

Tilt by lambcullen

Summary:



MAN WANTED: 52 cards. 52 Positions. Can an internet advertisement really bring two people together? Even if it's only based on sex? AU/AH/OOC Canon Couples.

Categories: AU-Human **Characters:** Bella, Edward

Challenges:

Series: SMUT - Best of the Best - Edward and Bella

Chapters: 21 **Completed:** Yes **Word count:** 81700 **Read:** 77689

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Story Notes:

S Meyer own all things Twilight. I just bend twist them into my own shapes.

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Chapter 1: Prologue by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Disclaimer: This is a work of complete fiction. It's meant to be fun. So if you don't like FICTIONAL characters, placing FICTIONAL adverts on websites, about a FICTIONAL sex game, then move along.

Thanks to MaleficentKnits - this is entirely your fault!

Hugs & Kisses to my betas- Maylin & Twirlgrrl. You guys amaze me!

.....Welcome to Tilt!

SM owns all things Twilight. Me? a lot of Twilight crap.

Tilt: Poker term -To play recklessly.

With each touch, each stroke and each kiss, my heart ached a little more. I knew I'd have to stop this. We simply couldn't continue the silly little game we'd started. It would hurt us both too much if we continued. Each time we met and chose another card, another position, she would invariably take a piece of my heart with her when it was over.

I knew I should tell her how I felt, but I was certain that would mark the end of it all. I simply couldn't bring myself to utter those words and end my time with her, so I continued to do as she asked. I picked the next card, she picked the place we'd do it. I did what I could while I was with her to keep a lid on my emotions, and saved the outpouring until I went home.

Alone.

Something that started off as awkward and embarrassing had morphed into something beautiful and perfect. She was like a drug to me, and the plan of a once a week liaison was now spiralling into every night. It excited me, but the faster we got through the cards, the faster our time would be up.

Was that what she wanted?

Dread weighed heavy in my guts. We'd talked about our lives so many times in our post coital haze, but never really spoke to each other about what we were doing. The only time we'd had a frank discussion about the game was that first day at the restaurant. I could feel the tension every time we met, and it was obvious we were approaching a crossroads. I just didn't have a clue what she wanted. I had little experience of women and how their minds worked. Jasper had told me to tell her straight. He thought he was so clever seeing through what we were doing, to what was really going on with us. I'd made it clear he was to keep out of it, and I could deal with it on my own. He'd laughed, telling me Bella would never know how I felt unless I told her. Luckily, when Bella finally met him he'd kept his mouth shut. I think he was too preoccupied with her little raven haired friend.

"Edward?" her voice floated into my thoughts. "Are you OK?"

I fleetingly closed my eyes, and swallowed down my love for this woman.

“I’m fine. I just zoned out a little.” I turned to her and cupped her face. “*You* do that to me. Now, was there something you wanted me to take care of?”

She giggled, her flushed face lighting up in glee. She was stunning. I just wished she was mine.

“We just picked a card, and it was a good one. You can’t really think I want another,” she whined, though there was no strength to her tone. It made me push a little more.

“We could do the same one again, or just go with it and do what we want. Forget the cards, just this once?”

She did that chewing thing with her lip; the one that I was growing to adore, while she thought about what I was really asking. We’d only ever had sex once each time we met. We would reproduce the position on the card and that would be it. If she agreed to this our meetings, and thus our relationship in general, would alter.

My heart pounded, as I waited for her to answer. My hands didn’t have that kind of patience, though. They skimmed up her naked torso and cupped her delicate breasts, flicking lightly at her little pink nipples. She gave a tiny whimper of pleasure and pushed her chest closer to me.

I was instantly hard again.

I slowly lowered my lips to hers and kissed her. It started off gentle; assessing whether she was going to allow this to go further, but I swiftly lost control and rolled her onto her back. I blanketed her body with my own and nestled myself between her thighs. Bella didn’t stop me when I plunged my tongue into her mouth, or when I rubbed myself against her. Her legs wrapped around my waist, as she whispered ‘yes’ into my neck. It was all the confirmation I needed.

I vowed this would not be the only time we were spontaneous. I would break down those walls of hers bit by bit, and eventually she would forget about the remaining cards, forget about the stupid game, and just focus on what was happening between us.

The heels of her feet dug into my ass, pulling me closer to her and making me hiss. My cock was enveloped in her wet folds, and I buried my head in her neck, muffling my little growl of frustration. Jasper was right. How long could I feasibly continue with this, and not tell her how I felt? It was killing me, and each time it became worse.

The decision was made for me the moment she sucked the lobe of my ear into her mouth. I trembled and lifted my head to gaze into her hooded eyes. I held her face between my hands and rocked my hips against her. Bella’s eyes rolled back in arousal. I adored how lost she got when we were like this, but hated the wall that appeared as soon as our time was up.

“Bella,” I whispered.

Her eyes fluttered open, and focused on mine. I inhaled sharply, preparing myself for what I was about to do.

It was make or break.

I thrust myself into her, and watched her eyes go wide with shock, but glaze with lust.

“Bella,” I repeated reverently. “I love you.”

She stilled underneath me, and my heart stopped.

Had I gone too far?

Was this the end of our game?

Was this the end of us?

End Notes:
<p>O.O</p> <p>SexDeckward declaring his love in the prologue! Can you believe it?</p> <p>Chapter 1 is on it's way, but let me know what you think...</p>

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Chapter 2: Advert by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hugs & Kisses to my amazing betas - Maylin & Twirlgrrl.

Huge thanks to RoseArcadia for my amazing banners, blinkies & new Thread over on Twilighted. Love to ninapolitan!

So.... back to the start:

SM owns all things Twilight. SexDeckward is all mine!

BPOV

I was never the most tactile person. I was shy, hated physical contact, even with my parents, and was very much a loner. The only person I ever let close was Alice. She was my best friend and had been since she rescued me from Jessica bitch Stanley. Jessica wanted the New Kids on the Block buttons off my backpack, and wouldn't take no for an answer. That was until Alice, my pint-sized hero, waded in, in her size two Doc Martins, and ended up in detention. Jessica had ended up with a black eye.

Alice wasn't subtle in her approach.

We balanced each other out. She was the outgoing one who always got what she wanted. I stayed in the shadows and hoped for the best. Alice demanded people pay attention to her, and she knocked down her own doors. I rang the bell, asked nicely and waited. I think you can guess who was the most successful.

Alice was now a highly sought after photographer. Her arty shots of the city sold for thousands of dollars at a time. I waited tables, and hoped one day someone would see me as more than the girl who brought them a beer and fries.

Someone had, but it hadn't lasted very long. Jacob had made a real play for me, coming into the restaurant every night for a month and ordering nothing more than a Coke and a burger. He'd always leave a large tip and his number under the untouched food. Eventually, I gave in. He seemed so sweet, with his boyish charm, and he had been for the first few months of dating. The problem was when we tried to take things further. I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I knew the theory, which part slotted where, but I'd never experienced it. It seemed silly, and I started laughing hysterically. Clearly, Jacob was not pleased with my response. The trouble was every time we tried after that, I remembered the way I'd laughed, and started to do it again.

My relationship with Jacob Black lasted four months, and five attempts at sex.

It had ended rather badly, and I never saw him again. I now stayed away from the opposite sex. I wasn't meant to have the kind of sex life Alice had. Some of her stories made me blush for days. She didn't give up on me, though. She was always dragging me out to parties and clubs,

hoping to find someone who could deal with her odd little friend. As yet, she'd come up dry. I was meant to be alone.

Maybe with cats.

I arrived home at our apartment after my shift. It was freezing outside, and I'd lost my gloves. I needed to thread them through my sleeves, on a piece of string, like a toddler. That way I'd never lose them again.

I turned on all the lights and wandered to the kitchen, intent on switching the heat on, but a huge basket on the counter caught my attention. It was pink and fluffy and had a huge bow on the top. There was no card, and I wondered what on earth it was. Alice would have left a note if she'd bought me a gift. I peeked through the cellophane and gasped in surprise.

It was a basket full of sex toys, lubricant and porn movies.

I almost died on the spot.

I was home alone, and yet I looked around, hoping no one could see through the windows and into the basket. Trembling with embarrassment, I looked closer.

"It won't hop outta there and fuck you, you know!"

I jumped at the sound of my roommate's voice. She was always sneaking up on me and trying to give me heart failure.

"What? Jesus, Alice! You can be so crude at times," I complained.

She rolled her heavily lined eyes at me, and threw her coat towards the couch.

"Oh, lighten the fuck up, Bella. It's a dildo! It won't do anything to you unless you make it."

Alice sighed in exasperation and began to open the cellophane.

"It was a gift from the company that I did the lingerie shoot for. It came earlier, but I didn't have a chance to look at it properly. Looks like fun, though," she said wiggling her eyebrows suggestively.

Laughter burst from my lips. Only Alice could get me to find vibrators and cherry flavored lubricant amusing. We moved the basket onto the living room floor and began to unpack it. I didn't have a clue what half of it was, and just stared at the items in wonder.

"Oh my God! This is perfect for me. Look, Bella!"

Alice shoved a black mug into my face. In bold white lettering it stated 'I'm not a slut. I'm just popular'.

"Really Alice? You want people to see you using this?"

She snatched it back and growled at me. We unpacked the rest of the strange items in silence, until her squeal of delight almost pierced my eardrums.

"Tequila! Ooo I think I like this company. Their freebies are the best."

She unscrewed the top and sniffed it, before bringing it to her lips. She winced as the fiery liquid burned down her throat.

"That is divine. You need to have some," she stated, passing me the bottle.

"Alice," I moaned. "You know I don't drink."

"Look, would you stop complaining, and remove that stick from your ass. Seriously, Bella, chill a little. It won't hurt, or ruin the rest of your boring existence. It's only liquor!"

It's only liquor...

Those words were still floating around in my head an hour later. I was drunk. There was no lying to myself, no getting around it.

I was extremely drunk.

We were still sprawled out across the floor, and I was laughing hysterically as Alice tested out the vibrator on her nose. She looked ridiculous with the purple nodules rotating in front of her face. She was going cross-eyed, and I could barely breathe, I was laughing so hard.

I popped a chocolate penis into my mouth and opened the small box of cards in my hand. I instantly stopped laughing when they fell across the floor, and I saw what pictures adorned them.

Naked bodies.

Flesh caressing flesh in strange little poses.

52 cards.

52 sexual positions.

Alice snorted loudly, pointing and giggling at my red face.

"It's only a picture, Bella. It's not even real porn."

"It doesn't need to be!" I snarled back, fumbling to put them all back in the carton. "You couldn't even get into some of those positions. They sell these things to stupid people who have nothing better to spend their money on."

"I bet you could! I bet you could do every single one of those cards."

She took them from my hand and began looking through them. Her drunken laughter just got louder the more she looked at them. Eventually I was laughing right along with her. We were picking out our favorites, and placing them on a separate pile. Granted, I didn't have many, and certainly not as many as Alice, but I was pleased with my five cards. Alice wasn't, she snatched them from me and began discarding them.

"Missionary? Bella!"

"There's a lot you can get done in missionary," I protested.

"What? Like paint the ceiling? Bella, the only thing you want done during sex is you! Oh my God, girl. We need to get you laid. This is unbelievable. I won't have you thinking that missionary is the best you can get."

She moved over to my laptop and began pulling up random websites. I started to panic, because Alice drunk with a laptop was not good. The last time that happened didn't bear thinking about. I shuddered at the images flitting through my head.

"Alice, are you on dating websites? No way! That's not happening. At all. No!"

She stilled her fingers on the keys, before glaring back at me.

"You're right, totally wrong place to look. We need to make them come to you knowing what you're asking for. Hmm..."

My liquor-fuzzed brain couldn't quite understand what she was going on about. I hadn't stipulated that I wanted anything. Had I?

I watched as her fingers danced across the keyboard, it was as if I was in slow motion, and by the time I shouted stop, I already knew it was too late. I had a sick, sinking feeling in my gut. She'd done something bad.

Very bad.

"Alice? What did you do?"

Apprehension lay thick in the air. She pouted her lips, her eyes wide with innocence.

"Well...erm...I guess you should read it. I don't really have the words."

She twisted the laptop, giving me a better view of the screen. My eyes skimmed across the advert she'd posted, and I barely made it to the trash can before throwing up every last one of the chocolate penises.

Man Wanted:

Position to be filled (well, 52 actually).

Must be caring, intelligent, GSOH and very flexible.

Mostly weekend work. Overnights will be involved. Positions are fun, but will require some manual labor.

All candidates will be screened. Only serious applicants need apply.

Contact: ABc123 at the following email address for further details.

"Alice," I croaked, wiping my mouth. "Tell me that's not about the cards. Tell me you didn't place an ad for a man so I can test those cards out. TELL ME!"

"I wish I could, but that's exactly what I did," she replied nonchalantly.

"Remove it. Now!"

I tried to grab the laptop from her, but she was too fast for me, and quickly removed it from my grasp.

"I can't remove it, and to be honest, I wouldn't anyway. Just go with it Bella, you never know..."

"What? I never know what? What particular breed of weirdo will reply to it? Because I don't want to know that. I don't want any part in this."

I stood up, shaking slightly on my drunken legs. I wasn't going to get involved with her stupid schemes. I walked unsteadily down the corridor to my room, but before I could close the door she yelled out to me.

"BELLA!! Someone's replied already. You have to come and see this!"

I slammed the door shut and crawled into bed, burying myself in sleep.

..0.0.0

EPOV

"You did what?" I snarled at my brother.

I never snarled at anyone, but he just pushed me to extremes. He was a moron who had nothing better to do than focus on my love life, or rather my lack of one.

Jasper was sprawled out on the floor of my loft apartment. We'd been drinking, and he thought it would be funny to browse dating websites.

I wasn't laughing.

I didn't need my brother to find me a girlfriend, mainly because I didn't want one. I'd decided life was easier alone. I was answerable to no one but myself, and couldn't go wrong then.

"Dude, I just told you. I replied to an interesting ad for you. Kinda kooky. Looked like a job ad, but it was in the personals, talking about *filling positions*." His eyebrows did a little dance as he said the last two words.

...like I said, moron.

"Jasper," I sighed. "If I wanted to date, I would. If I wanted to have sex, I would..."

"Use your five fingered friend," he interrupted.

Ignoring him and his pathetic little comment, I continued. "I would. Damn, I'm sure I could go downstairs and knock on Lauren's door. She's up for it, and from what I hear, she isn't too picky."

He hissed at me, giving me a little satisfaction, knowing I'd hit a sore point with him. Lauren was not to be mentioned in Jasper's company. He got itchy just remembering what had happened after their little escapade.

"Will you just come and at least read it? I gave her your number and your Gmail, so you will have to talk to her at some point."

"At the risk of repeating myself, dear brother, YOU DID WHAT?"

I ripped the laptop from his hands and demanded he leave. There was only so much of Jasper I could cope with in a day. He rolled his eyes and pulled his blue hoodie over his head.

"When you get home take a shower. Your hair is disgusting. How can you go more than three days without washing it?"

He ran his fingers through his tousled honey colored locks.

"It washes itself after a while. You really need to flick that fucking chip off your shoulder, Eddie. You're no better than me just because you use shampoo."

I snorted at his ludicrous statement and pointed at the door, clutching the laptop to my chest. He mumbled and shuffled out of my apartment, making me smirk. I got the impression he hoped I'd let him crash here tonight. I wouldn't put it past him if he did go knocking on Lauren's door now.

I placed the laptop on the kitchen counter and opened it, only intending to shoot a quick email off to rescind Jasper's offer. The least I could do was to be polite. However, there was an unopened email, and the moment I clicked onto it, I forgot about everything else.

An image of the most exquisitely beautiful woman, along with a short note flashed onto the screen. I was immediately lost in her delicate features and cascading chestnut locks. It was a candid shot, and I'm sure she had no idea it had been taken, but I was transfixed by the complete innocence she exuded.

It took me a good five minutes, before I read the attached note.

From: ABc123

To: ECullen

Thank you for the enquiry. I can't really give you any further details until we meet up in person. I find speaking to someone face to face gives me a better gauge on how well we will work together. It is imperative that I feel a connection to you, otherwise it's a nonstarter.

I would also like to explain that this is not a job offer. This is purely recreational, and therefore there will be no salary. However, it will have its own perks.

Lunch on Friday? Please email with a time that suits you.

B. Swan

The email made no sense at all. It wasn't a job, just as Jasper had said, but what the hell was it?

I pulled up the advert and compared the two, hoping to find clues.

52 positions.

Recreation.

A connection and working well together, which included overnight stays.

It sounded more like an escort service, but she'd mentioned no salary. I became more confused the more I looked at it.

Groaning, and before I had the sense to stop I typed my response. I was going to meet this woman, and find out what the hell was going on. I knew I was being ridiculous, there was no way the person I was meeting could be the woman in the photograph, but it was all such a mystery, and I loved a decent one of those.

I was preoccupied by the brunette and the advert for the rest of the week. I tried mapping out all the variables in the hope of figuring it out, but I always came up with same thing. Escort. So by the time we reached Friday, I was a nervous wreck. I was far from escort material, and I would never do anything even remotely like that. It was definitely more suited to Jasper. I hadn't told him what I'd done. I knew he would gloat and tell me it was just what I needed, even though he had no clue what this woman was offering.

What the hell had I gotten myself mixed up in?

I had written her an email advising I'd changed my mind a total of twelve times, but always deleted it. I couldn't fathom why. This was so far removed from my normal behavior. I would never have replied to such an advert, in fact, I wouldn't have even been looking if it wasn't for my moronic brother.

I showered and pressed some black trousers, along with a simple black shirt. I wanted to look smart, but casual enough to point out I knew it wasn't a job interview. I checked my appearance in the restaurant window, and ran my fingers through my messy hair, before entering. My glasses slipped down my nose obscuring my view a little, and as I pushed them back up I walked straight into a waiter. Drinks flew from his tray across the tile floor, smashing as they landed.

Fuck my life.

No matter what I did or where I went, I always ended up showing the world what a complete dork I was. I couldn't even walk into a restaurant without almost killing the patrons.

I mumbled an apology, and said that I had a reservation. The waiter rolled his eyes at me and gave a loud tut before leading me out onto the garden patio, and that's when I saw her.

The brunette.

It was really her.

My skin tingled with nerves as I approached the table. I looked down at her, fidgeting with the back of the chair. She looked just as scared as I was. I could see by the way she was gnawing at her lower lip. Her smile was cautious, as she held out her hand for me to shake, but my palm was sweaty. I didn't want to shake her hand and for her to be repulsed by me. I had no option but to wipe my palm along my thigh before taking her hand in mine. I just hoped it wasn't too obvious.

Her hand was delicate and slightly cool to touch, and I couldn't mistake the slight tremble. She wasn't prepared for this at all. It only made me wonder about what was going on even more.

I opened my mouth, wanting to get straight to the point, as I took a seat, but she spoke first.

"I want to apologize for wasting your time. I didn't post the advert, it was my friend. She thought it was funny to get drunk and eat chocolate penises, all while playing with a purple vibrator."

She slapped a hand across her mouth and turned scarlet at her outburst. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. Had she just mentioned chocolate penises and vibrators in the same sentence? Was this girl slightly demented? I'd known her thirty seconds.

I watched her retrieve her purse and start to move, apologizing and trying to hide underneath her hair. Something made me reach out and grab her. My whole body screamed for me to help her, for me to stop her from being upset. It scared the shit out of me, because it was alien and something I didn't even know you could feel about a complete stranger.

"Wait. Please?"

She stilled and peered through her hair at me. I gestured back towards the table, and she perched on the edge of the seat, eyeing me warily. I pushed my glasses back up my nose. They hadn't slipped; it was a nervous habit I'd formed a long time ago, and now I couldn't stop it.

"You're not wasting my time. I think I need to be honest with you too. My brother replied to the ad your friend placed, so it looks like we've both been set up."

She frowned at me and fumbled with her purse. I thought she was going to run again, but she pulled an asthma inhaler from inside and placed it to her lips.

"Are you feeling OK?" I asked panicking.

She nodded swiftly before breathing in the medication.

"Nerves," was her only response.

"Let's start again. Hello, I'm Edward Cullen."

I waited for her as she tucked her hair behind her ear.

"I'm Bella. Bella Swan. I really am sorry. I should have emailed you, but I thought apologizing in person was better," she whispered coyly.

"I understand that. Thank you for being so polite. I actually came here today to decline your offer. I too thought it was better in person. What a pair we make."

"Hmm, apparently we're hermits that need to be cared for by our friends."

I didn't miss her clipped tone. She was clearly not happy with what her friend had done.

"What was the advert for exactly?" I blurted out.

Fucking filter!

Bella looked at her lap and mumbled, but I couldn't hear a thing she was saying. I leaned in closer. Her scent hit me like a sledgehammer, making my trousers tight and my pulse race. I watched her throat move as she swallowed. With each small reaction I became more intrigued by the advert. What was it that was so mortifying to her?

I blinked as she handed me a small box, not really taking in what it was, but I was the one blushing when it finally registered.

It was like in a movie, when you see little images flick onto the screen, as the actor connects all the dots.

52 positions.

Overnight stays.

Recreational.

I wasn't too far from the truth when I'd thought it was an advert for an escort. She wanted someone to test the cards with her. I glared incredulously from the pack of cards to Bella. Why would she need to advertise for someone to make love to her? She was stunning.

"Jesus, this is so embarrassing. I can't apologize enough, Edward."

My first instinct had been to get up and walk. I'd only come to ease my curiosity, but the more I stared at her, the more I imagined her in the poses on those cards.

Was I mad?

The waiter arrived and Bella stuttered to him that she only wanted a drink of Coke. I ordered a glass of orange juice and watched her. I was still holding the cards. Why was I still holding them? Jasper would be cracking up laughing at me right now. If it was him, he'd already be recreating the first card in the nearest motel. I felt a pang of jealousy. Why couldn't I be like that? Jasper was carefree and that made him happy. I couldn't walk across the street without considering all the possible outcomes of that.

"I'll tell you what, how about we have lunch and just talk? We're both here, and it seems a waste of time for us to go home now we're here."

She gasped in surprise at my offering. I didn't blame her, because I didn't have the slightest clue why I was offering to have lunch with a perfect stranger. A perfect stranger that wanted to try 52 different sexual positions with me.

"I-I don't know. Why would you want to do that after knowing what the advert was about?"

"Truth? Bella, I'm not very good around new people. They confuse me and make me nervous, but with you I don't seem to feel that. I can talk to you after only ten minutes of meeting you, and that alone is why I want to stay and have lunch."

"Hmm, alright then. I'll stay for lunch. Thank you, Edward," she replied sweetly.

The waiter arrived with our drinks, and we began to look over the lunch menu. The atmosphere was awkward and uneasy, neither one of us knowing what the hell to do. Bella seemed very much like me in social situations, but that knowledge only made me more anxious.

The Sex Deck sat on the table in front of us, and I could see her cast surreptitious little glances at it every now and again. Was she thinking about me the same way I was thinking about her?

Her cheeks stained pink as we both reached for the cards at the same time. Bella gasped and pulled her hand away quickly.

"Bella, did you want..."

"Edward, I think..."

We said in unison. Our focus was on each other, both hoping we were thinking the same thing. One of us had to give. I swallowed hard.

"Bella, I'd really like it if you explained this whole thing to me. Maybe we could come up with a solution together?" I stated formally.

"That's extremely kind of you. I'd like that, but I don't really think there's a solution to my friend's stupidity," she giggled.

The sound made my balls grow tight. This perfect woman I knew nothing about was turning me on like nobody before. That included Jasper's porn collection.

"I think my brother's stupidity would rival your friends any day."

"Maybe we should set *them* up. It would certainly pay them back for this little fiasco."

I scowled at her. "I don't think this is a fiasco. I'm actually enjoying myself. Let's ignore them. Tell me something about yourself, other than your name. What do you do?"

Bella smiled warmly at me, before replying. She was quiet and blushed whenever we held eye contact, but I felt comfortable. From that moment, I knew there was something more to us. Something new and unusual. I also knew I would agree to her experiment, and I had no idea why.

I just had to get her to ask me.

End Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;">Gah! What do ya think?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Yes.. the cards are real.</p>

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Chapter 3: Hump by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Love to my lucious Beta's - Maylin & Twirlgrrl.</p> <p>I'll leave the super important info... and see you at the bottom :P</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

We'd agreed to go on another date. I was rather astounded I'd even asked her for another one, let alone the fact that she'd agreed. I was desperate to tell Jasper; to show him I could be just as reckless and spontaneous as he could. I didn't need to plan everything.

Bella had given me her cell phone number, and even though I'd entered it into my iPhone, I kept the little scrap of paper in my pocket. I have no idea why.

I adjusted my black tie and checked my appearance in the mirror. I'd tried for twenty minutes to do something with my hair, but had eventually given up. There was nothing that could be done with it. I'd also tried to put contacts in, but my hands had been shaking so much I'd dropped one on the floor and couldn't retrieve the damn thing. My glasses had to go back on. Squinting at Bella during dinner wasn't really an option.

I was trying to forget about those cards, but my testosterone fuelled brain wouldn't let me. I'd googled them when I got home. I was thoroughly shocked at some of the images. I honestly didn't believe two people could perform those positions. It only made me more curious as to why she would want to do this, and with a complete stranger, too. She'd admitted a friend of hers had posted the advert, but they must have at least talked about it. No real friend would post something like that without your knowledge.

Except Jasper.

It was all extremely random. Maybe tonight would give me the answers I sought.

There had only been one communication between us in the last two days. Bella had texted me to see if I was still on for the date. I was surprised, because up until that point I'd been the one to suggest everything. I'd begun to wonder if she was about to back out, so I'd resisted replying for fifteen minutes. I didn't want to look too eager.

Things were definitely looking up.

I checked my appearance one last time, before snapping my watch onto my wrist and leaving the apartment. I was meeting with her at a local hotel restaurant, and she'd gone very quiet when I'd mentioned it. I was hoping she'd let me pay. Even though we'd started out a little differently than others, I actually liked her. People must meet in odd circumstances every day, ours couldn't be that strange.

Bella was beautiful, but it was much more than her appearance. I was uncomfortable around people, like Bella, I was best left alone, but with her I could speak freely. Nothing had stunned me more than when I'd touched her to stop her from leaving the restaurant. I'd gripped her arm, and my palm still tingled from the touch. She was so very different, and to me, that made her special.

I stood in the garage and debated which car to take. Would she think I was flaunting my wealth if I took the DB9? I didn't ever want her to think that. She'd told me about her job as a waitress, and I didn't want her to feel disadvantaged towards me. My money wasn't an issue.

Opting for the Volvo, I climbed in and turned on the CD player. I hoped the classical tones would soothe my fraught nerves. We'd chosen to set the original reason for the date aside. We were going to try to get to know one another. My palms began to sweat, as I tried to recall the last time I'd been on a date.

I couldn't.

I'd never had an actual date. Not one that included dressing accordingly and booking a table anyway. Angela and I had known each other for years and had fallen into an awkward little relationship. She was my first real kiss, my first time having sex, and my first, and only, failed relationship.

I didn't function like others. I was clearly inept when it came to matters of the heart.

Bella wasn't in the restaurant when I arrived, so I ordered a bottle of wine and waited. It was the longest fifteen minutes of my life. Even though she'd checked with me to make sure I was still OK with this, I started to doubt whether she would turn up at all. However, when she did, my breath was ripped from my lungs. She looked utterly exquisite.

Her hair curled softly around her petite face. Her cheeks were petal pink, but darkened as her gaze met mine. I fumbled with the wine glass and blushed right back.

"Bella, you look lovely," I stated, pulling a chair out for her.

She placed her small sweater on the back of the chair and smoothed her skirt down, as she sat. I should have let the waiter to do it, because from behind all I could see was an expanse of creamy skin. Bare shoulders and back, all exposed for me to swoon over. I wanted to touch her, just to see what it would feel like underneath my fingertips. I fisted my hands and walked back to my seat, trying to forget the sight of her skin.

"Alice makes me wear the silliest of things, but I like this one. Thank you. I wasn't sure you'd come," she whispered, keeping her gaze on my chin rather than my eyes.

How were we ever going to manage to have sex, if we couldn't even look at each other? The atmosphere around us was awkward at best, neither one of us sure what to do. Conversation was nothing more than small talk, exactly as it had been when we first met. During the main course we were so uneasy we'd begun stuttering, and Bella had used her inhaler twice. I was a fucking failure. I'd even knocked over my wine glass, like a complete fool. She deserved more than this, more than some socially dysfunctional nerd.

When the waiter cleared away our half eaten food, I'd reached my limit. I needed to mention the game. That was really why we were here.

"Bella, the cards?" I blurted out.

Her eyes went wide, as she gasped and her eyes darted around the room. She was worried other people had heard me, and knew what I was talking about. It was preposterous that someone could deduce that from those two little words.

She mumbled that we shouldn't discuss it here.

"Then where? Look, you placed the ad for a reason, and I'm trying to tell you I'd like to help. Lord knows why. Bella, this whole situation is ludicrous, and I can't believe I'm even here, let alone agreeing to it."

"I didn't place the ad," she hissed indignantly. "I've told you that."

"OK," I retorted, placing my napkin on the table. "I'm assuming by your clipped tone and denial that you don't want to go ahead with this."

"I..."

I stood intent on paying the bill and leaving. As much as I felt drawn to her, I owed her nothing, and if she wouldn't even discuss the reason we were here, then what was the point?

"Before I go, I would ask you a couple of questions. If you didn't want to go ahead with the game, then firstly, why did you come here today? Secondly, why are the cards in your purse?"

Her eyes shot to her purse, and then back to me.

"How did you..?"

"It doesn't take a genius to work out you really want to try this, but for some reason you feel ashamed."

I pushed my glasses back up my nose and pulled my wallet from my trouser pocket. As I placed some bills on the table, she covered my hand with hers and looked up at me.

"Edward, you're right. I'm extremely embarrassed, and I don't understand why you aren't."

I sighed and was about to return to my seat, when she stood, retrieving her purse and sweater. It appeared we were both leaving. Was it wrong to hope we'd be going together? I knew nothing about her and yet, I wanted to help her.

"I *am* embarrassed by this. Bella, if you knew me, you'd know just how out of character this really is for me. There's just something about you that makes me want to help."

"Even if that means offering the use of your body?" she whispered; her eyes downcast.

We began to walk from the restaurant and into the foyer. I could see her anxious little glances towards the reception desk.

"Do you think..?"

"Maybe we should..?"

We both asked in unison.

Was she really thinking what I was?

To test the situation, I pulled out my wallet, but her hand held it closed.

"You paid for the meal, and this is my game. My advert."

Before I could truly comprehend what we were agreeing to, she'd walked to the front desk, booked a room for the night and returned with the key. My heart thundered in my chest. What the hell were we doing?

I took the key from her trembling fingers and walked towards the elevator, placing my hand on her elbow. Bella clutched her purse to her chest and nibbled at her bottom lip. I'd been in many odd situations before, but never one quite like this. I felt the need to ease our anxiety, so reached over and took her hand in mine. It was still quivering with nerves.

"We're only going to talk, Bella," I soothed.

My words didn't change her demeanour, and I was startled to realize I was the calm one. Inside I was panicking; completely terrified of what was going to happen when we walked into that room. Sex with Angela had been satisfactory, but more of a 'connecting the dots' affair than fun. It had been functional, whereas what I was commencing with Bella was supposed to be for enjoyment. Was I even capable of that?

Jasper would be hysterical right now. I could just imagine him rolling with laughter at his inexperienced, socially inept brother, trying out sex cards with a perfect stranger. It still amused him when he told people what my occupation was.

"Does this not terrify you?" she whispered.

I looked down at her wide eyes that were shining in fear.

"I'm petrified, but for some reason, I want to do this with you."

She squeezed my hand slightly, before muttering, "I like you, too."

My insides did a happy dance. She liked me!

We were silent the rest of the way, both locked inside our own insecurities, but we still held hands, all the way to the room.

I looked around as we walked inside. It was quaint, and pleasantly decorated, but the bed seemed to dominate the room. Or maybe that was just me thinking it did. I tried not to look at it, opting instead to pour us each a drink.

Bella perched on the edge of the mattress, placing her purse and tiny sweater on the floor next to her feet. She exuded innocence, the air around her completely pure. Jasper would take great delight in corrupting her. I, however, didn't know what to do next. I was so far out of my depth, I was beginning to drown.

I passed her a wine glass and stood watching her, as she took a sip. The silence was oppressive. I needed to do something.

I sat down next to her and turned to gaze directly at her. I knew she was nervous with eye contact, but we wouldn't be able to do very much if she couldn't even look at me. She twirled the stem between her fingers, as I pushed my glasses back up the bridge of my nose. We fidgeted and shuffled on the bed, neither one truly comfortable with the seating arrangement. I slowly inched my hand out and touched her knee.

She yelped.

I started to pull my hand back, but was rewarded by a whispered plea to leave it where it was. Her skin felt like velvet under my touch, and I couldn't help but stroke it gently.

She giggled.

It wasn't really the kind of reaction I was after, but at least she wasn't crying. That had to be a plus. The tips of my fingers toyed with the hem of her dress, as I moved a little closer to her.

"Bella," I said softly. "Can we just try one thing?"

Her teeth peeped out, from where they held her bottom lip, and she nodded sharply. I took a deep breath and leaned in. As I neared her lips I felt her breathe tickled my face, it made me shiver a little. At the same time an ache began in my groin. I was becoming aroused by her, and it was startling.

My lips met hers in a chaste kiss that was nothing more than skin touching skin, but it was enough.

Enough to make my lips tingle.

Enough to make my groin clench.

And enough to make my balls tight.

My lips stayed touching hers, moving slightly to caress them, and I felt her hand touch my thigh. It was so feather light I wasn't even sure it was real. That was until it was all ruined by a glass of wine being dropped into my lap and wetting my trousers.

"Oh, nonononononono! I'm so sorry, Edward!" she gasped, standing up to fetch a towel.

I moved the now empty glass to the floor and tried to wipe down the front of my trousers. This was not good. There was no way I could leave this room until my trousers were dry. I currently looked like I'd peed myself. I'd been stupid. I knew Bella still held the glass, and should never have tempted her.

She came racing out of the bathroom with a towel, and began patting my groin dry. I shifted uncomfortably. She was kneeling in the region of my dick, and I was scared witless she was going to see just how aroused I'd become from one chaste kiss with her.

"Bella," I croaked and stood up, trying to move out of her way. "I c-can attend to that."

She flushed and stepped backwards, tripping over her bag and toppling onto the bed.

What the fuck was wrong with us?

She covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

"Bella, what's wrong?"

Her crying increased, as I approached, and I stumbled for something to console her with. I didn't know enough about her to know whether touching would help. For want of anything better, I sat back down on the bed, leaning back on my elbow so my face was level with hers.

"Tell me. Is it me? Was it the kiss? I'm sorry."

She mumbled something against her palms, but continued to cry. I couldn't let myself be responsible for those tears. I wasn't the kind of person that made a girl cry.

I touched her wrist, intending to remove her hand from her beautiful face. She whimpered and turned her head, clearly mortified by the tears. I adjusted myself more comfortably on the mattress, resting my head on my hand, and waited. The tears would have to subside eventually and then we could talk. My fingertips tingled to touch her, to make sure she was OK. I waited. Eventually she calmed, but didn't look back at me. I couldn't hold out any longer.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have kissed you," I mumbled.

She exhaled loudly, and replied, "It's not you. You did nothing wrong, it's me. I THREW WINE ALL OVER YOU!"

"It will come out. That doesn't worry me."

I placed my hand tentatively across her stomach, hoping she wouldn't push me away. I was gratified when she actually covered it with her own.

"Can we talk about it? We're both very nervous right now, and I should've really made sure you'd put the glass down."

Bella finally turned her head to face me. Her big brown eyes were watery with tears, and her lips pouty from that sadness. She still looked adorable, and before my brain kicked into gear I leaned in and kissed her. It was a little more seductive than before, as I massaged my lips against hers. I could hear a small sound escape from her mouth, and was spurred on by it, shuffling my whole body in line with hers on the bed.

Her other hand cupped my cheek, and I was amazed when she deepened the kiss. She tasted so sweet and delicate, it was addictive. Just this one small taste and I was hooked. This whole incident had been awkward and strange but was all worth it for this one perfect moment.

Of course something had to ruin it.

My glasses slipped and cracked her on the nose.

"Ouch!"

I put them back on and groaned.

"What the hell is wrong with us?"

Bella giggled, making me feel better.

"We just need to get used to each other, I think. We're a little self-conscious around each other," she replied, massaging the bridge of her nose.

I thought for a moment, before sitting up and resting my back against the headboard.

"Come here, Bella."

She frowned, causing little lines to appear on her forehead. I beckoned her with my finger. I wasn't sure she was going to play along at first, but she slowly crawled up the bed and cautiously straddled my lap.

My mouth watered, as her breasts sat mere inches from my waiting lips. I watched her throat move as she swallowed with what I assumed was nerves again.

"What do we do now, Edward?"

I smiled at her, trying to soothe her, before replying, "How about we kiss for a little while?"

Her chest mottled red, before she crashed her mouth to mine, completely without warning. Our teeth clashed and noses bumped, before we settled into a comfortable rhythm. A slow and comforting kiss, that had my groin tightening in arousal, again. It was only made worse when she moved her hips a little, adjusting her position. The problem was, it now nestled my growing erection underneath her...well, her *lady parts*? *Center*? *Vagina*?

What the hell was I supposed to call it? What would she want me to?

Angela had always preferred the correct term of vagina, but would Bella?

She moaned softly and rocked her hips against me again, making me forget what the hell I'd been thinking about. Her hands moved to my neck, and tickled the hair at the back. I slowly slipped the tip of my tongue into her mouth, and was greeted by another moan, and a quickening of her pace. I know we needed to stop. This wasn't the best idea, but she felt so sweet and perfect in my arms, riding my trouser covered erection.

I opened my eyes, just a little, needing to see her face. I wondered if she kissed with her eyes open or closed. Angela was always one for having her eyes open, and I found that a little creepy. Bella didn't disappoint me. Her eyes were closed, as she revelled in the moment.

We may have had a clumsy start, but things appeared to be going much better now. My hands held her buttocks, and she didn't seem to mind when I pulled her towards me, mimicking her movements. It made her rocking intensify, and I could hear little whimpers coming from her, as she sped up. I needed to grit my teeth, as my abdomen was starting to tighten. I didn't want to come so soon, and certainly not in my trousers. I wasn't a teenager, but Bella was swirling her tongue against mine and pushing her heated sex against me, I couldn't stop her.

That was why moments later I pulled my mouth from hers and began to shudder.

"Oh...Oh...Bella!"

My orgasm was quick and incredibly intense. The moment I spilled into my underwear I felt ashamed. This beautiful lady on top of me had brought me to orgasm, and I was now unable to look at her. I felt selfish. I hung my head and whispered 'sorry', as my breathing began to calm.

"Hey, why are you sorry?" she asked concerned.

I cast my gaze to the comforter, but she held my face in her hands and tilted my head upwards. Her brow was furrowed again. Why was she confused? Was it not obvious why I was sorry?

"Tell me, Edward. You look sad. What did I do?"

"Christ! You did nothing. Bella, I just came in my trousers like a school boy after a few minutes of grinding, and you ask what *you* did? I'm so sorry. It wasn't meant to be like that."

She startled me by kissing my lips quickly, and wrapping her arms around my shoulders, pulling me into a comforting hug. She was the sweetest thing alive.

"Don't be sorry. Can I tell you something?" she whispered into my ear.

I shivered, and nodded.

"I've never made someone orgasm before. You're my first."

It was her turn to lower her head now. I shuffled us down the bed, so we lay side by side. I needed to see her face. I touched her cheek, and waited for her to open her eyes. My trousers were becoming sticky, but I knew I needed to make her feel better about this; otherwise there would be no second chance.

"Boyfriends?"

"One, but things never went according to plan with him. I'll elaborate at some point. Just not now, OK?"

"Bella, I'm honored to be your first. I'm sorry you gained nothing from it."

She giggled lightly, and placed her palm flat against my chest.

"I gained quite a lot from those ten minutes, Edward. Maybe one day you'll understand just how much. Thank you."

I had no idea what the hell she could have gained from making me stain my trousers, but she seemed pleased. That was better than I'd thought the night was going to end.

I made a grab for her when she moved from the bed. I didn't want her to leave, not just yet. However, she returned quickly with her purse and lay back down.

"I think we've both decided we're going to give this a go, right?" she said quietly.

I nodded, as she pulled the pack of cards from the little bag and tipped them onto the mattress.

I placed my hand on top of hers, as she randomly turned them over.

"Bella, do you mean it?"

"Yes," she breathed. "Please? Will you help me?"

There was no way I could deny the need in her voice, even if I wanted to.

"Can we talk about contraception?" I asked cautiously.

She mumbled about condoms and going on the pill, but I advised it would be prudent for us to both get checked out. I told her we would still be extremely careful and use both forms, but I wanted her to know she could trust me. She agreed.

"You asked about boyfriends. What about your girlfriends?"

"Only one. We did have sex, and it was quite fulfilling, but missing something. I can't really explain."

Bella opened her mouth to speak, when her phone rang. The theme tune to *The Big Bang Theory* filled the room, making me snort.

She looked at the screen and rolled her eyes.

"My friend, Alice. The one who placed the advert. I said I'd be home by now. I have to go."

I sat up and kissed her cheek.

"We need to pick a card before you go."

She shook her head, "No. You pick."

I knew what I wanted to try. I never had, but I felt like she should have it. I lifted it up and handed it to her. She turned scarlet.

At that moment I knew this woman would be my undoing. I just didn't know how soon that would occur.

End Notes:
So, SexDeckward already knows there's something there! DRY HUMP FTW!!!

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Chapter 4: For Her by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Love and thanks to my betas - Maylin & Twirlgrrl.</p> <p>SM Owns all things Twilight.</p>

BPOV

I'd been on cloud nine for the last five days. I'd actually made Edward orgasm! It hadn't taken that long either, *and* we'd been wearing clothes. I felt pretty proud of myself. It left me feeling elated afterwards, and even though Edward thought I needed some kind of reciprocation, I was more than happy knowing I wasn't inept when it came to sex. It made me a little less apprehensive about the next card and meeting him again.

I was still scared, but if I could make him orgasm from what little we'd done, then the other stuff really couldn't be that difficult. Could it?

I'd told no one about him. Alice was on some photo shoot in New York, so I didn't need to explain the odd text or email from him. Rosalie was different though. When I turned up at work two days later, Rose had yelled across the bar that I looked different.

"Did you get laid?"

I blushed immediately.

"No!" I stated. I wasn't lying.

She flicked her blond hair over her shoulder, stating she didn't believe me and would be pestering me the entire night, until I gave up the details. I'd rolled my eyes at her. She should know by now I didn't give up anything I didn't want to, no matter how much she asked.

She'd tried during my shift to get me to spill, but eventually she gave up; telling me to 'suit myself.' I knew she'd be annoyed when it finally came out. I was under no illusions, once Alice knew about this, the whole world would be told in thirty seconds flat. Geeky Bella getting sex on a regular basis would be the joke of the bar.

I waited the tables in a complete haze that night. I was extremely proud of myself and what I'd achieved with Edward. I hadn't even laughed when he held my waist, or when he gripped my buttocks. If that had been Jake, I'd have been laughing hysterically. We had a long way to go, and so many cards to use, but I was more confident than I'd ever been.

My life was beginning to look up.

I still felt nauseous when I thought of our next rendezvous. I knew what card Edward had chosen and each night I'd gone to bed, it had been all I could think about. It scared the hell out

of me, because I didn't understand why he would want to do that. Why would he find that arousing?

Cunnilingus.

I'd googled it. I needed to see exactly what it was, and how we were supposed to go about it. I found a website that made me turn crimson, but since no one was home with me when I was looking, I continued to stare. I was dumbstruck by the moving images depicting just how to do each position. I bookmarked it, knowing it could prove invaluable if we managed to get through the other cards.

The one Edward had picked seemed to have a few variations. There would be no way I could attempt some of them. They were simply too embarrassing to watch, let alone try. I wondered if Edward had been doing his own research, because he seemed as inexperienced as me. Though, he was one step ahead, in that he'd actually had a sex life. My fingers had itched to email him, and before I knew it, I'd sent him the link to the website.

My heart had almost pounded out of my chest while I'd waited for a reply. I'd had to get up to find my inhaler; the stress making my chest tight in anxiety. Would he think I was an atrocious pervert? Oh, God, I was an idiot, not only had I sprung the cards on him and ground myself on him until he came, but now I was sending him links to sexual websites. He was going to think I was a complete deviant.

I'd thought about trying to recall the email, but it had been too long, and I knew it never usually worked anyway. I was debating denying all knowledge when an email alert popped onto my screen. I swallowed hard before opening it. Like the fool I was, I closed my eyes, not wanting to see his disgust, but slowly I cracked them open, curiosity getting the better of me.

From: ECullen

To: ABc123

I'm going start by saying hello. I'm pleased you contacted me; though I admit to being a little stunned at the content.

It's certainly a very interesting and informative website. I think it could be a very useful tool, and I hope that's why you sent the link to me.

Can I be candid, and tell you I haven't stopped thinking of our dinner together? It was so much more than I can possibly convey to you via email. I'm looking forward to seeing you again, that is if you still want me? I'm still very ashamed of the speed at which things occurred that night.

I look forward to your reply Bella.

Edward.

I'd been a little taken aback. Why would he think I didn't want to continue this? Although it was excruciatingly embarrassing, I couldn't imagine trying to do this with anyone else now. There would be no way I could go through the mortification of explaining what the game was, never mind showing them the actual cards. My reply was not very well thought out.

From: ABc123

To: ECullen

Of course I still want you! You were the first person I made orgasm. I couldn't abandon you now.

Same time. Same place?

Bella x

I'd regretted the wording as soon as I'd sent it. It sounded like I pitied him, and that couldn't be further from the truth. I was such a loser. It was no wonder I'd resorted to online adverts to find a man.

Luckily, Edward's reply had been sweet. He'd informed me the room was already booked and he would meet me in the lobby. He actually said he was looking forward to it. I wasn't sure what to make of that. Why would he look forward to doing *that* to me? I fleetingly wondered if he expected something in return. He knew it was one card at a time, so I couldn't see him becoming confused. As uncomfortable as it was, I knew we needed to talk some more.

The week had dragged, and I couldn't quite believe I was excited about seeing him again. I scoured my closet for something to wear, wishing for a second that Alice was here to help. I opted for a short sleeved red sweater, along with some simple black trousers and red heels. I didn't own any lingerie and wondered whether maybe I should purchase some. Would he like that? Would he think I was too forward? Alice had always used fancy underwear to impress her latest guy. Maybe I would look online for some.

I pulled my satchel across my body and checked my keys, phone and wallet where inside. It was only when I was half out of the door that I realized I'd forgotten the cards. I went back to retrieve them, along with a box of condoms. I knew what the card was, but I wanted Edward to know I was responsible. If he wanted reciprocation then I wanted to be prepared.

I was panicking all the way to the hotel, and found it difficult to drive. Horns blared at me, because my attention was focused elsewhere.

It was in the hotel room with Edward.

I swallowed hard and tried to regulate my breathing. It was no good because shortly after I parked my car, I had to take my inhaler. The stress was doing no favors for my asthma. It wasn't like I could go to my doctor and ask him to increase the strength of the medication. He would ask why my asthma was no longer under control. He'd want to know what had changed in my life to cause the anxiety, and giving him the details of my dirty little secret was definitely a no-no.

I stumbled precariously on my heels towards the lobby, recognizing him immediately. A fluttering started in my stomach at the thought that he was waiting for me. His back was turned, and it allowed me to take in his form. His dark t-shirt stretched across his shoulders and tapered to his small waist. His jeans molded the curve of his buttocks nicely.

Was I checking him out?

Edward was checking his watch randomly and running his fingers nervously through his hair.

"Miss, can I help you?" The doorman asked, completely breaking my spell.

I stuttered, and walked tentatively towards Edward.

"Hello," I mumbled cautiously.

His grin was huge, lighting up his entire face. He moved as if to hug me, but stopped himself, thinking better of it. Disappointment flitted through my system, though I didn't know why. I wasn't a touchy kind of person, so why would I want him to do that?

"Hey, are you OK? You look a little breathless."

I nodded, seeing the concern on his face. It quickly disappeared as he pushed his glasses back up his nose.

"Shall we?" Edward asked, motioning towards the elevator.

I took a step, but being the complete idiot I was, my ankle gave way in my heels, and I stumbled forward. I tried to grab the table to stop me, but only succeeded in pushing the vase of lilies over. It crashed onto the floor, eliciting a gasp of shock from the other guests in the reception area.

I was such a moron.

Two firm hands gripped at my biceps, stopping my descent. I hid my face behind my hair, hoping a person couldn't die of mortification.

"I'm so sorry!"

Edward kept hold of my arms until my balance had returned. His emerald gaze fixed on me, making certain I was OK. I could hear people rushing around me, obviously cleaning up the mess I'd caused.

"Bella, you look so pale, and lightheaded. Have you eaten today?"

I thought back to earlier in the day. I must have had something, but I was coming up blank.

"Edward, I don't think I have," I whispered feeling so stupid. Who the hell *forgot* to eat?

He held my hand in his and pulled me towards the elevators.

"Well, before we do anything else, we'll order some room service. You need food."

He squeezed my hand gently as we entered the elevator and he pushed the button. We stood in awkward silence. I knew we were both thinking the same thing. We were thinking about the card, and how soon after we entering the room would we try it.

"How was work last night?" Edward asked.

I giggle snorted and almost wept at just how much of a nerd I was. Giggle snorting? I tried to ignore it and focus on his question. Did we really know that little about each other that we had to resort to small talk? A resounding 'yes' rang in my head. We knew nothing about each other, and we really should if we were going to continue to be so intimate. I took a deep breath, before looking directly into his eyes.

"My full name is Isabella Marie Swan. My dad's the police chief back in Forks, and my mom owns a bakery on the main street there. I'm an only child, but always wanted a sister. My best friend's name is Alice, and we share an apartment. We have done for four years. She's an amazing photographer..."

His eyes were wide with shock, as he tried to digest my verbal vomit. His glasses slipped and before I could stop myself, my hand reached out and pushed them back up. He smirked at me.

I swallowed. Hard.

That tilt of his lips was utterly ridiculous. Who the hell did that and looked as adorable as he did?

Adorable?

"Thank you for all that insight. However, I'd really like to get to our room, and then we can chat further."

As if on cue, the doors opened and we stepped into the corridor. I could feel the heat staining my cheeks as we entered the room.

"Edward?" I questioned softly.

He hummed in response, and picked up the room service menu.

"This is the same room."

He nodded and picked up the telephone, completely brushing off my comment. I didn't even hear what he'd ordered. I was too focused on the fact that he'd remembered the room number, and booked the same one for us today. Why would he do that?

I took my shoes off and placed them at the side of the door. It was best if I didn't try to walk in them anymore. I'd probably end up knocking Edward on his ass. When I turned around he was sitting on the edge of the bed, patting the mattress beside him. I sat nervously, and looked at him through my curtain of hair.

I watched his hands clench into fists. It was so unlike his usual demeanour I wondered what I'd done to cause his anger.

"I ordered you a sandwich. Is that all right?" His tone was hushed, but held a slight edge. I just couldn't make out what that edge was.

"Yes, thank you."

I began to gnaw at the inside of my cheek. My heart was thumping hard against my chest, and I could feel a thin film of sweat beginning to form on my palms. It would be easier if we just entered the room and got on with it. I'm sure I wouldn't feel as nervous.

"Edward, I want to..."

"Shush," he interrupted, lying back on the bed and beckoning me to follow.

I frowned at him, but didn't do as he wanted. I shuffled further up and crossed my legs, facing him.

"Can we talk while you eat?" he asked quietly.

"Did I do something wrong? I mean, I know I made a complete fool of myself in the lobby, but it really was an accident and I never intended to hurt anyone..."

He stopped my ramblings by placing his hand on my knee. I squeaked loudly. I was still not completely comfortable with his random touches. He didn't remove his hand, though. In fact he patted it twice.

"You did nothing wrong. I'll go first since you already gave me a little information in the elevator. Ok, my full name is Edward Anthony Cullen. I'm 29 and have one brother, Jasper. We own an internet company together, though I only really deal with the technical side of things; he's the people person. My mom and dad have been happily married since they were twenty-one and still act like teenagers. It's embarrassing. As I've already told you, I've had one relationship, Angela. It was my brother that replied to the advert. He's a clown."

I smiled at him, because even though I could see his annoyance with his brother, there was true affection in his words. It was nice to know a little more about him, and I was about to ask him some random questions, when there was a knock at the door. Edward leapt up and opened it, taking the food from the waiter and tipping him.

He brought it to the bed, and sat facing me, mirroring my pose.

"Eat," he said, making it a demand rather than a choice.

I picked up the sandwich and eyed him nervously, before taking a bite. Silence surrounded us, and it was becoming oppressive. We wouldn't be able to continue with this unless we became much more comfortable around each other.

"Tell me about Jasper," I asked around a mouthful of food.

Edward smiled immediately, his eyes twinkling with affection.

"He's two years younger than me, but you wouldn't believe it. He's always been like a teenager. He's a bit of a ladies' man, and doesn't try to hide it either."

I snorted at the complete contrast between them.

"Do I amuse you, Bella?"

"I was laughing at how different the two of you are. What's he like to work with? Do you get on well in the office?"

His brows drew together in confusion, but only for a moment before they smoothed out.

"We don't have that much interaction together. I mean, we did when we first started the business, but we have our own departments to deal with now."

I was about to ask exactly what it was that he did, when he took the empty plate from me and placed it on the floor. I hadn't even noticed how quickly I was eating it.

"Better?" he asked.

I nodded and began fumbling with the edge of my sweater.

"Edward, I..."

"Bella..."

We both stammered out, before both smiling and blushing terribly. Were we supposed to go at it now? What was the correct etiquette for this? Was there even an etiquette when it came to sordid little sex games?

Christ, Bella shut up!

"B-Bella, would you lie down with m-me?" he stuttered.

I chewed my lower lip, looking at him shyly and nodded.

"Can I ask you to do something first? I think it will help."

Cautiously, I agreed, but gasped when he asked me to remove my trousers. I'd never undressed *in front* of anyone before. I'd always been hidden under the covers with Jake.

I looked at the floor and mumbled for him to turn around. Edward didn't even question why, he turned over on the bed, placing his back to me. My trembling hands unzipped my trousers and shimmied them down my legs. I folded them and placed them on the chair in the corner of the room, before climbing onto the bed. I lay next to him, smelling his unique scent. He was citrus and spice. It made my nostrils flare.

I lay next to him, but he didn't turn to face me until I told him I was ready. I'd left my sweater and underwear on, because I didn't have enough confidence to remove them too. We were starting small and my trousers were small.

His intense green gaze was fixed to mine; he didn't look down to my naked legs. My hand fluttered in the space between us, deciding if I should touch him or not. He decided for me, when he linked his fingers in mine and rested them between us. I was more than a little soothed by the fact that he was shaking too. Edward was just as nervous as I was.

"Shall we try kissing a bit first?" he asked, his voice quivering.

I hummed and licked my lips.

He moved his head slowly towards me, gently pressing his lips to mine. The contact made my limbs weak and my muscles melt. It was a slow and cautious massage of lips, our mouths and hands the only contact between us.

Edward's hand tightened around mine, and he shuffled closer to my body. My leg moved of it's own accord and hooked over his knee. I felt his quick intake of breath at my boldness, as he pulled his lips from mine.

I giggled, and I stared at him. His glasses had steamed up. I wanted to take them off; wanting to see what he looked like without the black rims marring his face. A strange ache filled my chest,

unnerving me slightly. I was going to reach for my inhaler, but my chest didn't feel tight, just...*odd*? I tried to ignore it and focused on the ache that was building elsewhere.

"Can I touch your thigh?" he croaked out.

I breathed a 'yes' and braced myself for his touch. He moved his hand from where it was enveloped in mine, and laid his palm flat against my skin, and it was nothing like I'd expected. I thought I'd shy away, or want him to remove it, but as his fingers flexed on my skin, I found I wanted more. My private parts tingled, shocking me, and I stared at Edward wide eyed in wonder. I was stunned to see he was gazing back with the exact same expression.

"Can I m-move my hand a little higher, Bella?"

I chewed my lower lip and nodded. His fingers crept further up and slowly teased the edge of my black boy shorts. A giggle bubbled from my lips. I simply couldn't stop it.

"Hush." Edward soothed, as his fingers snaked under the cotton. They skimmed the underside of my buttocks making me clench them slightly. I could feel his body trembling, but it comforted me. I knew I was having the same effect on him, as he was on me.

"Will you kiss me again?"

He lifted the side of his mouth, in a crooked grin, before bringing it to mine. At the same time his lips caressed my mine, his fingers stroked the sensitive skin on my buttock. It wasn't much more than second base, but it was making the throb between my thighs intensify. This was strange, and so alien to me. When I'd tried this with Jacob I'd been laughing hysterically by this point, and although I wanted to do that now, I was holding it at bay.

His mouth ripped from mine, and he panted against my cheek.

"The card," I gasped.

A low rumble reverberated from his chest, and I squeezed my thighs together tightly.

Apparently, I liked the rumble.

"Can you lie on your back, Bella?" Edward breathed.

His cheeks were tinged pink, and his eyes had become dark with what I could only assume was desire.

It was desire for me. Is that what it looked like?

I did as he asked, and he moved around the mattress to kneel at the side of my legs.

"I...hmm... need to take them off," he whispered with a slightly strangled tone, as he gestured to my underwear.

I didn't know which was worse, me removing them in front of him, or him doing it for me. I tried to think it through, but all I could focus on was the pulsing between my thighs. I was growing in its intensity, and I needed some sort of friction to make it feel better.

When had I become so wanton?

I was lying waiting for a stranger to remove my panties.

Edward licked his lower lip slowly, and I found myself transfixed by the shiny trail it left. His tongue was going to do just that to my...

I giggled; again, I wasn't able to stop it. Edward ignored it, and placed his shaking hands in the waistband of my underwear. I bit harshly at the side of my cheek, and lifted my bottom of the bed. I looked away as he slid them down my legs, because I was too embarrassed to look at him. I heard a sharp intake of breath, but didn't know which one of us it came from.

"Bella, can you...erm,...open your..." he stuttered.

I closed my eyes tightly and let my knees fall apart on to the bed. I heard him move and the mattress dipped, before I felt heat between my thighs.

OhmyGodohmyGodohmyGodohmyGod!

He was between my legs! My naked legs, and my naked...*parts!*

I began panting in anxiety, and tried to think of little pink bunnies or bright beautiful rainbows. The problem was everything left my head in a whoosh, as Edward placed his lips to my heated bits.

I made a whimpering, giggling sound, and tried to squeeze my legs together, but his hands stopped the movement. I felt him breath across my folds, before he kissed them again.

Oh God, this was mortifying, but so good.

My hands moved to his hair, as his tongue traced my entrance. I gripped his locks harshly.

"Ouch! Bella!"

He looked up at me, and I almost fainted. Edward was between my legs, his lips slick from me. His glasses had steamed up again, but he removed them completely before rubbing his scalp.

"Sorry."

He went to lower his head again, this time using his fingers to hold my folds slightly apart. My whole body went into spasm when the tip of his tongue touched me. It was too much. I couldn't have him do that. Not yet.

"Edward. I can't. I'm sorry," I whispered, pushing myself up the bed, and away from his waiting lips.

He looked crestfallen, but nodded. I felt guilty. He'd wanted to try this for me, and I'd rejected him. It was just too much, too soon. I needed to feel more comfortable around him before I would feel OK with that kind of intimacy.

"I'm sorry," I repeated.

He shifted to lie next to me, but shook his head. His eyes were so much more striking without the glasses, but I was already missing them.

"I thought it might be too soon." He sighed, before mumbling about trying something else.

I frowned, perplexed by what he was referring to. That was until his hand started ghosting up my thigh.

I gulped.

I looked at him through hooded eyes, to see him staring at me, but not at my face. Edward was watching his hand as it got closer to my bits. I held my breath, waiting for them to connect, but gasped loudly when they did. His fingertips dipped into my wetness, and I mewled.

What the hell, Bella? Mewling?

I could hear his heavy breathing in my ear, and I had to close my eyes to shut out the embarrassment of his fingers delving into me. My whole body felt like flames were licking slowly against it; a soft, delicious torture, and it was like nothing I'd felt with Jake.

Is this what I'd been missing all this time?

Edward grunted into my ear, making my stomach swirl. It would appear I liked his grunts rather a lot, too. I noticed the more he moved his fingers, the more I pushed my hips towards them. It was startling how amazing those digits were making me feel. Each time they passed over the most sensitive part my eyes rolled backwards, and I purred in pleasure. His lips began to kiss a soft trail down my neck, to my shoulder, and between his fingers and his mouth, I was lost.

This was beyond what I could have expected. We were a couple of fumbling nerds, but we were fitting together perfectly. He began moving his fingers faster, and his breath was becoming quicker.

"Bella," he sighed into my ear, making me shiver.

His fingers pressed against my swollen clit, and I whimpered loudly. Suddenly little sparks began to shoot across my abdomen, making it twitch. My toes curled, as my eyes rolled back and my panting increased. I could hear myself moaning, as I clamped my thighs around Edward's hand, trying to prolong this amazing feeling.

It was sheer bliss and all thanks to Edward.

Edward had given me my first ever orgasm.

I tried to calm down, and focus on my breathing, but Edward was still moving his finger, and blowing softly into my ear. It was making me twitch, and eventually I pulled away, turning my back to him.

How could I look at him now?

What was I supposed to say to him after he'd done *that*?

His hand touched my shoulder warily.

"Bella, are you OK? Did I hurt you?"

I snorted loudly, but kept my back to him. My cheeks were burning with mortification. I'd moaned, purred and mewled for him. Alice would crack up laughing if she ever found out.

"You didn't hurt me, Edward. You were my first," I muttered.

The room grew deathly silent again, and I was wondering how quickly I could get off the bed and put my clothes back on, when Edward wrapped his arm around my waist and rested his chin on my shoulder.

"I made you orgasm?" he questioned softly, but I could hear a tiny bit of pride in his tone.

I couldn't help the smile that began to grow across my face. He was pleased he'd been my first and made me feel like never before. I had to admit, even though I knew very little about him, I was pleased it had been him. He'd been so caring and gentle, how could he think he'd hurt me?

"Yes."

"Wow! I have to say, you looked beautiful."

I felt his arms tighten around me, shortly before the alarm on my cell phone went off.

"Hmm, what's that?" Edward asked.

I slipped from the bed, keeping my back to him. I tugged my sweater down over my bottom and went to fetch my trousers. I wanted to find my underwear, but that would mean looking in the direction of the bed, and I couldn't meet his gaze. I would have to sacrifice them, and go without.

"My alarm. I set it so that we wouldn't stay here too long. I didn't want us continually trying to do something that wasn't working. I was being practical about it."

He didn't respond, so I put my trousers on in silence and retrieved my satchel. It was only when I pulled it across my shoulder that I realized we needed to pick the next card. It meant I would need to look at him. Shame burned at my skin, as I walked over and pulled the cards out.

"Pick one," I stated, my voice wobbling with nerves.

Edward took the pack and flicked through them quickly, before handing one to me and smiling.

I groaned.

"I can't..."

"Yes, you can. We're both in the game and you said I got to pick the card. Now where?"

"Here!" I huffed, before snatching the rest of the pack from him, and slipping on my heels. I wobbled to the door. My legs felt like jelly, and if I was honest, all I wanted to do was curl up on that bed with Edward and sleep. That was why I had set the alarm. I knew I would start to feel close to him, how could I not considering how intimate we were being?

I just knew I wasn't good at intimate, and I would try my best to keep emotions out of this game.

I just hoped Edward could.

End Notes:
MUAH xx

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Chapter 5: Smooth Talking by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Love to my beta team - Maylin & Twirlgrrl. I have no idea how you keep up with me, but I adore you both for it.

Special thanks to elusivetwilight who helped with my freakout!

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

"Why did I have to bring my pajamas, Edward?" I queried, as I sat on the hotel bed.

This was the third time we'd met, and I'd been twice as nervous as any of the other occasions. We'd continued to email and had even started the odd conversation by phone, but I knew my anxiety was all due to the card that Edward had chosen. I didn't think I could do what he was asking. I'd researched it, but even looking at the images on the website, or reading about how to do it correctly, made me blush.

I tried to call him about it, but I'd always disconnected it before it rang. How could I tell him that after what he'd done for me? I felt selfish. He'd entered into this ridiculous game and what did he get out of it? Up until today it had been very little, but I didn't know if I could actually replicate the card.

I studied him as he lay across the bed and propped his head up in his hand. His glasses had begun to slip, and I pushed them back up his nose for him. He grinned at me, scrunching up his nose a little.

"I thought, after last time, that we'd be more comfortable if we brought our nightwear. I kinda noticed you didn't like being naked around me."

He dipped his head, looking at the comforter. Would we ever feel OK in each other's presence? We talked about sex when we knew nothing about each other, and then days later would do those very things we'd discussed. We were awkward, nervous and completely inept when we'd been in other relationships, but when his lips met mine, or our bodies connected, we seemed to work. I couldn't explain the freedom I felt when he'd touched me intimately last week, in this very room.

"D-Do you want to stop this? I'm sorry," I whispered.

Edward pulled on my arm, making it buckle and ensuring I lay down next to him.

"I don't want to stop this, but it's your call; it's your game."

I turned on my side, mumbling that I wanted to continue, though I was still so uncertain as to whether I could perform what he was expecting. I chewed my lip anxiously, and finally met his gaze.

Edwards trembling fingers reached out to pull my lip from its confines, but to my astonishment, they didn't leave my face. He cupped my chin lightly with a cocked finger.

"I've been thinking this week," he breathed. "There's something I'd like to try. Erm, before the other thing. Actually, it's sort of linked to that, but not in the usual way..."

I giggled lightly at him, eliciting that cute little smirk he did.

"Rambling?" he questioned.

I nodded, and tried to hold back another laugh. We just didn't get any better.

"I don't really know how to say this, because I've never had to, so bear with me?"

His hand quivered as it moved to rest on the bed between us, and when he spoke it was timid and soft.

"What do you call your *parts*?"

"Huh?"

"Erm, y-your bits? You know, the *female* part of you?"

"Holy Christ! You want me to tell you what I call my vagina?" I yelled in shock.

Edward winced, though it had nothing to do with the volume of my voice. He couldn't be serious, could he? He actually wanted me to say out loud what I called it?

He was back to staring at the comforter, his cheeks tinged pink with embarrassment.

"I was listening to Jasper talk to some girl on the phone, and it made me think. He was on loudspeaker and wasn't ashamed of his behavior. He was very crude, but the girl lapped it up, saying things just as uncouth. It made me wonder whether talking like that would maybe...erm...well, you know, with you."

"With me? Whether saying dirty things would make me more *ready* for you? I don't know, Edward, if the things Jasper was saying were crude, then I can't see why I would like them."

He cleared his throat and moved closer to me. I could feel the heat pouring off him, and smell his spicy cologne. I pushed my thighs together. Clearly my body was remembering what Edward could do to it; what he'd achieved with his fingers last week. I thought over what he was asking. What did Alice call a penis? A dick? Saying that would be shameful, but her only other term was cock, and I could never say that. The ground would need to swallow me whole immediately after.

"Can I try it? If you don't like it, I'll stop, OK?"

I frowned, and nodded, bracing myself for the words that were about to leave his lips.

"Can I verbalize what my hands are doing to you, Bella? Would that be a good way to start?"

We were so full of questions. It only further underlined how little we knew about one another.

"W-Would you kiss me first?" I asked tentatively.

I knew if we could get in the mood, his words would not smart as much. I could feel his breath float across my face, as he brought his lips to mine. Our kisses were never like the ones I'd seen on TV. They were always slow and chaste, but it still made my legs a little wobbly.

I brought my hand to his shoulder and held his t-shirt tightly. Edward slowly pulled his lips from mine, but kissed a small path across my chin to my ear.

"Bella," he whispered. "Do you want me to play with your melons?"

I froze. What the hell was he on about? I began giggling, when I realized he meant my breasts. The giggles swiftly morphed into snorting, and then huge great belly laughs. I rolled on my back, clutching at my stomach, as I tried to contain my amusement.

"What?" he moaned completely confused.

"Melons?" I gasped, trying to calm myself. "Edward, where the hell did you learn such a thing? I don't really think Jasper would use that term. Especially if he's such a hit with women."

He pushed at his glasses as he sat up, and ran his fingers through his hair. I caught a glimpse of his face; he looked upset by my hilarity. I moved myself to a sitting position and touched his shoulder.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be so boisterous about it, but melons? Really?"

He shook his head and groaned.

"Urban dictionary. I should know better. This is going from bad to worse today, isn't it?"

I rubbed his back, amazed at how tactile I was around him. I never second guessed myself, I just touched him. It felt natural. I'd upset him, when all he was doing was trying to make me happy. He was doing all this for me, and I needed to be a little more gracious. I was sure there were many things about me that he wanted to laugh at, my childish, lamb decorated, pajamas for one, but he was too much of a gentleman to do it.

"I'm sorry. Really I am."

He pursed his lips and nodded. I'd really messed this one up. There was only one way I knew I could resolve it, and that was to try to talk dirty to him. That way he would know I wasn't treating this as a joke. I scooted closer and raised my mouth close to his ear. Blushing horrendously, I whispered, "Erm...Edward, would...you l-like me to touch your p-penis?"

He inhaled sharply, as his gazed met mine.

"Lie down. I have an idea. Turn away from me," he muttered.

I did as he asked and could feel him lie behind me. His lips were near my neck and his hand was resting on my side. I swallowed down the anxiety I felt and tried to relax, remembering just how good that first orgasm had felt as it seared through my system. His breath was raggedly caressing my shoulders, as his fingers dipped under my tank top.

"Don't look at me, and it won't be as awkward, I think. I'm going to try and tell you what I'm doing, maybe that will help us."

I hummed, but was too focused on his fingers tickling their way closer to the curve of my breast.

"I want to feel the warmth of your skin, Bella. It's so soft and smooth, like beautiful porcelain. My hands are itching to...to cup your...breasts."

I gave a tiny moan. The way the word breasts slipped from his lips was sheer torture. It sounded like a tease, but his shaking hand slowly took the weight of my small breast in his palm. My breathing seemed to increase, my chest rising and falling faster than before. Edward's was the same, as it fanned across my skin.

"Amazing. I'm going to skim my finger across your..." he swallowed audibly. "...your nipple."

My abdomen clenched at his words. If this was dirty talking, then I was all for it. Just the words were making me squeeze my thighs and long for more. However, when his thumb flicked my taut peak, I whimpered.

What the hell was that all about?

Edward hummed against my neck, and kissed is softly.

"Can I do it again?" he questioned.

I breathed 'yes', and writhed a little when he did. My buttocks rubbed against his front, and that was when I felt the evidence of what his words were doing to him. Edward was as into this as I was. Knowing how affected he was made me a little bolder, and I tilted my head slightly, baring my neck to him, as I said quietly, "Do it again...please?"

His chest vibrated with what I could only assume was a growl, as his thumb teased my nipple. I was panting now, maybe too much for someone who was only being felt up, but it was so good. He interrupted my haze when he moaned, "Bella, could you, oh Christ, could you touch me?"

Heat rose from my chest to my face, but that wasn't what was happening elsewhere. My pajama bottoms seemed very moist. I bit my lip and closed my eyes tightly, as I moved my hand behind me. I knew it was trembling as it came into contact with his sweat pants. Could I do this? Could I touch him, even if it was through his clothes? I gritted my teeth and reached out, yelping and shrinking back a little when my fingers met his hardness.

"Sorry," I whined.

Edward kissed my cheek and panted, "Try again."

I took a deep breath, as his hand moved to the other breast. My nipple was already hard from the attention he'd bestowed on the first one, so when he flicked it my hand jerked. It hit his hardness, making him hiss.

Wow, I made a man hiss!

Encouraged by his excitement, I pushed against his erection, and was rewarded by a gasp of pleasure. I was getting good at this.

"I'm going to move my hand, Bella. I'm moving it further down. Do you understand?"

I agreed and shook a little when he trailed his palm down across my stomach, and underneath my pants. I stiffened when the tips of his fingers teased at my opening. Edward groaned loudly, and it was only then that I noticed I was gripping his erection firmly.

I whimpered, lying stock still. I didn't know whether to let go or stay as I was. From the noises coming from his mouth he certainly wanted me to continue, but could I be that brazen?

"Bella, that feels... Jesus, that's so good," Edward gasped.

His finger began to run up and down my opening. He wanted entrance, and I was shocked to find that I wanted to let him. I moved my legs slightly, silently telling him I was alright with it. His fingers slipped in with ease, as mine tighten around his erection. This was the most amazing experience, and I almost shot of the bed when he touched my throbbing button.

My fist pulled at his hardness and I felt his sharp intake of breath, before he ground out.

"Let go of me. I won't hold...if you keep...shit!"

I was startled by his cussing. I'd never heard him say such a thing, but it had the opposite effect to what I would have imagined. I moaned at him, and pushed my hips closer to his hand.

"Say it again," I gasped out, rocking my hips to ease the ache.

"Huh?" Edward groaned, confused, but still completely lost in the same lust filled haze as me.

"Curse!"

He pulled at my ass roughly, bringing it closer to his hardness. What was happening to us? All I could think of was my need to feel that same intensity; the one I felt at Edward's hand last week. He was pushing himself against me, and swirling his fingers against my most sensitive spot. Little noises were escaping my lips, and all I could decipher from Edward were groans and pants, that was until his mouth moved to my ear and he uttered, "Fuck, Bella."

I came.

Blistering lights of red blinded my eyes, as my entire body stiffened. My toes curled, my breathing all but stopped, as that amazing feeling consumed me. I gasped his name, as his fingers continued their slow delicious torture. However, as soon as I began to come down from my high, I became incredibly ticklish and burst into fits of laughter, pulling myself away from him. The mattress bounced, as he flipped onto his back, and cleared his throat.

It took me a couple of minutes to stop laughing, but when I calmed down, I lay nervously wondering what the hell to do now. This was the second time he'd made me orgasm, and the second time he'd gotten nothing from it.

I turned to face him, and was saddened to see him covering his face with his hands. My stomach twisted. He was going to end this, because I was such a selfish failure. We hadn't even tried the card.

"Edward."

He didn't reply, nor did he remove his hands. I studied his body while he wasn't looking at me. His chest was still rising and falling quickly, and as my eyes travelled further down I was greeted with the evidence of his arousal. It was still covered by his sweats, but very prominent. My hand darted out before I consciously thought of it. I placed my palm flat on his belly, and pushed my fingers under the elastic of the sweats, my heart thundering against my chest.

"Bella." Edward croaked out.

I ignored him, and continued to inch my hand towards him. He moved his own hand from his face, and wrapped his fingers around my wrist, trying to stop me.

"You don't have to..."

I gazed at his pained face, whispering that I wanted to. It was only then that he loosened his hold on me, allowing me to finish what I had started. I just didn't have a clue what the hell I was supposed to do. Did I just put my mouth right on it, or would he need me to touch him first? I stared at him, biting at my lip, wanting him to understand my uncertainty. He saved me from having to verbalize it by lifting his bottom from the bed, and removing his sweats. He linked his fingers through mine and brought our shaking hands to his hardness. I couldn't look at it, but couldn't look at his face either. I was focusing on his navel, as he moved our hands up and down his smooth but firm length. Eventually curiosity won out, and I peered through my hair at what we were doing.

It was embarrassing, but incredibly erotic. I couldn't tear my eyes from it. Our fingers linked together, as Edward moved them up and down his shaft. He was breathing heavily, and little moans were bursting from his lips. I had the strange urge to kiss him, but I wouldn't be able to reach. I whimpered, as he asked huskily, "Are you watching?"

I'd never heard his voice in such a seductive tone. It made my abdomen swirl and tingle with an odd need. All I could do was nod, my eyes still stuck to the image before me. He pumped faster, holding us tighter to him as he did. My chest began to grow tight, anxious for what was about to happen. Would it just spurt everywhere? Jacob had always gone to the bathroom to do that sort of thing. I'd never actually seen it happen.

I was completely fascinated now though, but the more I looked, and the faster he pumped, the more I began to wheeze. I needed my inhaler, but I'd already messed up with him. I felt so guilty. I let Edward take the lead and concentrated on my breathing, trying to stay calm.

Seconds later, I felt him twitch and growl, as he came. The creamy fluid oozed from the tip of his erection and coated our hands.

"Ergh!" I moaned, pulling my hand away and climbing off the bed.

I hunted around for a towel, and wiped my hand. I could hear Edward shuffling on the bed, as I delved for my inhaler in my bag and took two huge puffs. It was only when I began to calm down that guilt set in heavy. I was such a loser when it came to sex. I slumped to the floor, holding my head in my hands. I wanted to cry at my ineptitude. Edward would be the second person I'd tried this with, and although I wasn't technically a virgin, I wasn't far from it. Jake had barely entered me before I'd started laughing and pushed him off me, and now I was complaining about a bit of fluid on my hand. What the hell was wrong with me?

I felt the heat of his body, before I acknowledged his presence next to me. He sat on the floor, and wrapped his hand around my body, pulling me close. As my head hit his chest, the tears began to fall. I sobbed like a baby, blubbing that I was useless and apologizing a million times to him. He tried to soothe me, but I couldn't really hear him over my wailing.

I have no real idea how long we sat there, hugging each other tightly while my tears subsided. It was the closest I'd ever felt to another person, excluding Alice. Edward knew very little about me, and yet he was comforting me, and holding me while I sobbed about not being about to reproduce the card he'd picked.

I sniffed loudly, and wiped my nose across his chest. He snorted.

"Thanks."

It only made me want to cry more. I looked up at him, a worried frown peeking over the top of his glasses, and mumbled about the card.

"Ignore it. We'll put it back in the pack, and you can try it again another time. That's if you want to still do this?" he asked cautiously.

"Yes! I do!" I all but shouted, clutching at his chest.

It was in that moment that I realized just how much I do want to do this. I'd been holding a piece of myself back, scared of what Edward would think if I was too forward, or if I asked questions. However, I now understood how stupid that was. He was discovering things as much as I was. This was as difficult for him as it was for me. If we were going to really do this, then we needed to stop being so coy and just go for it, embarrassment be damned. We would blush together.

I squealed when he stood and lifted me with him. I didn't have a chance to complain before he toppled us back onto the bed, and took up our standard position: spooning. I could admit to myself that I was beginning to enjoy this part of us. I just wasn't quite ready to tell Edward yet.

"Do you feel better?"

"I'm sor..."

"Can we both stop apologizing? We can both admit this is rather uncomfortable for us, so how about we just draw a line with the apologies?"

I closed my eyes, and allowed myself to relax into his embrace. He smelled so good and felt so nice.

I whispered 'yes', and closed my eyes.

"At the risk of upsetting you, c-can I say a couple of things?"

I braced myself, ready for him to berate me over the way I responded to his orgasm.

"Erm...I've been checked out. Like we discussed. I thought you'd want to know I'm clear, but I guess that's no surprise," he added with disdain.

I moved my arm behind me and placed my hand on his rough cheek, before saying softly, "Me too."

Edward tilted his face and kissed the center of my palm. It was the sweetest thing anyone had done for me. I had to remind myself that this was a game. Once the fifty-two cards were done we would go our separate ways, both more experienced and ready for a real relationship. The thought saddened me, but I shook it off. I would try my hardest to enjoy this, and to stop holding back.

"Good. Now can I tell you that was unbelievable?"

"You're joking, right? Edward, I jumped off the bed! I couldn't do the card. I'm s..."

He growled, and holy hell, it made my lady bits twitch. That was twice he'd made that sound and it had driven me to distraction both times.

"Forget the card. Listen to me. It was amazing."

The reverence in his voice told me all I needed to know. Edward wasn't lying. He meant it, and I was completely stunned by it. I was lost for words. I didn't know what to do to move on. If I moved from the bed it would seem like another rejection, and to be honest, I was enjoying this too much to move. In the end Edward spoke and altered the conversation entirely.

"I have a party to go to on Saturday. I'd really like you to be my date. We could come back here afterwards and pick a card. I know that would mean two cards next week, but...well...damn! I'm useless at this!"

My stomach fluttered with joy that he wanted to take me out, but at the same time, it churned with anxiety. I was no good on a date. Did he not see how much of a bad idea this was? I opened my mouth, but closed it as soon as the next word left his lips.

"Please?"

The pain in his voice told me how much he wanted this, and for some unknown reason I couldn't deny him.

"Yes, I'll go with you."

He kissed my palm again, and for the next thirty minutes we lay in silence, both lost in a world of uncertainty. My alarm burst our bubble. I thought I heard him curse again, but it was so quiet I wasn't sure. I cleaned up and dressed in the bathroom, before walking back into the room. It was the first time our eyes had met after my sobbing fest. I frowned at him, nibbling on my lip, as I toyed with the strap of my satchel.

"Bella, can I kiss you goodbye?"

I bit back a grin and nodded. We walked towards each other, and I stood on tip toes as our lips met. His hand held my hip, and I rested my palm flat on his chest. It was quick, but it had the usual effect on my legs.

He stopped me as I stepped towards the door, placing a hand on my elbow.

"I'll email you the information about the party. I'm willing to pay for your dress; after all you're doing it for me."

I was slightly hurt by the remark. Did he think because I waited tables that I couldn't afford a decent outfit to the party? I brushed it off. Now wasn't really the time to discuss it. I wanted to go home, get into my bed and cry at my stupidity.

"What makes you think I'll be wearing a dress?" I asked shyly.

He shook his head and stuttered that he didn't; that it was just a turn of phrase. I kissed him on the cheek, pushing at his glasses, before leaving him flustered and half naked in the hotel room.

It was only when I was driving home that I realized two things. Firstly, I needed help with choosing something to wear for our date. That would mean I'd have to tell Alice about Edward. I groaned, but the second one was even worse.

I'd left my inhaler in the hotel room.

I would have to collect it from Edward, or he would have to meet me to return it. That meant we would have to see each other before Saturday.

End Notes:
<p>OH NO! A date?!?</p> <p>How much fun is that <i>going</i> to be?</p>

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Chapter 6: Unexpected Fumblings by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Thank you to everyone reading, reviewing and recci-ing this. I heart you all.

Love to my amazing beta Maylin, who has been working overtime for me lately. I loves ya!

Hugs & gropes to my prereader Elusivekoolaid.

BPOV

"Bella, that's too prim for a party. You should really go with the blue one," Alice complained.

"The blue one is more like a belt, than a dress. I won't bare my flesh to the world."

"Only to perfect strangers," she snorted.

I flushed.

Telling Alice about Edward had been one of the most mortifying moments of my life. She hadn't made it any easier by laughing continuously throughout my explanation. It had taken her at least an hour to calm down and speak to me about him, but even then the smallest thing would set her off. I'd recounted everything that had happened between us, even the embarrassing vase smashing and the premature dry hump problem. Obviously, our complete inability to actually have sex cracked her up even more. I knew she didn't mean it viciously, but Alice had never been one to hide her feelings, especially not from me.

When she'd finally calmed down, and was only snorting at my story, she'd actually tried to help. She'd explained a few things to me, but not in her usual crude way. The cards we'd tried had been, so far, a major failure, but Alice was convinced that was because they were far too intimate for me and Edward. She thought something like oral sex really needed to be left until we were comfortable in each other's company. When she put it like that, I knew she was right, because I'd started to clam up the moment Edward put his head between my legs. It had felt awkward and exactly as Alice said, *intimate*.

Alice wanted to know all about him, but that's where I'd grown silent. There was very little I really knew about him, outside of that hotel room. I didn't even know what he did for a living, but vaguely remember him referring to it at one point. She'd pointed out that was another little blip in our relationship. According to Alice, women couldn't have sex without a connection to the other person. I was sure she was wrong, after all I'd seen the men she brought home, and it was never usually the same one more than twice. Her retort was simple; there'd been a connection when she was taking their photo. I didn't buy it for a second, but I never argued with her. I didn't like losing.

I'd told her what little I knew about him, eliciting more giggles from her. Apparently, it was just my luck to get someone as inexperienced as me. I had to agree; only I could meet someone as inept through an internet advert.

The sarcasm and jokes had continued throughout the week, she'd even threatened to tell Rose if I didn't let her come shopping for an outfit with me. That wasn't much of a hardship really. I needed the help. I wanted to look my best for him, because this would be the first time we'd been out in public together. That didn't make us a couple. Far from it. I just wanted to look good for him, and I wouldn't want him to be ashamed of me.

"Earth to Bella!" Alice shouted, waving her gloved hand in front of my face.

I grimaced at her, because by the tell tale smile on my lips, Alice knew exactly what I was thinking about.

"We should get you some really sexy lingerie to go under that," she wiggled her perfectly plucked brows, "you never know what could happen afterwards."

"Alice, I told you we were going to the hotel afterwards, but we haven't picked a card. At least I think we are. I've tried to call him, but some guy said he was in the shower and he'd pass on the message. I haven't heard from him, other than the email this morning asking if we were still on for tonight. He's picking me up and told me when to be ready."

"You lie!" she accused. "I saw that delivery."

I rolled my eyes at her. Two days after my last meeting with Edward, a small package was delivered to our apartment. Alice thought it was some token of love from Edward, and I don't know why, but I hadn't corrected her. It had been my inhaler, along with a short note. It hadn't been romantic, or a token of any kind. It was practical and cold. It hurt.

"I'm not lying, Alice, and I don't need to get sexy undies."

I placed the dress back onto the hanger and collected my purse. I liked the dress. It was pretty and it could definitely be worn on another occasion, therefore it was the practical choice. Alice had freaked out over an odd looking dress at the front of the store. I thought it looked more like a t-shirt that had been splattered in paint, but she didn't appreciate my input anymore than I appreciated hers. She'd also bought some red shoes with the strangest heels I'd ever seen.

When I'd asked her why she was buying them, she shrugged and replied, "You never know what's around the corner."

I shook my head and bought the dress, along with some simple black shoes. I knew exactly what was around the corner.

Singledom, along with four cats. I'd seen it in my dreams.

We'd debated where to go for lunch, and as usual, Alice won. I would have been more than happy with a burger, but she wanted 'real food'. I have no idea what she meant, but always gave in, because she was too strong willed to argue with.

We rounded the corner, ready to enter the restaurant, when I walked straight into someone. Hands clamped around my biceps and my whole body came alive. I noticed my palm flat

against the man's chest, and I could feel the beating of his heart. His scent assaulted me. I recognized it instantly, and inhaled deeply, filling my lungs with the spicy tang, before gulping as I looked up.

"Bella?"

"Hi," I mumbled.

My cheeks began to heat, and I wondered if I could get passed him without introducing him to Alice. I had no such luck. Alice shouldered me out of the way and held her hand out towards Edward. I watched him push at his glasses, as his gaze darted around the street.

"I'm Alice," she sang, as if that explained everything.

He looked cautiously at me, and finally took her hand in his.

"Erm, Edward."

"Holy fuck, *you're* Edward? *The* Edward? Bella, it's your Edward!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"I know who he is, Alice," I muttered wanting the ground to swallow me whole.

She shook his hand, smiling at him warmly.

"I'm Bella's friend and roommate. I'm sure she's told you a lot about me."

"Well...actually, we...No, no she hasn't." Edward mumbled.

He looked at me, hoping for assistance, but what did he expect me to do? It was Alice! She was a law unto herself, and even if I tried leaving, she would simply stay and continue to embarrass me.

"Well, we're just going to have lunch. Would you like to join us, and then I'll be able to find out so much more about the man that's playing a sordid little sex game with my best friend."

I let out a strangled cry, and I heard Edwards's sharp intake of breath.

"What the fuck, Alice?"

The little witch smirked at me. She knew exactly what she was doing by the bluntness of her words. Edward was shuffling uncomfortably, and staring at the sidewalk, blushing slightly. I'd be lucky if he ever spoke to me again, let alone picked another card.

"So you guys are *ashamed* of this odd little tryst you've got going? Interesting..."

"For Christ's sake Alice. Shut. Up."

"Hmm, well...I-I have to be going. I have an appointment to get to." Edward stuttered, never meeting my gaze.

I could've strangled her.

"Oh!" she said genuinely startled that he didn't want to join us. Sometimes I really did wonder if she was the same species as everyone else. She lived in her own bubble. "Well, we're going to finish shopping for Bella's outfit. She wouldn't want to disappoint you, would you Bella?"

All I could do was shake my head. I'd never been so mortified in public before. I reasoned that nobody was really paying attention, so it didn't matter. Edward was.

"You bought something new to wear?" he muttered to me, trying his best to ignore Alice.

I chewed my lip and nodded, watching a frown of annoyance appear on his face.

"I told you I'd pay for it, Bella."

"Oh, don't worry; it's not like it's going to knock your socks off or anything. It's very...how shall I put it? Practical." Alice interrupted.

I groaned and blushed furiously. If I strangled her here would Edward post my bail?

"I don't want you spending money when you don't need to," he hissed.

I cringed back from his annoyance, and glare at him through the top of my lashes.

"I'm not going to be a kept woman, Edward. I buy my own clothes."

Alice gasped at my tone. I'd only ever used it on her, and that was only when I was exceptionally pissed off. Edward shrunk back, clearing his throat, and combing his fingers through his hair.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

My hand instantly shot out, placing my palm flat against his chest. I tilted my head so I could look into his green eyes, and stated, "We had the clothing discussion, that's why I'm annoyed. Can we drop it? I've bought the dress. I want to go to the party with you."

Edward pursed his lips, and covered my hand in his, before saying a quiet, "Fine."

Alice was staring at us, wide eyed, and mouth open. We both turned to her, and asked "What?"

She sniggered and wafted the comment away.

"Absolutely nothing. You two just continue as you were."

"If you don't mind me saying, your friend is a little odd." Edward whispered close to my ear.

My stomach clenched, and I had no idea why. I could feel his breath tickling at my hair, making me shiver. What the hell was happening?

I fumbled for something to say, but could do no more than nod at him in agreement. All the while I was conscious of Alice standing next to us, waiting. Watching.

It was only then I realized my hand was still under his, against his chest. I tried snatching it away, but he held it firmly as his eyes bore into mine.

"So..." Alice drawled. "Who's the party for Edward?"

I felt his fingers squeeze my hand a little as he turned to look at Alice.

"My best friend, Emmett. He's turning thirty, so my brother and I are throwing him a surprise party. D-D-Do you want to come?"

I cringed internally, knowing she would say 'yes' but hoping she would tell him 'no'. Having her study every move we made was not my idea of fun. It was going to be strange enough as it was.

"Oh, yes!" she said excitedly, clapping her hands and bouncing on her tip toes. "I could take pictures. Did Bella tell you I'm a photographer?"

"Alice!" I hissed. "We don't exactly talk about you."

She ignored me, and continued to talk to Edward.

"Would your friend like some really good shots of the party? I know I've never met him, but that could be my gift. I can't go empty handed, can I?"

Edward stuttered, trying to work out what the hell to say to her. In the end he nodded, and shocked the hell out of me by raising my hand to his lips and quickly kissing my knuckles.

"I have to go. Sorry."

And before my brain would start to work again he'd gone, completely lost in the crowd of people.

I complained to her through lunch and all the way home. She didn't care. She'd gotten an invite to a party where she could assess me and Edward like some twisted school project, and she got to wear her paint splatter dress.

Fuck my life.

// T \

"I told you that dress was too practical." Alice bitched as we walked towards the front door.

I assumed it was Edwards's apartment, but he hadn't confirmed it. He'd wanted to collect us, but I'd steadfastly refused. He had a party to sort out, and to be honest I wanted to keep him and Alice separate as long as possible. I could tell she scared him.

I wanted to take a few moments to calm myself, but Alice knocked loudly on the front door taking the choice out of my hands. Footsteps came from inside, before a lock turned and the door opened wide. A blonde with shaggy hair answered. His smile was huge, showing off perfect white teeth. He wore a crumpled black shirt, buttoned loosely and black pinstriped trousers. His gaze darted from me to Alice, and never left her.

"Well, hello," he stated, cocking an eyebrow and reminding me of Edward.

I held my hand out to him, and he shook it absently, still staring at Alice.

"You must be Jasper. I'm Bella..."

"His little partner in crime? Yes, he's told me."

I cringed, but he still wasn't paying any attention to me. Blue eyes were locked with blue eyes cocooned in a bubble of their own. I sidestepped around them and into the apartment, looking around for Edward.

I gasped at what greeted me. The apartment was amazing; a huge open space, with a large wall of glass at the far end. The walls were muted shades with one painted a solid dark red. It only enhanced the wooden floors.

There were a few people scattered around, getting everything organized. Soft music flowed around the room, and I could hear clinking glasses from my right. I followed the sound to a small kitchen just off the main living space. Edward was setting out wine and what appeared to be punch. For the second time in minutes I inhaled sharply. He was wearing a white dress shirt, but his sleeves had been rolled up, and the top three buttons left undone, baring the dip at the base of his throat. Dark charcoal trousers adorned his legs, and his whole appearance was having an odd effect on me.

It only grew worse when he looked up. He'd changed his glasses. Instead of the black rimmed ones I was used to, these were grey; matching his pants, and were much more angular than the previous ones. I liked them. A lot.

Edward gazed from where he was slicing some fruit, and smiled immediately.

"Hey," he stated, wiping his hands on a towel and coming around the counter towards me.

"Hi."

I chewed the side of my lip and fumbled with my purse, but was completely taken aback when he swamped me in his embrace. His arms wrapped tightly around me and he buried his face in the crook of my neck.

"It's so good to see you. I'm glad you decided to come, Bella."

His words tickled at my skin, sending little sparks to my nipples and other really odd places.

What the hell?

His sudden confidence shocked me. Edward wasn't this easy around me, even after the things we'd done. In fact, only hours before, he'd been embarrassed and had stuttered when talking to me. I was confused by the change.

"Thanks," I stated, pulling away slightly. "Jasper let us in."

He rolled his eyes playfully, making me frown in puzzlement.

"So you met him then? Where is he?"

I placed my purse on the counter and sat on the tall stool next to it, gesturing for Edward to continue with what he was doing. He didn't, though. He stood in front of me and placed his hands on my hips, gazing down at me with twinkling green eyes.

"H-He erm...seems to be occupied with Alice."

"I see," he replied softly, before skimming the back of his knuckles down my cheek.

I swallowed a lump that had begun to form in my throat. This was a completely different side to him. More confident and affectionate, and my body was responding to it. I could feel my skin prickling for him to touch me, remembering what he could do to me; how he could make me lose control.

I held my breath as he lowered his head and skimmed his lips lightly across mine.

"We never picked a card," he mumbled against my needy lips.

I hummed in agreement, not trusting myself to say anything further.

"I think we should go to my room later and rectify that error."

I gulped. What the hell was wrong with him?

I heard Jasper and Alice enter the room. She was giggling loudly but stopped when she saw us.

"Can you two pull yourselves away from one another to finish getting things set up?" Jasper shouted.

Edward righted himself, and seemed to wobble a little, as if suddenly light headed. Jasper threw his head back and laughed loudly.

"You're gonna need to watch him, Bells. He's been on the punch already."

"Edward?"

He rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, blushing.

"Only a couple. Dutch courage?"

I couldn't blame him. I'd thought about it, but I'd known walking in these shoes would be difficult. However I was here now, and Edward certainly seemed all the better for it.

"I'll take one," I said firmly.

Alice and Jasper snorted, but were interrupted in their hilarity by a knock on the door. Bizarrely enough they both went to answer it, but my mind was too consumed with Edward to wonder what the hell was going on with them.

"I don't even know what Jasper's put in it."

"Maybe that's best?"

He smirked the sexy little grin he didn't do as often as I'd like, before pulling me around the counter and into the kitchen.

"Yeah, knowing Jasper it could be anything. Are you sure you want to try it?"

I nodded and he poured a glass, handing it to me. I noticed his hands weren't shaking. If alcohol made Edward calmer then I was all for trying it.

We stayed in the small kitchen, as more people began to file into the apartment. The music got louder and the punchbowl got shallower. It was amazing how much talking you could do when there wasn't a sex card hanging over your head. Edward was actually a funny guy, and that smirk was out in full force tonight.

He winked at me twice!

I almost fell off my stool.

He'd introduced me to his friend, Emmett. He was a huge bear of a guy, with the cutest little dimples I'd ever seen. He didn't talk for long. Apparently, he was more concerned with seeing what the party had to offer. I assumed he meant women, so didn't ask anything further. Edward apologized for his crassness, but I found him rather endearing.

Alice had come to check on me. At least I thought it was Alice, because she was chewing the face of Edward's brother, and I couldn't make out a word she was saying. It actually made me feel somewhat nauseous. Edward had blushed, and I knew he was about to say sorry again. I shook my head at him. I was having a great time, even though we hadn't even ventured out of the kitchen.

"Will you show me around?" I asked, trying to stand up and realizing I may have had one too many.

"Am I going to have to hold you up?"

I giggle snorted, and slapped my hand across my mouth to stop it. I opted to simply nod at him. The movements of my head, made me wobble, and I grabbed onto his forearm for support. A charge shot up my arm, so intense I almost removed it. This night had to be our strangest so far. Whatever Jasper had put in that punch was certainly having an impact. Edward was charming, if a little blurry, and I hadn't been embarrassed about meeting his gaze at all.

It was strange, because I knew there was a party going on in the next room, but it simply didn't exist to me. I was enjoying the freedom of being around Edward without worrying about other things. I just didn't know how long it would last.

"Maybe you should take those heels off. I like them...erm, a lot, actually, but you'd be able to walk better without them."

I nibbled at my bottom lip as I slipped them off, still holding onto Edward for support. He kicked them into the corner of the kitchen and looped my arm in his, leading me into the party.

It was in full swing; darkened room with flashing lights, music blaring and people dancing. I squinted and tried to spot Alice. I realized pretty quickly that there was no point. I would never find her in this. I did, however spot Emmett. He had a girl pinned to the wall and was grinding against her to the pulse of the music. I blinked in astonishment.

Edward must have been following my gawk, because I felt him stiffen and saw the rigid set of his jaw, before he leaned down and said into my ear, "This is the living room and full of complete reprobates at the moment."

I snorted as he escorted us towards the long corridor. Without letting go of me he knocked on a door and quickly opened it. Again, talking into my ear, "Bathroom."

I was surprised there was no one in there, and it was surprisingly clean. I didn't really get a good look before he knocked on the next door, throwing it open, saying, "Spare room."

"Pastels?" I giggled.

"My mother likes to dabble in interior design. She thought I needed a feminine guest room. I have no idea why."

"Doesn't Jasper live with you?"

Edward stumbled, knocking me into the wall. He fell against me, bracketing my head as his hands pressed against the wall. I held my breath; the air seemed to charge instantly. He frowned down at me, his glasses crooked from the fall. I reached up and righted them, hearing a little moan from Edward, as my fingers skimmed his face.

"No!"

I pulled my hands quickly away from him, scared of what I'd done wrong. He shook his head, making his eyes roll a little, Edward was inebriated. It was hilarious, and I held in a roll of laughter.

"He doesn't live with me. Jasper, I mean. This place is mine."

"Oh, I thought you didn't want me touching your glasses. Sorry."

He dropped his head, averting his gaze from mine and muttered, "I like it."

I didn't know what to say. He liked me touching him, but I could only do it comfortably when I was under the influence of alcohol. We'd talked more in the last two hours than at any point in our previous meetings. It felt peculiar to feel this relaxed with him. Would it all go back to stuttering and trembling hands tomorrow?

Edward slowly turned his head, and skimmed the tip of his nose along my jaw. My knees buckled slightly. I must have had much more to drink than I thought, to be having such a strong effect to him. There had always been a spark of something between us, but it was growing. The more he touched me, or spoke in my ear, the more I turned to jelly.

He took a deep breath and pushed himself away from the wall. Away from me, before quirkling his head further down the corridor.

"This way. I haven't finished the tour yet." His voice had gone cold, rigid even.

Didn't he want me?

I was never going to drink again. My head was a jumbled confusion of random thoughts. This wasn't good.

He walked to the end and typed a code into a small key pad on the door, opening it and allowing me to enter.

"My room."

"Paranoid much?"

Edward closed the door behind us and leaned against it. I sat nervously on the edge of the huge bed.

"Jasper likes to have parties here often. I usually barricade myself in here."

"But, it's your apartm...never mind, none of my business."

I looked around, amazed at yet more space and floor to ceiling windows. I knew Edward had money, but this place must have cost a fortune. The bed was the focal point of the room. It was a huge wrought iron thing with crisp blood red sheets.

"Red, again?" I questioned, wondering when I'd stopped using full sentences and only two words to communicate.

Edward merely shrugged and shook his head, as if he didn't have the right words needed either. He walked towards me, and sat down on the mattress, pushing at his glasses.

We'd been in this exact position before. Could we actually get a little further this time? Could I do it without laughing?

"I'm glad you came tonight," he stated.

I grinned at him, feeling dazzled by the intensity of his green eyes. It made me light headed, and a little giddy. All I could think about was the fact that we were on his bed, and his door was locked.

"Bella," he whispered.

1...2...3...

I mustered the courage and kissed him. My teeth clashed against his, making us both wince a little, but I didn't stop. The alcohol was swirling through my system, and I had very little control over my hormones at that point. My whole body was screaming for attention, but somewhere in the back of my head, a small voice was telling me to stop.

The scream won.

I counted to three in my head again, and grabbed the front of his trousers.

"OUCH!" he yelped, pulling away.

"Sorry. I'm so sorry. I was trying to..."

He placed a finger against my lips, stopping me from saying anything further. The mattress bobbed as he shuffled to toe off his shoes. I watched him; nerves beginning to set in when he began to unbutton his shirt. Were we really going to try it now?

"Erm...Edward?"

"Shush," he soothed, before lying down on the bed and tugging at my arm.

I rested next to him, unable to stop staring at his naked torso.

"We're both a little drunk, Bella," he warned.

I wasn't sure if he was trying to convince me or himself, that this was a bad idea. I didn't think it was. The liquor had taken away all of our anxiety and fumbling. Neither of us was too drunk to function, or think clearly, but he was worried. I knew if I wanted this I would have to take the first step. Edward was too cautious.

I counted again, before sitting up and straddling his lap. His eyes went wide, as I lowered my head to his chest and began kissing along his sternum. A tiny grunt escaped his lips as I adjusted my position across his hips. I could feel his hardness against me, and my hips rocked against it. Edward's hands shot to my shoulders, gripping them firmly. I swallowed down the urge to look up at him, and continued to kiss his flesh. If I looked at him I'd stop, and I really didn't want that. Nor did my throbbing kitty. It wanted to try what I'd been such a failure at in the past, and it wanted to try it with Edward.

He loosened his hold on my shoulders, as my lips met the edge of his trousers. My hands shook when I tried to unfasten them. I couldn't get the button undone, but he simply batted my hands out of the way and unzipped them himself. Taking a deep breath, I tried to pull them down, but he stopped me again.

"Bella, are you sure? There's a party going on just outside that door."

I wanted to yell at him, that I didn't care if there was a marching band outside the room, but didn't think it would go down so well.

"Is it locked? Can anyone get in?" I mumbled, glancing at him briefly.

"No one can get in. Only I have the code."

I nibbled at my lip, trying not to shiver from the sensations racing through my system. They were so strange; completely alien to me, but I wanted more.

I climbed off the bed and reached around to the zipper at the back of my dress. However, there was no way I was going to be able to undo it, and Edward knew it. He stood upright, his trousers slipping so they balanced precariously on his hip bones, and made a twirling motion with his finger.

I turned around, holding my breath, as his fingers slipped the zipper all the way down to the base of my spine. He was certainly trembling now.

Laughter came from outside the door, startling us when there were three loud knocks against the wood.

"GO AWAY, JAZ!" Edward bellowed.

I clutched my dress tightly to my chest, stopping it from falling to the floor.

"How did you know it was him?" I hissed.

"He always knocks three times," he stated matter of factly, before slowly slipping his finger underneath the straps of the dress, and pushing it gently down my arms. I closed my eyes as it

drifted down my body and floated to the floor. Edward inhaled sharply at the sight of my almost naked back, and his shaking fingers tickled down my spine.

"Lie with me, Bella."

How could I refuse a voice so soft and pleading?

I turned and tried to act as confident as I could, climbing up onto the bed. I imagined clothes on myself, that way I wouldn't feel so self conscious. Edward removed his trousers and lay next to me. I realized he'd removed his boxers and was now completely naked. I told myself not to look down, knowing what would greet me, but my treacherous body did what it pleased, and my eyes darted to his arousal.

He lifted my face back to his by placing a finger under my chin. Our gazes locked, as his lips met mine. Something felt different about this kiss, and I didn't know what it was. Maybe it was the alcohol. Maybe I was imagining it. I simply didn't know, or understand it.

For the first time I felt his tongue dip gently into my mouth, and slide against mine. I moaned, startling him. He pulled away, frowning at me. I stifled a giggle, because his glasses had steamed up again.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked concerned.

I shook my head before lifting my hand to his glasses.

"Can I try something? Can I take these off?"

The smirk came back, as he agreed. I removed them gently and placed them behind me on the bedside table. Music flooded the room, as I rolled back to him. He pointed to a series of buttons beside the bed.

"It does it all; windows, music, TV."

"Clever," was the best I could come up with. I wasn't really in the mood for discussing his gadgets.

The anticipation was getting too much for me. My stomach was in knots, and all I wanted to do was feel him above me, kissing me and us finally working to achieve something.

"Edward. Please?" I asked, hoping I didn't need to say anything further.

He turned his back to me, and for an instant I thought he was going to leave, but he opened a drawer and returned with a foil square.

"Are y-you sure, Bella?"

I nodded, and closed my eyes, as I removed my bra. I could hear him shuffling and a tearing of the wrapper. I took my panties off, still not looking at him. When I finally calmed myself enough to peek, he'd sheathed himself with the condom, and was stroking my side, trying to move me onto my back. I did as he requested and opened my legs, to allow him to blanket me with his body. I could feel the coolness of his covered erection as it pressed against my heated kitty. My abdomen clenched, and I braced myself.

However, Edward didn't enter me. He kissed me fiercely, and pushed his tongue in as I gasped. My hips moved of their own volition, rocking against his arousal, and enjoying the little noises he was producing.

I was the one who was making him utter those sounds. I was obviously doing something right.

I did an internal happy dance.

His kisses moved along my jaw and down my neck, where he nuzzled it softly. My head felt fuzzy, but I put it down to the liquor. My fingers wove into his hair, feeling the silky strands slip through them. I opened my legs a little further; it was a silent communication. I just hoped he understood. I concentrated on the music, not wanting to mess this up by laughing.

*Like a good book
I can't put this day back
a sorta fairytale
with you*

He whispered my name, and his whole body shook, as he adjusted himself and slowly entered me. I tried to relax, ignoring the tightness in my chest, and focusing on Edward's scent. His hair was near my nose, and it was entirely too intoxicating.

I felt myself stretching to accommodate him, and rotated my hips to ease the ache. He groaned loudly, lifting his face from my shoulder. His eyes seemed to have turned the most intense green. I was transfixed, as he rocked gently against me.

*A sorta fairytale
with you*

Feelings of contentment slammed through my body, confusing me. This was a game, and no more, wasn't it? But it had never been like this with Jake. It was awkward, and strange, but with Edward I wanted to carry on; for him to stay inside of me until we reached our completion. Jake would always get annoyed when I couldn't relax enough, but Edward was patient and caring. He didn't rush me, or make me feel guilty because we'd not had sex.

Edward felt right.

I gasped at the thought, as Edwards arms began to wobble slightly. He was panting, and he'd scrunched his eyes up tightly. I wondered what was wrong, so stroked the hair from his brow, whispering in concern.

"Bella...trying to...going to..."

I small giggle bubbled up. It wasn't directed at him, it was aimed at my own stupidity. He was trying to hold off for me. I was making Edward orgasm. I kissed him, at the same time I swirled my hips. I captured his guttural groan, as I felt him spasm inside of me.

It had been quick, but I had hoped we could actually do this, and we'd get better. I smiled up at him, as he stared down at me in amazement.

"Bella," he panted.

"We did it," I uttered, grinning like a fool.

"But you didn't..."

I shook my head, telling him it didn't matter.

"One step at a time, Edward."

He rolled to the side, and I felt bereft without him covering me, or his hardness inside of me. It was the oddest sensation.

He stroked the back of his fingers down my face, and just looked at me. I couldn't stop smiling.

"Are you OK?" he asked.

"I'm fine. Happy."

"We'll get better, right?"

He sounded so unsure, but I nodded, hoping it would ease his anxiety. He looked so cute with his flushed cheeks and glinting eyes. I moved closer and kissed him quickly. He hummed against my lips, making me shiver.

"Do you need your inhaler?" he questioned, as if worried by my shaking.

"No. Oddly enough, my chest feels fine."

We looked at each other a little longer, and he gave me another quick smirk before moving from the bed and leaving me feeling empty and cold. He blushed and mumbled about needing to remove the condom. I scooted under the covers while he used the en suite, excitement buzzed in my belly.

We'd done it.

Actually had sex.

"Edward!" I shouted.

He came running in from the bathroom, toothbrush hanging from his mouth and still stark naked. He raised a brow at me and waited.

"This means we can get rid of the missionary card, right?" I asked happily.

Edward's face hit the floor.

He was upset, but I didn't understand why. He mumbled 'I guess so' before walking back into the en suite, and this time closing the door. It left me alone in the bed with only the sound of *Tori Amos* for company.

What had I done wrong?

End Notes:

Song was Tori Amos – A Sorta Fairytale

O.O

What did she do wrong?

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Chapter 7: Ride 'em by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>You're all awesome.</p> <p>Thanks to my amazing betas, Maylin & Twirlgrrl. Kisses to you both.</p> <p>Love to my prereader, elusivekoolaid. ILY woman!</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

She'd stayed.

She'd slept in my bed.

I, on the other hand, hadn't slept a wink. I lay next to her, studying her while she was relaxed and her guard was down. I couldn't believe she'd stayed, but she was so happy at finally doing something right, she wasn't thinking clearly. Everything had been perfect until she mentioned the damn card, and that certainly brought me down to earth with a bump.

She only wanted me to replicate the cards.

Nothing more.

That stung.

I should be used to rejection, after all I'd had it dished out by Angela enough times, but from Bella it felt different. I wasn't going to stop what we were doing, but the more time I spent with her, the more I felt something shift. The only reason I'd had any alcohol at all last night was because I wanted to show her I wasn't a complete fumbling idiot. I could function and have fun like Jasper did. It had obviously worked, and I'd been euphoric... that was until she'd mentioned the card.

I sighed and ran my fingers through my hair. It was still only four AM. I slipped from the bed, leaving her gently snoring, and pulled on some jeans, before leaving the bedroom. The party had ended hours ago, and today I would need to apologize to Emmett for not being around. I knew he wouldn't have noticed though, he'd have been humping the leg of some tart.

I made sure the bedroom door was closed, and padded bare foot towards the kitchen. I took in the mess of the living area, and was pleasantly surprised. It was nowhere near as bad as I expected it to be. There were usually random people sleeping around the room when Jasper held parties here, but not today. It was empty, apart from a few beer bottles and empty food wrappers.

I flicked on the kettle and turned to open the fridge, almost jumping out of my skin, when I saw Alice in the far corner. She was wrapped in Jasper's robe, and hugging a mug in her tiny hands.

There was a dirty spoon on the counter, and the cocoa powder was left open. Clearly Alice wasn't averse to helping herself.

"Christ! You scared me, Alice."

"Have you finally fucked her?" she asked crudely.

"I-I don't really think we should be discussing this."

She stepped forward a little, and I could see now just how swamped by the robe she was.

"She's my friend, and I look after her. I always have. I'm not about to change that for you."

"Bella's a grown woman," I replied tartly, spooning cocoa into a mug. "I'm sure she wouldn't appreciate you discussing her sex life behind her back."

"I know all about her sex life, or rather lack thereof. And as for what Bella would or wouldn't appreciate, well I don't think you know her well enough to make that judgement. Do you?"

I was a little affronted by her tone. She seemed annoyed at me, and I really didn't understand why. I'd done nothing to hurt Bella, nor would I. So why was her best friend automatically assuming I would, and that she needed to protect her? I was also a little anxious because I was only dressed in my jeans. I didn't make a habit of wandering around the house half dressed in front of house guests.

"Our relationship is still very new, Alice. I have a lot to learn about Bella."

"Relationship?" she questioned.

She looked thoroughly confused, and my guts began to churn.

"Well, what else would you call it?"

"Sex," she replied bluntly. "But I find it extremely interesting that you don't."

I fumbled with the mug and kettle, almost spilling the boiling water. Had I really just explained my feelings for Bella? I thought I'd been much more articulate than that. She was studying me, making me nervous. What could she tell from those few words I'd supplied?

I shook my head, and tried to change the subject.

"Um, well you seem to know a lot about sex. Jasper? You've known him, what? Seven hours?"

To her credit, she snorted at me, and didn't seem bothered by my insinuation.

"We haven't fucked. Jasper said you wouldn't believe me, but we've been talking. That's all. However, it's not my sordid little game that's up for discussion. It's yours."

"L-look," I stuttered. "I know Bella's your friend, but you've no need to worry. I won't hurt her."

She came to stand in front of me, and poked her tiny finger at my chest.

"You say that now, but what about when you're done? What about when it ends? Because I get the feeling you don't want it to. The problem is Bella is closed off. When it comes to sex, there's this great big fucking wall. Do you think you're man enough to scale it, Edward?"

I shook my head, not really understanding why this needed to be discussed now, or even why we were doing it, half naked at four in the morning.

"I like her. She makes me smile, and trust me; a woman hasn't done that for a long time. Can you just accept that I'll do my best to keep her safe?"

"Yes, but I'm warning you, I'm watching. She's my best friend, and the only person I really love in this world. I'd do anything for her. That includes murder."

I gasped. What the hell had I gotten myself into?

She giggled loudly, before placing her mug on to counter, and standing on her tip toes to kiss my cheek. She was an odd little thing.

"Go back to bed, Edward. Go and make my best friend smile some more, because that's what you do, you know? You make her smile. She may be completely inept at relationships, but with you she seems different."

I stared wide eyed at her, startled by her admission. I made Bella smile. That fact alone made my day.

"I'm going to go and hump your brother, if that's OK? All this talking is highly overrated. Night, Edward."

I mumbled back at her, grossed out by her crudeness, but I could only concentrate on the fact that I made Bella happy. My mind drifted, as I began cleaning the kitchen and disinfecting the counters. I couldn't leave it as it was; someone would catch something. It was disgusting.

When I next checked the time it was just after six. Alice hadn't come back and there were odd little moans coming from the guest bedroom. What they were doing in there didn't even bear thinking about. I washed my hands and made a coffee for Bella. My hand was shaking, as I carried it back to my bedroom. I couldn't decide if I wanted her sleeping or awake when I entered. Both of them were going to be awkward.

I opened the door quietly and placed the mug on the little table next to her side of the bed, before lying down on top of the comforter. Her silky brown hair covered her face, and her nose kept twitching where it obviously tickled it. She looked utterly adorable.

If I had any sense I would back away now. I knew this couldn't end well. As Alice had confirmed, for some reason Bella was very closed off to relationships, therefore there was no hope here. The thought didn't stop me cautiously reaching out and moving the strands from her face, stroking her cheek with the back of my fingers. She stirred, moaning slightly and making my groin twitch.

"Morning," I whispered as her eyes fluttered open.

Her cheek flamed the moment she focused on me, and I knew instantly what she was remembering. I just hoped she was remembering it without shame, because it had been better

than I'd ever imagined. We needed practice, and to get over our nervousness around one another, but we'd started and we'd worked.

"I'm sorry," she muttered into the comforter.

I frowned, not understanding what she was apologizing for, at least not until she tried to climb out of the bed, managing to spill the coffee across the floor. I shot up, pulling her towards me and running my hands across her naked body, making sure she hadn't been burned by the hot brew. It was only when she gasped that I realized my hands were touching her bare thighs and my mouth was inches away from her breast. Saliva pooled in my mouth, and I bit down the urge to lick her nipples. I could see they were already erect. Was she turned on by me?

"Are you hurt?"

Bella bit her lip and shook her head, trying to pull the sheet up to cover herself. I shifted on the bed, allowing her to free the blanket from under me, and pull it to her chest. We stared at each other, neither one knowing exactly what to say.

"You don't have your glasses on," she blurted out.

"I don't really wear them around here. I know where everything is," I shrugged.

"I didn't mean to sleep here. I'm sorry."

I touched her chin with a shaking hand and tilted her head towards me. Mustering every bit of courage I had, I stated, "I kind of liked it."

Her brown eyes grew wide at my admission, and she opened her mouth to say something, snapping it shut almost immediately. I wanted to shout at her and demand she tell me, but I was no better. I wasn't telling her what was going on inside my head right now. That would have her running scared.

"I need to use the bathroom."

I nodded and climbed off the bed, before handing my robe to her. I tried to give her a little privacy by turning my back and playing with the CD's. I could hear her shuffling, and shortly after the bathroom door closed, the lock clicking shut. I exhaled deeply and slumped into the chair.

I was absolutely fucking useless when it came to women.

I really needed to talk to Jaz. He'd tell me what to do now. I contemplated going to the guest room and knocking on the door while Bella was in the bathroom, but it was evident they were enjoying themselves and it would be cruel to interrupt simply because I didn't have a clue how to say good morning to my girlfriend.

I flicked the music on, wanting to drown out my misery, when the bathroom door opened.

"Um, I found a new toothbrush and opened it. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all."

Tori Amos began to float around the room, and we both blushed furiously. I should have checked what was on there before starting it again. I reached to switch it off, but Bella moved quickly, covering my hand in hers.

"Don't. I like it, and it makes me remember."

She said it so softly I barely heard it over the music, but it was enough. She wasn't embarrassed by last night; she just didn't know what to do today anymore than I did. I wondered what Jasper would do right now. How would he defuse the situation, and make her more comfortable?

I turned my hand up and wrapped my fingers around her wrist. She frowned at me slightly, before I tugged her towards me. A small 'eep' escaped her lips, as she tumbled on top of me.

"Sit," I stated.

She nodded sharply towards my lap, her eyes darting away from my loosely buttoned jeans.

"Please?" I whispered.

We could do this, I was certain. We could become more comfortable around each other. We just had to try harder. We had to be more assertive with what we wanted, even though it felt odd to us.

Bella climbed cautiously onto my lap, straddling my hips. I swallowed hard, as the robe gaped open showing me her creamy breasts. I could remember with crystal clarity what they felt like in my palm, and I closed my eyes for a moment.

Her hands moved gently to my naked shoulders, and gripped tightly, as I shuffled to get us more comfortable. She was still biting her lip, and waiting for me to say something further. I was a little irritated that this was her game, and yet it was always me that decided certain aspects of it. I understood she was shy and nervous, but then, so was I. Angela had never felt as good in my arms as Bella did.

"Like this?" she questioned.

I nodded, and exhaled loudly before asking, "Was last night OK for you?"

She blushed furiously and hung her head. Her hair fell forward, covering her face from view. I wanted us to try and be honest with each other. We could lie to the world outside that door, but when it was just her and me, I needed honesty. Otherwise this could never go anywhere and after last night I realized I wanted it to.

My hand slipped into her hair, and I lowered my head to face her.

"Bella, please? We need to be honest with each other. N-no matter how mortifying it is."

"I know. I'm sorry."

I kissed her nose, wanting to ease the situation a little. However, Bella shocked me by moving her head, and her lips met mine. Our teeth clashed, until we adjusted to each other and our pace mirrored the others. Her fingers dug into my shoulders, as my arm wrapped around her

middle and pulled her closer to me. My other hand pushed into the back of her hair, weaving through the chocolate strands.

A low swirling began in my belly, at the same time I felt Bella shudder slightly. Her hand relaxed on my shoulder and softly, slowly began caressing my chest. It felt divine to have her touch me this way, even if she couldn't do it without her eyes being closed. I was determined we would get better at this.

Bella mumbled against my lips, but I couldn't understand what she was saying. I pulled away, tilting my head to meet her eyes.

"Tell me."

"Last night was great. I...I want to...do...do it again."

I couldn't stop the huge grin that began to spread across my face. She wanted to do it again.

She leaned back towards me and went to kiss me again, but just before her lips met mine she whispered, "Can we do it here? On the chair?"

I knew the reason she was talking to me against my lips. It was so I couldn't meet her gaze, she was too ashamed, but at that particular moment I didn't care. I wanted to give her what she desired. So with shaking hands, I pushed the robe from her shoulders, baring her breasts to me. Her head started to droop, but I stopped it by kissing her lightly. Her hand was still stroking my chest, as mine cupped her breast. She whimpered low and rocked a little in my lap.

It was a slow build.

The kisses were languid and chaste, that was until her tongue dipped into my mouth a little at a time. Last night was the first time we'd ever used our tongues, and we had been a little drunk, but today as it slid against mine, I couldn't stop the low rumble of pleasure reverberating through my chest.

My hands were teasing her breast, doing what they pleased without any conscious thought from me. Bella certainly seemed to be enjoying it, if the little sounds escaping her lips were anything to go by. She dropped her head to my shoulder, panting softly, as her hair tickled my chest. I lowered my hands to the cord holding the robe closed, and I felt her tense.

"We don't have..."

"Just do it, Edward," she moaned against my neck, kissing a little trail up to my ear.

I loosened the knot and spread the fabric open. I heard it flop to the floor, as I skimmed my palm tenderly down her back. I couldn't see her, because her front was so close to mine, and I knew she was doing it on purpose. Baby steps.

She caught me by surprise when she took my earlobe into her mouth and sucked. I hissed, making her pull away. She thought she'd done something wrong, and now it was my turn to be embarrassed.

"I liked it, Bella."

Her smile was coy, but it was utterly adorable the way her head moved to one side, and she looked at me through hooded eyes. I felt myself grow hard.

So did Bella.

Her eyes shot to my groin, and back up to me, her mouth forming a little 'o'. I was lost for words and resorted to Bella's way of dealing with that. I kissed her. At the same time, I stroked my hand down across her stomach and towards her ...*shoot*, I still didn't know what to call it!

I felt her thighs quiver, as I got closer to my goal, and her fingers reached for the buttons on my jeans at the same time I touched *her*. She stilled, as I delved precariously into her wetness, but what amazed me more, was the reaction afterwards. Bella threw her head back and groaned, as I swirled a single digit around her heated flesh. The sight made my stomach clench and my balls tighten. The response to seeing her this way was so intense I bit down to try and take the edge off the sudden need. It was like nothing I'd ever experienced. I wanted to open my jeans and push myself into her hard. It clawed at my insides, needing an escape. I pulled her head to mine and kissed her ferociously, plundering her mouth with my tongue. To my surprise she purred in approval. Was this why Jasper was rather aggressive towards woman? They always found his assertiveness attractive, and I'd never been able to understand it. Until now, that was.

I pushed my fingers against her swollen button, and smirked a little when she gasped. She was very wet, and more than ready for us to try this on the chair. Her stupid little cards intruded on our fumbings, and I shook my head, trying to dislodge it.

"Bella," I breathed. "Are you sure?"

She nodded, licking her lips and staring directly at me. There was no argument to be had here.

I reached over to the drawer, and handed her a box of condoms. I noticed my left hand was still cupping her breast, neither one of us seemed in a hurry to shift it. She took one from the box and handed it back to me, throwing the box onto the floor.

"Erm, I need to..." I stated, gesturing to my fly.

She licked her lower lip again, and reached nervously towards my crotch. I gulped, hoping she was about to do what I thought she was. Her fingers shook as they popped each button open. I thought I'd have to ease myself out, but I held my breath as her hand delved between the denim and tentatively touch my erection.

I hissed loudly.

The feel of her fingers carefully touching my hard on almost made me spill onto her again, but I began counting, thinking of anything that would stop me looking like a fool again. I moved us a little, as she pushed the denim down, letting my arousal bob and hit my stomach. She laughed.

My Bella actually laughed.

It wasn't a nervous laugh, either. It was just pure beautiful Bella. It made my head spin, and my arousal harder than moments before. I slid the condom down my length, surprised to see Bella watching what I was doing. She was a revelation to me this morning. I'd thought a lot of her confidence last night had been the liquor, but it clearly wasn't simply down to that. There was a lot to learn about this woman in front of me.

I gazed into her adorable doe eyes, and whispered, "Ready?"

She nodded shyly, before I pulled her closer and kissed her lips hotly.

I held my erection and guided it into her hot, wet sex. We both moaned, but it took a few movements and panting before I was completely inside of her. She winced a little, making me stop, but she assured me it was just because she was tense. I kissed her slowly, trying to get her to forget. It worked, and I slipped inside her with ease.

Bella was the first to move, she pulled at my shoulders, rocking fast. Was she in a hurry? Did she need to leave? It was only when she panted my name that I understood what she wanted. I needed to reread *Sex for Dummies*, either that or log back onto that website she'd linked me to.

I kissed the swell of her breast, trying to stop my inner musings. The problem was as soon as I focused on Bella, I felt my groin begin to stir and I knew I'd jizz if I didn't divert my attention.

Catch 22.

She held my shoulder in one hand and my hip with the other, riding me, and giving me the most amazing view. I growled, shocking myself, before resting my forehead on her chest. She squeezed her thighs, and swirled her hips, making me wonder if she'd checked that website recently.

The fact that she hadn't come last night, weighed heavily on my mind. I wanted to make her orgasm today, so moved my hand carefully back to her wetness. I could feel myself moving in and out of her against my fingertips, it only added to the sparks currently working their way from my crotch and zipping across my body. I pressed my thumb to her most sensitive spot, and watched her buck wildly against me. I swirled it, making her pant and grip my shoulder harshly. Her nails were marking my flesh, but I was focused on making Bella come. For some reason it was the most important thing to me. I didn't want her to leave my bedroom without her having an orgasm.

On that thought, I felt it. Small little twitches began in her thighs and move quickly to her abdomen. She began moving furiously on me, and incoherent little sounds filled the room. They weren't just from her though, I noticed I was doing the same. I was thrusting into her and mumbling against her chest. I said her name seconds before she broke apart in my arms. She tensed and slowed, her chest flushed and her head lolled back, as she revelled in her completion.

Just watching her in complete abandon made my own muscles clench, and I followed her into the red abyss. Growling loudly and spilling into the condom. I closed my eyes, seeing stars behind my closed lids, and panting for breath.

We clutched each other, gasping and sweaty, in the chair. Her head rested on my shoulder, while I nuzzled her chest. An odd sense of completion swept through me, but as it was so damn confusing, I dismissed it quickly.

Bella's fingers teased my hair slowly, making me shiver. I kept my eyes shut tightly, just relaxing and enjoying the small moment of calm. I could feel her heart crashing against her chest, and her breathing as it slowly began to even out. Suddenly, and scaring me to death, she burst into huge fits of giggles. I pulled away staring at her, completely perplexed as to what was so amusing.

I raised a questioning brow at her, but her happiness made me smirk.

"I just noticed I didn't laugh when you touched me, but then I couldn't stop from laughing, because I didn't laugh. I'm ridiculous!" she snorted.

"No, you're not," I uttered, catching myself before I said anything else.

She rolled her hips again making me hiss, but it was because she was stiff. Deciding to help her out, and stop her embarrassment, I reached down and collected the robe from the floor. I wrapped it around her shoulders, and kissed her nose softly.

"I...um...I think you need to...the...condom?" she asked blushing.

I nodded and helped her off my lap. She sat on the end of the bed, playing with the cord of the robe as I went to clean up.

She was in the same position when I came out. I'd slung a towel around my waist, knowing my nakedness would embarrass her. I sat next to her on the bed, and reached for my glasses. Bella took them from me and finally placed them on my face, after almost poking my eye out.

"I like you with them on," she whispered.

I opened my mouth to speak when three loud knocks came from the door. I watched Bella's shoulders slump, as she exhaled loudly.

"It's Jasper," I confirmed.

She nodded, adding "Three knocks." She rose from the bed and walked towards the bathroom.

"You better answer it."

I walked to the door, irritation setting in, and I wasn't really sure why. I opened it, staring angrily at Jasper. He had the biggest shit eating grin spread across his face, and his arm slung around Alice.

"Hey, Bro. Ali wanted to talk to Bells. OK?" He said casually as if he'd known them both for years.

"*Bella* is in the bathroom. I'll send her out when she's ready."

"Well," he drawled, wiggling his eyebrows. "We're kinda going out somewhere. Ali just wanted to make sure she was doing all right. Can you give her the message? Take her home? Be the amazing gentleman you are?"

I wanted to slap him.

I nodded, and smiled tersely towards Alice. She rubbed Jaspers chest and blew a kiss in my direction. I shook my head at their oddness, before closing the door. I turned to see Bella standing in the middle of the bedroom. She was dressed and trying to zip herself up. I circled my finger, gesturing for her to turn around, and zipped her up.

"Thank you. I heard them, you don't need to pass any message on, and I can see myself home, I'm not five." She sounded as angry as I felt.

"I don't think that's what they're insinuating. Your shoes are in the kitchen, along with your purse."

Bella walked towards the door, giving me no choice but to follow. We walked along the corridor in silence, and she sat on the stool to place her heels on. She chewed her lip awkwardly, looking at the floor, before finally taking a huge breath and staring up at me.

"Thank you."

I frowned. Was that it? This woman was tying me up in knots. She was a complete contradiction, and I just couldn't get a grasp of her. I wasn't about to tell her that she was welcome, that would sound pathetic. So, with hurt clawing at my insides, I said coldly, "That's two cards you can cross off your list now."

"Oh! Yeah, I guess."

I turned to pick up her tiny black sweater, and handed it to her as we walked to the front door.

"I'll call you."

I wanted to roll my eyes. No she wouldn't, she'd email me, but I smiled and nodded.

Bella stood on her tip toes and kissed me quickly, before waving and leaving me. I closed the door and leaned against it, allowing a moment to calm down. In the last twenty-four hours she had blown my world apart and she had no idea. Bella had one goal.

Those fifty-two fucking cards.

I'd promised to help her, and I would hold to that promise, but now I had a goal of my own.

I was going to get Bella Swan to fall in love with me.

End Notes:
The geek is determined! He wants his woman :D

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Chapter 8: Stand & Carry by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Thank you to everyone reading/reviewing & recci-ing it. I heart you all.

Love to my amazing beta Maylin & my sexy pre reader elusivekoolaid.

I've recieved a few reviews & pm's about how both Bella & Edward refer to their genitals.

***Seriously*, all I'm going to say to that is, whether *you* like it or not, these characters are only comfortable with using terms such as *kitty* or *shaft*. I have nothing further to add....**

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

"Jasper, just drop it."

"No, I can't. Edward you're a wreck. You need to either end it, or tell her this isn't a game for you."

I shook my head, growling in frustration. I couldn't tell her. She'd run, or rather stumble, as fast as she could away from me. I'd entered into this knowing what she wanted, but somehow, and I didn't know when, my heart had become involved. I liked her; *really* liked her. I was a huge jumble of emotions and didn't have the first clue what to do next.

"Have you spoken to her since the party?" Jasper asked.

"No, she said she'd call me, but nothing."

He snorted and picked up the telephone on my desk, handing the receiver to me.

"Do it."

"Jasper!" I shouted. "I won't. No! She said she'd call *me*."

He rested on the edge of my desk, peering at me through his scruffy blond locks.

"You're so fucking stubborn. Look, I saw Alice last night. Bella's been sick..."

"What?" I interrupted, instantly panicking. "What's wrong? Why didn't you tell me last night?"

"Woah!" He smiled, holding his hands up in submission. "I'm telling you now, and Ali says she seems better today."

I stood up abruptly, shoving my chair back so hard it hit the glass window behind me. I paced behind my desk. My whole body was screaming for me to go to her, but my head was still being rather obstinate.

"Today? You talked to her friend today?"

Jasper was smirking slyly at me, making me want to smack him. He was my brother and I loved him, but he was such a smug bastard sometimes. The party was almost a week ago, and after hearing nothing from her I'd begun to suspect our game was over, but now Jasper was telling me she'd been sick all that time. Guilt twisted in my guts. I know I couldn't have helped her before, because I hadn't known, but I no longer had that excuse.

"Yes, I don't know what rock you've been living under, but Alice and I are very well acquainted now. Intimately in fact. She does this thing with her tongue that would make..."

"NO!" I bellowed. "Shut up! I do not want to hear about what Alice can do."

I was tugging at my hair in complete frustration now. My heart at war with my head. I stared at Jasper, holding my hands out in a silent gesture. I wanted to know what I should do.

"Go to her," he said simply.

"But...this place? I have a meeting with..."

"Fuck this place! The meeting can be rescheduled, and I can handle anything else. I'm not a complete fuck up, you know."

I chose to ignore the last comment.

I collected my car keys and blackberry, waving it at him as I retrieved my jacket and left. The elevator seemed to take three times as long as it would usually, as it descended to the parking lot below the building. My hands were shaking, as I unlocked the DB9 and climbed in. It was only when I was on the way to Bella's that I realized I hadn't found out what was wrong with her. Jasper hadn't told me, and hadn't given any hints either.

I would have to get her a gift, or something to make her smile. Chocolates seemed wrong, especially if she was vomiting. I wondered about a cuddly toy of some kind, but would that be construed as too *'boyfriendly'*? I decided on flowers when I passed a small booth on the corner. I parked the car and stood looking at the array of bouquets. I was drawn to the pretty pink roses, they reminded me of her cheeks when she blushed. However, I knew roses were a little too personal for what we were at the moment.

"Can I help you, hun?"

I glanced at the owner of the booth and tried to explain what I wanted. The problem was I didn't know what it was that I really wanted. I muttered and stumbled my way to an explanation. The girl giggled and nodded knowingly.

"I think these would serve your purpose."

She handed me a small bunch of daffodils tied together with a simple piece of raffia. I smiled; they would definitely cheer Bella up. They glowed, just like she did. She handed me a small card

as I paid, and I didn't look at it until I was sat back behind the wheel of my car. It gave the meaning of certain flowers, and highlighted was daffodils. I had obviously been clearer, in my assessment of my relationship with Bella, than I thought.

Unrequited love.

I swallowed the lump in my throat and threw the card on to the passenger seat. Was I that transparent? A perfect stranger could see my feelings for Bella, so would that mean she could?

I would have to be more careful, and for a moment thought of turning around and not seeing how she was. It was only for an instant, though. I knew I had no choice; I needed to make sure she was feeling better. The thought of her alone in the apartment while sick, made me feel extremely guilty.

I parked the DB9 on the street, and retrieved the daffodils, before exiting the car. The wind was biting cold, and I shuddered as it whipped around me. I hoped she was at least snuggled up in bed and keeping warm.

My blackberry rang as I stood waiting for the elevator.

"Cullen."

"Hello Cullen, its Cullen."

I rolled my eyes at his stupidity. He always did this, and it was getting very old.

"Jasper, we do this every time. What do you want?" I asked impatiently.

"Well, apart from wanting to let you know Bella is home, and Alice isn't there. I also wanted to tell you the meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday, but it will have to be a conference call. That's all they could manage."

"OK, that will have to do. Thanks Jasper."

"Yeah," was all he said before hanging up.

Short but sweet. That was my brother.

I inhaled deeply before knocking loudly on the door. My insides squirmed with nerves. I'd never been here before, and what if she didn't want me coming to her home? She was set on this being a game between us, and the only sign that things could change had been when she'd agreed to come to the party. However, that had had its own incentive. Two cards could be used, and they had been. She'd never asked how I got her address to return the inhaler, and therefore I hadn't offered the information. We were simply a huge bundle of what's, and if's, and neither one of us had the answers.

I braced myself as the lock clicked and the door opened slightly, revealing a red nosed Bella. Her eyes were glassy and she was clutching a hot water bottle under her arm, and tissues in her hand.

"Edward?"

I thrust the flowers towards the gap in the door, startling her.

"Jasper, um...He and Alice... Well, I thought you didn't want to and...I only found out today that you were...I'm sorry, I'll go. I shouldn't be interrupting you."

I turned to leave, feeling thoroughly ashamed of my intrusion, when she opened the door fully and whispered for me to come in.

I pushed my glasses back up my nose, and nodded softly to her. She shuffled in the most ridiculous fuzzy bootie style slippers I'd ever seen, towards the couch and plonked herself down, placing the daffodils on the coffee table.. She looked completely exhausted.

"Thanks for the flowers."

I grinned and perched on the edge of the seat next to her. She was wearing short style pajamas, so all I could see was an expanse of milky flesh. I couldn't stop staring at her legs, and remembering them spread beneath me.

Oh my God, I was a complete pervert!

She was sick, and here I was ogling her. It was disgusting. Two cards down and I was turning into a lecherous creep, what on earth would happen when we were through? That thought made my guts clench. The end wasn't something I wanted to contemplate right now.

"Do you l-like them?" I stuttered, watching her as she wrapped her pink bathrobe tighter to her chest.

Bella nodded and blew her nose, a slight moan slipping from her lips.

"Thanks for coming to check on me, too. That's very considerate of you."

"I wanted to make sure you were OK, though Jasper never told me what was wrong with you. I'm sorry I didn't know sooner."

She adjusted her position, bringing her closer to me, as she rested her head on the cushion.

"Flu, but it's clearing up now. I should be better in the next day or so."

In time for our next meeting...

I ached.

Her hair fell forward, covering her face, and before I could stop myself, I reached out and tucked it gently behind her ear. She smiled at me, but the frown of weariness still remained.

"Has Alice been caring for you?" I asked concerned, but also desperate to fill the suffocating silence.

"Um, she was away for two days. They were the worst, but she's been around. She's not my mother," she whispered defensively.

"I...um...I'm just worried. Why didn't you call me, Bella? I could have helped."

She turned her head and muttered into her arm. I couldn't understand a thing she was saying. I tipped my head slightly, trying to see her face, but my glasses slipped. Bella caught them, and

sat upright so she could put them back on properly. Her fingertips skimmed my temples delicately, and I suppressed a shiver.

"Tell me, please? Why?"

"I didn't think you'd want to help me. I-It wasn't our usual day."

Ouch! That hurt.

"Today isn't our usual day, but I'm here. In fact, I came as soon as Jasper told me you were sick." I swallowed. "Bella, I want us to be friends. We won't be able to do this unless we are."

She hummed in agreement, letting go of my glasses. Her fingers ran down my cheeks, leaving tingles in their wake. I gritted my teeth to stop from holding her hands there.

She patted the back of the couch, wanting me to relax. I did as she asked, and watched her as she shuffled closer to me.

"Shouldn't you be at work?"

I smirked.

"Bonus of being your own boss. Jasper had to reschedule a meeting, but nothing that can't wait. I've told you, I wanted to make sure you were OK, and to be honest, I'm glad I did. You need some attention."

A small giggle slipped from her mouth, easing the ache in my chest. She'd looked so lost and forlorn when she'd opened the door. I would talk to Alice, she should never have left her alone, or the very least she could have done was call me.

"Did you call into work? Do they know?"

"Yes," she sighed. "I spoke to Rose. She's covering my shifts. It's not a problem."

"Bella when was the last time you slept? You look about ready to drop."

Her eyes drifted closed, and her head flopped onto my shoulder. I held my breath. Snuggling on the couch was not what I'd expected, but if she needed sleep, then I'd stay here for a week.

"Can I just take my jacket off? Then you can settle," I asked quietly.

Bella pulled back a little, her eyes still closed, and I took my jacket off, tossing it onto the floor. I leaned back, and she hugged my side almost instantly. I wrapped my arm around her shoulder and rested my chin on top of her hair, inhaling her scent.

Within minutes her breathing had evened out, and she was sleeping soundly. I closed my eyes, enjoying the sensation of having her so close to me. Just like I'd done the night of the party. Jasper was right, I'd have to tell her that this was changing for me, that I wanted more, but she was sick and needed me to help her. I couldn't do it now. At least that was what I was telling myself.

I knew I was lying.

// T \

Hmm....

I felt it before I was fully conscious.

A kiss on my neck.

A hand stroking my stomach.

A knee pushing against my groin.

I sighed into the feeling, and kept my eyes closed. I'd wake up and it would all disappear; just as it had done this morning. I'd been dreaming of Bella and how she'd wake me, only for my alarm to go off as her mouth moved to my more rigid places. I wasn't going to be woken again. I was going to keep my eyes tightly shut and enjoy wherever my thoughts took me.

The fingers tickled the hairs just above my belt buckle, sending little tremors towards my groin. I pushed up with my hips, wanting more. The breath tickled my ear, and it was only when I heard a soft whimper that I realized this was far from a dream. I recalled Bella sleeping in my arms, and I must have fallen asleep on the couch with her. If that was the case, though, that meant Bella was the one touching me now.

I gulped.

I still didn't have the strength to open my eyes. I honestly didn't want reality to seep in.

Her knee pushed at my crotch, and she ground herself against my thigh. My skin began to prickle, as it broke out in a nervous sweat. I moved my hand intending to do the right thing and stop her, but the treacherous thing pushed into her hair and the back of her head, and effectively held her at my neck. Her lips began a slow dance across my skin, licking under my collar. My hips bucked involuntarily against her, as she lapped below cotton.

It was becoming too much. I couldn't continue if she wasn't aware of what it was she was doing. She was also sick, and shouldn't be doing this while ill. I forced myself to open my eyes, and tilt my head towards her. To my astonishment, she was staring right at me, eyes wide and licking her lips.

"Hey," she smiled.

"Um, hey?" I said, knowing it sounded more like a question.

Her hand still rested on my stomach, the tips of her fingers a fraction below the waistband, and I was still clutching at her head. I had a sudden revelation that she must have pulled my shirt from my trousers to have her hand exactly where it was. I stared at her, shocked.

"I was kinda dreaming, but kinda not. Sorry," she blushed.

"Um, not a problem."

She gazed at my crotch, and took me by surprise when she said, "Clearly it is."

I couldn't respond. It was so out of character for her to say such things. I stared agog. My puzzlement obviously made her self-conscious, because she grimaced and immediately apologized.

"I n-need to shower. Help yourself to coffee or whatever."

She hastily stood and went to the bathroom. I mentally berated myself for my utter stupidity. I was a moron when it came to dealing with her.

I stood and walked to the small kitchen, intending to make some tea for her, but a loud crash and a whimper stopped me. I rushed towards the bathroom hearing the moaning getting louder.

"Bella? Are you OK?"

"Ouch! Fuck."

I grinned at her curse. I'd never heard anything like that from her before, and it sounded rather amusing. I knocked on the door, only for it to open on its own. Bella was lying on the floor in only her shorts. Her breasts were exposed, and all too inviting. I ground my teeth and tried to work out what the hell had happened to her.

"Bella?"

She was blushing furiously, her chest mottling.

"I slipped, banged my chin on the sink. Is it bleeding?"

She lifted it to me, exposing her long slender neck. She was not making this easy. I walked closer, as she covered her breasts with her arm, clearly only just remembering her nakedness. I cupped her chin, and could see a small cut, but nothing to be concerned about.

"You'll live. How did you slip?"

Bella tried to get up, but her legs were unsteady, and she wobbled precariously.

"Bella, please don't tell me you've forgotten to eat again," I sighed.

"OK, I won't. I'll tell you I wasn't hungry."

She was rather confident when she was sick. It was highly amusing. I pulled her to standing, and wedged her between me and the sink. She chewed on her lowered lip, still hugging her arms around her chest. I stroked the back of my hands down her biceps, making her shiver a little.

"And that's why you should have called me. You're sick, you need caring for."

"Kiss me."

"I think you could do...What?" I asked incredulously.

She hung her head and mumbled it again.

"Kiss me. Please?"

I was completely stunned, but cupped her chin, tilting her face up towards me, and kissed her tenderly. Her arms wrapped around my shoulders, pulling me closer and effectively rubbed her breasts against the thin cotton covering my chest. I inhaled, as I dipped my tongue tentatively into her mouth, her scent filled my lungs, making arousal pool low in my belly. She hummed slightly when her tongue met mine. She tasted divine, and I realized just what it was that I was feeling.

I'd missed her.

Being back here next to her, and feeling her in my arms, I felt happy and complete.

"Hmm," she purred interrupting my thoughts. "I feel kinda better already."

Her fingers danced along the collar of my shirt and tugged at my tie. I studied her, she still wasn't looking directly at me, but she would give short glances from the corner of her eye. It was getting easier between us, I could feel it.

"A kiss m- made you feel better?"

She nodded, smiling slightly.

"From you. Yes."

It was the sweetest thing I'd ever heard, and I wanted to ask her to repeat it over and over.

"Um...c-can I ask you something?"

I answered immediately, agreeing to her request and not having to think about it.

"In the interest of getting more comfortable around each other, Alice suggested something. I'd like to try it. Would you, please?"

Again, I agreed, not knowing exactly what I was saying yes to. I was sucked in completely by her. I'd do anything. Jasper would be killing himself with laughter if he could see me now, and I wouldn't blame him. Sap.

Bella bit her lip, as her fingers began to tease the knot of my tie open. I watched her, staying silent, and waiting for her to elaborate. She said nothing further, just slowly and shakily began to undress me. Her fingers fumbled with the knot, and then with the small buttons on my shirt, but eventually she splayed it open and ran her hands across my chest. I think I stopped breathing, unable to believe what she was doing.

"Al..." I gulped. "Alice asked you to undress me?"

Her fingers teased my belt buckle, making my thighs quiver.

"She said a ...um...shower would work. Maybe. Well, what she actually said in true Alice style was that we couldn't fuck that up."

"That's the second time you've cursed since I've been here," I chuckled.

Bella shrugged and unbutton my trousers. I inhaled sharply, staring into her brown eyes, hoping to communicate something, anything. I just needed her to see how she affected me.

"I channel Alice when I'm annoyed. She never let's anyone mess with her. I want to be like that, but I just don't have the conviction she does."

I ducked down to make eye contact. She was pouting and it was the most adorable thing I'd ever seen, even with her red nose.

"You don't need to be like someone else. Christ, I know that. Jasper was always the popular one, it annoyed me, but eventually I had to be myself. I can see how Alice would overshadow you sometimes, but Bella, she isn't now. Not here, in this room, with us. It's all about you." I paused, allowing me a moment to muster my courage, before continuing. "What I'm saying is I want us to lower those walls. I want us to really try, because right now all we're doing is floundering. Don't pretend with me, and I won't with you."

She stared at my chest, her eyes darting across the skin as she thought about what I'd said. My heart hammered loudly against my chest. Had I just messed everything up? Should I have kept my stupid mouth shut?

But slowly, she started to nod, lifting her face to mine, and kissing my lips quickly.

"Yes, we're going to really do it. Can I make a suggestion, though?" she asked timidly.

"Yes."

"Can we please start now, in the shower, because I'd really like to try that," she rambled.

"Wow!" I laughed.

She flushed and tried to duck her head again. However, I stopped her by lifting her chin and kissing her. I felt her short gasp against my lips, followed by a soft hum. Her hands roamed my torso, at the same time I thrust my fingers into her hair, holding her head close to me. I slipped my tongue against hers, as her fingers skimmed the waistband of my underwear. My stomach clenched immediately.

"Did I hurt you?" she asked pulling away.

"No. No, never. How about you get into the shower, and I'll follow?"

She started to gnaw at her lip again, but I pulled it slowly from her teeth, smiling at her.

"Will you be OK without your glasses?"

"I'll be fine. Go on," I stated, gesturing with my head towards the shower stall.

I took a few moments to calm myself, and remove my glasses. I could hear the water turn on, and the sound of clothes being removed, before a sigh of delight. Bella was obviously in the shower. My groin grew tight at the mental image of the water sluicing over her body. I was breaking out in a sweat at the thought of it, but then I realized I could *actually* be in there with her, not out here dreaming of it.

Moron.

I quickly removed the rest of my clothes and tried to appear as confident with my nakedness as possible, before opening the glass door and stepping under the spray with her. The skin to skin

contact made us both gasp, and before either of us could question or second guess what we were doing, I kissed her, pushing her against the tiles. She spluttered against my lips, as the water cascaded around us, but I continued. We needed to get lost in each other, and forget who we were supposed to be.

The more I touched her, the more assertive I became. Skimming my hand across her stomach elicited a tiny moan, but drifting them down her side made her push her hips towards me. The sleekness of her skin only added to the pleasure. Bella obviously felt the same, because she was caressing me with as much fervour. It was strangely freeing.

We continued to kiss, as our hands roamed. Her leg hitched and curled around my knee. It made her spasm and giggle. I pulled away frowning at her.

"The water, it...er...well it tickled me."

I still had no idea what she was referring to, so shook my head and brought my nose to hers in a soft Eskimo kiss.

"I like it when you do that," she whispered.

I made a mental note to continue to do it. It made her smile.

"Edward? Can we? I have condoms in the drawer."

I couldn't stop the grin spreading across my face. There was no question in my mind, but she was sick and it wouldn't be fair.

"You're sick. I think we should clean up, then I'll tuck you into bed, and you can get some rest."

"No!" she all but shouted. "I feel better...better with you here."

The admission took a lot, I knew that, and I could deny her nothing. I gripped her bottom and lifted her against me, before exiting the shower.

"Edward...I..."

"Shush," I interjected.

I placed her on the small vanity, still aligning her with me, and began opening the drawers hunting for the condoms. My stomach swirled with nerves, and my hand shook, but I was keeping my composure. If Bella saw just how useless I felt, it would send her retreating back into her shell. We'd come further today than ever before, and if I stood any chance of gaining her affections then I had to do this.

I almost wept in relief when I found the packet and pulled one out. I was amazed to see her watching me as I sheathed myself, though her cheeks tinged the rose petal pink, showing her shame. I stood between her open legs, my palms holding her thighs, as my thumbs caressed the inside skin gently. She trembled, before kissing me, and whispering 'please' into my mouth. I moved my hands back to her bottom and pulled her closer to me. The tip of my erection touched her wetness, making me bite back a predatory growl. The feelings that slammed through my system when I was with her were like nothing I'd ever experienced. With Angela everything had been rather clinical, and that wasn't just from her, I had been as much to blame.

I had never been this aroused, and in as much need as I was when I was with Bella. It scared me a little.

We continued to kiss, as I pushed slowly into her wet heat. I groaned, as she hummed. The sensation all too divine. Her tongue prodded aggressively against mine, as she rocked on the vanity. My hand moved from her bottom to cup her breast and tease her nipple. At the same time, my other hand pulled her closer still. We were both still wet from the shower, and our skin slid erotically against each others. I couldn't get enough, and by the way she'd begun gripping my shoulders she felt the same. I didn't want to take her too harshly, but need was very soon overtaking caution, and before it registered I was slamming into her like an animal. To my astonishment, Bella was moaning wildly. The more I thrust, the more she whimpered in delight. Well, who knew? She liked me to take charge, and liked it when I was somewhat forceful. I smirked, as I kissed the crook of her neck. She sobbed against my ear, as I sucked her lobe into my mouth.

"Please, Edward. Please...I need..."

I slid my hand towards the apex of her thighs and pressed softly against her clitoris. She writhed against my hand, panting loudly. My scrotum tightened, and my legs buckled slightly. I was a quivering mess, and I knew I was about to orgasm. I stroked my finger harder around her, and felt the tell tale shudder begin. Her nails dug into my shoulder, as I moaned, filling the condom as the heat consumed me. It clawed through my abdomen, making me twitch and push against her. That was all it took to send Bella over the edge and into her bubble of bliss.

I watched as she threw her head back, incoherent babbling spurting from her lips. Her chest was rising rapidly, and she continued to rock against me. She looked incredible. I kissed her forehead and hugged her to my torso. We stayed cuddling, until our breathing calmed and our heartbeats regulated. It was only when she began giggling that I pulled away to look at her. Her eyes were shining, and she clapped a hand across her mouth to try and stop the laughter. I was getting used to her little episodes now.

"What?" I chuckled.

"Oh, there's more than one. Sorry."

I pulled gently out of her and disposed of the condom, before returning to my place between her legs. She'd stopped now, but her lips were pursed, as she tried to stop the giggles returning.

"Go on," I prompted.

"That was...Wow. I mean really wow. I've never...it was never. Wow."

My ego grew. It appreciated her assessment.

"And?"

"I kinda snotted all over your shoulder. I'm so sorry!"

I closed my eyes, trying to calm myself, but her giggles were becoming infectious. I burst into a howl of laughter, and wrapped her in my arms.

"Great," I replied sarcastically. "I forgive you."

"Really?"

"Anything. I'd forgive you anything, and you were right. It was wow."

We giggled and dried each other, before I took her to bed. I watched her as she drifted off to sleep, and just before she succumbed, I gave her a quick Eskimo kiss.

I left my heart in bed with her, as I left the apartment and went back to work.

End Notes:
Awww... he is so damn cute!!
Thank you xxx

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Chapter 9: Utensils by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Deckward is back...though Carenhas officially renamed him cuteward after the last chapter.

Love to my amazing betas - Maylin & Twirlgrrl.

Kisses, hugs & gropes to my baby elusivekoolaid.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

Slow.

Soft.

Beautiful.

That's exactly how this position felt.

The card said *spoons* and, like the moron I was, I'd giggled at it. It looked a little strange, and I didn't really grasp how *that* could fit *there* from that particular angle. Edward had been as patient as always, clicking onto the website and showing me the animated people performing the exact position. I'd still not understood it.

...but, boy, I did now!

We'd decided to forgo the hotel room, and were in Edward's apartment. We were alone, with no chance of Jasper's unexpected interruption. To make sure, Edward, had bolted the door closed.

He'd cooked me lunch and we'd chatted nervously about the few days since we'd last seen each other. I'd blushed horrendously, remembering the way his wet skin had slipped against mine. I wanted to do it again, in his shower with my legs wrapped around his waist, but I didn't have the courage to ask.

The flowers he'd brought me were still in my bedroom. They were beginning to wilt, but I didn't want to part with them. No one had ever bought me flowers before. I wanted to treasure them. He'd been extremely sweet and taken such good care of me. I'd certainly never intended to be with him in the bathroom, but for some reason, at that particular moment, I'd felt confident and ready to ask for a little more.

For the first time we'd chosen the card together. Edward had taken the deck from my satchel and tipped them on to the bed, making me actually look at the naked figures. I'd studied his

reaction, and was surprised to see him just as affected as I was. His fingers shook as he picked up two cards and set them aside. Confused, I asked what they were, and why he was doing that. He'd mumbled about a *stand and carry* and a *dancer*. Apparently, we'd done them both in the bathroom a few days ago. I gulped at the memory and continued to stare at the cards in front of me.

It had been Edward that had chosen *spoons*, and I had to admit, it was my favorite so far. It was intimate, but as it wasn't face to face, I didn't feel as self conscious.

Edward's hand gripped my hip, as he guided himself into me. I bit back a moan. It stunned me how familiar with his body I was becoming, even in such a small amount of time. I could feel a growing bond with him, and desperately wanted to talk to Alice about it, but I didn't know just how to express it. The feelings had started off a couple of weeks ago, or maybe it was the first time he'd made me orgasm. I simply didn't know, but they'd crept up and confused me. I'd been close to tears when he'd come to see if I was OK, after he learned I was sick. He'd stroked my hair in such a gentle gesture my heart had clenched. I kept telling myself that this wasn't about my heart or my feelings, it was a voyage of discovery, but they appeared to be getting tangled up in it anyway.

I wanted to be bolder for him; to show him I wanted to have sex with him, and it wasn't really about the cards now, but he brought them up. He obviously thought that this was all about them.

I'd begun touching him more, trying to convey with actions when words eluded me. I noticed how often I touched his chest, covering his heart with my hand. Clearly my body knew what it wanted.

I whimpered.

Edward pulled me closer and kissed the side of my neck, obviously thinking it was down to the sex. It wasn't really, it was him.

He made me whimper.

The gentle way he kissed my neck, or the way his fingers squeezed me in reassurance. It all added to the emotion I was feeling. I didn't understand it, because this should never have morphed like this. I was a planner, but had made no contingency for this. I tried to fool myself into thinking that it was all down to the closeness, and that was why I was feeling this way. But deep down I knew the truth and couldn't deny it, no matter how much I wanted to.

"Bella." Edward moaned into my neck.

I shivered. We were awkward with our clothes on, but seemed to have begun to connect when they were off. They couldn't stay off forever though. Reality would seep into our situation very quickly, and we'd become the mumbling, stuttering self conscious people we were before. It was highly ironic that we were more comfortable with our clothes off.

Edward groaned, as he increased his pace, and I braced my hand flat on the mattress in front of me, so I could push back as quickly. His fingers tickled up my rib cage, making me forget my musings and focus solely on him. They skimmed the underside of my breast, before cupping it lightly in his palm. I gave a low moan, pushing my chest out further. It was heavenly when he

played with my breasts, and always aroused me further. I wish I could tell him that, but so far the boldest I'd got was telling him to kiss me.

"B-Bella...I... oh..." he stuttered.

I could feel my own skin tingling as my orgasm built, but Edward's was fast approaching. I could tell from the force of his thrusts and his panting breath across my ear. At the same time he began to twitch, he buried his face in the crook of my neck and growled. It was one of the sexiest things I'd ever heard. His hand moved to clutch my hip tightly, and therefore keep his balance as he came. His whole body trembled. He was consumed. I smiled knowing I had done that to him.

Edward slowed and kissed the lobe of my ear, turning me towards him. He slipped out of my body, making me shiver, and I nervously looked at his chest. It rose and fell quickly with his exertion. His fingers tilted my head up to look into his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

I frowned in confusion, and he answered almost immediately.

"You...erm...I was rather...quick?"

I felt my cheeks heat, but I didn't drop my gaze.

"Edward," I replied softly. "I'm fine."

"Fine?"

OK, so when he repeated it, it did sound rather lame, but I was perfectly happy with being close to him, and not feeling so anxious. I'd read enough books and magazines to know sometimes a woman just didn't orgasm. To ease his worry I kissed his nose quickly, only for him to then rub the tip of his against mine. His Eskimo kisses were just adorable.

I really needed to talk to Alice. I was lost.

"I need to go and...erm...bathroom."

I reached over to the little bedside table and retrieved his glasses, before passing them to him. His grin was huge as he said thanks, and walked quickly to the en suite. I scooted under the covers and turned the music on. *The Editors* filled the room; Edward's music taste always surprised me. In the car he had classical, but so far in here I'd heard many different styles. I made a mental note to ask him about it later, though I had to leave earlier than usual, because I had work. I had a few hours to make up after being off sick.

For now I snuggled into his covers, inhaling his musky scent, and feeling rather happy.

Edward was still grinning when he returned and sat on the bed next to me.

"I am sorry, Bella."

I shook my head and lifted the covers. I had the intense urge to cuddle. Was that wrong? Edward didn't seem to think so, because he shuffled down the bed and turned to me. He wrapped his hand around my waist, and tugged me a little closer.

"I have to be at work soon," I whispered.

I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay here.

Edward grimaced, but quickly composed himself.

"Are you there until closing?"

I nodded.

"It's just that I..."

"Would you want...?"

We both muttered together. Edward raised his brows, silently telling me to speak. I chewed on the inside of my cheek, before asking him if he'd like to come to the bar with me. My heart pounded, because it would mean him waiting around for quite a while. I didn't know if he'd want that.

"Erm, maybe you could ask Jasper, and I'd see Alice. You know, maybe then you wouldn't be just waiting for me."

His lips pursed, and he seemed a little annoyed at something. I just didn't know whether it was because he didn't know how to say no to me. Maybe he thought he owed it to me, given what we'd just done. I didn't want him feeling like he had to spend time with me.

"Yeah, we could do that. Do you want to shower before we go?"

I looked back down at his chest, as the sound of *All Sparks* floated around the room.

"I didn't bring a white shirt," I replied quietly. "I'll need to go back to my place."

"I could...no forget it."

I pulled away slightly, meeting his gaze, before asking what he was going to say. I got the impression I would have liked it, but he was too shy. This was getting worse, not better. Now we weren't having sex, we couldn't communicate. I leaned forward and kissed him. I caught his quick intake of breath with my mouth, and hoped this would loosen us up enough to speak a little more freely again. His hand moved to my bottom, and he kneaded my cheeks gently, as his lips moved slowly over mine. Kissing Edward always made me slightly light headed. The way he played his mouth across mine so softly, it was as if he knew exactly how I liked it.

"I was..." he said, as he pulled away. "Going to say y-you could use one...one of mine. Shirts that is. I have white."

I went to speak, but he was on a roll.

"That way you could have a shower here, and you wouldn't need to leave...rush home, I mean. You wouldn't need to rush home."

"Would one fit? And it would get dirty Edward, like food and beer stains kind of dirty."

I knew his shirts would be expensive, so really didn't want to ruin one, but the thought of staying here, and in bed with him longer was so very tempting.

"We could roll it up and tie it. I wouldn't mind," he said softly.

I grinned and nodded, as excitement shot through my body. Just the idea of wearing Edward's shirt while I worked made me light headed. I'd never had the opportunity to wear a boyfriend's clothes before. My friends over the last few years had done just that and made me feel inadequate. I'd never slept at Jacob's, and therefore it had never occurred, but I wasn't sleeping at Edward's now.

He was so very different than anyone I'd ever met before, and I was starting to rely on him more than I knew I should.

// T \

"Christ, Bella, what the hell did you do to land that?" Rose shouted.

I glanced over at Edward as I poured a double vodka. He was sitting in a corner booth, pushing his glasses up his nose and talking to Alice. I wanted to know what was being said. Were they discussing me? Or was it about the cards?

"Is this his?" she continued, tugging on the hem of my shirt.

I mumbled a 'yes' and continued filling the customer's order. It was quiet in the bar at the moment, but I knew it could all change in a matter of minutes.

"He is gorgeous. Damn, Bella, I wouldn't let him out of bed, but then by the look of you, I'd say you just fell out of it."

I felt my cheeks burn. Was it really that obvious? I'd showered and dried my hair before leaving his apartment; the only giveaway was his shirt. Rose was clearly more perceptive than I gave her credit for.

"I mean, look at those fingers. They're so long and elegant, I bet he does some amazing things with those, huh?" she rambled on, shoving me with her hip, and making me spill the tequila across the worktop.

I groaned and picked up a cloth, trying to clean it up. Edward looked over towards me and smiled shyly, before returning back towards his conversation. Alice was leaning back against Jasper who, in turn, was draped around her shoulders and playing with her hair. Jealousy coursed through me. Why couldn't we be like that? They'd only known each other a couple of weeks, and yet they were publically showing just how much they enjoyed each other. I knew Edward and I hadn't started off with the most conventional of meetings, but I would still love for him to play with my hair like that, or even look at me like Jasper did when Alice wasn't watching.

I turned quickly, not wanting to see anymore; it was beginning to hurt. I collected a plate of chilli fries and took a quick sniff of the collar of Edward's shirt. I knew he wouldn't get it back. I would cherish it along with the daffodils. Both of them had been new experiences for me, along with each card we replicated. It didn't matter which designers name was in the label; it was mine now.

"Caught you!" Rose snickered.

I sighed and moved around the bar, trying my best to ignore her. Sometimes she was no better than Alice. I'd seriously begun to worry about my mental health, because I seemed to attract an awful lot of people who were obsessed with sex.

I took the order of food and drink to table five, before wandering slowly over to my friends. Alice clapped as I approached.

"Ooo goodie. Do we get you as our waitress tonight? Do I have to leave a tip?"

"Alice..." I groaned.

"Oh, I have one! Always wear a smile. People will assume you're a crazy person and won't mess with you!"

She grinned maniacally. Jasper snorted, but I simply rolled my eyes, pulling the notepad from my back pocket. However, Alice didn't give in that easily.

"Another? Hmm... Live every day like it's your last. Crawl into a corner and cry."

"Anywayyy..." I drawled. "What will you all be having?"

Alice finally shut up, as she and Jasper looked over the menu. Edward was peering at me through the top of his gray rimmed glasses. The tip of his tongue was sticking out of the corner of his mouth, and I had to adjust my stance. Just a small peak of the wet tip was making my insides tighten with need. It petrified me. I gulped and tried to focus on his eyes, but even they were doing things to my nipples that I never thought possible from just a stare.

"I'll just have the club sandwich, and a coke. Thanks Bella," he stated softly.

"Christ, Eddie, can't you just have some greasy fries? Just once? Go on, live dangerously." Jasper laughed.

Edward grimaced, but refused to answer him, and continued to watch me. I could feel their weight, as I took the orders from Alice and Jasper; my whole body buzzed for him. Inviting him here was a bad idea. I was clumsy at the best of times, let alone when I knew he was watching me. Jasper was being deliberately evasive about how he wanted his burger, and I stuttered asking him the questions. Edward growled at him, making my insides turn to goo. To his credit, Jasper took the warning and told me exactly what he wanted.

I was writing it down when I felt something tickle my knee. I yelped loudly and moved out of the way, looking down, only to see Edward's hand moving back to his lap. He was obviously trying to sooth me, and touch me, but I'd messed it up along with everything else.

Moron. Moron. Moron.

I cursed myself as stupid, as I walked back to the bar and slapped the order on the counter top. Rose was frowning at me, but didn't bother asking. She knew better, because most of the time I'd clam up and tell her nothing. However, now wasn't one of those times, and I would have really liked to share some things with her. I knew I could approach her, but the bar was starting

to fill up, and I didn't want the whole world knowing I was starting to have feelings for the guy I was playing a sex game with.

Oh God, just thinking it made me cringe. It sounded so dirty and sordid. What had I turned into? I'd looked into the mirror this morning and hadn't recognized the excited woman looking back at me. She'd been happy and smiling, her cheeks glowing and ready to meet her lover. That person simply wasn't me, or rather, it wasn't what I was. I was so confused by my feelings that I no longer really knew who I was, or what I wanted.

Except Edward.

The thought of him made me smile every day. Even when I'd been sick, just knowing I had to get well soon so I could see him, made me feel better. He knew none of that though, because I couldn't tell him.

I was so scared he would reject me.

"Fuck, Bella, look who just came in."

I was still thinking of Edward, as I glanced to the door. My smile faded fast.

Jacob.

He stared over; his black eyes zeroing in on me like a target. I swallowed hard and felt my heart begin to race. Rose took hold of my hand and tried to pull me into the back, but my feet wouldn't move. Why was he here? He knew where I worked, and had stayed away for so long. Why now?

"Bella, please, come on." Rose insisted.

I turned only to be met by Alice. She was virtually hissing across the bar at him. I felt nauseous.

"Bella?" Alice questioned, feeling my brow with her cold hands.

I winced away from her, still staring in Jacob's direction.

"Alice, we need to move her. Edward's looking, and I'm assuming she hasn't told him yet."

"I don't think she has..."

I shook my head, trying to get them to understand. I couldn't tell him. We hadn't got that far. We knew very little about each other. I didn't even know what he did for a living.

I swallowed bile, and choked a little. What did he want?

I could feel Rose still tugging at my arm, desperate to move me. Alice was stroking my cheek and whispering soothing words, but they didn't make any sense. All I could hear was the raging thump of my heart and the rush of blood slamming through my body. I was starting to drown in my own void. I was back there; to that day.

Until I felt his touch.

Edward.

I knew it was him by his smell, and the way he caressed my cheek.

"What's wrong with her?" He asked my friend urgently. "Bella...Bella?"

Alice mumbled, but I was trying to focus on Edward, and get a grip of myself.

"Jacob? No, I know nothing. Bella?"

I took a deep breath, before saying, "I'm OK."

"You don't look it," Edward stated. "I think you need some air. Can I take her outside?"

I assumed Rose agreed, because the next thing I knew I was being escorted out by him. The cold slapped my face as he opened the door, and led me towards the alley at the side of the bar. Edward pulled out a crate and sat me down, kneeling between my legs and staring at me. His face showed pure concern, and of their own volition, my hands cupped his cheeks, feeling the coarse whiskers underneath.

"Bella," he breathed again.

"I'm OK. Just give me a moment. I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. I kn-know it's not my business, but you can tell me. I don't like seeing you like this," he soothed.

I swallowed the large lump of disgust that filled my throat. I had the distinct feeling if I didn't tell him, then he'd find out from Alice or Jasper. It wasn't fair for him to hear it from them. I shivered, feeling his hands stroked my arms.

"Um...The guy that came in...the dark hair, in the corner."

"Alice pointed him out."

"He's J-J...Jacob, the only other guy I've slept with," I whispered, thoroughly ashamed.

"Bel..."

"Let me try to tell you, OK?" I interrupted. Edward nodded, still stroking my arms; it was a small comfort. "Whenever we...Oh God, this is so embarrassing. Whenever we had sex I sorta giggled a lot. I know you've noticed it, but I couldn't stop it. I still try really hard with you not to. Jacob said he understood, I'm just really nervous, but...he didn't. Not really and each time I did it he would get more frustrated."

A whimper escaped, and Edward opened his mouth, but I stopped him, slowly moving my thumb across his bottom lip. He was helping, and if he kept quiet I knew I could tell him.

"One night he was stressed and asked if I'd try um...*pleasing* him with my mouth, but I only got as far as undoing his trousers. I was laughing and he lost it with me. I mean he really lost it, Edward."

I shuddered as a cold chill swept across my body; the memories of that night fresh in my mind.

"Did he hurt you?" Edward whispered.

I stifled a sob, as I nodded. His hand flexed on my biceps, and I felt his jaw rigid underneath my hands.

"He pushed me away, and called me a few names, but it was when I tried to stop him leaving. He spun on me and slapped me away," I choked.

"Slapped you away?" Edward hissed angrily. "What do you mean?"

"My face," I cringed, as the tears trickled down my face.

"What?" Edward asked incredulously.

"I'm sorry. I know I giggle. I just..."

"Don't! Don't you dare apologize. Not for that. Ever."

I whimpered as his lips touched mine. He kissed me and took the pain away, along with the tears. He understood where no one else did.

"Bella? Are you out here?"

I froze.

A low rumble started in Edward's chest, before he broke us apart by standing up and turned towards the voice.

"Him?" he asked me, scaring me with the sharpness of his tone. "You? You hurt my Bella?"

Jacob frowned and held his hands up in surrender.

"Listen, man, I just wanna talk to her. I ain't even gonna touch her, k?"

"No," he snarled. "You don't even get to look at her again."

Jacob snorted and took a step forward. I automatically shrank back, but Edward shielded me with his arm. I'd never seen him so assertive. He was growling at Jacob, but keeping me away from him, making sure I was safe. He was caring for me again. Just like when I was sick. He was adorable, and even though I was shaking and sobbing, my heart swelled a little more for him.

"Look, Bella, call off your bodyguard and lemme talk to you. I won't touch you, I swear."

"You won't even look at her, let alone touch her. Fucking dog!" Alice yelled, as she walked into the alley.

She was swiftly followed by Rose and Jasper.

"Problem?" Jasper asked innocently.

"No. He was just leaving, because he isn't welcome here, and Bella doesn't want him within a hundred yards of her. Do you Bella?" Alice asked.

I nodded, but looked at the floor. Now everyone would know. They'd know I'd laughed at him. They'd know I couldn't give him oral sex. They'd know I was a joke and useless without a set of cards aiding me. I began crying harder.

There was scuffling and some yelling, but I couldn't distinguish anything outside my own pity party. I knew Rose was hugging me, because I could smell her noxious perfume, but I couldn't feel Edward. I just hoped he wasn't getting himself into trouble, by going after Jacob. I wanted to draw a line under him, and move on. We had enough issues without Jacob adding to it.

"Bella? Are you all right? Bella, look at me, please?"

He didn't need to beg. As soon as I heard his voice, my tears began to clear.

"He's gone," he whispered, rubbing his nose against mine in the sweetest Eskimo kiss ever.

"Thank you," I stated, wiping my nose on the back of my hand.

Could it get any more embarrassing?

"Rose, I think Edward should take her home. She's going to be no use to you tonight always checking the door for that dickhead." Alice spat.

I looked over to Rose, who nodded at me, and patted Edward on the shoulder.

"Take care of her," she warned, before going back inside.

Alice kissed my cheek, as Edward helped me up and placed his arm around my shoulder.

"Go to Edwards and forget about tonight, Bella. I mean it. You'll be surprised just how much being with someone helps."

She took my satchel and coat from Jasper and handed them to Edward.

"You better look after her. I warned you, and you've just seen how serious I can be."

She ruined it by kissing him on the cheek and making him blush. I grinned, gazing at him through watery eyes.

"I'm so sor..."

"If you're about to apologize yet again, don't. None of that was your fault."

I nodded and snuggled closer to his chest, as we walked out of the alley and towards his car.

"Come home with me. Please, Bella?"

I stopped and stood on tiptoes to kiss him softly. His arms surrounded me, and calmed me. For the first time since the incident with Jake I felt safe.

"Yes," I breathed.

Our fingers entwined, as he lowered his nose to mine again.

Eskimo kisses were the best.

End Notes:
Thank you reading! xxx

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Chapter 10: Sensual Squeeze by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Thanks to you all for reading/reviewing.</p> <p>Love to my betas Maylin & Twirlgrrl. Kisses to my prereader elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

I'd never been a violent man; well not unless you count certain times around my brother. However, when Bella had filled me in on exactly what her ex had done to her, I'd wanted to hurt him. She didn't deserve to be treated that way. Not over something as silly as giggling. I admit, the first time she'd done it, it had been a little off putting, but now I was so used it, it didn't even register with me anymore. I knew it was nerves, and slapping her across the face wouldn't make it any easier on her.

I wouldn't allow her to be hit again.

Ever.

She'd tried to defend him, by stating it was only once, and that it was just a slap. It hurt to hear those words leaving her lips. She shouldn't feel the need to justify what he'd done. It was wrong.

I felt so protective of her.

I wanted to hug her all the way home, but I needed to drive. I made sure our fingers remained entwined, though. She would give an involuntary shudder every now and again, reminding me just how shook up she was. She remained silent, even when I'd tried to get her to talk. She shook her head and looked out of the window. I didn't try again. She needed some space.

I parked the car and led her slowly up to my apartment. I hoped Jasper hadn't decided to make a detour and come back here. Maybe Alice would keep him away. I could only hope.

I breathed a sigh of relief as I opened the door, and was greeted by darkness and complete silence. I guided her into the living space and switched on the lights. They filled the room with a warm glow, and made the area less stark. She stayed in the center of the room, hugging herself tightly, and staring out of the window onto the dark city below us. She looked completely lost, and so fragile. It was as though one touch and she would shatter into a thousand pieces. I just couldn't let that happen to her.

I studied her, staring out towards the city, as I called Jasper and got Alice to pack an overnight bag for her. She looked too forlorn. I wanted to go to her and make it all better, but I was pretty sure I'd mess it up somehow. I couldn't just leave it though. Taking a deep breath, I walked over to her and pulled her into the comfort of my embrace. She came willingly and without a fight, slumping against my chest. I wanted to say so much. I wanted to make her smile again, but I knew right now this was as responsive as she could be.

She was freezing cold, it was no wonder she was shaking, but when I tried to pull away to get a sweater, or my robe, she sobbed and clung to my shirt. It broke my heart the way she held onto me and suddenly splintered. I stroked her hair and hushed into her ear. I let her purge herself, before moving us so we could sit on the couch. I shuffled over, intending to give Bella space to sit next to me, but she curled up against my side and laid her head on my now wet chest.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled.

"Don't Bella," I stated gently. "Don't apologize for being hurt."

I stroked her arm, and looked down at her stricken face. Her cheeks were mottled where the tears had left tracks, and her eyes were still filled with unshed ones. I ached.

"Are you sure you want to stay here tonight? I could take you home to Alice."

Bella frowned in confusion and opened her mouth, closing it milliseconds later.

"What? Please tell me. I want to help, but I feel so useless," I pleaded.

"I w-want to stay." She cast her eyes downwards at our joined hands. "You make me feel safe."

My heart leapt.

"Then you need some rest. Let me get you settled in the guest room."

I tried to stand, but she stopped me, looking horrified.

"Please, Edward," she whimpered.

I didn't understand. I brushed her cheek with the back of my fingers trying to sooth her, but the tears had begun to fall again.

"Please don't let me sleep alone."

I couldn't stand to hear the sadness in her voice any longer. I slipped my arm under her knees and lifted her, carrying her to my room. I expected her to argue at being carted to my room, but she hummed and nuzzled my neck. Opening my bedroom door took a little juggling, but we managed it, and I laid her down gently on the mattress.

"Bella, I'm going to leave a t-shirt and sweats out for you. I'm just going to wait for Jasper to bring your overnight bag, OK? You could take a shower. If you wanted, I mean."

Her eyes were wide with trepidation, but she nodded and accepted the clothes. I didn't want to leave her, but I knew she'd want her own things, not mine that would be far too large for her.

I ran my fingers through my hair in frustration, as I walked back down the corridor. How was I supposed to make her feel better? I knew very little about her, other than what turned her on, and even that was new to me. I knew we were reaching a crossroads. If this situation was handled wrong then there would be no more cards, no more discoveries and no more hope of a future.

It would all be over.

I paced the living room. Waiting, but all I really wanted to do was hold her until she felt better. I was useless, and completely unable to help her misery.

I removed my glasses and held the bridge of my nose in my fingers, trying to ease the pressure that was building. If I could lay my hands on him I would hurt him. He would be the first man I ever punched, well except, Jasper, but that went without saying.

As if hearing my thoughts, I heard a key in the lock and the front door opened. Jasper looked sheepish as he entered the room, carrying Bella's overnight bag.

"She OK?" he questioned.

I groaned. "I don't know Jazz. She cried for a while, but she's taking a shower now. I told her she didn't have to stay here, but she doesn't want me to leave her."

He nudged my arm and winked at me.

"There you go then, you're in there."

"Oh my God, Jasper, you can be such a prick! You really want me to have sex with her after all that? Seriously? Sometimes I wonder if we have the same parents."

"Yeah, I wonder the same thing, dude. Look, all I was saying is that if she wants you when she's sad then that's gotta mean something."

I swallowed. He was right, it did mean that she trusted me to care for her, and the realization of that soothed the ache in my chest.

Jasper handed me the bag and mumbled about Alice packing it.

"I'll stay at Ali's tonight, if you need me," he shrugged.

"Do you ever sleep at your own place?" I asked, placing my glasses back on and taking the bag from him.

"Not unless I have to." He paused for moment, wondering whether he should bring it up.

"Um...Alice kinda told me that the dude at the bar hurt Bella. In the past, I mean."

I nodded, and took a deep breath, trying to quell my anger.

"Yeah, he did. I need you to do something for me, but you can't mention it to Bella," I whispered.

Jasper nodded and came closer.

"I need you to scope out some info on him from Alice. Do a check on him. I'd do it myself, but knowing my luck I'd be running a search and Bella would be standing behind me. Think you can handle that?"

He smirked at me, his blue eyes glinting in glee. "Damn, for sure I could. Do I get a code number, you know like 007?"

"Yeah, whatever you like," I groaned. "Can you do it for me though?"

"Consider it done. I'll mail you later. Look after her, or Alice will kill us both."

He slapped me on the back and left, slamming the door behind him. I didn't even have a chance to turn around before I heard Bella behind me. My heart pounded. Had she been listening? I didn't want to face her. I couldn't stand the thought of me hurting her more than she already had been tonight.

"Is that my bag from Alice," she asked quietly.

She didn't sound annoyed at me, so I took the chance and turned slowly, bracing myself. She smiled another watery smile and held her hand out. I noticed she was wearing my robe, but she certainly hadn't showered. She had fresh tear tracks on her face, and I guessed she'd started to sob again as soon as I'd left the room.

"Yes, it is. Jasper just dropped it off, but Alice packed it, so you're safe. I think," I smiled shyly.

Bella shook her head.

"I doubt it. I know Alice a little too well. I'll check it in a moment. Um... can I?...Um...Do y-you have any wine? I could really use a drink, Edward."

I winced. I should have offered her one. Sometimes my own ineptitude astounded even me. I muttered an apology and walked to the kitchen. I could feel her watching me as I took the wine from the fridge and removed the cork. It was only when I turned around, filling her glass that she spoke.

"Why did you apologize?"

I felt my cheeks heat, and I cleared my throat before answering.

"I should have offered you a drink when we arrived. I'm not really used to having someone here; only Jasper, but he helps himself."

Bella moved towards me and took the glass from my hand, placing it on the counter before laying her palm over my heart. I absorbed her touch and took in her sad expression.

"You don't need to apologize for that, silly."

Her smile wasn't all that convincing because the sides of her mouth quivered. I moved, before I even knew what I was doing. My lips connected with hers, caressing them tenderly. She sagged against me and hummed into my mouth. If this was all I could offer, then so be it. Bella didn't seem to be complaining or pulling away, in fact, the way she had started to clutch at the front of my shirt was suggesting quite the opposite.

My tongue slid tentatively towards hers, gliding into her wet mouth. I held back a moan when they connected. My arm looped around her, my fingers tickling along her spine through the robe. She thrust her breasts towards me; pressing them closer to my chest and making me intensify the kiss.

We were normally so wary and careful, this was very different. It was a little more forceful than usual, but she was humming in contentment, making me confident enough to continue.

My blackberry buzzed in my pocket.

We both stilled, and seconds later she pulled away, picking her bag up from the floor and walking slowly back towards my bedroom. Shaking my head, I pulled the blackberry from my pocket. I could have flung it through the window when I saw it was merely a spam email telling me I'd won an unbelievable amount of money. We'd been interrupted for that!

Muttering under my breath, I picked up her glass of wine and went to check on her.

The bedroom door was open, and I could hear her cursing, as she went through the contents of her bag. Her back was to me, but I could see the sharpness of her movements, as she lifted clothes from the bag and threw them onto the bed. I rapped my knuckles softly against the wood, wanting to let her know I was here. I didn't like to surprise her.

"I brought your wine, Bella."

"These aren't my clothes!" she snarled. "And that nightdress certainly isn't. I'm going to kill, Alice."

She gasped loudly, and her cheeks flamed as she delved further into the bag.

"What?"

"Oh, I'm really going to hurt her," she snarled, shocking me.

I waited as she began pacing and tried to call Alice on her cell.

"No bra!"

It was only after she spat the omission out that she realized exactly who she'd said it to. She gaped at me, waiting for my response. The problem was I didn't have a clue what to say. The idea of her without a bra would be appealing to any man. The thought made me tongue tied, and I fumbled my next few words.

"Huh?" she frowned, still waiting for Alice to answer.

"I..erm...couldn't you wear the one you had on just n-now?"

Bella glared at me, shaking her head, as if I'd asked her the dumbest question ever. I'd never seen her so annoyed, and to my shame, it was arousing me.

"I don't have one on now, Edward! I had a tank on! Christ, Alice, answer the damn phone!"

I gasped and stared at her.

No bra?

Oh. My.

I could feel my pants begin to strain, as she tossed the phone onto the bed, and flopped down onto the mattress. I waited. She was a complete mess of moods tonight, and I had the feeling that if I didn't tread carefully then we would end up arguing. That was the last thing I would ever want.

I walked slowly further into the room, as she held a scrap of purple colored material in her hands.

"What the hell did she pack for me? Oh, my God," she groaned.

"What? I think it looks pretty."

"Yes," Bella nodded. "If it was for Alice, or if we were going out somewhere. I'm not sure I'd even wear it then, to be honest."

"Hmm, well...we could... I mean we could go out for brunch tomorrow. If you wanted to."

Bella grimaced, and flung herself backward, making the mattress bounce.

"Today sucks!"

I wracked my brain for something to make her smile; something that would lighten the mood. I knew of one way, but wasn't sure how she would react to it. To test, I tickled her knee. Bella huffed but didn't move. Her arm covered her eyes, but she was still clutching onto the flimsy top. Her lips pouted when I tried it again, and I knew she was trying not to giggle. Encouraged by this, I moved my fingers to her hips and tickled her more firmly. She squealed and started wriggling, trying to move from my torture. I couldn't help the grin that started to play across my lips. She looked happy again, even if it was only for a few moments.

I'm not really sure how, but we ended up sprawled across the bed, clothes and toiletries discarded on the hardwood floor. Bella was on her stomach, laughing loudly and gasping for breath. The robe had ridden up, and from my position above her, I could see her pert fleshy bottom. I was growing hard, and I felt more than a little disgusted with myself. I was supposed to be making her smile, not coming onto her, but her little whimpers were going to send me over the edge.

I gritted my teeth and lay down next to her. My hand instantly wrapped around her waist, and we lay panting and chuckling, happy in each other's company. It was exhilarating to be this comfortable together.

Bella turned her head and bestowed a huge smile on me. Her cheeks were flush, her brown eyes wide with happiness. My hand descended to her bottom, and before realization set in, I was caressing her naked flesh.

"Thank you," she said softly.

I raised my brows at her in question, and rested my head on my arm. She astounded me when she moved her hand to my face and stroked the hair from my forehead.

"Thank you for making me smile, Edward. I needed it and I don't think anyone else could do it."

"Bella, I w-want..."

She stopped me from speaking any more by placing her finger against my lips. It was the most intimate moment we'd ever had, and that was highly amusing given how many times we'd had sex. We simply lay staring at each other, my hand caressing her bottom, her finger on my lips. A

million words passed between us, but none of them spoken. They were all communicated through our gazes, so when I moved to kiss her lips, it was no surprise to her. She sighed into my mouth and combed her fingers into my hair, holding me close to her.

It was Bella's tongue that met mine first, though tentatively. It was Bella that nibbled on my lower lip and it was her that eventually sucked on it gently.

My pants were extremely constricting by this point.

When I pulled away, needing to breathe, she blushed.

"I've....um...b-been reading up on kissing, and what you might like," she mumbled.

"Well, I..." I cleared my throat. "...um, did. Thank you."

She giggled quietly, never once breaking eye contact. That was new. She'd always shied away from that, and never held my eye for any length of time, but now she was the one holding it. I was the one that wanted to look away. It was extremely intense.

"I like it when you do that," she whispered.

She tilted her head towards where my hand was stroking her bottom, and I immediately snatched it away. I fisted my hand against the mattress, feeling stupid. I hadn't even really noticed what we were doing. I was too locked in her gaze.

"Edward, I said I liked it, so you don't need to remove your hand."

Doing as she bid, I hesitantly replaced it, and began slowly touching the swell of her cheeks again. Her eyes fluttered closed, as a soft hum left her lips. I snuggled closer, and brought my nose to hers, giving her a slow, gentle Eskimo kiss. It made her laugh again, but soon stopped when my lips met hers. She did the 'nibbling my bottom lip' thing, and it made me rub my hips against her thigh. This was slowly spiralling out of control, and if I didn't say something now, then I knew exactly where we were going to end up.

"Bella, I didn't bring you back here for this...I...I just wanted you to feel safe."

"I know, Edward, and I do, feel safe that is, but I want *this*. You make me feel better."

I kissed her again, this time delving my fingers underneath the robe, and gently loosening the tie. After some pushing and a little tugging I'd removed the robe from her completely. She tried to lie down on her back, but I tilted her onto her stomach, and continued my exploration of her creamy skin. My hands started at her shoulders and I massaged her muscles tenderly, as I worked my way down her spine. I'd reached the top of her buttocks, when she spoke.

"Edward, I'm feeling at a slight disadvantage. Can you at least take your shirt off?"

Her words were so softly spoken I could barely decipher them, but I understood what was wrong. I moved from the bed and undressed completely, turning the lights down low to take away some of the harshness. I knew her nakedness embarrassed her.

I could recall a card from her deck that we could try now, but I didn't want to bring them up. Not now. Even though I'd told her this wasn't the reason I'd brought her home, for me to foist myself on her would completely contradict that. I would have to steer us in that direction and

maybe mention it at a later date, or whenever the cards came up again, because I had no doubt that they would.

I climbed back onto the bed, and straddled her hips, before resuming my sensual massage. It was more a ghosting of my fingers across her bare skin, but I could see the goose bumps forming on her shoulders and arms because of it. She trembled as I ran a solitary finger up and down her spine. It only made me want her more.

I lowered my head to kiss the trail my fingers left, but my glasses slipped off and tumbled onto her back. I heard a low chuckle from her, making me smile, as it broke the slight tension.

I was amazed at how much easier this felt. The embarrassment was not as excruciating as it had been previously, and I knew that was down to her needing comfort. The incident in her bathroom had also helped; it seemed to have started the crumbling of our awkward little wall.

I shifted slightly to place my glasses on the small bedside table, and retrieve a condom from the drawer. I wanted to talk to her about contraception. We'd both been tested and were clear, and I also knew she was on the pill now, so there was no real need for the condoms. I just didn't know how to raise it. Now wasn't the time for a deep discussion with her, though, she was still hurting.

I returned to my previous place, just above her buttocks, and ran my palms over the pillowy skin. At the same time, I began kissing her shoulders, moving her hair out of the way with my nose. I nuzzled the base of her neck, breathing in her sweet scent, before being a little reckless and tasting it with my tongue.

"Ooo," she gasped clearly liking my tongue.

I continued to kiss and lick, as I fumbled with the condom. Bella was moving her hips in soft circles into the bed, and my thighs were trembling with need. My finger traced the crease on the underside of her bottom, making her squeeze her thighs when I reached her sex. Bella was wet, and the sight of her on my finger made a feral growl rumble through my chest. I gritted my teeth, biting back a need to consume her. It was a need I'd never felt before. I wanted to mark her; to warn everyone that she was mine. It made my head spin with its ferocity.

"Edward," she purred, pushing her bottom upwards and making demands of her own.

I groaned, and held onto her hips with my shaking hands. I raised them off the bed a little, but only enough to gain the right angle, before sliding into her wetness with one slow, tender stroke. I watched as she fisted the blanket, and I stilled, wondering if I'd hurt her.

"Please," she whimpered, rocking her bottom back towards me.

I didn't need to be asked again. I leaned forward, pressing my chest to her back, as I kissed her shoulder, and pushed into her. She turned her head towards me, at the same time she met me thrust for thrust. It was delicate and slow, completely different from the bathroom incident, but just as hard hitting.

I loved her.

I desperately wanted to tell her. It was on the tip of my tongue as our bodies melted together, but I just couldn't spoil the moment. This felt closer and more real, than any time we'd had sex

before. I didn't want her wall to construct itself, because I was asking for something she wasn't ready to give. I knew gaining Bella completely would take time, and I would have to be strong and wait. Her little moans and whimpers were not helping with my resolve, though. Each time she purred against my cheek I wanted to say it, and had to kiss her to stop the words shooting out.

My head was buried in the crook of her neck, her face tilted towards me, and I could feel her breath floating fiercely across my cheek. She let go of the covers to cup my cheek. It made me sigh from the sheer beauty of her touch.

"Oh...Oh, Edward," she sobbed.

I kissed her ear, uttering random words, but even I was unsure of what they were, because I was becoming consumed by the ball of fire expanding in my groin. It was starting to burn through my system, and threatened to overload me. I gasped and kissed her neck, as I thrust move forcefully into her. She inhaled sharply, but pushed back, wanting more.

I entwined our fingers on my cheek and snarled as I came. It was sharper than I'd felt before, so much more intense, and as I slowed my rocking I felt Bella orgasm around me. It was pure delight, feeling the flexing around my shaft. I wanted to stay like this forever, but was more than aware of the fact that I was lying on top of her. I was probably crushing her, no wonder she was gasping for air.

I rolled onto my side, feeling the loss of her heat immediately. Our fingers were still entwined, so I brought them to my lips and kissed each of her fingers. She turned her face to me, smiling. Her cheeks were pink, and her gaze was hooded. She appeared to be thoroughly sated. She turned slightly and moved to cuddle my side, resting her head on my chest. We lay like that until our heartbeats had slowed and our breathing regulated.

"I meant it when I said I didn't bring you here for this," I stated into her hair.

My voice seemed to echo around the quiet room.

"I know, but I needed the comfort, Edward. You really do help me."

"That's good to know. Tell me you feel better, Bella. Tell me you're not going to cry for him again," I pleaded, stroking her back.

"I wasn't crying *for* him. I was crying, because he made me realize just how pathetic I am to laugh whenever I get intimate. I don't want Jacob."

Hope bloomed, but I simply couldn't ask her.

"I hate to point out the obvious, but you haven't laughed at all since we started."

She looked up at me, frowning as if she didn't understand. I saw the exact moment comprehension dawned, because her face lit up. She squeezed my hand and stared at me in wonder.

"Oh, my God, I didn't! I didn't laugh! Wow!"

I chuckled and kissed her forehead.

"Thank you so much. You really are perfect!" she declared, nuzzling back against my chest.

I prayed she couldn't hear the pounding of my heart at those words.

I was perfect!

My Bella thought I was perfect!

I tried to calm myself but elation coursed through my veins. It was unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

"Um...Edward? W-would you consider being my date?" she asked quietly.

"Yes."

"You don't even know what for!" she giggled.

"I don't need to. Yes, it would be a pleasure to escort you out."

Bella kissed my chest, both startling and soothing me.

"It's to an exhibition of Alice's work." I felt her shrug. "I guess Jasper will be there too."

"Yes," I repeated, hugging her close.

We fell asleep in each other's arms shortly after. There was no talk of the cards, or no further talk on Jake.

It was just us.

End Notes:
<p>Aren't they cute?</p> <p>Bless.....</p>

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Chapter 11 by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Aww, Cuteward seems to have won you all over.

**Love to my wonderful beta, Maylin & my awesome prereader
elusivekoolaid.**

I adore you both.

HUGE amounts of love to Ninapolitan!!

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

"Alice's photos are really good, Bella. It's no wonder people are almost knocking down her door to sign her up," I stated in awe, as we strolled around the room.

Alice's photographs adorned the walls, and the room was bustling with people as they perused each one. The conversation was quiet, but with so many people it had begun to increase in volume the longer we stayed.

Bella and I had only been here an hour or so, and already I itched to get her alone. She looked stunning, wearing a dress that Alice had no doubt chosen, but it still suited her elegant personality. It was black lace over a pale pink satin, and her feet were encased in simple pink flats. She'd also pinned her hair up, exposing her long, pale neck and making my mouth water. The ache in my chest grew every time I met her, along with the ache further down my body. This was now beyond anything I could control. Bella held my heart in her hands, and she didn't even realize it.

"I told you she was amazing. She could be working anywhere in the world, but she refuses to leave." Bella shrugged. "She won't tell me why."

I cleared my throat. I had a pretty good idea, but if Alice didn't want to reveal it to her friend, then I certainly wouldn't say anything. It wasn't my place.

I rested my palm flat against the base of her spine and guided her to an eerie black and white shot of a deserted road. Trees hung menacingly either side of it, and mist floated around the branches. It looked completely isolated.

"How does she make it so damn scary? My skin is prickling just staring at it," I asked into the top of her head.

She stood slightly in front of me, so whenever I spoke, I saw a slight twitch of her head. I liked to think it was because my voice was having an effect on her. I didn't know if that was true, because she didn't reply. She seemed annoyed at me for some reason. I needed to get her alone and talk to her.

With the intention of making her smile, I brought my hand up to her shoulder, but she shook it off right away, and moved to the next photo. Her expression was blank and her stance was rigid.

"B-Bella? Are you OK?"

"Hmm, why wouldn't I be?" she snapped.

I frowned and adjusted my tie. It felt like it was strangling me. This whole scenario felt wrong. She'd been fine when I'd picked her up, and it was only after Jasper arrived with Alice that Bella had become so distant.

"You're just being rather abrupt with me, and it concerns me. Sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?"

She glared at me, waiting for my answer, but I could only mumble a few vowels. I snagged a couple of glasses of champagne from a passing waiter, and handed one to her.

"Drink. It helped last time."

Her eyes narrowed evilly for a second, before returning to normal and moving her attention back to the picture. What the hell had I done?

I stayed behind her, noting the tension in her shoulders, and the fact that she never took a sip of the drink. I glanced around for Jasper, hoping he could help me on this. How could I make things right with her, when I didn't know what had gone wrong? I'd come suitably dressed, and complimented her on what she was wearing. I'd even kissed her cheek, but it had all gone terribly wrong.

I drained my glass in one long gulp.

I'd hoped we were making progress but this was childish and ridiculously stupid. I took a deep breath and opened my mouth to speak, when she spun around and whispered.

"Pardon?"

"I said, you're glasses are tilted, and I'm sorry."

She bit at her lip, as I righted the frames. Her cheeks were flushed the cute petal pink I was growing so fond of. She was eyeing me cautiously, waiting for a response.

"What's wrong? Did I do something?"

My hand reached out and stroked her cheek, making her mouth open a little in shock. It had startled me too, because I'd certainly not planned to do that. My body wanted exactly what my heart did. They wanted Bella to smile.

"It's nothing. I'm being stupid," she stated, shaking her head. "Can we forget it? Shoot, here comes Alice."

I followed her gaze, and tried to take in exactly what Alice was wearing. I could see it was purple and was very flouncy, but it didn't seem to match the huge buckled boots on her feet. It was a very bizarre combination.

"What the hell does she have on her feet?" I whispered into Bella's ear.

She stifled a giggle, making me smile, and my chest unknot. "It's safer not to ask. Just tell her she looks awesome, OK?"

"Awesome? Not pretty or amazing?" I queried.

"Awesome, Edward."

I nodded and wrapped my arm around her waist. To my surprise she leaned towards me and rested her head against my chest. The air in the room seemed to thin. All I could smell was her.

"Hello! Thanks for coming. Can you believe how many people are here? It's crazy!" Alice squealed.

"It's a pleasure. Your work is beautiful, Alice. I'd really like to talk to you about a couple of pieces. If you don't mind?"

Alice's eyes lit up and she began bouncing on her tip toes.

"That would be awesome! Oh God! Really?"

"Hmm, yes. They have such presence. Bella told me you were good, but you go beyond that. It's really your calling. Well done, Alice."

She made me laugh by taking a little bow. However, her dress had a very low neckline, and the straps were extremely thin. She ended up showing me more than I assume she intended to. It embarrassed the hell out of me, but she was giggling and unfazed by the display of flesh.

"Come on! It's not like you haven't seen a pair of tits before. Remember, I know how many times you've seen hers," she gestured towards Bella, who was also turning bright red in mortification.

"Hmm, b-but not yours, Alice," I stumbled out.

"Oh, speaking of tits, did you see this, that your thoroughly precious brother bought me?"

I shook my head, knowing I hadn't been the one to discuss her breasts, as she thrust them towards me. I blinked rapidly, until I noticed she was showing me a necklace. It was a simple gold chain with a charm dangling from it. It took a few more blinks for me to see it was a gold camera charm.

"It's lovely."

"Isn't it? He is simply delicious. I could eat him up, and between you and me, I do often."

I wanted to the ground to swallow me whole. I really didn't want to know what she got up to with my brother. I heard Bella moan, and she turned her face into my shirt. I winced, wondering how to resurrect a conversation that was effectively dead.

"Well, you...erm...Oh, yes! You look *awesome*, Alice."

I smiled proudly at her, but only received an odd little grimace from her.

"You guys are perfect for each other," she said, wagging her finger between us. "I'm going to find my man. I'll talk to you both later, OK?"

I nodded, but Bella was still buried in my shirt. I took the opportunity to squeeze her a little tighter, and she startled me by moving her arm around my waist and hooking her thumb in my belt loop. My pulse kicked up a notch, surprised by her actions, but I wasn't going to point it out. I knew she'd retreat into herself. I was just stuck for what to do now. As if reading my mind, she asked if we could step outside for a little air. I took hold of her hand and escorted her out onto the street.

It was dark and only the street lights illuminated the road. The odd car drove by, but the only noise was coming from inside the gallery. Bella shivered as the wind whipped around us. Hating to see her cold, I removed my suit jacket and placed it around her shoulders.

"You're too good to me," she muttered. "Especially when I'm so mean to you in return."

"You're not mean to me. What could possibly make you think that? Bella," I sighed. "Will you please tell me what's wrong?"

She rubbed at her eye, smearing makeup across her cheek, and I lifted my hand to remove the black mark.

"See! You're doing it now, and all I'm doing is pouting over..."

"What? Don't stop now, this is the most I've got from you all night," I stated rather aggressively.

Her eyes went wide in shock. I hadn't meant to be so abrupt, but we needed to start communicating, otherwise all we had was sex. That thought left a bitter taste in my mouth.

"I told you I'm being silly."

She turned away from me, but I wasn't letting this drop. There was something eating away at her, and it had something to do with me.

"Bella, please?" I begged and gently placed my hand on her shoulder. My thumb stroked her exposed neck, and I felt her hum in approval.

"I-I...oh, I feel so stupid," she groaned.

"I'm going to start getting irritated in a moment. I won't keep asking, Bella."

"I was having a mini tantrum, because Jasper bought Alice a gift," she breathed in on a long expulsion.

I took a moment to grasp what she'd said. She was annoyed because I hadn't bought her anything? That was certainly a new aspect of our growing relationship.

"You wanted me to buy you something?" I hedged.

"I-I..." She turned to face me, her eyes darting anywhere but on my face. "I don't know."

She was making my head hurt, as well as my heart. If she didn't know what she wanted, then how was I to?

I must have groaned, or made some sort of sigh of exasperation, because she placed her hand on my chest and repeatedly apologized. I hated seeing her so confused, and the urge to ease it rose in my chest. I leaned towards her and rubbed my nose against hers. Her eyes fluttered closed and I felt the small exhale, at the same time her hand fisted in my shirt.

I slid the tip of my nose along hers, enjoying the closeness of her; she surrounded me.

"Bella," I said softly against her lips. "What's happening with us?"

Her grip on my shirt tightened a little, and she gulped audibly.

"Talk to me...I..."

"I'm jealous," she muttered, never opening her eyes.

We remained silent for what seemed like hours, just caressing each other with the tip of our noses. Bella's hand still held my shirt, and I still cupped the back of her neck. We were both lost in the confusion, both trying to gain some balance, and perspective as to what was happening between us.

It was only when the door to the gallery opened, and someone laughed loudly that our little bubble burst. Bella pulled away, and toed the floor. I could only hope we weren't going to take a step backwards now that reality was intruding. I took her hand in mine, and toyed with her fingertips. She finally looked at me, showing me her uncertainty.

"Bella..."

"K-kiss me," she interrupted, her voice trembling.

I stared at her, wanting to know if she was serious. Things were changing, and I didn't want her to regret anything we were doing. It was no longer a game to me, and I could only hope she was realizing that.

Slowly, I came forward, pressing my lips to hers as gently as I could. She tasted so sweet, and that small sip wasn't enough to sate the need burning through me. I tilted my head and fixed my mouth to hers more fully, caressing her lips with mine. Bella sagged under my affection, and it was her that tentatively licked my lower lip. At that point something fierce took hold of me, and I held her hips, pulling her closer to me. A small squeak sounded in her mouth, but was captured on my tongue.

We kissed slowly, neither of us in any hurry. It was a step further; a step closer to some form of a relationship and I welcomed it. She ran her fingers down my chest; little strokes that made me shiver. At the same time I skimmed my hand up her body, and cupped the back of her neck, wanting to deepen the kiss further. My fingers combed into her silky hair, and an involuntary rumble rolled through me, but seconds later we were jostled apart.

"Get a room!" Someone snarled as they walked by.

I couldn't respond, I was trying to gain my equilibrium, because that kiss had knocked me sideways. Bella looked as though it had done the same to her. She was touching her lips, and gazing at me through wide chocolate eyes. I could see the rapid rise and fall of her chest as she tried to calm herself. I couldn't pin down a single word to say, my head was a whirl of images and sensations, all linked to Bella. Instead, I opted to hold her hand in mine, and lead her back into the gallery. We could talk later, or rather, I hoped we could.

"Edward?"

I looked down at her to see a huge smile spread across her face. She was taking my jacket from her shoulders, and trying to hand it back to me.

"Thank you. I was being childish, but thank you."

I vowed to buy her something better than a necklace with a camera charm; something that was special to us, but it would be a surprise. I wouldn't tell her that now.

"I can't say I really understand, but you are certainly forgiven. Now, let's get another drink, and try to find my brother and your giddy little friend."

I kept her hand in mine, and tried to walk further into the room, but she pulled me back, smiling when I frowned.

"You have lipstick on your chin," she giggled, before reaching up and smoothing the makeup from my face. "There you go."

I swallowed the wave of emotion that was threatening to choke me, and gave her a quick smile. She seemed pleased with that and took a glass of wine from a passing waiter.

"I'll find you one that has red. I know you hate white," she stated.

My jaw almost fell to the floor. She wasn't completely oblivious to us, she did remember things about me; trivial things, like wine. I nodded, not trusting my voice to come out clearly and followed her into the crowd. Bella didn't seem to realize the significance of what she'd said, so for now, I let it drop.

"Where do you suppose they are? There's no way they could have left."

I scanned the crowd, and zoned in on them almost instantly. I lowered my head to Bella's shoulder and whispered in her ear, pointing in their direction. She gasped, as we watched Alice smooth her dress down, and adjust her breasts in the material. Jasper was fastening the last few buttons on his shirt, and grinning like the Cheshire cat.

"I think they were having a party of their own," I stated, clearing my throat uncomfortably.

Bella spun to face me, her eyes blazing in annoyance, and something else. Hurt?

"Here?" she squealed. "They've been doing *that*? Here? Now?"

"Um...Well, it appears that way."

She started to walk over, wanting to give them a piece of her mind, but I couldn't let her embarrass herself in front of so many people. This outburst seemed a little out of character for her, but then so did the jealousy.

Oh!

Was Bella upset because she wanted a little fun like that? I'd completely missed the obvious. She'd told me previously just how much she admired Alice's ability to just let go, maybe Bella wanted to be like that for a while. Could I offer that to her? Could I also just 'let go'?

I bit down harshly, and went after her before she could cause a scene. My hand shot out and wrapped around her wrist, pulling her towards the room Alice and Jasper had just vacated. She gave a sharp intake of breath as I closed the door behind us, flicking the lock.

"What the hell?" she asked, startled by my forcefulness.

"Y-you w-were about to cause a scene, and embarrass yourself. I'm sorry, Bella but I couldn't let you do that."

"Why not? What difference does it make to you?" She demanded raising her voice.

I didn't want this to turn nasty. I was only trying to help, but I could see by the way her features were twisting that she was becoming more and more annoyed. I took a step closer, intending to calm her, but she shook her head and held up her hand in warning.

"No, Edward! I want to go out there and speak to my friend."

"Why now? Why is it so important to give her your opinion right now? You know you'll spoil her night, don't you?" I growled.

Bella continued shaking her head in defiance, and I took another step closer. This time, instead of backing away, she took a step towards me, glaring at me.

"Move, Edward."

"No."

We took another step towards each other.

"Edward."

"No."

We were now virtually nose to nose. The air around us was virtually cracking, it was so highly charged, and it was only now I noticed neither one of us was stuttering, or blushing. Bella was panting in annoyance, and her eyes were set on mine in complete challenge. She was ready for this confrontation, but I wanted something else entirely, and it was making my trousers stir, even as I tried to grasp what was going on.

I'd never had this kind of reaction to an angry girlfriend. I had run for cover whenever Angela had started snarling. I was definitely running now, but I was moving towards it, rather than away. I could hear the people cheering outside, but they could be a million miles away. Right now every part of me was focused on Bella.

"You can't lock me in here, hoping I'll calm down."

"Why are you so worked up? Just answer me that. What does it matter if Jasper and Alice were in here playing board games? I don't understand, and I really want to. I've never seen you like this."

She shoved at my chest, but it wasn't forceful, and as a test, I stepped to the side, allowing her access to the door. She walked slowly over to it, making my heart pound in my chest, but she stopped as she touched the handle.

"You'll ruin her night," I stated quietly.

"She's the one who's ruined it. She shouldn't be having sex in a closet!"

"Why not?" I asked, hoping for once she would finally give in and tell me. "She's having fun, Bella. Why can't Alice have fun?"

"Because it's always her!" she spat, and immediately covered her mouth with her hand. She hadn't meant for the words to spill out, but now I understood.

I walked closer, and backed her into the door, cupping her face in my hand.

"Fun? You think Alice isn't jealous of the things we've been doing? Were they not fun?"

Bella licked her lower lip and met my eyes. Hers were shining with anger, but I could see the tears that threatened to fall. I knew my hand was trembling, but we were getting somewhere. Finally.

"I...it's just...Maybe, but this isn't what Alice thinks. Is it?"

"Depends what Alice thinks. I think it's something that started off with a lot of rules, but we've systematically broken each one. Some people would count that as fun, Alice especially."

I felt her swallow, as she stayed silent. We stared at one another, both waiting for the other to make the first move. The lower halves of our bodies were pressed together, her back pressed to the door, and my forearm rested between her breasts as my hand still held her face. I could feel the rapid movement of her breathing, and it only made me want to calm her further, but the proximity of our bodies, and the silent assessment of one another was stirring us both into a frenzy of want.

The intensity was foreign. I'd never needed her like this before. There was an edge to my hunger, something possessive in nature, but I couldn't get to grips with why I felt it now.

"Edward..."

"Bella..."

We whispered in unison, letting it hang in the air. We both understood what the unspoken words were, and smiled.

"I haven't ever..." she started.

"And you think I have? Never anywhere but the bedroom, Bella. This is new to me too."

She licked her lips, her eyes still fixed to mine.

"We don't have any protection," she gasped, as my lips connected with her jaw.

"No, but we don't need any. I'm not the one that needs to relax," I mumbled, as I pecked my way down her neck.

Bella gave a sharp intake of breath, as my hand slowly snaked up her dress and held her hip. I could feel the thin panties under my palm, and bit down the urge to pull them free. My lust was ferocious and I tried desperately to rein it in. I was turning into someone, around Bella, that I didn't recognize. However, she seemed to like that person, and he was the one she wanted to have sex with, not the stuttering and mumbling man I really was. I'd convinced myself I could be the one she wanted for the few precious hours I was with her.

Hearing her moan and gasp always brought me to the surface, and as I sucked her earlobe into my mouth that is exactly what happened. Bella tugged on my hair, making me wince and pull away, but so as not to upset her, I lowered myself to the floor, kneeling in front of her.

"Edward?" she purred.

"Shh, just let me. Please," I begged.

She took her lower lip between her teeth, and nodded shyly, as I hooked my thumbs into her panties. My hand shook while I skimmed the material down her legs, and she stepped out of them. I left the scrap of satin on the floor, and ghosted my hand back up her thighs. My lips followed, and if she wasn't sure of where I was taking this, she was when my head went under her dress.

"Oh!" she squeaked, making me smile.

I didn't reply. My actions would speak for me, but the closer I got to her needy center, the tighter she held my hair, and eventually I had to beg her to stop. She apologized at least ten times, and I found the only way to shut her up was to start back kissing my way up her legs.

I could smell her arousal. It beckoned me towards her most needy place, and my mouth watered in response. She adjusted her position as I came into contact with her inner thighs, and I watched them quiver with each small peck. My hands gripped her hips, as I pulled her closer to my mouth, my thumbs tracing little circles across her hipbones.

Her breathing altered, as I kissed the crease where her thigh became something much more interesting. And she gripped my shoulder when I traced her opening with my tongue.

"Edward, are you sure? I..."

"Shhh," I crooned against her wetness. "Forget where we are. Forget who's outside, Bella. It's just us OK?"

I felt her nod, as I parted her with my thumbs and tasted her. She was divine, delicious and I would claim her as mine. She just hadn't realized that yet.

My tongue lapped at her, making her nails bite harshly into the flesh under my shirt, but it faded into insignificance.

I was drunk on Bella.

The more I took from her, the more I wanted, and by the way she was thrusting her hips along with my licks, she felt the same. I slowly swirled her clitoris with my index finger before inserting it gently inside of her.

"Oh my..."

"Hmmm," I mumbled against her, making her buck her hips closer.

She was so hot against my tongue, so perfect against my lips. I pushed my finger into her, quickening the pace and wanting to feel her shatter around me. Her hips met the rhythm of my hand, as my tongue did a dance of its own. My taste buds were on fire with her exotic tang, and I couldn't get enough. I moved my other hand to her ass, holding her in place as I nibbled at her clitoris. She moaned loudly, writhing and begging for more.

I felt her begin to twitch seconds before she burst apart, consumed by her orgasm. She tightened around my finger, and I pulled my lips from her, just watching as her kitty flushed and pulsed.

I sat back on my knees, and removed my head from her dress, looking up at her dazed expression.

"Calmed down now?" I asked smugly.

"I...I...erm...yes?" she panted.

I stood up keeping her pressed against the door, and gazed at her.

"Are you going to tell me why you were so annoyed now?"

"Get me while I'm vulnerable, why don't you?"

I skimmed my knuckles down her face and kissed the tip of her nose.

"You're always vulnerable, that's one of the many things I like about you. Tell me."

She closed her eyes for a moment, before admitting she was jealous again of Jasper and Alice. I'd guessed that was the case, but desperately wanted her to verbalize it. She could have all that, and more, if only she would acknowledge that we were more than a pack of fifty-two cards.

"So, you get aggressive when you're jealous? Good to know, but do you feel better now?"

Bella giggled, and removed my glasses, before kissing my nose.

"I don't feel anything now! I'm mush," she smiled, wiping the lenses of my glasses.

I was about to take them from her, but she placed them back onto my face and grinned.

"There you go! They were...erm...smeared. You can see me now."

"I saw everything I needed to, Bella, and it was beautiful."

Before she could blush, or hide behind her hair, I leaned forward and kissed her lips. It was deep and thorough, as I swept my tongue along her teeth. Her hand fisted in my shirt as a knocking on the door startled us.

"I know you're in there! Can you guys hurry up? I have a toast to make, and I want you to hear it." Alice bellowed.

We both groaned, pulling apart and grimacing. We'd never be allowed to forget this; Alice would make sure of it. I picked her panties from the floor and handed them back to her shyly. Why was I blushing now after what I'd just done to her? Bella blushed just as furiously, as she took them and slipped them back on. I gave her some space, as she retrieved her bag and checked her hair and makeup, when she smiled at me, I knew she was ready to go back into the gallery.

I held my hand out to her and grinned when she took it. I tugged her closer, as she opened the door.

"Just for the record," I whispered into her ear. "I like your hair down."

She giggled, but was pulled away by Alice.

"You two need to do more than have sex. It's disgusting," she snarled, but ruined it by laughing. "I'm rescuing you from this man, Bella. All he's interested in doing is fucking! Come on."

"What!" I virtually shouted. "I can assure you, that is not the case..."

"Save it." Alice smiled, not bothered by my outburst.

Bella shrugged and was taken away by her friend. I stood watching them giggle and laugh; my feelings for her growing every time she glanced my way. The rest of the night was a blur, because all I could think of was how I was going to get her to see *me*, and not the man she came to when she needed to scratch an itch.

End Notes:
<p>I know, they already did this card, but that's what Deckward wanted to do to her</p> <p>...and it shows just how much their relationship has shifted!</p>

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Chapter 12: Lotus Love by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Love & Hugs to my beta Maylin & my pre reader Elusivekoolaid.

You're both too good for words.

FYI: this will always update on here before FF.net.

SM owns all things Twilight. Cuteward is all mine.

BPOV

"I'll never understand why you do that." Alice murmured from her perch on the couch.

She was filling her face with a huge bag of chips, and swigging from a large bottle of Pepsi. I was stretching out of the dolphin pose on my yoga mat. She would always complain when I took up the floor to exercise.

I'd hoped she had work today. I had a full two days off, and would have appreciated the time alone, but I had no such luck. She was taking root on the couch, and would not be moved. Apparently the fat babies and wild teens on some talk show was all she needed, well that and her junk food.

It had been two days since her exhibition, and she was only just coming down from the high it had given her. She hadn't taken the necklace off, and I could see it now, glinting as the sunlight hit her chest.

Again, jealousy roiled in my gut, and I immediately felt guilty for feeling such things towards my best friend. Alice was also a little upset. Jasper had gone out of town for two days with work, and she was already missing him. I felt sorry for her, but she was annoying me with her moping.

"I do it to stay fit," I retorted, starting the sun salutation.

She snorted, "I bet the flexibility issue is a win with Eddie-boy, right?"

I rolled my eyes at her insinuation, and after only one series of positions, lowered myself to the floor, sitting lotus on the mat. I stared at her, waiting for another witty reply, but she just glared back.

"Go on," I prodded.

"What? I'm just saying that being bendy can't hinder your little game."

"I hate the way you say that. You talk about it like it's dirty and wrong."

She crunched down on another chip, and flicked the crumbs off her sweater.

"I've never said it was wrong," she shrugged. "Maybe dirty, but that was meant as a kind of compliment. Bella, this is a little odd to see you like this. I mean, fucking hell, when was the last time you longed for a guy?"

"I don't...I didn't..." I stuttered.

"Exactly! Never! And now you understand why it can be a little amusing to me."

I took a gulp of water, and pouted at her.

"I'm glad I can make you smile," I replied sarcastically.

Alice ignored me, batting away my comment with her hand. She turned slightly towards me, her face serious.

"Can we talk? I mean really talk? You know, the kind where you're honest and you don't turn scarlet and stutter?"

"That depends what you want to discuss."

"The cards," she stated proudly.

"No," I responded abruptly. "I'm not telling you which ones we've done, Alice. That's personal."

Alice laughed loudly, her head falling backwards on to the cushions, as she opened her mouth wide.

"Personal? Are you for fucking real? You met Edward via the internet and meet him for sex in a hotel. How is that personal?"

"So now you're judging me?"

I swung my legs around me, intending to stand, when she placed her hand on my knee.

"Bells..."

"No, Alice! If I recall, it was your idea. You can't go telling me it's disgusting now."

She swung her legs off the couch and leaned down between them, trying to get her face level with mine.

"I never said it was disgusting. Can I please have my say?"

I frowned at her, but nodded. I didn't want to hear whatever she was about to spill, but as always, Alice won, and I remained silent.

"OK, Jake hurt you badly, and I worry about you. This thing with Edward shocks me, because not only are you having random sex, but you're having it more than me and you're smiling! Do you not see what a fucking huge anomaly that is? Bells, you've never had more sex than me. Ever!"

"I told you I wasn't talking to you about the intimate side."

"Oh, get over yourself!" she yelled. "I'm trying to be your friend. Why are you being so damn hostile?"

I sagged, and took a drink of water. She was right, I was being aggressive towards her, but that was because I always expected her to dislike my decisions. Alice was a good friend, but she always thought I was too quiet, too shy, too withdrawn and too compliant. The things she was saying now went against her usual ramblings to me, and it was difficult to take it in.

"I smile all the time," I muttered.

She shook her head, her black hair flying into her eyes, as she rubbed my knee gently.

"No, sweetie, you don't. Since everything went wrong with Jake, damn, even before then, you were sad, and you just trudged through each day. Since Edward arrived in your life, you smile, you laugh and you seem so much happier. Bella, ask Rose, I spoke to her yesterday, and she was amazed at the change in you. It's noticeable, and as cliched as it is, you're glowing."

I snickered at her. Glowing?

"I know you don't believe me. He's changing you, and it's sorta cute to watch."

I thought about her comments, taking the time to digest her assessment. Had I really changed? Analyzing the why I was with Edward, I knew I didn't hide from him as much as before, particularly when we were naked. I didn't shy away from his stare either, nor did I worry as much about telling him what I was thinking. They were all huge steps forward, but the biggest one was my giggles. When we got close, and things became heated I no longer laughed at the intimacy.

"I trust him, Alice," I whispered.

"I know, and that's why I'm letting this lead wherever it's meant to go. If there was any hesitation on your behalf, I would have stepped in. Maybe you would see that as me interfering, but I love you, sweetie, and I want to see you happy."

I could tell by the urgency of her expression that she meant it.

"I think I am with Edward. It feels strange, but I want to see him again. Even though I shouldn't."

"Why?"

"Um...well, we're not about that, are we? It's about cards and s-sex."

Alice laughed loudly, before glaring at me.

"You really think that? Bells, sometimes you can be so blind. I don't think either one of you think this is only about those silly little cards. If you thought that you guys would never have come to my exhibition, we would never have gone to the party at Edward's apartment, and he certainly wouldn't have come to check on you when you were sick."

I opened my mouth to speak, but closed it right afterward. She could be right. Her points were more than valid, but could I really believe that Edward wanted more too? I stared at her in awe, as a knock sounded on the door. She raised her brows at me. I'd seen that look before, it

basically told me she wasn't moving from the couch, and it would be up to me to see who was here.

I groaned, annoyed at the interruption, but also irritated by Alice and her lazy ass.

I yanked the door open, and glowered at the caller.

"Umm, hi."

Edward.

He was looking at me nervously over his gray rimmed glasses. I noticed he didn't have his suit on today, and I instantly missed it. Instead he wore dark jeans, and a simple white polo shirt. There was a leather courier bag hanging across his torso, and I bit back a smirk. He reminded me of chastised little schoolboy, waiting to see if his punishment was over. I just didn't know why he was so nervous.

"Hi," I said quietly back.

"I, erm...Well, I was just..."

"WHO IS IT?" Alice bellowed.

We both winced, as I stepped to the side, gesturing for him to enter the apartment. He shuffled until he was next to me, and lowered his head tentatively. His lips caressed mine in a soft gentle dance. My body began to hum in awareness; a feeling I was growing used to around him, but it had begun to grow stronger. When he was this close to me, my body demanded I touch him, feel his skin next to mine. It was a call I was having to force down. It was such a foreign sensation.

Edward's lips parted from mine, but he remained close.

"I'm sorry. I...n-needed to see you. Maybe I should go?"

"No!" I all but shouted and placed my hand on his chest. "I'm not busy."

He glanced down at my halter neck top and yoga pants, raising an eyebrow in question.

"I just finished. Alice demanded my attention," I retorted, rolling my eyes.

"Yoga?"

"Yeah, I've been..."

"Are you guys just gonna stay out here? Or are you actually going to enter the apartment?" Alice questioned from the doorway.

I spun, placing my hands on my hips. "Oh, so you aren't taking root on the couch then? I'm shocked you have legs!"

"Funny, Bella," she added sarcastically. "Hello, Edward. What a wonderful surprise. It's not your usual day to meet, is it?"

Edward choked a little at her words. I merely glared at her, hoping she'd move.

She held her hands up in surrender, and smiled. "OK, OK, I'm going out. I've gotta water Jasper's plants. I'll be back later."

"Jasper doesn't have plants." Edward stated. "Well, unless they're of the illegal variety, and that has been known."

I blinked, taken aback by his omission, but Alice simply giggled, grabbed her keys off the kitchen counter and waved, as she shoved passed Edward. It pushed his body up against mine, my head connected with his chest, and I breathed in his musky male scent. His arm came around my waist to steady me, and before I really knew what was happening, we were hugging. I stood on tip toes so I could wrap my arms around his shoulders. He nuzzled my neck and his breath tickled across my hair. I closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of him here, like this.

"I just came to see how you were," he whispered. "I'll leave you to finish."

I pulled away slowly, stroking my hand down his arm, and taking hold of his hand. I pulled him inside and kicked the door closed with my foot.

He scowled in confusion, but followed me into the living area.

"You don't have to leave, and thanks for coming over. I think you saved me. Alice wasn't planning on moving anytime soon."

Edward picked up the empty wrapper, and grimaced.

"I see."

I sat back down on my mat, crossing my legs in front of me and watched as Edward lifted the strap of his bag over his head and placed it on the floor. He sat down on the couch, and looked across at me. The air seemed to vibrate with an odd silence. It wasn't uncomfortable, though I felt the need to fill it. It seemed to be thick with anticipation, but I couldn't understand why. I swallowed, and tried to breathe slowly. The problem was each time I inhaled I could smell Edward more. It made my insides swirl; a sensation I only felt when we were about to...well...you know.

"So...um...well..."

I smiled at his stuttering. I felt exactly the same.

"Have you heard from Jasper?" I questioned.

Edward nodded. "This morning. Said he may even be home later tonight."

"That should please Alice."

He nodded again, and lowered himself onto the floor, facing me.

"I can't see you properly up there. This is much better."

He reached across and placed his hand on my knee, his thumb caressing me through my pants.

"I like you coming here, but you could have called, you know. I would have answered. I was being so silly at the exhibition."

I felt a blush stain my cheeks and apologized again.

"Shh, I didn't come to hear you say sorry again."

I looked at him apprehensively. Why had he come?

As if reading my mind, he reached into his bag and retrieved a small box.

"I came to give you this."

"No," I denied. "I'm not taking it. Oh, Edward, I'm sorry. I was being childish, and I never expected you to pander to me. I feel so guilty now."

"I want you to have it, and I didn't buy it because of your jealousy over Alice. I bought it...well, I...I bought it because I saw it and thought of you. Please?"

He pushed it back towards me, giving me no choice but to accepted it. My hands trembled as they flipped the little jewelry box open.

The moment I looked inside I started to cry. When I realized I was bawling, I cried even more from embarrassment. I was a mess. As the tears fell down my face and plopped onto my hand I felt Edward swamp me in his arms, and pull me against his body.

"Hey," he crooned. "I didn't mean to upset you. If you don't like it I can take it back, and get you something else. Shh, baby."

His endearment only made it worse. I hick-coughed, trying to calm down, all the while he stroked my hair and murmured in my ear.

"I'm sorry. I should have let you choose. I'm so inept at this!"

"No, no, no!" I panicked. "It's just...I love it, Edward. Thank you..."

I gulped, hoping to calm myself, but my bottom lip trembled when Edward opened the box and took the simple silver link bracelet from the box and placed it around my wrist. The small scarlet glass heart dangled from the clasp and made me want to sob all over again. He held me face between his hands, and kissed me tenderly.

"Are you sure you like it, Bella?"

"Oh, Edward, yes! It's beautiful." I felt another tear trickle down my cheek. "No one has ever..."

"It's alright. You don't need to explain. I just needed to know you liked it. I hadn't gone out to buy you anything, but it was there in the jewelers window, and I simply had to get it for you."

We stayed cuddled in each others arms for a while, and as I slowly calmed down, I noticed Edward was holding my forearm, his thumb was stroking across the skin, but the tip of it was moving across the swell of my breast. At the exact moment I noticed it, Edward stilled; he had too. Everything around us shifted, and a prickling began to tingle my skin.

"Bella?" Edward breathed.

"Yes," I confirmed, though he hadn't asked me a question.

I took a deep breath, mustering the courage, and carefully moved my hands underneath his polo shirt. My fingers came into contact with his toned abdominal muscles, and each time I skimmed my fingers across them he twitched.

"I didn't come here for this..."

"But you're here now. Let me thank you. Let's use another card," I giggled, trying to make light of the situation.

I no longer cared about those cards. I was beginning to care about Edward, and if I had to use the cards to spend time with him, I would. He kissed my cheeks free of tears, as I tried to ignore the ache in my chest. His hands floated across my arms, my thighs and torso, as he slowly and tenderly undressed me. My clothes formed a small pile on the floor next to my yoga mat, and Edward's swiftly followed. As each item was removed, he kissed the newly exposed area. I wanted to weep all over again at the care he was taking with me.

He was kneeling on my mat, as I climbed onto his lap, gripping his shoulders tightly. He'd sheathed himself with a condom, and was ready for me.

I giggled.

"Huh?" he smiled.

Blushing, I replied, "This card is the lotus one, and we're on my yoga mat. Sorry, it amused me for a moment."

Edward grinned and removed the tie from my hair. It tumbled free, cascading down my back, and tickling the bare skin. He combed his fingers through it, adding tiny pecks across my chest. I slid closer, feeling his arousal prodding my needy center. I wanted him.

"I've missed you," he uttered into my neck. At least that's what I thought he said, but he was mumbling it against my skin, so couldn't be certain. I wanted to say it back, but was worried I'd heard incorrectly. I didn't want to embarrass myself. Not now, not with him.

His hands stroked the hair from either side of my face, and he slowly lowered them, skimming under my chin and down the column of my throat. I could see myself reflected in the lens of his glasses. I was shifting my hips involuntarily, as they tried to seek out something only Edward's body could give.

I laid my palm flat over his heart, feeling its speedy thump under the skin, as he began to fondle with my breast. I shivered; his touch so delicate. His other hand gripped my hips and pulled me closer; so close the tip of his arousal entered me.

"Oh!" I squeaked.

"Hmm," he agreed, bringing his lips to my neck as he entered me completely.

There was a soft sigh of completion, and I wasn't positive who it came from...perhaps both of us. I could feel my heartbeat increase, pounding along with the rhythm of his, and my whole body

flourished under his touch. We kissed, and massaged one another as our hips pistoned gently. I could see the glinting of the bracelet, as I combed my hand through his hair and smiled.

"Wrap your legs tighter around me," he said quietly.

I did as he asked, and crossed my ankles, digging my heels into his bottom.

"Is that right?" I asked breathlessly. "Can you support me?"

Edward snorted a little and nodded. "Bella, its perfect and supporting you will never be a problem."

My insides melted at the total honesty of his words. This man was beginning to mean so much to me. The tenderness of his touches, and the affection he gave me was all consuming, and I responded to it each one with just as much kindness .

Edward's fingers held tighter to my hips, bringing me as close to her body as he could. My breasts pressed against his chest, sending tingles through my nipples. At the same time he entered me up to the hilt, hitting a spot inside of me that made me gasp. My abdomen clenched and awareness of my building orgasm flooded my system. I panted, amazed at just how quickly it had approached.

"Edward?" I breathed, confused.

"Shh, baby," he crooned, stroking my back with his free hand.

I buried my face in his neck, kissing the thin skin with short pecks as we continued to rock our way to oblivion. I could feel his heavy, shallow breathing against my breast, hear it in my ears, but he continued to exert himself by pushing his hips up towards me. I squeezed my thighs tighter and suddenly felt him groan. The rumble reverberated through both of our bodies. Edward thrust one last time harshly into me, before a tremor wracked his body, and he gave a loud growl as he reached his release.

His head fell onto my shoulder, as he tried to gain some balance on his world, whereas my whole body was buzzing with lust. I shamelessly carried on pushing myself against him, speeding up as I my own orgasm swamped my body, and forced a yell from my mouth.

We remained locked together as we both tried to calm down. It had all happened rather quickly, and we were both a little shell-shocked. His palm continued to float up and down my back, and eventually he thrust his fingers into my hair, and pulled my head up to meet his gaze.

"I didn't come here for this, Bella."

"I know you didn't." I agreed.

I mustered a little courage and kissed him. His lips opened immediately, allowing me to skim my tongue across his teeth.

"The bracelet is beautiful. Thank you."

He nodded and began to jostle us around. I squealed when he picked me up and lowered us both onto the couch. He laid us down, tucking me into his body in my favorite position. The blanket that hung on the back of the couch was pulled on top of us, and I hummed, snuggling closer.

"I need too...um...the condom?" Edward stuttered.

"Can you stay like this a little while?"

He kissed my shoulder and said yes lowly.

"Bella? Can I come to the bar for lunch tomorrow? Maybe you could sit with me?"

I smiled. "I'm off for the next two days, but...well, I could meet you anyway. If you want to."

His lips moved across my skin as he spoke his next words. "I would love to take you out to lunch."

My phone chirped, breaking our bliss, shortly followed by Edward's. We both grimaced and moved under duress. I watched him pull his cell from his bag and stalk towards the bathroom naked. A small giggle burst from my lips as I picked up mine from the coffee table.

"Hello?"

"Sorry to interrupt your sexcapades, but I just wanted to tell you I'm picking Jazzy up from the airport. He's finished his stuff early, so you and the nerd have the place to yourselves for a while longer."

"Alice!" I warned. "Don't call him that!"

"Yeah, whatever. Anyway..."

"Thanks for letting me know," I sighed, and was about to hang up when I realized something. "Alice, wait! Before you go...Um...What does Jasper actually do? Work, I mean?"

A derisive snort of laughter popped through the earpiece, and I scowled in irritation.

"You don't know what they do?" She laughed. "Christ, this just gets better and better. Ask him."

She didn't wait for a reply, or say goodbye, she just hung up.

I sighed loudly, and flopped onto the couch, pulling the blanket around me. I studied the bracelet Edward had bought me, a huge smile breaking out across my face. My heart swelled with...what was it I was feeling for him? There was something growing, and it was doing it rapidly. I tried to analyze how I was around him, and how my body reacted to him, but Edward strolled back into the room, disturbing my musings. He'd hung a towel around his waist and went to pour a glass of juice from the fridge.

"That was Jasper. He's on his way home."

"Yeah, that was Alice. She's collecting him from the airport."

He smiled and placed the juice back into the refrigerator.

"Edward? Can I ask you something?"

He turned, taking a huge gulp of the liquid and nodded.

"Um, w-what is it that you do? Your business? It's just that I've never really asked, and I'd like to know."

He winced, and I watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed. He seemed nervous, and I couldn't understand why. Whatever he was doing was making him a lot of money, so it couldn't be that mortifying.

"I...*We* own and run an internet business."

"OK, but what is that business? Don't you want to tell me?"

"Of course I do, but it's...fuck!"

I gasped at his curse. He rarely did anything like that, and it shocked me. All I could do was stare at him, perplexed and stunned.

"Sorry, I shouldn't have done that," he groaned, and came to kneel in front of me.

Edward took my hands in his and stroked his thumb across my knuckles. His eyes were fixed intensely on mine, as he continued. "You'll laugh."

"No, I won't. I promise," I denied.

He took a moment and a deep breath before he whispered, "Online dating..."

End Notes:
<p>*gasp*the Twilighited thread ladies guessed this a while ago...</p> <p>Thank you xxx</p>

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Chapter 13: Back to Basics by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello!

Love to my awesome beta Maylin & my amazing pre reader elusivekoolaid

I adore you both.

Thanks to the awesome Ninapolitan.

Slightly shorter chapter, but this is needed.

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

"You look beautiful in red, Bella."

She blushed and lowered her gaze, but still whispered, "Thank you."

I'd brought her to the park for a picnic on the grass. I thought if we weren't alone then she would feel more comfortable, and our relationship would be more than sex. She was consuming my every thought, and all I wanted was for us to meet and sex not to be involved.

I wished to be able to tell her, for the words to slip from my mouth like they did for other couples.

But we weren't other couples.

We were two awkward people who met via some stupid advert, and had been fumbling our way through ever since. I wanted that to change, but to do that we had to become more at ease with each other, and stop looking at those cards as if they were all we had.

"When you said lunch I thought you'd mean in a restaurant, but Edward, this is wonderful. I've never been on a real picnic before."

I raised my brows in surprise, fleetingly questioning what brand of moron she'd previously dated, but then I already knew the answer to that, didn't I?

"Has he been in touch?" I asked softly, passing her a glass of wine.

"Who? Oh! Um, I think he tried to call, but Alice intercepted it and deleted the message on the machine. I never mentioned it to her, and she doesn't think I saw her do it." She shrugged. "I think it's best we let this conversation drop. It's not something I want to talk about."

"But, Bella..."

"No," she interrupted. "Please, just drop it. I'm not ready."

I nodded. I ruined it all again with my gracelessness in relationships.

We sipped our wine in silence, and every few seconds I caught her glancing up at me through the top of her eyes. It felt like she wanted to ask me something but was too shy too.

"Go ahead," I prompted.

"Um...you're job?" She smiled shyly. "Why do you need me?"

"I'm sorry, I don't understand. What do you mean, *need* you?"

She blushed and ducked her head, clearly uncomfortable with the turn this conversation was taking. However, it made me happier, because we were doing something new. We were talking without those damn cards hanging over us.

Bella mumbled and all I heard was, "Attractive...charming...perfect...material."

"I didn't hear completely what you just said, but I can take a good guess. It's Jasper that runs the whole dating part of it. It was his idea to start it in the first place. I do all the coding. I don't even see the applicants, they're all numbers to me, so why would I want to date one?"

"Is that why you replied to my advert?"

"I told you, I didn't and I met up with you to apologize, but..." I drifted off, not sure she would want to hear the rest of it.

"But?"

"Then I saw you."

Bella's eyes cast downwards, before she whispered, "Did I look that pitiful? Edward, I don't want you seeing me out of sympathy."

I'd heard enough. She had it all wrong.

I reached out, stroking my finger down her cheek and hoping she would actually listen.

"I don't pity you, Bella. I want to keep seeing you. When will you understand that?"

She flushed and tried to move her gaze from mine, but I'd brought her here today to talk, and I was going to make her, even if it ended up as little more than a few sentences.

"I promise to try," she said against my palm, before kissing it quickly.

My heart clenched from that one display, and acting on instinct alone, I leaned forward and kissed her. My lips moved gently across hers, never too demanding. Bella wanted a little more, though. She was the one to stroke her tongue against mine, and she was the one who kissed a little fiercer. I went right along with it, enjoying the contrast from the stilted way our conversation had flowed, to the smoothness our bodies now had with each other.

When I felt her pushing me back onto the blanket I took a peek to see what she was doing. Bella was on all fours, kissing me as she crawled up my body. This was the most assertive she had ever been, so I went along with it. I lowered myself onto the blanket and let her straddle my

hips. When I was horizontal she moved her lips to my jaw, pecking along the bone towards my ear. I placed my hands on her hips, continually telling myself that we were outside, so touching her anywhere else was not possible. Maybe that was why she was doing this now; she felt safer to take the lead in public, knowing it couldn't turn into anything further.

"Bella," I breathed.

"We can't do anything," she replied but continued with the short kisses.

"Do you want to?"

She buried her head in the crook of my neck, her fragrant hair falling across my face, as she mumbled, "That's not what I meant. It's erm...my time of the ...month."

I ignored her embarrassment and smoothed my hands up her back, stroking her hair from around her shoulders, so I could see her face.

"Then can I make a suggestion?"

I felt her nod, as my fingers stroked her throat.

"How about we just lie here, talk and make out? Let's go back to the start, Bella."

She giggled softly and moved her lips back to mine.

"I think we can handle that."

On the last word I kissed her. It was a slow and gentle massage, but I could feel my body responding. I was rather ashamed, because she would think I hadn't heard her. I meant it when I said there was no need for us to do anything further, but that clearly hadn't been communicated to other parts of my body. I moved my hips, hoping to keep my arousal away from her, but realized as she moaned into my mouth that it had done the exact opposite. I was startled when she pushed back.

My hands were roaming across her back, and teased the hem of her shirt when they came back to rest on her hips. I heard a child laugh and reluctantly pulled away, blinking her back into focus.

"I think we need to be careful, Bella. We'll scare the children."

She smiled down at me, and nodded. I held her hips firmly as I moved us onto our sides, facing each other on the blanket.

"I've definitely never had a picnic lunch quite like this," I stated, stroking her side and feeling the smoothness of the satin underneath my fingers.

"It's certainly something to remember."

"Will you?"

I watched her features contort a little in confusion before she grinned. It made her brown eyes sparkle and I saw stars. She was perfect for me in every single way. I just needed to make her understand that.

"Of course I'll remember this. How could I forget someone who's as thoughtful as you?"

I tried not be upset by her insinuation that I was going to leave and therefore, her memories would be all she had left of me. Instead, I said excitedly, "Then let's make more."

"More what?"

"Memories, Bella. Hear me out, OK? You started this because you wanted to do things that you've never done before, so why not have fun while we're doing this? You seem so concerned with making sure a particular card is done, but we can do that and laugh at the same time, can't we?"

"I don't really understand what you mean," she pouted.

I kissed her lips, removing her perplexed expression, and tried to explain further.

"Each time we pick a card, you get upset if there was a problem completing it as you'd wanted, but if we make this about more than the card then you won't feel as disappointed. Let's say you picked a position that meant me carrying you and you wrapping your legs around my waist, then to stop the whole awkwardness of the situation we'll go to the beach, have fun with it other, and maybe try it in the sea." She laughed loudly, making me smile. "That way, if we fail at the position at least we have fun doing it. Yes?"

"Hmm, yeah. I like the sound of that."

"We've been going about this all wrong Bella. We're focus on the wrong part. This should be a fun discovery and I know that sometimes neither one of us has had fun, well, apart from the...um...obvious."

I watched her, and was ecstatic when she continued to smile and nod. Enjoying our playful comfort, I reached across her to the food in the basket and pulled out a strawberry. I placed it against her lips, making her eyes go wide.

"Bite," I told her simply.

Bella opened her mouth a little, but not enough for the tip of the strawberry to enter, so I pushed it closer. I understood my mistake the moment I saw her tongue dart out to touch the fruit. My groin tightened as I imagined her mouth doing the same things to a certain part of me, and not the damn strawberry. She made it infinitely worse when she groaned before chewing the sweet flesh. I moved towards her, and licked the juice from her lips. It elicited a moan from both of us, and I wanted to hear her do it again, but I was scared of pushing her too much. We were always walking a tightrope of emotions, but little by little it was getting more stable. I hoped this extra dimension would be what we needed to alter our relationship forever.

"What else have you brought," she asked.

"I'm sorry, are you hungry?"

She nodded as we sat back up, taking out the various plastic tubs of food, as I handed them to her. She seemed to like what I'd brought and was stunned when I told her I'd packed it myself. For the next hour we ate and did something I hadn't thought possible.

We actually talked.

It wasn't anything deep and we never went back to the conversation about the cards, but we weren't stuttering or blushing, we were just chatting. I asked her about Alice and how they'd become friends. She lit up when she talked of her, but I could tell she'd didn't understand the sacrifices Alice had made for her. Then again, Alice wasn't in a rush to explain to her, so I wasn't going to be the one to point it out.

I told her about my meeting with Alice next week. Bella was excited that I enjoyed her friends work as much as I did, and before long we'd gotten onto the subject of her and Jasper. We both looked to the bracelet on her wrist.

"I never expected you to buy this for me."

Her voice was so faint I had to lean in to hear her correctly.

"I wanted to buy you something, Bella. I just didn't think you'd accepted it, well, not until the night of the exhibition."

She touched the little pendant and told me just how much she loved it. I warmed me and to stop from touching her again I passed her another glass of wine.

"Are you trying to get me drunk?"

I wiggled my brows playfully, testing just how relaxed we were with each other. She chuckled and pushed at my shoulder. I instantly wrapped my hand around her wrist, intending to pull her towards me, but she tugged her arm back so quickly that I ended up toppling over on top of her. I braced myself, assuming she was going to be annoyed, but she placed her hands on my shoulder and blushed.

"Oops."

"Have you had enough to eat?" I questioned, trying to get myself upright.

"Yes, but now I wanted to do the other thing you mentioned."

"Huh?"

"You...well, you mentioned something about m-making out?"

"Here?" I asked, surprise lacing my voice.

"I...well...I guess."

I could tell she was unsure, so offered to go back to my place. Bella was much happier after that and packed the hamper back up before I'd even managed to slip my boots back on.

She smiled at me eagerly, swinging the wicker basket by her side.

"Are we OK to go back in my car?"

"I walked here, so yes, that would be great. You haven't had any wine though, have you?"

I assured her I'd drunk nothing more than a couple of sips, and folded the blanket. It was Bella who slipped her hand into mine as we began to stroll back to the car. I gritted my teeth to stop from squeezing her hand too tightly. This day was just perfect. We were like any normal couple having lunch in the park.

I opened her door, gesturing for her to enter and making her gigglesnort in the cutest of ways. I placed the hamper in the back seat and walked around to the driver's side, climbing in and starting the engine. Bella demanded control of the music; apparently it was the passengers privilege. I chuckled and let her have it her way. She sang lightly to herself as I drove through the streets back to my loft. I was relatively silent, just listening to her sing, and we didn't begin to talk properly again until we were clutching our coffee mugs and curled up on my couch. The TV was on, but neither of us was watching, we were content with drinking coffee and chatting.

"Is Jasper basically living at your place then?"

"No!" she gasped. "Alice spends more time over at his place. In fact it's kind of lonely when she's not around. She takes up so much space for someone so small. Do you know what I mean?"

I nodded. "Yes, Jasper is the same, hence the reason I couldn't wait to get my own place."

"But you gave him a key to the place, and you put a high tech lock on your bedroom door to keep him out. Mixed signals, Edward."

She took a sip of her coffee, as I pondered my explanation.

"The thing is, Jasper needs someone to kick his ass every now and again. He never listened to our parents, only ever to me. So when I decided to move out, he got extremely upset. Giving him a key seemed like a good idea at the time. That was until his first party."

She yawned, making me check my watch for the time.

"Do you have work tonight?" I worried.

"No. Gosh, if I did I wouldn't be able to last. I was on last night and I'm exhausted now."

As if proving the point she yawned again. I stood and took her coffee from her, placing it on the small table in front of us. I held my hand out and smiled when she took it, permitting me to pull her up.

"Where are we going?" she whispered.

"I'm taking you to bed, and not to make out like you wanted. You're tired, so I think you should rest."

Bella shook her head. "Oh, you don't need to do that. Call me a cab, Edward, I'll go home."

"No. You won't," I replied, leading her down the corridor.

I stood behind her as we reached my bedroom, and she tried to take a step back, knowing I had to key in the code for the door to open. I took hold of her shoulders and turned her back. She mumbled in confusion at me.

"It's OK. I'm going to tell you the code."

Bella stared back at me, her brown eyes wide in shock.

"But you...this is your...Edward?"

I lowered my lips to her ear and said lowly, "I trust you, Bella. I want you to know the code."

She bit her lip as tears seemed to form in her eyes. Why would she be upset by this? I thought I was doing something good. My chest began to ache, but the hold on my heart lessened when she touched the keypad and waited for me to tell her. I swallowed the lump in my throat and said each number slowly, watching her delicate fingers press each key.

The door clicked, allowing me to reach over her to push it completely open.

"Come on," I stated, shuffling her inside.

Bella came willingly, and kicked her shoes off, before flopping down on the bed. Her defeated posture and lack of complaint showed her complete fatigue.

"Do you want me to get you a t-shirt to sleep in?"

She blushed, as if she'd thought of something and didn't want to explain, but I wanted her to give me something. I've given her the code to my own private sanctuary, and it would be nice to get a little something in return.

As if reading my thoughts Bella whispered, "Do you remember that first time in the hotel room?"

"I couldn't ever forget it..."

"When we spooned on the bed? I had my sweater, but no trousers on?" She gulped before continuing, "I...w-want to do that now. Please?"

I nodded, and watched as she undid her trousers, dropping them to the floor. I shook my jeans off, and we climbed onto the bed in silence. I lay down first and waited for her to follow. She amazed me by leaning down and kissing my nose, before turning so we were spooning. We both exhaled loudly, as my arm came around her waist.

"I love it when we lay like this, Edward."

"Shh, you need to rest. Sleep, my Bella."

...and that's exactly what she did. I lay next to her, listening to her breathe as I stroked her body soothingly. I drifted off to sleep three hours later, surrounded by the love of life.

I was happy.

I just hoped it would last.

End Notes:

Awww....can they do it?

Thank you!!

xxx

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Chapter 14: Bubbles by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello!

Thank you to everyone still reading.

**Love to my Beta Maylin (Happy Birthday BB!!!) & my pre reader
elusivekoolaid.**

**My updates are now as follows: Tilt & First Edition update on alternate
weeks. Spiders will be slotted in along the way.**

All three are also on Twilighted.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

I was cracking.

Edward was the most caring and attentive person I'd ever known, and I was powerless to stop the feelings that were beginning to grow for him. I was scared, but wanted to tell him. This had morphed for me; morphed into a real relationship.

The last few days had been the happiest I'd ever had. We'd met up for lunch or dinner and just talked. The cards were no longer an issue because neither one of us were comfortable discussing my period and sex. We simply enjoyed each others company. It was awkward at first, but once we found a subject we both found interesting we forgot about everything else.

Alice had told me she saw a change. I thought she meant between me and Edward, but she'd actually only meant with me. She said I was happier, and she wasn't wrong. I was beginning to feel more confident around him, touching him with ease whenever I had the urge. At first he'd been startled, but soon enough, Edward had begun touching me back. We now greeted each other comfortably; small hugs and chaste kisses, but they were perfect for us.

When he wasn't with me I would toy with the bracelet he'd bought me and remember all the times we'd been together. I'd never felt quite like this, not even at the start with Jake. This was new and exhilarating. I wanted to be with him every moment of the day, so much so that he'd started coming to the bar and waiting while I worked. After my shift we would walk back to my place, hand in hand. We would kiss quickly and he would leave me.

I hated sleeping alone and wanted him near me.

Just like today. Edward had been waiting for me at the end of my shift, but instead of walking me to my apartment, he drove us to his. He'd prepared a wonderful supper and I'd ended up falling asleep on his couch, while resting my head on his shoulder.

I woke up this morning with Edward nuzzling my neck. It was perfect. There was no pressure because we were just happy in each others arms. We'd stayed spooning for an hour, neither of us saying a word. Over breakfast he told me he had a surprise for me. I was anxious, but more than ready for it.

That was until he told me it would mean me getting wet. I blushed, thinking he meant something very personal, and he'd spluttered almost immediately that he was referring to water. That made me even more embarrassed. I'd tried to question where we were going, or at least what I'd need to wear, but he'd shook his head telling me Alice had sorted it all out. I was really worried by that point.

Edward wouldn't have any of it. He tugged me into the living area and prepared me breakfast. I caught him eying me every now and again. It only made me blush more as I forked the eggs into my mouth. I cast my glance downwards, but felt each and every time he look at me. My body would stir in recognition.

I was needy for him, and that shocked me to the core. I'd never wanted someone with this kind of force, but the more I got to know him, the more I fell, and the more I started imagining what could be. If we continued down this road it didn't need to end when we used up that last card. We could build something more. That realization alone stunned me. I'd stumbled into this intent on it being an experiment, but it had backfired on me. It left me with two choices: End it now, or go with it and see where we ended up.

I was opting for the later, because the thought of ending it made my chest hurt.

"What are you thinking about?" Edward asked as he lifted a large bag from near the door.

"Nothing," I replied, waving away the comment with my hand.

He frowned, tilting his head towards the door. "You're lying, but I'll let it slide. Are we ready to go?"

"I'm not lying."

I stood staring at him, refusing to move. He sighed loudly and dropped the bag, before stalking over to me. He lifted his hand and cupped my jaw, his brows raising in question.

"Are we going to have this out now? I'd be happy to, but it would ruin our day and I don't want that."

"I wasn't..."

Edward stopped me by placing a thumb across my lips.

"Do you want me to tell you how I know you had something on your mind? You chew your lower lip, and that's exactly what you were doing. You don't have to tell me, but please don't lie to me. We're worth more than that."

"Are we?" I asked around his thumb.

He nodded, lowering his head and stroking his nose against mine. It was our thing; our Eskimo kiss and it instantly made me smile.

"That's better. Now, come on."

Edward took my hand in his and pulled me towards the door. He retrieved the bag and locked the door as we headed towards the elevator. I wanted to ask him again where we were going , but he had a smug little smirk on his lips, and I didn't want to spoil his fun. He squeezed my hand quickly as we walked to his car, and within minutes we were on our way to only he knew where.

I watched the city turn quickly into countryside, and my glances in his direction got me nothing. Edward was not going to tell me where we were going. After almost two hours I decided to stop torturing myself and snuggled into the seat, closing my eyes and hoping to take a nap.

"Hey, don't sleep, we're almost there."

"Where?" I grumbled.

He chuckled and stroked my thigh. I closed my eyes, enjoying the ease of his touch. I was still wary of when and how, but he seemed comfortable with his little displays. I wished I could be a impulsive with my affection, and hoped that it would come in time.

If we had time.

Edward turned off the main road onto a small dirt track. It was covered in overhanging trees and only small shafts of light entered the leafy tunnel. Edward was grinning wildly by the time we neared the exit, obviously enjoying my annoyance at being left in the dark. A low chuckle rippled from him, as I gasped at the sight that greeted me.

It was a quaint little log cabin, completely surrounded by countryside. Completely isolated.

"Oh, Edward!"

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

He unbuckled his seat belt, and climbed out of the car intent on helping me get out, but I beat him to it. I wanted to see it all. It was amazing. I stood in front of the car and just gazed out to the horizon.

"It's wonderful. Just...Wow!"

Edward came to stand beside me, tickling the tips of his fingers against mine. Without thinking about it I linked them together and smiled up at him.

"So are you going to tell me why we're here?" I questioned.

"I thought we could do with some time alone. Just us."

"Time?"

He let go of my hand and went to get the bags from the car, before finally answering me.

"Yes, time. We're here for the next three days."

"What? I can't! I have work, and ...well, stuff!"

"No, you don't," he laughed. "I sorted it with Rose and Alice packed you some clothes. Come on Bella, we agreed. The picnic. Remember?"

"But...I..." I stammered, trying to think of a reason I shouldn't be here.

I came up blank, in fact, everything inside of me was telling me to go with it. I had agreed to just enjoying our time together without pressure, and the thought of three days alone with Edward was already making my insides tighten in excitement. Nobody had ever planned something like this for me before, and I couldn't help falling for him a little bit more.

He was special and I knew at that point it would rip my heart out to end it with the last card.

I nodded and giggled nervously.

"Three days? Us?"

He nodded his head towards the cabin, and waited for me to walk towards the steps before he moved behind me.

"Yes, us. We're going to forget about everything else and just have fun. Exactly as we agreed."

I laughed and waited for Edward to open the door. The inside was cute and exactly as I'd imagined it: Homely. It wasn't extravagant, like his loft. It was small and warm in hues of beige and brown. A huge rug lay before the wood burning fire, and I tried to stop a blush at the erotic images that flitted through my mind.

"I...um, thought the very same thing, Bella." Edward whispered into my ear.

I could hear the hesitation in his voice. He was trying to be more assertive and I couldn't deny I was liking this new aspect of him. I wanted to be more like that; to be able to touch him whenever I itched to.

"Oh, my inhaler. I need-"

"Alice packed a spare, along with your preventative ones for the morning and night. She knows you very well."

I turned to look at him, pushing his glasses up his nose a little and watching as his eyes fluttered close.

"W-why do you do that?" I questioned quietly.

"What?"

His eyes opened wide, the green bright and intense.

"Whenever I set your glasses right, you close your eyes. Why?"

He struggled with the right words, opening and closing his mouth as he constantly rethought the phrasing. Eventually, he settle on, "I enjoy those little moments when you do what you feel. I hate the way you second guess yourself."

"What if I told you I want to try? I mean, to be like that more often."

"I'd say that I like the idea of that very much," he smiled, lowering his nose to mine and stroking them together gently. "Now, let me show you around."

He took my hand in his and led me around the small cabin. There was a fully stocked kitchen just off the main living area and a surprisingly large bathroom at the back. There was only one bedroom, but it was huge. One wall was glass, floor to ceiling and opened out onto a decked area that housed a hot tub.

"It really is wonderful. Have you been here before?"

"Um, kinda.."

I narrowed my eyes at him, sensing there was more to it.

"OK, I own it. Well, along with Jasper. We share it."

I nodded, amazed that they owned this little piece of calm. There was barely a sound, and nothing for what appeared to be miles. It was surreal.

"Are we really alone for three days?" I breathed.

"Yes. Now, I don't know about you, but I'd love to relax after the drive. Fancy a dip in the tub?"

"I don't have a...um..."

"Swimsuit? You certainly do, courtesy of Alice. I told you she packed everything you could possibly need."

I smiled shyly at him as he handed me the bag.

"You go and change and I will sort everything else out. Would you like a glass of wine?"

I agreed and shuffled off towards the bedroom. It felt a little strange knowing we would be sleeping here for the next few days. Alone. We would only have each others company, and I just hoped this would be what we needed to move forward with our relationship.

I placed the bag onto the bed and began to search through for my swimwear, almost yelling out loud when I saw what she'd supplied for me. It was a skimpy purple two piece. The top was a halter neck and would probably push my breasts together, giving me a cleavage that I didn't usually have. The panties were tiny and beyond anything I would usually wear.

I gritted my teeth, wondering what the hell I should do. I searched to see if I could find a T-shirt, thinking I could put one on over the top, but Alice had obviously considered that and omitted to pack any for me. She hadn't forgotten the cards though, but I ignored them and hunted around the room. I was going to have to place a towel around me and hopefully slip into the water without Edward paying too much attention.

My hands shook as I fumbled with my clothes and put the bikini on. It felt unnatural to be wearing something so revealing, so I quickly wrapped a towel around myself. I wondered if I should go through to the kitchen before walking onto the deck, but a short tap on the glass alerted me to Edward's presence outside. I inhaled sharply as I took in his lack of clothing. I hadn't been the only one getting undressed. Edward had changed into tight black swimshorts and he stood before me grinning and holding out a glass of white wine.

All I could do was stare. He was all bare chest, and taut muscles, and I became entranced by the delicious V he had disappearing into the waistband of the shorts. My temperature was rising from just looking at him. I tried to appear nonchalant, but it wasn't possible with his near naked body so close. I knew what he could do with that; how he could make me feel, and I wanted it again. It felt like it had been too long.

"Are you OK, Bella?"

"Sure," I said on a sigh, and took the glass from him.

"You look a little flushed."

As if understanding why, he blushed too, making me smile. We were getting better, but we were still so uncertain. I batted away the comment and sipped the wine. I could hear the water in the hot tub bubbling away, and wondered how I was going to get into it without exposing myself to Edward. He didn't seem concerned with his own lack of attire and placed his glass on the side of the tub before climbing in. I watched as he lowered himself into the water, and sighed as it bubbled around him.

"I love this place. Just sitting here and looking out into the hills calms me."

"I can understand that," I stated walking closer and resting on the edge. Edward reached out his hand as if to touch me, but snatched it back. I frowned at him, and to my amazement he reached out again. He ran his fingers along the edge of the towel at my breasts.

"Are you going to get in, Bella? I..." he breathed deeply, as if mustering the courage to speak. "I've missed you."

My heart melted at those words. Why couldn't I be that honest?

Edward pulled gently on the towel, loosening it. I winced when it opened and fell around my hips.

"Please come and sit in the tub."

He was so gentle with me, always trying to put me at ease even if he didn't feel that way himself. So to make him smile, and to give something back to him, I took a deep breath and removed the towel before lowering myself into the water. I had intended to sit next to him, but Edward wanted something entirely different. He instantly pulled me close to him, until I was sitting on his lap. I blushed and giggled nervously.

"I meant it. I missed you."

"We've seen each other everyday," I snorted, wrapping my arm around his shoulder.

His gaze was darting from my eyes and down to my breasts, exactly what Alice had hoped for. I tried to cover myself by turning further into him, but he wasn't stupid and he was very intuitive when it came to my body language.

"I thought we were going to have fun. Please don't do this. You look startlingly beautiful and I hate it when you hide. I don't feel exactly comfortable, but it's only you and me, right?"

"It's just not the kind of thing I'd normally wear, and Alice knows it. I don't even want to think about what else she packed for me."

Edward traced a solitary finger along my jaw until he reached my chin, and then tilted my head up towards his. His eyes softened as they focused on me, and I bit back a giggle. His black rimmed glasses were already starting to fog up.

"You could spend the next few days in a garbage bag for all I care, Bella. This isn't about your clothing, just like it isn't about Alice. Forget it all. Try, please?"

How could I say no when he asked like that? I wanted to prove to him that I *was* trying, so I slowly moved forward and pressed my lips to his. It was meant to be a quick soft kiss, but somehow it became deeper, more urgent, until tongue swept against tongue, and fingers fisted into hair. His hand ghosted up my back, making me shiver, before he moved around to cup my breast. I pulled my mouth away and exhaled loudly, as I buried my face in his neck. A low groan came from Edward, and he tried to adjust his hips slightly. It was too late, because I already felt the evidence of his arousal.

"Don't move," I pleaded.

"But I don't want it to be just about this, Bella."

I kissed his collarbone and whispered, "It isn't."

We remained silent, neither one of us ready to verbalize anything more. His stroking of my back continued, as did the gentle rocking of my hips against him. Our breathing became quicker, as did our heartbeats. Before I had time to take in what we were about to do, Edward had placed me on the small seat and was standing in front of me. His hips were pushing against mine in time with his tongue entering my mouth. Edward surrounded me in the most wonderful of ways. I whimpered when his lips slid down my throat, and his thumbs hooked into my bikini bottoms. My hips bucked with want, making Edward stop and stare.

"Tell me no," he stated quietly.

I shook my head, adding, "I can't. Edward, I...w-want this."

A slow smile spread across his face, as he slowly slipped my panties off. I worried my lip and looked away. It was becoming very intimate. It felt different from other times we'd had sex; this felt *more*. I just didn't understand why.

"Hey," he soothed, tilting my face back to his. "I want you here with me, not worrying about something silly. Is it the cards?"

I mumbled a 'yes' and reached for his shorts.

"Don't think of them." He kissed me. "Anyway, what I have in mind would certainly use one up."

He began to kiss me, lifting my bottom from the seat and wrapping my legs around his waist. His arousal rested against me, and the bubbles hitting my sensitive flesh made me moan. Edward hummed against my lips in satisfaction, as he pushed forward. I opened my eyes, wondering what was going on, only to see him retrieving a foil square from his jeans pocket near the tub.

I continued to kiss him, the water lapping across my breasts, as he pushed me back to rest my shoulders on the rim. I could feel his fingers as they placed the condom on, and instead of removing them he touched me gently, eliciting a gasp from me.

"Is this OK?" he asked, his fingers not stopping in their perusal of my folds.

"Yes."

My agreement seemed to encourage him, because he touched me more assertively, and nestled his erection against me. I began panting; the heat of the hot tub and my lust heating my blood. I wanted us to be free from all the awkwardness for just once; to be taken away on a ride of pure lust. I was sure Edward wanted the same, but we were too uncomfortable right now, even though I wanted to try. I closed my eyes as I breathed, "Please, Edward. Please..."

My abdomen was beginning to spasm from his fingers alone, and it shocked me to realize I didn't want my completion from them. I wanted Edward inside of me when I came.

I opened my mouth and tried to spit the words out, instead he kissed me, speaking against my lips as he entered me.

"I know, Bella. I really do."

The water sloshed around us, splashing at our skin with each thrust. I tossed my head back, resting it on the rim as Edward held my hips to his, pumping slowly. We'd never really gazed at each other while being so intimate, but today was different. Today our eyes locked and I saw every emotion he felt while filling my body.

I hoped he could see mine too.

My breast had worked its way out of the bikini top, and each time the water slapped at my nipple my thighs clenched. Edward soothed the skin when he brought his mouth to the taut peak and lapped.

I arched closer, a silent demand for more. I didn't need to ask, because he instantly began to thrust faster.

I came as Edward began to nibble on my breast. I yelled out louder than I'd ever done before. I was completely consumed by it; my whole body twitching in its wake. The clenching around his erection and the squeezing of my thighs pushed Edward over the edge. He buried his face in my chest and groaned in the most guttural of ways. It was darkly erotic and I felt wetness seep from my center again. It had been quicker than our previous times, but much more intense. I didn't understand why, but when he began kissing my wet breast again I stopped thinking about it and just enjoyed the moment.

His hand moved from my hip around to my bottom, where he began to massage the flesh gently.

"I think I'm thoroughly relaxed now, Edward."

He chuckled and swirled his tongue around my nipple again. He was still inside of me, and I felt his arousal kick. It made me giggle and seconds later we were both floundering in the water, laughing loudly and trying to gain some equilibrium.

We eventually nestled against each other on the seat, his hand stroking my arm, as I wrapped it around his waist. My head rested against his chest, and I could hear the slowing of his heartbeat. He handed me my glass of wine and we sipped in silence, watching the sun as it began to drift across the sky.

"Edward?"

"Hmm?"

"This was a lovely idea. Thank you," I sighed, snuggling closer.

"Anything, Bella. Absolutely, anything."

End Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;">Awww, how sappy is he??</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bless..... Thank you!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Have a great Easter.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">xx</p>

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Chapter 15: Noodle Nuzzle by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Thanks to you all for still reading, and special thank to JAG on RAoR, who recci'd Tilt over there on SinDay :D

Love to my beta Maylin & prereader elusivekoolaid.

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

She was amazing.

I stood in the living area and watched her sun bathing out on the deck. She'd removed the seating cushions from the couch and dragged them out into the open. She knew there was a lounge, but apparently it wasn't comfy enough. I'd laughed at her logic, but left her to her own devices. I needed to do a few things on my laptop anyway.

I emailed Jasper, and shot off a few urgent replies. I'd promised myself I wouldn't do any work but Bella seemed to want a little time alone. Maybe she was reflecting on the hot tub, as was I. It had been different from other occasions; neither one of us had hidden from our desire.

However, it had been more than lust. It was a desire to just be together. At least it was for me. When we were together like that I could convince myself that Bella felt the same, but anxiety would set in afterward. That was always due to the fact that I would have to cajole her into relaxing, and to simply being with me. She'd never taken the lead, apart from when she shut me down. She was always assertive enough to do that first, which made me question just how one sided everything was with us.

We slept in the same bed last night, but nothing had happened. Bella had produced the cards that Alice had so thoughtfully included, and we'd discarded the one we'd enacted last night. We'd watched a little TV together, and at one point, we'd cuddled, but there was still a distance. It was something that wouldn't disappear until we were honest with each other as to where this was going. I had to bite my tongue many times over the last few days, because those words were bursting to get out. Jasper had told me I just needed to come out and tell her, but I held back and I wasn't completely sure why. I just knew now wasn't right.

Coming here had been a great idea, and I could see Bella thought the same. It was odd how different she appeared. Even though we'd only been here a little over twenty-four hours she seemed so much more relaxed, especially around me. I was growing used to the tentative little touches she offered already, and didn't know how I was going to manage to go back to the way we were.

"Hey, what's wrong?" she asked.

I blinked at the sudden interruption to my daydream.

"Nothing. Why do you ask?"

"You're scowling, Edward, and I don't need to know you to understand you have something on your mind."

She turned onto her stomach, her legs swinging in the air.

"You *do* know me," I sighed, walking out onto the deck.

Her cheeks tinged pink as she stammered , "In s-some areas, yes."

I scowled at her words. Did she really think that all she knew about me was what I liked while we were naked? Was I hoping in vain that this wasn't one sided?

She pushed her sunglasses up to rest on the top of her head, as her big brown eyes met mine. We stared at each other, a strange current following between us. She slowly licked her lips, before saying quietly, "I like you in jeans."

I raised a brow at her, startled by her admission, and almost gawked when she continued.

"Don't get me wrong, I like the suits, but ...yeah, I dunno, the jeans..."

"Lost for words?"

She patted the cushion next to her, beckoning me over.

"I just thought I should tell you w-what I like. You're always kinda telling me and...um, I want to try."

The more she spoke, the quieter she got, but I understood, and was encouraged by her words. I walked closer and sat cross legged near her head. My hand instantly reached out, smoothing a lock of hair behind her ear. She grinned warmly at me, making my chest ache. She was oblivious to her effect on me. Just that smile could have my heart pounding, and the butterflies going crazy in my stomach.

"Thank you for telling me. It's nice to know what you like, Bella. Would I sound too much like my brother if I told you I liked that bikini?"

She giggled lightly, and shook her head. I realized my fingers where dancing along her jaw, but didn't remove them; it felt too good.

"Well, to make it clear, I think you look beautiful in it, and I'm pleased Alice packed it."

"More or less than the purple one?" She mumbled.

"Sorry?"

Her chest flushed, alerting me to her embarrassment, so I leaned forward and stroked my nose gently against hers. Her eyes fluttered closed, as she repeated her question.

"This one," I gulped. "It...it..."

"Tell me, please."

I lowered my hand to her shoulder and teased the string that looped around her neck, swallowing as I mustered the courage to tell her what I really thought. She bit her lower lip, waiting.

"I...I-like the way it barely covers you. It only c-cups you loosely. It makes me want to touch you."

"I've never really worn anything like this. I don't mind around you," she confessed softly.

I groaned, clenching the thin cord of her bikini top.

"I think Alice should be thanked when we return home-"

Bella interrupted with a groan of her own. I waited for her to elaborate, noticing how close we still were. I could see her pupils dilate when my fingers skimmed across her collarbone, and I couldn't help from repeating it just to watch them again.

"I don't want to go back. Even after one day I'm loving it. Does that sound silly?"

I kissed her nose, inhaling the coconutty scent of her sunscreen.

"Not at all. I like being with you like this. It's nice to sit and talk."

She nodded and turned onto her side, patting the cushion again.

"Come and lie with me, please."

I inhaled sharply at the sight of her breasts pushed together. The right one was now barely encased in the polka dot triangle. The swell of her pillowy skin was unbelievably enticing; it called to me, begging to be caressed. I clenched my hand into a fist, to stop from doing just that as I moved to lie beside her. I placed my hand on her waist, feeling the delicate skin under my palm. The sun was high in the sky warming her flesh and giving it a soft glow.

"I feel less anxious already," she sighed.

"Why?" I asked sharply. "I'm sorry, I mean why do you feel anxious around me back home, but less so here?"

She screwed her nose up slightly as she thought, making me want to kiss the wrinkles away.

"It's like...Well, like everyone is watching us, waiting for it to fall apart."

"What to fall apart? What is it that we have, Bella?"

My heart pounded hard against my chest as I waited for her to answer.

"We're friends, I hope. I like how comfortable we're becoming with each other. I only feel that with Alice or Rose, and I want it to continue."

I should have felt upset by her *friends* declaration, but the fact that she was being honest only made my love for her intensify. My hand squeezed her waist gently, as I moved my lips to hers, kissing her tenderly. It was soft and sweet, but she shocked me when she shuffled closer, pushing her leg between mine. Her tongue swept against my lower lip, as a fire began to burn

through my body. I went along with it, keeping my hand on her side, when hers combed into my hair.

We rested there, making out like teenagers for over an hour. I learned little nuances about her that I'd never had the pleasure, or time to learn before. We'd never had this time to just kiss and touch, because the first time had been awkward and embarrassing. My hand still shook, and I would still be thinking of my next move so I didn't feel like a complete amateur, but it felt right.

Perfect.

When she became a little more assertive, kissing my throat, and pushing me almost onto my back, I moaned.

"Oh! Sorry, I...um, did I hurt you?" she asked cautiously.

I shook my head slowly, and took a moment to calm myself, before croaking out, "It was good. I liked you showing me what you want, but it was a surprise, that's all. I don't really want you to stop, but...I will if you need us to."

A huge grin spread across her face, making my jeans tighten. I adjusted my hips, trying to ease the throb that had now begun to build, but all it did was push my arousal against her thigh. She let out a quick squeak, but didn't move. In fact, I could have sworn she pushed back. We stared at each other, her brown eyes warm and glistening with excitement. I wanted to confess so much to her; it was right there on the tip of my tongue, but I held back.

I didn't want to destroy this moment.

"Please don't stop," she mumbled. "I have...Oh God, I have something I want to try."

I tipped my ear towards her and asked her to repeat herself. She flushed, took a deep breath and said, "I have something I'd really like us to try. I was looking at the cards. There was one-"

"Show me?"

Bella reached behind me, pulling the pack from underneath the magazine and retrieving the one she wanted.

The Noodle Nuzzle.

It was basically side by side but with our legs entwined. It looked very intimate as we would be face to face and completely connected.

"Y-You don't have to."

I didn't take my eyes from her, as I moved my hand to the string tie of her bikini bottoms, and slowly began to pull them open. I heard a sharp inhale of breath, and I wasn't sure whether it was from me or Bella. When the scraps of material gave way I stroked the skin, smiling when I could see a smattering of goose flesh. Bella began to kiss along my jaw, soft little pecks from my ear to my chin, where she nibbled playfully.

"Bella, I need to get a condom."

She shook her head, making my eyes go wide. Today was just one surprise after another.

"We were tested, right? I've been taking my pill. Please don't interrupt this. We're doing so well."

She was right. We were being more honest and confident with each other than ever before. If I broke us apart now it could set us back, and I really disliked the thought of that, so I kissed her. This time it wasn't a gentle one. I kissed her with every ounce of passion that I felt. My hands ghosted across her skin, enjoying the way she undulated against me. Each push, or stroke against my erection made me hiss or groan in arousal, and within moments we were both naked and gasping for breath as I entered her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, at the same time I hissed.

Her body encased me, almost tipping me over the edge that very second. I took huge gulps of air with each slow thrust, but shockingly, Bella didn't really want slow. She wanted lust and passion, and was pushing her hips quickly towards mine. Her breasts were still partially encased in the triangles of her bikini top, but I nudged one carefully with my chin and began kissing her breast.

"Stubble...ticklish..." she panted, grinning at me.

Teasing, I rubbed my cheek across hers, and thrust my hips forcefully, eliciting a loud moan from her. I could see her chest had begun to mottle and it was rising and falling quicker than before. She was meeting me thrust for thrust. This was so very different than our previous times together.

It was freeing and I wanted more.

I needed to be deeper inside of her.

On that thought I was ready to push her onto her back, but Bella beat me to it. I gazed up at her, as she straddled my hips and blew me a quick kiss before lowering herself onto me.

We whimpered in unison, and it only grew louder when she rocked against me.

"Bella," I sighed, holding tightly onto her hips. "...so beautiful."

"I need...I need to..."

I entwined our fingers together, pleased when she used my arms as support.

"Oh, God, it feels so..." she stammered.

"Intense?" I offered, pulling her torso down to mine when she nodded.

"Is this better?"

Bella's lips met mine. "Yes."

At that point our lust spiraled out of control. We became a jumble of limbs, gasps and passionate kisses. It was wonderfully freeing, and when Bella orgasmed it was a strangled cry that left her lips, shortly followed by my own. She slumped against me, our sticky torso's

meshing together. Her breath whipped harshly against my throat, as she tried to calm herself, but I couldn't move her. This was what I'd wanted for weeks now: Bella and I completely lost in each other and free of our awkwardness. It was the first time I felt like we'd made progress in this relationship.

I stroked her back, feeling her hum in approval.

"We're sweaty," she giggled.

"Uh huh," I agreed, tickling at her ribs and making her squirm.

I tumbled us over, blanketing her with my body and nuzzling her neck. She squealed and wrapped her legs around my hips.

"I love this. It's what I've wanted for so long with you." The words burst from my lips before I could stop them. "I feel so carefree with you right now. I want it to be like this always."

"Like this? Sex?"

"No, love. Just comfortable with each other. Today you told me what you wanted, and I liked that. Do you think you can do it again?" I asked cautiously, not acknowledging my slip.

Bella didn't acknowledge it either, she simply nodded and whispered, "I'll try," before burying her face in my neck.

We lay silently for while, just calming down and taking in exactly what had happened between us.

Eventually, Bella shifted, wincing as she moved her hips.

"Are you OK?"

"Yeah, I've just got a little bit of cramp."

She pulled away, making me feel instantly lost without her in my arms, but she didn't move far. She retrieved a towel and wrapped it around herself, placing her palm on my bare chest.

"I mean it, I'll try. This place is wonderfully soothing."

"Agreed. I noticed you've barely used your inhaler," I interjected.

"Must be the air."

We made small talk for a little while, she continued to stroke my chest, as I toyed with the hem of the towel.

"What shall we do this afternoon? We only have tonight to enjoy ourselves, because we have to leave at lunchtime tomorrow, right?"

I nodded, sitting up and pulling her back against my chest. We looked out over the hills, and I felt a small sigh escape her lips.

"We could do something very different for us," I muttered into her ear.

"Whats that?"

"We could have a real conversation. I'd really like to know you more and what better time than now?"

She shrugged a little and replied, "Sure."

Excited by her acceptance, but still cautious I put forward one name. "Jake."

"Edward, I told-"

"Shush, hear me out. I know you said in the park that you weren't ready, but I think you need to be. You need to tell me, Bella, because we need to get past this. Please?"

She remained in my arms, but silence surrounded us. I could hear the bubble of the hot tub, the wind in the trees, and the birds chirping. I was sure if I concentrated I could hear her heart pounding, and was convinced she was going to freeze me out. So when she sighed loudly I braced myself.

"I stayed with him because I didn't feel I was worth anything more. He's handsome and popular, and I was amazed that he was interested in me. Maybe that's why I overlooked everything."

I hugged her tighter, the sorrow in her voice wasn't hard to miss. I was about to try and soothe her, but she continued.

"He was really sweet at the start, but then his friends would ask him why he was with me, and he would just shrug. That hurt, probably more than the slap. Alice never liked him, and was always telling me I could do better; that he wasn't for me. I never believed her. I should have, because I wouldn't have had to go through all that if I'd trusted my friend."

I kissed her bare shoulder, and smiled when her hand came up to cup my cheek softly.

"Alice is a wonderful friend for you to have. She's willing to do a lot for you, even though she sounds rather vicious at times."

Bella giggled and snuggled a little closer, as she replied, "Yes, she can be a little severe, but she means well."

"Yes," I agreed, running my nose along her neck. "But I wonder if you realize just how well."

"What?"

"Have you ever asked Alice why she never left when she got the job offers?"

"I did once, but in her usual smartass way she fobbed me off. Why? Do you know?" she frowned, turning her face to mine.

I kissed her nose, I just wasn't able to hold it back and asked, "Can you do me a small favor?"

Bella nodded.

"Can you ask Alice again when we get home? For me?"

"I don't really understand, but sure, I'll do it."

I grinned, "I lo...um, I like that you'd do that for me. Thank you."

I bit my lip, mentally cursing myself for my almost stupid slip. It would have ruined everything, and there would have been no going back.

"Can I ask you about erm, was it Angela?"

"Oh!" I exclaimed, surprised. "Well, yes, I guess. If you really want to know?"

Bella turned in my arms, and straddled my hips, eying me warily to make sure it was OK. I wouldn't have moved her for anything. She felt perfect exactly where she was.

"I'm not sure where to start, to be honest, Bella. Well, we met through Jasper and it wasn't exactly fireworks, but we were comfortable. She's a wonderful person but not meant for me..."

I let that hang, in some ways hoping she would ask exactly who it was that I was meant for, but she just blushed and squeezed my shoulders a little.

"D-Did you love her?" she stammered.

"No," I said instantly with conviction. "I cared about her, but it wasn't love."

She seemed to accept that and I expected more questions but instead, she leaned forward, bringing her mouth to my mouth and kissing me. Our lips massaged one another, as our hands roamed each others bodies. It was luxurious and gentle and only made me love her more.

"I like your kisses," she said huskily.

I rubbed my nose against hers, as she pushed my glasses back up.

"I'm rather partial to yours too."

She gave a little gigglesnort and pushed playfully at my chest. I reached across the deck and retrieved the card, waving it in front of her face.

"Another one to discard?"

Bella nodded slowly, her brow furrowing with uncertainty.

"Something wrong?" I asked, hoping she was about to say something that would allow me to purge every feeling I had for her.

I was mentally begging for a way in, but instead I got a peck on my lips.

"No, silly. Everything's fine." She climbed off my lap, clutching the towel to her chest. "I'm hungry, can we get something to eat, please?"

Knowing that our little bubble had now burst, I stood, dragging on my jeans and followed her back into the cabin.

We had less than twenty-four hours here, and I wasn't sure I could make it through without whispering those three words.

End Notes:
Aww, he's fighting it...but for how long?

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Chapter 16: Emotional Acrobat by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Thanks for every single review!</p> <p>Huge thanks to my beta Maylin & my prereader elusivekoolaid</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

I awoke with a sinking feeling.

Today was our last day here, and in the space of a few short hours we would have to leave and return to reality.

I really didn't want to, because I knew last night we'd made progress. Last night we'd felt real, and I didn't want that to disappear the moment we arrived home. I also didn't want the fun aspect of the cards to dissolve either.

Bella mewled in her sleep and turned over to nuzzle my chest. I gazed down at her, smoothing her hair from her face. Her cheeks were pink and her lips pursed, just waiting to be kissed. Every inch of my body screamed *Mine*. Holding those three words back was getting too difficult, and I wondered what her reaction would be when I finally admitted how I felt.

I leaned down and kissed the tip of her nose, whispering, "I love you, Bella Swan."

I smiled, liking how it sounded on my tongue, but knowing I was a coward for telling her while she slept.

My cell buzzed and I reached over quickly to grab it, so it didn't wake Bella. I checked the illuminated screen to see a text from Jasper.

You sore yet? Do I need 2 buy lotion?

I bit back a snort of laughter. He was an ass most of the time, but he always got right to the point. Even if it was before nine in the morning. I decided to ignore the crudeness of his text and act innocent.

Not sunburned at all. So don't worry about the lotion.

You should be working.

I knew it would be a matter of seconds before he replied, so quickly set my cell to silent. Bella rubbed her cheek against my chest, making my balls grow tight and an erection begin to grow. I adjusted our position, needing to move Bella's leg from between my thighs, because it was only making matters worse.

Am working. Annoying U, aren't I?

Plyd any card games l8ly?

I rolled my eyes, and fired off a quick reply, telling him it was none of his business, before turning my cell off.

Bella stirred, making a little moan as she turned slightly.

"Morning," I smiled, stroking her cheek with my thumb.

"Hmm," she purred, stretching out her legs and kissing my nose softly.

I blinked, always shocked when she was assertive. I groaned when she rubbed her hips against mine.

"Bella..."

She raised her brows at me, but continued to rock against me. This was going one way and from the speed at which her hand was moving down my torso, it was going there fast. Her lips met my throat and began to leaving tender little kisses across the flesh. My temperature soared.

"Bella," I repeated, as she reached across me to the nightstand.

She looked up at me, her expression dazed, but moments later it cleared when she waved a card in front of my face.

"Are you sure?"

"Please, Edward," she breathed, kissing my collarbone.

I snapped, slapping the card from her hands.

My control around her simply gave way, and I growled lowly before pulling her back to my chest and laying myself flat onto the mattress. She turned her head into my neck, gasping as I parted her thighs. The heat of her arousal was rolling off her, and we groaned in unison as I touched her sex tentatively.

Her arms lifted and wove around my neck, tugging my mouth to her throat. I did as she wanted and began to nibble on the skin as my fingers toyed with her slick heat. This was much more than before, she seemed to be enjoying my more dominant edge. I wanted to ask; to talk to her during sex, but I was positive she wouldn't respond well to that. Instead, I whispered soft words of encouragement into her ear, and brought my free hand up to cup her breast.

"Oh, yes. I l-like you...touching my breasts," she panted, pushing against my fingers in a silent demand for more.

My erection was nestled against her buttocks, and each time she moved I hissed from the intensity of the sensation. She began to move faster, as she was careering towards her completion. I wanted to be inside her when she did. I was selfish, but I wanted to feel her grasping me as she whimpered my name.

I continued to massage her sex, but moved underneath her freeing my erection. It pushed against her, eliciting a soft moan from her lips against my neck.

"Yes," she breathed. "Please."

I didn't wait; I couldn't, so thrust upwards, allowing her body to sheath me, before we rocked slowly together. Her whole body was undulating on top of mine, making her bottom slide deliciously against my stomach. Her breathing was becoming erratic and her skin was scorching to my touch. I needed to taste her; to move my mouth over hers as we made love, so turned my head and pressed my lips to hers. A small sigh escaped from her into my mouth, and for some reason it soothed me. It sounded so innocently erotic I felt my erection kick inside of her.

My fingers were still teasing her, feeling how wet she was becoming. I was amused at how aroused she'd woken, but wasn't complaining. Bella appeared to be more comfortable with showing me what she wanted after our conversation yesterday, and this whole retreat had been more than I could have ever anticipated. It had brought us to a place where we could actually start to evolve.

And I was determined we would.

I wanted Bella as a part of my life, not some little secret that I played card games with.

"Bella. Oh, Bella, I I-"

"YES!" She yelled out as her body began to twitch.

I bit back the rest of my admission, and pushed my hips more forcefully against her. She splintered around me, gasping, moaning and thrashing as she orgasmed. The moment her body clamped around my erection I gritted my teeth as my abdomen grew tight and my own completion slammed into me.

I snarled, arching my back and holding her tightly against me, as I spilled into her. We were both gasping for breath, neither one moving until it became a little uncomfortable. Bella giggled a little and turned in my arms, pressing her front to mine and allowing my erection to leave her body.

She pressed a quick kiss onto my chin, before resting her head on my chest. I shuffled us into a more comfortable position, cuddling her into my side, and wrapping the sheets back around us. She sighed lightly and snuggled closer.

With each touch, each stroke and each kiss, my heart ached a little more. I knew I'd have to stop this. We simply couldn't continue the silly little game we'd started. It would hurt us both too much if we continued. Each time we met and chose another card, another position, she would invariably take a piece of my heart with her when it was over.

I knew I should tell her how I felt, but I was certain that would mark the end of it all. I simply couldn't bring myself to utter those words and end my time with her, so I continued to do as she

asked. I did what I could while I was with her to keep a lid on my emotions, and saved the outpouring until I went home.

Alone.

Something that started off as awkward and embarrassing had morphed into something beautiful and perfect. She was like a drug to me, and the plan of a once a week liaison was now spiraling into every night. It excited me, but the faster we got through the cards, the faster our time would be up.

Was that what she wanted?

Dread weighed heavy in my gut. We'd talked about our lives so many times in our post coital haze, but never really spoke to each other about what we were doing. The only time we'd had a frank discussion about the game was that first day at the restaurant. I could feel the tension every time we met, and it was obvious we were approaching a crossroads. I just didn't have a clue what she wanted. I had little experience of women and how their minds worked. Jasper had told me to tell her straight. He thought he was so clever seeing through what we were doing, to what was really going on with us. I'd made it clear he was to keep out of it, and I could deal with it on my own. He'd laughed, telling me Bella would never know how I felt unless I told her. Luckily, when Bella finally met him he'd kept his mouth shut. I think he was too preoccupied with her little raven haired friend.

"Edward?" her voice floated into my thoughts. "Are you OK?"

I fleetingly closed my eyes, and swallowed down my love for this woman.

"I'm fine. I just zoned out a little." I turned to her and cupped her face. "*You* do that to me. Now, was there something you wanted me to take care of?"

She giggled, her flushed face lighting up in glee. She was stunning. I just wished she was mine.

"We just picked a card, and it was a good one. You can't really think I want another," she whined, though there was no strength to her tone. It made me push a little more.

"We could do the same one again, or just go with it and do what we want. Forget the cards, just this once?"

She did that chewing thing with her lip; the one that I was growing to adore, while she thought about what I was really asking. We'd only ever had sex once each time we met. We would reproduce the position on the card and that would be it. If she agreed to this our meetings, and thus our relationship in general, would alter.

My heart pounded, as I waited for her to answer. My hands didn't have that kind of patience, though. They skimmed up her naked torso and cupped her delicate breasts, flicking lightly at her little pink nipples. She gave a tiny whimper of pleasure and pushed her chest closer to me.

I was instantly hard again.

I slowly lowered my lips to hers and kissed her. It started off gentle; assessing whether she was going to allow this to go further, but I swiftly lost control and rolled her onto her back. I blanketed her body with my own and nestled myself between her thighs. Bella didn't stop me

when I plunged my tongue into her mouth, or when I rubbed myself against her. Her legs wrapped around my waist, as she whispered 'yes' into my neck. It was all the confirmation I needed.

I vowed this would not be the only time we were spontaneous. I would break down those walls of hers bit by bit, and eventually she would forget about the remaining cards, forget about the stupid game, and just focus on what was happening between us.

The heels of her feet dug into my bottom, pulling me closer to her and making me hiss. My erection was enveloped in her wet folds, and I buried my head in her neck, muffling my little growl of frustration. Jasper was right. How long could I feasibly continue with this, and not tell her how I felt? It was killing me, and each time it became worse.

The decision was made for me the moment she sucked the lobe of my ear into her mouth. I trembled and lifted my head to gaze into her hooded eyes. I held her face between my hands and rocked my hips against her. Bella's eyes rolled back in arousal. I adored how lost she got when we were like this, but hated the wall that appeared as soon as our time was up.

"Bella," I whispered.

Her eyes fluttered open, and focused on mine. I inhaled sharply, preparing myself for what I was about to do.

It was make or break.

I thrust myself into her, and watched her eyes go wide with shock, but glaze with lust.

"Bella," I repeated reverently. "I love you."

She stilled underneath me, and my heart stopped.

Had I gone too far?

Was this the end of our game?

Was this the end of us?

Her brown eyes were wide in surprise and her mouth opened, as if she was trying to say something. At that moment I was an asshole, I rocked my hips trying to use my position to make her forget about what I'd just declared. It didn't work, because she shoved at my chest, scuttling backwards towards the headboard. She tugged up the sheets and stared at me, her fingers trembling on the cotton.

"Bella, say something. Please?" I croaked.

The heart that had stopped when I'd said those words was now pounding fiercely against my chest. I swallowed my anxiety and reached out, pleased when she didn't flinch away. I touched my fingertips to hers, hoping she would release the sheet and touch me back, but she remained frozen. A small shudder wracked her body, making her shoulders quake.

"Have I really messed this up?"

She bit her lip and shook her head slowly. I shuffled closer, but when I tried to pull her into my arms she remained rigid.

"Just give me...I just need a moment."

I climbed off the bed and pulled on some boxer shorts. Wanting to give her a little space, I went into the bathroom, splashing cold water onto my face and mentally screaming at myself for being a complete fool. I'd managed to keep my stupid mouth shut for weeks, so why the hell had it spewed out now?

I stared at myself in the mirror, snarling at my reflection. I wanted to call Jasper, but had left my cell in the bedroom with Bella. My hands were gripping the porcelain sink, as I took huge deep breaths, trying to calm down.

"Edward..." Her voice sounded weak as it floated into the bathroom.

I inhaled deeply and walked out, taking in her posture while I stood at the foot of the bed.

"I can take you home, just give me a little while to pack everything up," I offered before she could speak.

"Shut up and sit down," she shouted, startling the hell out of me.

I rested on the edge, not really sure of what to do with myself. I just felt very foolish.

"Did you mean it?"

I gulped and nodded, "I'm sorry."

Her brow furrowed, as she shifted a little closer to me. She was still holding the sheet to her chest, but the look of horror had left her face. That had to be a good sign, didn't it?

"Don't be sorry, it's how you feel. I j-just don't know what to do with that information, Edward. This wasn't about that, was it? I n-never expected this."

"I see," I stated bluntly. "Feelings were never meant to get tangled in this? Bella, I find it really hard to believe that you could be that cold. Sex*does* include some kind of feeling, and there would be no way you would have come out here with a perfect stranger. I can't alter how I feel. I'm just sorry I told you."

Her face fell, her features stricken, making guilt roil in my gut. I'd referred to her as cold, exactly what Jacob had said once. I hadn't meant to. I was messing this up the more I opened my mouth.

"I'm not cold," she squeaked. "I've been in love with someone before, and he only hurt me. Badly. So, what I'm saying to you is that I don't know what to *do* with your declaration." She sighed softly and continued. "I don't want you to apologize for saying it."

"But now we can't go back."

"No, we can't...What do we do now, Edward? I've never been here before. I'm scared."

I swamped her in my embrace, pleased when she came willingly.

"How do you mean you've never been here before?" I asked, kissing the top of her head.

"I know you're not like Jake, and I know you won't hurt me. I've never trusted someone like I do you. You know me more than he ever did, so that reality alone frightens me."

Her voice was so low I had to dip my ear closer to her mouth.

"Don't be scared. I *will* take care of you, and I think you know that. I never planned for this to happen, Bella, but I wouldn't change it because every decision I made brought me to you. To us. I don't want this to end," I said firmly.

She shivered , but nestled as close as she could to me. And even though the possibility she could end it all now hurt, her demeanor told me she wasn't about to. I would do whatever I could to make her see just how right we were together. I knew it would take some work, but we'd come a long way from that first awkward kiss and fumble. We could do this together. I was certain.

"I...I don't want this to end either," she stated quietly. "I want..."

"Tell me."

I cupped her face and turned it to look at me. Tears were shining in her eyes, and her lower lip was trembling. I smoothed it tenderly with my thumb and waited. She took a huge gulp of air, before whispering words I thought I'd never hear.

"I think I love you too."

End Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;">OH!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Did that go how you thought?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">xx</p>

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Chapter 17: Languid Liaison by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello!

Huge hugs to my beta Maylin - she's sick and needs TLC.

Also massive thanks to my pre reader Elusivekoolaid, because besides completing me, she helped me sort out a few plot issues :D

This is a short chapter... sorry :(

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

It was our last day...and I didn't want to leave, but the packed bags at the door told me there was no arguing.

My time here had been so much more than I'd ever expected. *Edward* was more than I'd ever expected.

I was stunned to find out he wanted me, only me. I wasn't sure what to do with that revelation, because Jake had said those very words, but it had turned out to mean very little.

I could comprehend just how different Edward was, and that was why I trusted him so much and not just with my body. I just had a hard time really accepting the words.

My feelings had become so confused around him. I couldn't determine whether it was about sex or if I truly did care about him. Being here, alone made me see things more clearly, and now I could understand them. Edward was the only person I knew that would risk arranging a weekend away without my knowledge. He'd come to me as soon as he'd heard I was ill, even though we were still strangers at the time. He'd put up with my childish jealousy about Alice's necklace and had tried to placate me. Alice would have just told me to fuck off in her usual crude manner.

That thought alone made me wince.

I'd promised Edward I would talk to her when we got home, but I wasn't sure I wanted to hear her answers. A small part of me knew exactly why she'd never left the city, even when the job offers had been too good to pass up. I was certain I also knew why she'd never moved out of our apartment. She'd been making sacrifices for me and up until now I had been oblivious.

It seemed like my life was about to change irrevocably.

Not just because of Edward, but because I wanted it to be different.

I felt in control.

I felt stronger.

I wasn't as embarrassed or as anxious around him as I used to be. That was a huge change in itself, but there was more. Not only did I want to touch him, kiss him, but I pined for him to do those things to me. I would step closer to him, hoping he would wrap his arm around me and pull me close to his body. His scent always made me smile. It was a heady combination of citrus and musk that made my head swim, and I would have to stop myself from nuzzling his neck and inhaling it deeply.

The Eskimo kisses he gave me would brighten my whole day, and when I was alone at night I would replay those tiny moments over and over. Sometimes I wondered if he was too good to be true.

Groaning, I scanned the bedroom one last time to make sure I hadn't left anything. Unfortunately, the whole cabin was as it was the day we arrived: empty. It was a beautiful place and I hoped we could return, maybe for longer next time. Alice would be so jealous when I told her about it, but then I remembered that Jasper would probably bring her here at some point. Her relationship with him was much more stable than mine.

I walked over towards the front door, gazing around one last time, and bent down to pick up my bag, but I was encompassed in Edward's arms before I could pick it up. He kissed the shell of my ear, making my skin break out in gooseflesh. I shivered and turned to face him. His eyes were reflecting my own sadness.

"Can I ask a favor?" he whispered gently.

I nodded, holding my lower lip between my teeth nervously.

"Would you stay at my place tonight? With me? I'm going to be completely honest here, and say that I'm not ready to let you go."

My legs turned to jelly at the smoothness of his tone. He was always the one to open up first and that made me feel inadequate. I needed to try harder. I had to prove to him that this wasn't one sided, and that I was worth all the energy he was putting into our relationship.

I placed my hand on his chest, over his heart and looked directly into his eyes.

"I want to stay with you. I'm not ready to part yet either, Edward."

His smile lit his whole face and made his eyes shine with happiness. I grinned back; confessing that to him had been easier than I thought, and the quick kiss he placed on my lips told me how pleased he was.

"Let's go. Let's go home."

The word *home* hung in the air between us, waiting for someone to reach out and claim it as theirs, but neither spoke anything further. We linked our fingers together and walked from the cabin.

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"You can go and freshen up if you need to. I'll put some coffee on." Edward stated as we entered his apartment.

"Please. That would be wonderful."

I started to carry my bag down towards his bedroom but stopped half way along the corridor.

"Hm, Edward? Can you unlock your door?"

"What?" he shouted absently. "Oh!"

He appeared at the end of the hallway, wiping his hands on a small towel.

"Bella, I gave you the combination. Don't you remember?"

"I-I do, but to be honest I thought you'd change it once I left. It's a very personal thing. I mean, Jasper doesn't know, so I find it hard to believe that you trust me that much."

Edward frowned for a split second before composing himself and walking towards me. His hands cupped my face, as he brought his lips closer to mine.

"I love you, and with that love comes a hell of a lot of trust. Don't you see that?"

"I'm trying."

His forehead met mine, and his intoxicating scent enveloped me.

"Try harder. For me?"

My only response was to crush my lips against his. I poured every emotion I felt for him into that kiss, wanting to show him that I was pushing myself to be more.

Not just for him, but for me too.

I knew that I had to try harder if I wanted this relationship to work. Just thinking the word made me giggle against his lips. He pulled back frowning and waiting for me to tell him what was so amusing.

"I'm sorry. I just had a thought. It wasn't funny really."

"What wasn't?" he asked patiently, leaning back against the wall.

He still held me close; his torso pressed to mine. My body began to hum in awareness, and I could feel my nipples starting to tighten. I was growing accustomed to my body's responses around Edward. Sometimes it was confirmation that it, along with my heart, knew what to do, even if my head held back.

I stammered, trying to verbalize what I'd been thinking, before finally just purging the feelings.

"I was thinking about relationships and giggled out of nerves, because I realized something-"

"That this is one," he interrupted.

I nodded, feeling my cheeks heat. His fingers tucked strands of my hair behind my ear, and my eyes fluttered closed, enjoying the gentleness of his touch.

"I know I've not repeated those words since last night, but that's only because I don't want to scare you. I don't want to be too much. This is new to me too."

"We're doing OK, Edward," I confirmed.

"Yes," he agreed, kissing the tip of my nose. "We are, and I can see that you're trying. I just don't want to hold back. Bella, I'm so happy that you feel the same; that there *is* something here that we can build on no matter how we started."

"I'm scared I'm going to mess this up. I always mess everything up. I'm completely inept at any kind of relationship."

"That's not true," he said abruptly. "What about you and Alice? How long have you guys known each other? You two manage perfectly fine."

I shrugged. "She gets me."

Edward pulled away and took the bag from my hands, leading us towards his room. He punched in the code and tossed the bag onto the bed. I watched it bounced as he turned to me.

"Does she? I think you're a little blind to how Alice feels, and that's why I told you to speak to her. I admit she's abrupt and sometimes it comes across as very harsh, but I see something in her that you clearly don't."

"So tell me."

Edward shook his head and slumped onto the mattress.

"I really think it's something you need to sort out with her, Bella. You need to actually listen to what she has to say."

"But-"

"No. I don't want us to fight, honey. Please, just talk to your friend."

He reached out his hand, and when I took it he pulled me towards him. I kneeled on the floor between his legs, resting my hands on his thighs. He smoothed my hair back from my face and placed another small kiss on my nose.

"I'm happy, Bella. I just want you to be also."

"I'm happy here with you," I confessed.

"But you're not anywhere else," he stated rather than questioned. "Your job? The apartment with Alice? I can see you're just going through each day as it comes, that's why you did the advertisement."

"I've told you. I didn't!"

He held up a solitary finger to stop me, and then continued to speak.

"I know Alice placed the ad, but if you don't mind me saying, I find it rather out of character for you to meet me just to decline the invitation. I know you now Bella, and that one day strikes me as you wanting more."

I chewed my lip, puzzled by the turn in conversation. I was happy with my life, wasn't I? I'd just longed for someone to share it with, and now I had Edward.

So why were his words echoing around my head? Why did they feel like the truth?

"I'm not saying these things to upset you. In fact, I don't know why I'm saying them now at all. Forget it. I'm sorry."

I swallowed, completely confused by the turn of the conversation. This hadn't been what I had in mind when we'd returned to Edward's apartment, and now I was debating just getting up and going home. He hadn't really upset me, but his points had struck a chord.

"Don't be upset. Really forget I said a word."

He brought his lips to mine and began a series of short, quick pecks. He persisted until I responded, kissing him back passionately. Our lips never parted as he pulled me up onto his lap. His hands delved under my thin shirt, pushing it up. I lifted my arms, allowing him to pull the material over my head and toss it to the floor. There was an urgency to Edward's movements. One I'd never felt before. So when my bra followed the shirt immediately after I wasn't surprised.

He shifted us completely onto the bed, and leaned me back against the mattress. My legs were still wrapped around his hips, and my simple skirt had ridden up my thighs. I stared up at Edward wondering where we were going with this particular position. A small smile played across his lips, as he reached down and began unbuckling his belt. With his other hand he skimmed the edge of my panties; the tips of his fingers skimming my sensitive folds.

My eyes rolled back at his delicate touch. I was becoming so accustomed to it, but always wanted more.

"Oh, Bella," he breathed, as he elevated our hips up a little from the bed.

It was only for a moment. Just long enough to push his jeans and underwear down his bottom and expose his arousal. My eyes went wide at the evidence of his lust.

It always stunned me.

When he filled me I moaned loudly, unable to stop the wave of emotion that flooded through me. From that moment I was lost in Edward and lost in the moment. We became a series of slow, gentle rocks against each other, tender touches and soft caresses. I remained flat on the

bed, my legs wrapped around Edward. He was leaning over me, kneeling on the mattress and touching my breasts. I tried to hold his gaze, but it felt too much, and when his mouth connected with my nipple I lost the battle and closed them. Each nibble he bestowed on them made sparks of color flash against my eyelids, and I would grind my hips more forcefully against his.

My orgasm was quick and blazed through every part of body. I cried out, clutching at his hands. I giggled when he nuzzled my breasts, because his hair tickled my skin. Edward pulled away as I laughed and removed his jeans completely, along with his t-shirt. I was going to rearrange my skirt and panties, but opted to remove them entirely. He tugged the sheets over us and switched on some low music.

I sobered.

"Did I do something wrong?" I whispered.

"No. No, you didn't. Come here."

Edward held his arms out, beckoning for me to cuddle with him. I went to him without question, curling into his side and reveling in the warmth of his embrace. I could hear his heart thudding as I rested my head on his chest. My exhilaration was quickly replaced by anxiety, and I waited for him to confess whatever was wrong.

"Edward?" I questioned when he didn't speak.

"I'm sorry. I..." he sighed loudly. "I'm fine. Don't worry."

"But I do worry. You didn't..." I started, letting the sentence hang at the end because I didn't know how to verbalize it.

"Shush, I promise you, I'm good. "

I didn't believe him, but after such a wonderful time at the cabin I didn't want this last day to end in an argument. So I snuggled closer and let the music and Edward's heartbeat soothe me. I was curious as to whether he was still aroused, and lifted my knee covertly and slid it over his thigh. I inched it higher, hoping my knee would graze his arousal. At least then I'd feel like he was really into this, because right now it was as if he'd only done this for me.

"Bella? Don't," he choked out, gripping my thigh.

"I w-wasn't doing anything. I was only getting comfier."

A low groan rumbled through his chest, as he jostled us about, moving us further down the bed. He turned to the side so we were lying face to face and stroked my arm.

"Comfy now?" he questioned, raising a solitary brow.

"Sure."

"Maybe you should take a nap? It's been a long day."

"Edwar-"

"No. Drop it. I told you I'm fine. I *know* you're fine, so nap."

My throat closed at the abruptness of his tone, but I didn't know what else to say, so burrowed into the pillows and closed my eyes. Even though he was in the bed, mere millimeters from me I felt alone. I replayed the day, trying to pin point where I had gone wrong, or what I'd done to upset him but I was getting nothing. He seemed to have changed around the time we talked in the corridor.

I gave a stuttered sigh, trying to compose myself when he groaned.

"I'm sorry."

My eyes shot open quickly.

"What did I do?"

"Nothing," he rumbled. "Not. A. Thing. This was all my doing. I apologize."

"Are you going to tell me what's wrong then?"

"I just started thinking at the wrong time. It put me off."

I frowned at his rather weak excuse, but didn't have the strength to argue with him. Where would it get me anyway?

He leaned forward and kissed me.

"I love you. I mean it."

I nodded slowly before whispering back.

"I love you too."

Those words didn't ease my anxiety. In the space of forty-five minutes something had changed within Edward and therefore, it had changed *us*.

End Notes:
 Oh My! What the hell just happened? THANK YOU!

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Chapter 18: Handy Reunion by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

***Shocker!* Yes, this is another update!**

Super huge thanks to the best beta ever, Maylin & the best prereader in the whole wide world, elusivekoolaid.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

"It's been two weeks, Bella, and you guys have seen each other twice. What's going on?" Alice asked.

We were sitting cross legged on the floor, a huge bag of chips between us and playing Monopoly. Jasper and Edward had been away in New York for the last six days, but were due back this evening.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I replied, moving my little dog four squares. "I can't see him if he's not even here."

"Ouchy. Cough up the two hundred, lady."

I groaned, handing it over, along with the dice. She didn't roll. She glared at me, waiting for me to answer her earlier question.

"What?"

"You know what!" she snapped. "I know Edward and Jasper aren't here now, but they only went to New York six days ago. You had over a week to talk about what was said at the cabin, but you guys haven't, have you?"

I shook my head, waiting for her to get angry. She often lost her patience with me. That was one of the reasons I hadn't told her about the promise I'd made to Edward. There never seemed like a right time with her. Plus, I didn't want to explain what had happened when we'd returned from the cabin. It felt wrong to discuss something so personal, and if I was honest, I wasn't sure what had happened myself.

"Do you love him? I mean, you weren't just saying it because you felt like you had to?"

"I...I do. It's just scary, Alice."

She rolled the dice, moving her top hat seven spaces and picking up a card.

"I know it's scary. Damn, Bella, how do you think I felt when after only a few days I wanted to say those words to Jasper? I knew nothing about him and yet, I was positive he was the one. Mine forever. So I do understand," she said softly. "Can I ask you something?"

"You don't usually ask first," I mumbled.

"Are you going to tell Edward about what's over on that counter?"

I swallowed, my heart starting to beat faster and scowled at her.

"It's only an application. I think it makes sense to work my way up in the company I'm with now. Alice, I really don't want to be a waitress for the rest of my life, and this could eventually allow me to manage a franchise of my own. I'm just thinking of the future."

"And isn't that the issue?" she asked cryptically.

I waited for her to elaborate, but she pulled a handful of chips from the bag and pierced me with her blue eyes as she chewed. When I didn't respond she sighed loudly and continued.

"You never thought of the future before Edward. You didn't care if waitressing was all you ever did, because you were just existing. Since Edward arrived in your life you live. You actually live! The change has been slow and sometimes subtle, but I see it. I think you do too."

I stared at the counters and little houses on the board, as my head was filled with images. I reflected on incidents before I'd met Edward, embarrassment turning my cheeks pink. I'd been so uncomfortable; so very awkward, and even though I wasn't like Alice, I *was* a different person. I couldn't deny that. I'd recognized it at the cabin, when I'd looked at the bikini's she'd packed for me. I'd been nervous, but I'd been willing to put them on. Six months prior and that wouldn't have been the case.

That was the first small thing I'd noticed. After that I could see more and more just how much his presence affected me. Then there was the conversation about Alice. I'd started to understand that people had made a lot of concessions for me, and I'd been too wrapped up in my own hurt to see it.

I had to put that right.

I had to start living.

"I do see the change. I just...I just don't know how it got so bad. How did I get here, Alice?"

"Do you really want the truth?"

I nodded, chewing on my lip as I waited.

"In some ways it's my fault. I was always there to wade in and defend you or fight your battles. From that first day we met at school I was there as your shield. You never had to really stand up and take the shit life gave you...until Jake. You didn't know how to deal with his aggression and as much as I tried to be there, I couldn't. I had a job to do and I couldn't be in your bedroom when things got heated, or Jake's house when you stayed over. So you see, because I sheltered you, you never learned to trust yourself, or to have the strength to fight back."

"I don't see how that's your fault. I'm not a child, and you're certainly not my parent," I snapped.

"See! You've never been short with me like that. The lamb is turning into a lion. I'm loving this new Bella!"

"I couldn't have changed that much!" I protested, pulling my knees to my chest and resting my chin on top of them.

"You know you have, and I think you'll change more. You're just discovering who you are and what you want."

"I should've done it years ago-"

"Agreed," she interrupted, placing her hand on my foot. "But you're doing it and that's what's important. The biggest question now is what next? What does Bella Swan do now?"

"We go to the airport and collect Edward and Jasper," I replied facetiously.

"Not funny."

"I wasn't joking. We have a few hours, but then we have to leave. I need to shower and-"

"Pick out something nice to wear..."

"Would you stop interrupting me?" I grumbled, standing abruptly. When she giggled I had to laugh too, but sobered almost instantly. "I'm worried, Ali."

"About?"

"W-what if Edward doesn't want a changed me? I don't think I could go back to just existing. I'm starting to get excited."

Alice stood up, facing me and linking her hand in mine.

"He will accept it. You guys just need to find your way."

I nodded, not entirely sure and walked towards the bedroom. Changes had to happen for me to be happy, but what would the cost be?

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"How can you walk in those?" I asked gesturing to her heels as we stood waiting in the airport.

Their flight had landed so they should be here any minute, and I was nervous. We hadn't said those three words, or had sex since we'd left the cabin. They were like a dream; one that continued to haunt me in my waking hours. I'd wondered many times over the last few weeks if I'd simply imagined them. Edward had called me but it was our odd stilted form of communication; the one we usually got tied up in.

"We've had this conversation. The more you wear them, the easier it gets and the higher you can go. Plus they'll come to good use later. You won't hear Jasper complaining."

I rolled my eyes, looking anxiously towards the gate. People had started to arrive, pulling their luggage behind them. Alice squealed, almost deafening us all when she spotted Jasper. She raced ahead, teetering on the heels before launching herself at him. Jasper dropped his bag instantly, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her with abandon.

Jealousy consumed me. They were so easy and carefree with each other that I couldn't stop comparing them with us. If I launched myself at Edward in the same way would he catch me? Would he risk embarrassment to hold me? Could I?

I studied them, wondering where Edward was. They didn't notice anyone around them, because they were too absorbed in one another. Jasper's fingertips were buried under the hem of Alice's shorts as he hitched her higher. People around them smiled at their happiness, making me feel guilty.

"Jasper? Where's-"

"He just went to clean up. He's right behind me," he stated into Alice's neck rather than to me.

I nodded and gazed back at the gate, as Edward strolled out. I started forward, as if to run, but caught myself. I felt stupid and too many people were watching. Instead, I lifted my hand and waved. He came slowly towards me, dropping his bag at our feet and taking my face in his hands.

"Oh, how I missed you," he breathed before lowering his mouth to mine and kissing me.

It wasn't as intense as the one that had passed between Alice and Jasper, but it still had my knees going weak. His thumbs stroked my cheekbones as his lips moved over mine, and my arms wound around his neck of their own accord.

"Hey," he whispered against my lips.

My eyes fluttered open, meeting his mossy green ones.

"Hey, back."

"I mean it. I missed you terribly, sometimes to distraction."

I grinned, and the butterflies in my stomach danced when he rubbed his nose against mine.

"Oh! Where are your glasses?"

"Jasper sat on them, and then to top it off he somehow managed to flush my spare pair this morning. I have no idea how, but that's Jasper for you."

He pulled me to his side, and picked his bag back up before walking over to Alice and Jasper. Edward cleared his throat loudly, trying to disturb the two who were currently attacking each other's mouths. It was mortifying to watch.

"Can we go, Jasper? I just want to get home," Edward pleaded.

I could hear the weariness to his tone, knowing he truly was exhausted. I didn't want him to wait while those two virtually ate each other, and was about to reiterate Edward's request when they finally came apart.

"Come on then." Alice laughed, as Jasper lowered her to the floor.

Edward didn't let go of me, as we walked to the car. Even when we were buckled up in the back seat, my hand remained in his. He would kiss my knuckles at random intervals, humming against the skin and underlining just how much he missed me. His touches did nothing for the butterflies; they only got worse.

By the time Alice dropped us off I was beyond anxious. My insides were tight and I just wanted to be alone with him. I'd never felt a pull like it. It was as if every single cell in my body was vibrating with need for Edward.

It was frightening, and yet exhilarating at the same time.

I wanted to jump on him, like Alice had to Jasper, as soon as the door to the apartment closed, but I didn't. In fact, I started to walk further into the room, when Edward pulled me back.

"Hey, don't go now. I...well, I...want you close. I really missed you," he said softly.

I smiled, coming back into his embrace and resting my head on his chest.

"I missed you too. I...hmm, I wish we could've talked a little more. It felt strange after the cabin."

I felt him exhale deeply, before tugging me over to the couch. We sat down, his arms keeping me close. His scent was going a long way to soothing my worry, but we were still very awkward around each other.

"Bella? Can you relax? I really wish we could've spoken more too, but now it kind of feels like we've taken a step back. Have we?"

I gazed up at him, and mustered the courage to lean in and kiss him on the lips.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I feel anxious. Things happened at the cabin and then when we returned there was that incident, but then you had to leave. We couldn't really talk about any of it."

"By *things*, do you mean our declarations, or what happened that first night?" He groaned. "Is this because I haven't told you since then?"

I cringed under his scrutiny, but was determined to correct him.

"No! But it..." I worried my lower lip nervously, trying to work out how to word my thoughts.

"Please, Bella, tell me," Edward pleaded, stroking his thumb across my knuckles.

I took a deep breath and admitted quietly, "I wasn't sure if things were different now that we were home."

"What? Why would you think that?"

"I ...Hmm..." I stuttered.

"Can you do something for me?" Edward asked his voice low and seductive.

I felt my breasts tighten as they virtually begged for his touch, but I could only nod in agreement.

"Could you just do what you feel, what you want, without analyzing it? Just do what you feel right here, right now. For me. Please?"

"I...w-want to touch you," I whispered shyly.

"Oh God, Bella, please. I've missed you so much."

His hands cupped my face again; his lips crushed mine. I fisted my hands in his shirt, tugging him towards me and groaning at his flavor. It was more passionate than any kiss we'd shared before and I wanted more. I undid the top button of his shirt, needing to feel his skin beneath my fingers. It was oddly empowering when he moaned against my lips, so I slipped the second button free of its noose.

"I need to touch you, love." Edward moaned, as my fingers grazed his collarbone.

My skin was burning with want; my fingers itching to caress every inch of him. My head was demanding I take action. It was telling me to be assertive and touch him where I really wanted to. I could feel Edward's fingers trembling as they teased the hem of my dress, but he wasn't letting his nerves get to him. He was trying to be confident for us both, so I vowed to try harder.

I lowered my hands, following the path his buttons took, before skimming the waistband of his trousers. He gasped, placing his face into my neck when I fumbled with his belt. I struggled with the buckle and eventually slipped it free.

He kissed the seam where my neck met my shoulder as I popped the button open.

"Oh..." he sighed, pushing his hips up to meet my touch.

I hissed as his hardness met my palm. I'd never been this bold, but his reactions made me want to be this way all the time. He was enjoying it.

I swallowed back my anxiety as I carefully touched him through his underwear. Edward groaned and pushed harder into my hand.

"Bella...Oh..."

His actions were telling me exactly what he wanted, but I had to build myself up to do it, slowly stroking and gripping him over the cotton until I was much more comfortable with our positions. Our mouths reconnected as he cupped my breast, making me exhale in wonder. This was careering out of control faster than I'd expected, but never having been this lust filled before I wanted more. I wanted to feel every aspect of this, wanted the intense all consuming desire.

Edward broke our kiss, and was about to speak when I finally delved my fingers below the elastic and took hold of his hardness. His hiss was fierce, and so was the way he squeezed my breast. Within seconds the top of my dress was around my waist; my breast free of the bra cup, and his trousers and underwear were pushed down to his knees. We became nothing more than a series of pants, gasps and thrusts. We were both completely absorbed in the intensity of passion spilling from us.

I was amazed at just how assertive I'd been in the last few minutes. My hand was wrapped around his erection and I was stroking him, enjoying the feeling of his hardness in my hand. Edward startled me further when he covered my hand with his, helping with my pumps. We both moaned, my forehead dropping to his chest.

I could see it.

Could see exactly what we were doing.

It was amazingly erotic.

"Edward," I whimpered, moving my head to show him the image before us.

He groaned and jerked, before coming over our hands. My first instinct was to pull it away, but he was still having spasms and making tiny growls. So I slowed my pace, only stopping when Edward removed his own hand. He was still cupping my breast, still stroking at my taut nipple, as his breathing began to slow.

"I'm sorry," he sighed, removing his hand and taking off his shirt.

I watched him, perplexed by his apology, as he began to clean up.

"This wasn't quite the reunion I'd envisaged."

"You didn't want us to do this?" I gasped, stunned from his words.

His eyes went wide, as he stopped the strokes on my skin.

"That's not what I...Damn, I didn't mean it that way." He kissed me sharply. "Why can't I ever say just what I mean around you? It always comes out wrong. I always try to do the right thing but invariably mess it up."

"Can I ask what you did mean?" I muttered.

Edward tossed the shirt to the floor and gripped my hands in his trembling ones.

"I just meant I never intended for this to happen as soon as we got back here. I'd planned to order some food and maybe cuddle on the couch. I was going to apologize for my stupid behaviour the night we returned from the cabin. I was even going to let you pick the movie. I messed up-"

"I don't understand how."

"I made it sexual, and I shouldn't have."

I brought his hands to my lips and kissed the tips of his fingers.

"Y-you didn't do it alone, Edward. We need to just take it as it comes."

I snorted.

"I can't actually believe I just said that."

We stared at each other, both searching for the right thing to say, or the correct thing to do. It should be easier to admit my feelings for him now that I'd already verbalized them, but it wasn't. The three words still remained on the tip of my tongue: waiting.

"Shall we order the food and have an evening like I intended?" he questioned.

"Yes," I nodded. "That would be very nice, Edward."

As he stood and walked to collect his cell, I rearranged my clothing and fought for something neutral to ask.

"So, hmm, did you and Jasper meet up with your parents? I know you said they were in New York too, and that you'd try..."

"We did," he replied, flopping back down on the couch. "In fact, they'll be back on Wednesday and they really want to meet you and Alice."

I shivered.

"Y-you told them about me?"

"Of course I did. I love you and I want my parents to meet you. Now, what shall we order?"

I gulped, debating whether I was ready to meet his mother and father, and trying to think of a feasible excuse as to why I couldn't. However, I had nothing but my fear that they wouldn't like me; that I wouldn't be good enough for their son.

"Hey," he crooned, wrapping his arm around my shoulders and pulling me close. "You look scared. Bella, they'll adore you. There's nothing to be frightened about, and to be honest, Alice will steal the show anyway."

I nodded, still unconvinced but set it to one side, because Edward was finally home.

End Notes:
<p>*I know Edward confused some of you last chapter - the answers are all in the story. I'm not trying to trick you. The next chapter is EPOV, and I really hope that helps.</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>xx</p>

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Chapter 19: Crossroad Confession by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Hug thanks the my beta, Maylin & pre reader Elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

"Will you stop shaking? They're going to adore you, Bella."

"I j-just...I've never met the parents before," she stuttered timidly.

Her hand tightened around mine, as we walked up the stone steps to my parent's house. I'd been momentarily stunned by her appearance when I'd collected her. The dress, though still reserved and very *Bella*, was stunning on her. It was midnight blue velvet with large gold discs on the rim. It made me smile that she would take such care with her appearance.

Bella clearly wanted to make a good impression.

Jasper was meeting us here, and of course, bringing Alice. I'd admitted to Bella earlier that I was worried about what Alice would wear. Her heels got higher and her outfit's stranger the more times I saw her. Bella had been preoccupied though, never really listening to what I'd said.

It scared me.

Something was shifting between us, but with that change came dread. Bella wasn't the shy, awkward woman I'd first met. It wasn't a complete change, but I saw the subtleties; maybe Alice had seen them too. She was more confident, and not just around me. Her dress today only proved my observations correct, because she simply wouldn't have worn it months ago.

I'd wanted her to be more comfortable and happy with who she was and the decisions she made, but now I was getting what I'd hoped for I was unsure if I really wanted it. The reality of that had hit me the night we'd returned from the cabin. That had been why I'd stopped our love making. My feelings were confusing me. What if she changed so much she no longer wanted to be with me? What if I was nothing more than a stepping stone?

After all, this was never intended to be a relationship.

It was about those fifty-two cards.

"Now you're the one shaking," she giggled, squeezing my hand tighter.

I smiled down at her, watching her cheeks tint pink.

"Come on, let's go inside. Mom will be pacing the floor, because I'm certain she saw us pull up in the car."

Bella took a deep breath and nodded. I pushed the door open, and was about to shout hello, when my mom came rushing out from the kitchen.

"Edward!"

She threw her arms around my neck, pulling me into a warm embrace that was pure home.

"She's beautiful," she whispered into my ear, before pulling away and smiling at Bella.

"Hello, it's a pleasure to finally meet you. I've heard so much, it's like I already know you."

She held her hand out, but when Bella took it she hugged her as she'd done to me.

"Beautiful dress."

"Thank you." Bella blushed, stepping back closer to me.

I placed my arm protectively around her waist, making my mother smile even more.

"Come and keep me company in the kitchen. I'm just basting the chicken."

She walked off in front of us, the skirt of her dress swishing around her legs and her heels clicking on the stone floor. I glanced at Bella, worried about how she was going to react to my mom's affection, but she didn't seem phased. Instead, she reached up, pushing gently at my new glasses and kissing me on the tip of my nose.

"She's nice, Edward."

Reaching up, I held her face in my hands and brought my mouth to hers. The kiss was nothing more than a quick peck, but it was enough to calm my nerves over the situation. My heartbeat slowed as ease flowed through me. I took her hand in mine, and instead of taking her to the kitchen I led her upstairs.

"Edward!" she gasped, pulling on my hand and trying to bring me to a stop.

"What?"

"W-we can't! This isn't even your house, and your mom is cooking dinner. It would be extremely rude."

I frowned.

"I don't think my mom would complain about me showing you around the place. I grew up here. I just wanted you to see it, but if you don't want-"

"Oh!" she interrupted, covering her mouth with her hand. "I thought...I... well, let's not discuss that, show me the house, please."

She'd completely lost me. I was thoroughly confused, but didn't want to cause a scene. So I tugged on her hand and led her the rest of the way up.

After showing Bella all the bedrooms, except for mine, I tried to return to help mom, but Bella stopped me. She stood at the top of the stairs frowning, hands on hips and pouting.

"Huh?" I questioned, running my fingers through my hair.

"Are you going to try and tell me that there isn't a room missing?"

I bit back a smile and shrugged nonchalantly.

"If Jasper still has a room, then I'm certain you do too. Show me."

"You don't want to see it. It's like Jasper's-childish. Mom is always saying she'll redecorate them, but changes her mind because she's sentimental."

I tried to move her, to get her to walk downstairs with me but she wouldn't budge. I wasn't getting out of this one, so sighing heavily I led her across the hall and opened the door to my childhood.

Bella swept around me, entering before I did. Anxiety made my skin prickle. What would she think of the items in the room? Would she see another side to me? I hadn't lived in this house for many years but a lot of my teenage trinkets still remained.

I nervously toyed with my hair, combing at it randomly and watching her reaction. She stood in the center and turned full circle before coming towards me.

"Can I touch?" she whispered.

My eyes went wide in shock. Did she mean me?

"Your things, Edward? Can I touch, or would you rather I left them alone?"

"Why do you want to touch?" I croaked out, shuffling on my feet.

This was so awkward.

"I just want to get to know you. I'm s-sorry."

She cast her gaze down towards the floor, making me feel foolish for being embarrassed by my youth. I wasn't even sure why I felt that way, but I felt guilty for it.

"I apologize, Bella." I gestured around the room. "Go ahead."

"Only if you're sure," she affirmed, but started towards the shelves of books and journals.

My heart rate increased, hoping she wouldn't want to read the ramblings of a teenage boy. To my relief Bella merely flicked at the spines with the pads of her fingers. I could see that she was

reading the inked notes I'd written on the edges of the books, so she knew exactly what they were.

"I thought only girls kept journals," she stated absently.

I gulped, perplexed as to how to answer it. I took a moment, and decided I didn't want to go into what a lonely child I'd been and opted instead to brush her comment off.

"Apparently not."

Bella continued to browse, moving around to my desk and suddenly laughing loudly.

"Oh my God, I collected these too!"

She picked up a keychain, followed by a binder. I knew what they were instantly, and grinned at her.

"Jasper and I would argue over which card belonged to who, and Mom would end up confiscating them all. We had all kinds of trinkets relating to them. I bet Jas still has some in his room."

"I bet he has some in his apartment," she snorted.

She handed me the keychain, still giggling. She looked stunning, and before I could stop myself I kissed her quickly. Her cheeks went pink and she took her lower lip between her teeth in shyness.

"Can you remember their names?" I asked.

"Sure, they're the *Garbage Pail Kids*."

"Oh, no, no Miss Swan," I teased. "The *actual* names. Like this keychain, what's he called?"

She rolled her eyes in the most adorable fashion, making my groin tighten with need.

"That's easy. It's *Drippy Dan*."

"Well done. I wonder how many more you remember."

We sat down on my single bed and opened the binder. In it were pages after pages full of the trading cards. Each one was pristine and had never been removed from its slot. I placed my hand across the names which were printed on the bottom of each card and turned to Bella.

"Come one then, smarty pants. Who's this?"

I tried to ignore the feel of her thigh against mine, but my skin literally tingled from the touch.

"*Flabby Abbey*," she shot at me.

"This one?"

"*Bony Tony*. You're really not making these very difficult, Edward."

I was about to ask her another, when Jasper stumbled into the room, followed by Alice in the oddest outfit yet. It looked like a large gray rag wrapped around her tiny body. All I could do was shake my head because words eluded me.

Jasper pointed at the binder and snickered.

"What the hell is it with you two and cards? Seriously? I don't get it."

"What? I-"

"Your mom wants us downstairs. Dinner's almost ready." Alice interjected, taking Bella by the hand and leading her out of the room.

"What was that all about?" I snarled at Jasper.

He shrugged casually.

"Just pointing out the obvious. If we hadn't have walked in you guys would've gotten all hot and sweaty over them. Glossy paper seems to be a kink you both share."

I stood sharply, tossing the binder onto the bed.

"We're more than that." He raised a brow in question. "We are!"

I couldn't stand to see the accusations written all over his face, so stormed from the room, trying to calm down before I joined everyone for dinner.

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I tried not to watch them as we all sat around the dinner table.

It was extremely difficult.

Alice and Jasper where whispering into each others ears and touching each other affectionately. As always, it made me jealous.

It made me want.

Bella was silent, chewing on her food slowly and carefully, obviously trying to make a good impression. She really didn't need to. The fact that I'd actually brought someone to dinner told my mother everything she'd want to know. I knew Mom would call me later to get as many details as she could, even though she was trying now by asking Bella seemingly subtle questions.

They weren't.

"So, Jasper's told me all about Alice, but I'm sorry, Edward has been much more reserved. What is it that you do, Bella?"

"Hmm, well, I waitress," she whispered. "But I'm in the process of applying elsewhere. They have a management programme that I've filled out the application for."

I blinked rapidly, confused by her little revelation.

"You are?" I questioned, trying not to sound as hurt as I felt. "You never told me..."

"It...Well, it was...I..."

"She only did it a couple of days ago. She would've told you soon enough." Alice stated, clearly trying to take the heat off her best friend.

"You knew?"

"Edward, can we talk about this later. Please?"

I knew I was pouting but that little detail had really annoyed me. Was I really that irrelevant that I was the last to be told? Even my mother had technically been told before I had. It may have been something small, but the fact that she hadn't even considered telling me really cut.

It made me question so many things.

What were we?

I felt a crossroads approaching; a conversation that could make or break us. We'd told each other how we felt, but did it solve all of the issues we had, both as individuals and together?

"We *will* talk after dinner. This isn't something that can wait, and I'm sure you know that."

She cast her eyes down towards her plate and toyed with her vegetables. Mom was smiling nervously around the table, making sure each of us met her gaze. When she met mine she raised her perfectly plucked brows in question. I shook my head minutely, not wanting to go over everything in front of Jasper and Alice.

I cleared my throat and tried to change the subject.

"So Dad got tied up with the merger?"

"Hmm, he really wanted to meet you both. He's very sorry, though I've liked having you all to myself." Esme smiled. "I commented on Bella's dress when she arrived, but Alice I'd love to know where yours came from. It's very cutting edge."

"She looks hot!" Jasper added.

Alice kissed his cheek, holding her fork out for him to eat from, making jealousy roil in my stomach. Alice showed Jasper affection all the time. They really loved each other.

I tossed my fork onto my plate, letting it clatter against the ceramic loudly. Bella cringed, but Mom chose to ignore my little display.

"So where do you shop Alice?"

Alice gave a twenty minute ramble about a little exclusive boutique that stocked only one off's. I had to agree the dress she had on today was definitely something only one person would wear. It was no wonder they didn't make more.

I was only aware of random words spewing from her mouth with tiny interjections from my brother. I was too preoccupied with Bella and the way she was trying not to look at me. She was

looking around the room; her eyes darting from one place to the next -anywhere but towards me.

I couldn't take it anymore. It hurt for us to be like this. So I shoved my chair back, standing and holding my hand out to her.

"Will you excuse us? Bella and I have something to discuss," I asked my mom before turning. "Bella?"

She stood slowly, glancing at Alice for support. However, she was too busy whispering something into Jaspers ear. At least that's what I hoped was happening.

I escorted her out into the garden towards a large sheltered patio area, gesturing for her to take a seat on the small wooden bench. My chest ached when she sat as far away from me as she could, worrying her hands in her lap.

"Bella," I said gruffly, waiting for her to meet my gaze.

"You embarrassed me," she whispered. "In front of you mother! Edward, how could you?"

"I...When you said-"

"And more importantly, why? Why would you bring me here only to do that?"

She'd still not looked at me, and it only made the pain I felt worse. Was I blowing this all out proportion?

I groaned, turning towards her and trying to reach out and touch her. She didn't allow it. She moved as close to the edge of the bench as she could without falling off and waited for my response.

"I didn't do it to embarrass you. I wanted you to meet my parents because I love you, but you really don't get it, do you? You're clueless."

"I have no idea what-"

"But that's part of the problem," I sighed. "Bella, you let me lead you. Always doing what I persuade you into."

"That's not true. The cards..."

"Don't!" I snapped. "I want to burn those damn things! Yes, they brought us together, but you use them to hide behind. Whenever you want to do something, or show me affection you use a card to do it. I can't take that anymore."

Her eyes were dark and wide from my outburst, but it felt so good to purge all the things that I'd kept to myself. I couldn't stop now.

"I'm to blame too, because I knew early on how I felt about you, but I let you continue as you were. I hoped, really hoped, Bella, that you'd see I was very different from Jake and you'd begin to open up. You never did really, and this thing about the job only underlines the point."

"I meant to tell you," she whispered. "I didn't think it would be that big of a deal."

"Really? If it wasn't then why did you make sure to mention it to Mom as soon as she asked what you did for a living?"

She gasped, clearly realizing what it must have looked like to me.

"Edward, I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to. I was going to tell you when you got back from New York but I was never sure how to raise the subject."

"You didn't know how to tell me about your life." I made it a statement rather than a question. "And that is the center of our problems. You see me as the guy who replied to your advert. I see you as my girlfriend. The woman I love."

"But I told you how I felt," she replied, her voice tight.

She was swiping at her eyes, making me want to take her in my arms and apologize for even raising any of this. But that would get us nowhere. We'd remain the couple who had a pack of fifty-two cards to work through, and once complete the liaison would expire.

I didn't want that.

I wanted Bella.

"You told me you *thought* you loved me. There's a difference. I know without reservation. You know about my life, my rather ironic occupation and have met my family. I've met your friend. I know nothing about any family you may have. The only thing you have ever disclosed to me is Jake. Oh, and those damn kid's cards upstairs. Think about that, please? I'm not being unreasonable here, nor am I doing this to hurt you. In fact, my hands are shaking and I'm having to force myself to do this." I took a moment to try to calm myself before continuing. "Did you ever notice that?"

She didn't reply, just stared.

"That my hands shake when I touch you? Did you ever think I'm just as scared and awkward as you? Can I confess something else?"

Bella nodded and wiped away another tear.

"The reason I started the Eskimo kisses was because I wanted to kiss you so frequently. I thought you'd run a mile, because it was about the cards, so I came up with a way of being just as close to you without the kiss."

"I love the Eskimo kisses," she whimpered.

"And I love you, but I'm frightened this isn't going anywhere, Bella. I want you in my life. You know exactly where you stand with me, and even though it was hard for me to tell you, I did. I have no idea what's going on in your head. None."

I tried to keep my voice low, and make sure she didn't think I was forcing her into anything. This was a conversation we should have had at the cabin after the declaration had been spoken.

My heartache eased a little when she finally looked at me. Her mouth opened and closed, as she tried to work out how to say what she needed to.

"I've relied on you and Alice too much. I've been happy to sit back and let someone else lead me. Alice told me as much the morning you came back from New York. But you already knew that, didn't you? That's why she never took up the job offers?"

Her voice was so low, so sad, that it was literally ripping my heart to pieces.

"I never meant for this to happen."

"For me to fall in love with you?" I gasped, no longer able to hide the hurt in my voice.

"No. Well, yes, but I meant everything. Alice, the cards, you, it's all linked and I don't know where to start," she sobbed.

Smiling, I stoked her arm in comfort.

"Don't you see? You've already done that. You just have to keep going, keep changing what doesn't work for you anymore."

"But I didn't even know that it wasn't working until I met you."

"You do now. The question is where do you go from here?" I asked anxiously.

She shook her head, before burying her face in her hands.

I felt suddenly nauseous, but I had to ask; I had to know the answer.

"Bella, where do we go from here? Do you want me at all?"

End Notes:
<p>Don't hate him too much. Putting myself in his place, I know I'd feel the same.</p> <p>I won't make you wait too long for the next chap. It's written.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>

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Chapter 20: Penultimate Preamble by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Oh and here's another!

HUGE thanks to my awesome beta, Maylin & pre reader Elusivekoolaid.

Totally not what I originally wrote but my flashdrive corrupted 2k of the chapter. AllyinPerth tried to recover it, but sadly I had to rewrite it.

Thank you for trying Ally!

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

"Bella, where do we go from here? Do you want me at all?"

The words played on a continuous loop in my head. I tried to focus on the man next to me, but I was consumed by the hurt in his voice. He truly thought I didn't want him, and that we were nothing more than two people who hooked up for sex.

He'd admitted that things had changed for him very early on, but he still thought I was cold to his feelings. That couldn't be further from the truth. Had I not told him I loved him? Had I not shown him in the only way I could that I cared?

We sat in silence on the bench, neither one knowing exactly what to say, or how to make this right.

Had we ever been right?

From the moment we agreed to this it had been wrong. We should have stopped it, because neither one of us had been the kind of person who could enter into such a relationship and come out unscathed. Sex was never something I fixated on, so I'd been stupid and naïve to think I could base a relationship around that aspect alone. This was my own doing, but I couldn't begin to regret it.

Every decision I'd made had brought me here.

Brought me to Edward.

I just had to work out how I was going to solve this; how I was going to make this right.

I could see his hands trembling in his lap, as he picked at his nails. Edward thought I'd paid no attention to the small things - to *him*, but I knew more than I'd clearly let on. His anger had scared me, because he'd never once shown that side of himself to me. The odd thing was, I hadn't been fearful of what he would do physically. It was emotionally.

I loved him.

I gulped and turned to face him, wiping the tears from my cheeks.

"Edward," I croaked. "I-"

"Don't give me some false hope, Bella. Just say it and cut me lose," he interrupted harshly.

"Why would you think that? I told you I was trying. This isn't easy for me, but I want to do it."

"Don't you see just how far out of my comfort zone I've gone to make sure you were happy? And yet all you tell me is that you're trying. Bella, I need you to try harder. I need something!"

He stood abruptly and began to pace in front of me. I briefly wondered what Esme thought of us, but knew Alice would be filling her in. It was embarrassing for it to happen here of all places, and it was the first time I'd met his mom.

"I'm never enough," I whispered absently to myself. "People always want more, and I don't know how to do that."

Edward stopped moving and turned quickly, his green eyes piercing into mine.

"I want *you*. You! But you need to be you and not the shell of a person in front of me. I see who you are. I catch glimpses, like at the cabin in the hot tub or out on the deck, but then you retreat so swiftly that I actually get whiplash. I walk on eggshells around you, Alice does too, but you don't see it. Bella, you're so wrapped up in your hurt that you don't look around at the rest of us."

"That's not true. What happened with Jake does not affect what's going on here."

He raised a brow in question, leaning forward a little.

"It doesn't?"

"No! When I'm with you I'm happy," I declared, watching the corner of his lips twitch.

"Really?"

"Edward, when have I ever given you the impression I'm not?"

"When you bring up those damn cards," he snapped back immediately.

"Burn them!" I shouted. "Throw them away! Give them to Alice! Edward, I simply do not care! I don't want to fight with you. I hate this. Please?"

I gulped back a sob and tried to compose myself. It was only after I cleared the unshed tears that I saw the look on his face. The anger and upset was gone, replaced by a huge grin.

The anxiety flooding my system eased a little, but I still wasn't sure if we'd actually achieved anything.

Except for making ourselves look foolish.

"Would you really do that?" he breathed softly. "You'd discard something that important?"

"They aren't important." I stood up, reaching to holding his face in my hands. "You are. You're what's important."

To make him see that I meant every word I stood on my tiptoes and kissed him with everything I possessed. My lips pushed forcefully against his, as our tongues slid slowly together. I felt his hands tighten on my waist, before slipping down and cupping my bottom. It was intense; the flow between us much more demanding than it ever had been before. I wasn't going to fool myself into thinking that this one kiss, this one resolution, solved everything but I knew this was a shift.

We were heading towards the unknown.

It was going to be a real relationship without cards.

Without an expiry date.

It was daunting, but warmth pushed away the nausea along with the nerves. We were going to do this. Edward was the only person to ever make me feel these emotions, and if I was honest with myself, I'd known something was different from the start. Maybe that was why I'd gone ahead with the idea, because I was sure if it had been anyone else I would have refused.

Edward hummed as he pulled away, skimming the back of his fingers down my cheek.

"Bella..." he said almost reverently.

"I'm sorry. I never meant for you to think it was all about those cards. Edward," I gulped. "...it hasn't been for some time."

"Then all I ask is that you show me that. We'll dispose of them; forget they ever existed and just be together."

He rubbed the tip of his nose gently against mine, his thumb caressing my jaw in slow strokes. His eyes were a brilliant green, reflecting nothing but affection, and if we'd have been anywhere but here I would have begged him to undress me. As it was, I took a few moments to compose myself before we returned to the others.

It was awkward and conversation grew a little stilted at times. I tried to forget our argument and focus on the people around us.

"So, Bella, you mentioned applying for another job. A management programme?" Esme questioned as we ate dessert.

I cringed, hoping it wouldn't start up anything else, but when I glanced at Edward he smiled, telling me it was all right.

"Hm, yes," I replied cautiously. "If I did it I could eventually own a franchise for it. It would mean a lot of extra hours, but I think it's time I thought about my future." Esme nodded. "I mean, Edward and Jasper have their own very successful company, and Alice travels the world taking the most amazing photos."

"She sure does." Jasper added, kissing her forcefully on the lips.

She spluttered, coughing on whatever she'd been eating, but grinned at him. Before jealousy could affect my temperament, Edward reached out and stroked my arm with a single finger. He was so perceptive to my moods, and was there to try to ease my anxiety. Their public displays of affection would always get to me, but this time I was soothed by the look in his eyes.

"I think it's a wonderful idea, sweetie. I was so proud the day these two started the agency."

Conversation flowed freely after that, certainly better than I'd thought. We'd disrupted her family dinner with our constant lack of communication, and I was surprised she was so nice to me given it was the first time we'd met. She wanted to know about Alice's photos, and obviously questioned her more on her unique fashion sense. During the whole conversation I'd see Edward shooting me quick assessing glances, making sure I was all right with this. I noted he was very much like Esme, not just in looks, but the way he read people. Esme tried not to focus the whole conversation around me, because she could tell I didn't like that kind of attention, just as Edward did. They were a very loving family, and I found myself wishing I could have met his father.

When our offer to clean up was declined, Edward decided it was time to go home. I was certainly tired, but I didn't want the night to end. It had gone very differently to how it had originally started, but I couldn't begin to regret our argument. It had brought us into this new relationship. I was scared, because I'd never had a relationship like this but wanted it desperately.

I wanted Edward.

/ T \

"I really want to take you back to my place, love, but I don't think that's the best idea at the moment. Do you?" Edward asked as we climbed into his car.

"Why not?" I said quietly.

"Bella, we need to talk, and I think the best way forward for us is to actually date. No other *interactions*."

I giggled nervously, knowing exactly what he meant by interactions. I blushed as images of those very times filled my head.

"But...well..."

"Please, just say it. Try?"

I took a deep breath and whispered, "But if we n-no longer have the cards, then it would be a s-step for...forward no matter what we do, right?"

He frowned, thinking about what I'd said before turning slightly in his chair and caressing my cheek with the back of his fingers.

"I will agree to us continuing the conversation at my apartment, OK?"

I tried to stop the huge smile spreading across my face, but failed. Edward grinned back, stroking my bottom lip with his thumb.

"We're doing just fine, Edward. I'm going to try and we're going to be perfect."

I pushed his glasses up his nose, making him chuckle, before he buckled himself in and started the engine. I turned the CD player on, as he pulled away from the sidewalk. *Clair de lune* floated out from the speakers, and I closed my eyes, just letting the notes wash over me. At least that's what I thought was happening, but when I opened them again the car had stopped and Edward was looming over me. I blinked him into focus, taking in his warm green eyes, and his bronze hair as it fell onto his forehead. I instinctively reached up, stroking the strand away and mumbling, "So damn pretty..."

A solitary brow rose in amusement.

"Really?"

I groaned, mortified at my slip as I climbed out of the car, and walked quickly toward the entrance of Edward's building. I could feel him behind me, his heat permeating my dress and ghosting across my skin. He heightened my reaction further when he rested his chin on my shoulder and whispered into my ear.

"I was only teasing."

I swallowed and pressed the button for the elevator. His hands held my hips, his fingers tickling at my hip bones, making it difficult to think clearly. By the time the elevator arrived my breathing was shallow and my heart was pounding. He guided me inside, his hand moving to the base of my spine, and he continued to stand behind me as the doors closed. I spun around to see him with his back to the wall, legs crossed at the ankles. He looked so relaxed, and yet I was vibrating from his touch. He'd said we were here to talk, but the way he was looking at me now, the hunger in his eyes was telling me a completely different story. Knowing exactly what I wanted, I took a deep breath and took his face in my hands. Edward gasped as my lips met his, and his hands instantly hauled me closer. Our tongues mated; our lips caressed. Small sounds of encouragement were falling from his mouth into mine, only making me want him more.

My fingers were toying with the top button of his shirt, when the elevator came to a halt. I grumbled and tried to move away, but ended up screeching when Edward placed his arm under my knees and lifted me up. He was grinning as he carried me towards his apartment.

"I do have legs," I protested when he opened the door.

"I know, but this is so much nicer," he retorted, slowly lowering me to my feet.

My knees wobbled, so for support I leaned against the back of the couch but fisted his shirt and pulled him with me. His hands held the couch on either side of my hips and surrounding me in his warmth. I took a deep breath, mustering the courage to show him exactly what I wanted, before walking my fingers up his chest. I started to unbutton each little disc, freeing it from its

noose. A rumble rolled through his chest, as he lowered his lips to mine. I could taste his need; it reflected mine and only made me want him more. Edward took his lips from mine for an instant, only long enough to mutter, "I didn't...not here...bedroom."

"Here," I stated, pushing the shirt from his shoulders.

I skimmed my fingers across his muscles, feeling each dip under my fingertips. His abdomen shuddered, as I let my hand rest just above his navel.

"I didn't bring you here for this," he croaked.

"I know, but I...Edward, I want this."

He gave a short nod, before raising my free hand to his mouth and kissing the tip of each finger. Sparks of arousal shot down my arm, and seemed to center around my nipples. My temperature rose; coherent thoughts dissipating, and all that was left was Edward.

When he stepped back to unbuckle his belt I lifted my dress over my head and kicked off my shoes. I stood before him in my bra and panties, my hands skimming across my body anxiously, trying to hide myself. His arms shot out, gripping my wrists and holding them at my hips.

"Don't," he stated forcefully, before placing his mouth on my shoulder.

My head fell back and a loud sigh expelled from my lips, as he nibbled, licked and kissed his way along my collarbone. He let go of my wrist, stroking his fingers up my ribcage and around my back, allowing him to undo my bra. It dropped to the floor between us, leaving Edward to kick it away.

I delved my hands into his hair, feeling the smooth strands flick through my fingers. His gaze was hooded; his breathing shallow, as he crooned, "Turn around, love."

I licked my lips, nerves zipping to my very core, but I did as he'd asked. I held onto the back of the couch and sighed audibly when his lips met with the skin on my spine. He kissed and swirled his tongue around each vertebra. The only sign of his nerves was the slight quake to his hands, where they were linked over mine on the couch.

I felt rather than heard his words, as his lips moved against my skin, and I didn't need to ask him to repeat them. I knew.

He told me he loved me.

I tried to turn, wanting to be looking directly at him when I declared the same, but Edward had other ideas. He let go of my hands and began to tease the hem of my panties. I pushed my bottom towards him, trying to gain some friction for the ache that was becoming all consuming. He nipped at my shoulder, when his thumbs hooked the material and pulled them down my legs. I helped, stepping out of them and waited for his touch.

"I need you, Bella," he ground out. "Need you so much."

His words held a reverence I fully understood, and as his erection teased my opening I dropped my head to his shoulder and almost begged him to take me. My arm wrapped backwards

around his neck, as his lips connected with my jaw. At the same time he thrust into me, making me cry out, and cupped my breast gently.

Edward was everywhere.

In every part of my body and soul.

At that very moment I knew he was all I would ever want, and no matter what, I needed to grow beyond my anxiety. Our bodies moved in unison, clinging to each other as he pumped within me. I'd never made love like this, but then everything was new with Edward.

Even me.

Each thrust made me gasp, each roll of my nipple made me sigh, and with each sound from me I was greeted with one of Edward's own. Knowing those noises were escaping his lips because of what he was gaining from me, only made me more determined to give back the affection he exuded whenever we were together.

"I love you," I moaned, as I turned my head to look at him.

His retort was a fierce kiss, one that left me panting and clinging onto him desperately.

When my orgasm came it thundered through my body, leaving me hoarse from my screams and weak at the knees. Edward's followed, as I tried to gain my equilibrium. He flopped against me, my torso bending over the back of the couch. His chest was heaving against my back, but he continued to kiss my skin, never wanting to sever the connection. I shivered as he left my body and gave one last stroke to my stomach. My body felt cold without his blanketing mine, but it wasn't for very long, because he turned me around carefully and cupped my bottom. He said nothing further, just kissed me, lifting me up and giving me no other choice than to wrap my legs around his hips. He carried me to his bedroom and tossed me onto the bed. I giggled as I bounced on the mattress, feeling completely exhilarated. Edward walked around the bed, not caring about his nakedness and switched on some music. I laughed even louder as he followed me on to the mattress, and tugged my body into the haven of his. He tickled my ribs, making me squeal and kick my legs in protest. It only encouraged him more, and soon we were writhing around the bed, crumpling the sheets and discarding the pillows. It was wonderful to be this free with him. I hoped it would always be this way.

We both sobered when the start of our *Tori Amos* song filled the room. Edward reached out, cupping my face and gave me a gentle Eskimo kiss. My eyes fluttered closed as contentment washed over me.

"Edward," I whispered, returning his quick peck and pushing at his glasses. "There's something else I need to t-tell you."

He stilled.

"It's about the management programme."

He nodded, wanting me to go ahead. I knew I should have told him before, but there was never the right time. Not that this was right either.



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Chapter 21: Closing Coupling by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

I'm here again.

Huge thanks to my beta, Maylin & prereader elusivekoolaid.

More notes at the bottom...

SM owns all things Twilight. Deckward belongs to Elusivekoolaid.

Bpov

I placed my cell onto the bedside table and smiled. My eyes glazed with tears, but I refused to cry. Being here was good for me; I could feel it, and I was determined to make it through the remaining two weeks. Each day, I tried not to let my separation from him affect my training, but it was harder to deny it at night.

Leaving had been the hardest thing I had ever done, but it was also the best. I felt like I could breathe, even though I hadn't been aware I'd been suffocating.

When I came back the hotel room and could hear the sound of my shoes on the wooden floor echo around the room, I couldn't bury it anymore. It wasn't getting any easier either. The first few nights had been somewhat of a novelty, and I thought I was coping well, but then Edward had called me I'd broken down on the phone, sobbing. I'd even asked him to come and get me.

Edward had refused.

He'd tried to calm me, to make me see that I needed to do this. We'd talked about it for many nights before I'd left, and we'd come to an understanding. I knew he was right, because without this I would be back to square one: not knowing who I really was and drowning in my own awkwardness. That weekend he'd canceled all of his meeting and flew to New York to see me.

It had been wonderful.

Edward's hand roamed across my naked back, his fingers skimming my spine. His mouth was devouring my throat, as my head tipped back to allow him better access. I rode him slowly, needing to prolong this connection with him. He gasped against my skin, as I combed my fingers through his hair.

He hadn't even dropped his luggage to the floor when I wrapped my arms around him. I just wanted to breathe in his scent. I needed to restore my equilibrium, and Edward was what righted my world. It was strange, because the time apart seemed to overshadow any awkwardness. We both

longed to be together. He'd carried me across to the bed and we'd stripped each other slowly, never breaking eye contact.

"I miss you. I always miss you," he sighed into my breasts.

I moaned, rocking against him, as I straddled his hips. His lips covered my nipple; his tongue tenderly lapping at the taut peak.

"Me too," I mumbled, lifting my head and kissing his forehead.

"I love you."

I swallowed, emotion closing my throat. I'd been away for just over a week and we were already finding it hard, how were we going to make it through the next seven weeks?

"I love you too," I stated, bringing his lips to mine and kissing him with everything I had.

I pushed closer to him, still wanting more as I felt him swell within me. My eyes fluttered closed, trying to remember every one of his touches, his kisses and the way I shivered when he pumped inside of me. These were images that would soothe me at night. They were the pictures that kept me strong.

I was doing this for a reason.

I was doing this for me.

Our completion during that first reunion had been all consuming. It left us both gasping and panting for air. We hadn't separated though. I remained in his lap, my head resting on his shoulder; his on mine.

We stayed like that until we were too exhausted to remain upright.

Edward had tried to make it here every weekend, but it simply hadn't been feasible for him. So in the six weeks I'd been here he'd only managed it twice. In some respects I knew it was probably better for me. If he was always here, then there would have been no point.

Edward would call me first thing in the morning; his was the first voice I heard every single day, and it would be the last thing I heard at night. He would stay on the line, listening until I was asleep. It was the most romantic thing I'd ever heard, and that was why I loved him.

I knew that now without question.

Alice had called sporadically, but again, I knew why. She also knew I had to do this alone. She'd stopped being my back bone. It was scary but I felt free.

I was actually living my life, and I loved it.

Today had been rough, and I'd needed to talk to Edward, needed his voice to calm me, but he wasn't answering. It was going straight to voicemail. It was too late at night for him to be in a meeting, but the only other reason would be that he was sleeping. That thought made me blink back a tear, because it would be the first night he hadn't called me to lull me to sleep.

I kicked my heels off, pulling my shirt from where it was tucked into my skirt and flopping down onto the bed. I stared at the ceiling, replaying moments that made me happy - anything to keep the tears at bay. I giggled, remembering the first time we'd tried to be intimate on the phone.

"We can do this, love. Just lie back and put me on loudspeaker." Edward whispered down the phone.

I closed my eyes and tried to imagine him here with me. I did as he asked, placing my cell on the pillow next to me.

"I feel silly, Edward."

"Just trust me, OK?"

"Have you ever even done this before?" I giggled, relaxing back onto the mattress.

"Hmm, well I...Hmm, googled it..."

The line went silent as he waited for my reaction, and it took a good few seconds for it to sink in, before I burst out laughing. And once I started I couldn't stop. I'd felt so low and alone, and yet all it took was a reminder of our awkwardness for that to all disappear. We hadn't changed that much, we were still the couple that had to push themselves.

Edward was very quiet during my outburst, and only spoke when I sobered.

"I miss you so much, Bella."

I gulped at the sadness that oozed from his words. I felt the same, and my heart ached just as much as his did, but I wasn't going to mar the time we did spend talking to each other. These were going to be the parts that saw us through.

"I know. I miss you too, but you were saying you googled some information about how to keep your girlfriend smiley?" I asked, trying to lighten the mood.

"Girlfriend?"

"Of course, why what else would you call me?"

"Girlfriend is wonderful. Say it again for me," he uttered softly.

I turned towards my cell and whispered, "Girlfriend."

We stayed like that for a while, just listening to each other breathe. I didn't feel so alone having him like this. I could close my eyes and smell him - pretend he was here.

"So are we going to try this, love?"

I nodded, forgetting he couldn't see me.

"Do you think you can imagine me there? With you?" he asked softly.

"I d-don't think that'll be a problem," I giggled.

He asked me to start off slow, to caress my stomach and tell him how it felt. I was so embarrassed. My body was hot, but needy, and it flushed even more when he told me he was doing the exact same thing he'd asked me to do. I could remember what his skin felt like under my touch, and it only made me long for the reality more.

"What shall I do next?" I questioned nervously.

"Erm...M-maybe you should tell me where your hands are now?" he stammered.

"They're on my stomach, where you told me to put them!"

There was a small groan, before he said, "OK, can you slip them up to your...breasts?"

"Over my tank?"

"I don't think so...Hmm, I don't think it stated that."

I grinned, laughing towards my cell.

"We're not very good at this, are we?"

"We weren't very good at other things, Bella, but we're doing just fine now, aren't we?"

My chest ached, and I clutched my cell closer.

"I really miss you, Edward. I don't know that I can do this," I stated honestly.

"You can, love. I know you can, and when you get home we'll be better for it."

I believed him.

"Do you think we can make it, Edward? Really?"

He didn't even take a moment to think before he answered. "Without question."

Those small moments in time were what warmed me, especially when, like now, I felt so low.

It was almost one in the morning. A new day.

A step closer to Edward.

The training was going really well, and they'd arranged for me to continue it in another franchise back home. It wouldn't be the one where Rose worked, but at least I'd be going home. It would be another year before I'd be eligible for my own franchise. The thought excited me. Everything seemed to be slotting into place.

Everything I'd ever wanted.

I reached for my cell again, intent on trying to reach Edward. He knew what time I finished today, and we hadn't gone a night without calling each other. I began to worry, and briefly considered calling Jasper instead, but at this time of night I never knew what I'd hear on the end of the line. Alice and Jasper weren't exactly shy when it came to their liaisons. So instead I texted him, hoping that he'd just fallen asleep, before turning over and trying to get some sleep.

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I woke with a raging headache, my vision blurry and my limbs weak. I groaned, climbing from the bed, realizing I was still in yesterdays clothes. Sleep had eluded me for most of the night. I tossed and turned, worried about Edward. I'd sent him three more texts and had tried to call him again at around five. He didn't answer, nor did he respond to my texts. I was beginning to get a sick feeling in the pit of stomach.

Something was wrong.

I stumbled from the bed, hunting in my purse for some pills to relieve the pain throbbing in my temples. Hopefully it would subside soon, and then I'd call Alice or Jasper. I reasoned that if something terrible had happened then they would have called me by now.

After taking two pills I began to unbutton my shirt, but my hands were shaking and I gave up, slumping back onto the bed. There was a small knock at the door, making me groan and turn away from the noise, but whoever was on the other side of the door was very insistent. They paused for a minute, only to begin knocking again.

"Ok!" I wailed.

My legs felt like lead as I walked towards the door. I flung it open, trying to glare at the annoyance, but I was sure it came across more like a grimace.

"What?" I snapped, trying to blink whoever it was into focus.

"Bella."

My heart thundered into life at the sound of his voice.

Edward.

He was here.

I launched myself at him, my headache forgotten, as the dam burst and I began to sob. I heard his bag hit the floor, and his arms banded around me.

"Oh, baby, don't cry," he soothed.

He carried me into the room, kicking at his bag, before shutting the door and pressing me back against the wood.

"W-what are you doing here?" I whispered, as my hands roamed his shoulders.

I needed the physical confirmation that he was really here.

"Shh, don't cry."

His lips met mine, kissing me with a hunger I'd never felt from him before. His fingers delved underneath my skirt, before squeezing my bottom and pulling me closer. A small whimper escaped my lips, as the remaining tears trickled down my cheeks.

"I was worried. You didn't answer my calls or reply to my texts. I thought something had happened-"

"Hey," he said softly, placing a small kiss on the tip of my nose. "I'm here. I'm fine. My phone died in the taxi on the way to the airport, and I thought you'd be sleeping anyway. I'm sorry I scared you."

I nodded, and chewed anxiously on my lip. It made Edward frown.

"What, love? Tell me."

I exhaled deeply, mustering the strength, before looking directly into his bright green eyes.

"I need you now, Edward."

He tossed his head back, laughing loudly.

"I'm so glad you said that, because as much as I'd love to sit and talk right now, my body is demanding something much more intense."

We both giggled, as he took us towards the chair in the corner of the room. I wasn't sure why he chose that, because there was a perfectly good bed dominating my hotel suite. I didn't question it, though. I just needed to be connected to him once again.

He made speedy work of removing my shirt and bra, and on the way he discarded his own sweater. I was straddling his lap, smiling down at him, loving the way his eyes twinkled in the light.

I lost all conscious thought, as I brought my lips to his. I kissed him with everything I had. It was tender and slow at first, and then loving and seductive. Edward hummed, enjoying me taking the lead for once and tilted his head further to the left so he could deepen it.

Need was raging through my body, making my skin sensitive and desperate for his gentle touch. I trailed my fingers down his neck, feeling the coarseness of the stubble underneath, and was rewarded with a quick sweep of his tongue against mine.

I wanted to tell him just how much I loved him, and that I never wanted to be apart again, but I couldn't speak right now. I was brimming with so much emotion, consumed entirely by Edward.

We continued to kiss tenderly as our hips rocked against each other. Not another word was spoken; our bodies said everything we needed to. I was making tiny sounds of desire, as my mouth moved along his jaw. I nibbled on Edward's neck, feeling the coarseness graze my tender lips.

"I need you to remove your skirt, Bella," he whispered.

I shifted off his lap and stood before him. This was the most assertive I'd ever been with him. I'd undressed in front of him before, but had tried to hide myself.

I wasn't going to do it this time.

I was going to be bold.

I unzipped the skirt, watching his eyes widen in shock and shimmied it down my legs, taking my panties with it. I heard his sharp intake of breath, and could help but be aroused by the way he perused my naked form. He leaned forward to caress my stomach, kissing at my navel. I lifted my leg, so I could straddle him again. He held up a solitary finger and unzipped his jeans, raising his bottom off the chair, and pushing them down his legs. I blushed as I watched his erection bob, but felt my abdomen clench.

"You're so beautiful," he all but growled.

My gaze met his, and I licked my lips wanting to do one thing for him now.

The one thing I'd never for him.

I wanted to place my mouth around him.

Edward seemed to know what I was thinking because he shook his head and stated, "You don't have to, love."

I was a little disappointed, because he'd wanted it at the start of this relationship, so why wouldn't he want it now.

"I w-want to. Please?"

I didn't want him to deny me this, so lowered myself to the floor and took hold of his arousal. I could see how turned on he was because the tip was glistening with his need, and unable to stop myself, I lapped at it. Edward bucked, completely stunned by my advance. His knuckles were white as they gripped the arms of the chair.

I stared up at him, licking my lips one last time before covering him with my mouth. He moaned loudly, before pushing his fingers into my already disheveled hair. I'd never wanted this with anyone, and the reminder of the incident with Jake would always linger, but it felt different now.

Edward was what made it different.

His love had made *me* different.

I felt empowered by the knowledge and by the little noises that were emanating from his chest. I wanted to continue, but he pulled my head up, gazing at me in complete devotion.

"I rarely curse, Bella, but I fucking love you."

I smiled at him, as I climbed back onto his lap. His erection nestled between my folds, and I pulled back slowly before pushing myself onto him in one swift movement.

We moaned in unison.

It was perfection.

A coupling without cards, or expiry.

Just us.

He brought his hand up to cup my breast, stroking his fingers across the swell of skin, and making me sigh. I rocked against him so slowly, savoring each thrust, and feeling deliciously full. His eyes never left mine. We were joined in every single way; our lives linked forever.

That was when I truly knew there was no one else but Edward.

He was my forever.

Gasping, I touched his lips, wanting to make sure he was really here, before I stated, "Forever, Edward."

The smile that spread across his lips lit up his entire face.

"Forever, Bella."

I kissed him, circling my hips and feeling his stomach twitch. He hissed, gripping my hips and pulling me closer. I closed my eyes and threw my head back at the sensation, as Edward tugged, gripped my hips, and moved us faster.

"Oh..." I moaned.

I could feel my orgasm begin to build, as he thrust into my body. His cheeks were flush now, reflecting what I knew mine must be like. He was panting as hard as I was, and I could feel his pounding heartbeat underneath my palm. He cupped the back of my neck and pulled me down, placing a searing kiss on my lips as we came together. We cried into each others mouths, slowing our pace as orgasm slowly subsided.

He continued his slow seduction of my lips, as I felt the last tremors in my body. I gasped for air and rested my head in the crook of his neck. Every muscle was quivering, and it wasn't just from the orgasm.

I inhaled deeply, as he turned to look at me in wonder.

"I thought I could be strong. I thought I could be apart from you, but I can't," he stated honestly.

The need in his voice went straight to my heart, and it begged to make it better.

"But I have two weeks left."

I lifted my hand to push his glasses back up his nose. He closed his eyes, pushing the side of his face into my palm.

"I'm going nowhere until you're done."

"I don't understand."

His hand floated up my back, restarting the tingles over my skin.

"I've cleared the next two weeks. I'm staying here. With you." He cupped my face in both hands. "And then, Isabella Swan, we're going home."

"Home?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes, baby. Home. Our home. I love you, and I never want to be apart from you again. You are my life now, and always will be."

I didn't know how to respond. He was everything I'd given up on finding.

I began to cry; the tears rolled down my face at an alarming rate, and when he wrapped me in his arms the sobbing only got worse.

"Just say yes, love. I can't be without you. I *won't*."

I snorted as I tried to regroup, wiping my nose with the back of hand, before I my watery gaze met his.

"I've hid myself for so long, never believing I was worthy of a love like yours, but Edward, you showed me that I am worthy. You showed me I could give it back and that I did deserved it. I know it took patience on your side, and maybe at times you wondered why you were bothering, so I want to say two things to you..." I grinned, before bouncing on his lap and shouting at the top of my lungs. "I love you! And yes! Yes! Yes!"

Someone in the suite next to ours banged on the wall, and a muffled yell followed. We spluttered, as Edward stood, lifting me up and carrying me to the bed.

"You've just made me the happiest man in the world," he said, tossing me onto the bed.

I bounced, before scooting under the covers.

"You're really here for two weeks? With me?"

He nodded and walked towards his discarded bag. He was still completely naked, and my pulse became erratic as I drank in the sight.

"What will we do? In my free time, I mean? Go sight seeing?"

He jumped onto the bed, and swiftly moved me underneath him.

"I have another idea."

I frowned, but couldn't stop the burst of laughter that escaped my mouth when I saw what he was holding.

52 cards.

52 positions.

One life changing moment.

End Notes:

...and so you have it.

I know many of you expected 52 chapters, but it was never about the cards, and I think that was evident early on. It was about two very awkward people finding their own way, and now they have.

I honestly adore every single review I get. I read them, often more than once, and hope you realize the impact your words have on me.

Huge thanks to my beta - I adore you. I can't ever express how much.

Boob gropes to my pre reader, Elusivекoolaid. You're always there when I need you, and I won't ever forget that.

Chapter 2 of Dark Possession will be uploaded in about a weeks time.

Thank you.

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