying to figure out a way to make up for a lousy Christmas. I just wish we could've given them more than the sterile plastic twelve inch pre-lit tree that had to stay behind the glass door. I mean this is the first time Esme hasn't picked out our tree since she could walk."

Before I realized I was even crying, Edward was wiping my tears away from my cheeks with his thumbs.

"Hey now, baby, you need to remember that they'll more than likely forget about the lack of things we had for them. I don't know about you, but I'm sure when I look back on this, our first Christmas all together, I'll always remember it as the year my family was made complete. After all, I did get a new beautiful daughter to spoil, and Elizabeth has a sister. I'm hoping against hope that I can even say she has a new mommy?"

He looked at me with nothing but adoration, and before I could control myself, I threw my arms around his neck and bawled like a baby.

"I know it's rather presumptuous of me to think that you might want to take on the role of Elizabeth's mother figure. I mean...I was hoping in time..."

I cut him off by going one further and planting a massive, very passionate kiss on his lips. We were so caught up in this newness of our budding relationship that we both failed to hear the muffled giggles of our daughters.

"I believe we have an audience," Edward whispered against my lips. Before I could stop it, I felt the heat of my blush making its way up my neck.

I looked over at our little 'angels' and sure enough, they both had smiles on their faces. Well, at least I believed they were smiles, because even though she did not need to wear one, Elizabeth insisted on being allowed to wear her own mask. I would never truly understand how their connection worked; I only knew it was as strong, if not stronger, than the bond a set of identical twins shared.

"What are you two silly girls up to?" I made my way over to the bed and sat next to our girls. They both started giggling louder, shaking their heads as Edward threatened to tickle them both.

"So, what are we going to do with these two imps, love?" Edward asked with a gleam in his mesmerizing eyes.

"Hmm, maybe we need to sell them to the gypsies? No, not the gypsies, I think they'd do better at the circus. They could become clowns, don't you think? Or better still, how about we take them home and love them until the end of time?"

"Daddy!"

"Momma!"

Both of them squawked at us at the same time, making us smile, especially since Esme had called Edward daddy, and Elizabeth had called me momma.

"Well, I think we should get these two home and settled in before the rest of the family decides to send out a search party."

We had decided to let the girls stay together to keep their stress levels low. The thinking behind it was that Esme would heal faster if stress was nonexistent for her right now.

So here we were, driving in Edward's car, heading to his house because he had the extra room. It was so surreal that we would be living together as real family.

When I turned around to see why it was so quiet, I found both girls sound asleep in their booster seats. They both had pleasant smiles on their faces and their hands were clasped together. Before I was able to stop myself, a small sob broke free.

"Hey, beautiful, why the sad face?"

I turned to see Edward's piercing green eyes looking at me with concern. "I'm not sad, really; I'm more relieved that we're going to get a happy ending. Edward, I don't know what would have happened to her if fate hadn't stepped in and put them into the same classroom. I mean what are the chances that they would meet like they did? You both, not just Elizabeth, saved Esme's life. You both saved my life as well."

"Bella, I know we got off on the wrong foot, and it didn't help matters that I put my other foot in my mouth, on more than one occasion, actually. I was an

ass to you, to both of you, and I can only hope and pray that you'll let me make it up to you someday. I want to believe that I've been given a second chance here. Not only as her father, but a second chance to prove myself worthy of your, uh...friendship...as well as..."

I was gob-smacked; did my ears fail me? I hoped not, because I could have sworn I just heard him trying to say he wanted to try for more. I would be crazy not to jump at the chance to have a future with Edward. I mean, the man was near perfect in every way. Add to the fact that we had a daughter together and well, yeah, you get the picture.

I was so lost in my inner thoughts that I didn't even notice we had stopped moving. It wasn't until I felt a warm soft hand cup my face that I came out of the inner workings of my mind.

"Hey, why don't I get the girls settled in their room and then we can discuss things further?"

All I could do was nod my head like one of those little bobble-headed dogs you see in some people's rear windows...pathetic.

EPOV

Bella was still in a stupor when I went back to the car to fetch the bags. So with both of my daughters tucked into bed, I made my way down the stairs to meet my destiny. I knew we would be more than just parents to our daughters. The question was would Bella be willing to allow her feelings for me to blossom into more than just friendship. I was hoping for more; no, I *needed* more.

If I was being honest, I would just admit to myself, 'Hey, you know you love her.' I knew some would think it was too soon to use the "L" word, but I did love her. I loved her more than as just the mother of my child. I wanted to make a life with her, with both of them. I wanted to bind them to me in every sense of the word. To be honest, I wanted Elizabeth to be bound to them as well.

I knew I couldn't ask her to become my little angel's mother. That had to come on its own, but I knew Beth already loved Bella, and she would love to have her as her mother. I knew it had always been hard on Elizabeth not having a mother, but I could never bring myself to go looking for a replacement; I always felt that the right woman would find us. Well, now I knew that we were just waiting for Bella and Esme to find us.

When I walked into my living room, I was met with those big doe eyes and for a moment, I was transfixed. My mind was blank and it took her giggle to break the spell she had me under. I sat down next to Bella and took her hands into mine, taking a deep breath. *Here goes nothing...*

"Love, I want you to know...I'm going to be honest and try and not hold anything back...I'm just going to say it. Bella, I want more than just a friendship with you. I've known for some time now that you and Esme belong in mine and Elizabeth's lives. I know things got off to a rocky start, and then we almost lost Esme. My lord, Bella I could have lost my child without ever getting the proper chance to know her; my heart aches with this knowledge. What I'm trying to say is, well, do you think we could move forward to, ah...um, shit, this was so much easier in my head..."

"Edward, if I could interrupt for just a moment..." Bella stopped me with a shy smile, and at this point, all I could do was nod my head in the affirmative.

"It seems to me that you'd like to, um...Edward, are you trying to tell me you want to date me? Maybe even take things further...maybe one day marry me? Because if that's what you're trying to say to me, then yes, Edward, I would most definitely love to pursue a future with you and our daughters."

Before I could stop myself, I pulled her into my arms and kissed her like there was no tomorrow. The kiss was like tossing a match into dry tinder and she was kissing me back with as much fervor. We could have stayed like that forever, except we were brought out of our kiss-induced stupor by catcalls, rounds of applause, and the sweetest sound my ears had ever heard...the twin giggles of our very unlikely 'twin girls.'

I knew now that when you were given a second chance at happiness, you should never think twice...

AN:

Well, people, I think I like it as is, what say you? Please don't hate me too much. I went back and forth with dragging out their 'courtship,' but I just think it would be a lot of fluff and in the end, I just felt it was better left un-fluffed.

This has been so much fun for me to write and share with you all. I want to thank all of you for sticking around and letting me share this idea with you.

Of course, I would never have been able to bring this to you without the help of my wonderful beta, Dollybigmomma. She was the force that helped me keep the story going. I will forever be grateful to her and her wonderful red pen. The woman truly has a gift with the written word and we're all lucky that she wields it for good.

I'm almost 100% sure I will have an epilogue for you all soon, so keep your fingers crossed. Also, I'm working on a period piece as we speak and I love it so much already. If you haven't done so yet, put me on author alert so you can be among the lucky ones that get to read all about Lord Masen.

TTFN,

Tickledpinkstamper

27. Chapter 27

Well people here it is, I hope you all enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. Now as I've said before we need to give credit, were credits due, so let's give it up for my beta! Dollybigmomma, you have been my rock and I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this story would still be in my head if you had not came across me one day asking questions. THANK YOU, Dolly!

Now without further adieux...

Epilogue

EDWARD

Since that fateful meeting between my sweet daughters on their first day of kindergarten ten years ago, I considered myself one lucky man. We might have started on a rocky foundation and been thrown a few nasty curve balls, but in the end, it had all worked out. What with my pigheadedness and Esme's health scare, I thought we might not ever come together as a family; much less such a large and tightly-knit one at that.

It took me over a year to prove to my Bella that I was never going to leave either her or our daughter. Esme, on the other hand, never doubted me for one minute. I was not certain, but I was pretty sure those two imps had always had a plan and then quite a few backup plans for getting their parents together.

Once Bella said yes, we wasted very little time with an engagement. It didn't hurt any that both Aunt Esme and Alice had been staging their own covert operation that they had fondly named "Cupid's Arrow" of all things. It really was a beautiful wedding, what with both girls walking hand in hand down the aisle towards me with angelic smiles on their faces. Their beauty was only eclipsed when their mother began her own journey down the aisle to join me in our forever.

As part of our ceremony, Bella signed papers legally adopting my Elizabeth, and I signed Esme's new birth certificate showing me as her father. Elizabeth had already started calling Bella momma right along with Esme, who also called me daddy as soon as she was confirmed mine. We were a family now and I couldn't have been happier.

I knew our union would stand the test of time, that we could weather whatever storms came our way. That was over ten years ago and our union had only gotten stronger. As for our family, it quickly grew by leaps and bounds. We had talked long and hard about sex and both of us agreed we would wait until after we tied the knot to consummate our union. We had both learned our lesson. I knew in this day and age some would think it old-fashioned of us, but truth be told, we were scared shitless after what happened last time.

It was a good thing we did abstained, because I kid you not, we were very successful and proficient at baby making. Not only did our chosen form of birth control fail us on our honeymoon, it would seem that according to Emmett, I had mutant "super ninja sperm" which he had made comments about regularly over the last ten years. He and Rosalie weren't much better as they also now had a houseful of kids.

I hated to admit it, but I secretly may have believed him. Not only did I get Bella pregnant, but I managed to make it twins. That's right, but not just once... twice! Yep, you heard me correct, twice. We had two sets of twins, all girls.

First was Peyton Rose and Alice Renee, or Wren as she liked to be called, who were now nine. Both girls were the spitting image of their mother, right down to their chocolate brown eyes, curly brown tresses, and love for all things literature-related.

Next we had our six-year-olds, Violet Marie and Charlotte Vivian. These two were polar opposite of each other, in body and deed. Violet was my cousin reincarnated. That little girl was Alice's mini-me. Now Charlotte, or as everybody called her, Charley, was our one and only tomboy. She loved spending the day with her male cousins and her Grampy. My father-in-law was thrilled to have a fishing and camping buddy.

Just when we thought we were in the clear, the Good Lord saw fit to bless us with yet another child. Yep, you guessed it, another daughter, Juliet Grace, my little 'Crowning Jewel' who had just turned three. And according to Bella, that was the only family jewel I was going to be allowed to keep if I got her pregnant again.

So I can tell you that I wasted no time after Juliet's birth fulfilling my wife's edict, because I knew if ever I wanted to have sex again, I had to do it. And let's face it, I was a man, so hell yeah, it was a given I was going to go 'under the knife.'

That was six months ago and here I sat stunned, looking at the images on the screen as my wife tried to stifle her giggles at my reaction. Apparently, my "super ninja sperm" was not going to go gently into that goodnight, because on that screen were the perfect images of my sons. Yep, sons, plural, as in another set of twins. Boys.

"So, Edward, what's with you and this twin thing?" the doctor asked as he cleaned the gel off Bella's stomach. "You guys seem to be trying to set a world's record for the most number of twin births in one family or something," he teased.

I was still too stunned to say anything. Bella's hand found mine, "Are you okay, Edward?"

"Uh, yeah, I'm fine."

The doctor finished and left the room to allow Bella to get dressed. I sat there still in a daze until I felt my wife's lips on my forehead, "GI Joes instead of Barbies, footballs instead of baby dolls, wrestling instead of tea parties, boy scout meetings instead of ballet classes, father and son outings without having to stand outside the restroom..." Bella listed and the smile on my face grew by the second. I had always been content with our girls, but suddenly I found myself excited beyond measure. I pulled my wife into my arms and buried my face between her already-growing bosoms.

"I love you, Bella. Thank you," I murmured trying not to cry. "Are you going to remove my manhood now?" I questioned suddenly a little nervous. I had done as she asked, but apparently God had other ideas.

"No, but you're not going back to that same urologist. I don't know what happened, but whatever he did, it obviously didn't work."

“Maybe these little guys were just meant to be ours. We’re going to have nine kids, Bella,” I said taking a deep breath as the realization of this set in. “I never gave a second thought to ever having more than just Elizabeth before you came into my life. I’m so glad you did, though, and I’m so glad you’re mine, Bella. I have everything I could’ve ever wanted.”

I looked into my beautiful wife’s eyes and knew that was really true, and I wouldn’t think twice about doing it all over again.

AN:

I can’t even begin to thank you all for sticking with me. I know it’s been hit and miss this past year, but hey at lest now I can say I finished it. Oh My Gosh people, I did it!

Again thank you to my beta Dollybigmomma for all of her wonderful work and patience. This was such a learning a personal growth process. Now for the hard part, waiting to hear your feedback.

So, what did you think? Be honest with me, because it’s the only way for me to improve.

For those of you who have not yet put me on AA. You may want to do that, as I have a wonderful story that I’m working on. It’s a ‘Period Piece’ about second chances and true love, set in the let 1800’s.

Widowed Lord Masen is duty-bound to find a suitable wife and a mother for his six young children. The only thing keeping him from fulfilling this duty is a longing for love. He is about to learn that ‘sooner or later, everything will be okay!’

So fingers crossed and I will see you on the other side :D

tickledpinkstamper