Summary: Winner of the JBNP Award for Most Angsty Story and Non-Canon Award for Best Romance; Runner Up for Non-Canon Award for Best Bella/Pack Member Pairing. Bella is 21 when she first arrives in Forks. She is Jacob's imprint. She is Edward's singer. With her soul tied to two mortal enemies, how can she survive? Beta and pre-reading by niamhg and MistC.
Chapter 1*: PROLOGUE

A/N: No, I just couldn't stay away ... So here we go again with another J/B ... Thank you to niamhg for offering to pre-read for me again:-)

Jacob Black stood on the mountain top, one foot raised on a boulder, surveying the land below him.

His land.

As future Chief of the Quileute tribe and, more importantly, as Alpha of the Quileute wolf pack, the safety of the people who lived on this land was his responsibility.

This was one of Jacob’s favourite places to come, when he wanted to be alone. He could see every part of La Push territory from here. Even though he was technically miles away, his supernatural vision allowed him to see everything he needed to. His supernatural speed would allow him to be at the source of any threat in under a minute, if necessary. He was still close enough to his land, his home, to be able to Protect effectively.

On the other hand, he was always completely alone here. The other wolves rarely strayed this high. It wasn't on any of the routine patrols, and there was no other reason for them to be here.

Jacob's mother's ashes had been scattered here. His father, wheelchair bound for almost a decade, could no longer make the journey up the mountain. The only other people who might have visited, his twin sisters, found it too painful. Jacob didn't find it painful. He found it peaceful. He never spoke to Sarah or anything like that. He just liked to know that a part of her spirit might linger close by.

The wind was gathering momentum and Jacob could sense a storm coming. His thick, raven black, jaw length hair was being whipped around his handsome face. The wind didn't bother him. He would have been comfortable just wearing his usual attire, shorts or cut off jeans.

Today, he was wearing a black T-shirt and full length jeans. He was even wearing shoes. It was just a formality because he was going to take his dad to visit his old friend, Charlie Swan, in Forks later. Wandering around in shorts in October in Washington would draw too much attention. He would probably need to wear a jacket, too, for appearance sake.

A movement in a usually quiet part of the reservation caught Jacob’s attention and his head jerked in that direction. He grinned as he recognised his pack brother, Jared, and his imprint Kim. Probably not something Jacob wanted to witness. He would likely catch the replay in Jared’s mind later, anyway.

Jacob watched the couple for a moment longer, feeling the familiar pang in his chest whenever he saw an imprinted wolf with his girl. He tried not to spend too much time wondering when he would find his own imprint. Everyone had been expecting it for the three years since he had first phased. As Alpha, his imprint was expected to be spectacular. At first, he had railed against the very idea that some supernatural force would dictate who he fell in love with; but as he watched his brothers find their imprints and with them, extraordinary relationships, he had come to value the importance for the wolves.

And he was lonely. It didn't take a genius to figure out that if you were destined to imprint, you shouldn't be in a serious relationship with another girl. So for three years - well, really since he had first become interested in dating - Jacob had had to keep all his relationships casual. Usually, he just avoided dating altogether. If he needed to blow off some steam, which happened roughly every month or so, he would go to Port Angeles, drink far too much heavy liquor, and go home with some random chick who didn't look like she was expecting anything serious.

It wasn't what he wanted. Jacob, like all the wolves, had an enormous capacity to love. He was built to love, and to protect. He just needed to find his damn imprint.

Shaking himself out of this reverie, Jacob turned away from Jared and Kim, and began heading back down the mountainside. He started at a jog and then picked up pace for the sheer hell of it. He liked speed and he could run fast, even in his human form. He was back at the red cabin he lived in with his dad, in no time.

Billy was waiting for him, ready to go and visit his old friend. In practised movements, Jacob helped his dad into his Rabbit, folded his wheelchair and stowed it in the back. He had to drive him to Forks and be available to drive him home again later. Usually, he just dropped his dad off, went home, and returned a few hours afterwards. Today was a little different because Charlie’s daughter Bella had just arrived in Forks.

Bella had left Forks with her mother when she was just a child. She had visited her dad during vacations for years and had frequently played with Jacob and his sisters. Apparently the friendship between Bella and Jacob had been ... special. He didn't really remember it much. He had heard the stories and seen the photos of two chubby kids playing in the mud together, but other than that and a few vague memories, Jacob couldn't remember much of the police Chief's daughter.

Charlie had had an incident at work a few weeks ago. He had been badly beaten by a drunk while responding to a 911 call out and needed several months off work while his various fractures and internal injuries healed. Such a crime in Forks was unheard of and the whole town had been buzzing with the scandal. Apparently, it coincided with Bella needing "a
"I see we have a situation on our hands." Jacob forced his head to turn and look at his dad, who was smiling brightly.

The first thing he noticed was the deep crimson blush which beautifully stained her cheeks. The second thing he noticed when the young woman moved, breaking eye contact and with it, the initial spell, was her soul that had never been touched before, calling to him like a siren. It belonged to him. Jacob reached his long arm out and fused itself to the young woman who was standing staring, slightly open mouthed at him.

They engaged and fused themselves together. Every cable that connected Jacob to this Earth snapped, coiled in a new direction, engulfing and completing one another. Every connection of him with his soul, which he had never even known was shut, opened suddenly. A tornado of emotions raced through it. The strength of it overwhelmed him. The fight for his heart, which he had never even known to exist, was raging. It was his reason for being.

Jacob saw it clearly, as though scales had been removed from his eyes and he was seeing the sun for the first time. This was the reason he had been brought into existence. Nobody, nothing else mattered. His heart, which he had never even known was shut, opened suddenly. A tornado of emotions raced through it. The strength of them caused him to drop heavily to one knee. It was, he thought vaguely, the perfect position for him to be in, this ancient gesture of servitude and devotion.

A voice was buzzing irritatingly in his ears, attempting to break through this wonderful moment of clarity. But it was only when the young woman moved, breaking eye contact and with it, the initial spell, that Jacob began to return to his senses.

The first thing he noticed was the deep crimson blush which beautifully stained her cheeks. The second thing he noticed was that he was still on bended knee on Charlie Swan's front porch. The third thing he noticed was his dad's voice.

"I see we have a situation on our hands." Jacob forced his head to turn and look at his dad, who was smiling brightly.

Jacob didn't think his dad's friend would be so keen if he knew the boy he was pinning his hopes on was a wolf and destined to imprint on, presumably, a native girl. Still, Jacob had business with Bella today. He had fixed up an old truck for her and he wanted to make sure she was having no problems with it. More importantly than that, however, in the 24 hours since her arrival, Bella had somehow managed to get involved with the local coven of bloodsuckers.

Arriving at Charlie Swan's house, Billy waited while Jacob got his wheelchair ready. He was looking forward to seeing Bella again. It had been far too long. Billy was pleased that Jacob had agreed to stay for today's visit. The girl knew nobody and if she was to stay and look after her father for a while, she would need some friends. Billy was relieved that Jacob had always been cautious about getting involved with girls. He didn't need to worry about his son leading Bella on and then imprinting and leaving her.

Jacob had his father sitting in his chair and was pushing him to the front door of the familiar house when he first detected the most incredible scent he had ever encountered. His nostrils flared instinctively. He couldn't quite place what it was but damn, it smelled good. It strengthened as he approached the front door. It was a hint of vanilla mixed in with something much more potent. Something ... heady.

Unconsciously, Jacob's pace quickened. Whatever the source of that scent was, he needed it. It reached into a part of his soul that had never been touched before, calling to him like a siren. It belonged to him. Jacob reached his long arm around his dad's chair and tried to open the door. It was locked, unusually, and he frowned, aware of his wolf growling his displeasure at being thus thwarted.

He must have actually growled because his dad was saying, "Since when do you act like an animal in public?"

"What?" Confused, Jacob met Billy's eyes. His dad was frowning at him.

Jacob mentally slapped himself. What the hell? Shaking his head as though to clear it, he raised his hand and knocked on the door, astounded when the urge to just break the damn obstruction down burst through him.

He heard light footsteps approach. There was a clatter as though something had been bumped into and a muffled owl which would have made him laugh except that as the footsteps drew closer, that incredible scent grew stronger. It was driving him wild and now he really did want to break the fucking door down to get to it, whatever it was.

Finally, after an interminable time, he heard the key turn in the lock and the door swung open, revealing a tiny, pale skinned young woman with beautiful thick brown curls that hung around her shoulders. Jacob realised that of course she was the source of the scent, it emanated from her in the most maddening, intoxicating way. His arms twitched at his sides as she smiled warmly at his dad. He wanted to pull her into his strong arms and make her look at him, not the old man in the wheelchair.

Some part of his mind realised that he wasn't exactly being reasonable, but at just that moment, the young woman's chocolate eyes raised to meet his own, darker brown eyes, and it happened.

His soul reached out and caressed hers. Her soul responded immediately, accepting his. Their two souls joined together, engulfing and completing one another. Every cable that connected Jacob to this Earth snapped, coiled in a new direction, and fused itself to the young woman who was standing staring, slightly open mouthed at him.

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"I see we have a situation on our hands." Jacob forced his head to turn and look at his dad, who was smiling brightly.
"Jacob, meet Bella Swan. Bella, this is my son, Jacob. I think we'll be seeing a lot of you, Bella." Chuckling, Billy Black clapped his son on the back and wheeled himself over the threshold, leaving Jacob to explain himself to his imprint.
I had never had much of a relationship with my dad. So much so that whenever he came to mind, I thought of him as Charlie. I didn't remember anything of living with him and mom in my childhood. My earliest memory was falling and cutting my knee in a park and being unable to find my mom for comfort. That was in Phoenix.

Of course I was sent to Charlie for vacations but in all honesty, he didn't know what to do with me when I was there. He lived alone, and his bachelor lifestyle didn't prepare him for entertaining a young girl. Mostly, he sent me to La Push while he worked or fished. Sarah Black looked after me with her own three kids. I adored Sarah. She was so … motherly, in a way that Renee most definitely wasn't.

I had memories of long summer afternoons playing outside with Jacob Black. He was two years younger than me but he was a warm, sunny little boy who made me feel at ease. His older sisters, Rachel and Rebecca, were twins and they formed a close knit unit together that daunted me.

I remembered playing in the Blacks' yard while the aroma of baking drifted through the open windows. I remembered running inside with Jacob dragging me by the hand to see if we could lick the mixing bowl clean. I remembered Sarah smiling at her young son when he told me to go first because I was "his" visitor. I remembered feeling a little sad that my own mother didn't bake and let me lick the bowl clean.

After Sarah passed away, I would often just hang out with the Black children with the minimum of supervision provided by one of the other women on the res. As I got older, I began to worry about mom while I was away. Would she remember to buy herself groceries? Would she remember to go to work on Monday mornings? Would she remember to pay the phone bill before the line got disconnected? Eventually, I made such a fuss about going to Forks that my parents agreed I didn't have to go back.

Renee marrying Phil was a relief to me. I didn't have to be caretaker anymore. I finished high school and got a scholarship to college. I met my only boyfriend there. His name was Pete and we shared a horror of most college-related activities. My student days were sheltered by him. Frat parties and all manner of initiations were bypassed as we studied together and explored local culture. If I occasionally felt a little bored, I would remind myself that this was a golden opportunity that wouldn't have been mine had Renee not re-married.

After graduation, I had a decision to make. I was 21 and somewhere in the back of my mind, a voice was telling me that staying with Pete would be a mistake. I wasn't inclined to fits of fancy, nor was I the kind of girl who believed that the grass was always greener on the other side. But somewhere deep within me, I was increasingly feeling that an essential part of me was … missing.

I didn't understand it and when I had first noticed it, aged 17, I had simply ignored it. But the more time passed, the louder that voice grew until shortly after turning 21, I had no choice but to listen. By the time graduation arrived, I knew I was going to take the biggest risk of my life, and walk away from a solid relationship in search of whatever it was that I was going to be looking for.

The sense of profound relief and freedom I felt left me in no doubt that I had made the right decision. I just hoped that trusting my instincts would lead me in the right direction.

Before I could decide which direction that may be, I received a phone call to tell me that Charlie had been attacked at work. He was in a bad way. I was horrified to find that if the worst had happened, I really had no valuable memories of him. It was a wake up call and I immediately knew that I needed to rectify that situation. I was in the perfect position to go and look after him. I had finished college, was looking for work, single, and knew plenty about caring for a parent.

I booked my flight.

My arrival in Forks was as uneventful as it was unheralded. I had a single bag with me, containing my favourite books, some toiletries, and what few clothes I owned that were appropriate for dull weather. I caught the bus to Forks, and walked the rest of the way to Charlie's house.

He was expecting me, which I assumed was the reason for the front door being unlocked when I arrived. I let myself in, surprising myself by feeling slightly nostalgic when I popped my head around the kitchen door. Nothing had changed. The white linoleum floor had a few more deeply ingrained stains than I remembered, and the yellow cabinets were faded, but otherwise it didn't look like a single appliance had been replaced or moved since I was last here over a decade earlier.

"Dad?" I called. I didn't want to wake him if he was asleep, but at the same time he was known to keep a loaded rifle in the house and I wanted to be absolutely certain that he knew it was me and not some random intruder.

A faint "Bells?" sounded from up the stairs and I bounded up them, two at a time.
Hesitating outside his bedroom door, I cringed as I asked, "Are you decent?"

"Of course I am!" was his gruff reply.

I went in cautiously, and gasped at the sight before me. Charlie was covered in plaster cast and looked groggy, presumably from medication. His eyes were bloodshot and his face had a dreadful pallor.

"How have you been managing?" I gasped out. He had been in hospital until two days earlier and I knew Jacob Black had brought him home, but had he actually been out of bed in the past two days?

"Boys from La Push drop in a lot," he told me. "They move me about as I need." I gaped at him. He wasn't overweight, but he was a big man and he was covered in casts. Moving him would be heavy, and awkward. Who were these boys?

Catching some expression on my face, he said, "I'm fine, Bella! It's good to see you," he added, his voice gruff again.

"Yeah. You too, Ch- .... um, dad," I said. We both examined his quilt until the awkward moment had passed.

"So um, can I get you anything?" Taking a closer look, I saw that there was a pitcher of water and a glass beside him, and a tray with leftover food on it.

"I'm fine Bells. Maybe you could just settle in and bring me some lunch later."

"Okay." I gathered up the tray and brought it downstairs, wondering how the hell I was going to physically handle Charlie over the coming weeks. *Didn't think of that, Bella*, I told myself. But it didn't matter. I would have come anyway.

My concerns were put to rest quickly. Barely half an hour after I arrived, someone tried to shove their way through the front door. The door nearly came off its hinges and my heart went into overdrive. When the knock came, I answered it cautiously.

The most enormous native man I had ever seen in my life stood on Charlie's porch, frowning at the door as if it were a complex puzzle. His face lit up when he saw me.

"You must be Bella! Charlie said you were arriving today. I'm Quil," he extended his hand for me to shake and when I touched him I gasped at the searing heat of his skin.

"Um, can I help you?" I asked and he laughed. It was more of a guffaw, actually.

"I think that might be the other way around, darlin', unless you think you can get Charlie to the john."

"Oh!" This must be one of the La Push .... boys? "Do ... do you come here a lot?"

Quil guffawed again. "Do I come here often? Even I can do better than that, darlin'." My face inevitably flushed crimson and his eyes softened. "Aw I'm only teasin'. Yeah, me or one of the other guys drop in every coupla hours throughout the day, and we're just a phone call away at night. We've just been gettin' your dad whatever he needs, moving him downstairs during the day, whatever. Seth shoulda been here earlier to move him down already but he couldn't make it. But don't worry, Jake'll kick his ass."

"Wow!" I had no idea Charlie had such a strong network of support and I was struck by how little I actually knew about my father. "Well, he did look uncomfortable so I think he would appreciate it if you can move him." I heard the doubt in my own voice and Quil grinned cockily at me.

"No problem darlin'."

I barely reached his shoulder as he brushed past me and took the stairs three at a time. I could clearly see his biceps under his T-shirt but I still felt uncertain as to whether he would be able to manage Charlie on his own. I hesitated at the foot of the stairs until the easy banter that was flowing upstairs reassured me that all was under control. I went into the kitchen to organise a cold drink for Quil, assuming he would need it after this.

Fifteen minutes later, Charlie had been to the bathroom, apparently been helped wash up a little, and was seated on the recliner in the living room. Quil hadn't even broken a sweat. I handed him his drink anyway.

"Will you be back later?" I asked him hopefully. There was just no way I could physically handle Charlie alone.

Quil looked disappointed when he answered me. "Naw, not me. I need to go to work now. But one of the other guys'll drop in throughout the day. They'll move Charlie whenever he needs it, but if you could do with some help between visits, just call Sue. Her number's in the kitchen. She'll send one of us round within fifteen minutes, okay?"

"Twenty minutes unless you want to get done for speeding," Charlie said with an attempt at severity from his medicated position on the recliner.

"Aw relax, Chief. You're laid up and who else is gonna catch us?" Quil's eyes were twinkling mischievously and I found myself laughing. He turned to me. "Not that you'll need to worry about speeding in that rust bucket." He jerked his thumb
towards the window, chortling.

"The truck?" I had seen the red truck when I arrived and wondered about it.

"It's yours, Bells," Charlie told me. "Billy Black wanted rid of it, Jake fixed it up for you. Figured you'd need something to get around in while you're here."

"Wow!" I was speechless. "Thanks, dad!"

"It'll run fine," Quil sounded slightly defensive. "Jake did all the work on it himself. Well," he frowned, "it'll run slow, but fine."

"It's perfect," I beamed at them both and Quil nodded, apparently pleased. I liked Quil. There was something very relaxing about him.

I changed my mind on that when I saw him blatantly appraising me. "Say, Chief," he was saying, "you're gonna have to lock your daughter here up while she's stayin'. If you need a bodyguard, you have my number." He winked at me cockily and stood up to leave, chortling as my face inevitably flushed crimson again.

I showed Quil out and went back to fidget around Charlie until he told me to quit fussing. We sat awkwardly together for a while, neither of us sparkling conversationalists.

"Looks like Quil likes you," he commented suddenly.

"Um … he was friendly."

"Yeah, they're all good kids." I wondered again at his choice of word. Quil looked like anything but a boy or a kid.

"How old is he?"

Charlie chuckled. "Nineteen, not that you'd think it. He's the same age as Jake. You remember Jake? He's coming to visit with Billy tomorrow."

"Billy and Jacob Black? Sure, I remember. Sarah used to look after me and I played with Jacob and the twins."

Charlie seemed pleased with my memories. "That's them, Bells. Sarah was real good to us. Jake's just like her. He's a great kid. Good looking, too. Wait till you meet him tomorrow."

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I narrowed my eyes slightly. "Dad I just broke up with Pete. I'm not here to find a new boyfriend," I told him firmly. The very last thing I needed was Charlie trying to set me up with his friend's son who was two years my junior. Just because I had fond memories of a sunny little boy and cookie mixture didn't mean I wanted a teenaged boyfriend.

"Now don't make your mind up before meeting him, Bells," Charlie told me severely. "You could do with a friend while you're here and Jake's kind and he's loyal. He's got a mature head on his shoulders and he's a decent kid."

I was surprised. Charlie rarely voiced a strong opinion on anything, but here he was speaking so warmly about Jacob Black you would think he was family. I promised to be sociable and left it at that.

Once it became clear that neither Charlie nor I felt the need to engage in trivial small talk just because I had arrived back in town, I left him in peace and began assessing what I had brought myself into.

It was obvious that as far as physical handling went, everything was under control. Everything about Charlie's house screamed bachelor, though. It needed a good clean and the cupboards needed filled. I made a list, asked Charlie about his food preferences, and headed out in my truck to reacquaint myself with Forks, and the grocery store.

I was completely unaware that such an innocent trip would change my life forever.

A/N: Be nice and Bella's POV of the imprint will be up tomorrow;-)
A/N: Thank you all for reading and reviewing. I hope you enjoy this one:-) Thank you to niamhg for pre-reading. As always, you’re very patient with me.

Forks was just like I remembered it. Like Charlie’s kitchen, it seemed as though time had stood still. There were a couple of new shops on the high street and a small confectionery store that I remembered from my childhood had gone, but otherwise, nothing seemed to have changed.

After parking my truck, which I could tell I was going to love, and having a preliminary wander around, the October chill drove me off the street. My warmest jacket wasn’t keeping out the cold and I felt myself start to shiver. The grocery store was just ahead and I was grateful for the heat inside when I entered.

Consulting my list, I began to acquaint myself with the aisles and shelves. I would be a regular here. I found all the fresh ingredients and headed for the pasta. I was lost in my own thoughts, planning a pasta for tonight’s dinner and perhaps a chicken dish for the next night. Wandering around, eyes on the shelves, pushing the cart in front of me, I was just asking for an accident to occur.

Disaster struck in the hardware section when my cart unexpectedly collided with something hard and unyielding. With a loud “ooof” escaping from me, I looked up, startled, to see what I had just collided with.

The last thing I expected to see turning to face me was a beautiful blonde girl. Beautiful wasn’t descriptive enough. She was simply sensational. Her long hair fell like a waterfall around her and her features were chiselled and breathtaking. Her eyes were an unusual golden colour which were slightly unnerving. I wasn’t sure if it was the colour that unnerved me, or the hardness in them as she glared at me, clearly furious at my klutziness.

I didn’t blame her. That cart must have hurt. I was puzzled as to why it had felt like colliding with stone, but didn’t have time to process it before I started blurting out my apologies.

“Oh! I am so sorry! I wasn’t paying attention. Are you okay?”

She looked me up and down for a moment before saying, “I’m fine. Be more careful, please.”

Her voice was cold and angry, but somehow strangely appealing. I blushed even deeper and stammered some further apologies before stumbling on my way. I was mortified. Paying significantly more attention to what I was doing, I became aware of a man standing at the end of the aisle, apparently watching our exchange.

At first, I thought it was Quil. He was enormous, like Quil, and native, but when I looked more closely it clearly wasn’t him. He looked tense and angry, and I wondered if he was with the blonde beauty. They would have made a stunning couple, his swarthy darkness and her ethereal paleness contrasting perfectly. However as I watched, I realised that he seemed to be simply watching the scene unfold. I scuttled past him, and quickly completed my shopping.

I arrived at the lone checkout and joined the short queue, horrified to see that the blonde woman was at the front of the queue with a young man with bronze hair and angular facial features. Between them and me were an elderly man, and a younger boy.

Watching the blonde woman and her companion, I was mesmerised by their beauty. They were both impossibly perfect in every aspect of their appearance. Emotions were being stirred within me. I could feel myself almost being drawn towards them by their very beauty, yet simultaneously recoiling from … something. I had never reacted like this to another human being and I felt confused about what had me responding in this way.

I waited for the cashier to process the blonde woman’s purchases. She had a number of items that vaguely seemed to me to be something to do with cars. I smiled at the image of this perfect beauty under the hood of a car, and decided she must be buying the items on behalf of somebody else.

The entrance to the store was to my right and angled slightly behind me. The door opened, heralding a new customer. A gust of autumn wind blew in and swirled around me, making me shiver and withdraw deeper into my jacket as I continued to contemplate the beautiful couple at the front of the queue.

The man’s head suddenly snapped up and he looked directly at me. His nostrils were flaring and his eyes looked wild. I gasped as I saw the look of absolute abhorrence in his stare, and instinctively took a step back.

I then stepped forwards again, drawn by some invisible magnetic force.

For the longest moment, my eyes were locked on his. Something deep within me twisted and I bent slightly at the waist under its impact. It wasn’t necessarily a pleasant sensation, but it was a powerful one. It was frightening. I felt as though something had been irreversibly altered in my chemical make-up. Something inside me had connected with the man who was still staring at me with the utmost loathing in his eyes.

Tears sprang to my own eyes, provoked by his hatred. A loud crack broke the spell and I tore my gaze from him, staring in shock instead at the blonde woman who seemed to have delivered a powerful blow to him. I noticed that she, too, was
staring at me. Her eyes seemed fearful and resentful, rather than angry as they had been before. Her gaze darted over my shoulder and alarm marred her beautiful features. She grabbed onto her companion's arm and all but dragged him towards the exit, her eyes locked on something behind me.

Turning, I saw the native man I had seen earlier. He was standing a little way behind me, looking with fury at the couple who were now leaving the store at a rapid pace. He seemed to be trembling hard, and he looked positively terrifying.

The atmosphere between him and the exiting couple was electric. More than that, it was dangerous. They seemed afraid of him, but both were clearly angry. And he was angry, but he seemed frightened, too.

I didn't even realise I had started to move after the bronze haired young man until a large hand clamped down on my arm. I could feel the heat through my jacket and sweatshirt.

"You need to wait here for a minute, miss. Aren't you going to pay for your groceries?"

Whirling round, I saw the native man looking at me with deep, concerned eyes. He had stopped trembling, but his hand was still restraining me. I realised I was shivering and his heat was soothing on my arm. Confused, I looked at my cart full of groceries and shook my head to clear it.

"Why had I been about to follow that boy?"

"Uh … sure." I looked up at him, searching his face for some clue as to what had just happened, but he seemed perfectly calm now. His face was a serene mask. I slowly emptied my cart as I tried to figure out what had just happened. My hands were shaking and my breathing was coming in rapid gasps. I was absolutely terrified, and I didn't know why.

The native man cleared his throat and I looked up at him. His eyes were still concerned.

"Are you alright, miss?"

"I'm … I don't …" I tried to think of a way to formulate my jumbled thoughts into something that I could say aloud which would actually make any sense. In the end I just blurted out, "What just happened there?"

He frowned and seemed to think for a moment. Finally, he extended a hand for me to shake. "I'm Seth," he told me.

I recognised the name instantly. "You're Quil's friend!" I shook his hand. "I'm Bella Swan, Charlie's daughter."

His eyes widened slightly. "Oh! Bella, it's nice to finally meet you. Charlie talks about you a lot. Let me help you." He began tossing items from my cart onto the belt and I realised he had deftly steered me off course.

"Seth? Who were that couple?"

He hesitated again and I could plainly see his reluctance to answer my question.

"Fair enough." He lowered his voice a little. "Edward and Rosalie Cullen. They're … not good news. I thought he looked like he was going to do something to you. I dunno." He shrugged and began asking when I had arrived, what I thought of Forks so far, that kind of thing.

Vaguely suspicious that he was again steering me off course, I nonetheless allowed our conversation to flow. Like Quil, Seth was relaxed and an easy conversationalist. He was also massive, and muscular. I was beginning to see how these "boys" managed to handle Charlie.

"So will you be coming to Charlie's later?" I asked Seth as he helped me load up my truck with all my purchases. He grinned slightly sheepishly.

"Yeah. I should've been there this morning but I uh, got a little sidetracked." He blew his fringe out his eyes and his skin darkened in what may have been a blush. "My girlfriend," he explained apologetically.

"Jake's gonna kill me," he said and something in his tone made me think he was genuinely nervous.

I looked at him in astonishment. "It's not that big of a deal, Seth," I told him. "Charlie was fine. Quil came and moved him downstairs. As far as I can gather, you guys have been amazing. I don't think spending some time with your girlfriend is a criminal offence, you know."

Seth smiled appreciatively at me. "Do me a favour and tell Jake that. Have you met him yet?"

"Not yet," I told him. "I think he's coming round tomorrow. I'll make sure I tell him Charlie was fine." I was wondering what the hell kind of guy Jake was, that Seth would be nervous of him. I supposed I would find out soon enough.

I thanked Seth for his help and climbed into the truck cab. I had one more question for him before I left, though. Turning to him before I closed the door, I tried one more time.
I thought about it for a moment. I most certainly wasn't going to leave it at that but it didn't seem like Seth would give me any information so I just nodded. I didn't miss the look of relief in his eyes, which piqued my curiosity even further.

"See ya later, Bella," he called as he turned to go.

"See you, Seth."

Back home, I checked on Charlie and unpacked the groceries before making some sandwiches for our lunch. As I worked, I ran over the morning's events again.

I had an uncomfortable ache in my chest that I couldn't explain. It had started when my eyes met Edward's and I had felt that twist inside me. It almost felt as though a part of me had been damaged, or changed in a mildly unpleasant way. I couldn't identify exactly what it was. My hands stilled in their work as I remembered his golden eyes burning into mine, that look of utter abhorrence branding my very soul.

I realised with a jolt that I was holding my breath and had one arm wrapped around my chest as though to hold together the part of me that suddenly felt damaged. Confused, I hastily went back to making lunch. My hands felt so cold that my fingers were clumsy and I blew on them in a vain attempt to warm them. I had been cold earlier but there now seemed to be a chill lodged in my bones that I couldn't heat. I finally put on an extra sweatshirt.

With Charlie confined to the living room, we ate there. I brought him a tray through and managed to balance it across the arm of his chair and a low table so that he could reach it easily. We ate in silence until I realised that as Chief of Police, he must know everyone in Forks.

"Hey dad, what do you know about the Cullens?" I asked.

"Good people," he said firmly. He launched into the family dynamics as he knew them. Carlisle, the father, was an excellent doctor. Esme, his wife, a good woman. Five foster children, all high school graduates. Two went off to college, the other three remained at home but Charlie wasn't sure what they did with their time.

I explained that I had met them, and Seth, this morning.

"Seth seemed to think they're bad news," I told him.

Charlie just about exploded. He ranted and raved about the narrow mindedness of some people, assured me the Cullens were good people, and told me not to listen to local gossip and prejudice.

"Young Seth should know better," he finished, sounding genuinely disappointed.

Young. "How old is Seth?" I asked, amused again at the thought of either Quil or Seth being young boys.

"Seventeen."

I nearly choked on my drink.

The rest of that day passed uneventfully. I cleaned and organised, unpacked and cooked. Seth dropped in to bring Charlie to the bathroom. Then another giant, Jared, came cheerfully by. Seth returned again in the evening and brought Charlie up to bed as though he weighed no more than the tray of food I was carrying.

After Charlie was in bed, I was left alone with my thoughts. The discomfort in my chest hadn't faded and I had caught myself on more than one occasion holding myself together with my arm.

I didn't like it, and I was still convinced it was somehow connected with Edward Cullen.

I couldn't get him out of my head. The look in his eyes haunted my every thought. He was under my skin and I wanted to demand of him why he hated me, what I had done to deserve his loathing.

I wanted to run my hands through his messy bronze hair.

I wanted to run away from him screaming in fear, but with no idea what I was frightened of exactly.

I was a wreck.

In an attempt to take my mind off him, I mulled over what I had learned today about Jacob Black. Jared had mentioned him during his visit, and Seth had reminded me to tell him that Charlie was fine without Seth's help that morning.

Whenever they spoke of Jacob, they spoke with a kind of deference. I had mentioned it to Charlie. He had shrugged and said that the boy was a born leader, the other kids probably just looked up to him.
I tried to reconcile the slightly fearful respect of Quil, Seth and Jared, with the sunny little boy I remembered from my childhood. I failed abysmally.

Tired from my journey and a slightly emotional day, I went to bed early. My bedroom had smelled a little stale when I was unpacking earlier. I had wrestled with the window in an attempt to open it but it was stuck fast. I had enlisted Seth's help, and watched slightly shamefaced as he slid it easily open. My room now felt fresh and I debated whether to close it again. I liked fresh air while I slept, but I had been so cold all afternoon that I was tempted to shut it. In the end, I left the window ajar and fetched an extra blanket from the cupboard in the hall before I settled down for the night.

My dreams were troubled. Golden eyes filled with hatred pierced my soul. My chest ached and I ran towards a boy with bronze hair, only to turn and flee again when I got too close to him. Finally, his hand reached out to touch me and I froze to the spot, thrilled and terrified all at once.

I sat bolt upright in bed, gasping for air. My eyes registered a tall figure across the room, chalk white skin almost glowing in the dark. I cut off a scream and dove for the lamp on my nightstand. Switching it on, I darted my head back to the corner where I had seen the figure.

There was nothing there.

My heart was hammering in my chest and my throat felt parched.

"Holy shit!" I heard my own voice, thin with fear, and exhaled shakily. I was trembling all over as I swung my feet over the side of the bed and let them dangle there for a moment while I attempted to regain some control over my heart rate and breathing. Finally, I padded downstairs to get a glass of water. Standing in the kitchen chugging it back, I could still feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins.

Get a grip, Bella.

Some tiny movement in my peripheral vision made me spin towards the window. What had I seen there? My heart rate increased again and combined with the ache that was still there, caused me to clutch at my chest in discomfort.

Suddenly angry, I gave myself a mental scolding. If there had been a movement outside, it was probably a nocturnal animal. Living so close to the forest, it was hardly unlikely. A pink post it on the fridge door with a phone number on it caught my eye. For a wild moment I considered calling Sue Clearwater and asking her to send one of "the boys" round, but a glance at the clock told me it was 3am and nobody would appreciate being roused from sleep because of my fanciful imagination.

I finally went back to bed, trying to find some warmth between the blankets. My room felt too cold and when I went to shut the window, I was surprised to find it wide open. Frowning, I shut it most of the way and shivered my way back to bed. Sleep evaded me for the rest of the night. Ten minutes or so after closing my eyes, they flew open again when I distinctly heard a loud wolf howl close by. That forest was even closer than I had thought.

I felt groggy the next morning, and was a little cranky as I made a pot of strong coffee. Charlie was still sleeping and I busied myself by opening my bedroom window wide and cleaning the room thoroughly. The front door almost flying off its hinges alerted me to the fact that someone was here from La Push. I ran to unlock it and was surprised when the face that met me wasn't open and friendly, but scowling and impatient.

Paul introduced himself slightly curtly and headed straight upstairs. I listened until I was sure that he was being civil to Charlie, then went to make dad some breakfast.

Paul dispensed with his duties with the minimum of time and fuss, and stopped on his way out only to tell me that Jake would be here in a couple of hours.

I noticed that even this surly man said Jacob's name with respect in his tone, albeit slightly grudgingly.

The next two hours passed quickly, household chores and Charlie occupying my time. I was still feeling tired and cold, and the ache in my chest hadn't diminished, but I was pleased to see how thrilled Charlie was at the prospect of his visitors. He said more than once that he hoped Billy would stay to watch that afternoon's match, and I promised to prepare lunch for them if needed.

My signal that they had arrived was the now familiar sound of the front door being almost battered down. Sighing, I thought I should actually put a sign up that read, "Door Locked". I supposed Charlie must have left it open for the boys after his return from hospital but I thought it would be much safer to simply give them a key.

I hurried to the front door. I was distracted momentarily by the strange but rather pleasant sensation of being pulled towards the door. I also registered that for the first time since the morning before, the ache in my chest began to lessen slightly. Distracted by these thoughts, I inevitably battered my shin off the coat stand as I went.

Opening the door, my gaze immediately fell on the man in the wheelchair. I recognised Billy Black straightaway and a warm smile spread across my face as I remembered a younger, mobile version of this man throwing me into the air and chuckling at my squeals.
But as I smiled at him, my eyes began to move of their own volition. No, not of their own volition. Something inside my very being was directing them to look, look up and into the eyes of Billy's companion.

My gaze met the warm, intelligent, espresso coloured eyes of Jacob Black. My mouth dropped slightly open as I fell inside them. I distinctly felt his soul reach out and caress mine. My own soul responded instantly, welcoming him gladly. His essence immediately banished the ache that Edward Cullen had left in my chest, making me whole and warming me from the inside out.

Of course.

The essential part of me that had been missing was now in place. Jacob Black completed me, and I instinctively knew that I completed him, too. He dropped heavily to one knee in front of me and it was the most natural thing in the world for him to do.

My heart soared and opened, filling with love and respect for the huge, muscular man who knelt before me with absolute love and devotion in his eyes.

Time ceased to exist as we stared at one another. I could feel my heart stutter and hiccup at a furious pace. Through it, I became aware that Billy was speaking and embarrassment broke through as I realised that I was staring open-mouthed at his son, who was on bended knee in front of me.

I dropped my gaze and regretted it immediately, but when I looked back again Jacob was looking at his father. Billy somewhat absurdly introduced us and then wheeled himself past me, chuckling.

I was left alone with Jacob.
After Billy disappeared inside, Jacob rose slightly unsteadily from his kneeling position. He was huge, I vaguely noticed. We were looking at one another again and I thought I could stay there forever, just gazing into his beautiful eyes.

The minutes passed by, and neither of us spoke. There were no words for this moment. A spell had been cast over us both and a mundane comment would break it, something I was loath to do.

In the end, it was Charlie who broke it, calling me in to him. His voice made me look over my shoulder and when I turned back, Jacob was looking behind me, too.

"I - I, um ..." I gestured towards the living room and Jacob nodded. I turned away from him, shocked at how difficult that was to do, and walked up the narrow hallway to the living room door. I was aware of Jacob following me. It seemed as though I could tell exactly where he was in relation to me, even though my back was to him. The cold and discomfort I had been feeling since the morning before had left me. In their place was warmth and a sense of fullness.

I didn't understand what had just happened, but I liked it.

Charlie needed his pain meds and hinted that I should get our guests a drink. If he noticed my glassy eyed look, the hulking man who was lingering slightly behind me, or the sparks of electricity that were in the atmosphere between us, he didn't react. Billy, on the other hand, was looking highly amused as he surveyed both me and his son.

I nodded at Charlie's requests and automatically turned to go into the kitchen. I almost crashed straight into Jacob's chest and stumbled as I tried to correct my path. His hand reached out to steady me and he caught hold of my wrist.

If I thought we had generated sparks before, there were now a thousand volts of electricity shooting pleasantly up my arm from his touch. His heat, similar to Quil's, added to the sensation and I audibly gasped. My eyes shot up to look at Jacob again. His own eyes were wide as if he, too, was struggling to comprehend the magnitude of what was happening between us.

Billy cleared his throat and I attempted grace as I stepped around Jacob and out of the living room. I wasn't surprised to feel him following me again. I frowned as I realised that I hadn't heard him speak at all, and all he had heard me say was, "I - I, um". I also recollected that this man was apparently a strong leader who elicited fear and respect from his friends. Nerves hit me full force.

In the kitchen, I swallowed hard and decided to try out my powers of speech. "Would you like a drink?" I asked him politely. He shook his head, looking dazed. I nodded my own head, deciding that speaking wasn't a priority after all, and quickly organised Charlie's meds and some drinks.

Jacob didn't follow me into the living room and I was almost crushed by disappointment. I gave the men their refreshments and hesitated before deciding that there was absolutely no point trying to fight the pull from the kitchen.

Walking slowly back in, I saw Jacob standing with his back to the door. He was leaning with both hands spread on the kitchen counter, his head down. He seemed to be trying to control his breathing. I took one step into the room and he whipped around to face me, the suddenness of his movement startling me. I jumped slightly and the look of deep contrition on his face almost made me laugh.

"I'm sorry," he spoke for the first time. "I didn't mean to frighten you." His voice was husky and low. It was soothing.

"You didn't frighten me." My own voice was scarcely above a whisper. We were back to staring at each other again until gradually, I detected a hint of amusement creep into his eyes.

"Do you ... have any Quileute blood?" he asked suddenly.

Wondering at his choice of opening, I told him that I didn't think so. A wide grin spread across his face. It was so warm and infectious that I couldn't help but smile back at him. His grin wavered slightly and he said quietly, "You have a beautiful smile, Bella."

His husky voice and the way my name rolled off his tongue made my knees weaken. I sat heavily down in a chair and exhaled shakily. "This place is weird," I whispered under my breath.

"Why?"

I looked up, shocked that he had heard me. He was studying me intently. I hesitated. My instincts were telling me that I could trust this man with my life, but how could I explain the past 24 hours? Yesterday, I had seen a boy who hated me at first sight and who had twisted some kind of hole in my chest. I had been achy and cold since that meeting and had a nightmare followed by a hallucination. Today, one look at Jacob had made all that disappear, leaving a warm sense of completion in its place.

I fought down the urge to laugh hysterically and settled for shrugging my shoulders. "I just seem to be imagining things," I
told him. My words sounded lame to my own ears.

Jacob crossed the room slowly and sat down opposite me. He didn't look comfortable. "Would you come out somewhere with me?" he asked suddenly. "Anywhere you like." His voice was earnest and I didn't think I could have refused him anything. Nerves made me shoot too quickly to my feet and I stumbled again. Jacob was out of his chair and grabbing my arm to steady me again before I could blink.

I froze, staring at him. He had moved fast; faster than I had ever seen anyone move. And his hand was on my arm again. Heat and electricity jolted up to my shoulder once more with just one touch from him. I was thoroughly confused and suddenly felt overwhelmed with the events of the last 24 hours.

"C'mon Bella," Jacob said quietly. "Let's get outta here."

I called through to Charlie that we were leaving for a while.

"See you later, Bells," he shouted back. I detected a hint of smugness in his voice which confused me until I remembered he had wanted me to get to know Jacob better. Wish granted, dad, I thought wryly.

"Bells." Jacob's voice came quietly from behind me. I turned back to look at him. He had a small smile on his lips. "That suits you," he told me, walking round me to hold the front door open. As I passed him, he laid his hand on the small of my back and once again his touch shot currents and heat through me. They ran up my spine to my neck this time. It was the most delicious sensation and I could have happily kept his hands on my body at all times. Whoa, Bella! All kinds of thoughts ran through my mind, startling me. This was so unlike me.

Jacob shut the door behind us and jogged down the porch steps to catch up with me. He took hold of my hand and I couldn't think of a single reason for objecting to it. It didn't matter that we had only met half an hour earlier, or that we had barely had a conversational exchange in that time. His enormous, deliciously warm hand simply encircled mine as if it were made for that purpose. It felt like the most natural thing in the world.

I noticed Jacob breathing deeply as we headed to his car and thought back to the deep breathing he had been doing in the kitchen earlier. I wondered what that was about. The plot only thickened when we got into his Rabbit and he turned to me with a slightly tortured expression on his face.

"Shoulda brought the bike," he muttered. "We're not gonna go far, 'kay?"

I wasn't going to argue with anything. I was basking in the warmth that seemed to radiate from his very being. I actually thought he could have driven us right to the Canadian border and I wouldn't have cared less. He asked if there was anywhere in particular I wanted to go. I pointed out that I didn't know too many places around Forks.

Jacob frowned as though concentrating hard. He brightened suddenly and told me we were headed to the beach. I was slightly dubious about my jacket's ability to keep out the cold breeze from the sea, but was still feeling amenable to anything he suggested.

As he drove, Jacob's face kept the tortured expression and he seemed highly agitated. His fingers drummed impatiently on the steering wheel and his leg kept jerking. I began to wonder whether I had misjudged his reaction to what had happened between us a mere half hour earlier. The happiness that was embedded into my soul didn't seem to be shared by him.

He drove faster than I would have, and Quil's comment about Charlie being unable to prevent the La Push boys speeding came to mind. I alternated my gaze between the spectacular forest scenery out my window, and the stunning profile of the man next to me.

We spent the journey mostly in silence. I wasn't uncomfortable by any means, but I got the distinct impression that Jacob couldn't wait to be out the car. Fifteen minutes or so later, he pulled up at what looked like a parking lot alongside a beach. Darting out of the car, Jacob jogged round to the passenger side and opened my door.

As soon as I was out the car, he took hold of my hand again. There was quite a strong wind blowing in from the sea. Jacob was breathing deeply again, visibly relaxing before my eyes.

"This," he said emphatically, "is much better."

"Of course it is," I half-laughed, with absolutely no idea what he was talking about. He grinned at me, clearly more at ease now.

"I needed some fresh air," he told me. "This is better."

Still holding my hand, Jacob led me down onto the sandy beach, where he underwent something of a transformation. It seemed that he really had needed the fresh air. All the agitation and discomfort he had displayed on the journey here disappeared, and his tension seeped out of him as we started to walk along the shoreline.

He began to chat and ask me questions about how I was settling in and how Charlie was. Like
Quil and Seth, I quickly found Jacob easy to talk to and I soon relaxed into our conversation. He asked how I was finding the truck and launched into some detail about what had needed done in its engine. He lost me at the second sentence and he noticed almost immediately.

"Sorry," he apologised with a grin. "I'm used to talking with guys."

I had to ask. I couldn't stop the words blunting out of my mouth. The emotions Jacob Black had effortlessly elicited from my heart were out of control and I needed to be absolutely clear on one thing.

"No girlfriend?"

Jacob stared at me in disbelief. "Yes," he said finally. My heart plummeted and, ridiculously, I felt tears stinging my eyes. He raised our joined hands so that I could see them. "And she really doesn't mind me holding other girls' hands."

I rolled my eyes at him, but couldn't stop the grin that spread across my face when I realised he was being sarcastic. He looked stricken suddenly.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No!" The grin on his face mirrored my own and I felt reassured that I hadn't imagined things earlier. "I just broke up with my boyfriend, actually," I confessed. I lapsed into silence, wondering about that. I had broken up with Pete because I had felt something was missing. That something felt very much like ... Jacob. How could I possibly know that, less than an hour after meeting him?

I realised he was watching me intently again and tried to snap out of my thoughts. "Difficult break-up?" he asked.

"Only because I couldn't really explain properly why I wanted to end it," I told him. I shook my head. "I just needed a change, I guess."

"So I heard." He began chatting freely again, pointing things out to me as we walked. This was First Beach, he told me. He pointed out the few houses that could be seen from the shoreline, including the cabin he lived in with Billy. He showed me where the rock pools were, and the landmarks to look out for if I ever decided to swim at the beach. There was an undercurrent it was best to stay away from, he told me.

The sea wind began to cut through my jacket and I started to shiver as we walked. Jacob noticed almost immediately.

"I'm sorry Bella, I don't really feel the cold. I didn't think. Do you want to head back?" I most definitely did not want to head back but I was also freezing. I hesitated and he took control. He gently removed his hand from around mine and wrapped his arm around my shoulder instead. Pulling me closer to his side, he seemed to be gauging my reaction closely. His arm and body were as warm as his hand and I instinctively leaned into him, wrapping my own arm around his waist.

The heat Jacob generated was phenomenal. I wondered vaguely if he had a fever and that was the reason he needed fresh air, but my senses were on overload as our bodies touched and I couldn't give it much consideration. He was only wearing a T-shirt and a thin jacket and I could clearly feel solid muscle through them as he tightened his hold on me, pressing me into his side. All the electricity I had felt earlier intensified with so much physical contact and it was the best sensation in the world. Jacob smelled like earth and pine and it was a comforting aroma. I smiled against his jacket and for the briefest moment thought I felt his lips brush against my hair.

As we walked together in a comfortable silence, I fell into a kind of reverie. I had absolutely no explanation for what was happening to me. I had known I was missing a part of myself and I was profoundly grateful that I had listened to my instincts and left Pete. I wasn't afraid of the strength of my reaction to Jacob, but I did know it wasn't exactly normal. I also knew that he seemed to be feeling it too. And as for yesterday's episode with Edward and Rosalie Cullen - I had no idea how to explain that one.

Breaking into my thoughts, Jacob started asking about my life. He wanted to know where and what I had studied, about Renee, even about my relationship with Pete. He seemed particularly interested in what my future plans were, and seemed pleased when I admitted I didn't really have any hard and fast ideas. I would hopefully find some work reasonably close to Forks, and take life from there.

Jacob's stomach rumbling loudly alerted me to the time. My hand that wasn't around his waist flew to my mouth.

"I promised Charlie I'd make lunch for you and your dad! We'd better get back," I told him. His face fell slightly and I smiled. "I'm guessing you're hungry and would like some lunch?"

"I think I'd rather stay here with you," he said, steering me over to a dead driftwood tree that lay on the beach and sitting us both down on it. He moved his arm from around my shoulder and the cold wind instantly made me shiver. Jacob frowned and took both my hands in his, rubbing them as though trying to heat me through them.

"I think we need to talk before we head back, Bella," he said quietly. He exhaled sharply, then stood up abruptly and swung one muscular leg over the tree so that he was straddling it, facing me. He took my hands in his again and I twisted round to face him more fully.
I sensed he had something specific to say, so I waited until he was ready. He seemed to be struggling to find the right words, examining our joined hands as he thought. Finally, he raised his eyes to mine and as I fell inside their beautiful depths again, I saw a strong resolve there. *This man is stubborn* ran fleetingly through my mind, making me smile a little. So was I.

"Something happened between us earlier, Bella," he began. He was watching my reaction closely. I maintained eye contact. "I know you felt something, too. I don't know what exactly you felt, or how strongly, but I need to know that you're not freaked out by it."

"I'm not freaked out," I told him instantly. "I'm a little confused, but I'm kind of just hoping that you ... felt it too." I held my breath momentarily and the most stunning smile lit up his whole face.

"Oh I felt it all right," he laughed. "Right about the point where I dropped to one knee." His smile turned a little bashful but he was still watching me carefully. "I guess that must have contributed to you thinking things are weird around here, huh?"


"Like what, Bella?" he coaxed me quietly.

I hesitated. I didn't know how to put it all into words, the things that had happened since my arrival in Forks. I decided to play it safe for the time being. "Like me, sitting here with you, comfortable with you even though we've only just met. Like me, liking holding your hand when I don't really know anything about you." My cheeks were scarlet by the time I had finished but I was glad I had been open about my feelings, for once.

I was rewarded by the expression in Jacob's beautiful eyes. They were soft and he looked completely overwhelmed. Slowly, he raised our joined hands to his mouth and softly pressed his full lips against the back of my hand. He was still watching me carefully.

"And that, Bella?" His voice was so deliciously low and husky that I shivered involuntarily, and it wasn't the cold doing it.

"I like that too," I admitted.

Very slowly, still watching me closely, Jacob scooted himself closer to me along the tree trunk. He cautiously raised one of his hands to my cheek, searching my eyes as he moved his face minutely closer to mine.

With his lips just centimetres from mine, he whispered, "And this?" before brushing my lips gently with his own.

My breathing hitched and my heart stopped, restarted and began to pound. The strongest volt of electricity yet sparked against my lips and enervated my entire body. I instinctively shut my eyes and raised my hands to his neck. My fingers touched his silky, raven hair as I kept his head in place, returning the kiss.

One of his hands found the small of my back and he pulled me slightly closer to him. His other hand moved from my cheek to my hair and he ran his fingers slowly through the strands. No part of my brain was telling me that this was too soon. No part of my normally ever-present common sense was shouting at me that I barely knew this man. I could feel his heat, smell his earthy scent, taste the salt from the sea breeze on his lips, and my entire body was igniting.

I distinctly heard a groan leave his lips as he deepened the kiss. I responded instantly and tangled my fingers in his hair. I was lost in him and surrounded by him. Unbelievably, in mere seconds of kissing, I felt myself becoming turned on. Apparently, sensible Bella had left the building.

Jacob's fingers suddenly twisted in my hair and he used the hand on my back to pull me closer still. He moved his arm further around me and I could feel his fingers gripping my waist. I leaned into him and deepened our kiss further. He was everywhere, bombarding my senses and I couldn't think straight. His tongue gently probed my bottom lip, which instantly parted from my top lip allowing him access to my mouth. My tongue met his and an intricate dance began.

His heat seeped into me and every chill left my body. The sea wind couldn't touch me. I moved even closer to him, consumed by him, needing more. He groaned again, more loudly this time, and suddenly pulled back from me. I wanted to cry out, to drag him back to me, but the tortured expression was back on his face. His cheeks looked flushed under his russet skin and I knew my own would be crimson. His chest was heaving as he breathed hard.

"Fuck, Bella," he whispered.

I knew exactly what he meant. Slowly, and looking as if he was in considerable discomfort, Jacob swung his leg back over the trunk, and held his hand out to me.

"Let's go back before Charlie sends out a search party," he said. His voice sounded even huskier than before, almost hoarse.

Part of me wanted to pout and refuse to move until he got back on the tree and started kissing me again, but the thought of Charlie hungry and unable to move from his recliner brought me to my feet.

We walked back along the beach and I realised we had actually covered a considerable distance. Jacob's arm was
around my shoulder again but this time I wrapped both my arms around his waist, and he frequently dropped kisses on my hair. My legs were actually shaking slightly as I walked, and I sensed that Jacob wasn't in full command of himself either. I wondered again how it could be that I felt so in tune with him.

We spent the first half of our return walk in silence. Some slight change in Jacob's physique, some tensing of muscles or alteration in the way his arm felt around me, drew my attention and I raised my head to look at him. His face was harder suddenly, troubled.

"Jacob?"

He looked down at me, his eyes uncertain. "Bella," he began, and then hesitated. "You ... met two people yesterday, at the store. Seth told me about it." I shuddered involuntarily and he noticed. "Tell me," he urged. I met his eyes and there was a fierce intensity in them that sent a thrill through me. I sensed a slightly animalistic danger about him but instead of frightening me, it made me feel safe, protected.

"The boy frightened me," I admitted.

"How?" His voice was urgent.

"He looked at me as though he hated me. Like he was furious with me." I debated whether to elaborate but I still hadn't made sense of it all. "It left an impression," I finally said.

"Did he talk to you? Threaten you?"

"What? No!" I briefly explained how I had bumped my cart into Rosalie and everything that had happened subsequently. I omitted the part about how I had felt something twist inside me which had been healed by Jacob himself. I was beginning to think I had imagined all of that.

Jacob listened carefully and seemed relieved when I finished. "Bella if you see either of them again, if you even think you see them, can you tell me straightaway?"

"Of course I can, but why?"

Jacob hesitated again. He looked out to sea for a while as though contemplating something. Eventually, he turned back to me. "There are things that you need to know. But can I ask you to just trust me, for now?"

I felt ire rise within me. Seth had fobbed me off the day before. I had kind of expected more from Jacob. I stopped in my tracks and glared at him. He stopped too, looking mildly surprised.

"What the hell is going on here, Jacob?"

Alarm crossed his face and it gave me the confidence to continue. "Charlie reckons the Cullens are decent people. But Edward frankly scared the shit out of me yesterday, I even had a nightmare about him last night! Seth looked like he was going to attack them, and now you're acting all weird about them. What's going on?" I folded my arms across my chest for emphasis. There was so much going on that I didn't understand and it was starting to take its toll.

Jacob's face was earnest as he spoke again. "Bella, honey, can you trust me? Just for a little while? You will find everything out, I promise. But it needs to be done properly, I can't just spill it all here on the beach with no-one else here. There are ... ways that this needs to be done." His voice was pleading and he created more questions for me than he answered. But, quite honestly, he had me when he called me "honey". It dripped off his tongue and soothed me. Slightly reluctantly, I nodded and stepped closer to him again.

I was going to get to the bottom of things one way or the other. But for now, I was content to be close to Jacob.

A/N: So this week and next, my kids are on spring break. In other words, I won't have much time to write. I'll update whenever I can over the next two weeks and then get back on track after that!
A/N: So I know I said it’s the school holidays and I wouldn’t be posting as frequently, but you’ve brought this story to 100 reviews in only four chapters and that made me a squealy kind of happy. So here’s the next chapter already, because you’re all amazing. This chapter, especially the second half, took a lot of rewriting and rethinking to get it right. I need to say a MASSIVE thank you to both niamhg and MistC for pre-reading, re-reading, being honest and putting up with my hysterics. You ladies are stars.

By the time we arrived back at Jacob’s car, our conversation was light and flowing again. Jacob had made a big effort to distract me with humorous stories about the La Push boys that I had already met. I found myself laughing with him and looking forward to getting to know them all better.

I was pretty sure I was glowing when we reached his Rabbit. A combination of our kiss, his body heat, and generally falling in ... whatever this was, had me feeling slightly giddy. When I looked up at Jacob, I saw that his eyes were sparkling and he had the biggest grin plastered on his face. He met my gaze and his smile faltered slightly. He looked a little overwhelmed again.

I suddenly found myself pushed roughly against the passenger door of his car and he started kissing me hard. There was nothing cautious or tentative about this kiss and once again, he was everywhere. One hand was tangled in my hair while his other arm twined around my waist pulling me flush against his muscular body. His lips still tasted salty from the sea air and his warmth enveloped me completely.

I clearly felt his member quickly harden against me and I gasped as my body responded with a rush of heat at my core. I had no sooner registered how turned on I was becoming than Jacob pulled abruptly away, his eyes wild. He took one step back, breaking the contact between our bodies and I instinctively stepped forward, closing the space again.

"Bella," he swallowed hard and squeezed his eyes shut momentarily. "We need to go, honey," he whispered, and reached around me to open the car door.

I really wanted to sulk. That was twice now that he had given me a taste of the most glorious sensations I had ever felt, only to abruptly withdraw them. But on the other hand, the way he had called me honey again turned me to putty in his hands. I climbed into the car without complaint.

Jacob got in the driver's side and immediately looked stricken. He seemed to think for a moment before asking me if I was warm enough.

"I'm roasting," I told him. "You're so hot!" I frowned as I registered the double meaning behind my words and he laughed.

"Do you mind if I open my window?"

I looked over at him. "Fresh air again?"

"Yup." He rolled down his window and practically stuck his head out it as he started to drive.

"You're going to make me paranoid," I told him. "You act like I stink or something."

An amused smile spread across his face but he didn't answer. I made a mental note to shower before seeing Jacob in the future.

We arrived back at Charlie's in what felt like no time. I was shocked to realise it was almost 2pm. Charlie and Billy would be starving. I had literally lost track of time and I ran guiltily up the stairs and into the house. I needn't have worried. The two men were engrossed in a match on TV, eating pizza and surrounded by carry out boxes. Charlie waved his hand at me.

"Figured you two would eat while you were out so we just went ahead and ordered pizza in," he told me.

"I'm sorry, dad. I kind of forgot the time."

Both men looked between Jacob and I. He had a huge grin on his face and I was pretty sure I looked flushed and over-excited.

"No problem, Bells," Charlie said. I distinctly heard the smugness again and rolled my eyes. "You two just have fun." I felt my blush deepen and headed for the sanctuary of the kitchen, Jacob tailing me.

His stomach had been rumbling loudly the whole drive back so I immediately started making an omelette with chips and a salad. He was huge, so I kind of figured he would have a big appetite. I made loads. While I worked, Jacob moved around the kitchen, easily locating cutlery and crockery.

"Have you been in here before?" I asked him, surprised.

His surprise matched mine. "Of course I have." He grinned again. "Your dad's TV is bigger than ours so we kind of watch most matches here."
"I didn't realise how close you and my dad are." I was struck again by the fact that Charlie had a whole life that I knew nothing of. It saddened me.

"Your dad loves me," Jacob said confidently. He crossed the kitchen in a few long strides and abruptly pulled me into his arms again. A thrill ran through me. "That's why he's gonna be so happy about this," he murmured before kissing me hard. All thoughts of the lack of relationship I had with Charlie flew out my mind as soon as Jacob's lips touched mine. Determined not to let him go this time, I locked my arms firmly around his neck and kissed him back with wanton abandon.

Once more, I felt him harden quickly and once more, my body responded in kind. Jacob pulled back almost immediately and I was annoyed to realise that he probably hadn't even realised how hard I had been holding on to him.

"I need to stop doing that," he said hoarsely.

"Please don't." The words were out my mouth before I thought about them and he barked a laugh. He looked into my eyes with an intensity that simultaneously surprised me, and took my breath away.

"Bella I promise that all this ... weirdness will be explained to you but until then, we need to ... keep things cool. 'Kay?"

"Why?" I was really starting to feel petulant. Jacob was wearing his tortured expression again.

"Because if I let things go too far and then you're not comfortable with what you learn, I don't want you left with any regrets." It looked like it was costing him a great effort to say that and I frowned.

"I don't understand any of this," I complained.

Jacob pushed a few strands of hair behind my ear and then pulled me into a tight hug that almost cut off my air supply. "I promise I'll speak to everyone who needs to know about us tonight, and we'll sort this out quickly, okay?"

"That doesn't increase my understanding," I gasped. "And I can't breathe!"

"Sorry," he pulled back. "On both counts."

"Kiss me," I demanded.

"No," he fired back at me, but his eyes were twinkling and I could tell my sulkiness amused him.

"Fine," I turned away from him and banged things around the kitchen for a while. I was hyper aware of his eyes on me but I was caught completely off guard when he suddenly grabbed me around the waist, spun me around, and pushed my back up against the fridge.

He was holding onto me very tightly and I didn't think it was my legs that were holding me up anymore. They were weak and trembling as my body responded to him with a force that matched his own. One of his hands pushed up my T-shirt and the heat from his palm and fingers against my skin made me moan again. His hand quickly found my breast and I gave a frustrated groan that I was wearing a bra and couldn't feel him directly on my skin.

Jacob was grinding against me hard and my hips were rolling into him, desperately trying to find some friction. His other hand, the one that wasn't fondling my breast, let go of me. The only things keeping me standing were his leg, which he positioned between mine, and the fridge at my back. His hand moved around my front and began to head down my thigh.

Both my arms were locked around his neck and there was no way in hell I was letting him pull back this time.

His hand was very nearly between my legs and my core was literally aching for his touch when a loud voice shouted, "Jacob!"

We sprang apart and my eyes widened in horror when I saw Billy Black sitting in his wheelchair, glaring at his son with absolute fury in his eyes. Turning to Jacob I saw that his jaw was clenched and his eyes were the wildest I had seen them yet.

"Bella, Charlie needs a blanket, he's getting cold," Billy told me, his eyes never leaving Jacob. Taking the hint, but feeling highly annoyed about it, I started to move around Jacob to go and fetch the blanket. I was slightly shocked when Jacob grabbed hold of my wrist and stopped me.

"Stay here," he ground out from between clenched teeth. I looked up at him in surprise, then turned to Billy. His eyes were narrowed and he was watching his son cautiously.

"Jacob," he said evenly. "You need to get yourself under control. She has to accept it first." I froze. Accept what, exactly? Turning back to Jacob, I saw that his whole body was tensed and he looked as though he was struggling hard with some inner turmoil. I looked back and forward between the two men, father and son, trying to make some sense of what was unfolding before my eyes. They were glaring at one another, some silent communication going on between them that only
Eventually, Billy started to wheel himself in our direction. With incredible speed, Jacob threw himself in front of me and adopted a stance that was definitely threatening. I gasped as I heard a sound come from him that could only be called a menacing growl. Billy stopped in his tracks, his eyes widening in alarm. Looking at Jacob, I was reminded of a wild animal protecting its mate. A wild animal who had been disturbed while preparing to take its mate. He was, I realised, absolutely out of control.

Instinct took over. Without stopping to think that I should be afraid, without questioning myself at all, I stepped to Jacob's side. Taking his hand in mine, I used my other hand to rub his back firmly.

"Jacob, it's okay," I soothed him. I watched with a sense of disbelieving awe as he started to melt under my touch. He relaxed his aggressive stance and leaned towards me. Resting his forehead against mine, he shut his eyes as though reveling in my touch. I kept on rubbing his back and soothing him, fascinated as he calmed further with every movement of my hand. Glancing at Billy, I caught his eye. He smiled and nodded at me before turning and wheeling himself back out the room.

I put my arms around Jacob's waist and stepped closer to him. I wanted to soothe him completely. His arms wound around me and he held me tightly. We held that embrace for quite some time until he finally pulled back and looked at me with sorrowful eyes.

"I'm sorry, Bella," he murmured, shaking his head. "That was my fault. I need to control this until I can tell you everything."

"Just tell me, Jacob," I pleaded. I could take it. Whatever it was. "If you're going to tell me anyway, why wait?"

"Because there are ways this has to be done." I saw the stubborn set to his jaw and suspected he still wasn't completely in command of himself. Instinct told me not to push him right now. Sighing, I pulled away and told him I was going to get Charlie a blanket and would be right back.

Running up the stairs, I decided to take a few minutes to myself first. There was no point trying to pretend that the pull I felt to Jacob was normal, or that the way he had behaved in the kitchen could be explained in any rational way. The fact that I was so willing to accept it was bewildering. I trusted that he was going to keep his word and tell me everything I needed to know, but for now I was overwhelmed and confused.

Going into my bedroom and shutting the door firmly behind me, the first thing I noticed was the chill. My window had somehow worked its way wide open again and the room was freezing. I crossed the room to shut it, slamming it all the way closed and fastening the latch firmly. Sitting cross legged on my bed, I started to mull over the events of the day so far. It was pretty obvious that the moment I met Jacob Black, he had become the centre of my universe. He had felt it too, and he had accepted it unquestioningly. I wasn't questioning it either, hell I was welcoming it with open arms, but it was more than that for him. He almost seemed to have expected it.

I relived the feeling of being in his arms, the passion of his kisses, the wild, animalistic expression in his beautiful espresso brown eyes. I desperately wanted more of him. Knowing that he was right downstairs in the kitchen drove me back off my bed. What in the hell was I doing alone up here when he was waiting for me?

I crossed my room to open the door. I had only opened it a little when something, some sixth sense or instinct, made me turn my head to look at my closet. Hairs rose on the back of my neck. The closet door was ajar. I knew it had been shut tightly earlier. I had cleaned and organised my room this morning and one of the last things I had done was to arrange my clothes in the closet. I distinctly remembered closing the door just as Paul had arrived.

I registered my own fear at the same time as I gasped and clutched at my chest. The twist I had felt yesterday was back, muted perhaps, but definitely back. Something began to tug at me and it was at odds with the sense of fullness and completion that Jacob had given me.

All that happened in a fraction of a second. I had no sooner turned to throw myself out the bedroom door than I heard a loud noise from downstairs. It sounded like someone had thrown furniture.

"Bella!" It was Jacob bellowing my name from the kitchen. I heard the panic in his voice. I opened my door fully, my eyes widening as I saw him charge towards me. How the hell did he get up the stairs so fast? Jacob grabbed me and all but threw me against the wall in the hall. A shriek escaped my lips at the force he used. His eyes raked over me and I saw the naked fear in them.

"Are you alright? Did he hurt you? Touch you?"

"Wha -? Who?"

But he was gone. Before I could have blinked, his back was disappearing into my bedroom. I heard the closet door bang and Jacob cursed loudly. Following him on shaky legs into the room, I again felt a gust of wind and saw my window was open wide once more.

A cry of horror passed my lips, making Jacob turn to me. My legs gave out under me and I began to crumple to the floor. Again moving at impossible speed, he was at my side to break my fall.
Picking me up bridal style, Jacob raced downstairs with me. My head was buried in the crook of his neck and I could feel sobbs threatening to break free. Too much too much too much. I didn't look up as he carried me into the living room where both our dads were, so what their reaction was to seeing us like that, I never knew.

"Jacob?" That was Billy. His voice came just ahead of Charlie's.

"What in the hell is wrong with Bella?"

Jacob set me down on the couch and hunkered down in front of me, taking my hands in his. My tears were starting to flow now and I knew I wouldn't be able to stop them.

"Bella did you see him?" he asked me. I shook my head and Charlie voiced the obvious question.

"See who? Was someone in this house?"

I answered him myself through my tears. "It was Edward Cullen, wasn't it?" I looked up at Jacob and saw the confusion on his face as he nodded slowly. "I can feel him," I whispered. "The same way I can feel you, but with you it's a good feeling. With him it's bad. It hurts."

Jacob's body started to tremble hard and anger warred with fear for precedence in his eyes. The way he trembled reminded me of something. It reminded me of the way Seth had reacted to the Cullens at the store. Overwhelmed again by how much I couldn't comprehend, my sobs renewed with greater force.

"Bella," his voice was almost a moan as he put his arms around me, holding me closely to him as he knelt on the floor in front of me. He began talking while he rubbed soothingly on my back, and I realised he was addressing Billy.

"It's too late to go after him now, and this is their territory anyway. But I need the pack here." He gave a frustrated sigh. "I can't leave her here to go phase but I need to alert them!"

"You might try a telephone," Billy said mildly and Jacob actually laughed a little. When he spoke again however, his voice was very serious.

"She needs to know, dad. Right now!"

"Jacob you know how this needs to be done."

"The hell I do!" He was angry again. "I'm the fuckin' Alpha, I make the rules."

"Jacob!" Billy's temper was also riled. "You cannot decide this now. Getting the boys over here is your priority if you want to protect Bella."

That seemed to get through to his headstrong son. Jacob removed his arms from around me and got to his feet just as Charlie demanded to know what was going on. I was surprised he hadn't stepped in earlier, but when I looked at him I saw his face contorted in pain. I instantly stood to go get his medication but Jacob stopped me.

"You need to stay here, Bella, just till some of the guys get here."

"Charlie needs his meds," I told him firmly, wiping my eyes with my sleeve. Jacob looked over at Charlie and nodded.

"I'm coming with you," he said. "I'm not letting you out of my sight again."

He led the way to the kitchen where my eyes widened. The chair Jacob had been sitting on was tipped over at the other end of the kitchen, as if he had literally knocked it flying as he stood up. I frowned as I saw the empty plate on the table. How had he eaten all that food so fast? My questions were piling up and I thought I might just start screaming and not stop if anything else happened now.

Jacob had pulled out his cell phone and was talking in a low voice to someone while I organised a glass of water and Charlie's pills. He mentioned Quil, and cursed a lot. I didn't catch much other than that.

He led me back through to the living room where I gave Charlie his meds, and followed me when I went back upstairs to get him a blanket. I then decided to keep busy by cleaning up the kitchen. Of course Jacob followed me again. He was watching me closely as I set about washing up with shaking hands.

"Bella," he finally said. "Are you okay?"

I spun to face him. "Of course I'm not okay, Jacob! I have no idea what's going on, but things are way off with you! And I don't even know where to start with Edward Cullen! You keep asking me to trust you but then I see you looking scared and upset and that terrifies me, and I don't even know why!" Tears were spilling over again and he pulled me into another tight hug.

"Tell me what you meant earlier about being able to feel Edward," he whispered into my ear. Fury rose within me and I pushed at him with all my strength. He took a step back, letting me go.
"How about I tell you when you start being straight with me!" I was surprised when instead of arguing back, his shoulders slumped and he nodded, looking slightly defeated.

"I'm gonna break all the rules to tell you, Bella, I promise," he told me earnestly. "I'll tell you today. But the guys'll be here in a minute, they're close by." He jerked his head towards the window as if he could tell exactly where they were. I wiped at my tears again and nodded, turning back to the sink.

"Fuck it!" I heard him growl from behind me. The next thing I knew, he had pulled me round to face him and was kissing me again with all the passion of our last kiss. My legs reduced instantly to jelly and a tidal wave of lust washed over me. His mouth moved along my jaw and his fingers tightened on my waist. I whimpered slightly, desperately needing his hands on me. All of a sudden, he buried his face in the crook of my neck and seemed to inhale deeply.

"Bella," he moaned. A delicious shiver ran through me. I twisted my fingers in his hair and he stilled. Slowly raising his head, he stared at me and I could see that his skin was flushed and his eyes were turbulent pools of raw emotion.

I was pretty sure I looked the same way to him.

"They're here," he said quietly, releasing me just as the front door flew open.

A moment later, Quil appeared in the kitchen doorway, followed by yet another enormous native man.

"Chill out, boss, the cavalry's arrived," Quil said cheerfully. He turned to me. "Hi, darlin'. Jake givin' you a hard time?" He winked at me. "Don't worry, I'll take care of you."

An alarming sounding growl came from Jake, making me jump. Quil's eyes shot back to Jake and they narrowed as cogs seemed to turn in his head. They suddenly widened again.

"Holy fuckin' shit! Are you for real?" Turning back to me, he squinted. "She doesn't look Quileute," he observed and Jake gave an exasperated sigh.

"Not the time, Quil! I need you to stay with Bella, dad and Charlie, then come out and phase with me when Embry comes back in. Embry - outside, now."

The other man was looking as astonished as Quil, but simply nodded and headed through the kitchen for the back door. Jake reached out and squeezed my hand.

"You'll be safe with Quil. I'll be back in two minutes." He followed Embry out, leaving me standing staring at Quil. His jaw was still hanging open as he tried to process the enormity of whatever it was he had just learned. I wondered suddenly if I might be able to glean some information from him. His eyes narrowed again and he crossed his arms over his chest.

"Can't tell you," he said.

"Of course not!" I shot crossly back at him, and turned back to the dishes.

Embry was back in no time, grinning widely.

"Hi, Bella," he said to me. "I'm Embry, Jake's other wing man."

I raised my soapy hand in greeting, still too annoyed to make small talk with him. Quil went outside and was back equally quickly, Jacob shadowing him. Quil was also beaming.

"Kay Bella, I'm off limits to you now. Sorry, darlin'." Jacob shoved at him but he was grinning too. Evidently sharing whatever the news was with his two wing men had pleased him greatly.

"C'mon honey," he extended his hand to me. "We need to talk to dad and then I can tell you everything."

With absolutely no fight left in me, I allowed Jacob to lead me through to the living room where Billy attempted to persuade him to go and talk to the council right away. They argued back and forth for a time, and Charlie dozed off. From what little I understood, Jacob was refusing to leave me and Billy was impressing on him the importance of doing things the council's way.

In the end, it was Embry who intervened. He hadn't said anything but had been listening thoughtfully.

"Jake just go. You know Quil and I won't let anything harm Bella. Or your dad or Charlie. It's us, man, we've got you covered."

Jacob hesitated and I stepped in. I didn't know what was going on but I thought I understood that not speaking to the council would land him in trouble.

"Don't upset the council, Jacob," I begged him. "I can wait to find out if I have to, just don't do anything that will make things more difficult for you."
Looking anything but happy about it, Jacob finally sighed and got to his feet. It hit me suddenly that he was going to leave and I couldn't believe the wave of misery and dread that crashed over me. I wanted to beg him to stay. I wanted to cry, throw myself at him, do anything at all that might prevent him from walking through the door. The only thing that stopped me was that he looked as though it was taking an extraordinary effort for him to step away from me and I didn't want to make it more difficult for him.

I walked with him out to the front door, where he pulled me into another tight hug. I felt so protected and safe when he held me like that and I never wanted to leave his arms.

"You'll be safe with Embry and Quil, honey. I'll be back as soon as I can," he murmured into my hair. I nodded.

"I know. I just wish you didn't have to go."

Jacob put his hand under my chin and tilted my face up to look at him. I saw absolute love and tenderness in his eyes as he closed the gap between our mouths. My eyes fluttered closed as his lips touched mine, so softly. I melted against him, cherishing the moment. Too soon, it was over and Jacob reluctantly stepped back from me. His eyes never leaving mine, he opened the front door, and stepped through it, taking his warmth and protection with him.

I slowly went back into the living room. Charlie was snoring gently on the recliner and the three other men were talking in low, serious voices. Sitting a little shakily on the couch, I saw Quil turn to me with a grin on his face.

"Don't worry, darlin'. We're right here. Guard dogs on duty." His eyes twinkled and the chuckle that came from Billy Black made me think there was more to the joke than I understood. Rolling my eyes, I went into the kitchen to start preparing dinner for us all. I stopped in my tracks when Embry stood to follow me.

"Sorry, Bella," he answered my unspoken question. "You're not allowed out of our sight. Jake's orders."

Shaking my head and unable to muster any energy to argue with him, I went ahead into the kitchen.

As I worked, I examined the feelings in my chest. Edward's ache was there again. It was warring with Jacob's claim on my soul. I craved Jacob but it seemed as though only his physical presence could fully alleviate the pain and chill caused by Edward Cullen.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I sent out a silent plea to whatever deity may be listening.

Please hurry Jacob back to me.

A/N: There will be an Edward POV coming up shortly which explains what actually happened there. I know it was a bit confusing as it is here. Next chapter will be up when I can!
A/N: Well since you’re all being sooo nice to me, here’s another chapter;-) Huge thanks to niamhg and MistC again for pre/beta reading with so much patience.

The late afternoon and early evening stretched interminably on. Every fiber of my being craved Jacob and I kept finding myself on the verge of tears. My chest continued to throb and I imagined that the chill was seeping deeper into my bones. I knew only Jacob could make me feel whole again. And more than that, I just wanted him beside me.

Quil kept the others effortlessly entertained. Embry was quieter and he suited my mood better. I gravitated towards him whenever I found myself idle and he seemed to understand how I was feeling. He reassured me frequently that Jake would be back as soon as he could, that it would be killing him to be away and he would be impatient to return to me. The ease with which Embry, Quil and Billy seemed to accept my morose agitation only contributed to the ever-increasing list of things I needed explanations for.

I was stunned at dinner time when both Quil and Embry wolfed down massive quantities of food in no time at all. I had made sure to leave plenty aside for Jacob, but began to doubt if I had enough. Embry stopped me when I began to make more food, telling me not to worry about them. Quil swatted his head and told me to go ahead and do whatever I wanted. As I watched their easy, familiar banter with one another, I couldn't help but feel glad they seemed to be so accepting of me. They seemed more like brothers than friends and I looked forward to getting to know them better, at Jacob’s side.

It was after 8pm when Embry told me quietly that Jake was almost back. He had been sitting beside me on the couch and hadn't touched his cell phone. How the hell he could know that Jacob was nearly there was just thrown onto my mental pile of questions. I was pretty sure I could trust him, though, and practically threw myself to the front door. I bit back my annoyance when Embry followed me out onto the porch. He or Quil had accompanied me everywhere except the bathroom the entire time Jacob had been gone. After my initial shock at finding that Edward Cullen had been hiding in my closet had dissipated, I had argued and railed against it, but they had both stood firm. Jacob had "ordered" them to not let me out of their sight, and they were not going to let him down.

My annoyance disappeared as soon as I saw a red VW Rabbit turn into the driveway. Hardly able to contain my eagerness, I waited only until Jacob leaped out the car and started jogging towards me before I launched myself down the steps and towards him. He lifted me up into a tight hug and I exhaled in relief when my world righted itself again.

Jacob held onto me as though he wouldn't ever let go. I clung around his neck, ecstatic in his presence. I vaguely heard a chuckle and a thin, aging voice cryptically say, "That right there's an Alpha imprint, my boy."

"Oh we're talking about it now, are we?" I recognised Quil's voice and moved my head so that I could see who he was talking to.

"It's Old Quil," Jacob murmured against my hair. "Quil's grandfather. He said he needed to be here when I tell you. I think he's just being nosey."

"So I get to hear it now?" I asked eagerly. Jacob nodded and pulled back to look at me. I was beaming as I looked up at him and he smiled back at me, but there was apprehension in his eyes. He took my hands in his and his smile faded as he looked at me earnestly.

"Before we go in, Bella ... Can you promise me one thing?" I was ready to promise him anything if he would only stay and be honest with me. He leaned his forehead against mine and took a deep breath. "Remember I'm still me," he whispered. I pulled my head back to look at him, completely confused all over again. I nodded my promise and he led me back into the house.

Passing the kitchen, I asked if he was hungry.

"No honey, I'm fine."

"Liar!" Quil yelled from the living room. "He's always hungry, Bella!"

"Quil if you wanna stay for this, shut the fuck up!" Jacob yelled back at him. "I ate at Seth's mom's," he told me.

We went into the living room, where Charlie was chatting with Old Quil as if he knew him well. The living room was a reasonable size, but with three giants and three older men there, it was overcrowded. Quil sat on one couch with his grandfather. Jake pulled me onto the other couch beside him and Embry pulled a chair in from the kitchen. With Charlie in the recliner and Billy in his wheelchair, the room was filled.

I offered everyone refreshments. Quil and Embry simultaneously stood up.

"We've got it, darlin'," Quil told me. "It's storytime for you." They left the room and moments later could be heard clattering around the kitchen.

I caught Charlie's eye and he pulled a face as if to say he had no idea what was going on, either.

"So Billy, I'm guessing this isn't just social," he said. Billy shook his head and looked over at Jacob, whose leg was
"Something happened today Charlie that makes it necessary for you to be told about a tribal secret," Billy began. "It is absolutely imperative that everything that is said in this room tonight, goes with you to your grave. Both of you," he added, turning to me. I nodded. Charlie looked offended and Billy sighed. "I know, but it needed to be said."

Turning back to Jacob, Billy raised his eyebrows. "Do you want to tell it?"

Jacob shook his head. He looked like he was going to throw up. Quil and Embry came in with drinks and an assortment of food. Quil looked at Jacob and chortled before leaving the room again. He came back with a large mixing bowl seconds later and handed it to Jacob.

"Just in case," Quil winked at me. I gave a disbelieving laugh. What could this bad?

Billy cleared his throat and Quil immediately sat back down next to his grandfather. He jumped up again to dim the lights and Jacob exploded at him.

"Will you just sit the fuck down so we can get this over with!"

"Relax, man, it's a good story. Bella's never heard it before and Charlie's probably only heard bits of it. Let them enjoy it with the proper atmosphere!" Quil scolded, but he sat down and nodded at Billy to continue.

"Charlie," Billy said gravely, "you've asked me many times about certain ... oddities in the tribe. The boys' growth spurts, their body heat. It has been necessary for me to lie to you many times." He raised his hands placatingly as Charlie's eyebrows shot up. "I hope that after this evening, you will understand why."

"Why are you telling me now?" Charlie asked. Ever the cop.

"Bella," Billy replied simply. "It's part of the story."

Over the next hour, Billy wove magic in Charlie's living room. In a voice filled with authority, he spoke of cold ones and Spirit Warriors who could change their shape at will. He told of tribal magic and ancient Chiefs with noble lineage who fought as wolves to defend their people from one deadly enemy. In the dim light, goosebumps raised on my arms and I leaned closer into Jacob's warmth. He wrapped his arms around me and held me very tightly.

I quickly forgot about all the people in the room who seemed to be fixated on my reactions. I forgot that I was waiting for an explanation about the weirdness of the past couple of days. I forgot about everything except the story I was being told, and Jacob by my side.

Over an hour later, Billy paused in his story and took a drink. Jacob tightened his hold on me even further as his dad began to speak again.

"To this day, most of the Quileute people believe these legends to be just that. Stories, fairytales that are told and retold around bonfires on the beach." He sighed heavily. "My generation was lucky and the shifting gene was never triggered. My son's generation ... not so." He looked at Jacob with real sorrow in his eyes. "The burdens the Spirit Warriors of the tribe carry are many. I have seen with my own eyes how young lives are ripped apart and future dreams destroyed when the cold ones stray too close. It is necessary for each of the Warriors to find one person that can balance them. One special bond is forged for each wolf, and that bond enables the man to stay in control of the wolf and endure whatever hardships he may face. That bond is called imprinting. To be an imprint is a grave responsibility, but also a source of great joy. Bella, you are Jacob's imprint. And can I just say that you've been a long time in coming home. We've all been waiting over three years for you!"

Billy fell silent and gazed expectantly between me and Charlie. I looked around the room and found Quil, Old Quil and Embry watching me with identical expressions of expectancy on their faces. Charlie was looking at Billy as though he had two heads. I turned to Jacob last of all, shaking my head slightly.

"You're a Spirit Warrior," I clarified. It sounded a lot like that was what Billy had just said.

"Yes." Jacob's voice wasn't co-operating with him. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Yes. I'm a wolf. I'm the Alpha of the pack."

That right there's an Alpha imprint, my boy.

I swallowed hard and a half laugh escaped my lips. "You're telling me that you turn into a wolf, to protect humans from ... cold ones?"

"Vampires." Jacob practically spat the word out and I could see his hatred. I searched his eyes and saw the truth.

Charlie was spluttering, somewhere between laughter and anger. I didn't blame him. He wanted to know was this a joke. Billy calmly told him that it wasn't. Charlie blustered some more and then fell silent, looking at me.

I couldn't think straight. There were six pairs of eyes on me, all waiting for my reaction. The only pair I cared about were so
full of anguish and fear that my heart broke. I wet my dry lips.

"Can we talk about this somewhere else?" I whispered and Jacob nodded. He started to lead me out of the living room, halting when Charlie started yelling at him to let my hand go and get back in there now.

"We'll be back soon, dad," I told him firmly, taking Jacob's hand again and pulling him towards the stairs. He shook his head.

"I can't go up there right now, Bella. If it still smells of Cullen I'll fuckin' phase in your bedroom. Let's go outside." He jerked his head to the front door and I nodded.

I expected him to sit on the porch, but when he began to lead me onto the street and towards the treeline at the forest, I followed him unquestioningly.

A short way inside the forest, Jacob came to a stop. He faced me, taking my other hand into his, and looked at me pleadingly.

"I'm still me, Bella. I'm still the guy you spent the day with today, that you liked, that you kissed. This doesn't change that."

"Is it real?" That was really all I wanted to know.

"Yes, it's real." His voice was resigned. "I turn into a wolf. A giant one. I chase leeches when they stray too close to our territory, and I spend way too much time running round the forest on four paws."

"No, I mean, what I feel for you. The ... imprint? Is it real? Is it just an illusion of love, or do I really feel this way about you?"

Jacob took a small step closer to me. He was very serious when he answered me. "It's real. And whatever you feel for me, I feel a thousand times more strongly for you."

I opened my mouth to argue over that point when he took my face in his hands and looked deeply into my eyes. "A thousand times stronger, Bella." Staggered, I saw the truth in his eyes.

Sitting down heavily on the forest floor, I put my head in my hands, trying to think. There was everything to ask, and nothing to say. Looking up again, I saw that Jacob had silently sat down in front of me. His eyes looked agonised and I frowned.

"What's wrong?" I reached out for his hand and he looked at me in disbelief.

"What's wrong? Bella, I've just told you that I morph into a giant dog and you're my soulmate. I'm waiting for you to freak out and tell me to leave you the hell alone!"

"I'm not freaking out, Jacob," I told him. "And I'm definitely not going to tell you to leave me alone. I hated it when you were gone this afternoon. It's just a lot to take in," I finished on a whisper.

Jacob nodded and I saw his eyes soften, profound relief mixing with residual anxiety. I shivered in the night air and he pulled me to him, positioning his own back against a tree with me between his legs. My first question formed immediately.

"Your body temperature?"

"108.9," he answered promptly. "Always. All the wolves are the same."

"How many?"

"Ten, if you count Leah. She's the only female. It was tougher for her, there were a lot of complications I'll tell you about another time. The council agreed to allow her to quit the pack and she went to college. She'll always be a wolf and she has to phase sometimes, but she's leading as normal a life as she can. There are nine wolves protecting the reservation."

"Do you have to ask the council's permission to leave the pack?"

Jacob stiffened slightly and I guessed this was a touchy subject. "The previous Alpha allowed the council to make all the biggest decisions. I don't see why they should."

Sensing that this was a subject best left for another day, I changed my line of questioning. "Phasing is what you call it when you turn into a wolf?"

"Phasing or shifting."

"Does it hurt?"

"Only at first. The actual shifting process takes a long time to build up and come on. I was the fastest, probably because I'm Alpha. It took me about four months from showing the first signs to actually phasing for the first time."

I started to ask what the first signs were and then stopped. **Over three years we've been waiting for you. It took me four months.**
"Bella?"

"How long ago did you start to turn?" I played with his fingers as I waited for the answer I knew he was going to give me.

"Nearly four years ago. It was Christmas four years ago that dad first noticed how fast I was growing. Couple of weeks after that I developed a fever that's never cooled since."

I nodded. Four years ago I was 17. Four years ago I first started to feel that a part of me was missing. I knew Jacob was waiting for me to explain. I twisted so I could see his face.

"Is it possible I knew you were missing from my life from when you started to change?" I asked, watching as his eyes widened momentarily before he smiled.

"Two of the other imprints have said the same thing," he told me. He seemed happy to know that. Absurdly, I felt proud of myself for pleasing him.

My questions continued for a long time. Jacob patiently answered them all fully. No detail was too small, no query too absurd. He took his time and talked me through the process of turning into a wolf. He explained about the pack mind and the wolves' supernatural powers. I listened, awed, to his description of accelerated healing powers, extreme speeds and heightened senses. He told me about the pack members and their imprints. Only Quil and Brady were still to imprint.

As he spoke, I rested against him, soaking up his warmth and tracing patterns on his arm with my fingertips as I listened. Despite hearing for the first time that there was a whole world of supernatural I had never dreamed existed, I was perfectly content. So long as I was with Jacob, I felt safe and loved.

That thought reminded me. Sitting up straighter, I turned to look at him again.

"What is Edward Cullen?"

Jacob's whole body stiffened and his eyes turned hard and angry. "Bloodsucker," he spat out.

"He's a vampire?" I almost yelled it in my disbelief. Jacob nodded. "Well ... what does he want with me?" I asked. Jacob went very still and seemed to think carefully before answering.

"I can only imagine," he finally said. "Seth thought at the store that he was going to attack you. Like, drink your blood. Rosalie seemed to stop him."

"She's a vampire too?"

Jacob told me the whole family were bloodsuckers. Vegetarians, they called themselves. He told me of a treaty that had been forged with his ancestors, a treaty he felt should be voided if for no other reason than to stop the wolf gene from triggering in his tribe.

"We don't need nine wolves. Two or three would be enough for what we have to do, but with a whole fuckin' coven living so close by, we just keep on shifting. It's not fair to the younger kids. We have an experienced pack, we don't need puppies phasing."

"Tell me everything that's happened with Edward, Bella. Please."

I told him. As he had done with his pack's history, I spared no details. I told him of the twist I had felt in my chest when I first saw Edward, and the subsequent ache and chill. I explained how Jacob himself eradicated it, but how it had returned to some extent when he had left that afternoon. I told him of my nightmare and hallucination of the night before. I told him of the pull I had felt towards my closet earlier, and how I was simultaneously drawn and terrified.

Jacob listened silently. He began to tremble hard when he heard I had imagined seeing Edward in my room the night before. He stiffened when I described the pull I felt. When I finished, he remained silent for a long time.

"Jacob?" I whispered finally. I was so very afraid I had disappointed or angered him.

"It's more than just your blood he wants," he murmured finally. "I don't know what it is. I don't want to know what it is, but I'm going to find out." He fell silent again. I didn't interrupt his thoughts this time. Finally, he seemed to shake himself. "You're safe, Bella," he told me firmly. "That's what's important. There are things I don't understand but I will get to the bottom of them, and you will be protected at all times. You and Charlie. Your house will be guarded twenty four hours a day for now, and we can work out a long term solution in time."

"Is he that dangerous?" I whispered. Jacob kissed my hair.

"Yes," he told me firmly. "But we're lethal. You will be kept safe, Bella, you don't need to worry about that."

I wasn't worried. I realised with a jolt that I trusted this man with my life. Literally.

"He'll learn quickly to stay the fuck away from you," he said grimly. I looked up at him with a smile.
"And you?"
"What about me?"
"Will you be staying away from me?"

"The hell I will," he breathed. He pushed my hair back from my face and bent his head to kiss me firmly. I twisted round so that I was kneeling in front of him, kissing him back. I sensed a change in Jacob now that I knew his secrets. He was almost rough when he grabbed my thighs and hauled me up so that I was straddling him. I gasped against his mouth when he abruptly stood up and turned around. With my legs still wrapped around his waist, he pressed my back into the tree he had been leaning against. His sheer strength and dominance took my breath away. He handled me as though I weighed precisely nothing. He took control and I had no choice but to submit to him.

I liked it. Hell, it was driving me wild. I bit at his bottom lip and he growled, one hand diving under my shirt and finding my nipple through my bra. I cried out as he pinched it hard. I felt the flames of lust licking through my body. I was on fire for him and needing more. I rolled my hips and whimpered when he ran his hand down from my breast, across my stomach and between my legs. I moaned when he rubbed me through my jeans, desperate for him to rip the offending pants off. I wanted to feel his hands on me, skin on skin.

I could feel his straining erection against my thigh. Wanting to touch him, I repositioned slightly and ran my hand down to his waistband. Jacob groaned when he realised where I was going, and when I touched the prominent bulge in his jeans, his hips jerked hard.

Wanting down, I pushed against him, knowing he would somehow understand what I needed. He instantly slid me down his body, never breaking our passionate kiss. Greedy for him, I started to unbutton his jeans. He responded in kind, his fingers deftly unfastening my own pants.

I didn't even stop to think how fast we were moving, or how quickly our kiss had escalated out of control. I needed him. My body was desperate for him and I could tell he felt the same. I fumbled with his jeans and slid my hand inside at the same time as he let out a loud moan and jerked his hips back from me.

"Not like this," he growled against my lips. My eyes flew open, seeing that his own were squeezed shut. He was struggling and I decided to play dirty.

"Exactly like this," I pleaded, moving my hand back towards its original destination.

His eyes opened and I saw his jaw set in what I suspected was quickly going to become a familiar way.

"No." His tone was final. Jacob had made his mind up and I knew that the moment was gone.

"Jacob," I groaned but he was shaking his head as he fastened both our jeans back up.

"I'm sorry Bella, and you can see how much I want you," he told me. "But our first time together is going to be special."

I knew he was right but I was so turned on I couldn't think straight. "I want you," I told him, astonished by my own boldness.

"I know." He ground the words out between gritted teeth and I looked at him in surprise. He sighed. "Heightened senses, Bella." I still didn't get it so he spelled it out for me. "I can smell you, honey."

I felt my eyes widen and my mouth popped into an O. Jacob buried his face in my hair and pulled me into one of his amazing hugs.

"You've been driving me crazy all day," he admitted.

"The fresh air," I realised.

"Mmhmm. It's not just when you're turned on, though. Your scent in general is like an aphrodisiac, and comforting all at the same time." He inhaled deeply with his nose still buried in my hair. "I don't know what you smell like. Vanilla but something else, too. It's incredible."

"Good smell?" I checked and he chuckled.

"It will be, once the imprint settles. Right now it just drives me out of my mind." Collecting himself, he pulled back from me and took my hand. "It's after midnight, they'll all be wondering how we're doing. Let's go back before I lose control and do something stupid."

"I wouldn't mind if you did," I told him, but let him pull me back towards Charlie's house. As we walked, more questions came to mind.

"So my role is what, exactly?"

"Just to be there for me," he answered promptly. "That's all. Imprints just know, it's amazing. Like in the kitchen earlier, you didn't know anything about all this but you still knew what to do to calm me down." He laughed and it was a carefree
sound, like great burdens had been lifted from him. I smiled to hear it. "I think you're going to single handedly prove my dad right, and Old Quil wrong, you know. Dad's always said the role of an imprint is to handle the wolf, keep him calm and focussed. Old Quil says that's romantic rubbish and the imprint is to ensure the pack's bloodlines are undiluted."

"Oht!" I could see the obvious flaw in Old Quil's theory. I frowned. "Soooo, he won't approve of me, then?"

"Oh hell of course he will, you can't argue with an imprint! That's why we have procedures in place. A newly imprinted wolf needs to show another wolf the imprint through the pack mind. That wolf then confirms to the council that it is a proper imprint. Just incase, you know, we make a mistake." He rolled his eyes at the apparent ludicrous of that idea.

"So that's why you couldn't tell me earlier?"

"That's why. Technically I still broke the rules." I laughed at the pride in his voice. Jacob Black was going to be a handful. "You're supposed to be on the beach hearing this, at a bonfire, followed by a joining ceremony for you to formally accept the imprint."

"Joining ceremony?"

Jacob grinned down at me as we approached Charlie's house. "Imprints are absolute. The idea that an imprinted wolf will ever want to be with someone else is ridiculous. So in pack tradition, as soon as a wolf imprints and the girl accepts it, they just got married. Nowadays things are different so we don't get married legally straightaway, but the council still performs a ceremony to acknowledge that the couple are married in tribal law. Marry me, Bella?"

I wasn't entirely convinced he was teasing. "How about I marry you when you stop getting me all worked up and then pulling away?" I grumbled as we walked up the steps to Charlie's front porch.

"Huh." Jacob stopped me and pulled me into his arms. Ghosting his lips across my neck, raising goosebumps and making me shiver in anticipation, he whispered his next words.

"Trust me, honey. When we make love for the first time..." His lips stilled next to my ear. "I'll be lovin' you the Quileute way."

He paused for a moment to let that sink in, pulling his head back to watch my reaction. I had no idea exactly what that entailed but his voice held a promise that made me gulp loudly. He smirked and took my hand to lead me inside. I had only one thought.

_Holy shit._

**A/N: Edward is up next. He is not a nice boy.**
This is what has been happening with Edward. I wrote a lot of this late at night, in the dark, alone. I scared myself silly. I hope you enjoy it!

Edward's POV

*My life was an unending, unchanging midnight... I was frozen... When change came for one of us, it was a rare and permanent thing. I had seen it happen with Carlisle, and then a decade later with Rosalie. Love had changed them in an eternal way, a way that never faded... It would always be that way for me, too. I would always love this fragile human girl, for the rest of my limitless existence. (quote from Stephenie Meyer's "Midnight Sun")*

I hadn't even known she was there, at the store. I couldn't hear her mind. The usual cacophony of thoughts assaulted my brain. The cashier was wondering when she would be allowed to take her break because she was needing a cigarette. The old man behind Rosalie and I in the queue was hoping he would make it home before the rain came. The young boy was berating himself over a pass he had missed during sports earlier in the day. The only other mind I was aware of was Seth, the Quileute dog. He was in the background, generally growling and looking for an excuse to report back to his Alpha.

It was always that way with the mongrels. They snarled a lot and crowded us when they saw us in public places. As if we would ever lose control. We were too disciplined. Even Jasper, tempted as he sometimes was, would never be stupid enough to give the dogs a reason to attack us.

She was so small that she must have been hidden from my peripheral vision behind the other customers in the queue. She was completely invisible to me until the store door opened and a strong gust of wind blew her scent to me. It must have been masked by the dog's overpowering stench up until then. It was the most intoxicating aroma I had ever encountered. There was a hint of vanilla, but it was overpowered by the sweetest, most exotic scent. One part of my brain thought *ylang ylang* as my instincts kicked in.

*I was a predator. She was my prey... I was a vampire, and she had the sweetest blood I'd smelled in eighty years... Thirst burned through my throat like fire. My mouth was baked and desiccated... My stomach twisted with the hunger that was an echo of the thirst. My muscles coiled to spring... (quote from Stephenie Meyer's "Midnight Sun")*

My head snapped up and I saw her, this insignificant girl who was about to topple my whole family like a house of cards. But then, her eyes met mine and I felt the change. It was just as Carlisle and Rosalie remembered it. The vacant space in my inner psyche that should have housed my soul sucked a piece of her soul into its black depths. It connected me to her, and her to me, in an irreversible way.

I had found her. My singer. *Mi Cantante.*

I was overjoyed at the same time as I felt a deep self-loathing for what I was necessarily going to do to this innocent little girl. Rosalie dealt a blow to my back that would have been powerful enough to send the entire cash desk flying. It was enough to alert me to the dog's thoughts. He saw my control slip and was moments away from phasing in the middle of Fork's general store. The girl's eyes were wide with fear but my long dead heart almost leapt when I recognised the pull she was feeling to me. The two pieces of her soul longed to re-connect.

*Mi Cantante. I must leave you now. But I will come for you soon.*

I wanted to wait for her, outside the store. Rosalie tried to convince me to leave with her. At first, I refused to listen. One hundred years I had longed to find mi cantante. I was not now going to walk away. My phone rang. It was Alice, calling from Alaska where she was spending time with Jasper, away from humans while he fought his cravings after a near incident six months earlier.

Alice told me my future had disappeared. It happened whenever any of my family was in danger of crossing one of the mutts. I immediately knew that Seth would not leave mi cantante alone. Reluctantly, I allowed Rosalie to drive me home.

It was, I supposed, not important in the long run. I had time. I knew her aroma. I would find her.

My family were thrilled. They had been waiting for me to find my singer for too long. Carlisle warned me to be cautious. We didn't know who this mystery girl was. Alice could shed no light when I phoned her. She said she was getting flashes, glimpses of different scenarios mixed with nothingness.

Frustrated, I set out to find mi cantante. It would take time and patience, scouting the town until I caught her aroma. It was such a distinctive scent though that I would be able to pick it out immediately. And my heart was filled with hope. She had felt the pull. She was mine.

I found the aroma eventually, ever so faintly at first but strengthening in one direction. I simply followed it. It was branded
into my vampiric memory. I would recognise it anywhere now, detect it above any other scent at considerable distances. I had to remind myself to maintain a human speed as I walked closer and closer to my destination. Excitement pooled in my stomach as I realised that her scent was bringing me directly to a domestic abode.

It was the police Chief's house. Carlisle had treated him after his attack. I wondered if he had hired a nurse and that was who the girl was. Whatever relationship she had to him, this posed a problem. Charlie Swan was in constant close contact with the Quileute dogs. Their stench was everywhere and I knew that I needed to keep my distance. I kept walking, frustrated even further by this complication.

I dare not go into the forest behind Charlie's residence. That was definitely wolf territory. In the end, I broke into a nearby house. All its occupants were out, and if I concentrated hard I could make out some of the comings and goings at the police Chief's home.

I heard muted voices, a man and a younger girl. I was willing to bet that the girl was mi cantante, but I did not yet have the evidence to merit me going for her. I recoiled as Seth jogged out from the forest and up to the Swan house. After my initial disgust, I realised this was a good thing. The dogs' minds were distinctive. They thought like animals, in pictures and confusing flashes as well as the more civilised dialogue of humans.

Focussing hard on Seth, I got all the information that I needed. Mi cantante was Bella, Charlie's daughter. Pitiful human that she was, she couldn't open her bedroom window. Seth easily did it for her, and she thanked him sweetly.

Using every fibre of concentration within me, I found the rhythm of her heartbeat and the timbre of her voice. I committed both to memory. I would find her anywhere, now. I could feel the part of her soul that now belonged to me pulling towards her.

"Soon," I whispered.

I stayed in that empty house until its occupants returned home. Then, I jumped from a rear window and silently made my way to a safe distance from Bella's home, where I waited until night fell. I was careful to keep myself positioned downwind at all times. Another dog, the one they called Jared, stopped by, and then Seth returned. Charlie settled for the night and Bella quietly moved around the house. I drove myself near demented trying to picture what she was doing as I concentrated to identify where she was in the house.

Darkness had long descended when she went to bed. I was in a quandary. I knew it was risky to go to her. The wolves were evidently around the house several times a day. My scent would be instantly recognisable to them. On the other hand, Bella's window was still ajar and the strength of the autumn wind would help to eliminate my scent from her room.

It was a foolish risk, but one I had to take. Her soul, now my soul, was pulling and tugging towards its other half, longing for completion. I longed to inhale the intoxicating scent of mi cantante again.

Would I bite her tonight? I was afraid of my control. I needed to consult with Carlisle first. He was the only member of my family who had ever successfully turned someone. No, tonight I would simply indulge in her scent. I would wrap myself in it, filling my lungs and sweetly torturing myself with her call. Then, in the morning, I would speak with Carlisle.

Opening her window wide, I climbed through. Her aroma assaulted me and I breathed deeply, drawing her enticing ylang ylang and vanilla scent into every corner of my being. I heard her moan and froze until I realised she was sleeping. She was dreaming. Fascinated, I watched her. She was restless and her heart rate was rapid and irregular. I smelled fear and cursed it. It polluted her natural scent.

It also excited my predator's nature. I tightened my fists. Control yourself. I could not lose her now, mi cantante. Just for a short time, self-control was of the utmost importance.

I couldn't make out what she was dreaming of. One moment she would have a soft smile on her lips, and then a frown would mar her beautiful features and her heart would begin to pound again. She shook her head a few times, mumbled "no".

Bella rolled over suddenly in her bed. She had been tightly swaddled in blankets, as though she was cold. When she moved to her side, her coverings slipped and I caught a glimpse of bare flesh. It was only her shoulder and part of her upper arm, but it ignited my imagination in a way I was entirely unused to.

I knew from Carlisle's memories that the lure of el cantante was sexual as well as sensual, but nothing had prepared me for the suddenness of my body's reaction. I groaned under the sudden hardening of a part of my body that had long ago been rendered unnecessary. Clenching my fists even tighter and gritting my teeth together, I told myself again. Control.

Distracted thus, I missed the first signs that she was awake. Normally fast enough to flee unseen, I was fairly sure Bella saw me when she sat up suddenly, gasping. She dove for her bedside lamp. I dove for the window.

I stayed out of sight around the side of the house for a while, replaying it all in my mind. Her sleeping form, her scent, the sight of her bare skin, the sound of her heartbeat. Shutting my eyes tightly, I inhaled deeply. I groaned. She was close by. I could smell her.

Again, I paused to consider. It was dangerous, prowling around her house like this. If the wolves caught my scent, they...
would know immediately who was responsible when she vanished. My whole family would be at risk if the pack chose to follow us.

The pull was too strong. I made my way silently to the kitchen window and watched as she rapidly drank a glass of water. Her heart was pounding. She had scared herself with a nightmare.

*You will have no more nightmares soon, mi cantante.*

I realised she was wearing only a tank top on her top half. She was cold. My keen eyes could pick out the goosebumps on her arms. Her nipples were stiff under the flimsy material. I shifted position slightly to afford myself a better look. She detected my motion, and whipped her head towards the window. Of course, I ducked out of sight in time, but I was furious with myself.

*Enough, fool!*

The risks were too great, the stakes too high. I must go home and wait until an opportunity presented itself. I discussed in detail with Carlisle what my options were. He offered to turn her himself, but I longed for just one taste of her intoxicating blood. I began to refine my plan.

Esme was concerned that I was so consumed by my need for Bella that I would make a fatal mistake. She worried about the presence of the wolves. I didn't share her fear. The pack had no reason to connect me to Bella's disappearance. They were too engrossed in their tribe's protection and their imprints.

Carlisle and I were both fascinated by the concept of imprinting. It was in many respects similar to a vampire's singer. The change was immediate, all-consuming to both parties, and irreversible. However while a vampire had no soul and needed to sever a part of its singer's soul to forge the connection, this was not necessary for the wolves. The wolves had their own soul, which joined with the imprint's, forging the most powerful connection even Carlisle had ever encountered.

Morning came, and I was anxious to return to my stake-out. But first, I wanted to know more about *mi cantante.* I went to visit J Jenks, a shady lawyer whom Jasper used on occasion when false documents were required. He was able to access databases and records while I waited and in no time at all, I was armed with the basic facts.

Isabella Marie Swan was 21 years old and a college graduate. She had no significant other who would miss her. Her mother had remarried, and there was little evidence of a relationship with her father.

She was absolutely perfect. Nobody to miss her, nobody in a position to immediately search for her. She would be changed, and long gone before anyone became overly concerned about her.

Elated, I returned to her, *mi cantante.* I growled in anger as I approached her home. Her heartbeat was not there. I took up occupancy in the same house as the day before. It was still downwind from Charlie's house. The revolting stench of the Alpha dog could be smelled even there. His scent was the strongest and the most threatening to our kind. Of all the pack, we were wariest of him. Jacob Black was a strong and unyielding leader. One false move, and he would be ecstatic to give his pack the order to destroy us all.

We avoided him at all costs. Yet his scent was here, at Bella's house. I supposed it wasn't a surprise. His father and Charlie were good friends and when I concentrated, I detected both men in the living room.

Jacob and Bella were both absent. It was difficult to make out either Charlie or Billy's exact thoughts from this distance. I wasn't attuned enough to either mind to be able to cover that distance, but I picked up the general flavour. Billy Black was absolutely ecstatic about something to do with his son. It seemed to involve Bella, but I couldn't imagine what. Charlie was hopeful, again something to do with Bella and Jacob.

I ground my teeth in frustration. I longed to move closer, but knew I could not risk Jacob detecting my presence when he returned for his father. I was forced to wait.

Time had never passed so slowly. I gave up attempting to listen in to the men's thoughts, and spent my time reliving the glorious night before instead. *Her scent, her heart beat, her skin, her beautiful face.*

Finally, finally, I detected a flicker of a dog's thoughts coming closer. Immediately attentive, I rushed to the window. Sure enough, the rusty car that the Alpha dog drove was puttering into view.

I tuned into his thoughts. Anger immediately rose within me.


He was consumed by her. He had ... kissed her. At first I thought it was his vile imagination, but his memory was very clear, and very vivid.

Her hair felt like silk against his calloused fingers. Her skin felt pleasantly cool to his heated touch. Her lips tasted like honey. Her tongue was like velvet against his own. Her body molded to his as though designed just for that purpose. He believed her body was designed for his. He had ... imprinted on her.
I took a foolish risk.

She was mine. The dog was defiling her, treating her with the utmost disrespect. There was more urgency in my thoughts now. It wasn't just about me anymore, wanting to taste her, wanting to change her. I knew I could not allow him to mate with her as his wolf was demanding. I needed to rescue her from him.

Guessing that Jacob was quite literally unable to focus on anything other than his imprint for the time being, I made my way back to Bella's bedroom. Her scent called to me the same way it called to him, and I craved it like an addict. Smelling her through the mind of the Alpha mutt was driving me insane. It was only a ghost of a scent, coming to me through his animalistic pictures and flashes. I wanted the real thing. Bella herself was out of the question as long as Jacob Black was with her. Being in the sanctuary of her bedroom was the next best thing.

I had barely reached her bedroom when I heard her footfalls on the stairs. She was coming up for a blanket for Charlie, I had heard that much. Knowing she was so close, just outside at the hall closet, made me hesitate. I was fast. I didn't know if I was faster than the wolf, but I would have the smallest of head starts. It may be enough.

What was I thinking? Would I bite her there? No. That would be too incriminating. Would I whisk her away? It was tempting. But no, Jacob would know my scent when he inevitably came looking for her. I knew there was no way I could take Bella at this moment. But I had to somehow find a way to get to her before his wolf claimed his imprint.

But wait ... she had passed the closet and was coming to her room. I should have gone back out the window but the opportunity to be so close to her, to smell her, to imagine the taste of her, was too good to pass up.

I flew into her closet, leaving the door slightly ajar so I could watch her and bathe myself in her heady aroma. Her mind remained a curious blank. It added to her intrigue.

I watched as she shut her window, knowing that it would make my own scent concentrated in the confined space of her bedroom. It was fast. I didn't know if I was faster than the wolf, but I would have the smallest of head starts. It may be enough.

I shook my head, trying to clear it of this enormity. I tried to control my anger and block out Jacob's thoughts, but they were loud.

He was surrounded by her scent in the small car. Vanilla mixed with something else. It was frustrating him. He couldn't place it. Of course such an unrefined mutt wouldn't know of an exotic flower such as ylang ylang. But his mind was wandering again now. He had smelled her arousal, and his memory of it triggered further thoughts.

The difference between his memories and his imaginings were clear to me. He thought about burying himself deep within her folds. I fought harder to keep down my anger as he day dreamed of defiling her, mi cantante.

At first, I worried that the Alpha wolf with his increased senses would detect that I had been there. I cursed my own stupidity at entering Bella's bedroom the night before. It quickly became clear however that Jacob was so engrossed in his imprint that he was entirely unable to focus on anything else. Her scent in particular intoxicated him. It seemed to be even more bewitching to him than it was to me. It drove all other scents from his consciousness, and I knew I was safe.

I was forced to hide out and watch the afternoon play out through Jacob Black's thoughts. I witnessed their first kiss in the kitchen and felt his joy when she demanded that he kiss her again. The dog refused her, before throwing her against the fridge and attacking her. She stood no chance against him and I was actually on my way to rescue her, my damsel in distress, when through the mind's eye of my natural enemy I smelled the evidence of her pleasure.

The pull of her soul increased as I cautiously drew closer to them, drawn by the scene that was playing out through Jacob's mind.

When Billy joined them, I witnessed the effects of the imprint on the wild Alpha wolf. He was beyond reason until she soothed him. Jacob's thoughts were primal. His wolf wanted to claim his mate and his father was a threat. Billy was afraid of his own son for the briefest moment. The Chief, a wise man, recognised the animal and had no idea how to handle him in this situation. It was Bella who calmed him. Her touch was soothing, her scent comforting. I marvelled at the effect of her scent on him. It was simultaneously arousing for him, and calming. How strange.

Jacob was very focussed on the scent of mi cantante. Her aroma surrounded him, completely filling his senses and intoxicating him.

The pull of her soul increased as I cautiously drew closer to them, drawn by the scene that was playing out through Jacob's mind.

I shook my head, trying to clear it of this enormity. I tried to control my anger and block out Jacob's thoughts, but they were loud.

I watched as she shut her window, knowing that it would make my own scent concentrated in the confined space of her bedroom. I hoped Jacob was fully pre-occupied.

I could sense the emotions rolling off Bella. She was agitated and appeared a little upset. The dog had evidently elicited strong reactions from her. His mishandling of her had left her breathing ragged. Anger and bile rose in my throat again as a vivid flash from his mind came at me from downstairs. His mind was entirely consumed by her. He was imagining his own russet hand caressing the same pale skin I had coveted only the night before. He was trying to conjure the taste of her pink rosebud nipples as he sucked them into his mouth. Fully aware that his current train of thoughts weren't helping, he was willing his rock hard erection to subside a little and ease his discomfort.

Too much information, dog.
Something seemed to dawn on Bella and she leaped off the bed, heading for the door. The part of her soul that now belonged to me called to her and she paused in the doorway, turning her head and looking directly at my place of concealment.

She could feel me! Happiness surged through me, all anger at the Alpha mutt forgotten. She would be mine, imprint regardless. I just needed patience.

Why was she afraid? I could smell it emanating from her, see it even through the narrow, dark aperture from which I gazed upon her. Was it the power of the emotions I elicited in her that made her so frightened? Fear not, little one.

Two things happened very fast. Bella threw open her bedroom door and Jacob Black, who was lost in a reverie of the disgusting things he wanted to do to her, to mi cantante, caught my scent.

His mental images changed in an instant. His mind saw no longer a beautiful, naked body writhing in pleasure under him and calling his name. Instead, he saw her broken form, bones smashed and a bleeding wound in her neck. Indignation surged through me. Does he think I have no control?

Panic hit him hard and an anger that yes, frightened even me. I thought I had time to get out, but the fool moved at wolf speed, terror at the thought of anything happening to his beloved Bella overriding his common sense, if he had any.

My own panic mirrored his own. I was cornered in a closet. Jacob dragged Bella out of the room and wasted his critical hunting time in checking her welfare. I launched myself out of the closet, whipped open her window, and threw myself out it.

I watched in disbelief as the Alpha dog’s mind went absolutely primal. He was fully prepared to hurl himself out of the window after me, phasing mid air and hunting me to destruction. Fear raced through me at his deadly determination. My time was over.

And then, incredibly, through his anger and malice, Jacob heard his imprint make the smallest of whimpers. It signalled to him that something was wrong with her, and he turned back to her. She was falling to the ground, her legs giving way under her. He ran to break her fall, knowing as he did so that he had lost the opportunity to destroy me.

I ran to safety. I licked my wounds and began to hatch my plan.

Bella’s soul belonged to me. She would be mine. I had given myself away. I would not be so foolish again.

The Alpha dog would ensure his imprint was protected at all times. He would look for an excuse, any excuse to destroy me now. I would not give him one.

I had the advantage, I realised with a smile. I knew his weakness. I knew the one thing that would always distract him from his hunt, take over his senses and give me the advantage. I knew what would help me win this struggle.

Mi cantante.

A/N: Brrrr ... just, brrrrrr. Next chapter will be up quicker than this one was!
I didn't expect to get much sleep that night. When Jacob and I had gone back inside, we found Charlie in a very worked up state. His initial shock had worn off and been replaced with anger and fear.

He was angry at the lies he had been told over the years. He was angry that his oldest, closest friend hadn't trusted him enough to share his secrets. He was angry that the boy he had long regarded as a son lived such a terrifying hidden life.

He was afraid of all he had learned. He feared the world of the supernatural. Most of all, he was terrified of what my future held now that I was tied to a shape shifter.

At some point, Charlie remembered that Edward Cullen had been in the house earlier. He had asked the right questions and Billy had filled him in on the Cullens' true identity. This revelation sparked further fear and anger and by the time Jacob and I returned, Charlie was beyond reason. He attempted to ground me, to forbid Jacob from coming near me, and to refuse to return to the hospital for any treatment under Carlisle Cullen.

I firmly explained that I was an adult and couldn't be grounded, and that Jacob was going to be a permanent fixture in my life. I tried to appease him a little by promising to find him an alternative doctor.

We all talked in circles for a long time. Apologies were given and reasons demanded. Fears were voiced and attempts made to appease them. Charlie remained unyielding. Finally, he became so tired and groggy that I persuaded him to go to bed and told him that we would discuss things further the next day. While Quil brought Charlie upstairs, Embry volunteered to bring Billy and Old Quil home in Jacob's car.

Finally, Quil also left and I found myself alone with Jacob. He pulled me into his arms and told me matter of factly that he would be staying the night.

"I mean it, Bella. You're not going to be unguarded for one minute until I find out what's going on with Cullen."

"So um, you're sleeping here, with me?" I was suddenly nervous. It was one thing to get carried away during a passionate kiss. It was entirely another to walk upstairs with him right now, twelve hours after meeting, and know we were going to bed together.

Jacob tightened his arms around me and kissed my forehead. "I'm gonna sleep outside in wolf form, honey. I'll be right there and I'll hear you if you call me. But I wanna be phased tonight so that when the other wolves phase in they'll know straightaway what's going on. Normally I would've called the pack together but it's the middle of the night." He kissed my lips softly and looked almost shy as he asked, "Wanna see me?"

"Your wolf?" I felt ridiculously excited and he laughed when my voice reflected my feelings.

"Yeah. C'mon, you look dead on your feet. Let's check your room, then you get ready for bed while I go phase. I'll wait in the trees till you're ready."

Jacob took no chances. He checked over the entire house, paying extra attention to closets, nooks and crannies. As soon as we entered my bedroom, he let out a low, menacing growl. My heart automatically constricted in fear. Was Edward here?

"Sorry, honey," Jacob soothed me. "I can still smell him a little." His fists were clenched and he was trembling hard. He looked away from me and took a large step across the room. I sensed something was off. Reaching out to him, I asked what was wrong. He hesitated and my temper, fuelled by exhaustion, came to the fore.

"Tell me, Jacob! Enough secrets already, okay?"

"I know, it's just ... you've dealt with everything so well and ... I don't want this to make it too weird for you."

"It gets weirder?" I asked him dryly. I didn't really see how it possibly could, but from the expression on his face, there was still something I didn't know.

I was absolutely drained. Sitting on my bed with a sigh, I said, "Spit it out, Jacob."

He continued to stand at the other side of the room, looking uncomfortable as he stumbled his way through an explanation. "It's an Alpha thing. Well, an Alpha imprint thing, really. See, you ... or, my wolf thinks anyway, that you belong to me. Or to him. With all the wolves, when we imprint, we have this ... I suppose you would call it an urge, to mate. After making love, our scent is kind of permanently transferred to our imprint and every other wolf or challenger knows she's been claimed. And according to the imprinted wolves in my pack, making love for the first time also intensifies the imprint. Anyway, everything's stronger with me because I'm Alpha. Which means that my ..." He hesitated as though searching for the right words and his cheeks darkened, "... need to ... take you, is strong already. But with knowing that my enemy wants you for some reason, it's ... difficult to control. And being in here, sensing that he's been in here and then you being right there..."
and we're alone ... let's just say it's testing my willpower and I don't think I'm gonna win this one. So I'm gonna go. Right now." He turned and fled, leaving me sitting on the edge of my bed, slightly stunned.

I thought that maybe I should have been alarmed but frankly, the fact that he wanted me so badly kind of excited me. I took a few minutes to process everything he had just said before slowly standing up. Moving to my window, I looked down but couldn't see anything.

"Jacob, are you there?" I hissed, feeling slightly foolish. A baleful yip from the treeline drew my eyes in the right direction, and then the most enormous wolf began trotting across the yard. It was difficult to tell in the dark, but his fur seemed to be an unusual shade of brown. He was beautiful, majestic. Enthralled, I watched as he came closer, his eyes never leaving mine. A smile spread across my face which turned into a laugh when his wolfish lips formed an unmistakable grin.

"Can I come down?" I called. After the speech he had just given me, I didn't want to make things more difficult for him and I guessed that his wolf would struggle more than the man around me. At the same time, I desperately wanted to acquaint myself with Jacob's wolf. I was elated when he nodded, jerking his head to the side to let me know I should use the back door. I suppose a young woman talking to an enormous wolf in full view of the street would be too conspicuous.

He was sitting outside the back door waiting for me when I stepped outside. It was freezing and I was just wearing a T-shirt and my jeans. I shivered and stepped closer to his warmth. I snuggled right into his thick fur, running my fingers through it. It was, I noticed, a deep russet colour. I didn't feel weird, or like this was in any way strange or unnatural. Jacob was a wolf, I was his soulmate, and I was showing him my acceptance. Pulling back to look in his eyes, I saw that the wolf's were identical to the human's. Warm and intelligent. They gazed back at me with absolute adoration and I smiled up at him.

"You're beautiful," I told him. He lowered his huge face, rubbed my cheek gently with his gigantic head, and turned to trot back towards the treeline.

Fifteen minutes later, ready for bed but certain that I wouldn't sleep for one minute that night, I looked out my bedroom window again. An immediate low bark told me that my Protector was there, watching over me. I blew him a kiss, climbed into bed, and must have fallen promptly asleep.

My dreams began pleasantly. An enormous russet wolf watched over me with gentle brown eyes as I wandered along a beach. I recognised the driftwood tree that Jacob had first kissed me on. I walked straight past it up to the forest beyond and as I approached it, the ache in my chest began once more. I clutched my arm around my middle to hold it together, but kept on course into the trees. A pair of golden eyes watched me from among the foliage. Turning to look for my wolf, he was nowhere to be seen. The eyes in the foliage glinted evilly and I heard an agonised howl. Jacob was hurt! I tried to run in the direction of the howl but everywhere I turned, the eyes were watching me. I became disorientated and began to run blindly through the forest with something behind me. Looking over my shoulder, I saw Edward Cullen gaining on me.

"Bella!"

I sat bolt upright in bed. A figure was leaning over the bed and I opened my mouth to scream. A hot hand clamped over my mouth and Jacob's husky voice said quietly, "Sssh honey, it's me, it's Jacob. Don't wake Charlie. You were having a bad dream 'sall."

I tried to regain control over my ragged breathing and shaking form. I nodded at him to signal that I understood and he removed his hand from over my mouth. Cautiously, he sat down on the mattress and rubbed my arm soothingly. Despite my fear, I noticed that he was only wearing a pair of shorts. His upper half was on full display. My eyes ran over impressive abs, and muscular arms and shoulders.

"You okay?"

"Nightmare," I gasped out. "I was on the beach with your wolf, and then I went into the forest but I lost you. I heard you howl like you were in pain, and my chest started to ache again. And Edward was there, following me. Then when I woke up, I thought you were him!"

Jacob pulled a face. "You really think with me guarding you he would've got in here? That's kind of insulting, you know. Move over."

I scooted across the mattress. When I realised that this russet demi-God was about to climb into my bed, my heart skipped a beat. He grinned and I realised he had heard it. There was no time to get embarrassed about it, though. Jacob lay down next to me and pulled me easily into his side. I wrapped my arm over his stomach and rested my head on his shoulder. His heat and proximity instantly soothed me and I smiled.

We lay there quietly for a little while. My mind calmed and my breathing and heart rate evened out to a slower pace. Jacob's torso moved under my arm in a steady rhythm as he breathed. I repositioned my head so I could hear the steady thumping of his heart beat. His heart was all I could hear. There was no traffic outside, no noises in the house other than a very occasional creak. It was so peaceful lying there next to him, and the thought came unbidden into my head.

I'm in love with this man.

I must have tensed, or perhaps the rhythm of my heart or breathing altered because Jacob noticed a change in me.
"Bella?" he whispered.

Oh no way. I wasn't going to say those words to him tonight. Even with all the imprint and supernatural stuff, even with his promise that what he felt for me was a thousand times stronger than what I felt for him, he hadn't said those words and there was still a small part of me that was disbelieving at the speed we were moving at. I swallowed before answering.

"I was just thinking how I only met you less than twenty four hours ago but you already mean so much to me," I whispered back to him.

Jacob's arms tightened around me and he kissed my hair. "I'm glad, Bella," he murmured. "You do know that you are literally my whole universe now, right?"

"I think so. It's still a lot to get my head around but I'm getting there," I told him honestly.

We lay there in silence for a little longer. He began to run his fingers through my hair, and I smiled against his chest. How could he know how much I liked that? I knew it was the supernatural effects of our imprint and he was letting his instinct guide him, but it astonished me.

"It's amazing how you just know me," I told him.

"Just the same as you know me," he observed. "Like in the kitchen earlier, when dad came in. Sorry about that. I'm not a total animal, I promise."

I snorted. "I don't think it would bother me if you were, Jake." His fingers stilled in my hair for a moment.

"That's the first time you've called me that," he murmured. "I like the way you say it."

"I liked the way you said 'Bells' earlier," I told him. He had only said it the once, echoing Charlie just after he met me.

"That's us sorted, then," he told me with a smile in his voice. "We're Jake 'n' Bells."

"That sounds ... right," I marvelled and he tilted my face up to meet his, kissing me gently.

"Doesn't it," he breathed against my lips. "No formal Jacob and Bella here."

I lay in his arms for a while longer, smiling as widely as I could see he was whenever I looked up at him. Without really thinking about it, I turned my head to kiss his chest. His sharp intake of breath caught my attention and I kissed him again, lingering over it this time.

"Bella."

"Yes?"

"That's ... sensitive."

"What, this?" I kept looking at him as I lowered my lips to his chest again. His eyes widened and even my human ears heard his heart start to pound as I touched his skin with my lips, and swirled my tongue around.

"Minx," he told me. His voice was huskier than usual and I smiled sweetly at him before settling back into the position I had been in before.

"Keep that kind of behaviour up and I'm gonna have to go," he informed me candidly.

"Why? I mean I know everything now. You've told me your wolf wants to mate with me. Why are we waiting, exactly?" I knew I should be shocked by how forward I was being and how desperate I was in my desire for him, but being with this man felt so right. Nothing I did with him would ever be a mistake. I knew that instinctively and I didn't see the need to wait.

"Charlie," he informed me grimly. "You saw him tonight, Bells." My name fell naturally from his full lips. "He's really unsure of me right now. If he hears us, it's not gonna help things and we might need him on our side soon."

"I thought he loved you," I grumbled.

"He did! That was before he found out I'm a wolf, I hunt and destroy vampires, and I've imprinted on his daughter, though. I think that tested his love a little." I could hear the smile in his voice but I also detected a hint of sadness. I wondered suddenly how Jake and the rest of his pack felt about being wolves. It was one thing we hadn't covered in the forest earlier.

"Do you like being a wolf?" I was genuinely curious.

"Sometimes," he admitted honestly. "There are good things about it. There are some fuckin' awesome things about it. But then it can just plain suck, too."
"What's good?"

"Speed. Strength. Heightened senses."

"And bad?"

"Heightened senses." I heard the grin in his voice and raised my head to look at him questioningly. "Like now," he clarified. "I'm lying here half naked next to the beautiful girl I imprinted on less than a day ago, and it's fuckin' killing me."

"I'm yours," I told him firmly. *Just take me already.* "I can be quiet," I added hopefully.

"You'll be screaming my name," Jake told me confidently. I didn't doubt him and a thrill ran through me, ending up at my core. He groaned and started to move off the bed.

"Where are you going?"

"Fresh air," he told me.

"When?" I almost snarled it at him, I was so frustrated.

"Bella, our first time together is going to be special, and we are going to be alone so that I can do everything I want to do to you." Despite my annoyance, another thrill ran through me at his words. "We will be together real soon honey, I promise," he whispered before heading to the window. I sat bolt upright as I realised he was going to jump out it.

"What are you doing?" I hissed, but he was already gone.

I had no more nightmares that night. When I woke with the sun rays coming in my window, I realised that the dreams I did have may have tested Jake's self control to the limit.

**Jake**

Jake raced snarling through the forest. His ferocity as a wolf was unparalleled at the best of times, and he was more keyed up that morning than any of his pack had ever seen him. He didn't even attempt to conceal his thoughts as he hurtled towards the meeting point.

Word had spread by that time. The entire pack knew. Their Alpha had finally imprinted. The fact that his imprint was a white girl had caused a sensation. The fact that she was the daughter of a good friend to the tribe's Chief had pleased them all, and they were glad that Charlie Swan now knew the truth about them.

The pack had seen freshly imprinted wolves before, and they knew the agitation that came with it. They also knew their Alpha would be worse affected by the need to claim his mate than the rest of them. Still, they were all staggered by the force of his passion. They all sat nervously, waiting for him to reach the clearing in the forest. Only Quil was absent. He was guarding the Swan residence but was connected to them through the pack mind.

Jake’s thoughts assaulted them all. Fuck, he needed to mate. The younger wolves shifted uneasily as their leader relived the way Bella felt in his arms, the feel of her lips against his, the way she had teased him in her bed, making his cock throb. She had gone back to sleep after he left. He had heard her moaning his name and the fact that she was calling him Jake now pleased him absurdly. He had smelled her arousal from the trees across her yard.

He howled in frustration as he tore into the clearing where his pack were assembled, waiting for him. Not a single wolf would antagonise him today. There would be none of the good natured ribbing amongst themselves that Jacob usually tolerated. This was all business.

Sam, the previous Alpha and current Beta, was the first to openly acknowledge the situation.

*Congratulations, Jake. I'm happy for you. She'll be good for you.*

*Don't know if it fuckin' feels that way right now, Sam.*

**Embry** - *Easy, Jake. You expected this.*

Jacob snarled viciously and Embry dipped his head. His old friend was not going to be reasoned with right now. The wolves all understood. They would simply keep a low profile until their Alpha had claimed his mate. Repeatedly, no doubt. That last thought was Quil's and Jacob threw a wave of anger his way before starting the meeting.

*You all know about Cullen. I don't know what he wants with Bella but he will not get it. Until we know more, one extra wolf needs to be on duty at all times. That wolf will be guarding Bella's home. I'll take on as many of those shifts as possible and no, I won't be in wolf form but the usual rules apply. Howl for me if you need to. Questions?*

**Seth** - *Jake we'll be phased in Cullen territory.*
The treaty no longer exists.

A tremor of unease ran through the pack. The treaty had stood for generations. It had worked for generations. Voiding it may cause repercussions.

**Jared** - *What if they cross into our territory, Jake?*

*Then hell fucking mend them.*

A collective curse ran through the wolves’ minds. Their Alpha was out of control and beyond reason. With one mind, they looked to their Beta to handle him. Nobody else wanted to take him on.

**Sam** - *We need to communicate with them if we’re changing the rules.*

*I know I’m going to them today. Sam, I’ll need you with me. Embry, Seth, you too.*

Jake didn’t need to explain his choices. They all saw it in his mind. Sam, Embry and Seth were his most level headed wolves. He knew he was capable of acting irrationally at the moment and was leaving his volatile wolves behind. Relief flooded the pack. They would fight and destroy any bloodsucker happily, but to start a dangerous war because their leader was horny seemed foolish.

Jacob snarled viciously at them all and Sam stepped in again.

*Jacob please consider holding off going to the Cullens until you have claimed Bella.*

He let them all see it. He was afraid of the pull she felt to Edward. He didn’t know what it was and it frightened him. His wolf needed answers. He guessed that Edward wanted her for his own.

**Sam** - *All the more reason for you to claim her first, Jake. Once you’ve finalized the imprint, she belongs to you completely. She will be under your Protection and she will no longer be appealing to a bloodsucker.*

*We don’t know all that for sure, Sam. It’s just a legend that our imprints are Protected. We’ve never tested it.*

**Sam** - *All the legends have been true so far. And you have nothing to lose anyway.*

The wolves watched as Jake thought that through. Profound relief rolled off them in waves when they saw his resolve form. He would claim his mate that very day. Only when his wolf was sated would he go to the Cullens. He showed the wolves where he was taking Bella and knew they would stay far away from there until they heard from him again.

*Charlie needs looked after, and dad will need help too.*

**Jared** - *Don’t worry about that. The girls will help out and we’ll keep doing the physical handling as we have been.*

Jake sent his gratitude to them all. He ignored Paul who was trying his hardest to keep his mind in check, valuing his hide too much to enrage his Alpha today. Paul’s gut was telling him that the reservation could be attacked by a coven of vampires right now and their Alpha would still be thinking with his dick. Jake felt Paul’s instincts and hid his own response. He wholeheartedly agreed.

As day broke over the reservation, Jacob headed to the red cabin he shared with Billy. He hadn’t slept in over twenty four hours but his thoughts were not of rest. He longed to return to his imprint but knew that he should let her sleep for a while longer. She would need her energy today.

Jake let himself into the cabin, showered, and ate. It was 8am. He allowed himself a short nap on the couch until he heard Billy stir. Going to his father, he helped him get through his morning routine and into his chair, talking all the time. Billy sensed his son’s urgency and knew Jake was in no mood for discussions. He simply listened as he outlined his plans.

"The pack will be around for both you and Charlie, the girls too. Edward wants something with Bella and I’m going to get to the bottom of it. But first, I’m going to claim her," Jacob was matter of fact about it. He knew his dad understood. Billy had been around the pack long enough to know that taking their mate was a priority to all newly imprinted wolves. He also knew that the Alpha’s drive would be unparalleled. He simply nodded, and Jacob continued.

"I don't know what Charlie will make of this but to be honest, I don't care right now. I'll deal with that afterwards. Sam thinks if I claim Bella, she won't be so appealing to Cullen. That settles it as far as I'm concerned. I don't know how long we'll be gone. Sam's in charge while I'm away."

Billy kept all thoughts to himself and simply accepted the facts. He trusted in Jake’s ability to run the pack. He knew if his son felt his imprint was under any threat, his response would be primal. Billy had seen Jake’s anger firsthand when he himself had interrupted him the day before.

Pack life was on hold until the Alpha’s needs were satisfied, and his mate had been claimed as his own.

*Bella’s POV*
I yawned and stretched, rolling over in bed to check the time. It was after 9am. Listening intently, I heard no noise in the house. Charlie must still be sleeping. We had had a late night. My chest ached. The Edward Effect. Guessing that meant that Jake was no longer outside, I went to my window and scanned the treeline. After a moment, a giant chocolate coloured wolf appeared at the edge of the forest, nodding at me in acknowledgement. I didn't know who it was, or if I had even met them yet. Jacob said there were nine wolves protecting La Push and I had only met six so far. I waved anyway, and went to shower and dress.

I took my time in the shower, washing my hair and shaving. I knew it was only a matter of time before Jacob and I made love and I sensed that for all he kept pulling back, he didn't want to wait much longer. I wanted to be at my best for him.

It was 10am when I was finally dressed and in the kitchen, eating breakfast. I was wearing a sweater, my chest aching and my body cold. I almost felt like crying, my need to have Jake by my side was so strong. It wasn't just so that he could make me feel whole again, either.

I heard the roar of an engine outside and when the knock on the door came, it sounded urgent. I knew it was Jake when the ache began to lessen as I walked towards the door. Throwing it open, my ecstatic smile froze on my lips when I took in his appearance.

Jake's eyes were blazing with lust and determination. His entire body was tensed with purpose. He held out a helmet to me and jerked his head towards a motorbike that stood alongside my truck. A large bag was strapped to it.

"We're going now."

I knew exactly what he meant and my body responded instantly.

"What do I need?"

"Just you."

Nodding, I took the helmet in one hand, and his hand in my other. He led me to the bike and fastened my helmet for me.

"When will we be back?" I needed to know before we left that he had made arrangements for Charlie.

"I don't know," he told me honestly. "But Charlie will be looked after honey. Don't worry." He swung his leg over the bike and looked over his shoulder as I climbed on behind him and held tightly around his waist.

His muscular leg kicked the throttle and the bike roared to life under us. Gunning the engine, Jake tore us out of the driveway and towards an unknown destination.

I wasn't sure if I would ever be the same again, after this experience. I couldn't have cared less.

A/N: So *clears throat* the next chapter is called Lovin' The Quileute Way, and it is what it says. Don't say I didn't warn you.
Chapter 8 Lovin' the Quileute Way

A/N: Do you know the only chapter I’ve ever posted that got more reviews than the last one was the final chapter of WotW. So because you asked, here you are...

Thank you to MistC and niamhg for giving up time over their Easter weekend to read this for me:-D

The trip seemed to take a long time. I didn't know exactly how fast Jake was driving but I suspected that however long the journey was taking, it should have been longer. I simply held on tight and trusted Jake to keep me safe.

He sped us along the highway and then onto a smaller road that wound up into the mountainside. We climbed higher and I became aware that the air I was breathing was becoming thinner and icier. I was wearing my sweater but that wouldn't keep out the chill from the October mountain air. I knew that meant Jake wasn't planning on letting me out of his arms and the thought shot directly to my already inflamed core.

The bike wobbled ever so slightly and I fought to control my hormones. **Think of something else, Bella!**

I wondered what Charlie would make of this, and cringed. Everything about it would horrify him. He hated motorbikes and here I was, tearing along a narrow path on one, clinging on to a shape shifter. I was undoubtedly on my way to have sex with that shape shifter. And I was more aroused than I had ever been in my life. **Think of something else!**

And so the drive went on. Jake tore up the path and I struggled to control my thoughts and my body's responses. The thrumming of the bike that I straddled wasn't helping either.

Finally, Jake brought the bike to a stop and twisted his head to look at me.

"Well that was an interesting ride, Bella," he told me and I blushed furiously.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't help it!" I blurted out but he just laughed at me.

"Don't apologise. It was good for my ego." I struggled to climb off the bike. "I don't think your ego needs any help," I told him. He grinned cockily as he swung easily off the bike and unfastened my helmet.

"Probably not," he admitted.

I looked around me, suddenly doubting our reasons for being here. Had I misunderstood the purpose of this trip? We were high up on a mountain and there was nothing in the area that was obviously a house, or anywhere to stay really. I frowned. Surely Jake hadn't brought us all the way here for a picnic or something?

I turned to him and saw that he was watching me uncertainly. "Um ... is this okay, Bells? It's just that I thought we would be absolutely alone here which wouldn't happen at either of our houses. Would you have preferred somewhere more ... uh, indoors?"

I couldn't help it. I burst out laughing. Apparently I hadn't misinterpreted his intentions, and we really were going to make love on the mountainside.

"Just a couple of questions," I told him. "Are we staying here? I mean, we'll need to eat if we're gone for long."

Jake smiled at me and extended his hand for me to take. "Let me show you around. We need to climb a little higher but it's not far." He swung the large bag from his bike up and over his shoulder, and held it with his free hand. As we walked and climbed, Jake helping me when I needed it, he talked about the place he was bringing me to.

"My mom's ashes were scattered here. It's the place I come to when I want to be alone. Nobody else ever comes up here. I've never brought anyone here before, either." I was struck again by how matter of fact Jake was about everything. It seemed perfectly natural to him that he would bring me here, to his place of solitude, a day after meeting me. He just accepted so completely that we were meant for one another.

"I remember your mom," I told him. "She was always really kind to me. More than my own mom was, in some ways." Jake said nothing but squeezed my hand. "You must miss her," I observed quietly and he nodded.

"Of course I do. I mean, there isn't anything I can do about it, but ... yeah."

We were quiet for a short time. Suddenly, we climbed over a boulder and I gasped at what lay before me. It seemed as though the plateau we had reached was the top of the world. La Push and the beach and forest lay below us, stretched out like a miniature playset. There was what looked like a cave naturally formed in the rock face to our left. Outside the mouth of the cave was the remnants of a fire and the ground to our right sloped sharply downhill to a wooded area. I could hear what sounded like running water but couldn't see anything.
I turned a full 360 degrees before looking at Jake. He was watching me with a small smile on his lips.

"This is so beautiful!" I gasped and he nodded, still smiling.

"Fireplace right there for roasting food and general human warming," he indicated the remnants of the fire outside the cave. "Mountain stream that way for bathing," he gestured down towards the wooded area. "And boudoir ... right over there," he pointed over my shoulder to the cave.

"Bathroom?" I checked and he made an apologetic face.

"Outdoors, sorry."

I nodded, unbothered. This wasn't what I had pictured but now that we were here, it seemed exactly what we needed.

"It's perfect," I told him and he grinned happily at me.

"Let me light that fire," he said. "Then we can unpack the bag and uh ..." His voice tailed off and I smiled at his retreating back. I watched as he easily picked up large fallen branches and tossed them onto the fireplace.

"I thought you would be keeping me warm," I chided. He grinned at me over his shoulder.

"Oh I will be." Again with that confidence. I shivered in anticipation.

"Can I do anything to help?"

"Nope. Just enjoy the view. I won't be long."

I settled myself on a boulder, watching Jake bend down to pick up another branch. It actually looked like half a small tree but he handled it easily, breaking it over his knee and bending again to pick up a piece that fell off.

"The view's amazing," I told him cheekily. He turned to look at me and laughed when he realised I'd been talking about his ass. He shook his head at me in mock disgust and turned back to finish his job of lighting the fire. I thought he bent over a little more often than was really necessary after that, not that I was complaining.

The fire was lit quickly and I moved to its heat, shivering slightly in only my sweater. Jake opened the bag and pulled out a blanket and a stash of food and drinks, all of which he stored in the cave. Finally, he turned to look at me. My heart began to pound and my palms to sweat. The look in his eyes left me in no doubt.

This was it.

Slowly, Jake closed the distance between us. He was watching me very closely, as though afraid I would bolt. I maintained eye contact, willing him to understand that I was as certain of this as he was. Very, very slowly, he raised one hand and cupped my cheek with it.

"Bella." His voice was scarcely above a whisper. "This isn't just about my wolf claiming its imprint. I want you to know that. It's about me, the man, loving you, Bella Swan. Okay?"

Did he just say it?

Comprehension flashed in his eyes in response to whatever he saw on my face. Raising an eyebrow, he gave an amused smile as he said, "I am completely in love with you, Bella, did you not understand that?"

I felt myself blush. "I kind of thought you would be but, you hadn't said it," I defended myself.

Smiling, Jake brushed my lips with his own and murmured against them, "I love you."

I locked my arms around his neck and murmured back, "And I love you." Jake's head jerked back to look at me and his smile was stunning. The next thing I knew, I was crushed in his arms and he was kissing me with breathtaking passion. I felt his need for me and moaned into his mouth as I realised that this kiss would not be broken, he would not pull back this time.

Right there, standing on the mountaintop, Jacob Black began to undress me. He seemed to be in no hurry as he slowly pulled my sweater over my head and tossed it aside. He languorously ran his large, hot hands upwards over the bare skin of my arms as he sucked my bottom lip into his mouth and ran his tongue along it. Goosebumps formed on my arms as the cold mountain air contrasted with the heat from his hands. He turned one of his hands around and ran the back of his fingers slowly from my shoulder down to my wrist. His other hand cupped my neck as his tongue slowly entered my mouth, tasting my own tongue as it began to dance with his.

I loosened my arms around his neck and tangled my fingers in his thick, jaw length hair instead. Jake's hand slipped slowly under my T-shirt. He ran his fingers around the waistband of my jeans, then slipped his hand up my back and held me in place while he began slowly moving his tongue around my mouth, probing and exploring. I moved one of my hands and began feeling for the hem of his untucked T-shirt, longing to feel the firmness of his muscles under my hand. I moved as slowly as he was, stroking my fingers along his abs. I felt his breathing hitch and deepen and responded with a firmer touch that made him groan into my mouth.
He released my neck and broke our kiss to pull my T-shirt over my head. It was discarded just as my sweater had been and I stood in front of him in my bra and jeans. I saw and felt his eyes rake over me. There was a fire smoldering in them that made me shiver. He gazed openly at my breasts and I realised that a combination of my arousal and the cold mountain air had stiffened my nipples. Reaching behind my back, I unfastened my bra and watched as his eyes widened and darkened when I slid it down my arms and threw it away.

"This is a little unfair," I told him candidly, smiling as I indicated his T-shirt.

It was discarded in moments. We stood slightly apart, drinking the sight of each other in. Jake's muscular chest was perfect. Reaching out, I traced each defined muscle of his 6-pack and watched as his skin quivered and formed goosebumps under my touch. Jacob put his arms around me and pulled me closer to him, kissing me passionately again. I felt his hot, solid chest against my cold, softer one and the collision of sensations made us both moan loudly.

Suddenly desperate for him, my hands reached for Jake's jeans and I began to unfasten them. He gripped my ass through my own jeans, squeezing tightly as I began to pull down his pants. He was wearing nothing underneath. Stepping back from me slightly, he kicked off his shoes and socks and whipped his jeans completely off.

Jacob Black stood naked before me. I saw his manhood for the first time. It was standing proudly to attention and like everything else about him, it was impressive. Unable to help myself, I licked my lips and heard him growl as he reached for me with a new urgency of his own.

Dropping to both knees before me, Jake swiftly removed my own sneakers and socks, and had my jeans unfastened and around my ankles in no time. I stepped out of them and kicked them to the side. Still kneeling in front of me, Jake pulled my panties down and discarded them, too. His gaze raked over my entire naked form. Looking down at him, I saw his heavy cock twitch and hoped that meant he liked what he saw.

Leaning forward, he began to kiss my abdomen, just below my navel. He put his hands on my hips, steadying me firmly as he began peppering kisses over my stomach. He created a hot trail down towards my mound before diverting and kissing down my inner thigh. I knew he would be able to smell exactly what he was doing to me and I didn't care. I tangled my fingers into his hair. I longed for his touch, any part of him between my legs to ease the ache that he was creating there. I felt moisture begin to trickle down my leg and he extended his tongue, slowly licking up the telltale trail to my core. He moaned against me as he licked his way along the centre of my folds. The combination of his tongue and moan sent jolts through me and I gasped and staggered slightly. Jake simply tightened his grip on my hips and licked me again, slowly and very deliberately. A whimper escaped from me and Jake began kissing back up my stomach, rising from his knees reluctantly. I didn't want him to stop for any reason. Hypothermia be damned. Jake gripped the backs of my thighs and continued to grind into me.

"Are you cold?" His voice was deep and husky, his eyes full of longing. I realised I was actually freezing and nodded reluctantly. I didn't want him to stop for any reason. Hypothermia be damned. Jake gripped the backs of my thighs and lifted me effortlessly. I wound my legs around him and leaned into his warmth. I started to kiss and suck on his neck and felt a rumble reverberate through his chest as he carried me closer to the fire.

"Wait here," he told me, his voice still contorted with lust. I wasn't sure where exactly he thought I would go, stark naked on the mountainside, but the ability to be snarky had left me and I simply nodded.

He was back in moments, with the blanket from the cave. He laid it out on the ground and lifted me again. He placed me on the blanket before slowly lowering himself on top of me. His body heat instantly began to warm my cold skin. He moved his mouth to my neck and began nibbling and kissing around my neck and collarbone while rolling his hips and grinding his erection against my thigh. I moaned, raking my fingernails into his back. I managed to move one leg out from under his weight to wrap it around his waist. Jake moved one hand to my ass and pulled me more tightly against him as he continued to grind into me.

We were both breathing hard and moaning when Jake began to kiss down to my breasts. He moved his hand back up from my ass to fondle one breast while he sucked and nipped at the other with his lips and teeth. Every time his teeth grazed my hardened nipple, a jolt of electricity flew down to my core and I felt myself grow wetter and wetter.

The noises Jake was making were beginning to sound animalistic and I could feel his taut muscles strain under my touch. I suspected my scent was driving him completely out of his mind. He raised his head and our eyes met. He was teetering on the brink of control. I saw it in his hooded gaze and the set of his jaw.

"Let go, Jake," I whispered to him as I reached down to touch his member for the first time. His hips jerked as my hand closed around him and he thrust into my palm with his loudest moan yet. His eyes squeezed shut.

"No, Bella," he groaned. "I am not letting the wolf take over. I'm not a complete animal."

"You won't hurt me." I knew instinctively what he was afraid of and I trusted him implicitly. "Do what you need to do." But he continued to shake his head with his eyes squeezed shut. He was fighting with himself and the power of our imprint guided me. Releasing my hold on him, I pushed at him.

"Roll onto your back." He did as I bid him, eyes still tightly shut, cheeks flushed and one arm thrown out above his head. His other hand pulled me up on top of him and I straddled his hips and began kissing down his chest and abs. His breathing deepened and I took my time, kissing and sucking my way down to his perfectly formed V. I propped myself up one
arm, and began slowly stroking his erection with my other hand.

I wasn't sure why, but despite clearly arousing him further, my actions also soothed him. I felt him relax a little under me and his breathing evened out. Finally, he murmured at me to stop and gently pushed my hand away from his thick penis. Looking at him, I saw that his eyes were open again and he was smiling softly.

"You're some kind of witch," he teased me and I knew the man was back in control of the wolf. Pushing himself into a sitting position, he gently lifted me into his lap and I wound my legs around his waist. Running his hands through my hair, he began kissing at my neck and jawline. He moved one hand round to my breast and fondled it, tugging at my nipple and eliciting a loud moan from me which made him smile against my neck.

My core was throbbing for his touch again by the time he slowly ran his hand down my stomach and between my legs. Thrilled by the thought that he was finally going to touch me the way my body was longing for, I threw my head back and tilted my hips to give him better access.

Jake growled my name and bit down on my shoulder as he began moving his thumb in tight circles around my clit. I jumped slightly at the heat of his touch before whimpering as his long middle finger pushed inside me.

The cold mountain air swirled at my back as Jake's heat radiated from him to warm my front. His hot mouth was kissing and biting all along my shoulder and collarbone. His hot hand worked between my legs and brought me closer to the brink of ecstasy. The combination of all those sensations were overloading me and making me lose all control. I wondered if this was similar to how Jake himself had felt earlier.

Jake pushed another finger inside me, pumping in and out as his thumb continued to circle my clit and his other hand tangled roughly in my hair. His mouth moved to my breasts again, his teeth grazing my nipple and sending delicious currents to the core that he was expertly working.

He was so in tune with my body. Every spot he touched that gave me pleasure, he concentrated on. Every change in pressure that thrilled me was taken full advantage of as he brought me closer and closer to the brink. I began riding his fingers, beyond caring that I was sweating and flushed, or that I was gasping and moaning incoherently. My entire body was consumed with finding its release. I knew beyond any doubt that Jake was going to give me it.

"Look at me Bella." His voice was heavy with emotion and when I opened my eyes, I saw him looking at me with so much lust and adoration it made my head spin. "Keep looking at me," he ordered me. "I want to see your eyes when you cum."

"Fuck!" It fell out of my mouth and his eyes widened before an amused smile crossed his features. He suddenly crooked his fingers inside me and swept his thumb across my clitoris. My walls convulsed around his hand as I came with a loud moan, my eyes locked on his. I felt myself fall apart at the seams when I realised he wasn't stopping. He continued to rub my over-stimulated clit and as my walls clenched hard again, I cried out his name at full volume. I didn't know whether I could take any more. A satisfied smile crossed his face and I remembered his promise, You'll be screaming my name.

Breathlessly, I started to come down from my Jake high, leaning my forehead against his as my heart rate began to slow. Jake removed his fingers from inside me, tilted my chin and kissed me deeply. He gently lay me on my back, never breaking our kiss, and positioned himself above me.

"This might be a good time to talk about protection," he observed with a small smile against my lips.

"I've been on the pill for years," I assured him and he nodded.

"Okay." Pulling his face back to look at me with a cheeky grin, he asked, "How d'you like Quileute lovin' so far?"

I laughed. "I think it might be addictive."

"Just gettin' started, honey," he informed me, his grin still huge as he closed the distance between us to kiss me deeply again. I could feel his hot, heavy need against my thigh. I tangled my fingers in his hair and wrapped my leg around his waist again, wanting to feel him inside me.

"Jake," I moaned. He muffled a groan of his own and rocked his hips into me.

"I want you, Bells." He practically slurred the words in his need and I pushed my hips up to him.

"Then take me!"

Slowly, he positioned himself at my entrance and equally slowly began to push his way inside me. His eyes looked deeply into mine as he moved. My eyes widened at his sheer size and he stopped, allowing me to adjust.

"I'm fine," I told him after a moment. "Keep going."

Jake was gentle with me. The struggle he had felt with his wolf earlier seemed to have gone completely. He pushed slowly until he was fully seated within me. When he began rocking in and out of me, he was in control and taking his time. His size and heat filled me and took over my senses. He lifted one of my legs higher around his waist and angled his hips so he could push deeper into me, hitting an exquisite spot as he did so. Our eyes were still locked and I saw the emotions
surface as he slowly moved in and out of me.

I felt it the moment his soul began to inhabit my own. Up until then, our souls had been joined together, embracing one another. But now, as Jake used his body to penetrate mine, his soul entered mine too. I saw his eyes widen as his warmth and light found an empty space inside me. A part of his soul immediately filled that cold, dark void and I knew Edward's ache had been eliminated forever. Whatever Edward had done to me, Jake had quite literally cured.

Tears began to spill from my eyes as I absorbed the magnitude of what was happening between us. The bond between our souls had deepened. A part of Jake literally resided within my being now. I felt it as clearly as I felt him moving in and out of me. Tears ran down my face and he gently kissed them away. His own eyes when he looked at me again were moist.

He moved my leg even higher on his waist, hitting some magical spot deep inside me when he pushed in again. I felt my stomach clench and moaned loudly as he increased his pace a little. My fingernails dug into the flesh on his back and he growled, his next thrusts becoming quite uncoordinated.

Jake reached between us and began massaging my clit again with his thumb. Combined with the spot he was hitting deep within me, the friction he created brought me to a sudden release. I screamed out his name again as my hips jerked upwards of their own accord. I felt a rush of juices between my legs and my walls convulsed around his erection, making him grunt and drop his head into the crook of my neck as he thrust into me a few more times.

Quickening his pace now, Jake threw his head back with a moan as he neared his own release. I was stunned at the force of the orgasm that had just ripped through me and my breathing was still heavy when he suddenly stilled within me, his head raised and looking alert.

"Jake?" I was surprised that he had stopped so close to cumming.

Something flashed across his eyes. It was anger but also a deep concern and he dropped his head back into the crook of my neck again, mumbling something that sounded like, "I don't fuckin' believe this."

"Wha-?" I was trying to figure out what was going on and drawing a blank. Slowly, grimacing as though it was causing him actual physical pain to do so, Jake pulled out of me.

Teeth gritted, he ground out, "Bella I am so sorry. I need to go phase, just for a minute and I will be. Right. Back. Something's goin' on with the pack, can you hear them?"

Concentrating for a moment, I realised that there was a sound like angry animals somewhere in the distance. Jake's eyes were pleading with me to understand as he stood up and I reassured him quickly.

"I'm not going anywhere, I'll be waiting right here." He nodded, cursed under his breath again, and took off at a run.

I watched as the air around him shimmered and he turned into the gigantic russet wolf. His paws pounded across the ground for several strides before he skidded to a halt. His hackles stood straight up and he let loose such a ferocious snarl that I jumped to my feet.

The wolf stood stock still for several long moments, hackles raised and body crouched as though he were ready to leap through the air. He turned to look over his shoulder at me, then turned back to face the other way again. He seemed undecided and I wondered what the hell was going on.

Finally, with a loud yap he whirled back around to me. The air shimmered again and the man rose to his feet in all his naked glory. I watched slightly open mouthed as Jacob Black strode towards me, his eyes full of primal anger and an animalistic hunger.

I gasped when he reached me, looked deeply into my eyes and suddenly pulled me to him in an almost bruisingly passionate kiss.

I found myself spun around and pushed against a boulder. My legs were nudged apart, my hands placed on the stone to brace myself. A low growl came from the man behind me and with a renewed rush of pleasure I understood what was about to happen.

The Alpha wolf was going to claim his mate. And this time, he would not be so gentle.

A/N: The Alpha is up next, tomorrow or the day after.
*Chapter 10*: Chapter 9 The Alpha

A/N: I absolutely cannot believe how many people are getting in touch with me about this story:-) I keep on saying it, but I can't say it enough - thank you to everybody who reads, reviews, messages ... And that's not mentioning all the alerts/favourites that are being added. I wouldn't stay focused without the help of niamhg and MistC who read, encourage, and make me laugh between chapters, so a big thank you for you ladies, too.

One thing everybody who knew about the wolf pack had realised quickly was that the temperament of the wolf directly matched the temperament of the boy who phased. Sam, for instance, the first wolf to phase, had always been serious minded and respectful to his elders. As a wolf, when Alpha he had been a conscientious leader who continued to show deference to the tribe's Elders and Chief.

Paul, an angry and volatile young man with a large chip on both shoulders, was a vicious and aggressive wolf who rarely cooperated with his Alpha unless a direct order was issued.

Embry and Seth, both sweet natured and even tempered, were docile and placid in wolf form. They were vicious and deadly when needed, but only a trespassing leech could trigger that response in them.

Quil and Jared, both pranksters who tended to find a light side to every situation, had slightly skittish wolves.

The obvious exception had been Jacob Black.

When Billy had first learned that his son's generation of wolves were phasing, he had spent a considerable amount of time worrying. His sixteen year old boy was sunny and good natured. He had a stubborn streak but his father's relaxed parenting had rarely caused it to surface. Billy quite simply didn't think Jake could handle the pressure of being Alpha to older and sometimes difficult wolves.

Billy watched his son take an astounding growth spurt and bulk up with solid muscle. He worried constantly. Then, Jake phased, and Billy had a new concern. The young boy was not in control of his wolf. Oh, he had astonishing control over the actual shifting process, and he took to the idiosyncrasies of pack life with ease. But the first sign that the wolf was dominating the boy had been the hot temper Jake suddenly developed shortly after phasing. He had to be kept off school longer than most of the other kids, not because he was in danger of phasing in class, but because he was likely to become alarmingly angry at the drop of a hat.

Months passed and the wolf continued to make itself known. It was a volatile, dominant Alpha male. Jake didn't want the Alpha mantle and struggled to control his wolf's desire to be the literal leader of the pack. Without the emotional maturity to deal with his wolf's demands, Jake's stubborn streak kicked in and he started to act out. In the early months after phasing, he had caused Sam all manner of headaches. He refused to cooperate during training exercises, frequently failed to show up for patrols, and infected the entire pack with his bad attitude. In reality, he was simply a teenage boy trying to keep his sense of self and not lose himself to the dominant animal that resided within him.

The Elders advised Sam to give the boy time. Billy thought his son needed a swift kick in the ass, but was unable to do it himself and Sam refused to do it for him, preferring to follow the Elders' advice instead.

It was difficult to identify when the change began. Four months after phasing for the first time, Jake attended one of the council bonfires. He listened to his father and Old Quil re-tell the legends he had been hearing since his childhood. This time, he knew the truth behind them. Billy often thought that was the turning point, perhaps some pride in his birthright being ignited as he listened to the stories of the lineage from which he was descended. Certainly, after that night Jake learned things of the tribe's history that he had never been taught. He began to ask questions and develop a sense of self and not lose himself to the dominant animal that resided within him.

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Billy began to notice changes in the boy's personality. While before phasing, he had been carefree and laid back, he now developed a focus the likes of which Billy remembered in his own grandfather. Whatever Jake chose to do, it was a measured decision which had been carefully thought through before a final conclusion was reached. Still able to have fun with the guys in the pack, Jake nonetheless became more serious minded than he ever had been before. His dedication to the pack was soon unparalleled. He began to challenge Sam's tendency to act on Elders' orders. Who's putting their necks on the line here, Sam? he would bellow, his temper still volatile.

By the time Jacob turned seventeen, he was champing at the bit to take over the pack. Sam recognised that the rightful Alpha had strengths that he lacked. Jake had developed an uncanny ability to look at a situation from every angle and make an informed decision quickly and under pressure. Sam himself lacked that ability. He also lacked the resolve to stick to his decision, however unpopular it may be. Jake certainly didn't care about the opinions of others.

Jacob Black was born to be the pack's Alpha. Sam gladly relinquished the position to him soon after the boy's seventeenth birthday. Recognising the older wolf's greater experience and more level head, Jake asked Sam to stay on as his Beta, a role which Sam Uley held with pride.

Things changed quickly after Jake took over the pack. The same day he became Alpha, he told the Elders to convene to meet with him. He accepted no arguments. If they wanted to hear what he had to say, they would be there. They all showed up, Billy included.
Jake told them on no uncertain terms that he would run his pack as he saw fit, with no interference from them. He alone knew his wolves' innermost thoughts. He saw no reason to share such personal information with the Elders. He would make his decisions according to what was best for each wolf. There would be no more asking for permission and no more bowing down before the Elders. His speech over, Jacob Black turned on his heel and left. Billy wanted to applaud. He felt ashamed he had ever doubted his only son's ability to lead.

Jake started as he meant to continue. He categorically refused to listen to the Elders and quite simply ran his pack as he liked. He had the respect of each and every one of his wolves. Even Paul gave his obedience freely and rarely required an Alpha command to toe the line.

Under Jake's authority, the pack honed its skills and evolved into a deadly killing machine. Each wolf's strengths were developed, their weaknesses counterbalanced by another pack member. Vampires straying too close to the boundary line didn't stand a chance. Jake allowed the wolves free rein to follow a scent outside the reservation and hunt a leech who had passed through, just for the fun of a kill. He knew the importance of keeping his pack motivated.

Only the Cullens were given a reprieve. The Cullens knew as well as Jake's pack did that the Alpha would have loved an excuse to destroy them all. The ancient treaty was one of the few things that he did abide by, and everyone knew it was just because his own ancestor had drawn it up.

Jake's wolf was dominant and vicious. Even after taking over as Alpha, he struggled to control it. When Jake was seventeen, the most common wish of Billy, the pack and the Elders was that he would find his imprint. They all had different reasons.

The wolves wanted their Alpha happy and fulfilled. They knew his life was a difficult one and they saw his enormous capacity to love. They felt he deserved the contentment that his imprint would bring him. They also thought he might be a little less aggressive towards them at times if he had something gentler in his life.

The Elders hoped the headstrong Alpha's imprint would be able to sway him to their thinking. Where everyone else failed, perhaps the love of a good woman would help him to see reason.

Billy just wanted to see his son less conflicted by his wolf. He believed that his imprint would be just what he needed to gain the final control that was required before he could become a truly great leader.

Jake's wolf was strong, but as the boy matured, the man became stronger. By his eighteenth birthday, he felt that he controlled his wolf more often than the other way around. He was proud of this achievement and continued to work harder at it. His control increased and by the time he turned nineteen, his wolf got the better of him next to never.

Everyone was still wishing he would imprint, but only Billy's reasons had changed. His boy had astonished him again by growing stronger than his dominant wolf without any help from an imprint or anyone else. Now, Billy just wanted grandchildren.

Jake himself had assumed that when he finally imprinted, he would be able to quell his wolf's demands. The wolves had had varying degrees of success with that when they had imprinted. Sam, the first wolf to phase and imprint, had struggled greatly and had scarred Emily badly when he lost control around her. The first time they had made love, too, his wolf had surfaced and Sam had taken Emily more aggressively than he had either anticipated or wanted. Sam had been horrified afterwards but Emily had thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Sam's struggles were likely to have been because he was the first wolf to phase and go through everything. The other wolves, more prepared by virtue of knowing what to expect, had varying experiences. Paul had given his wolf free rein. Jake had been livid when he had seen what his sister Rachel had endured. Paul had foolishly shown Jake how much Rachel had enjoyed it. Jake had taken a sizable chunk out of Paul's flank and ordered him on the worst patrols for a month.

Seth and Embry had naturally stayed in full command of their wolves and had enjoyed the intense experience of the imprint deepening as they made gentle love to their new imprints. Jared and Brady had maintained reasonable control of themselves, the wolf gaining a little more dominance closer to their climaxes.

Jake had been certain he would be able to maintain control when he imprinted, despite the knowledge that his own imprint was likely to be the most intense of the pack. Half an hour after meeting Bella, he had cursed his own naivety. It took every ounce of willpower and self restraint he had learned over the last three years not to give in to his wolf. He fantasised about throwing her over the hood of his car, Charlie's kitchen table, the driftwood tree on the beach, and fucking her hard from behind. He couldn't rid his mind of the things he wanted to do to her and his wolf snarled and fought him for dominance.

Stubborn and headstrong, Jake was damned if he was going to allow the wolf to take over. The effort he had expended to stop Bella from touching him in the forest after she had accepted the imprint was literally superhuman. Equally, when he had smelled his enemy in her room while she was getting ready for bed the night before, it was absolutely essential that he physically tore himself from her presence. If he hadn't left when he did, he would have slammed her against the wall and shot his seed into her just to mark his territory.

Jake wanted more than that for the first time he made love with his Bells. This beautiful girl who had been created
especially for him was going to be his entire life. He would marry her and raise a family with her. She would provide him with the future Alpha and Chief. He would love her and care for her, devote his very existence to her. Their first time together would be no impulsive fuck to satisfy his inner animal.

At the same time, Jake knew that Edward Cullen posed a threat. He didn't know the exact nature of the threat, but he had a deep conviction that he needed to claim his mate as a matter of urgency. It was no more than a strong instinct, but Jake had learned to trust his gut, especially when it came to bloodsuckers. When Sam had reminded him of the legend that an imprint was Protected from harm after mating with her wolf, his mind had been made up and he immediately made plans to bring Bella to the one place he knew he could be alone with her.

He had anticipated his wolf would be happy. Instead, the animal was anxious and aggressive, urging him on. Get it over with seemed to be the message his wolf was sending him. Jake had been nervous and uptight the entire trip up the mountain, but he still believed he could maintain control of the wolf and love Bella as she deserved.

When he had started to touch her breasts and kiss them, her body had responded strongly to him. The scent of her arousal had been driving him out of his mind since the day before but suddenly, with her naked under him and wave after wave of fresh juices flowing between her legs every time he bit down on her sensitive nipple, he had all but lost control.

When she had reached for his erection and told him to let go, fuck he had nearly driven into her so hard it would probably have split her in two. He wanted to take her aggressively, bite and scratch at her, shoot his seed so deeply into her that every challenger would know from twenty miles out that she was his. The intention wasn't to harm her, just mark her as clearly, unequivocally belonging to him.

He had never felt so dangerous and it scared him. Was he capable of hurting her the way Sam had hurt Emily? Scarring her, disfiguring her beautiful face or body? He had never before thought he had that in him but now, laying there so intimately with her, he wasn't as confident.

And then, she had bewitched him. How she had done it given that everything she was doing was turning him on even more, he had no idea. He had the sense that maybe it was something to do with her intentions rather than her actions, but he was beyond thinking it through by then.

Jake had regained control over his wolf and with the man firmly in charge once more, he had been able to love her as he had wanted. He had brought her to orgasm once, then immediately again to fulfil his promise of making her scream.

Entering her body had been all the more incredible because he had been in full command of himself when he did so. When their souls had fully united, he had felt the empty space within her and had instinctively known that Edward Cullen was somehow responsible for the loss of that part of her soul. He knew it didn't matter, he was there now, Protecting her.

The imprint had deepened, as he had known it would, and the love he had felt before became all consuming. Bella found another release and he felt his own approaching. Once he had cum inside her, the Protection his soul afforded her would be completed by the fact that no competitor would be able to stand his scent on her.

And then, unbelievably, he had heard Brady's panicked howl sound in the distance. It had been followed by an immediate cacophony of noise from the pack. Howls and snarls had alerted him to something being terribly, terribly wrong on the reservation.

As Jake had instinctively done for a long time now, he quickly weighed all his options. He could finish what he had started with Bella and then go check on his pack. He was close to his release and wouldn't take long. There were two problems with that. If his pack needed him and he chose to satisfy his hungers before helping his brothers, he would never forgive himself if something happened. Paul's earlier thoughts were still fresh in his mind. A coven could attack and the Alpha would be thinking with his dick.

The second problem was that after making love with Bella for the first time, he wanted to lie with her in his arms for a while before loving her all over again. He definitely didn't want to shoot into her and run off.

He knew what he had to do, and he pulled out of her and phased. When he exploded into the pack's consciousness, he was snarling and pissed as all hell. The pack all saw his fury, and the reason for it. What he saw in return only fuelled his rage.

The five Cullen bloodsuckers who still resided in Forks were attempting to cross the treaty line.

What the fuck?

Sam - Jake we think they're trying to stop you claiming Bella.

What the FUCK?

Sam - We don't know what happened, Jake, but they're determined to cross the perimeter and they're not giving up.

I'm on my way.

Quil - NO! Jake get the fuck back to your girl and finish this. This has something to do with Edward, I'd bet my balls on it.
it. Leave the bloodsuckers to us. Claim your fuckin' girl and stop him.

Jake hesitated. He was loath to leave his brothers to fight without him, but if Quil was right then it was essential he completed their lovemaking. Jake looked over his shoulder at her. Standing there naked on the mountainside, her long hair blowing in the breeze, she looked like a goddess. The entire pack saw her. As if he had seen her too, Edward Cullen screamed and seemed to redouble his efforts to get across the perimeter. Jake's wolf was howling for control again.

Undecided, Jake watched for a moment longer as Edward Cullen launched himself past Seth and was immediately blocked by Jared. Edward's face contorted in rage as he sprang away again and he yelled, "That filthy mutt had better not touch her!"

Jake wheeled back to Bella. As he phased back to human, he willingly submitted to his wolf, allowing the animal's instincts to control what happened next. Pausing only to look into Bella's eyes to ensure she wasn't afraid of him, he pulled her into a bruising kiss but there was no time for romance or foreplay. It wasn't necessary anyway. His cock was throbbing, aching to be buried deep inside her again. He broke the kiss and turned her roughly around. There was a convenient boulder he could take her against. He smelled her rush of arousal and knew she was willingly giving herself to him.

Nudging her legs roughly apart, the Alpha bent his imprint at the waist and placed her hands on the boulder. He braced his own hands on her hips and drove himself unceremoniously into her. One part of his consciousness heard the enraged snarls and growls of his pack. It only fuelled his emotions as he pounded into Bella over and over. Her cries grew louder and the scent of her arousal thickly filled his flaring nostrils. He moved one hand round her front and began pulling and kneading the tender bundle of nerves that he instinctively knew how to handle.

Bella came apart around him. If she had screamed his name before, she was practically breaking the sound barrier now. Jake continued to hammer into her, hearing his pack's snarls escalate in apparently direct response to Bella's orgasm. He felt his stomach clench and his cock pulse. Giving over to the wolf completely, he bent over her and bit down hard on her shoulder, drawing blood and leaving his mark. Bella cried out again, the mixture of pleasure and pain sending her into orbit. Bellowing, Jake released, his seed shooting deep within her and finally, irreversibly marking her as his own.

He had no sooner cum than he heard an agonised shriek from Edward Cullen, whose own supernatural hearing had presumably allowed him to interpret what he had just heard.

Jacob's body was shaking hard with emotion as he pulled out of Bella and turned her into his chest. Collapsing onto the ground with her, he was slightly surprised to feel his cheeks moist with tears as he pushed her hair back from her face to examine her.

"Are you okay? Did I hurt you?"

Bella's face was flushed and her breathing was erratic. She shook her head. "No of course you didn't. You never will, Jake." She reached up and wiped at his tears. "What happened?" she whispered.

Jake told her. It went against his nature to sugarcoat or lie to her. He told her that the Cullens were attempting to commit suicide by crossing the treaty line, apparently to prevent him from claiming her. He explained the Protection she was allegedly afforded now. He told her everything that had happened in the last fifteen minutes and prayed she wouldn't be as freaked out by it as she frankly should be.

Stunning him, Bella crawled into Jake's lap, cradled his head against her chest, and began to comfort him.

"You did what you needed to do, for us," she soothed him. "You didn't hurt me. Our first time was just as wonderful as you promised it would be. And I'm glad you ended it like you did. I'm safe now, and we can have our future together. Don't feel bad, Jake. But I do think you should phase and check on the rest of the pack," she finished.

Jake pulled back to look at her in shock.

Fucking hell the Spirits had chosen her well for him.

Kissing her, he stood them both up before pulling back. Never taking his eyes off her, he stepped back until he had plenty of space to phase. Remembering just in time that if he shifted while watching her, the whole pack would immediately see her in all her naked beauty again, he averted his gaze out over the mountain and phased.

The pack was in uproar. They had clearly heard both Bella's screams of ecstasy and Jake's own bellowed release. Their suspicions that the Cullens were attempting to prevent the union were confirmed when Edward collapsed to the ground in anguish. The rest of the coven had whisked him off before the pack could react.

Jake was incandescent.

Why didn't you fucking destroy them, Sam?

Sam - I'm sorry, Jake. You didn't issue an order and I've never felt it was necessary to attack the Cullens.

You mean you've never wanted to justify your decision to the Elders! Coward!

The pack recoiled. They had never heard Jake attack a brother so personally. They knew the day's events were extreme but none of them wanted to get in the middle of this. Sam remained silent. He knew he was in for it.
Suddenly, their Alpha's focus changed. His anger softened and the pack felt something like pleasure break through his keyed up state. Bella had stepped forward and was winding her fingers into his shaggy fur, soothing him with her touch. Jake's head turned towards her, careful not to lower his gaze to her naked body. Through his eyes, the pack saw her beautiful face, still flushed from their lovemaking and framed by her thick curls. She was looking at him with so much loving concern that his anger softened further. Sam took advantage of this gentler side of his Alpha.

Jake it's over. You've claimed Bella and Edward knows it. They've gone. Maybe we won't be troubled by them again.

Well they're sure as hell gonna be fuckin' troubled by us! Keep running tight patrols. Do you need me back?

**Embry** - No. We don't, Jake. We'll howl if there's any sign of them again but I really do think they were trying to stop you claiming Bella. Stay there with her, man. Sort out the wolf and then come home.

Jacob phased back to human and pulled Bella immediately into his arms.

"I think it's over, honey. The pack'll let me know if we need to go back."

"So it's just us? We can stay here a while longer?"

Jake smiled down at his girl. "I think we can stay here just as long as you like, Bells. Anything in particular you want to do?" he asked innocently.

Bella surprised him by grabbing his ass and pressing her body even closer to his. Her eyes were sparkling when she answered him.

"More Quileute lovin', Alpha."

**A/N:** So ... next up is a little behind-the-scenes to explain a bit more what's going on with Edward. That's just a necessary evil before getting back to some serious J/B lovin'. Hope you enjoyed this one!
*Chapter 11*: Chapter 10 Confrontation

A/N: Thank you as always to niamhg and MistC for pre/beta reading. This chapter also had a guest appearance from feebes, who went way beyond what I had any right to ask of her, to help me work out some issues at 4am her local time. Thank you feebes, you are wonderful.

The instant Edward had come tearing home after being detected by Jacob Black in Bella's bedroom closet, he had gone straight to Carlisle. He knew full well that the ramifications of his actions would be far reaching. Carlisle had listened to his son, called a family meeting, and all hell had broken loose.

Rosalie was furious. She herself had had her choices ripped from her, and she had been staunchly opposed to Edward doing anything other than walking away from Bella Swan since the day he had first set eyes on her. She believed they had no right to make such a choice on behalf of somebody else.

"She's not even dying, Carlisle!" she had pleaded with her creator. "You've always said, for all of us, you only did it because we were dying. But Bella has a whole life ahead of her, a happy life!"

Rosalie was afraid for the girl, and terrified of the repercussions of her so-called brother biting a human so close to the shape shifters of La Push. And not just any human, but the Alpha wolf's imprint.

Nobody listened to Rose.

Esme was concerned for Edward. He was wild eyed and rambling. She would do anything, anything at all, that was required to ensure his future happiness. When one was destined to exist for all eternity, it was necessary to secure one's contentment. Ready to indulge her son in any and every whim, she felt sorrow for the pain Bella's change would cause the pack, but it really was for the greater good of her own family.

"We'll work this out, Edward," she promised him tenderly, holding him tightly to her.

Emmett was unbothered. He understood that Edward wanted his soulmate by his side, although he could have done without the theatrics. If the dogs looked like they were going to attack, Emmett and the rest of the Cullens would fight or take flight. He gave it no further thought than that. He wished Rosalie would calm down.

Still in Alaska with Alice, Jasper was unable to dampen Edward's anguish or Rose's fury.

Carlisle was deeply troubled. He was a wise vampire who had studied people and relationships his entire existence. He was fascinated by everything to do with the wolfpack, and the imprinting phenomenon in particular. He knew that the nature of imprinting was as irreversible as a vampire claiming a piece of his singer's soul.

He attempted to explain the dilemma to his son. "You are aware how this works, Edward. Under normal circumstances, after taking the required piece of Bella's soul, you would have drank some of her blood and infected her with your venom. As she died, her soul would recognise its missing part in you and bond her to you in an irreversible way for all eternity. Unfortunately, her soul is now also tied to your mortal enemies. We have no way of knowing what will happen if you attempt to turn her, Edward."

Carlisle saw no way out of this situation that ended well for everybody. The part of Bella Swan's soul that now resided inside Edward would pull them towards one another until he claimed her blood and turned her. But with her soul also tied to Jacob Black's, Carlisle feared what sort of creature would be created if Edward infected her with his venom.

It was no longer as simple as taking Bella and turning her. The Alpha wolf would leave no stone unturned in his quest for revenge. It may have been possible to manipulate the unfortunate situation, had Edward not been detected in the girl's bedroom. However, now that he was known to have been there, the finger would be pointed first at him if anything happened to Bella.

Carlisle began to make calls, contacting all manner of creatures of the night that he had become acquainted with over the course of his existence. Anyone he thought may be able to offer some insight, he phoned.

"Edward has found his singer," he told his old friend, Matthias. Matthias was an ancient vampire, learned in the truths behind legends and folklore. "He has taken the required piece of her soul. Unfortunately, there is a wolfpack on a nearby tribal reservation. The Alpha has imprinted on the same girl. What happens now, to the girl's soul?"

Matthias, like everyone else Carlisle contacted, had no more knowledge than he himself had. He promised to read through some records that he had, and think about the puzzle. It was the best he could do.

Throughout that night, Esme and Carlisle sat with Edward, ensuring he did not to go back to the Swan residence. The lure of her soul was strong and despite knowing that Bella would be personally guarded by Jacob Black, Edward longed to be closer to her. Esme cajoled and reasoned with him, begged him to play her favourite piano tunes, anything at all to try and keep his mind occupied.

As dawn broke, Carlisle received a return call from Matthias. A thought had struck him that he wanted to share with his old friend.
Edward had of course heard the conversation. His head had snapped up as he listened, and he had been out the front door before Carlisle had ended the call. Esme yelled up the stairs to Emmett, who leaped out of the first floor window and took Edward down. Rosalie hurtled through the air after her husband to help. Snarling and desperate in his attempts to break free, Edward had almost taken Emmett's hand off, but the bearlike vampire was too strong. They had dragged him back indoors, paying no heed to his struggles and screams. Emmett literally pinned him to the couch until he calmed enough to listen.

Carlisle was aware of the traditions that the Quileute tribe were deeply immersed in. It never occurred to him that Jacob may have disregarded one of the oldest imprinting traditions. Carlisle promised his son that Bella would be invited to an evening bonfire on the beach. There, she would be told of the pack and the imprint, a joining ceremony would take place, and then the mating would occur. If it hadn't happened the night before, they had at least the rest of the day to decide on their course of action.

Edward wanted to go to the Swan residence immediately to see whether his singer had been contaminated. The rest of the family were afraid he would do something foolish, either way. Carlisle felt sure that the Alpha's scent would be so distinctive on Bella that he would be able to tell from quite a distance away if they had mated. He volunteered to go himself. Only once they had determined that, would they decide on their next steps.

Carlisle was there and back in next to no time. Bella remained at Charlie's home, and she had not been defiled. The whole clan relaxed. Esme called Alice, who was in a state of near panic as Edward's future continued to flicker and alternate with nothingness.

Emmett was the one who came up with the most obvious way of finding out what they needed to know. His reasoning was that the Alpha wolf would share all his plans with his pack through their mind link. If Edward could get close enough to any of the wolves, he may be able to glean enough information to determine what kind of time frame they had. If the bonfire was set for that evening, they must find a way to remove Bella before then.

Unwilling to leave Edward unsupervised; they all went with him to the perimeter line. It wasn't long before Edward caught one of the wolves' minds. It was one of the puppies, Brady. He was in a state of great agitation. He was horny and frustrated, and longing to finish his patrol shift so he could go to his imprint.

Typical dog, Edward thought in disgust. Then, he caught a flash of why the pup was in such a worked up state. He had been influenced by the power of his Alpha's need. Jacob Black was intending to claim his mate, on the reservation... right now.

With a scream of fury, Edward attempted to launch himself over the perimeter. He knew nothing about where the filthy dog had taken his imprint, or how he could possibly get to them and stop them. He only knew that if Jacob successfully mated with Bella, Edward would be entirely unable to stand the scent of her, but would be tied to her forever. His entire mind was consumed with stopping the act from taking place.

Had the rest of the Cullens not been there, Edward would have been ripped apart within minutes. Brady immediately sent out a panicked warning and call for help. Two of his brothers were already phased, and the rest joined quickly until all eight wolves were stretched out along the perimeter line.

Rosalie wanted to go home. The odds were stacked high against them and crossing the treaty line was suicide. Edward refused to give Bella up. Carlisle attempted to reason with him but even he knew that if the mating was completed, his son was left in an impossible situation.

"It's suicide," Rose whispered. Her husband squeezed her hand. Rose met Esme's eyes and knew neither Esme nor Carlisle would do anything other than stand by Edward. Emmett loved to fight and was champing at the bit to back his brother up. Rose made her decision. She would stay with her family. She would rather die trying with them, than live an eternity alone. Perhaps she may even be able to help Bella if the worst somehow happened.

For fifteen minutes they danced around the boundary, five leeches against eight wolves. Edward saw it in the nearest wolf's mind when Jacob phased in. The Alpha's fury staggered Edward and for the briefest of moments, self-preservation kicked in and he wondered whether he ought to save his own skin and that of his family. But then, Jacob had turned to look at Bella and Edward saw her with all the impact of eight minds, as each member of the pack took in her naked beauty. With her hair blowing in the breeze and the serious expression on her face, she looked like a force of nature.

Edward wanted her. He didn't know exactly where she was, but he had a vague idea that if he got across the line, the Alpha would join his brothers. That would postpone what had not yet occurred, buying him some time. He leapt for the perimeter line. He actually made it past Seth, but was instantly blocked by Jared and he shot backwards again, darting out of reach and to a safe distance.

Edward quickly communicated to his family what he had just seen. Their efforts to do something, anything, to prevent the mating from occurring redoubled. Their attempts may be futile, but the alternative was an eternity of conflicted torture for Edward.
Bella's screams of ecstasy suddenly carried through the air and Emmett actually laughed. He didn't even attempt to hide his thoughts; *Doubt Edward could make her scream like that.* Knowing it was futile but enraged beyond anything he had ever experienced before, Edward tried harder still to get past the infernal dogs guarding La Push. They fought him back viciously.

Carlisle was thinking hard at him. *We have to give up. They will cross the line and attack us soon.* But Edward knew their Beta didn't have the courage to issue that command. He saw him waver and decide to attack only if one of the leeches actually showed any sign of going for a wolf. Simply attempting to cross the line, Sam thought, was not enough for a Beta to make such a far-reaching decision.

And then, the pack heard their Alpha cry out in ecstasy. He had taken his mate. Bella belonged to Jacob, body and soul. In anguish, Edward collapsed to the ground. The pack were stunned for a moment, their leader's mating call affecting them all. He had claimed his imprint and in solidifying his connection with her, her ties to the pack were forged. As one, they turned snarling to face the vampires who were threatening her. Even without the order to do so, somehow Jacob's mating cry had ignited a ferocious desire to destroy the coven that had the audacity to try and cross into their lands.

Edward felt himself lifted and whisked away. He was unceremoniously dumped on the couch by Emmett, and hadn't moved since. He was wallowing in his own anguish. His singer had been defiled.

"Edward, we will find a way around this," Esme soothed.

"How?" Rosalie snapped. "What will the next plan be, Esme? Walk onto the reservation and ask for her? **He has claimed her.** She will never be unprotected, and she will no longer sing to Edward either. We should leave!"

"We haven't done anything wrong, Rose," Carlisle attempted to reason with her.

"That won't matter to them! We tried to cross the boundary! Edward was in Bella's bedroom! They may be dogs but they aren't that stupid. They will know that Edward wants her, and that we attempted to get to her. We need to leave." She enunciated the last sentence very slowly and clearly.

Emmett walked up behind his furious wife and wrapped his arms around her middle. "Calm down, Rose," he pleaded with her. "There's no need for us to run. We'll smell them coming when they're miles out. It's not like they can surprise us in our sleep," he snorted. "Let's not jump the gun."

Rosalie shook her head in frustration. Not one of them would listen to her. They needed to get the hell out of Forks and leave Bella Swan and Jacob Black alone.

Anything else would be suicide.

**La Push**

The wolves were all aggressive and agitated. It had been a fucker of a day. The morning meeting with their frustrated and angry leader had set them all on edge. The imprinted wolves had needed their girls after that meeting. Quil had grumbled about developing blisters on his palms.

Knowing what was set to take place up the mountain had been in the pack mind all day. Even if one of the wolves had succeeded in forgetting about it, the rest of his brothers had not. Without their Alpha, and with his imprint apparently under some kind of leech threat, the pack had unanimously decided to voluntarily step up patrols. As a result, the pack had made itself restless and skittish by fuelling each other's imagination as to what exactly Jacob was doing right now.

When Brady had sent up the howl to alert the pack to danger, Paul and Embry were also phased. The others joined quickly. In disbelief they had watched as the Cullens actually attempted to cross the treaty line. They didn't need to be told to keep them out.

Jacob phasing in had resulted in further aggression as the wolves felt every ounce of his anger and frustration. They all saw Bella and would all have willingly given their lives for her. Edward's reaction to them seeing Bella alerted Sam, Paul and Embry to the fact that something was going on they knew nothing of. *It was as if he had seen her too. How was that possible?*

Paul, Quil, Collin and even Seth longed for Sam to give the order to finish the leeches. Sam refused. It wasn't his call, he decided. Quil and Embry let him see their belief that Jake would be pissed. Sam wavered, but preferred Jake's wrath to having to explain himself to the Elders. It was a rare occasion that any of the wolves wished Leah hadn't left for college, but Paul wondered whether she may have been able to sway Sam. The Beta snarled at the insinuation that a female who was not his imprint could persuade him so easily.

Bella's screamed orgasm, Jake's own bellowed release, Edward's reaction, and Jake's fury at Sam had been the final events of the afternoon's drama. Paul and Brady, who were far and away the angriest wolves at the moment, were left patrolling the reservation. Collin was guarding Charlie's house, and the rest of the wolves charged back to Sam's for a debriefing.

Sam announced they needed to know what may be going on with the Cullens. He dispatched Quil to Billy's to fill him in.
and find out anything that their Chief might know from the legends. Quil grumbled about having been chosen for the job because he had no imprint to go fuck. He was dead right.

The pack members who had been at Sam's dispersed. Sam had Emily up against a wall before the front door was fully shut behind the last man to leave. All the frustrations and fears of the day needed to be released, and for the imprinted wolves, that meant only one thing.

Even Embry was rougher with his imprint, Layla, than he had ever been before. After one round on their kitchen floor and another in the shower, he had finally calmed down enough to tell her about his day.

Seth, too, was highly agitated as he stormed into Mai's parents' house. They were still fairly newly imprinted and he hadn't yet moved in with her. He hoped against hope he could be alone with her, deciding he would need to bring her into the forest if her mother was home. Luck was on his side, and Mai discovered her wolf actually did have an aggressive streak that she liked as he slammed into her, jolting her bed across her bedroom floor as he did so.

Kim took one look at Jared and quickly texted her friend to cancel their shopping trip that afternoon. Jared had already ripped her T-shirt off by the time she sent the message.

Meanwhile, Billy was listening to Quil's tale with grave concern. He already knew what Seth had witnessed in the store and, of course, he knew about Edward having been in Bella's room. A suspicion had been growing in his mind, and the day's events seemed to have confirmed it. Wheeling himself to the phone, Billy called Old Quil, who had studied vampire lore more than any other Elder. Quil grumbled some more about not being a messenger or a chauffeur, but did go and collect his grandfather.

The two older men sat with their heads together for quite some time, their demeanours serious. Quil listened in growing horror as they talked of a story that had been handed down through their legends. Bloodsuckers believe they have soulmates. A human's blood sings to the vampire and the leech sucks a part of the human's soul into its own. A bond is forged between human and vampire that solidifies after the leech has tasted the human's blood and turned him or her.

It sounded a lot like Bella Swan was Edward's singer. That meant Edward would be driven to taste her blood and change her. It also meant he had a sinister hold over her. The whole pack knew that Bella had already admitted as much to Jacob.

"Did he claim her?" Old Quil asked his grandson harshly.

"Uh, yeah." Quil rubbed the back of his neck, unsure of the protocol for discussing a friend's sex life in front of that friend's father.

"Good. Then her scent will no longer sing to him." Old Quil seemed relieved but Billy was still frowning.

"What happens to the part of her soul that he possesses, though?"

Nobody had any answer.

A/N: More Jake and Bella bonding up next. For a couple of chapters lol.
A/N: All the usual thank yous to MistC and niamhg for reading; and to everyone who reads and reviews. This chapter and next are just a little J/B fluffly lemony bonding. I hope you enjoy them!

I relaxed back against Jake's strong chest, feeling his protective arms wrap around me. I was still breathless from my last orgasm and Jake had a huge smug grin plastered on his face. He bent his head and nibbled on my earlobe, making my whole body quiver.

"I think we should just stay here forever," he informed me. "I can hunt for game, we can roast it on the fire, and we can just make love for the rest of our lives. Everything we need is right here."

I smiled. Everything I needed certainly was right here, keeping me safe in his muscular arms. Turning my neck, I kissed his full lips and smiled some more at the expression of sheer happiness in his eyes.

"Are you warm enough?" he asked me.

"Boiling," I assured him. "That was quite a workout you just put me through!" I felt his chest shake with laughter behind me.

"Hungry?" he checked.

"A little," I said. I knew he was too. His stomach had been making its needs known for a while. Wrapping me in the blanket, Jake pulled plastic plates and cups from his bag. He had brought cans of food and we warmed them over the fire. Our makeshift meal prepared, we sat by the fire and ate together.

While we ate, we talked. I wanted to know more about the man I was destined to spend my life with. He answered all my questions. He told me how he had grieved for his mother as a young boy but tried to be strong for his dad and sisters. With Billy in a wheelchair, Jake took it upon himself to try and be the man of the house. He laughed as he remembered some of the things he had done, trying to help out but getting it horribly wrong and ending up in trouble. The picture he unwittingly painted was of a child who was desperate to provide comfort to those he loved, with little thought given to himself. It made me feel sad for him.

He told me how he had rebelled when he had first phased, and how ashamed he was of that now. I thought it was perfectly understandable and told him as much. He rewarded me with the most tender expression in his eyes as he leaned in to kiss me softly.

Jake also told me about pack life, and the responsibilities of being Alpha. He literally never switched off. I had already seen that for myself when he had left to check on the pack during our lovemaking. He was deeply concerned that I was upset about that. Instead, I felt proud of him. He was a conscientious leader.

He told me of how he had struggled to gain control over his wolf, and the conflict he still sometimes felt when what he wanted as a man was at odds with his wolf's demands. As he spoke of that, he fingered the deep mark he had left on my shoulder. He had been horrified by that mark when he saw it. His teeth had broken through my skin and we both suspected a scar of sorts would be left behind. Jake had been upset, despite my protests that it actually didn't hurt anywhere near as much as it looked like it should. He didn't know of any of the other wolves biting their imprints and was confused about why he had done it. My casual deduction that it must be an Alpha thing had upset him further. He couldn't get his head around the fact that I was actually wildly turned on by his primal side.

"Aren't you afraid of me, though?" he frowned.

"No," I shook my head firmly. "I don't even feel like I should be. You won't ever hurt me." I shrugged. "Sometimes you'll need me to just be here for whatever you need, and that's fine. I want to do that for you."

I didn't know any other way to articulate what I meant. I looked over at Jake when he uncharacteristically remained silent. His eyes were full of emotion and he seemed overwhelmed.

"Jake?"

He shook his head, and leaned in to kiss me. "You, Bella Swan, are amazing." He tangled his fingers in my hair and kissed me again before whispering, "You were totally worth the wait."

Jake had questions for me, too. He wanted to know more about my time in Phoenix with Renee. I told him honestly how I had needed to be the sensible one, the one who knew when bills needed paid and how much money we had to spare for extras. That was never as much as Renee had thought. I taught myself to cook so that we could eat a decent meal.

He asked me every detail about what Edward had done, and how he made me feel. I gave him as much information as I could, including the conviction I had that any damage that had been done, Jacob himself had fixed. He nodded his agreement, but announced that he would be paying the Cullens a visit when we came off the mountain anyway.

"To say what?" I asked him.

"I don't know, exactly. I do know that they wouldn't have tried to cross the treaty line if they didn't think they had a good
reason to risk their lives for it. That makes me very, very worried Bella." He frowned. "What can Edward Cullen possibly
want from you that would make his entire family go on a suicide mission?"

I must have tensed because he looked down at me quickly. "You're safe, honey," he told me firmly. "He won't get anywhere
near you, the pack will make sure of that. I don't know for sure yet, but I think you're going to find the rest of the guys are
very protective of you. We're protective of all the imprints, but I think you'll get special treatment."

"When can I meet everyone?" I wanted to know.

"As soon as we get back, if you like," he told me. I could tell he was pleased I had asked.

When we were finally talked out and had eaten our fills, Jake suggested going down to the mountain stream for a swim,
promising to keep me warm.

"You'd better, that water will be freezing!"

"I won't let you go," Jake promised me. He meant it literally. He picked me up, carried me bridal style downhill to the wide
stream, and waded into the water still carrying me. The icy water splashing onto my skin made me wince, and Jake
instantly turned me so that my whole upper body was pressed against his, my legs around his waist. I held on around his
neck and we just gazed at each other as he brought us deeper into the water.

The sensation was incredible. The icy fluid swirled around my entire body, but Jacob's extreme body heat kept me warm.
Steam actually rose off him as the water collided with his skin and I shook my head, marvelling again as I absorbed
everything I had learned about the supernatural over the past couple of days.

Jake held me in place with one hand, and trailed his other hand up to my shoulder, tenderly touching the place where he
had bitten me earlier in primal anger and fear.

His espresso eyes were now soft and gentle as he bent his head to mine and began kissing me slowly and deeply. As
much as Jacob's animalistic side excited me, I adored it when he was tender with me too. This was a side of Jacob Black
that I suspected few people ever saw. I revelled in the warmth of his tongue as it glided along mine, and the feel of his
teeth grazing my lips.

"I love you," he whispered as he moved his mouth to my jaw and down to my neck. I tightened my hold around his neck
and pulled myself tighter against him.

"I love you too," I whispered back and felt his lips curve into a smile against my neck. I shut my eyes, immersing myself in
all the sensations he created in me. This, I thought, was paradise.

We stayed in the water for a long time, kissing and talking. Jake let me go only when I asked him to, wanting to swim for a
while in lieu of taking a shower. He swam lazily alongside me and pulled me immediately back into his arms when I got
cold.

We ended up simply lazing together in the water. Jake's back was propped against some kind of boulder, his arms
wound around me as we just watched the water flow slowly past us and enjoyed the feel of each other.

Jacob suddenly dipped his face into the crook of my neck and said, "I was wondering something but ... I don't really know
if I want the answer."

I immediately guessed what he was talking about and tried to hide my amusement.

"Just ask it, Jake."

He sighed. "Don't tell me if it's like, hundreds, because my wolf will go nuts, okay?" I snorted and he blurted out, "Okay,
fine! How many lovers have you had?"

"One," I answered promptly. Smiling sweetly, I asked, "You?"

Jake's eyes widened in disbelief and he repeated, "One," with so much incredulity in his voice that I feigned indignation.

"Well what kind of girl did you take me for?" I frowned then, considering his evidence. "It's just you that does this to me,
you know. And you didn't answer. How many lovers have you had?"

I knew it was loads. The skill Jake had demonstrated today wasn't learned solely from an imprint's instincts or even a pack
mind. The demi-god who was squirming uncomfortably under my amused gaze had been with a lot of different women, of
that I was absolutely certain.

"Uh..." He rubbed the back of his neck and averted his eyes. "Bella, it's going to sound terrible. I can't believe ... seriously,
just the one?"

"Just Pete. And we kind of had a standard formula that we stuck to." I raised my eyebrows at him. "You, Jacob Black,
have been quite an education this afternoon. Come on, tell me. How many?"
"I don't know," he finally told me, reluctantly. "Honestly, I don't. It's ... a lot." He suddenly started rambling. "Bella we can't have serious relationships, we just can't. It would be so unfair to any girl for a wolf to get involved with her. We can't tell anyone about the pack, not unless she's our imprint. So this poor girl would be thinking she was in a relationship with a normal guy, and then one day we would just imprint and leave her, and she would never know why. It's kind of a rule we all stick to. No girlfriends until we imprint. But uh, we need to let off steam sometimes, especially after a leech hunt. So then the unimprinted wolves go to a club, or a bar, somewhere well away from La Push and they uh ... find a girl who doesn't seem to be looking for anything serious. So ... that's happened like, a lot over the past few years. Probably every time I've hunted a bloodsucker, and then anytime there's been a major issue within the pack. So I've destroyed seventeen leeches, that would make it I dunno, twenty something girls."

He cringed and I bust out laughing. Jake looked at me, shocked.

"Seriously, Jake? You remember exactly how many leeches you've destroyed but not the girls you've been with?"

His cheeks were flaming red when he answered. "I don't ... I didn't ever ... **Fuck**, Bells, it's a wolf thing, okay? If a girl isn't our imprint, we just don't see them. Even before imprinting, we would never be really interested in any girl who wasn't intended for us, not really. It was always just sex, just mindless sex to blow off steam, that's all!"

"Soooo," I said solemnly. "You were just using all those girls."

"Just as much as they were using me, Bella," he answered me seriously. He frowned as though trying to find the right words. I could tell he was struggling. "Look, Bella, the girls that we ... go with, they're never girls that seem to want anything other than a good time. We do that deliberately. And none of those girls, not one of them, would give a shit about us. We make damn sure they're girls who just want a good time, and nothing else. Girls who don't care about anything other than how hot the guy is they're seen going home with. Or how many times he can make her ... What I mean is, they wouldn't care what my name was, or anything about me. Means to an end, Bella."

He looked at me guiltily, waiting for my verdict. I settled back against his chest, thinking it over. It actually made perfect sense to me, on a logical level. If all the wolves were like Jake seemed to be, they had active libidos. Unable to form a relationship they knew they were destined to leave, the best solution probably was a series of one night stands with girls unlikely to want a relationship.

"Are you disappointed in me, Bells?" he asked quietly.

"No! Not disappointed. I just ... I guess I hate thinking about you being with all those girls." I twisted my head round to look at him. "That's over now though, right? With us being imprinted. Don't look so offended, Jacob! You're the one who's just admitted to only ever having had meaningless sex!"

Jacob turned me in his arms to look into my eyes. He seemed a little upset. "Bella I swear to you that it's just you. You and me, and that's it. I can't even **think** about ever being with anyone else now, okay? I get that you don't like my past and I don't blame you, I don't particularly like it either. I never did, but it was blow steam off that way or take it out on dad and the pack." He thought for a moment and then seemed to have an idea. "Would it help if I tell you that I've officially been with you longer than with any other girl?"

I laughed again. "Seriously?" He nodded happily.

"A few hours at the most, Bells, that's all I've ever been with a girl."

"That's ... quite sad, actually, Jake." He nodded again and I saw the shadow of loneliness in his eyes. I made my decision. Jake's past was in the past. I believed him wholeheartedly that it was just him and me, now. Reaching for his neck, I pulled him down into a kiss. "Well, I guess if I get to reap the benefits of the expertise you've learned, I'm okay with that."

Profound relief flooded Jake's eyes and he leaned in to kiss me again. "Just you and me, honey," he promised against my lips and I nodded.

"I know."

Shortly after that, the inevitable rain started. Jake lifted me out of the water. He set me on my feet while he shook some water out of his hair, and I realised that our energetic sessions earlier had actually left me a little sore. I took a few steps and winced. Jake picked up on it immediately.

"Are you okay?"

"Just a bit tender," I told him with a grin. He looked stricken.

"Sorry, Bells," he said contritely. He picked me up bridal style and started to walk up the path with me towards our cave. "I won't touch you again till you've recovered." I pouted theatrically and he grinned. "No way," he told me emphatically.

Back at the cave, Jake stoked the fire and added another small tree to keep it roaring. I wrapped myself in the blanket and got us both a can of soda from his bag, grinning when I saw the large box of condoms in there. He hadn't been taking any chances in his preparations for our trip.
We sat together just inside the cave, watching the rain as we drank our sodas and chatted easily. Jake went out to tend to the fire and as I watched him, I realised that he had been stark naked since we had undressed each other several hours earlier. Running my eyes over his perfect abs, tight ass and muscular legs, I felt myself start to become aroused.

Jake returned into the cave and raised an eyebrow at me. "I didn't even touch you!" he said and I snorted.

"You don't need to, I just have to look at you."

He frowned. "Are you still sore?"

"Just a little," I told him, standing and reaching for him. Jacob wrapped his arms around me and kissed my hair.

"I don't want to hurt you," he said sincerely. I leaned into him, kissing the sensitive part of his chest and swirling my tongue around. "Bella," he groaned, "don't make this hard."

"I plan on making it very, very hard," I laughed, reaching for his cock. It was already standing to attention. Jacob grabbed a hold of my wrist and shook his head.

"No!" He told me firmly. "I'm not hurting you. I already hurt you earlier, and upset you telling you about my past. I'm not going to cause you any more pain."

I looked up at him, thinking. I wanted him and wasn't at all worried about him hurting me, but I could tell he had made up his mind and wasn't going to let his self-control slip. I suspected telling him I was fine and attempting to seduce him weren't going to be effective.

"Please?" I asked, looking as sorrowful as I could muster. His lips twitched and I knew I had him. Lifting me up easily, he pushed me against the wall of the cave and looked at me severely.

"The kitten wants to take on the Alpha, does she?" I saw the humour in his eyes and I kissed him, biting down hard on his bottom lip.

"She absolutely does," I told him seriously. "Who's going to win, do you think?"

Jake snorted and leaned in to kiss my neck. "The kitten," he said on a sigh. "The kitten will get me every fuckin' time."

"Uh ... mmmm," was all I could manage. He was placing hot kisses all over my neck and shoulder, and I could feel his arousal against my thigh. I wrapped my legs tighter around him and twisted my fingers into his hair.

Thirty minutes later, we were tangled together on the floor of the cave. Jacob's tongue was dancing intricately with my own. One of his hands was wrapped tightly around my waist. Two of the fingers of his other hand were swirling inside me, making me cry out in utter ecstasy while his thumb rubbed my clit agonisingly slowly.

"Mu ... more, Jake," I begged him breathlessly. He had been teasing me for the past half hour, almost but not quite touching my most sensitive parts, and then touching them in not quite the way I needed. The fire he was stoking within me was smouldering ever hotter without quite igniting. I knew he was doing it deliberately and the fact that he was in so much control of my body excited me even further.

He didn't increase his pressure and I resorted to begging. "Please, Jake," I moaned into his mouth. Growling, he suddenly started moving his thumb faster and pumping his fingers in and out of me more vigorously. It was all I needed and within moments his name left my lips on a loud cry as my walls convulsed erratically around his fingers. He continued to kiss me until my breathing evened out. Then, he pulled his head back to look at me.

"I want you to know something," he whispered. "This is something I've never done with anyone before you."

"What? Caveman sex?" I whispered back and he barked a laugh.

"Making love," he told me, looking seriously into my eyes. I had already worked that one out, and I just smiled at him.

"I know, Jake."

Seemingly satisfied, he lined himself up with my entrance and pushed inside of me, never breaking eye contact. As he rocked himself in and out of me, I saw a myriad of emotions in his expressive eyes. Pure, unadulterated love was replaced with a kind of awed reverence, which in turn gave way to lustful hunger as his thrusts became more urgent. Finally breaking eye contact, he dipped his head into my neck and moaned throatily. That sound sent jolts of electricity to my core and with a primal sounding cry, Jake somehow got to his feet without separating our bodies. I was pushed hard against the wall and the Alpha wolf came out to play once more.

Jake slammed roughly into me again and again, scraping my back against the cave's wall. His fingers dug into my thighs so hard I knew he would bruise me. It only fuelled my passion and I cried out when he angled his hips and thrust even more deeply into me. I threw my head back and came all around him, my spasms speeding his own orgasm. With a loud, guttural shout, Jacob spilled into me again, rocking his hips several more times as we both came back to earth.

Shaky and breathless, I gasped out, "You really are a caveman!"
He didn't laugh. His face buried in my hair, he said, "I hurt you again." Exasperated, I tugged at his hair until he raised his head to look at me.

"I. Like. It." I glared at him. "What I don't like is when you send me straight to heaven and then decide you regret it afterwards!" I watched as that sank in, and then continued. "Seriously, Jake. If you ever hurt me too much or do something I don't like, I'll tell you. If I'm shouting your name and cumming, I'm having fun. Okay?"

A slow grin spread across his face. "Imprints are supposed to be docile," he informed me. "You're not a kitten, you're a wildcat!"

I rolled my eyes. "And what would an Alpha do with a docile imprint?"

Jacob looked at me in amusement before shaking his head and setting me on my feet. "Fine," he said. "Bella's having fun when she's screaming." He kissed me and pulled me back down onto the blanket, lying on his back with me draped over his chest. We both fell asleep.

It was pitch dark outside when I woke up. I was alone, and cold. Sitting up instantly, I hissed Jake's name. He was by my side in seconds.

"Sorry, honey, you were in a deep sleep and I wanted to phase to find out what was happening. I was right outside."

It was too dark to see his face, hell I could hardly make out his outline in the pitch blackness, but something in his tone alerted me to a problem.

"What is it, Jake? Is Charlie alright?"

"He's fine, honey. Quil was phased. He spent most of the afternoon with dad and Old Quil." I found myself wrapped securely in his arms and laid back down on the blanket with Jacob's comforting weight on top of me. I snuggled into his warmth. "They think Edward believes you're his soulmate, Bella." Over the next few minutes, he explained to me what that meant. Edward most likely took a piece of my soul, which was what caused the ache in my chest and the pull I felt to him. The leech now wanted to taste my blood and turn me into a vampire, to spend all eternity with him. I knew I should probably be terrified, but somehow as I lay there in an isolated cave in the arms of the man I was rapidly growing to adore, I couldn't muster any more than slight alarm.

"He will not get to you, Bella," Jacob promised me. "I swear on the entire fucking pack that you are safe. But it makes it more urgent that I go and find out what the hell he's thinking. I hate to say it, honey, but we probably need to go home in the morning."

I pouted in the dark. "Cut our honeymoon short because of a bloodsucker?"

"Honeymoon, Bells?" I heard the amusement in his voice.

"Kidding, Jake." I rolled my eyes in the dark, knowing he would probably see it.

"It does bring me to my next point though, Bella," he told me. He moved his face very close to mine and whispered, "We need to talk about our joining ceremony."

"I thought we'd bypassed that?" I asked in surprise.

"No," he corrected me. "We postponed it by not having the traditional imprint's bonfire. But we'll still be expected to do it. Look, honey, I wasn't going to try and talk you into it just yet. I mean, it's not the first time I've argued against the Elders so they wouldn't have been too surprised if I'd just told them we weren't gonna do it. But if I'm gonna move you up to La Push and start a war against the Cullens, it'd be easier if we were married in the eyes of the council. More than that, though ... I want to, Bells. I want to be tied to you. I know it's not the same as a legal marriage but, it kind of is if you're Quileute."

I was silent for a moment, trying to absorb all of that. "You're moving me to La Push?"

"Yes," he told me firmly. "I know you can argue it's too soon and probably a whole lot of other things as well, but we can protect you better on the res. If you don't want to move in with me and dad, you could stay with one of the other imprints until we work something more permanent out. But you and Charlie need to be under our protection on our territory."

"Okay. You're starting a war with the Cullens?"

"If they don't agree to get the fuck out of Forks and never come back, then yes, I will attack them," he stated bluntly.

"Okay. You want to be married to me under your laws?"

"Yes." His voice was quieter now and the air between us hissed with expectancy.

"Okay," I finally told him.

"Okay? Okay you'll take part in the joining ceremony, move to La Push and let me destroy a few bloodsuckers for you?"
He sounded ridiculously excited and I couldn't help but laugh.

"It doesn't get more romantic for a girl than having bloodsuckers destroyed for her. So yes, you've won me over," I teased him.

I didn't tease him anymore after that. For the next hour, he brought me tenderly up to the stars and back again, murmuring his absolute love and devotion over and over again. Finally, spent and exhausted, we fell asleep in one another's arms, ready to face the rest of our lives together.
It took us awhile to make it off the mountain the next day. Jacob's original plan had been for us to stay away until his wolf let him know he was satisfied. Now that the man had secured my promise to move to La Push and participate in a joining ceremony though, he was keen to return and start planning for both events.

We just kept on getting distracted. I woke up from pleasant dreams to Jake nuzzling my neck, licking and nibbling the skin there. I turned my head to kiss him deeply. Before we got too carried away, I wanted to take another dip in the stream. It being icy cold, Jake of course had to join me. More kissing and touching ensued. I couldn't believe the effect Jake had on my body. I was starting to think I was as insatiable as his wolf, and told him so. He answered by firmly wrapping my legs around his waist and slipping inside me, taking me in the water.

"'Snot just my wolf, Bells," he breathed in my ear as he began to move inside me. We ended up with my back pressed against a rock as Jake brought us both to a simultaneous climax. Breathing heavily against the crook of my neck, he stayed inside me for a long time.

"Bella?" he finally asked.

"Mmmm?" I was running my fingers through his thick, wet hair and simply revelling in my post-orgasmic bliss, safe in his arms.

"When can we do the joining ceremony?"

"Well, how long do we need to organise it?"

Jacob finally raised his head from my neck and grinned at me. "About half an hour. It's just a case of getting some key people together, unless you want to make a big deal out of it."

I nodded. "Half an hour after we get back, then."

He rolled his eyes. "Seriously, Bella. When?"

"Half an hour after we get back," I repeated with a kiss on his lips. "Although," I frowned, "Charlie should be there. We should wait until he's well enough to attend."

"We can do the ceremony at his bedside Bells, that's not the problem." He pulled out of me and I pouted. He kissed my nose. "You know he's gonna want to kill me after this."

"I'm not planning on sharing the details with him," I told him.

"Honey, you told him you'd talk more with him yesterday morning. When he woke up, you were gone. None of the guys would have lied to him, he knows you've been with me. He's gonna be pissed. I think inviting him to a joining ceremony within the next few hours is uh, not gonna have a positive response."

Jake's demeanour was very serious.

"Don't worry about it, Jake," I told him. "I'm 21 years old, I haven't lived with Charlie in ... well, ever, really. He's my father but I really don't think he'll try and stop me making a decision like this. And he does love you. I know he's kind of shocked right now, but I think he sees you as the son he never had. He'll be happy for us. He might just need a little time."

Jake looked genuinely worried and I realised he must actually be upset about what Charlie thought of him now that he knew the truth. Tightening my arms around him, I tried to comfort him in my embrace. Jake tightened his own grip around my waist.

"Jake please don't worry," I told him. "I'll talk to Charlie and make this all okay. I think we should go ahead and organise the ceremony."

"Without his blessing?" He sounded dubious.

"He will give us his blessing," I said firmly. "I could tell it meant a lot to Jake to have it, and I was determined he would get it. I felt a little sad that he was the one who wanted my father's blessing so desperately. I renewed my determination to establish a better relationship with Charlie."

"Let's say you can bewitch him, too," Jake smiled at me. "Does tonight sound okay if I can organise it?"

"Sure." I was a little surprised by his urgency but I wasn't complaining. "Is there something I should know, Jake? Why the rush?"

He shrugged a little. "One, I've waited far too long for you and now that you're here, I don't want to wait any longer. If you tell me it's not too soon for you, then I don't see the point in putting it off. Two, I get the feeling we've not heard the last of Edward Cullen. The pack will protect you with their lives regardless, but if our relationship isn't official in the eyes of the Elders, they might cause some issues that would just be a waste of my time. Time that could be better spent with you, or
protecting you.” He frowned slightly. “I’m not gonna take any chances with your safety, Bells. If I can’t be with you personally, another wolf will be.”

I opened my mouth to protest but he shook his head. “No arguments.” He lifted me easily from against the rock and began walking out of the stream with me.

Jake walked us back up to the cave and started gathering our clothes. I pouted at him when he handed me mine and he grinned as he pulled on his own jeans.

“Move in with me straightaway and we can be naked together all the time, Bella,” he teased me.

“With your dad around?” I asked sarcastically.

“Fair point.” He took my clothes back out of my hands and turned me around, slipping my bra straps over my arms and shoulders before fastening it.

“Seriously though.” He turned me back to face him and pulled my T-shirt over my head. “Will you move in with me?” His eyes searched mine as I straightened my top.

“I need to stay with Charlie, Jake,” I reminded him. “The whole point of me moving back here was to look after him. I can’t bail on him now.”

“Charlie needs to move up to the res too, honey. Edward has been in your house. It’s not safe. Look, Charlie can move into the twins’ old room, you can move in with me, and we’ll look after our dads together. It’s not the biggest place, but we can make do till Charlie’s better and then re-think things.”

I finished dressing while he spoke, thinking hard. I could plainly see that he was dead serious. Meeting his eyes, I exhaled sharply.

“How much danger are Charlie and I in, Jake? Is this you being over-protective, or is it really necessary?”

I knew he would be honest with me.

“It’s a bit of both, Bella. We have no idea what Edward is thinking, or what his next move will be. If he decides to take some kind of revenge, or just loses his temper, that,” he snapped his fingers, “is how long it will take him to kill you or Charlie.” He pulled me close to his body. “And what would I do now, if something happened to you?” His voice was gentler now. “I need you on the res, honey. As much as I’ll try, I can’t be with you all of the time. It’ll be easier to protect you in La Push.”

I nodded, trying to think. Jake gave me a minute and then tried again.

“Bells, you could move in with Sue Clearwater, to Leah’s old room. Sue absolutely won’t have a problem with that. I want you with me, but if you’re not comfortable with that yet, then please consider moving in with Sue. Or with Sam and Emily, they have an extra bedroom too.” His eyes were pleading with me and I made my mind up.

“Okay.” I blew some hair out of my eyes. “We’d better get going. I need to convince Charlie to move in with Billy, arrange alternative medical care for him, tell him that we’re having a joining ceremony this evening, and tell him that you and I are going to be having hot wolf sex at every opportunity under the same roof as him.” I pulled a wry face. “This is going to be so much fun.”

A beautiful smile had spread across Jake’s face as he listened to me.

“Seriously? You’re moving in with me and dad?” he checked.

“Well there’s no point getting married under tribal law and then living under separate roofs, is there?” I grinned back at him.

Jake laughed and pulled me into a tight hug that cut off my air supply. Happiness was literally radiating off him. It was infectious and I ended up laughing with him.

My laugh was cut short when he pulled back slightly and began kissing me hard. My head span with the suddenness of his movement, and the lack of oxygen. I felt my knees give way slightly and he pulled back, smiling smugly.

“Jeez, Bells, I seriously make you weak at the knees?”

“Get over yourself, Black,” I teased him. “You were cutting off my air supply, that’s all.”

His eyes smoldered. Uh-oh.

“You don’t think I can make your legs give way?” he challenged me. I gulped, certain that he knew the answer just as well as I did. Of course he could. In one swift movement, Jake pulled my sweatshirt off and ripped my T-shirt straight from my body. Slightly stunned, I reeled back from him.
Jake's eyes danced with amusement as he stalked towards me. His nostrils flared when he smelled the effect he was having on me. Reaching out for me, he spun me around and pulled my back flush against his chest. He pressed his erection into my back and I bit back my moan.

He might be guaranteed to win this game, but that didn't mean I couldn't play too.

He swept my hair aside and placed his open mouth on my shoulder, biting down slightly. "This doesn't work?" he murmured huskily before biting down again, a little harder this time.

I squeezed my eyes shut, determined not to give in straight away. "Nope." My voice was reasonably strong, I was pleased to hear.

One long arm snaked around my middle and he held me more firmly in place. He ran his tongue up from my neck to my ear and nibbled around the shell of my ear for a while. I focussed on keeping my breathing steady. Jake moved his head round to the other side of my neck and began kissing down my back. He knelt behind me, keeping me firmly in place so I couldn't turn, and bit down hard on the skin at my waist. I gasped at the sensation I had never felt before and he asked, "This?"

Smiling, I immediately responded, "Nope," again. His breath puffed against my waist as though he had let out a silent laugh. I knew the aroma that would be hitting him full force was betraying me but he was so cocky that I was determined to hold out as long as I could.

Turning me around, Jake rose supernaturally fast and bit down gently on one of my nipples through my bra. I staggered slightly and moaned out loud. *Mission accomplished, Jacob Black.* He rose to his full height and cocked an eyebrow at me. "That?"

Narrowing my eyes at him, I shook my head. I was unable to stop the laugh that bubbled up from me and his eyes were dancing with mirth. Again moving at inhuman speed, he yanked down my jeans and panties and lifted me with one arm so he could use his other hand to pull them off.

Spreading my legs, he dropped to his knees again. Lifting one of my legs onto his shoulder, he steadied me with his hands on my hips and began rapidly sucking and licking my clit.

"Fuck!" It exploded from my lips as the leg that wasn't over Jake's shoulder completely gave way under me. He held me easily in place and continued his merciless administrations. Wrapping one arm securely around my waist, he moved his other hand between my legs and pushed two fingers inside me. I began to grind against his fingers. This felt so damn good and he knew he had won anyway. I was completely lost in the sensations he was creating when he suddenly inserted a third finger into me. I fell apart, screaming his name. My body convulsed and Jake began to slow his movements, allowing me to come back to Earth in my own sweet time.

Finally, still holding tightly to me, Jake stood up and kissed me lightly on the lips. Looking into my eyes, he let me go. I stumbled, my legs still not quite able to support me after the mind blowing orgasm he had just given me. Jake immediately held onto me again, the expression on his face completely smug.

"That worked," he announced proudly, before kissing me hard. I moved closer to him as soon as I could will my legs to work. I felt his very prominent erection through his jeans, and pushed against his chest.

"My turn," I told him and his eyes widened. "I can't hold you up but I think the rock can manage." I licked my lips for effect and his huge cock twitched. Sinking to my knees, I prayed I could do this right. It just wasn't something Pete and I had ever done. I vaguely wondered why we had never experimented with each other's bodies, but the colossal man in front of me quickly banished all thoughts of my ex-lover.

Allowing instinct to take over, I stretched out my tongue and licked him from base to shaft, looking up at him as I did so.

"Fuck, Bells!" I nearly laughed when he leaned back heavily against the rock, his knees evidently already feeling the strain. Emboldened, I repeated my tongue action, fondling his balls in my hand as I did so. A guttural sounding groan came from Jake and I took him as far into my mouth as I could.

Every moan, every sigh, every sign that his control was slipping fuelled my desire to experiment. I twisted my hand at the base of his shaft as I darted my tongue across his tip. I grazed my teeth along the length of him. I sucked hard and nibbled gently. It wasn't long before he came apart in my mouth, giving me my first taste of his potent liquid. His hands were tangled in my hair and the noise he made when he came sounded completely primal.

I drank all I could from him before kissing up his abs and chest. He gazed at me from under hooded lids. He was breathing hard and fully supported by the rock wall at his back.

"Fuckin' hell!" he gasped out. "You win." He leaned his head back against the rock and wrapped his arms around me.

I couldn't help my own smug smile. "I've never done that before," I confessed.
Jake’s head snapped back to look at me. “You ... seriously?” A slow smile crossed his features and he asked, "What else have you never done?"

I snorted. “Tons. I told you, standard formula. That’s all we ever did.”

Something was glinting in Jacob’s eyes and he lowered his lips to meet my mouth. “It will be my very great pleasure to educate you, Ms. Swan,” he murmured. I shivered at his words and he grinned at me. “Sorry Bells, you’re gonna have to give me five minutes to recover. Don’t tell the guys, they’ll never let me live it down.”

I laughed. "Given the temperature of the water earlier, I don't think they have any reason to be anything other than highly impressed." I reached for my clothes and Jake protested.

"Hey! Five minutes isn't that long!"

"Charlie," I reminded him simply and he groaned, shoving himself off the rock face.

"Fine," he agreed as he fastened his jeans. "But promise me you'll sleep in my bed tonight, Bells?" His eyes were pleading and I smiled at him.

"Isn't tonight like, our wedding night? Where else would I sleep?"

Jake pulled me into his arms again. I loved the way he just seemed unable to let me go for long. I felt exactly the same way about him. "Bella Black," he whispered against my neck.

"I change my name?" I was a little startled, not that I supposed it mattered.

"No," he admitted reluctantly. "Not yet, anyway," he added with a grin.

Not yet. The future promised in those two words almost made my knees give way again.

We finally made it back to the bike. My muscles were stiff and sore from so much Jake, and he frowned at me, concerned.

"Can you ride back, honey? Maybe I should’ve brought the car. It just can't make it as high up the mountain, that's why I brought the bike. I could carry you part way down and then go get the car, but I don't really want to leave you alone.”

"I'll be fine, Jake. I'll take a hot bath later and I'll be good as new, I promise.”

He watched me carefully until I was settled. When he drove, he was careful to avoid potholes and bumps. I was struck by his thoughtfulness. Despite the oozing machismo and the animal within, he really was incredibly sweet. I smiled against his back. Did I really get to spend the rest of my life with this incredible man? Did I really have a guaranteed lifetime of unconditional love from him? What had I ever done to deserve that?

We arrived back in Forks too quickly. Jake turned to me outside Charlie’s house.

"That ride wasn't nearly so interesting as the one there, Bella. What were you thinking about this time?” He watched me as I climbed gingerly off the bike. "Are you in pain?"

"Not really," I shook my head. "Just a little tender, and my muscles are stiff.” Jake swung his leg over the bike and I answered his other question as he fiddled with the clasp of my helmet. "As for what I was thinking about, I was wondering what I ever did to deserve a lifetime with you. It seems too good to be true.”

Jake’s eyes met mine and they were soft pools of tender love. "A lifetime, Bella," he breathed. He looked overwhelmed again and I realised just how lonely his life must have been, unable to form any relationships with women. Impulsively, I threw my arms around his waist and buried my head in his chest. I would devote my life to him, and his past loneliness would be forgotten.

"Whoa, you're back early. All wolfed out already, Alpha?"

Jake’s chest rumbled a little withlaughter.

"Not likely, Jared. Bella's agreed to having a joining ceremony tonight.”

I raised my head. Jake’s eyes were sparkling as he gave the news to his pack brother. Jared’s answering smile was genuine. He clapped Jake on the back.

"Congratulations, both of you. Uh, you need to know that Charlie’s a bit pissed. I've just spent half an hour getting my ear chewed off so you might wanna cool it on the PDA for the time being."

I felt Jake tense and grabbed his hand.

"Oh don't be ridiculous. Come on, we’re getting this over with,” I ordered him. He followed me up the stairs and I heard Jared snort a laugh behind us. Turning to look at him, I saw the slightly sheepish grin on Jake’s face.
"Wait till the pack sees that!" Jared laughed and started to jog away.

"What was that about?" I asked, confused.

"None of the guys are used to seeing me so uh, docile," Jake explained.

"That's silly. You're not that tough, you know." He raised his eyebrows at me, clearly offended. "Oh I get that you're the Alpha and in charge, blah blah," I told him. "But under it all, you just want to be looked after."

Jake looked slightly stunned and I smiled to myself. I hadn't needed an imprint to work that one out, either.

Charlie was sitting on his recliner chair in the living room when we went in. He took one look at me and his face turned pink, then red, then purple. His gaze seemed to be alternating between our joined hands, my hair, and my dishevelled clothes.

"Isabella Marie Swan!" he began. I raised my hand to stop him and he practically choked. Dropping Jake's hand just for a minute, I crossed the room and sat in the couch beside my father's chair.

"Dad, I would really like you to listen to me right now. Jake is still Jake, wolf or not. He's still the boy you've watched grow up, lose his mom, and look after his dad. He's still the boy that I think you hoped I would fall in love with. Well, I have. Imprinting and wolves or not, I would have fallen in love with Jacob regardless. He loves me too, and we've already agreed to spend the rest of our lives together. Don't try and tell me this isn't what you wanted, either.

"The wolf pack can protect you and me both, dad. Edward Cullen thinks I'm his soulmate and he's already been in this house at least twice. It's too much to expect the pack to protect us in vampire territory. So you and I are moving up to La Push, today. We'll live with Billy and Jake for the time being. I'll sort out a good doctor for you there.

"Jake and I are having a joining ceremony, hopefully this evening. That means we'll be married under Quileute law. We would both really like your blessing, dad, but we're going through with it regardless. We were literally born to be together. I think you already know that."

I held my breath, waiting for his reaction. I was aware of Jake standing across the room. I could practically feel his tension. Charlie stared at me in shock for a few minutes. Eventually, he turned to Jake.

"Jacob?"

Jake cleared his throat. "Yes, sir?"

"Just tell me one thing. You'll take care of her?"

I smiled. Charlie was on our side. Jake walked across the room and sat down opposite Charlie. I appreciated what he was doing. The Chief of Police didn't want to strain his neck to look up at the man he was giving his daughter to.

"I love Bella with all my heart and soul, Charlie," Jake said sincerely. "I know we've only just met but really, we already knew each other. I don't mean from when we were kids. I mean, my soul knows her soul, and her soul knows mine. I promise I will take care of her, and devote my life to keeping her safe and happy."

Charlie nodded and lapsed into thought once more. A few minutes passed before he spoke again.

"And these new living arrangements," he asked finally. "They involve you two..." He gestured between us, pulling a face that clearly said he didn't want to know. "You'll be in Jake's room?" he finally settled for.

"Yes," I told him firmly.

Charlie sighed. "Well I'm in no state to pack," he said gruffly. "You'll need to do it for me, Bells. Do me a favour. Don't forget my earplugs."

I gave Charlie a hug. He patted my back awkwardly and shook Jake's extended hand. Looking at Jake's hopeful face, he finally huffed out a breath.

"You have my blessing, son. I know you'll be good for her."

Jake's smile looked almost painful, it was so wide. I told him I was going to start packing and headed for the door. He was by my side in an instant.

"Let me check upstairs first, Bells. I can't smell anything and I know Jared's just left, but I need to be sure."

I had a sneaking suspicion he was looking for a reason to leave me alone with Charlie, but I didn't complain. Jake ran up the stairs and I turned back to my dad.

"Are you sure, Bells?" he asked me.

"Of course I am, dad," I assured him. "I would never enter into something like this if I wasn't absolutely, one hundred
percent certain."

Charlie patted my hand. "I just want you to be happy, kiddo. Your mom and I jumped into things and that didn't end up too good."

"Were you a wolf or mom a danger magnet?" I asked dryly and he managed a smile.

"Fair enough." He gestured to my hair. "Go and try and make that look a little less obvious."

"I - what?" My hand flew to my hair. Jake chose that moment to come back into the room and he chuckled.

I went upstairs and into the bathroom. I laughed when I saw my reflection. One description of my long, thick hair would have been 'bird's nest'. Another would be 'sex hair'.

I gazed at my own reflection for a minute. I hardly recognised myself. My eyes were sparkling and undeniably happy. My cheeks had more colour in them than I remembered ever having had before. I had a couple of obvious bite marks on my neck and dirt smudged on my chin.

For the first time in my life, I felt absolutely beautiful.
Moving Charlie to La Push had been something of an operation. Quil and Seth were enlisted to transport him there safely and comfortably. I packed a bag with some belongings I thought he would want to have with him, and then phoned the hospital to request a transfer of his care from Carlisle Cullen.

By the time I had arranged for him to be treated by an alternative doctor, checked I had all his medication and finished his packing, it was after lunchtime. Jake had packed a bag for me while I organised Charlie. When we were finally ready to go, even my stomach was growling loudly.

I had packed a box of supplies from Charlie’s kitchen to bring up to La Push. I started pulling things back out of it and Jake asked what I was doing.


He glowered at me. "Not funny."

"I’m making us some lunch. I’m starving and you must be weak with hunger by now!"

"Actually Bells, I thought we could just go straight to Sam and Emily’s. Emily will have plenty of food made and I want to see Sam about what happened yesterday," Jake told me.

I looked at him for a moment. I knew he would be starving. I also knew he was still pissed at Sam for not giving the order to destroy the Cullens the day before. I shook my head.

"Eat first Jake," I said firmly. "I’ll make something quick, I promise. You can even eat it on the way if you prefer. But you’re not going to have this out with Sam on an empty stomach."

He opened his mouth as though to protest, then seemed to think better of it and pulled me to him for a kiss instead.

"Okay," he agreed. "You’re probably right." He released me and watched as I began swiftly making sandwiches for us both. I had a suspicion he enjoyed me bossing him around over domestic issues.

Half an hour later, we left Charlie’s home and drove out of Forks. When we crossed some invisible line, Jacob relaxed a little. He turned to me with a smile. "You’re not gonna be in any danger now, Bells." He squeezed my hand and a thought struck me.

"Am I allowed off the reservation at all?"

He looked at me incredulously. "You’re not a prisoner, honey. You can come and go as you please." He then added, "But just until we’ve sorted out what’s going on with Cullen, can you tell me if you want to leave La Push so I can make sure you’re guarded?"

"And when are you going to see him?"

Jake blew out a breath. "I want to do it today, get it over with and find out what the score is. But it might need to wait till tomorrow. It depends what’s been happening with the pack while we were away. I need to see Sam and dad, and get everything organised for this evening. Uh, is there anything special you want for the ceremony?"

"Like what?"

"I dunno. Do you want me to wear anything in particular? Or do you need to go shopping for anything? What do girls usually do at these things?"

"Damned if I know," I told him with a laugh. "Is it okay for us just to turn up as we are? You definitely need to be fully dressed though. I might get distracted otherwise."

He grinned at that. "Talk to Emily. She’ll tell you what to expect and what happened at her own ceremony. I don’t remember anything special. It was just all the pack and Elders at a bonfire, dad blessed them, and Sam kissed her a lot. That’s the bit I’m looking forward to," he winked at me.

We had pulled up outside a small cabin with pretty yellow flower boxes in the windows. An enormous man appeared in the doorway, leading a young woman by the hand. I clearly saw the deep red weals that disfigured her beautiful face. Jake had told me the whole story and I noticed him looking at me slightly nervously as he opened my car door for me. I smiled at him, reassuring him. Still not afraid of you. He smiled back and introduced me to Sam and his fiancee.
"Bella," Emily pulled me into a hug. "You have no idea how happy I am to meet you!" She smiled at me, only the left side of her face moving. "It's about time you got here for Jacob!"

Sam's hand was extended to me and his eyes were warm and friendly.

"Hello, Bella." I shook his hand, feeling the now familiar heat.

"It's nice to meet you both," I told them sincerely. I was really looking forward to meeting the key people in Jake's life, and I knew beyond any doubt that other than Billy, the pack and their imprints were the most important.

Emily caught my elbow and steered me towards her home. "You must have a thousand questions, Bella," she guessed. "I'll answer anything you want. This is going to be harder for you than any of the rest of us, we at least grew up hearing the legends. The boys have all told me you've been good with weird, but then they're boys. Anything you need to know, just ask me."

She chattered freely as she ushered me over the doorstep into her living room. Looking over my shoulder, I saw Jake and Sam glowering at one another. Jake's voice was muted so I couldn't make out any of what he was saying, but there was no denying the ferocity of his expression.

I turned back to Emily. "Will they be okay?" She raised her eyebrows at me. "I mean, they're not going to kill each other or anything?" I half laughed to show her I wasn't entirely serious, but the answering look in her eyes was understanding.

"They'll be fine," she assured me, indicating that I should sit down on the couch. "The protection of an imprint is something the pack all take very seriously. Jake's newly imprinted, he's Alpha, and we have good reason to believe you're under a vampire threat. That makes what happened yesterday a very big deal. So there will be some fall out today, but they're brothers Bella. They absolutely will not harm one another." She looked at me earnestly. "The wolves are, to varying degrees, headstrong and volatile. They have tempers and they can seem alarming when they get mad at each other. But at the end of the day, they are all Protectors. And they really are a family, too. Some of the pack, Jake and Sam included, never had that much of a family life before they phased. They would never, ever harm each other."

"What do you think, Emily?" I asked her. "I mean, I'm new to all this. Should the pack have destroyed the Cullens yesterday?"

Emily laughed. "That's one hell of a question, Bella! Everyone understands Jake's reaction. Edward wants you, you're Jake's imprint, ergo Jake wants Edward destroyed. And if Jake had been with the pack, he would have given the order and it would have given the boys great pleasure to carry it out. But Sam isn't Alpha anymore. That means he doesn't have the right to make a decision that would break a generations old treaty. He also doesn't want to be responsible for the rest of the Cullens arriving here hell bent on avenging their family. Sam did what he thought was best. Jake disagrees. It really is that simple."

I nodded. I hadn't missed that Emily hadn't voiced her personal opinion, which was what I had asked her for. Then again, I figured she was Sam's imprint, talking to Jake's imprint. Changing the subject, I asked her about the joining ceremony.

"Oh congratulations Bella!" she enthused when I told her we were hoping it would take place that same evening. "We were wondering when Jake would be able to persuade you to have it. We should have known it wouldn't take him long!"

I grinned at her. "It didn't take much persuasion. He's ... amazing." Did I just gush?

Emily laughed happily. "Welcome to the wonderful world of imprinting, Bella. What did you want to know about the ceremony?"

I asked her what I should expect, and what I needed to organise. She explained that it was simply a case of me confirming that I accepted the imprint and would keep the pack's secret, followed by a traditional blessing performed by Billy and witnessed by the rest of the Elders. It didn't sound too daunting.

"Remember that imprints never know why they're attending the bonfire, Bella," she told me. "So every one of us has just been dressed in sweats, jeans, whatever. It's not a formal affair at all. It's not like a wedding, even though it is a marriage under tribal law. Does that make sense?"

It did, and I was relieved that I didn't need to pull something spectacular off at such short notice.

"You know the girls are all dying to meet you, Bella." Emily's eyes were twinkling. "We have to stick together. We can't tell anyone the truth about the boys, so we rely on each other. Would you mind if I text them all and ask them to come over and meet you?"

"No, that would be perfect," I told her. "I've been wanting to meet everyone. I still haven't met some of the pack."

Emily thought for a moment. "You know, Jacob's cheated you out of a bonfire. I think we should have one soon so that you can meet everyone properly. Tonight's probably too short notice, with the ceremony and all. Let me go and talk to Sam." She got to her feet and looked out the window. "Actually on second thoughts, I'll just go ahead and organise it," she said to me with a grin. "They're not done yet."
I looked out the window while Emily fired out some text messages. Sam and Jake were still in the front yard. Both were
gesticulating wildly and now that I was listening, their voices were both definitely raised.

Glancing over at Emily, she seemed completely unbothered. She caught my eye and smiled. "Don't worry Bella. If things
start to get out of hand, we'll just feed them."

While we waited for the other imprints to arrive, Emily filled me in. I had already met Jared. Kim was his imprint. They had
imprinted just a short time after Sam and Emily, and Kim was therefore as experienced as Emily with welcoming new
members of the pack. I quickly realised that I was considered the newest member. Imprints apparently counted as well as
wolves.

Paul was with Jake's sister Rachel, which I already knew. Rachel was feisty and well able to handle Paul, Emily told me
with a laugh. She implied that whenever they were together, sparks inevitably flew.

Embry's imprint was called Layla, and Emily told me she was sweet and a little shy. "A lot like Embry," she said. Seth was
with Mai. They had only imprinted a month earlier and Emily thought it would be good for Mai to know there was someone
else so new to it all. Brady's imprint was a girl from his school, Katy. Emily hinted that their young age had been causing a
lot of headaches, but she was evidently amused by whatever it was.

The remaining wolves, Quil and Collin, had yet to imprint. Emily said Collin was only 16, but nobody knew why Quil hadn't
met his imprint yet.

"There's just no telling," she told me. "Some of the wolves imprint immediately, like Jared and Brady. For others, like Jake
and Seth, it takes longer. We don't really know when to expect it for Quil and Collin."

The door flew almost off its hinges and Sam came storming in. I jumped out of my skin but Emily was completely unfazed.

"Come and eat," she told him, extending her hand to him and nudging him in the direction of what I assumed to be the
kitchen. She jerked her head at me, indicating I should go out to Jake. I found him in the yard, stomping around and
muttering to himself. He looked up as soon as I stepped out of the cabin, crossed the yard quickly and pulled me into his
arms.

Not sure what to say, I simply held onto him. I felt his shoulder muscles start to relax under my touch and began rubbing his
back to try and soothe him some more. It worked, and eventually I pulled back my head to look at him.

"Not good?" I asked. He sighed deeply.

"I told him his actions weren't those of a Beta." He groaned and buried his head in my hair. "D'you think that was too
harsh?"

"Do you?" I was still too new to all the pack dynamics and hierarchy. In fact, this was the first time I had witnessed any real
altercation and I was aware that there was a lot I had yet to experience of this supernatural world.

"I don't know, Bells. Sam's never been one to make controversial decisions. I knew that when I appointed him as my Beta.
Actually it's one of the reasons I wanted him in the role. I'm the one that makes the rash decisions while he takes a more
balanced approach. But yesterday needed more than that." He sighed again. "I guess the bottom line is that if I wanted
that decision made, I should've been there myself. Which I couldn't have been, under the circumstances." He looked at me
ruefully. "Dammit, Bells. I'm gonna have to apologise now." Pulling me back into a tight hug, he murmured, "Everything
really is much easier with you here."

I laughed a little. "I didn't do anything," I reminded him.

"Doesn't matter. Just knowing you're here makes everything feel better." He started kissing me, his tongue slipping
quickly into my mouth. I returned the kiss, molding myself against his body and feeling his now familiar hardness pressing
into me. I was completely lost in our kiss, oblivious to everything that was going on around me. Jake groaned and pulled
back, prompting an answering groan of disapproval from me.

"We've got company," he whispered into my ear. Looking up, shocked when I remembered we were still in Sam and
Emily's yard, I saw two native girls walking up the short path towards us, smiling widely.

"Hey Kim, Layla," Jake greeted them. "Meet Bella."

"Hi Bella! I'm Kim, Jared's girl." She was the plainer of the two girls, but her eyes were warm and caring, and her smile
was clearly genuine. The prettier girl introduced herself as Embry's imprint, Layla. She was definitely shy. I thought we
would probably get on quite well.

"I take it Emily's rallied the imprints then, huh?" Jake seemed pleased and I nodded.

"She was talking about a bonfire," I added. "But not tonight, because of our ceremony."

"You're doing the joining ceremony?" Layla asked excitedly. Jake beamed at me.

"I'll leave you to it, honey. Gotta go talk to Sam again." He kissed me gently and headed indoors. I turned back to the two
native girls.
"Um, yeah, we're hoping to do it tonight."

"Embry said Jake'd talk you into it quickly if it killed him," Layla laughed.

"Well I didn't need that much persuasion." I told them the same as I'd told Emily.

"The wonderful world of imprinting," Kim said and I laughed.

"That's exactly what Emily said!"

Kim led us into the small cabin. I didn't see any sign of either Jake or Sam. Emily came through with a tray of drinks and biscuits.

"They've gone out back," she answered my unspoken question. "They need to decide what to do now. Jake wants to go and talk to Edward Cullen but Sam's trying to persuade him to wait until he's calmed down a little." She shook her head with an amused smile. "They disagree a lot, Bella, but they have each other's backs regardless."

Kim nodded her agreement. "Jared always says the pack needs Jake up front leading the pack, but they're glad Sam can manage to reason with him sometimes."

"I think Sam has a replacement now, though," Emily said with a grin at me.

"I'm not sure if Bella's calming, judging from what Embry said," Layla piped up. Her smile was slightly wicked. "Embry said he's never seen a wolf so er, worked up, over his imprint."

Kim and Emily laughed and I blushed scarlet. I realised the girls must hear a lot of what went on in the pack mind.

"No secrets, huh?" I checked.

"None," Kim shook her head. "It's worse for the guys, but you get used to it. And honestly, Bella, it's great to have a group of girls who understand and support you. We're really glad you're here. Not just for Jacob, but for us, too."

I felt a little embarrassed but before I could answer, the door opened and another girl walked in. She was stunningly beautiful and had an air of bubbly confidence about her.

"I'm guessing you're Bella," she grinned at me, flopping down on the couch next to me. "I'm Mai, Seth's girl. I'm so glad I'm not the new girl anymore!"

"Hi," I said, taking in her hair. It was probably the thickest and glossiest that I had ever seen. "Wow. Your hair is beautiful."

She stuck her tongue out. "And totally impractical. Seth likes it down." That was all the explanation that was needed.

Kim snickered. "You don't want to know the things Seth likes to do with Mai's hair," she told me and I let out a squeak.

"Oh God, there really aren't any secrets, are there?"

"No way," Mai grinned. Sobering for a moment, she admitted, "I still haven't got used to it, to be honest. But the voices of experience over there tell me you just learn to deal. I'm still learning," she stage whispered the last part to me and I laughed. I could tell I was going to like Mai, too.

"Um, I met Seth the day I moved back," I told her. "At the store."

"We know," the girls all chorused. I looked from one to the other, a little confused.

"Edward Cullen apparently looked like he was going to lose it in the middle of the store. Seth nearly lost it and phased, too," Layla explained. "It was big news, and I mean huge!"

"We knew all about you before we even knew you were Jake's imprint," Mai added. Raising her hand and pretending to air write a headline, she said dramatically, "Police Chief's daughter sucked dry in Forks general store."

"I can see how that might cause a stir," I agreed, slightly bemused. "Anyway," I continued with a grin, "that day at the store, Seth told me he had forgotten to check on my dad that morning because you distracted him. He never mentioned your hair, though."

Mai hid her face behind a cushion as the other girls whooped. "I'd forgotten about that," she cringed. "Your dad was okay though, wasn't he?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course he was! I was only teasing, Mai," I reassured her.

"I will get my own back," she promised me. I laughed again. I was definitely going to like her.

"So we're waiting on Rachel and Katy?" I checked.
"Just Katy," said a voice from the doorway and a chorus of "Hey Rachel" went around the room. I got to my feet. This was the imprint I had been the most nervous about meeting. Jake's sister. She stood where she was for a moment, openly apprising me. I looked back at her. She was tall and held herself with the same confidence her brother wore. Her eyes were a lighter brown than his, but her nose was the same. She was simply beautiful.

"My brother was right," she said eventually. "You are stunning." She smiled then, and her smile was so like Jacob's that I had to swallow back my gasp. "Welcome to the family, Bella." She crossed over to me and pulled me into a hug. I hugged her back and after a moment heard her laugh.

"Stop looking so sappy, Jake," she chided. "You know I'll flay her alive if she ever hurts you." She let me go and I turned to see him leaning against the kitchen door. His eyes were soft and it was easy to see that his sister hugging his imprint had affected him deeply. Our eyes locked for a moment and Rachel groaned.

Jake's lips twitched but his eyes never left mine. "Sam and I are gonna phase and get Seth. Then we're heading over to the Cullens."

Sam came in behind Jake and nodded at Emily. "We'll be back soon. We're just going to talk."

Mai looked a little concerned but Jake and Sam reassured her that Seth would be in no danger. They stressed again that they were just going to talk to Edward and try and get to the bottom of what he wanted with me. I could see Jake's tension, but he insisted he was fine. With a hug and a deep kiss, he left me with the girls. Emily looked at ease and I assumed that was a good sign.

The next hour passed pleasantly. The girls were clearly all relaxed and comfortable with one another, and welcomed me warmly into their midst. Rachel in particular seemed to be making an effort to learn more about me. Katy turned up shortly after school was let out for the day. She was young and a little shy, but seemed a sweet girl. She gravitated towards Emily, who looked after her with cookies and milk, and encouraged her to do her homework. She seemed very young, too young, to be involved in all this secrecy.

I said as much to Rachel when Katy was settled at the kitchen table writing out an assignment. Rachel nodded her agreement but told me she had handled it very well so far.

I wondered what the girls all did. They were all, Katy excepted, around my age. Rachel had a paid job with the Council. She told me it was ideal because the Elders obviously knew about Paul and allowed her to work around his patrol schedule.

Kim worked as a receptionist in Forks, part time so that she could be home for whenever Jared needed her. Layla worked at her aunt's bakery here in La Push and attended community college two days a week. Mai was taking an online science course and wanted to teach eventually. Emily leaned back in the couch and patted her abdomen.

"Oh! Jake didn't tell me! Congratulations!" I enthused. "Wow."

Rachel was rolling her eyes. "Typical man not to say anything. It's only the next generation of puppies getting started."

"When are you due?" I asked.

"I'm only three months along. Not until April," Emily told me. "I was working in a cafe but I had a scare early on. Sam and I decided I should just quit my job. Better safe than sorry! Who needs another cup of tea?"

"Emily you sit down," I started to protest. The other girls all yelled at me and I raised my hands in surrender. "What did I say?"

Emily was laughing. "I'll let you off this once since you're new. But please, don't treat me like I'm ill, or fragile, Bella! Sam does enough of that and it drives me insane."

"Fair enough. But I can still help," I told her firmly. I followed her through to her kitchen. She showed me where everything was and I helped her organise another tray of drinks and snacks. Just as I sat down again, the door burst open and three huge men came barging in.

"Hey darlin'," Quil greeted me with a grin. "Sorry Emily, you got serious competition. Bella here can cook up a storm! She made dinner at Charlie's, night before last. Damn it was good!"

"Dumbass." Embry, who had come in behind Quil, swatted his friend on the head before pulling Layla out of her seat and into his arms. I watched as he kissed her gently, the expression in his eyes soft. She beamed happily at him as she wound her arms around his neck and asked how his patrol had been. They were clearly very good together and I couldn't tear my eyes away from the obvious love in front of me.

It was Emily who broke my reverie. She had figured out why Quil was a dumbass and was giving him a scolding.

"You came here after midnight telling me you were starving, Quil Ateara! Well may you look sheepish, you bottomless pit. I
"Aw Em I wouldn't have woke you, I heard you move about. I knew Sam was due home from patrol soon and you'd be waiting up for him. I just figured you might have leftovers was all!" he protested.

Emily folded her arms across her chest. "And since when do any of you ever leave leftovers?" she demanded. Quil hung his head and I laughed out loud when I realised his tail really would have been between his legs, had he been in his wolf form.

He turned to me with a mock scowl. "So much for us bein' friends, Bella," he lamented. I just laughed harder.

The third man held his hand out to me. "Bella, I'm Collin, Jake's cousin. It's nice to meet you." Shaking his hand, I couldn't help but gawk at him. Like Seth and all the others, he looked much older than he was. How his teachers at school never questioned his age was beyond me.

"How - how do you get away with telling people you're 16?" I squeaked out and he laughed.

"I'm in it with Brady, we just kinda stick together. But I guess people just believe what you tell them when they don't know any better." He shrugged. I shook my head, trying to imagine not knowing the truth and blindly accepting that certain members of the tribe had a genetic tendency to extreme growth spurts. I supposed I already had, with Seth. I had thought it was strange, but didn't question it too much.

"It's not any weirder than the vamps, Bella," Kim pointed out. "They're frozen in time. Like the Cullens, they claim to be growing older but they haven't aged a day in the five years they've been here."

"Surely someone will notice eventually, though?" I asked.

"Of course," Kim said. "They'll need to move on sooner or later. They can't stay in the one place too long, and they can't return quickly either, not while someone might remember them. I was talking to someone the other day that works at the hospital with Carlisle. She mentioned Rosalie, said she'd been in to see Carlisle at work and how people were saying she didn't look a day older than when she graduated."

"Who was that?" Embry sounded interested and I realised the news that people were beginning to talk about the Cullens was important to the pack. Jake had told me it was the coven's presence in the area that caused the wolves to phase. If they left, the tribe's boys would presumably stop shifting.

"Donna Clearwater. Seth and Leah's cousin," Kim told Embry.

"Oh yeah," Mai offered. "Seth said his cousin was just back from college and nursing at the hospital with the leech doctor."

"Donna Clearwater?" Embry was grinning and looking over at Quil, whose face was a curious shade of beetroot. He cleared his throat.

"Ancient history, Embry," he growled.

"Something we should know, Quil?" Emily asked sweetly. He shook his head but Embry was already talking.

"Donna had the biggest crush on him at school. She was older than us but for some reason she had this huge thing for Quil. She used to have Biology just before us on a Tuesday. She got her seat moved to the same one he sat at and would leave notes for him taped to the desk." Embry snorted at the memory and Quil grabbed a mug, looking like he was about to pitch it at Embry's head.

"Don't you dare!" Emily yelled at him and he promptly put it back down again.

"It's not a big deal," he muttered, his face still scarlet.

"Did you like her?" I asked, curious. He shook his head.

"Was humiliating," he grumbled. "She used to sign her name on the notes..." his voice trailed off and Embry doubled over laughing.

"And that's humiliating because..." Rachel prompted.

"She signed it 'Donna Ateara'," Embry supplied.

"Hilarious," Layla said dryly.

"Embry and Jake would've thought so," Rachel grinned. "I remember the way the three of them used to carry on together." She chuckled at some memory.

The banter continued for a while. I was enjoying the company but a large part of me missed Jake. I was growing restless without him and Emily noticed.
"He'll be feeling it worse," she told me. "Trust me."

"Does it settle after a while?" I wanted to know. "I mean, I feel like I'm going stir crazy unless he's right next to me." I frowned and Rachel smiled at me.

"It settles," she said simply.

Emily elaborated. "The bond you share will always be special. There's a supernatural element to it that never leaves. You kind of just know how each other is feeling, and as an imprint you'll always know what to do to help your wolf. But the feeling you have now, the intensity of needing to be with him? That fades eventually, to an extent."

"When?" Mai asked with a groan and everyone laughed.

"So," I checked, "eventually it's just like being in love but with a deeper bond?"

"And amazing sex," Kim added.

"I'm out." Quil leaped to his feet. "Girls talking like that is my cue to leave."

"Bye Quil!" the girls chorused and I laughed again. I couldn't remember the last time I had laughed as much as I was this afternoon.

"Let's get one thing clear," Rachel said severely. "We all know that Alpha sex is supposed to be even more intense than mere wolf sex, although how that is even possible I have no idea. I do not want to leave this conversation with images of my brother that will give me nightmares, okay?"

"I am not sharing," I said firmly. I may be enjoying myself, but talking openly about the education that I had been receiving over the past couple of days wasn't going to happen.

"Oh come on, Bella," Layla pleaded. "We've all been dying to know what's different with the Alpha."

Collin and Embry both got to their feet as well. "Following Quil," Embry said as they left. The girls, all except Rachel who seemed nauseated, looked at me expectantly.

"No!" I protested. "I don't know you! I don't even know the name for some of the things Jake did."

Rachel covered her ears and the other girls all laughed.

"Just one tiny detail?" Mai pleaded. Her eyes were dancing with mirth and I knew they were all enjoying watching me squirm.

"Fine," I told her. "He bit me. It healed really quickly, but it's left a mark."

The room was suddenly hushed and Rachel was staring at me intently. "Can I see it?" she asked quietly. "I mean, assuming it's somewhere not embarrassing for both of us."

"It's right there." I pulled back my shirt and showed her the mark on the back of my shoulder. Rachel fingered it gently as she examined it.

"Wow, Bella," she said finally.

"What's wrong? Jake didn't know why he did it, he was upset about it afterwards."

Rachel removed her hand from my shoulder and covered the mark again with my shirt, almost reverently.

"After dad and Old Quil figured out you're probably Edward Cullen's singer, they asked me to do a little research. My job at the Council gives me access to all our old records and parchments. I found a legend about an Alpha biting his imprint. Have you heard that just by being imprinted, we're supposed to be Protected from supernatural harm? And that once the imprint is consummated, the Protection is stronger?"

I nodded and she continued. "Well according to this legend, one Alpha instinctively knew that his imprint was going to be in danger, and he had this overwhelming urge to bite her. The details of the story were a little hazy, but it turned out that the mark he left on her was so repulsive to the creature that wanted to harm her, that she was kept safe."

She hesitated and exchanged a glance with Emily. "I told the girls about it this morning. They were just kind of joking around about what Alpha sex might involve and whether you'd be able to walk straight today. I told them the story. I was kidding about not believing my brother would have sex and said maybe he'd settle for biting you instead."

"And the rest of the story?" I prompted her. I could tell there was more from the way she and Emily were looking at one another.

"The Alpha's connection with his imprint was deeper after he bit her. He could sense whenever she was in harm's way. If she hurt herself or was afraid, he knew. And then, when she finally died, he instantly dropped dead too. The legend has it
that his mark connected their souls so tightly that one literally could not survive without the other."

Rachel looked at me very seriously. "Bella, if that legend is true, like all the others have been, your connection with Jacob is on a whole different level. In the most literal sense, you cannot live without each other."

"Wow." I couldn't think of anything else to say. It didn't seem like too much of a big deal on top of everything else I'd heard over the past few days. I wasn't sure I liked the bit about Jake potentially dropping dead if something happened to me, but I wasn't finding it as shocking as the other girls seemed to be. In the last 72 hours, I had learned of werewolves and vampires, imprinting and singers. A mystical mark didn't seem too surreal on top of all that.

Another fifteen minutes passed in conversation about the mark, and the many effects of imprinting. Brady arrived, fresh from patrol, and went into the kitchen with Katy. He said Jake, Sam and Seth had shifted to human when they reached the Cullens and hadn't phased back in since. I was beginning to wonder what was taking them so long, and I could see Emily becoming agitated too. Finally, unable to sit still any longer, I stood and began collecting mugs and plates. I waved off Emily's protests and told her I needed to be busy otherwise I would go crazy.

It happened as I was carrying the plates through to the kitchen. It struck from nowhere.

The most excruciating pain I had ever felt seared across my back, raking from my right shoulder down to my left waist. Screaming in agony, I dropped to the ground. Plates fell from my hands and scattered, cracking and breaking against the floor. The trail of fire stopped, leaving a throbbing pain behind which consumed my entire body. I felt a warm wetness saturate my back.

Moments later, an equally excruciating pain hit my right thigh. It felt like needles sinking into my leg. Through my screaming, I was aware of a commotion. It seemed all the girls were gathered around me. I heard someone, perhaps Rachel, yell at Brady to go and phase to get Jake the hell back here.

"Look at the blood," someone else gasped. Moving my head, I saw that my jeans were soaking rapidly through with blood from the pain in my thigh. I yelled out again when someone tried to peel my shirt back from the deep gash on my back, although the pain there seemed less now in light of the new wound on my leg.

"It's healing!" a voice said incredulously. What was?

I never got round to asking the question. A fresh pain, similar to the one in my leg, hit my left side. It doubled me over and made me scream out in agony.

My vision tunneled under the pain. It consumed me. I had only one conscious thought as everything faded to black.

Jake.

A/N: Next chapter up hopefully tomorrow.
A/N: Leaving all my random chattering to the end, today.

Jacob’s POV

I ran across my land with Sam and Seth flanking me. Usually I enjoyed running flat out like this and would concentrate on the wind blowing through my shaggy fur and whistling in my ears. Today, I was focussed on one thing. I was going to run the Cullens out of Forks. First though, I was going to find out what Edward thought he wanted from Bella. He would tell me, one way or the other. One way was the easy way, that he would just talk freely. The other way was my preferred option.

Sam and Seth were with me because they were both level headed. My original plan the day before had been to bring Embry, too. The main reason for that was because my wolf had been so keyed up, and Embry would be the first to see the signs if I was liable to do something stupid. Since claiming Bella, my wolf was significantly calmer and I decided that four wolves might be overkill. We wanted to talk, not threaten.

Yeah, right. I was fooling no-one.

Sam was keeping his head down as he ran at my right flank. He knew I was still mad as hell with him. His reasons were sound. Attacking the Cullens would trigger something we, or rather the Elders, had been trying to avoid for years.

The problem was that reasons were no longer relevant. We weren't politicians, we were fucking wolves. When an imprint was endangered, we didn't use diplomacy and logic. We just Protected. I couldn't detect any regret in Sam's mind, either.

You'd have done the same as me when you were my Beta, Jake.

The fuck I would!

Seth - Who are you kidding, Sam?

It was unusual for Seth to voice an opinion when there was an issue between me and Sam. I saw in his mind that he had wanted Sam to issue the order. He let me see his bloodlust, the way he had longed to sink his teeth into the leeches who were daring to threaten his Alpha's imprint. I was proud of him and let him see it.

Sam started thinking of Emily, no doubt to keep what he thought of the little exchange between Seth and I private. His thoughts of Emily immediately made my mind wander to Bells, which in turn had Seth thinking of Mai.

Bella. I sighed happily, not missing the amusement from my companions. The ease with which she was taking to everything was astounding. It was always the same with the imprints. The wolf worried himself sick about telling her the truth, and she accepted it quickly and completely. Dad thought it must be part of the biological make-up of what makes an imprint. Bella's attitude was even more astonishing given that she hadn't grown up with all our legends.

She was completely perfect for me. Beautiful and sexy, sweet and a bit feisty, warm and intelligent. I knew she would take care of me in a way that nobody ever had before, or not since mom had died anyway. Bella had been absolutely right when she said I just wanted to be looked after. I did.

I also knew she wouldn't take any shit from me. Not that I would ever treat her with anything other than respect and devotion, but I was liable to be hard headed and she would be the first to point it out to me. I probably needed that.

The Spirits had, yet again, got it absolutely right. I wondered when it would stop amazing me that imprints were so perfectly chosen for their wolves. I had once thought imprinting was a bad thing, removing our choices from us and dictating yet another part of our lives. But I knew beyond any doubt that if there were no monsters and magic, and I had just happened to meet Bells through our fathers, I would have fallen for her completely and immediately. She seemed to feel the same about me. Imprinting just made it more special. Or, rather, it would make it more special, in time. Right now it was just fucking torture.

As we neared the Cullens' residence, I wondered whether thinking of Bella had been such a good idea. I had lost my deadly focus. The last time I had been with her sexually was nearly five hours ago and for a newly imprinted wolf, that was almost unbearable. I replayed again and again the way she had wrapped her lips around my cock, sucked and nibbled and teased. Fuck! I needed her. We wouldn't have much time alone together until after our joining ceremony that evening. I began to imagine the things I would do to her after that...

Seth - Uh, Jake? We're at the perimeter.

I know, dumbass.

Seth - Yeah, you just seemed a bit distracted.

Sam chuckled and I rolled my mind's eye at Seth. Sure, sure. Fantasizing about my imprint I may have been, but I was still the Alpha wolf and I knew where the fucking perimeter was.
A little farther and the stench of leech started to become cloying. We all snorted through our noses periodically, trying to clear some of the stink even though we knew it was futile.

*We'll phase to human soon. We shouldn't go in as wolves and start something before we get a chance to talk.*

Even if I wanted to. I had promised Sam I would at least try to talk before making any further decisions. We were on their land now, so he was inclined to feel that caution was required. I thought caution had already been thrown out the window when they tried to cross into our lands, but that discussion was getting old.

*Careful with your thoughts.*

I had been filled in on how Edward seemed to have seen Bella on the mountainside through the pack mind the day before. We knew from our legends that some bloodsuckers had special powers. Mind reading didn't seem too unlikely. Until we knew for sure, we would take no chances.

When I considered us to be close enough, I decided we should all phase to human. We didn't bother with T-shirts despite the October chill. The Cullens knew what we were.

"Are we just gonna walk up and knock the door?" Seth asked, evidently amused at the idea.

I shrugged. "If we have to. I'm guessing they'll smell us coming and they won't want to be fenced in. I think they'll come out to meet us."

I was right. We were still a few hundred meters out when the front door opened and Doctor Fang came out, his hands raised placatingly.

"We have no harmful intentions towards you," he said. His voice was soothing and unraised. He knew we could hear him anyway.

I strode towards him, Sam and Seth flanking me just the same as when we were wolves. I stopped fifty meters away.

"One of your things wants something with Bella Swan," I told him. I felt Sam shift minutely in irritation when I said thing. He thought I was being unnecessarily rude. I thought there was a time and place for manners, and speaking to your enemy wasn't it. "I'm here to find out what it is that he wants."

Fang nodded. "Would you like to come inside? We can discuss the matter in comfort."

I snorted in derision. Fang waited until he realised that was all the answer he was going to get. He nodded.

"We have an unfortunate situation on our hands, Jacob," he began. The door opened behind him again and Pansy Boy appeared.

"I will speak for myself, Carlisle," he stated.

"What do you want with Bella?" I asked immediately. No point beating around the bush.

"Bella," he replied simply.

I guessed I had my answer. My fists clenched automatically and I felt a familiar tremor run through my spine. *Cool it,* I warned myself. I took a step closer to him.

"Bella is my imprint," I explained it through gritted teeth. "Her life will be protected by the pack, at all times. She does not want anything to do with you. I am here to tell you and your coven to get out of Forks. If you leave now, we will let you go peaceably. If you refuse, we will attack. You are outnumbered, and I know you have seen what we are capable of. It's a no-brainer."

"Jacob, please listen for a moment." It was Doctor Fang. "It is not as simple as that."

"Yes, it really is," I interrupted him. "Leave or you will be destroyed. And do not even think about returning for Bella," I threw in for good measure.

"Can we talk alone?" Pansy Boy asked.

I spread my hands incredulously. "Because we won't be overheard?" Narrowing my eyes at him, I thought, *Or do we talk like this?*

He didn't acknowledge that, but there was the slightest flicker in his expression that only supernatural eyes would have picked up on. It was all the answer I needed. In the unlikely event that nothing else came from this meeting, we had learned something valuable about our adversaries today.

"All I'm asking for is two minutes of your time," he said. I shrugged, seeing no harm in it. Then again, no way was I turning my back to him. I knew Sam and Seth would have me covered, but it went against all my instincts.
"After you." I gestured across the massive yard.

He walked some distance away before turning to face me. I folded my arms across my chest and stared at him.

"Have you heard of a singer?" he began. I nodded curtly. "Bella is - was, my singer."

"She's not anymore, because she's mated with me," I surmised and he nodded. "But you have a piece of her soul so you still feel drawn to her," I continued. He nodded again. "Yeah, I know all that, but it's not my problem, leech."

"I would think you may be more concerned with what happens to the piece of her soul that I have," Pansy Boy said snidely.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Doesn't really matter. My soul protects hers now. She feels nothing for you, not even a pull. It's really not relevant anymore."

I could tell he wasn't expecting that. I saw anger flicker in his eyes which he quickly controlled. Doctor Fang approached us, crowded by Seth and Sam.

"Jacob perhaps you could give us some time to arrange our affairs before we leave. I have patients at the hospital who cannot simply be left."

"There are no other doctors at the hospital?" I asked sarcastically. My eyes were still trained on Pansy Boy.

"None with my ... unique abilities. Your role is to Protect human life, Jacob. Surely that would include my patients at the hospital. At least give me some time to organise reasonable care for them," Carlisle asked. I didn't trust him.

"My biggest role is to protect my imprint," I began. I stopped in my tracks when something that I couldn't identify flickered through Edward's eyes. He looked smug, triumphant somehow. Anger flared in me again. I didn't know what he was thinking but it sure as hell wasn't something that was good news for me or Bella.

Bella. I struggled to control the wave of temper that was threatening to crash over me. I was here to take steps towards ensuring her safety. Flying off the handle wasn't going to help that. Breathing deeply, I turned back to the doctor who was still pleading his case.

"We have never caused you any harm. We have never threatened you or your people. I admit our actions the other day were ... foolish. You have my word that it will not happen again. We will leave, Jacob, but Edward is currently in an impossible situation. While he possesses a piece of Bella's soul, he is drawn to her. I hope to find a way to return that piece of her soul to her."

That caught my attention. This was why I was here, to figure out how to keep Bella safe from Edward. "How?" I asked urgently.

"I don't yet know," he admitted. "I have an old friend, Matthias, who is currently investigating the situation. If you would agree to giving me a little time, he may be able to help."

I paused to consider this. As much as I hated it, if Doctor Fang really could somehow get that piece of Bella's soul back, it may be worth allowing them to hang around for a little longer. But then again...

"Can't you just leave, and phone me with the information?"

I heard a distinctive snort from inside the house. Carlisle glanced over his shoulder, looking amused.

"Emmett appreciates your tendency to cut straight to the point," he explained. "We could, Jacob, but again I bring your attention to my patients at the hospital. I have a moral obligation to them."

"I raised my eyebrows at the idea of a leech having moral anything and he sighed. "Jacob, your forefathers saw the value in forging a treaty with our people..."

"NO!" I interrupted him, furious now. "My forefathers allowed your coven to continue to exist. Trust me, if they had anticipated that one of you would have threatened a future imprint, you would have been ripped limb from limb and burned on the spot." I could feel my spine begin to tremor again. "The treaty is void. You will leave now, or we attack in the morning."

Turning back to Pansy Boy, I glared at him. "You will make no further attempts to contact Bella, or to reach her in any way." Stepping closer, trying to ignore the cloying stench assaulting my senses, I finished, "Here's a new treaty. You so much as look at the girl I am going to marry today, and I will end you."

I turned to leave. Again, turning my back on my enemy didn't feel like the best idea, but I was done here. I didn't really think, with Sam and Seth right next to me, either leech would try anything stupid.

Of course, I had reckoned without Bella's bewitching influence. Carlisle yelled, "Edward, no!" at the same time Sam phased, snarling and Seth bellowed at me to look out. Spinning, I saw Pansy Boy launch through the air at me. I sidestepped, phasing simultaneously. Seth also exploded into his wolf.

I zeroed in on Edward. He was crouched before me, ready to spring.

Are you seriously going to attack me?
His eyes were wild and I backed up my thoughts with a menacing growl. He actually growled back at me. That was a new one. We circled each other. My peripheral senses detected the three other leeches come out of the house. I seriously doubted they would all attack us, but just incase, I checked to see who else was phased. Paul and Jared were patrolling. I summoned them.

"None of them will attack," Edward ground out. "This is between you and me."

No offense leech but I don't trust you. Back-up's comin' anyway.

I quite liked this situation. Me and Edward, fighting it out between us. For Bella. It seemed like the way it should be.

Why do you still want her? If she has my scent and doesn't sing to you anymore?

"I cannot leave her while I possess her soul."

And the solution is?

He didn't answer.

Do you even know what the solution is?

Still no answer. He made no move to attack, either. I was getting fed up, circling and posturing. Paul and Jared were drawing closer. Sam and Seth were monitoring the other four leeches, all of whom were looking passive and non-threatening. Even the Bear.

I took a step back. As much as I longed to destroy Pansy Boy, my primary focus was Bella's safety. I had given the coven my terms, and would not renege on them and ignite the rest of the leeches' wrath. They had fair warning. If they were still here in the morning, my entire pack would destroy them within minutes. I kind of hoped they would still be here.

Sam, Seth, let's go. They know where we stand.

Having learned the hard way not to turn my back on them, we all began backing up through the yard. Edward straightened and looked straight into my eyes, contempt all over his face.

"The answer to your question, dog, is to turn her."

"Edward!" Esme and Rosalie's panicked cries sounded as I saw red. I launched myself at him with all my strength. He swiftly side-stepped, the same move I had pulled earlier when he had attacked me.

He's fast.

It flickered through my mind at the same time as I realised that he could read my thoughts and therefore foresee my every move. The knowledge only increased my fury and I flew at him again, snarling and snapping. His ability to dodge my every attack fuelled my rage. I could feel myself going out of control and I allowed it to happen. I saw the alarm in Pansy Boy's eyes as he realised just how primal an Alpha wolf could be.

Launching at him again, I expected the move he made to avoid me. I was ready for it and I wheeled behind him. Raising my forepaw, I swiped viciously at his back. My claws raked satisfyingly into his marble exterior, gouging deeply from his right shoulder down to his left waist. My move surprised him, and he staggered under the impact. I immediately sank my jaws into his right thigh. My teeth penetrated deeply and I tasted his foul essence. It ignited blood lust and I wanted to kill.

Through my rage and frenzy, something happened. Deep within my soul, the light that I knew to be Bella flickered frantically. Pain. Fear. I whined and staggered from the shock.

Seth - What the fuck?

Stunned and momentarily distracted, I almost missed Edward diving at me. I dodged him just in time and we returned to circling one another. I couldn't attack. I was trying to work out what the hell was going on with Bella. I sent a panicked call to Jared to double back and check on her. He was wheeling around before I'd finished my plea.

I didn't know how, but I just knew she was hurting and terrified. She was in La Push, dammit! She was safe on the reservation, with the imprints, at Emily's. All the leeches were right here where I could see them. What could possibly have happened?

Edward was watching me closely, evidently listening in. I tried to focus. He could see how distracted I was and it wouldn't take him long to take advantage of that. He dove at me and I whirled away from him, sinking my teeth into his left side as I did so.

Fresh pain and terror washed over Bella.

Brady exploded into the pack mind. He was frightened and confused. The memory of what he had just seen was fresh in his mind. It took me a fraction of a second to get it.
Bella’s wounds, which had appeared apparently from nowhere, matched the damage I had inflicted on Edward.

I may have cured the hole in her soul. But all I had done was cement over a gap. Edward was still connected to her very being.

I bellowed at Pansy Boy in my mind, hoping against hope that he would listen. He had already seen in the pack mind what was going on but I wanted to spell it out for him.

"STOP! We’re hurting Bella! If you want her unharmed, you need to stop now. If we keep going here, we will kill her."

I backed up from him to show my intentions. He also relaxed his stance and backed away.

*Brady get the fuck back in that house and tell me how she is.*

I frantically thought over what I had just done to Edward. Were any of those wounds enough to inflict any permanent damage? To be fatal? I concentrated on the light in my soul. It was still flickering but fear seemed to be taking precedence over pain. When he healed, would she? I shifted from paw to paw, waiting anxiously for Brady. He seemed to take forever to phase back in.

*The wounds are healing Jake. There’s a lot of blood and she's unconscious, but the gashes on her back are almost fully healed. They look like clawmarks, man.*

*They are. Stay with her. Jared's nearly with you. One of you stay connected to the pack to keep me up to date. I'm finishing here and coming straight over.*

Fear and adrenaline were thundering through my veins. My heart was beating at a ridiculous pace and for the first time ever in wolf form, I felt vulnerable. Keeping my eyes on Pansy Boy, I issued my final commands of the day.

*Do not leave! Stay here and keep yourself safe until we figure out how to release Bella’s soul from you. Fill your family in on what has just happened. I will return in the morning to talk with Carlisle.*

Wheeling and snapping at Seth’s heels to hurry him up, I started to race back to Bella.

I could only pray to the Spirits that she would be alright.

*A/N: It will all be explained, I promise. But did anyone figure it out? It’s a bit of a roller coaster from here on in and I will be going outside my comfort zone with some of it so whatever your thoughts are, let me know!*

*MistC and niamhg - thank you, thank you, thank you.*
Wow! I was inundated with messages from readers all asking the same question, so for anyone who's been fretting but didn't ask ... Bella will not be getting together with Edward! Never in one of my fics. Never.

What I meant when I said I'm venturing outside my comfort zone now ... was this...

I opened my eyes slowly. My head felt groggy and my body weak. My leg felt a little tender, as though it had been hurting and was on the mend.

I had no idea where I was.

"Bella?" Turning my head slightly, I saw a beautiful native American woman sitting beside me, her face concerned. Looking past her, I saw a number of other women in various activities. They had all frozen what they were doing and were staring over at me.

"Rachel?" I asked. My throat was dry and a little sore.

"Oh Bella you're okay," she said. The relief in her voice was tangible.

I tried to sit up. "Jake?" I needed him beside me.

Rachel nodded her head, helping me to sit against some cushions. "He's on his way, sweetheart. Jared said he's tearing the ground up to get to you. He won't be long. Do you need anything?"

"Water, please. My throat's sore and dry. What happened, Rachel?" I remembered talking with the imprints. That's right, this was Emily's house. I ... fell down. Wounds. Blood. Agony. I let out a whimper as I remembered the pain and the pools of warm, sticky red moisture. So much blood.

"Ssshhh, Bella," Rachel soothed me. "I'll get you a glass of water." She raised her hand to smooth some hair back from my face and I saw dried red streaks on her shaking fingers.

"There was so much blood!" I gasped. "What happened?"

Rachel looked at me in silence for a moment. "We're not sure, Bella," she finally said. "But you're okay. Jake'll be here soon. He'll take care of everything, sweetheart."

Nodding weakly, I let my head drop back against the cushions as I surveyed the room. Layla was picking up broken pieces of crockery. She smiled over at me reassuringly. I managed some kind of grimace in return. Blood stained the rug and Emily was on her knees scrubbing at it.

"Emily you shouldn't be doing that," I murmured. She looked over at me with a mock scowl.

"Didn't I tell you, no treating me like an invalid?" she asked. "Besides, I think I'm in the better shape of the two of us. How are you feeling?" She straightened and came over to me.

"Weak," I said. "My leg's a little sore." I looked down at it and gasped at the red that saturated the material of my jeans. What happened? Was I injured?

"Don't look at it, Bella." Emily took my hand in hers. I noticed that, like Rachel's, her hand was trembling. "It probably looks worse than it is. Kim's on the phone to Sue Clearwater right now. She'll look after you properly."

"How long was I out? Did I faint?"

"Yes, you seemed to be in a lot of pain. I think you passed out. You were unconscious for maybe ten minutes?"

Rachel came back with the glass of water. I noticed her hands were freshly washed, and her fringe was a little damp as though she had splashed water over her face, too. Her hand was steadier when she gave me the glass. I chugged back the lot. My throat felt absolutely parched and I remembered I had been screaming loud and hard.

"Did I frighten everyone?" I asked. My voice sounded a little stronger now that I had hydrated my throat.

Rachel smiled at me and shook her head. "Don't you worry about anyone else, sweetheart. More water?"

Nodding, I handed her the glass and laid my head back against the cushions. Emily was back scrubbing the rug and Layla was sweeping up the smaller shards of broken crockery. Kim popped her head round the kitchen door and told me that Sue was on her way.

"Jake. I needed him so badly I wanted to cry. I knew just his presence would soothe me. He would know what to do. Jake would make it all okay.
Rachel returned with another glass of water. She perched next to me on the couch as I sipped at it. "My back isn't sore anymore, or my side," I said, suddenly remembering the places I had been hurting.

"They healed, Bella," she said gently. "We don't really know..."

The door burst open and Jake barrelled through it, his eyes wildly scanning the room until he saw me, propped up on the couch.

"Bella!" He crossed the room and dropped to his knees beside the couch. Fear and worry were etched on his face as his eyes scanned my body, lingering in apparent horror on my leg and side. He reached out for me as though to pull me into a hug, then pulled his arms back again. "Where are you hurting, honey?"

I shook my head, reaching for him. "Just my leg a little." His arms were around me in an instant and my tears flowed. Great hiccupping sobs racked my body as he held me tightly, rocking me a little.

"It's okay baby, it's okay," he kept murmuring. I felt his breathing hitch a few times and knew he was crying, too. We stayed like that for a while, until his presence and his body heat soothed me and my tears began to dry.

Finally, Jake pulled back enough to look into my eyes. His own eyes were red rimmed. His face and voice were very serious.

"Bella, I need you to tell me everything you remember, and what you're feeling right now."

"Can I be there for that?" a voice asked. Looking up, I saw a woman I hadn't met before standing close to the door, clutching a large bag. She seemed to have been there for awhile and was giving us space. I noticed everyone else had cleared out of the room to give us some privacy.

"Sue," Jake's voice wasn't completely steady. "Meet Bella, my imprint."

The woman smiled warmly at me. "Hello Bella. My name is Sue Clearwater. I'm Seth's mom. I'm also a doctor of sorts, not a medical doctor but more what you would call a medicine woman. May I listen to what you remember?"

I nodded my head and she sat on the nearest chair, placing her bag at her feet. "I don't remember much," I said, looking at Jake. "I was getting restless wishing you would hurry up and come back, and I stood up to bring some plates and things into the kitchen. Then this pain, this excruciating pain, kind of ripped down my back." Jake's head hung between his shoulders suddenly and he squeezed my hand. "I think I fell, and then a different pain was in my leg. It was bleeding, look!" I showed them my jeans leg. Jake didn't look. His head was up again but he was looking to the side, his jaw clenched.

Sue leaned over and looked at the blood. Her expression didn't change. She nodded at me to continue.

"Um, there was a lot of blood, and I was screaming. And then another pain hit my side, and I think I passed out. Emily thought I was out for maybe ten minutes. When I came round, my back and side both felt fine but my leg still hurt a little. I think it's okay now, though." I moved it experimentally. It felt good as new. "I just feel kind of ... washed out, and scared," I admitted.

Jake cleared his throat and glanced over at Sue. "You need to hear this too, Sue." He took a deep breath. "Bella, honey ... the wounds you suffered. I did that. To Edward. Everything I did to him, happened to you too."

I just kind of stared at him for a while. "I ... don't understand."

"Jacob start at the beginning, please," Sue requested. Jake took a drink from the glass of water that Rachel must have placed on the floor by the couch. He quickly gave Sue my history with Edward Cullen, and how we had believed that Jake's own Protection had mended my soul.

"I went to the Cullens' today, with Sam and Seth." Sue inhaled sharply and Jake looked at her almost apologetically. "We just went to talk, Sue, not to start anything. But Edward confirmed that he wants Bella and ... he said the only way to remove the pull he feels to Bella is to turn her. I lost it and attacked him. Every wound I inflicted on him, Bella felt. I think she healed fast because he did, but she's flesh and blood so her wounds bled."

Turning to Sue, he whispered, "What do we do?"

"Jake!" I gasped. Of all the things I hadn't expected, it was to see him afraid, and at a loss. That scared me more than anything else had so far. He turned back to me quickly, understanding me.

"Bella we will figure this out. I swear to you that I will somehow make this okay. But right now, I honestly don't know where to start."

"I can help with that. Jacob I need full access to Bella please. You'll need to move, I'm sorry." Sue was all efficiency as she gently lifted my shirt and looked at my side. "I'll need water and towels to clear the blood away so that I can see the wound," she announced.
"I'm on it." Turning my head, I saw Rachel. Her brown eyes met her brother's and he nodded his gratitude. She gave him a small smile and turned back to the kitchen.

"Do you feel any pain anywhere, Bella?" Sue was asking me.

I shook my head. "Just a bit weak."

"Probably from blood loss," she told me. "The first thing we need to do is make sure that right now, you are physically well. Once we've dealt with that, we can worry about figuring out the rest, does that sound okay?"

"That sounds fine," I agreed.

Rachel came back quickly with a basin of water. Layla followed her with an armful of towels. Both girls left again immediately.

Jake helped Sue remove my T-shirt by ripping it up the middle. He held my hand while Sue gently cleaned away the blood. There wasn't a mark on my skin. The same was found on my back. Sue asked Jake to rip off my jeans leg. While she cleaned the blood from my thigh, he went to ask Emily for clothes I could use. He returned with sweats and a T-shirt just as Sue was declaring my leg to be fine, too.

"We have no way of knowing exactly how much blood you've lost, Bella," she finally told me. "But that seems to be the extent of the damage you've suffered. You need to rest. You'll feel weak and tired until some of your blood has replenished. I'm sure Jacob will be keeping a close eye on you. I'll tell him things to be aware of, you don't need to worry about that." She smiled kindly at me and waited as Jake helped me into Emily's clothes.

"Now," Sue said. "From what we understand, a piece of Bella's soul now belongs to Edward. The pull towards him that Bella was experiencing has disappeared. Do you have any residual ... symptoms, for want of a better word?" she asked me.

I shook my head. "No, definitely not. I felt Jacob cure the loss of that part of my soul," I told her.

"Yet there is obviously still a deep connection between you and Edward," Sue pointed out. "Whatever harm is inflicted on him, manifests in a very real way on you, Bella."

She fell silent, deep in thought. When she spoke again, she had the air of someone who was thinking aloud to try and organise her thoughts. "Jacob, your soul protects Bella's soul. Obviously that only extends to the part of her soul that she still has. The missing part, the part that Edward has, remains outside your Protection. But it still belongs to Bella." She fell silent again.

I looked at Jake. He had positioned himself behind me on the couch, leaning me back against him. He had been very still, and very quiet. He was holding onto me as though terrified I was going to disappear. His face had an expression on it I never wanted to see again. He looked riddled with guilt, and petrified. He looked very young and vulnerable.

Swallowing hard, I raised my hand to his cheek. "Jake, I'm fine."

He shook his head. "I did it. I hurt you like that."

"Hardly on purpose!" I was indignant.

"I'm supposed to be able to Protect you from supernatural harm, Bella! Not inflict it on you myself!"

"Stop it!" I hissed at him. His eyes snapped to mine, wide with shock. "This is not. Your. Fault," I ground out. "Edward did this. He took a part of my soul, and if it wasn't for you I would probably be dead already, or a vampire. At the very least, I'd have that awful achy coldness in my chest all the time. You fixed me, Jake. You cured me of what he did to me. And now we will work this out, together." I just had no idea how.

Jake buried his head in my hair for a moment. "That son of a fuck is gonna pay."

Sue laid a cool hand on my arm. She was looking at Jake when she spoke. "Do we know what Edward wants?" she asked.

"Bella," Jake replied promptly. "Even though her blood doesn't sing to him anymore, he thinks the only way to rid himself of the pull to her is to turn her."

"So it's in his best interest to keep her safe?" Sue prompted.

"Of course!" He seemed surprised by the question.

"And you? How did you treat him?"

Jake paused for a moment before answering her. I thought he was probably as bewildered by her line of questioning as I was. "Well he's a leech and he wants to turn my imprint into a bloodsucker, Sue. How d'you think I treated him? I was rude and obnoxious, and then attacked him." I heard a small smile in his voice but Sue's face was very serious.
"I think we need to consider the possibility that Edward can use what he now knows against you, Jacob," she told him.

I twisted my head to look at Jake, a little confused. I saw his blank expression turn into a mask of horror.

"He wouldn't," he said weakly, but his voice held no conviction.

"Wouldn't what?" The penny dropped. "He would harm himself deliberately to hurt me?" I heard my own voice rise in hysteria and Jake started rubbing my arm in an attempt to soothe me.

"To hurt me, Bells," he corrected quietly. He shut his eyes tightly for a moment and I felt his body tremble hard beneath me.

"Jacob get outside!" Sue was on her feet, looking alarmed. I twisted round and cupped his face in my hands.

"Jake, calm down," I begged him. "I need you here, with me." I waited for a moment until I felt his trembling begin to subside, then leaned forward and kissed his lips. "I need you," I repeated.

This new world I was in was insane, and if I was going to stay calm and not start screaming my lungs out, I needed Jacob Black beside me.

His eyes opened finally, and when he looked at me I couldn't help but smile. Something had snapped inside him. The frightened, bewildered young man was gone, and the Alpha was back in control. He nodded at me slightly, the smallest of curves gracing his lips. I knew what message he was silently giving me. *It's gonna be okay, Bells honey.*

"Sue," he turned to look at her and began to talk. Authority and confidence dripped from his voice. "Get all the Elders together. We need to go through all the old legends for any clue as to what the fuck is going on here."

Mentioning the legends triggered my memory. "Jake, Rachel told me something about the mark you gave me." I explained the story quickly to him. He listened carefully. If he was surprised, he didn't let it show. When I was finished, he nodded quickly.

"Okay, that gives us something else to work with. Sue?"

Sue had gone into the kitchen carrying her bag while I had been telling Jake about the Alpha Mark. She returned when Jake called, holding a steaming mug which she handed to me.

"It's a herbal tea, Bella," she explained. "It'll help you sleep. I think you should get as much rest as possible and not get too worked up. I know you've had a lot to deal with. This should help."

I took it from her gratefully. Jake caught my eye and smiled his approval. "Sue's concoctions are good," he told me.

I took a sip of the boiling liquid. It tasted delicious, and very soothing. I leaned my head back against Jake and kept sipping while he coordinated everyone.

"Rach? I take it you were listening?" he asked dryly.

"Naturally," she smiled at him.

"Can you help with the parchments? You'll know better than me where to find anything that might be useful."

"Of course."

"Emily? Can Bella stay here for the time being?"

"She can stay as long as she needs to. I'll make up the spare bed just in case."

I felt Jake nod behind me. "Hopefully I'll be able to bring her home tonight, but thanks Emily."

"What do you mean hopefully?" I demanded, turning to look at him. "What about our joining ceremony?"

Jake stared back at me, disbelief warring with amusement on his face. "Bella," he said slowly, "You have just been mauled by a supernatural force..."

"And healed again!" I interrupted. I was aiming for indignation but found it difficult to muster the energy.

"And lost a lot of blood," Jake told me firmly. "We're gonna have to postpone the ceremony, honey." He stroked some hair back from my face and leaned in to kiss me. "We will have a ceremony as soon as we can, Bells, but I don't think this evening is the best idea."

I pouted and he smiled a crooked smile. "Soon," he whispered against my lips. He pulled back and grinned at me. "But first I gotta save your soul. Let's get our priorities straight, will we?"

"Well ... what can I do to help?" I asked, frowning at the effort it cost me to speak.
"Rest." His voice was firm again. I settled my head back against his warm comfort again. My eyes felt heavy. What was in that tea?

"Jake?" It was Rachel. "What about -?" She hesitated, looking at me, but then continued. "Shouldn't someone try and find out what Edward's thinking?"

I felt Jake nod behind me. "I'll go before I do anything else," he said. I tried to protest. Jake had to stay here, with me. Anything else and panic would overwhelm me. I couldn't will my mouth to form the words and was struggling to keep my eyes open.

"Jacob, we can start to comb through the parchments without you," Sue assured him. "You go to the Cullens and join us when you're ready. If there's anything in there, we will find it." She stood to leave and Jake thanked her profusely.

Jake was talking and I wanted to scream at him to listen to me and stay. "Emily I know this isn't something we usually do, but if I'm going back to the crypt I need to be able to see Bella at all times. I'm thinking of having Seth phased in the house. Is that okay?"

"It's fine, Jacob. He'll need to move some furniture, there's not that much space, but under the circumstances I think it's the best solution," she quickly agreed.

My muscles were weakening and I couldn't grab hold of Jake when he gently lifted me and moved out from behind me. He laid me down on the couch and covered me with a blanket. My eyes were shut and I had no control over my body or mouth but I was screaming internally Don't go!

"Bella," his lips were very close to my ear as he whispered to me. "I know you hate this, I can feel it. There is no other way, honey. I'll be back as soon as I can, hopefully before you wake up. I think Sue knocked you out good." His hot hand pushed hair from my eyes and stroked down my cheek. His breath fanned my face as he leaned in to kiss me gently. "I love you. I will make this okay."

Sleep claimed me fully.

**Jake's POV**

I thundered over the ground again, pushing myself and my pack ever faster towards our enemies' home. Last time, I had brought my steadier wolves, those most likely to remain in full control. This time, I had my most vicious fighters by my side.

My thoughts were in turmoil. Would Edward harm himself to get to me? Would he knowingly inflict harm on Bella? I had to face the fact that my own attitude earlier in the day would have pissed him off. Would that be enough to make him want to do something ... unthinkable?

My wolves were quiet. I felt their rage and fear, but they were keeping their heads down, allowing me to try and get my head around this new twist. The biggest head fuck was what I had already tried to explain to Bella. I was a Protector. She was my imprint. And I may not be able to protect her from this. I felt ... impotent.

Wolves were not used to feeling impotent.

**Paul - If there's any fuckin' way to break this thing, Jake, we'll find it.**

It was a measure of the severity of the situation that Paul wasn't wise-cracking about his Alpha being impotent.

**Quil - What are we gonna do if it looks like Pansy Boy wants to hurt her? Cos none of us can actually touch him, right?**

*If I even get a hint that he has any intention of harming himself to hurt Bella, I'll fuckin' kidnap him and lock him up somewhere.*

A ripple of approval ran through my wolves. I had Paul, Quil, Brady and Jared with me. Seth was phased in Emily's living room. Bella was sleeping soundly. I felt guilty at leaving her. I had felt her panic and knew Sue had really drugged her with that tea. I suspected she had done it deliberately to prevent Bella getting upset over me having to do something like this.

Sometimes, Sue rocked.

Seth snickered in Emily's living room when he registered that thought in my mind.

Sam and Collin were patrolling the reservation. It was just a formality. We didn't really expect the Cullens to come to La Push this afternoon but the day had been full of shocks so far. None of us wanted to take the risk. Sam had graciously refrained from pointing out the obvious - that if he had given the order to destroy the Cullens the day before, Bella would be dead and gone.

Only Embry wasn't phased, but he would take over from Seth shortly. We weren't domesticated puppies. It went against our natures to be indoors. Seth and Embry were the most likely to handle it, but we could all detect that Seth was fighting some agitation down. Mai crossed his field of vision and he followed her with his eyes.
Bella!

_**Seth** - Sorry, Jake. Couldn't help it._

I know. Just try and keep focussed on Bella till I'm done. I need to see her.

Fuck, what was I asking him to do? Ignore his imprint so I could see mine? This was fucking insane.

_**Seth** - It's cool, man._

Nothing about this situation was cool. I focussed on the light within me that was Bella. I could feel her clearly now, when I concentrated. When had that started? I noticed it when I was attacking Edward but now that I thought about it, it may have formed after I bit her. That was something else I needed to get my head around, but not now.

She felt peaceful, I was relieved to note. She was ... flying?

_**Bella**_

My dreams were peaceful. Bright colours and vivid sensations washed over me. I was on a mountainside, basking in the warmth and light of the sun. No, not the actual sun - _my_ sun. Jacob.

Then, I was in a forest, barefoot. The cool, damp moss felt pleasant underfoot. My hand strayed to the side and I felt warm, shaggy fur under my hands. I twisted my fingers through it and turned to look. My russett Protector dipped his head and nuzzled my neck. I kissed his snout. I was so safe.

The scene changed again. I was on a beach. Was it First Beach? I couldn't tell. It was a long expanse of sand stretching as far as I could see in every direction, except where the sea lay to my right. Gentle waves lapped on the shore. I looked around expectantly. Where was Jacob in this part of my dream?

Instead, I found a light of sorts. It wasn't like any light I had ever seen before. I had no words to describe it. But I _knew_ it. I recognised its essence, somehow. What - no, wait, _who_ - was it?

_That's not important, Bella._

The voice sounded in my head. Now that was frustrating. I knew the voice, too.

_Still not important,_ the voice chuckled.

"Where am I?" I asked.

_That's an interesting question, Bella, and one that we don't have time for right now. Let's call it your subconscious. It will be my pleasure to explain it all to you one day, but not yet. I hope, not for a long time to come._

_Jacob will protect you, Bella. He will protect you and that which belongs to you both. But he cannot do it alone. You must fight, Bella._

"I will! I will fight for him. But what exactly am I fighting?"

_Evil. An abomination of nature. But together, you and Jacob are stronger than either of you are individually. Remember that, Bella._

"I will. Tell me what to do."

The light was gone. Turning around, I realised I was no longer on the beach. I was indoors. I was in Emily's living room. A giant wolf that I somehow knew to be Seth was on the floor, staring at ... me? I was lying on the couch. Was I dead? No, my body was breathing. I could see my chest rise and fall steadily. An out of body experience?

_Jacob._ He needed me. Without though, I was flying through the air. I was outdoors and racing over the top of the forest. I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do without my body when I got there. I did know that Jacob needed me.

There. A band of five enormous wolves pounding over the ground. The russett Alpha at the head of the V formation. I shot down towards him. He was agitated. He was frightened and upset again. Without knowing how, I understood that the Cullen home was close by. He needed to get it together before he arrived there.

"Jake."

The Alpha's powerful stride faltered for the briefest moment. Then, his head tossed and he let out a howl to the sky. It was the cry of a warrior. I felt peace flow from me into him.

All was well. I returned to my body.
A/N: I want some of Sue’s tea.
*Chapter 17*: Chapter 16 Dream Roaming

A/N: Thank you to niamhg and MistC, as always.

**Jacob’s POV**

Bella's essence poured into my soul, calming and soothing me as we neared the Cullen residence. I had no idea what had just happened, but I was grateful for it. I knew I needed it.

**Quil** - *What the fuck was that?*

*Bella. Don't ask. I haven't a clue.*

**Paul** - *This is fuckin' weird shit, man.*

*Weirder than wolves and imprints?*

We were almost at the Cullens'. I had no idea how far out Edward could hear us.

**Quil** - *Oh he gets his real name nowdoes he? Not Pansy Boy anymore?*

*Not till Bella's safe. Everybody stay phased. Edward can read our minds. We might be able to communicate with them that way if he's prepared to interpret. We're less vulnerable in wolf form and I can stay connected to Seth too.*

We slowed to a trot and crossed the Cullens' yard. The door opened and Carlisle stepped outside. I stubbornly refused to shift and he nodded his understanding at me.

"Edward?" he called over his shoulder.

**Pans** - *Edward* appeared on the porch behind Carlisle. "Will you translate for us?" the doc asked him politely. Edward nodded curtly, looking at me.

*You filled them in?*

"Yes, I told them everything that happened. The wounds you gave me were mirrored exactly on Bella’s body. She was in La Push at the time. I assume she healed when I did?"

*Yes, but she lost a lot of blood.*

"She lost a lot of blood," he informed Carlisle.

"Jacob, Bella may need medical attention. You cannot bring her to Forks Hospital," Carlisle told me.

*We're covered.*

"They're covered."

*How?" Carlisle enquired, his professional concern never slipping.*

I had years of experience keeping wolves out of my mind. I concentrated on the two faces in front of me and Edward narrowed his eyes at me. I was just experimenting really, to see if I could keep him out the same way I kept my pack out. His mouth curved into a smile.

"They have a medicine woman. The mother of one of the pack."

**Brady** - *Sorry, Jake.*

'Sokay. It's not a secret. You didn't do anything wrong letting him see it.*

Edward was looking at me expectantly. "You said you would return in the morning."

*I need to know you have no plans to harm Bella.*

Edward translated for Carlisle, whose frozen face immediately formed a passable frown. "Why would Edward harm Bella?"

*Do you intend to harm her to get your revenge on me?*

"You have a very high opinion of yourself, dog," Edward sneered and my temper flared.

**Quil** - *Easy, Jake. He provoked you earlier, don't let him do it again. Think about Bella.*
Just like that, something clicked into place. I blocked it instantly, not allowing either Edward or the pack to see it. I saw Edward frown slightly. He had caught a flavour of something but not the full thought. I checked on Bella through Seth's connection. She was still sleeping peacefully. She didn't seem to be flying, either.

"Flying?" Edward asked with his eyebrow raised.

I shifted back to human, making sure my wolves knew to stay as they were before I did so.

"Carlisle," I addressed the doctor. "If I ask you a question, will you answer me honestly?"

"Of course."

Sure, sure. It was worth a try, though.

"How can a vampire be physically harmed?"

Carlisle smiled slightly. "Is this professional research, Jacob? From what I've seen, you and your pack are more than capable of bringing down an entire group of vampires."

"I want to know how Bella can be hurt, through Edward."

The doctor nodded. "I see." He glanced at Edward, whose jaw was set. He looked petulant. "Obviously damage can be inflicted by yourselves," he inclined his head towards us. "Another vampire can damage or destroy us. Other than that, very little can actually harm us. We are more or less indestructible through natural means."

"Very little can harm you, or nothing?" I clarified, biting back my impatience. I needed to work out what I was protecting Bella from.

"Nothing, as far as I know, Jacob. Fire can be very damaging but we are cautious of that." I nodded and he inclined his head towards me. "Jacob I know it goes against your nature to trust me, but I truthfully want to help Bella Swan. She can only be harmed through Edward if one of your own pack, or a member of my own family, inflict any harm on him. I can assure you that none of us have any intention of damaging Edward in any way, and presumably none of your pack will attack him either. Bella is safe."

"And you?" I turned to Edward.

"What about me?"

"Will you try and hurt yourself, to hurt her?"

He made an impatient noise. "Why would I attempt to harm myself?"

"Answer me."

"Edward." Carlisle's voice, though gentle, carried a warning.

"I wouldn't even know how to," Pans - Edward finally spat out.

I nodded. So far so good. This next bit was going to be difficult. I turned back to Carlisle.

"What can we do?"

"We?" Edward asked obnoxiously. I ground my teeth.

"Yes, we. I'm prepared to work together to resolve this situation."

"An alliance?" Again with that obnoxious tone. Even in human form, I felt my hackles rise.

"Yes." I tried to keep my tone even.

Carlisle interrupted our glaring match. "I think we can all agree that removing the piece of Bella's soul from Edward and returning it to her is the best solution for everyone."

I nodded at him. "Any idea how?" Returning my glare to Edward again, I added, "Without turning her."

"My old friend is researching for us as we speak, Jacob. If anyone can uncover the answer, it is Matthias."

I nodded again, thinking. I had come here to try and ensure that Bella would not be harmed because Edward wanted to get to me. I had been reassured about that. The problem was that I didn't trust either leech, especially not Pans - Edward.

Knowing my brothers were going to be in uproar over this one, I reached my decision. "One of my pack will be within sight or sound of Edward at all times." He opened his mouth to object but Carlisle held his hand up to stop him, and nodded at me to continue. I addressed Edward directly. "If you even think about doing something stupid, something that would hurt Bella, you will be stopped. I have absolutely no problem with taking you forcibly to La Push and locking you the fuck up
Carlisle looked at Edward, whose jaw was clenched.

"Did you run that past your pack, dog?" Edward demanded.

"No." No point lying about it, really.

"Are you just going to order them to follow your every whim?" he sneered.

Damn, he knew how to get under my skin.

"Don't have to. They'll be protecting an imprint. Their Alpha's imprint." I knew he would be able to see the pride the wolves took in that role. Judging from the sour look on his face, they hadn't let me down.

Carlisle stepped in again. "Jacob is that strictly necessary?"

"Yes," I ground out. Meeting his eyes, I was deadly serious as I told him, "Any harm that comes to Bella will be meted out and more to your entire family when this is over." I saw the understanding in his eyes and shifted back to my wolf.

Brady?

Okay. What do you want me to do?

Just make sure he doesn't try anything stupid. Quil will take the next shift, starting in two hours.

Quil - Yeah, yeah, the non-imprinted wolf gets the night shift.

Only half of it. I'll send the other non-imprinted wolf in later.

Quil - Funny, Jake.

Paul - Seriously, Jake? We're babysitting a fuckin' leech?

For now, yes.

I didn't bother to hide my disapproval that Paul had argued with me in front of our enemy. I understood where he was coming from, but where Bella was concerned, I would do whatever was necessary. He acquiesced.

Brady, there's gonna be an extra wolf phased at all times. If you need back-up, howl. I'll be phasing in and out regularly to check on everything. I doubt they'll attack you, but if they do, howl and run circles till help arrives. Are we good?

Brady - We're good, Jake.

I showed him my gratitude and brought the rest of my pack home. To Bella.

Bella's POV

My eyes opened. For the second time that day, I found myself lying on Emily's couch. I attempted to raise my head and my vision swam. I groaned, laying my head back against the cushions and shutting my eyes again.

"Bella?" I cracked one eye open, unable to resist the lure of that voice.

"Hey." I smiled at the man who was sitting next to me. He had pulled a kitchen chair to the couch and was sitting forward on it, his elbows on his knees. He smiled back at me.

"Hey.

"You're back already? How long did I sleep?"

Jake chuckled. "About four hours. Sue knocked you out good. That must've been one of her stronger mixes."

"I had weird dreams," I told him, rubbing sleep from my eyes. "You were in all of them." I frowned then. "All except for one. That one was ... strange."

"Not good, huh? That would be because I wasn't in it." He winked and I rolled my eyes at him.

"I said it was strange, not unpleasant. How did it go at the Cullens?"

Jake raised his hand in a so-so gesture. "They've given their word Edward won't do anything stupid that would hurt you. I don't trust them though. Quil's there now, I'm gonna have a wolf with them at all times till we sort it all out. How are you feeling, honey?"
I thought about it. "I feel okay actually. I'm hungry and I'd love to take a bath."

"Think you can make a short journey?" Jake asked. I could tell he was trying to fight back his eagerness and I smiled at him.

"Your place?" I guessed and he nodded. "I think so. But Jake what are we going to tell Charlie?"

"You are not going to tell him anything," he said firmly. "I will tell both our dads everything, but only after you're settled."

Emily appeared over Jake's shoulder. She was carrying something in both hands.

"I made a stew for all of you to eat tonight," she told us.

"Thanks, Emily," Jake smiled at her. I started to protest but she shook her head at me.

"We look out for each other, Bella. All of us."

"Well, thank you." I was genuinely touched as I took the huge covered bowl from her. The family spirit within the pack was unfamiliar to me. I absolutely loved it.

Jake scooped me up easily into his arms and carried me out to his car. He deposited me on the passenger seat and buckled me in. I was shocked to notice it was dark outside. I really had slept the afternoon away.

It wasn't far. A few minutes after leaving Sam and Emily's, Jake pulled his car up outside a red cabin. It was a little larger than Sam's and looked like it had been recently painted. I smiled when I saw the wheelchair ramp leading up to the front door. Jake had told me it was the first thing he had ever made with his own hands.

"I think Sue's beaten us to it with the explanations," he told me as he lifted me effortlessly from the car. "She's inside with Rachel just now."

"Do you think they found anything?" I asked hopefully.

"Let's hope so," Jake murmured as he nudged the front door of the cabin open with his foot. Grinning as he carried me over the threshold, he said, "This is fitting."

I found myself in a small living room. My dad sat on an armchair, his broken leg propped up on a coffee table. He didn't look comfortable. Billy was in his wheelchair to Charlie's left. Sue and Rachel sat on the couch, facing the two men. Jake carried me over to the only other chair in the room, and sat me on it before turning to our dads.

"You've heard?"

I already knew from the look on Charlie's face that he had heard everything. He was looking at me in absolute horror.

"Bells?" he asked. "You've sustained ... a wolf attack?"

"Not exactly," I told him. My voice sounded weak and Jake interrupted.

"Charlie I really don't mean any disrespect to you, but Bella has had one helluva day. I'll tell you anything you want to know later, but please allow her to rest just now."

Charlie's face turned an alarming shade of red, but he nodded abruptly and kept quiet.

Sue rose from the couch and came over to me. "How are you feeling now, Bella?"

"A little better," I told her. "What was in that tea? I don't think I've ever slept so deeply and I had very vivid dreams."

She smiled at me. "A powerful herbal mixture. It's been in my family for generations. Leah is studying some of the science behind my medicines at college. She assures me the scientific evidence is entirely lacking but as you seem to have seen for yourself today, that is completely irrelevant."

I snorted. "Well whatever was in it, I was flying. Literally."

I saw Jake look at me sharply and met his eyes. I couldn't work out the expression on his face but he didn't give me the chance to question him. "Come on, honey," he told me. "Let's get you fed." He took the dish from my grasp and brought it into what I assumed was the kitchen. Sue spent some time checking me over while he was away. She took my pulse and looked at my pupils.

"Just get plenty of rest, Bella," was her verdict. "I can leave some of the tea mixture for you, if you like. It's strong but it's perfectly safe."

"Yes, please," I told her.

Jake returned from the kitchen and told us that dinner was in the oven. He picked me up, sat down, and settled me on his
lap before asking his sister and Sue what they had found.

"We've brought the most likely parchments." She gestured to a cardboard box that lay on the floor in front of the couch. "I think it's unlikely we'll find an exact situation that any previous wolf packs have had to deal with. But Rachel thought that perhaps vampire lore may contain details of what happens when a victim's soul is split. Assuming not all vampires turn their singers immediately, there may be something recorded about how a vampire can affect the victim."

Jake nodded and I saw comprehension flash in his eyes. His sister saw it too. "Jake?" she asked.

"What I'm about to tell you cannot be shared with the pack yet," he said very seriously. Sue looked at him in open astonishment.

"I know," he acknowledged. "I don't like it. But Edward can read all of their minds and I don't want him to know that I've figured this out yet. If one of the wolves learns about this, it'll be open to the entire pack mind and therefore Edward Cullen." He looked around us all, checking for any discord. His eyes lingered the longest on Rachel, and she got to her feet.

"I think it's easiest for everyone if I don't hear this," she said. Jake smiled at her, apparently approving of her decision. I realised she didn't want to be privy to something that she needed to keep from Paul. Jake walked with his sister to the front door of the cabin and she stretched up to kiss his cheek on her way out.

Once Rachel had left, Jake came back to sit with me and began to explain. "I think Edward provoked me deliberately into attacking him. I think he knew, or at the very least suspected, that Bella would be hurt. He's a damn good actor, liar, whatever you want to call him. I didn't pick up on it at the time. It was something Quil said later that made me realise it. But unless he had a death wish, it made no sense for him to provoke me the way he did."

"Why would he do that?" Billy asked.

Jake shrugged. "Maybe he wanted to check his theory and see if he was right. I think he has a plan. I know Carlisle is talking about returning Bella's soul to her, but Edward has been alone for a century. He might still be thinking about turning her." He tightened his arms around me and I felt a small tremor run through his body before he continued. "That's why I don't want him to know that I've worked this out. It's a long shot, but if he knew that Bella would be harmed when I attacked him, he might know something else too. If I watch him closely I might get some ideas."

"Meaning that you need to be there yourself?" Billy asked. I saw the concern on his face.

"I think it's only fair if I'm there myself as much as possible, yes." Jake kissed my hair almost absently. "I don't think this situation can continue as it is for long though."

Sue nodded and then stood. She told us she would distribute the parchments around all the Elders, leaving some here for Jake and Billy to read too. She suggested giving everyone time to read, and then convening the following morning. Jake brought the box out to her car. Billy went too, strategically leaving Charlie and I alone.

"Bella," he began but I interrupted him.

"Dad, please don't," I begged him. "I know you're mad, and I know you want all the details, but I honestly don't have the energy. Can you wait for Jake to tell you later?"

We surveyed one another across the small room for a moment.

"You look like hell," he finally said and I snorted.

"So do you." His mustache twitched and I knew we were good. "Seriously, dad, you don't look comfortable." I frowned. "You can't stay here like that." I scanned the room. "Maybe Jake could bring your recliner up in the truck, if we rearrange a little."

"Redecorating already, Bells?" I heard Jake's voice behind me and turned to smile at him. He was pushing Billy back into the cabin and had probably overheard the entire exchange between Charlie and I.

"Just getting an old man comfortable," I said sweetly.

"Are you sure this is the best living arrangement Billy?" Charlie asked dryly.

Billy chuckled. "You know you'll love it," he told my dad.

Jake winked at me on his way back through to the kitchen and I settled my head back against my chair, smiling to myself. Despite the horror of what had happened today, I was feeling happy. I was happy to be here with Jake and our fathers, in what was to be my new home. I looked around me and wondered what the rest of the cabin was like. Tentatively, I got to my feet. My head span instantly and I plopped back down on the chair with a groan.

"Jake!" Charlie yelled. He was out the kitchen and by my side in an instant.

"I'm fine," I told him. "I just tried to stand up and felt dizzy."
All three men muttered their disapproval at my trying to stand. "I need to go to the bathroom," I defended myself.

"You need anything, you ask Jake," Charlie told me. Jake picked me up and carried me along a narrow hallway to the first room on the left.

"Bathroom," he told me.

"You can put me down now," I told him and he looked at me sternly.

"Bella it's not like I haven't seen you naked," he reminded me.

"Now," I ground out. Frowning, Jake set me on my feet and tentatively let me go. I breathed deeply.

I splashed some cold water over my face and looked around the small room. There was a bath with a showerhead over it. I longed for a bath but hunger was winning out. Eat first, Bella, I told myself.

"Jake did you pack any of my bathroom things?" I called through the door, certain he would be waiting outside.

"Your toothbrush and what was in the shower," he yelled back. He sounded further away. "Want me to get them from the car?"

"No it's okay, it can wait till after dinner." Something was niggling in the back of my mind but I was too worn out to think about it.

A few minutes later, I opened the bathroom door. The door opposite was open and Jake was putting fresh sheets on a bed. He looked up, clearly checking to see how I was faring.

"I'm okay," I assured him, walking on slightly shaky legs into his bedroom and looking around. It was very male. The bed was definitely wolf-sized. There was a dresser and a closet, and a desk that looked more like a laundry point than a writing place.

"I'd have tidied up if I'd known you were moving in," he grinned sheepishly at me, sweeping the dirty laundry off the desk and into his arms. He disappeared with it and came back quickly. "I'll clear some space in the closet for you. There's not much in it actually so you can move as much of your stuff here as you want. I only brought the basics when I packed for you."

Again, something niggled in my mind. I let it go and wrapped my arms around Jacob's warm waist. He held me tightly to him.

"It's gonna be fine, Bells," he promised me. "He won't try anything stupid with a wolf there at all times. If he looks like he wants to, I mean it, we'll bring him here and lock him up someplace where he can't harm himself."

I nodded against his chest. I believed him wholeheartedly. "I'm not frightened when you're here," I told him truthfully.

Jake tilted my face up and bent his down to me. He kissed me softly. "Let's get you fed," he said.

"I preferred the kissing," I told him solemnly and he smiled.

"Later, I promise." He swung me up into his arms and carried me back to the living room.

With Charlie in his casts and me so weak, it made more sense to eat off our laps. Jake and Billy served us Emily's food and some drinks. The conversation was kept casual. I think we all felt there had been enough drama for one day. Jake ran out to phase in response to a howl, which had me and our dads on tenterhooks for a minute. It turned out to be something of a false alarm but it served to remind us all of the seriousness of our situation. Or, specifically, my own situation.

After dinner, Jake ran me a bath. While I soaked in it, washing away the last of the blood from earlier, he saw to both our dads and then phased to check in with the pack. I felt guilty, lying in the bath while he ran after the three of us. I decided to make another of Sue's teas to drink before bed. It had definitely worked wonders earlier.

Jake returned just as I was pouring water into the tea. He carried it through to the bedroom for me, holding my hand in his free one. Setting my cup on the dresser by the bed, he climbed onto the mattress and opened his arms to me. I clambered up beside him, relaxing against him and began to drink.

"That stuff really knocked you out, huh?" Jake asked. He was playing with strands of my hair, twirling them elaborately through his fingers. His head was resting on mine and I felt completely at home.

"It did," I acknowledged.

"Tell me about your dreams."
"I don't remember everything. I was on our mountain and you were there. I felt your heat and your light and thought you were like my personal sun. Then we were in the forest. You were your wolf and I felt so Protected by you. Then I was on the beach but you weren't there. Someone was, but I don't know who. Whoever it was told me I had to fight an abomination of nature, and that you and I are stronger together than either of us are separately. Then I was in Emily's, looking down at myself and I knew you needed me. So I flew to you and saw you in formation leading four other wolves. I knew you were upset so I sent you peace, and then I went back to my body. Pretty weird stuff, isn't it."

Jake was silent for a moment. "Bells, honey, if I told you that I did feel you giving me peace, would you believe me? All the wolves felt it through the pack mind too. You said my name, I heard it in my mind. It freaked Paul and Quil out," he added and I heard the grin in his voice.

I turned to look at him, taking care not to spill my hot drink. "I actually did that?" I asked in disbelief. Jake nodded slowly at me.

"I think you did. Don't ask me how. Maybe you should be careful with that tea," he teased.

I squinted into the cup. "Who exactly is Sue? She said she was a medicine woman?"

"She is. She's like the tribe's unofficial doctor, midwife, counsellor, agony aunt, whatever. She has a herbal remedy for everything and I promise you they work. More than that though, she's just ... Sue." He shrugged behind me. "She is probably the best person to know in an emergency or a crisis. She looked out for me after mom died," he added and his voice had softened. "Honestly, Bells, if Sue says you should drink that, then you really should."

"So ... I was in a deep sleep but part of my dream somehow became a reality and I really did have an out of body experience." I frowned, unable to get my head around that. "A week ago the most interesting thing about my life was that I was moving back to Forks to look after Charlie." I nestled my head into the crook of his neck. "As crazy as this all is, I wouldn't trade it since I get to be with you," I told him.

Jake kissed my head. "I'm glad, Bells," he murmured.

The tea was already beginning to take effect. I could feel my muscles relaxing and my eyes start to close. I sighed. "I wanted tonight to be different," I told him. I could hear my voice sounding slightly groggy. "I wanted us to have our joining ceremony and then fall asleep in your arms."

"You are falling asleep in my arms," Jake said, tightening his hold on me to prove his point.

"Naked in your arms," I said with an attempt at severity.

"Me too, Bells," he breathed in my ear. "We will. Just as soon as you have your strength back, I promise." I heard him swallow. "I've never been so scared in my life," he whispered.

"Me either," I whispered back. I could feel sleep claiming me. I felt Jake gently lift the mug from my hands but I had something else I needed to say before I succumbed. "We need to fight it together, she said so." I wasn't sure if he had heard, my whisper was so quiet.

I felt warm hands lay me out on the bed and a blanket covered me. Hot, familiar lips pressed against mine and a beloved husky voice said, "I love you more than I can ever tell you."

Sleep claimed me.

As before, my dreams were vivid. We walked hand in hand along the beach, heading for the driftwood tree where we had shared our first kiss. My hand fit perfectly in his. He had something he was bursting to tell me but he wanted to wait until we had got to our special place. I was laughing at his barely contained excitement. We reached our destination and he swung me around, both of us laughing freely. "It's finished, honey." I squealed and peppered kisses all over his face, understanding him perfectly.

The scene changed. Jacob swept me off my feet, his espresso eyes dancing with laughter at my protests. He carried me over the threshold of a small cottage. He set me on my feet and kissed a gold band on my left hand. His hand moved to caress the slight swelling of my abdomen. I basked in his love and devotion.

I was on the beach again. Not First Beach, but the beach where she waited. She? I had said "she" to Jake before I fell asleep too. I looked for her and found her on my right hand side again.

"This isn't a dream, is it?" I asked her.

No. This is the place within you that you cannot consciously access yet. It is the very essence of you. Your subconscious, like I said.

"I wish I could remember who you are."

We don't have much time, Bella.
"Did Sue know this would happen to me when I drank her tea?"

No. The wrong questions, Bella. We never have much time, sweetheart.

"How do Jacob and I fight this evil?" I asked immediately.

Together. Listen to your instincts, Bella. Edward has a part of you. It will call to you.

"But I don't feel any pull to him now," I protested.

Jacob protects you from Edward. But your soul still belongs to you. The missing part wants to reunite with you.

"Tell me what to do," I begged.

The light had gone. The scene changed and I was looking down on my sleeping figure again. I'm going deeper into my subconscious with every newdream. I understood that suddenly.

I didn't know why I was out of my body this time. Last time was because Jacob needed me, but I didn't have that feeling now. I heard voices and figured he was in the living room telling our dads the details of what had happened to me that day. I wanted to go and see but I was being pulled towards the bedroom window.

I was out of the window and flying again.

There was Quil. His chocolate coloured wolf was beautiful. He was bored and wishing Collin would hurry up and relieve him from duty. There was the Cullens' home. I swooshed in through a window and stopped short. What the hell was I doing? This was where Edward Cullen lived. I was in a house full of vampires. But then again, I was safe in bed in Jake's cabin. Wasn't I?

Something needed me. It was in the house, but not in the immediate vicinity.

An unnaturally pale man with blonde hair was crossing the vast living room towards a pretty young woman who was standing eerily still in the middle of the room.

"It'll be so nice to have them home, Carlisle," she was saying. "I've missed them both."

"Under the circumstances, I think Jasper in particular will be helpful, Esme."

The woman called Esme looked out the window. "Do you think he would appreciate some food?"

What Carlisle thought of feeding Quil, I never found out. A blur shot across the room, halting in front of them. I recognised Edward. I felt the pull of the missing piece of my soul.

"Bella's here," he hissed. "I can feel her."

A/N: So the next few chapters are giving me headaches and I need to do a lot of work on them still. Posting might be slower than usual this week. It's not problems with my muse, it's my obsessive tendencies. Bear with me!
My eyes snapped open. I sat up, wondering what the hell had just happened. I had been dreaming again. Was it dreaming? Hadn't Jacob told me that he really had felt me earlier? Did that mean I was really talking with the woman on the beach, too?

I rubbed my eyes, wondering where Jake was. I wanted to talk to him about this newest dream. More than that, I wanted him close. It had been too long since we left the mountainside this morning. I could hear wolves howling. Some sounded very close by and I guessed there must be some kind of pack alarm that had pulled Jake from his bed.

It was pitch dark. A sliver of light from the hallway shone through the cracked open door, allowing me to see the shadows in Jake's room. I drew my knees up to my chest, feeling slightly spooked by my dream, or hallucination, or whatever it was. I felt around for the half finished cup of tea on the dresser and sniffed at it dubiously.

A loud crash made me jump half out of my skin. Moments later, Jake hurtled through his bedroom door. He stopped in his tracks, staring at me in shock. I kind of knew how he felt. He was completely naked, illuminated from the light in the hallway.

"You're here?" he asked, clearly stunned.

"I was here when you left," I pointed out, trying not to drool.

"Do not go back to sleep. I'll be right back." He disappeared again. I sat where I was, frowning in the dark. He was back in less than a minute. I was happy the instant I realised he was getting into bed. Instead of lying down with me though, he knelt in front of me. I could just about make out the shadows of his face in the dark. I knew he could see me clearly.

"Bella can you please tell me that you were not just flying again, or whatever it is that tea makes you do?" he pleaded with me. His voice sounded tense.

"I... was," I admitted.

"Where were you?" He sounded like he was about to fly off the handle.

"At the Cullens' house," I said quietly. I had a suspicion of what had just happened.

Jake stayed very quiet and still for a moment, before suddenly jumping off the bed.

"Where are you going?" I protested.

"To throw that tea away, and burn the rest of the mixture," he said harshly. I saw him wheel back to face me. "Do you know that Edward knew you were there? He must have sensed you, your soul calling to him or whatever the fuck is going on here! Quil heard him say that you were there and all hell has just broken loose. I came in here five minutes ago to check on you. You were sleeping. Then Quil howled and when I phased in, he said Edward was going demented trying to locate you in his house. I came back in here and you were sitting up in bed. What the fuck is going on, Bella?"

"I don't know, Jake," I told him earnestly. "All I know is that I fall asleep and I have vivid dreams. Then I meet..." I paused. "I don't know, I meet someone on a beach, and she talks to me. And then I'm out of my body. I don't know how it happens! I didn't mean to go to the Cullens. I just ended up there," I finished lamely.

Jake went quiet again and sat on the edge of the bed. Wanting to see his expression, I reached for the night light and switched it on. He looked deep in thought. He was swirling the remaining liquid in the cup around, peering into it as though it held the answers. When he looked back up at me, I knew he had a plan. I waited expectantly to hear it.

"We need dad, and Sue," he said finally. "But it's late, it'll need to wait till morning. I'm not leaving you again tonight. I'm too nervous about what happens when you fall asleep."

"I won't drink anymore tea," I promised him. "What are you thinking?"

Jake put the cup down and gently pushed me back down on the mattress. He positioned himself on top of me and I automatically wrapped one leg around his waist. Looking straight into my eyes, he started to talk.

"In our legends, before even Taha Aki and the wolves, there were Spirit Warriors who had the ability to leave their bodies. Their Spirits roamed freely, independently of their bodies. It was Taha Aki who joined with the wolf, but our records date
back before then, to Kaheleha. He's the first known Spirit Chief in our records and legends. Basically, when our lands
needed defended, the Warriors' Spirits, or souls, left their bodies. They could communicate with animals and scream in
the wind to scare off enemies. When they were victorious, they just returned to their bodies. It was a bit like us wolves. We
can shift at will. The Spirit Warriors could separate their souls from their bodies at will."

By the time he had finished, I was absolutely certain that I had experienced exactly what he was describing.

"So..." I frowned as I tried to work it out. Jake traced the contours of my face while I thought. "Sue's tea somehow allows
me to leave my body like a Spirit Warrior. I have no control over it, though."

"Which scares the hell out of me," Jake admitted. He was frowning too, deep in thought. "I think we need to talk to Sue
about what's in that stuff. I know she won't have expected anything like this to happen." He shook his head. "Can you
control where you go?" he asked. "When you're out your body?"

"I haven't really tried," I admitted. We both fell into deep thought. "What time is it?" I eventually asked.

"'Bout midnight," he told me.

"And you can stay? You don't need to patrol or anything?"

"No, I'm yours. I'll need to take over at the Cullens in the morning but not till about eight."

I pulled his face to mine and kissed him hungrily. He responded immediately, moaning against my lips as I pushed my
hips up into him.

"We need to be quiet," I whispered. For good measure, I sternly added, "No making me scream."

Jake grinned at me. "No promises. But Bells, are you up to this? How are you feeling?"

"Like making love with you," I told him firmly. It had been too long since the morning. Too long since I had been alone with
him and able to roam his body with my hands like I was doing now. Apparently, Jake felt the same way. Every stroke,
every caress of my hands was turning him on. I could feel him hardening against my leg. He attacked my lips with a groan
and we locked in a silent, breathless embrace. His mouth never left mine as his hands found my skin under my pyjamas.
Garments were discarded and fingers tangled in hair. Limbs entwined and breathing became laboured.

Jake finally pushed inside me. We moaned into one another's mouths as our bodies connected. He rocked into me
quickly, biting on both our lips to quell his moans. I pushed my hips up to match his thrusts, muffling my own moans against
his mouth. His movements quickly became urgent and I couldn't help the cry that escaped my lips when his hand moved
between us, finding the source of all my pleasure and sending me flying over the edge.

Just a few more rapid, uncoordinated thrusts and Jake's whole body stiffened. I felt him release inside me and a surge of
pure joy flew through me. Whatever was going to happen, I knew I would be okay as long as I trusted in Jacob.

The woman on the beach's words came back to me. Together, you and Jacob are stronger than either of you are
individually.

We lay there for some time, still connected in the most natural of ways. I simply revelled in the sensation of being with him.
My hands explored the broad expanse of his back, and down the thick muscles of his arms. I found the long fingers of his
hand and threaded them through my own. I looked up to find him watching me.

"What are you doing?" he whispered.


"So are you," he told me seriously.

"I feel beautiful when I'm with you," I confided.

"You don't usually?" he asked in disbelief.

"No," I shook my head. "I've never really thought of myself that way."

Jake looked at me curiously for a moment before shrugging. "You will," he promised me. I believed him.

We lay in one another's arms for a while, talking. This was just Jake n Bells, relishing the feel of each other and making
small talk. It felt so incredibly right. The way it was supposed to be. I loved the way he made me feel. Safe. Protected.
Warm. Happy. And so much in love. His smile when I told him as much was almost beatific.

I grew sleepy. "Bells stay with me," Jake asked me urgently. "If you have another of those ... dreams, please stay. Don't go
back there."

"I haven't had any tea, Jake," I told him. "But I'll stay with you, if it happens." My eyes drifted shut.
If I dreamed, I didn’t remember. Either way, I woke up several hours later, safe in Jacob’s arms as he lay spooned behind me. He was holding onto me very tightly, and I imagined that even in his sleep he was afraid I would fly away. My mind wandered to my experience the night before, in the Cullens’ house. In the cold light of morning, the enormity of it hit me. A vampire who wanted to turn me into his partner for all eternity, who possessed a piece of my soul, had detected my presence. I shuddered and felt Jake stir next to me.

“There is no way you can be cold,” he murmured sleepily, nuzzling my hair. I turned in his arms and kissed him lightly.

“I was spooking myself thinking about what happened last night.”

Just like that, the Alpha was wide awake and on full alert. “What time is it?” he looked at his watch. “It’s just after six. How are you feeling?”

“Okay,” I told him. “Still a bit weak maybe, but better. Whatever is in Sue’s tea, it does work.”

“Yeah well, maybe we should just feed you steak for a few days instead. Are you up to talking with dad?”

“Now? Isn’t he sleeping?”

“This is important Bells, he won’t mind if I wake him. And I need to be at the Cullens in a couple of hours.”

“Well as long as you’re sure he won’t mind,” I said doubtfully.

“He won’t,” Jake assured me. “Can you get dressed?” He pulled on a pair of jeans as he spoke. I could feel the urgency from him and nodded. Zero to sixty, Alpha wolf style, I thought.

Fifteen minutes later, I was dressed and had found my way about the kitchen. Eggs and toast were being prepared and coffee was brewing. Jake wheeled Billy into the room and took in the scene before him.

“You don’t need to make us breakfast, Bella,” he told me. “You’re still recovering.”

“Quiet,” I scolded him. “You said we don’t have much time.” Jake sat down wordlessly and Billy chuckled.

“So,” the tribal Chief said once we were all seated with breakfast and coffee before us. “What’s going on?”

Jake just launched straight in. “Bella had two out of body experiences yesterday. Billy’s eyebrows shot up and he looked at me with a piercing gaze. "Both happened after drinking Sue’s tea. The first time, she came to me when I was on my way back to the Cullens. I was frightened and angry, and her Spirit soothed me. The rest of the pack felt it, or those that were phased anyway. It was real.” Jake glanced at me before continuing. “Last night, it happened again. She went to the Cullens’ house. Edward sensed her spirit there. That’s what all the howling was about, Quil sent the alarm up that Edward had said Bella was in their house. She was sound asleep in my bed. She woke up before anything could happen.” He finished his explanation and gave his dad a don’t ask me expression.

“Well, the first thing I need to say is, please don’t drink anymore of Sue’s tea, Bella.” Billy’s eyes twinkled slightly. “I’ve said for decades that she’s really a witch, you know.” I smiled, appreciating his attempt to bring some levity to the situation. We could both see how tense Jake was. “Tell me your experiences, Bella.”

I told him everything I could remember. How I had no control over it happening. How I didn’t know what had drawn me to either Jake or the Cullens’ home. My spirit, or soul, or whatever it was, had simply flown of its own accord. Billy nodded thoughtfully before turning to his son.

“Kaheleha,” was all he said. Jake nodded his agreement.

“That’s what I thought,” he told his father. Billy pushed his chair back from the table without further ado, and wheeled himself from the kitchen. I looked questioningly at Jake, who listened for a minute before telling me, “He’s phoning Sue.”

Within half an hour, Sue was settled on Billy’s couch, a cup of coffee in her hand as she listened carefully to everything we told her. When we reached the part about me actually having left my body, she choked on the mouthful of coffee she had just taken.

“Bella!” she gasped. “When you told me yesterday you were flying, I thought ... well I thought you were exaggerating, to be perfectly honest!”

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“Bella!” she gasped. “When you told me yesterday you were flying, I thought ... well I thought you were exaggerating, to be perfectly honest!”

“There’s more,” Jake told her grimly. With a glance at his watch, he quickly told her the rest. By the time he had finished, Sue’s hand was over her mouth in horror.

“I never imagined ...” her voice faded and Jake shook his head. He was growing impatient. I rubbed my hand on his arm to try and soothe him a little.

“Sue do you have any idea what might have caused that to happen? I kind of want to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

“But Jacob,” Sue protested, “if Bella can leave her body, and she is your imprint ...”
"I know," he said impatiently and I looked at him questioningly. He pleaded at me with his eyes. *Later.* Knowing how badly he wanted answers before he had to go to the Cullens', I nodded. He squeezed my hand in gratitude. "Sue, I really need to know what might have caused this, so we can stop it happening again."

Sue shook her head slowly. "There's a powerful, rare herb in that tea," she said. "It's found mainly in the mountains where Taha Aki is said to have left his body when he scouted the area for threats during times of peace. My family lore says that the herb has magical properties. It is a sedative and is said to strengthen the spirit. I never thought ..." her voice trailed off. "This has never happened before," she whispered. Her face looked pale.

Jake looked at her intently. "So you think that herb could have caused the depth of Bella's sleep, strengthening her spirit enough that it could break free from her body?" he checked.

"It's all I can think of, Jacob." She looked between us. "I am so sorry, Bella," she said earnestly. "I've never experienced anything like this before. My aunt taught me to be careful with all herbs. I should have realized yesterday when you spoke so strongly about it."

"It's okay, Sue," I told her. "Now that we know what causes it, I'll just stay away from your medicines." I didn't see that there was any harm done in the long run.

"Definitely no herbs," Jake said. He stood and pulled me to my feet. "I have to go," he told his dad and Sue. "Thank you for coming over this morning, Sue." Taking my hand, he led me to the front door and out onto the porch. Cupping my face in his hands, he started speaking very earnestly. "Bella, I'm going to have to spend a lot of time at the Cullens until this is sorted out. Embry is gonna be right outside all morning, just in the trees over there. He'll be connected to me, and he'll be able to hear you. If you need to go anywhere, just call out to him and he'll bring you wherever you need to go. When he finishes at noon, Jared will take over. I'll come home this afternoon for a while. No herbs, no magic tea, and no overdoing it, 'kay?"

"'Kay," I promised him with a smile. Leaning in to kiss me, Jake's eyes were very serious. I knew he must be dreading leaving me, especially to go where he was going.

"Can you hide your thoughts from Edward?" I asked him when he released me from his searing kiss.

"Seem to be able to," he told me. "I guess we're about to find out." Pulling me in for one final hug, he kissed me again before jogging down the porch steps and into the trees. Moments later, a black and grey wolf appeared briefly at the edge of the trees. Embry, reassuring me that he was there. I waved my acknowledgement. He dipped his head and stepped back out of sight again. I went back into the cabin to wait out the day without Jacob.

**Jacob's POV**

*Hating* that I had to leave Bells, but knowing this was the best way I could ensure her Protection at the moment, I took off into the forest. I didn't phase straightaway. I was absolutely dreading the day ahead of me. I needed to take some time to focus my mind. There were so many things I had to block from my thoughts that I didn't want Edward to read. I took some time to make sure everything was buried beneath other thoughts. All of it. My intimate moments with Bells, and holy fuck I wanted to think of them constantly, were the first to be pushed down. Then there was the fact that she really had been in the Cullens home last night, or her Spirit had, anyway. He couldn't be allowed to know that. The fact that she was able to leave her body at all was something best kept from Edward until I knew exactly what it meant. And I also didn't want him to know that I suspected he had deliberately provoked me to attack him. He was plotting something, of that I was absolutely certain. I would feign complete ignorance and watch him closely.

When I was certain that I was in full control of my thoughts, I phased into my wolf and headed at full pelt to the Cullens'. Collin was agitated at his post there and was more than ready for me to take over. I didn't blame him. The stench of the leeches had been burning his nose and airways for hours.

*I'm on my way Collin. You're off for the rest of the day.*

**Collin** - *Thanks, Jake. Carlisle sent Edward out earlier to find out when you were arriving. I think they want you for something.*

*Great, I'll look forward to that.*

My sarcastic mood had turned foul by the time I arrived. Having to leave Bella and spend the day with leeches at a time like this was killing me. I knew keeping my thoughts to myself was going to be difficult and exhausting. Even though I knew through Embry that Bells was fine, I was skittish about all the unknowns shrouding us at the moment.

I had no sooner taken up position, closer to the house than any of the other wolves would, than the door opened and Edward and Carlisle appeared. They gave them a token growl. I knew it wasn't in my best interests to piss them off but I was in no mood for small talk with my natural enemies.

"Jacob is feeling agitated today," Edward informed Carlisle.

"Then we'll keep this brief. My friend Matthias continues to research on our behalf. I would like you to consider meeting..."
"Jacob wants to know why," Edward translated. That was annoying.

"Because he believes the answer to our problem most likely lies with the nature of your imprint. We will give you our full cooperation, Jacob. Whatever is required to return Bella's soul to her, we will do. You have my word on that."

And you?

Edward was standing ever so slightly behind Carlisle. His eyes glinted at me as he spoke. "Jacob wants to know if he has my word on that too." He inclined his head towards me, smiling coldly as he answered. "You do."

I wasn't sure about the doc. But Edward Cullen was lying through his fucking teeth. And he wanted me to know it.

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Bella's POV

The morning passed too slowly. Rachel arrived soon after Jake left. Nobody allowed me to do anything. I was treated as though I was as much of an invalid as Charlie. Any and all attempts to help, to fetch food or drinks, to administer Charlie's medication, even to make my bed, were thwarted by Rachel and Sue. Charlie and Billy were staunchly on their sides.

Nor could I help with reading the parchments, since they were all in Quileute. Billy and Charlie commandeered the television, watching sports which did not interest me at all. In the end, I went back to bed for a nap. I had dozed for about half an hour when Rachel knocked on the bedroom door. I raised my head sleepily as she popped her head into the room.

"I think we've found something, Bella," she told me excitedly. "Would you like to come and hear it?"

Five minutes later, I was settled on the couch beside Sue. Billy and Charlie had turned off the television and were watching expectantly as Rachel arranged a parchment on her lap.

"You both know the story of Kaheleha's time?" she checked with Charlie and I. I nodded.

"His time was before your people could transform into wolves?" Charlie checked. "The men's Spirits left their bodies to defend the tribe?"

"That's right," Rachel confirmed. "Taha Aki was the first Warrior to inhabit a wolf's form, but our records date back to Kaheleha. His ancestors may have been Spirit Warriors too, but we don't have records going that far back. Anyway, there's an account here of a vampire attack which occurred while the Warriors were in Spirit form. Remember that the Spirit Warriors were connected through their minds, just the same as Jake's pack's mind, okay?"

"One of the Warriors' bodies was bitten by a vampire while he was in his Spirit form. This is the account from his brothers who were in Spirit form with him at the time. I'll be a bit loose with the translation because our language has evolved since these records were written, but you'll get the idea.

"The first we knew of the attack on our brother Miskanda's body was when his Spirit screamed in agony. We did not know what was happening. We all felt his Spirit implode. What was left seemed to be a blackened, hardened shell, not the light of beauty that we were used to seeing. We all had the impression that while our brother still existed, he was no longer one of us. Our fears were confirmed when we returned to his body. A livid bite mark, created by no animal we have ever encountered before, was evident on his neck. His body, though uninhabited by his Spirit, twitched on the ground as though in severe pain.

"Miskanda's deviant Spirit re-entered his body despite our protests that we should investigate further. He did not reappear. For two days we watched as our brother screamed and writhed in agony. He begged us to destroy him. On the third day, we brought his wife to see him. He begged her on the lives of their children to kill him to end his pain. She wielded the knife herself and we burned his body in accordance with the tribe's requirements."

Rachel stopped reading and looked up at us. "I think that tells us what happens to a person's soul when they are bitten by a vampire." She pulled a face. "Lucky they burned that body."

"Soul is the same as Spirit?" Charlie asked.

Billy nodded. "In our traditions, yes, we believe so."

"So when someone is bitten by a bloodsucker, their soul implodes?" I asked in horror. I wasn't sure how this was supposed to help and it sounded positively horrific.

"There's more," Rachel continued. She began reading from her parchment again. "We were all in a state of great panic. We did not understand what had happened to our brother's Spirit. Never before have we encountered such an attack. We have been taking steps to protect our Spirits using the ancient practice of meditation. We believe that we can defend our Spirits against malicious attacks if we strengthen them in this way. The truth of this has however yet to be tested."

She looked at Sue. "Over to you."
Sue nodded and looked at me. "There are a lot of ifs and buts about this Bella, but the gist of it seems to be that you can strengthen your Spirit through our ancient meditation practices. I think, given that you are clearly able to access your Spirit, that I can teach you those practices. You can use them to gain control over your Spirit, and hopefully to defend it."

I think my mouth was hanging open. I looked around the room incredulously. Charlie's face probably mirrored mine. The three members of the tribe looked pleased.

"Um ... I can learn to meditate, access my soul at will, and learn to protect it from imploding if Edward tries to turn me?" I clarified.

"That's about the size of it," Sue told me. She was clearly pleased that I had grasped it. I couldn't help the half laugh that escaped from me.

"Bella." It was Billy, speaking for the first time since we had assembled in his living room. "You can do this. You have already accessed your Spirit twice." Turning to Charlie with humour in his eyes, he said, "You might want to take a look at your family tree and see who lied."

"What?" Charlie asked, clearly confused.

"Your daughter may look like a paleface, but she's Quileute through and through," Billy explained.

"We don't have any Quileute blood," I protested but Charlie was clearing his throat. "Dad?" I asked, incredulously.

"Your great great grandmother," he told me. "Just a family rumour that nobody's paid much attention to. But uh, she had a dark haired son with darker skin tone. My grandfather. Your great great grandfather and their three other children were all fairer skinned and lighter haired. It wasn't the kind of thing that was discussed in those days and like I say, it's just an old family rumour." He pulled a face. "I think we're learning to pay closer attention to all those old rumours and legends."

Billy hooted with laughter and slapped his thigh. "Damn, Charlie, you're Quileute too, then!" He raised his coffee cup to his old friend, cackling. "I told Jake, the night he imprinted on you Bella," he told me smugly. "No Alpha wolf would ever imprint on a girl who didn't have native blood in her. Just wouldn't happen."

I shook my head. I was starting to think I was going to wake up in my bed in Charlie's house and find that the past few days had all been a crazy dream.

Sue was all business. "We really should get started straightaway, Bella," she told me. "It's important that you master this as quickly as possible. Will we move to the kitchen?"

Over the next couple of hours, Sue taught me how to breathe properly for meditation and how to focus my thoughts. It was harder than I'd thought. I kept finding my mind wandering and my breathing becoming shallower. After two hours, Sue had to leave. She gave me instructions to practice, and told me she would see me again the following day for further training. It was important, she said, to gain control over my breathing and concentration before we progressed further.

It gave me something to do that afternoon. Rachel came and went a few times, apparently dividing her time between looking after Billy and Charlie, and keeping her own home. I protested that I could take over here but was quickly shouted down.

"Give yourself a couple of days Bella," Rachel told me kindly. "I don't mind, really. You can take over when you're stronger. As defined by my brother," she added with a grin and I groaned. That could take days.

Around four pm, Rachel slipped into the cabin again. She smiled at me and announced, "I need to borrow Bella for a while." Putting her hand under my elbow, she steered me out of my seat and towards Jake's room. "Pack an overnight bag, you're going to my place. Make yourself at home when you get there," she whispered in my ear before letting me go.

"Rachel?" I called after her but she just grinned at me over her shoulder. Frowning, I threw a change of clothes and my toothbrush into my backpack and made my way back to the living room. Rachel was fussing around our dads.

"Paul's waiting in the car outside," she told me brightly. I looked at her, confused, then looked at Billy whose face was showing dawning comprehension.

"Charlie, isn't there a match on?" he asked, reaching for the remote control and engaging my dad in a lively debate as to whether the match that was about to start was worth watching or not. I waved my goodbyes, wondering what was going on and why Billy was so obviously trying to distract Charlie's attention.

A green Chevy sat outside, Paul at the wheel. Feeling slightly nervous, I glanced at the treeline before climbing in the passenger door.

"Um, does Jared know we're leaving?" I asked tentatively. I was a little wary of Paul. I had only met him the morning he had come to Charlie's, before I had met Jake.

He surprised me by smiling warmly at me. "Hey Bella. Yeah, course he knows. Jake told him."
"Jake?"

"Well where d'you think we're going?" he asked me.

"I thought - Rachel said I've to go to your place."

"Where my Alpha and your future husband is waiting, or will be by the time we get there."

I sat back in my seat, a little confused. Why would Jake be waiting for me at his sister's home? Why not meet me at his own home?

Paul was watching me out of the corner of his eye as he drove. "Not got it, huh?" he asked me with a chuckle.

"Uh ... no," I admitted.

"Jake has spent about eight hours being goaded by Edward Cullen, surrounded by the stench of five leeches. He needs his imprint. You'd better be ready for him," he added very seriously.

"Oh!" I got there in the end. Whatever Jake needed, he couldn't take in front of our fathers. We needed to be alone.

Pulling up outside a charming cabin with flower beds planted all around it, Paul winked at me. "Rach and I will be staying at Billy's tonight. We'll see you tomorrow."

I hopped out of the car, energised when I realised that I had the rest of the day and all night alone with Jacob. Paul grinned and waved as he drove off, and I practically skipped up to the cabin door.

The door was wrenched open and I stopped in my tracks when I saw Jake. His eyes were wild and his hair unkempt. His hands were balled into fists and his jaw clenched tightly. He had just endured a day of absolute hell.

I stepped straight up to him and wound my arms tightly around his waist. I heard Jake kick the door shut and waited for the clothes ripping to begin.

It didn't. He simply held me tightly and buried his face in my hair, breathing deeply. I smiled as I recognised the deep diaphragmatic breathing Sue had taught me earlier in the day. I would need to ask him about that later. I knew instinctively that Jake was using my scent to erase the cloying stench of the Cullens from his senses. I stood very still in his arms while he inhaled my aroma. I felt his embrace loosen a little and he raised his head finally.

"I'm sorry to drag you here, Bells." He sounded genuinely upset and I shook my head.

"I'm fine, Jake. I'm recovering really quickly, and if I get to spend the rest of the day and night alone with you, I'd have travelled a hundred times the distance." I smiled up at him and saw his eyes soften.

He bent his head to kiss me, stopping just before meeting my lips to whisper against them, "I am so grateful for you, Bells." I was lost in his kiss within moments. He lifted me easily, hitching my legs around his waist as he carried me I had no idea where. It wasn't until I felt a hard surface under my back and he began unfastening my jeans that I opened my eyes and saw we were in the kitchen. I guessed it was the nearest available surface.

We christened a lot of surfaces that afternoon.

A/N: I know I didn't cover what happened at the Cullens with Edward feeling that Bella was there ... I will in a couple of chapters' time. There's too much else going on with Jake n Bells that I want to cover first.
A/N: I really want to say a special thank you to everybody who is taking the time to leave a review for this fic. I will freely admit this is the toughest story I’ve taken on yet and it honestly is your feedback that’s keeping me writing when my head is fuddled. Which happens a lot. And thank you to niamhg and MistC too because you are both wonderful.

Jake and I lay on Rachel and Paul's spare bed, limbs intertwined, breathing laboured. Jake was seated inside me and when he rocked his hips gently my entire body shuddered again, still inflamed after my last climax.

It was almost midnight. We had been at the little house for eight hours and had done nothing other than eat and make love. I was exhausted and sore, and wonderfully happy.

"I've worn you out and I promised I wouldn't," Jake lamented as he ran his eyes over my face. He rolled us so we were side by side and wrapped his strong arms around me.

"Mmmmm. I don't think you've heard me complaining," I smiled as I nuzzled into his neck, inhaling his wonderful earth and pine aroma. I thought I understood why my scent affected him so much. His scent was becoming familiar, and heady, to me.

"Do you wanna sleep?" he asked but I shook my head.

"I want to clean up a little first."

"I like it when you smell like this," he protested.

"Bath," I insisted and he kissed my cheek.

"Fine. I'll go and run it."

Ten minutes later we were in the bath together. I had laughed when I saw it. It was absolutely enormous. Wolf size, as Jake had pointed out. It looked bizarrely at odds with the rest of the cabin, but I guessed it made sense for an imprinted wolf who spent his days running around the forest to have adequate bathing facilities.

It meant Jake and I could comfortably take a bath together, which was precisely what we were doing. Grinning, Jake asked me to tell him about my day. I laughed. We had been together for hours and really hadn't done much talking.

I told him about Sue and Rachel's discovery, and what Sue thought it meant. As he listened carefully, he used a sponge to soap my arms, back and chest. It was a little distracting, but I got through the tale.

"So Sue reckons that you should be able to actually control your Spirit," he summarised. "Then you could leave your body at will just like the ancient Warriors could. Sue also thinks once you have control over that, you can learn to strengthen and protect your own Spirit."


"Yes, I think you can," Jake told me. "You've already done it. You know you must have some Quileute blood in you somewhere Bells. Dad reckons there's no way we could have imprinted otherwise, and you must be descended from a Warrior."

"Charlie already cleared that one up." I told him the story of my great-great-grandmother and he grinned.

"I am so grateful to whichever old Indian it was that seduced your poor great-great-grandmother." He nibbled on my shoulder.

"Who says he seduced her? Maybe it was the other way around," I pointed out as I took his arms and wrapped them tighter around me.

"Maybe it was," his husky voice was right at my ear. "Maybe she was a temptress, like you." I snorted and he kissed my cheek. "So how do you feel about it?" he wanted to know.

"Honestly? It all sounds a bit far fetched. That I can learn to control my soul, or Spirit, or whatever you want to call it. That I can choose to have out of body experiences at will, and learn to protect my soul from a vampire bite. I mean, I'll try it. I'll try anything to get rid of Edward. But it's ... bizarre."

Jake turned my face with his finger. "More far fetched and bizarre than me turning into a wolf?" he asked, very seriously. "Or imprinting? Vampires?"

I frowned. "Well, I suppose when you put it like that... No, not stranger than any of that."

"Will you work at it, Bells?" he asked me. He was searching my eyes and I knew he thought this was of vital importance.
"Of course I will," I told him. "Sue already taught me about meditative breathing. You breathe that way," I remembered. "Earlier, when you were smelling me."

Jake laughed. "Yeah, it's kind of a tribal thing. All kids get schooled in the 'old ways' for traditional ceremonies and stuff. Some of it's been really useful as a wolf actually."

"What else do you get taught?" I was fascinated.

"It's mostly just customs and rituals. Some prayers and incantations. But to properly pray, you're supposed to be in a semi-meditative state. So we learn about the breathing and how to focus our minds."

"Wow." I couldn't imagine learning anything like that at any school I had been to.

"Oh you have no idea how seriously we Quileutes take our heritage," he said wryly. I turned to look at him again.

"With good reason, obviously," I reminded him.

"Yeah." Jake fell silent for a moment before asking, "Bells?"

"Hmmm?" I was tracing shapes on his muscular leg, which was bent at the knee and resting at my side. I was a little distracted.

"I want to have a home like this, with you," he told me. My attention re-focused and I turned in the water, kneeling between his legs to look at him.

"I love you, Bells," he said. "And you know that I can absolutely guarantee you a lifetime. This," he gestured around us, "having our own place where we can be alone and build a life together. I don't wanna wait for that when I know what I want. Do you think it's too soon?"

I grinned at him. My heart was soaring. I had agreed to the joining ceremony and I had moved into his dad's cabin with him. But the thought of having our own home where we could start our lives together, just the two of us, was making me giddy.

"I don't think it's too soon," I told him and his face shone with happiness. "I mean, the girl I was a week ago would have yelled that this is all too soon. Me being here with you right now, in love and ready to commit the rest of my life to you. But that was her. The new Bella is absolutely ready to move into a home of our own with you."

Jake grabbed me around the waist and re-positioned me so that I was lying on top of him. "I'm glad I met the new Bella. The old Bella sounds far too sensible."

I laughed. "You have no idea. And you didn't meet the new Bella. You created the new Bella."

"No," he shook his head. "The real Bella just needed to be let out." As he pulled me in for a kiss I realised beyond any doubt that he was absolutely right.

The rest of the night passed too quickly. We slept and talked, made love and talked some more. Jake showed me some of the breathing techniques he had learned as a child and I found that when he was beside me, it all became easier. With Jake next to me, I could focus my mind on anything at all and keep it there without any stray thoughts wandering in. Jake, of course, playfully tested me. He tried to distract me by nibbling on my earlobe or running his hand seductively up my leg. And okay, those distractions were immediately effective. But when we were both behaving, I found I could achieve the relaxed, focussed state that Sue wanted me to aim for. I was pleased with my progress, and ecstatic that Jake was so happy about it too.

Over breakfast the following morning, Jake's mood gradually became more serious. He was on his way back to the Cullens for the day.

"Are you going to be okay today?" I asked him, concerned. We were sitting at the kitchen table, finished breakfast and drinking coffee.

"Yeah," he assured me. "Yesterday was the first day and I swear Edward was trying to goad me. I told you how he lied about wanting to return the part of your soul to you. I actually think I believe Carlisle, that he wants to help. But Edward," Jake glowered and shook his head. "He's playing some kind of game. You know he kept coming out to the yard for various stupid reasons, all of them obviously fabricated. He would come just close enough that his stink was unbearable and then leave again. I swear he was doing it on purpose, knowing I can't attack him."

I got off my chair and walked around the table to him. I straddled his lap and kissed him. "Jake you can do this," I told him. "You keep your cool today and I'll spend the whole day practising Sue's techniques and meeting with her to learn more, okay? We'll work this out as fast as we can. Maybe Edward's just playing about and he really will leave with the rest of his family," I added hopefully.

"And maybe he's a nice guy," Jake said dryly. "But fine, it's a deal. I'll stay calm and you practise. Hey, maybe when you learn how you can fly on over to the Cullens and do what you did the other day with that peace sending thing. That would
piss Pansy Boy off," he grinned.

His head jerked up suddenly and he groaned. "That's our time up, honey." He kissed me and stood up, setting me easily on my feet as he did so. A moment later the front door opened and Paul appeared in the kitchen.

"Hey Bella. Fuckin' hell Jake could you not have confined your activities to just one room?"

I flushed and Jake snorted. "Be grateful Bella's conscientious," he told his brother-in-law. "She insisted on airing all the rooms and she's washed the sheets."

Paul sniffed dubiously. "Damn home smells of fuckin' Alpha sex."

"Sorry." Jake actually sounded genuinely contrite. "Uh, Bells we need to go." He pulled on my hand and I waved at Paul as I was dragged past him to collect my backpack. I looked quizzically at Jake when he had led me outside.

"Shoulda thought of that," he muttered. "Paul needs to uh, reclaim his home now."

"Oh!"

"Rachel won't be at dad's much, today," Jake pulled a face and I cringed. Our night together had made it necessary for Paul and Rachel to spend the day making their home more palatable for Paul's wolf. "Yeah," Jake said when he saw my understanding. He grabbed my hand and started walking us towards the road.

"So uh, do you wanna walk back to dad's, or go wolfback riding?"

"Wolfback riding," I said promptly and Jake laughed.

"That's my girl," he said proudly. He led me into the trees.

"Are all the wolves' homes so close to the forest?" I asked.

"Yep. It's kind of the only requirement we have. Everything else is up to the girls. Just so as you know for when we start looking for our own place. Which will be when?" Jake looked at me hopefully and I grinned.

"How about right after I've learned to control my Spirit, you've saved my Spirit, and we've defeated the bad guys?"

"Sounds about right." Jake started to remove his shorts as I watched. "Bells?"

"Yeah?"

"Eyes are this way," he teased. I looked up at him, somewhere between amused and embarrassed at having been caught ogling his manhood. "Can we do the joining ceremony tonight?" he asked me.

"You didn't need to be naked to talk me into that," I told him.

"Wasn't taking any chances. Is that a yes?"

"It's a yes please. What do I need to do?" I asked.

"Just tell dad. He'll be only too happy to organise it," Jake told me wryly. "Ready?" I nodded and he swiftly tied his shorts around his ankle. He shimmered around the edges and his beautiful russet wolf appeared in place of the man.

I blinked. "What just happened there?" The wolf gave a low bark and I saw amusement in his intelligent eyes. He lowered himself to the ground and I clambered on, hoping I wasn't hurting him when I grabbed onto his fur. He didn't flinch and I assumed he was as strong as he looked.

Jake set off at a leisurely pace. I took in this newest bizarre situation I was finding myself in. Riding comfortably on the back of a wolf that was easily the size of a horse. I tangled my fingers into his shaggy fur and began running strands through them. I was just experimenting with the feel and texture of him, but when his enormous head turned and nuzzled at my leg, I realised he could feel it and was basking in it. Smiling to myself, I kept going, running my fingers through fur and stroking his flank. Jake slowed his pace and I knew he was drawing this out.

All too soon, he stopped and lowered himself to the ground. I slid off his back and within moments the man appeared before me. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me softly.

"That," he said emphatically, "is something we need to do more often."

"Definitely," I grinned.

"Did you like it?" he asked and I nodded.

"Surreal but wonderful," I told him.

"I don't think my wolf has ever felt so docile," Jake confided. "He absolutely loved you petting him like that. Ferocious my"
ass, he's a puppy.” He grinned and kissed me again. Resting his forehead against mine, he dropped his hands to take mine and sighed. "I gotta go. But we have a date tonight, right?"

"Absolutely," I told him. He stepped back, not letting go of my hands until he really had to. Without taking his eyes from mine, he shifted into his wolf. He waited. Realising what he wanted, I laughed and walked up to him. I started to stroke my hands along his fur and he actually closed his eyes.

"Daft mutt," I teased him. He cracked one eye open before suddenly shooting his tongue out and licking my cheek. "Jacob!" I yelled at him. He barked, wheeled and took off at a jog, leaving me shaking my head and scrubbing at my cheek with my sleeve. Daft mutt, indeed.

I stepped out of the trees and saw that Jake had left me right across the road from his dad's cabin. I wondered suddenly what Charlie had been told. Cringing slightly, I went in the front door. Billy and my dad were sitting in their usual positions. Both men looked up when I came in. Charlie instantly focussed on the television screen. I nearly laughed when I saw that it was switched off. I guessed he was as keen to avoid any embarrassing conversations as I was.

"Good time?" Billy asked innocently. I settled for rolling my eyes at him.

"Um, Billy? Jake and I were hoping to do the joining ceremony this evening. He said just to let you know."

Billy's whole face lit up and he rubbed his hands together gleefully. "Leave it to me, Bella. Charlie? C'mon Chief, our kids are getting hitched tonight."

Even Charlie couldn't hide his grin.

The day passed. I spent a large portion of it in Jake's room, sitting cross legged against the headboard of the bed while I practised breathing techniques and mind focussing. It was, I was pleased to note, definitely getting easier. I also had to admit that it was deeply relaxing, and energising somehow.

Knowing that Rachel wouldn't be making an appearance anytime really soon, at lunchtime I convinced the dads that I was recovered enough from my blood loss to prepare us all some lunch. As we ate sandwiches and soup, they filled me in on what they had been organising. I was horrified to learn that Charlie fully intended to honour age old tradition and attend the ceremony by a bonfire on the beach.

"You can't, dad!" I protested vigorously. "You're not strong enough!"

"Bella I have been stuck in that chair with my damn leg propped up on a table for two days. Before that I was staring at the walls of my own house for days. I am telling you that I'm going to the beach tonight. It's not like the boys can't get me there and back. It's to be a clear night, Bells. I'm going."

Ashamed, I realised that my bid to come to Forks to establish a relationship with Charlie was failing abysmally. I had given precious little thought to his predicament since meeting Jacob. I nodded reluctantly, determined to do something to make him more comfortable while we were staying with Billy.

After lunch, I went to the treeline across the road and quietly called for Sam. Jake had told me he was on afternoon guard duty. He appeared quickly, his huge black wolf looking at me quizzically.

"Can one of the pack go to Charlie's and put his recliner in my truck?" I asked. "He isn't comfortable and having his own chair would make some kind of a difference to him."

Sam nodded and I thanked him. "Do you need lunch or anything?" I checked. He shook his head and I turned to leave. A few moments later I heard him call my name. Turning, I saw the man standing in his shorts.

"Jake says to tell you to bring anything you need to make you or Charlie comfortable at his place. And that you look beautiful and he can't wait for tonight," Sam finished with a wide smile.

"Tell him to stop annoying Edward Cullen by trying to make him jealous," I replied, unfooled.

Sam laughed loudly. "I guess you've got him all figured out already, huh?"

I grinned and headed back to the cabin, where I returned to my meditation practice. Sue arrived not long afterwards and seemed delighted with my progress.

"Do you feel ready to move on, Bella?" she asked. The truth was that I was desperate to move on and I told her so. For an hour, she schooled me in trying to find what she called my "inner light". I grew increasingly frustrated by the vagueness of it all.

"It's the source of your self, Bella. It's your soul, your Spirit. It will take time and patience but you will find it. Just keep concentrating."

I tried and I tried. Finally, Sue had to leave. "Just keep on practising, Bella," she advised me. I had told her how Jake helped me learn how to focus my mind, just by being there. "Perhaps try when Jacob is around," she suggested before
leaving. "But now I have to go. I have an important role to fulfill this evening." Her eyes twinkled and I realised she was talking about the joining ceremony.

Everyone was talking about it. Billy and Charlie were plotting together. Rachel's eyes were brimming with excitement when she finally made an appearance at 3pm. Then again, her glow could have been due to something else entirely, I realised. Layla came by to sweetly ask how I was and whether she could do anything to help me prepare for it. She was helping me choose something to wear from the limited choices I had with me when Embry and Collin appeared with Charlie's recliner.

The two wolves made quick work of moving the furniture around Billy's living room to make room for the large seat. Charlie grumbled about the fuss and not wanting to take over the cabin, but Billy shouted him down and I could see the relief in Charlie's eyes when he was finally seated comfortably.

I noticed that while Embry worked, he kept one eye firmly on Layla. She hovered around and the instant Charlie was settled, she went straight to Embry. He pulled her close to him and kissed her gently on the lips. I was struck again by the absolute devotion in the way they looked at one another.

"Sickening isn't it?" Collin asked, seeing what I was looking at.

"They look so good together," I commented, knowing they could hear me.

Collin looked at me curiously. "They're not any different to you and Jake," he told me. I turned to him, surprised and trying to remember when Collin had seen Jake and I together. "Pack mind," he reminded me, seeing my confusion.

"Oh, right," I remembered. "Really? We look like that?"

"Yes," chorused Charlie and Billy, making me laugh.

Not long after that, Jake arrived. I saw Charlie eying us as Jake pulled me roughly to his body, inhaling my scent deeply as he had done the afternoon before. He was definitely calmer today, though. He pulled back and smiled at me. His eyes weren't as wild as they had been and he seemed to be completely in control of his wolf.

"Dad? We all set for later?" he asked.

"Yep. You two just need to turn up on the beach at six. We're good to go. Embry and Collin have just left, they're going to set up the bonfire now."

Jake was beaming. "Thanks, dad. Can I talk to you for a minute?" He let me go and jerked his head towards the hallway. Billy looked surprised but nodded, allowing Jake to push him out of sight somewhere. Charlie and I exchanged a glance and he shrugged. I busied myself in the kitchen.

"Leave all that, honey," I heard Jake say behind me. He had come into the kitchen so quietly I hadn't heard him. "Come with me for a while."

He led us out to the front of the cabin and hesitated for a moment. "We could walk but we're a bit short on time if we need to be at the beach for six. Car or wolf?" he asked me.

"Wolf," I replied immediately and he smiled at me, apparently delighted at my choice. We went into the forest and were soon making our way through the foliage. Jake was going at a faster pace this time and I felt his urgency. It didn't take long. He stopped and crouched until I was safely on the ground.

When he had phased back and pulled his shorts on, he looked at me long and hard. "This is just a suggestion, okay?" he told me. "If you don't like it, it's fine. We'll find something else. I was thinking about us moving in together when I was phased. I know it makes sense for us to wait until we have time to find something we really like, but I just don't want to wait Bella. Seth was phased at the same time and he reminded me of ... this."

Jake pulled back some branches and watched me closely, gauging my reaction. I looked past his arm, through the foliage, and felt my mouth drop slightly open.

I was looking at the most eccentric looking little cottage I had ever seen. It was impossible to date how old it was. It had a crooked chimney and a boarded up window. It seemed asymmetrical somehow and I realised it was actually built on a very steep slope. I wondered how that worked inside. Creepers grew up all along the front wall, even growing over the top of the doorway. It looked neglected and uninhabited, and absolutely perfect.

"It's ... who does it belong to?" I asked.

"Nobody, really. It was in Seth's family once, that's how he remembered it. I think he brought Mai here when they were first imprinted," he told me. "But when his great aunt died it came to light that she had never actually owned it. It had been gifted to her by the Elders. She was Sue's equivalent when Ephraim was Alpha of the last pack, so it was probably their way of paying her. Anyway, it's just been kind of lying here ever since because nobody's known what to do with it or who it really belongs to. I just asked dad and he said we can have it for now. If you want, we can move in as soon as we've cleaned it up a bit. And if we decide to stay in it, I can pay the Elders something for it to make it legally ours." He fidgeted
"Of course I do," I breathed. I knew it would need a lot of work, but I was desperate to see it.

Jake got the front door open with a sharp nudge from his shoulder. The air inside was damp and stale so we left the door open. We found ourselves in a narrow hallway which had three doors off it and a flight of steep stairs at the far end. Taking my hand, Jake began to guide us around the cottage. The door to our right was a living room. It was large enough for a werewolf and perhaps a few other more normal sized people. We pulled back a dust cover to reveal an ancient couch which most definitely needed replaced. Jake laughed when he tried to sit on it and something under the couch gave way completely.

The window was at the side, not the front. It looked straight into the forest and I could imagine myself sitting at the window with a book, watching for a russet wolf coming home. I smiled at the picture and Jake brought us back to the hall. The door opposite led into a kitchen. It was small but perfectly adequate. The cooker and oven looked serviceable and I thought the table and chairs would be fine with a little attention.

I was trying not to bounce when Jake led me through the third door. It was a bathroom. The faucets didn't work but Jake assured me that was fixable. I knew a good scrub would have it looking fine. A bubble of excitement was growing in the pit of my stomach. Jake was watching me cautiously and I knew he was probably thinking that I would be put off by the dirt and age of everything. I was actually charmed by it.

We climbed the steep flight of stairs and found ourselves in a room which spanned the entire top floor of the cottage. It would be the bedroom. Because the house was on such a steep slope, the enormous glass doors at the back of the room led not to a balcony, but to a garden. It was overgrown and wild but my imagination created a seating area and flower beds. I smiled as a picture came to my mind. I would be working in the garden and would look up to see a russet wolf loping out of the trees and through the gap in the fence.

"So who was Seth's great aunt's wolf?" I asked and Jake laughed.

"You don't miss much do you? He was one of Ephraim's pack. I think between his furry tendencies and her brewing, they preferred the solitude out here. I'll bet this garden is full of herbs and things that Sue could use. Don't touch anything!" he added severely for my benefit.

Standing there in the unkempt garden of the eccentric little cottage, Jacob pulled me into his arms. "What do you think, Bells?" he asked me.

"I think we've just found our new home, Mr Black," I told him. His eyes danced as he picked me up, my legs around his waist.

"I'll get the whole pack involved. It won't take them long to fix it up," he told me.

"Aren't they doing enough, Jake?" I asked him. "With the extra shifts at the Cullens, and guarding me at your dad's cabin?"

His eyes became serious as he looked at me. "Bella this is what we do. We're a family. We look out for each other. Not one of them minds. Okay, the Cullen shift is causing headaches but that's just because we need to be so controlled around our enemies and it goes against our natures. But you know, the guys get bored sometimes. They can't leave the res, they patrol and lead their secret lives, take whatever jobs they can to support their girls. Something like this actually gives them a boost. It's ... different. So I can promise you that when I ask for volunteers, they will all be clamouring to help."

I could tell he meant every word. "Your family is amazing," I told him sincerely and he smiled.

"Our family, Bells. You're a part of it now, too. I've told you, imprinting is absolute. From the minute word got out that I had imprinted on you, everyone considered you family. And as the mother of the future Alpha, trust me you hold an honoured position in the family." Jake's eyes were still serious. "That's why you will be kept safe at all costs, honey."

I felt tears well up in my eyes and Jake kissed me softly. "I didn't mean to upset you," he frowned.

"I'm not upset," I corrected him quickly. "Just ... I don't know. Emotional, I guess. A lot's happened and I'm not used to the whole family thing. It's special. It makes me feel special."

"You are special," he told me as he put his lips on mine and parted them with his tongue. We became lost in a kiss. My breathing deepened and my mind focussed in on the heat of Jake's mouth on mine. I lost sight of everything else as all that I had been practising came automatically to the fore.

I felt my mind centre and still. And there, right there while Jacob held me and we kissed in the garden, I found it. It was surrounded by a calm glow that I knew to be Jacob's Protection. His glow burned more brightly in one place and I understood that was the part that had been ripped out by Edward Cullen. I had found my inner light.

I had found my Spirit.
"Try it again," Jake ordered and I groaned. He was, I was finding out, a slave driver.

When I had accessed my Spirit, I immediately broke our kiss to tell him. Of course, that had made me lose my Spirit again and I hadn't been able to regain it since then. I had been trying for half an hour. The most I got was a vague glimpse of light before it slipped away again. I was getting frustrated and tired.

"C'mon Bells, one last time and then we'll go get hitched," Jake grinned at me. He knew I couldn't resist that grin. I rolled my eyes, then shut them and concentrated hard. We had relocated to the kitchen. Jake was sitting on one of the chairs and I was straddling his lap, facing him. For some reason, I found all the meditative exercises easier when he was physically close to me. He had suggested it might be because I was trying to access my soul, which he was a part of.

I focussed on correcting my breathing. Relaxing my shoulders, I breathed in from my abdomen and let it out again through my mouth. I kept that up for a while, then began to focus my mind. Jake was holding both of my hands and I had been using that contact as my anchor for the last ten minutes. I emptied my mind, focussing only on the heat of his hands on mine as I kept breathing slowly and deeply.

My mind began to centre again. I exhaled very slowly, focussing and waiting. Sue had told me to allow it to happen naturally, and I had found that the glimpses I got were when I wasn't trying too hard.

Breathe in, breathe out, Jake's hands.

My mind was clear of everything else. I could feel myself getting closer to what I was looking for. I deliberately didn't try to find it.

Breathe in, breathe out, Jake's hands.

A faint glow in my mind's eye told me I was close. I kept my focus and the glow grew a little stronger.

Breathe in, breathe out, Jake's hands.

And there it was. It was so beautiful. It seemed real, tangible. I was fascinated as I took it in. The glow surrounding it was ethereal and I couldn't tell where I ended and Jake's Protection began. We were joined, but separate. And there was that part of me that was no longer there, which Jake's essence filled.

What did I do now? I wondered. Sue wanted me to access my Spirit and now I had. What was next?

"Bella?" I heard Jake's voice. It was hushed. He sounded both very close by, and very far away. I had a decision to make. I could open my eyes and look at him, or I could stay here in this beautiful place. Just a moment longer.

"Bella!" Jake's voice was more urgent now, and I opened my eyes in surprise, losing my Spirit again as I did so. "Did you just leave again?" he demanded.

"No! But I found it! I found my Spirit, Jake," I practically squealed.

"I could see that," he told me. "You looked so calm and peaceful, I knew you must have gone into a deep meditation. Think you can do it again?"

"I think so," I said. "Out in the garden, it just happened. This time, I think I realised how to do it."

"Kay," Jake smiled. "Let's try it again later honey. We need to get going or else we'll be late for our own ceremony!"

"What? What time is it?" I asked, shocked. I had been sure it was only just after 5pm.

"It's nearly five thirty, Bella. You were out for ages. I started to get worried that you really had left your body again."

"Five thirty?" I repeated in absolute disbelief. "I wasn't that long!"

"Bells, you were sitting there looking like an angel for ten minutes before I called you," Jake told me.

I stared at him for a long moment. "It only felt like seconds."

"Well, it wasn't." He leaned in to kiss me. "I'm really glad you've done that, honey, but we do need to go now."

"Of course!" I jumped to my feet and we made our way out of the cottage. I turned to look at it while Jake shut the door behind us. Something tugged at the fringes of my memory and I frowned.

"What's wrong?" Jake asked me, pausing with his hand on the latch.

"Just ... some kind of deja vu or something. Not quite, though." I thought about it some more but chasing the memory I was trying to access only made it more elusive. "It doesn't matter," I said finally. "Let's go get married!"
Half an hour later, Jake and I arrived hand in hand at our bonfire on the beach. We had made it back to the red cabin in
time to change quickly and leave again. Jake was wearing jeans and a tightly fitted black T-shirt that was going to be
highly distracting for me. I was wearing jeans too, with a green shirt. It was the best I had with me. I knew I was going to
have to go back to Charlie's soon to get more clothes.

It was pitch dark on the path to the beach. Jake held onto my hand tightly and caught me when I inevitably stumbled. As we
neared the sand, I could clearly see the bonfire roaring a little way up the beach. A large group of people were milling
around it. Jake burst out laughing suddenly, a deep genuine laugh that made me look at him quizzically.

"You'll see it soon," he told me. Curiously, I scanned the scene we were making our way towards. There were a couple of
dozen people, sitting or standing around the bonfire. There was some kind of table erected. And there was a strange
shaped lump that was in the shadows from the angle we were approaching.

As we drew nearer, cries of "Here they are!" went up. Hoots and hollers sounded and I flushed and grinned. Jake put his
arm around my waist and squeezed a little.

"S'not too late to back out," he told me seriously.

"As if!" I put my own arm around his waist and looked up at him. The glow from the roaring bonfire illuminated his face and
shone in his eyes. Happiness and excitement were radiating from him. He smiled down at me before pointing with his free
hand towards the bonfire.

"Can you make it out now?" he asked.

Following his finger in the direction of the lump beside the burning pyre, I bust out laughing. Charlie was sitting on his
recliner on the beach.

"They didn't!" I laughed.

"Oh yes we did," Jared grinned, bounding over to us. "Just picked the chair up and carried Charlie in it."

Shaking my head and still laughing, I headed over to my dad. "You're drinking beer!" I scolded him. "Does that mix with
your meds?"

He rolled his eyes at me and I got the impression it wasn't his first drink of the evening. "Now Bells I've managed without
you fussing over me for years. It's good to have you home and you know how happy I am that you're with Jake. But I'm a
grown man and if I want a beer at my daughter's wedding, I'll have one."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "You rehearsed that little speech," I accused.

He tipped his bottle towards me in acknowledgement.

"I helped!" Billy yelled from his wheelchair. He was being pushed through the thick sand by Paul, who didn't seem to be
expending the slightest bit of energy.

Knowing I was onto a lost cause, I gave up. I was about to turn away when Charlie called me back.

"C'mere Bells," he told me, trying to sit up a little. I went over to him and he surprised me by extending his arms for a hug.
He really must have been drinking. Or perhaps, I thought, the beer was mixing with his medication and affecting him more
than it should. I went awkwardly into his embrace and he patted me equally awkwardly on the back for a moment. When I
moved back again, he cleared his throat.

"Now I know this is all fast and, well frankly a bit bizarre," he began. "But Jake's a good kid. Or man. Wolf. Whatever. He'll
take care of you, Bells. If I could have chosen any man for you to spend your life with, it would be Jacob Black. Anyone can
see he adores you and I think he's good for you. I would've liked to have had a bit more ... well, normal father time with this.
Y'know, threatening him on prom night, that kind of thing. But I guess I missed out on all that anyway." My eyes filled with
tears and he waved his hand at me. "Now don't start that, Bella. It's just the way things worked out. But what I'm trying to
say is, I'm happy for you kids. And I'm hoping this will mean that you stay around these parts so I can be a proper
grandfather. Not too soon, though," he added, because he was Charlie.

I sniffed and gave him a hug. "I'm sorry I wasn't here, dad," I whispered and he raised one hand to rub my arm.

"Now Bells it wasn't you that left, and it wasn't your fault Renee left either. I'm glad you're here now, that's all. And speaking
of Renee, I take it she knows nothing about you getting married this evening?"

"Uh..."

"That's what I thought. Just make sure you two do a proper wedding when I can walk to give you away. And invite your
mother."

"We will." It was Jake speaking. He came up behind me and put his arms around my waist. "I can promise you that," he
said to Charlie.
"Jake, Bella, are you ready?" Billy asked.

"You bet!" Jake said enthusiastically, making several people laugh. I turned to look at Billy, and gave a small gasp. He was wearing a ceremonial headdress and had a basket on his knee which seemed to hold a number of items. This really was an official tribal ceremony.

"C'mon honey," Jake took my hand. "I'll explain it all to you as we go along." We made our way towards the tribal Chief, whose eyes were smiling kindly at us. Everybody around the bonfire hushed and Jake dropped to his knees in front of his father. I knelt beside Jacob and he winked at me before turning back to Billy.

I took in every detail of Billy's headdress. It was more of a turban than a headdress. It was like a hat with no top, wrapped around his forehead. A tail of sorts hung down over his right shoulder. It seemed to be made of some kind of brown animal fur and was richly decorated with blue and yellow paintings. I made out stars and fish. There was also a russet coloured wolf. I smiled when I saw that.

Meeting his eyes, I realised he was waiting for me to finish my appraisal. Flushing, I mouthed "sorry" and he chuckled.

"Jacob, Bella," he began. "It gives me very great pleasure to be here this evening. We have all been waiting for this day for over three years now. The Alpha of the pack finding his intended life partner is a cause for great celebration. And oh, we will celebrate tonight," he added. A laugh went up from the assembled guests and someone shouted, "Hear, hear!"

"Bella," Billy continued, "the formal part of this evening's celebrations will be conducted now. I'm afraid they must be spoken in Quileute but I'm sure Jacob will translate for you. Or perhaps not, if he thinks there may be something in there you'd rather not agree to," he added with a grin. Another shout of laughter went up around the bonfire. I looked at Jake who was shaking his head at his father in mock disgust.

"Sue, perhaps you could translate for Charlie," Billy continued. "Just omit the part where Jake is expected to take another wife every year." I was laughing too by that time and Jake rolled his eyes at me.

"Don't encourage him!" he muttered and I elbowed him.

"Someone's impatient," I scolded.

"Damn straight," he shot back at me.

Billy raised his hands slightly and the crowd grew quiet once more. He began speaking in the indigenous language of his people. His words flowed and sounded almost musical to my ears. Jake moved closer to me and spoke quietly in my ear.

"This part is about how we've lived separate lives up until now, facing life's hardships alone. See Embry and Quil?" He gestured towards his two wingmen who were lighting two small fires to our left. I nodded. "Those fires represent our individual lives. They'll be joined together later."

Fascinated, I watched as Embry placed something between the two fires, separating it from the flames with stones. Billy's musical voice had stopped. He waited until Embry gave Jake a thumbs up and took his place by Layla's side again, his arm immediately snaking around her waist.

Billy reached into the basket on his knee and gestured to Jake and I.

"This represents our joining," Jake told me as he took my hand in his and extended them towards his father. Billy murmured quiet words, wrapping a leather strap intricately around our wrists as he spoke. When our wrists were fastened together, he removed a piece of cloth from the basket and draped it over the strap, murmuring further words. My hand was tightly bound to Jacob's at the wrist when he stood, pulling me to my feet.

"The Elders will each say a prayer for us now," he explained. "Then we combine the fires to represent our future lives together, and that's it, done."

"And this?" I whispered, raising our wrists which were still bound by the thick leather strap.

Jake moved his mouth to my ear and murmured, "I get to use that on you later." My eyes snapped to his, wide with shock. He was laughing and I nudged him with my elbow. Looking back at the assembled crowd, I noticed a few of the wolves snickering and wondered if they had heard. "Dad'll take it off as soon as we're done," Jake told me. He was still grinning at his own joke when Sue, Old Quil and four other people whom I took to be Elders approached us.

The six Elders lined up in what appeared to be a specific order. Old Quil was first, Sue behind him. The four unknown faces took their places behind them. In turn, they stepped forward and murmured a Quileute prayer before us. Sue gave me a warm smile and kissed both our cheeks when she was done. I noticed two of the unknown people weren't particularly friendly, and felt Jake shift impatiently when it was their turn. I guessed they were the Elders who had the biggest problems with the headstrong Alpha.

Once that was done, Jake led me to the two fires set by Embry and Quil.

"Knowing Quil, there's an accelerant on that." He gestured to the wood that Embry had lain between the fires. "Careful
when I move the stones, honey.” Leaning down, he removed the stones that separated the fires from the connecting piece of wood. As he had predicted, the wood ignited hard and fast, joining the two smaller fires and setting up a loud cheer from the assembled crowd.

Grinning, Jake pulled me close to him and kissed me thoroughly until I was flushed and breathless. The pack cat called and cheered. Everyone clapped and I guessed that was the ceremony concluded. The expression of pure joy in Jake’s eyes when he finally released me confirmed that.

Going back to Billy, Jake held out our joined hands for his father to untie. The two men embraced and then Billy tugged on my hand until I leaned down and hugged him, too. He said nothing, but the tears shining in his eyes told me how much this meant to him.

Jake and I turned to go to Charlie, but Billy had one thing to say first. "Jacob,” he called us back. Turning, I saw a lone tear slip down the older man’s weathered cheek as he said, “Your mother would be so happy to see this.”

Just like that, I knew who the woman in my dream was. Sarah Black. She was watching over us both. A tidal wave of emotion hit me as I remembered a woman with kind eyes dabbing at my cut knee while her four year old son held my hand, telling me solemnly that if I was brave he would ask his mom to give me a cookie. Tears washed down my cheeks as I smiled at the memory. Noticing, Jake pulled me into his arms.

"I might have super senses honey but I’m still a guy and tears and smiles at the same time are kind of confusing,” he told me. "What are you feeling?”

"I just remembered something,” I explained. "It made me sad but smile at the same time.” I told him about my memory, omitting that his mother was the woman I had been dreaming of. I knew Jake missed Sarah. I also knew he preferred not to talk about it. I decided that was a conversation best kept for when we were alone together.

Jake hugged me tighter to him. "I wish I had memories like that of us,” he told me wistfully. "I know we were supposed to have been really close but I don’t remember much.”

"You were younger,” I pointed out. "I only remember a few things, but you were always looking out for me.”

"Still am, Bells,” he chuckled, clearly amused by that.

Going over to Charlie, we both received a hug. My dad’s eyes, like Billy’s, were moist and he held onto my hand as he gruffly congratulated us both. We were still talking with him when some traditional music started up. Jake unexpectedly grabbed my hand and twirled me under his arm.

"Ready to dance, Bells?” he asked.

"Dancing. My favourite pastime,” I said sarcastically but he just laughed at me.

"You’ll need to dance with everyone tonight. Every single one of the pack. Starting with me.” He pulled me to one side of the bonfire and pressed me flush against his body. "Nobody else gets to dance with you like this, though,” he breathed into my ear as he began moving his hips sensually against me. I felt a little awkward, knowing everyone was watching us, but Jake wouldn’t loosen his grip.

"Relax, Bells,” he murmured. "Just feel the music and move with me. Don’t overthink it.”

I soon found myself enjoying it. Jacob’s heat and proximity helped me relax and as I felt my body begin to move in synchrony with his, I realised we were swaying in time with a low drum beat that was in the background of the music.

At some point, Jake began to kiss me. I was absolutely lost in him, lost in space and time as we moved to the music. I felt intoxicated and overwhelmingly happy. I didn’t even notice the music ending until laughs and cat calls sounded all around us.

Breaking our kiss, Jake looked around slightly sheepishly at the rest of the pack and imprints, who were watching us and clearly enjoying our embarrassment. Looking over at our dads, I saw Charlie was determinedly not watching while Billy looked like the cat who had got the cream as he took us in.

"Cut it out, Jake,” Quil called, stepping forward. “That girl needs to see how a real wolf moves. Shall we, darlin’?”

Jake kissed my hand and gave it to Quil. He said something to his old friend that was too low for me to hear, causing Quil to roll his eyes.

"You made of porcelain, Bella?” he asked me.

"No,” I laughed.

"Nah, didn’t think so.” Quil swung me away from him and then proceeded to practically throw me around to the music, while everyone around us clapped and cheered. By the time the song finished, I was breathless and laughing hard. Before I had the chance to catch my breath, Paul grabbed hold of me and swung me around, dancing in obvious competition with Quil.
At some point during that dance, other couples began to join in. I saw Jake dancing with Rachel. They were engrossed in conversation as they moved and I envied the effortless fluidity with which they danced. I doubted I would ever be able to dance like that. The rest of the pack danced with their imprints. I wondered how Collin and Quil felt, alone at these events. It wasn’t lost on me that Jake would have joined them until recently. I was feeling sorry for them until Paul chuckled.

"Uh-oh, here they come." He twirled me around slowly, allowing me to see a small group of girls approach.

"Who are they?" I asked when Paul swung me back to face him.

"Pack groupies," he grinned. I raised my eyebrows and he elaborated. "Anytime there’s a bonfire here on the beach, it’s usually us. Especially at this time of year. It’s too cold for normal people. So there are a group of girls that come down to join in with the dancing. They’re always hoping to score with one of the pack. You know how that goes, though. No local girls and no stringing girls along. So the unimprinted guys have to behave. They can still dance though, there’s no harm in that."

"So ... every time there’s a bonfire, the local single girls come down and flirt with the unimprinted pack members," I said.

"That’s it," Paul confirmed. "And," he twirled me around 180 degrees and held me in place, pointing to one girl in particular, "Lisa there is not going to be happy to meet you."

"Paul!" It was Jake, and he sounded livid. He was storming towards us.

"What?" Paul asked innocently. "Ah c’mon Jake, you’re an imprinted wolf who just got hitched. Bella’s smart. She knows she doesn’t need to worry."

Glowering at Paul, Jake grabbed my hand. Paul let me go and raised his hands in surrender. He went off to find Rachel, leaving me with a very pissed off Alpha wolf.

"Jake calm down," I told him. "So she likes you. I can understand that."

"I’ve never done more than dance with her, I swear," he told me earnestly.

"Okay," I shrugged. I had to admit that I didn’t blame the girls at all. Some of La Push’s most attractive single men gathered in the one place was bound to attract attention.

"You’re sure you don’t mind?" Jake asked.

"Why would I mind? You told me the pack rules and you’ve just told me you’ve only ever danced with her. I can’t blame her for liking you. I actually think she has excellent taste," I concluded.

Jake smiled as he pulled me close to his body. "Can I have another dance with my wife?" he asked. "Before more wolves descend." I nodded happily and allowed him to dictate how we moved. As before, he held me close and moved his hips sensually, twirling me occasionally.

During one of those twirls, I saw the girl Paul had pointed out to me watching me closely. Our eyes met as Jake pulled me flush against him again. I saw her sour gaze travel down our closely joined bodies and couldn’t help but smile.

"I guess you never danced with Lisa quite like this, huh?"

Jake snorted. "Hardly. That would’ve given her way the wrong signals. Never wanted to, either."

"She’s not impressed," I told him.

Jake glanced over at the small group of girls and double took at one of them. A slow grin spread across his face and he looked around the assembled crowd. His chest shook with laughter as he told me, "Quil’s gone into hiding."

"Why?" I asked.

"Donna Clearwater," Jake grinned. "She had the biggest crush on Quil at school. She’s been away at college. That’s her standing next to Lisa."

I looked over to see a very pretty girl with wavy brown hair. She looked like she was attempting to appease Lisa, whose back was now turned firmly to Jake and I.

"She’s pretty," I said and Jake shrugged.

"If you say so. Quil’s still hiding though." He laughed then. "I guess Collin gets all the girls to himself this evening."

"Don’t any of you dance with them if you’re imprinted?" I asked.

"No way. Jake shook his head emphatically.
"Why not?"
"Honey you have no idea what rumours fly around the res about us. And just incase you hear any, not a single damn one is true. We don't do anything that might fuel them." He was very serious.

The music changed and Embry stepped in. "I've not had the pleasure, Bella." He held his hand out and Jake twirled me away from him.

"Nope," he said. "She's my wife, go get your own."

"The sooner you let everyone dance with her, the sooner you can leave." Embry raised one eyebrow and waited. Jake pulled a face and kissed me softly before letting me go.

Embry started to dance, pulling me along with him. "Congratulations," he told me and I smiled at him. "You look radiant," he observed. "You're kind of glowing."

I laughed. "That's called a sheen of sweat from dancing with overheated wolves," I stage whispered and he chuckled.

"Nah, it's more than that. I don't know. I can't put my finger on it. You just look happy."

"I am," I told him.

"Jake too," he smiled. "And it's about damn time."

We both looked over at him and Embry snorted. Jake had been intercepted by Lisa. Everything about his body language was telling her he wanted to leave but she kept one hand on his arm as she tossed her hair and chatted.

"Doesn't she know we just had a joining ceremony?" I frowned.

"She should. The twin fires are a dead giveaway and you and Jake are the only new couple here. Go get 'im before he starts freaking out that you'll get the wrong impression," Embry told me, releasing his grip on me. "It really freaked him out when he had to confess his past to you."

I walked over to Jake and Lisa. Smiling sweetly, I introduced myself to her as Jake's wife and wrapped my arms around his waist. He looked down at me with a mixture of relief and amusement in his eyes.

"Well, congratulations Jacob," Lisa said coolly. She inclined her head at me and I widened my smile. Jake pulled me close to him and twirled me away from the group of girls who were watching the exchange and staring curiously at me.

"So, I can't leave my husband alone for a minute when there are other women around, is that how it is?" I teased him and he narrowed his eyes at me.

"I think they would respect a legal marriage more," he said solemnly. "So let's organise it."

"Remember what dad said," I told him. "He has to be able to walk and mom has to be invited." 

"Charlie can borrow dad's wheelchair," he retorted heartlessly, making me laugh.

"There's Quil." I nodded my head in his direction. He was skulking around the far side of the bonfire. Jake laughed and called out to him.

"Hey Quil, there are five girls round there and only Collin to dance with them. You'd better go keep the side up."

Quil stomped up to us and pointed an accusing finger at Jake. "You are a smug bastard," he told him. "Fine, but I'm not dancing with Donna Clearwater. Chick scares me."

Jake and I swayed to the music, watching in amusement as he sulked towards the group of girls. I thought Donna looked slightly embarrassed when she saw Quil, but her smile was friendly when she looked up at him. I saw him rub the back of his neck as he turned towards her. His hand froze suddenly and his mouth dropped open.

Jake suddenly burst out laughing and I heard guffaws from some of the other pack members. Confused, I looked up at Jake.

"Quil just imprinted on Donna," he explained. "I guess dad has his work cut out tonight!"

Three hours later, I was starting to droop with exhaustion. I guessed I must still be weak from the blood I had lost two days earlier, despite the healing properties of Sue's tea. Jake naturally noticed, and led me over to our dads to say goodnight. We passed Quil and Donna on the way. She was looking understandably stunned by the attention Quil was lavishing on her. Her friends had proven to be problematic. Unable to find a way to subtly get them to leave, Billy had declared that there would be no secret sharing and no further joining ceremony that evening.

Quil looked utterly enraptured. I was happy for him. I was also curious to see how well Donna adapted to the situation.
"Dad, Charlie, we’re leaving," Jake said to our fathers. "Bella’s getting tired. And it’s our wedding night," he added, unnecessarily, I thought.

"Where are you staying tonight?" Charlie asked gruffly.

"Uh, dad’s place," Jake told him, looking a little confused.

"Well that's not much of a wedding night, son," Charlie pointed out and I cringed. "Seems to me that with my house lying empty, you’d be better off there. I know it’s in Forks and that’s not your territory, but I doubt any leech is stupid enough to disturb an Alpha on his wedding night." He wasn't making eye contact with anyone as he spoke, but he reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He tossed them at Jake, who caught them deftly and started to thank him. Charlie waved his hands at him. "Don't want to hear it. Just go. Night Bells."

"Yeah, night dad," I mumbled.

Half an hour later, Jake pulled his car up outside Charlie's home. "You feel okay about this, Bells?" he checked and I nodded.

"Yeah, it's better this way. I mean, I know we made love the other night at your dad's cabin, but this is different. Everyone knows what we'll be doing tonight and it would just have been plain embarrassing at your dad's."

Jake led me up the steps to the door and unlocked it. He paused to swing me up into his arms and grinned as he carried me over the threshold. "That's twice," he told me. "Maybe third time will be for real, in our own home."

"That's it!" I gasped and he looked at me, confused. "The deja vu moment I had at the cottage earlier! It was my dream. Jake, I dreamed that you carried me over the threshold of our home. I had a wedding band on and I was pregnant. But it was the cottage. I dreamed about it!"

Jake set me on my feet and looked at me intently. "You dreamed about that cottage before you even saw it?"

"Yes," I said emphatically. There was no doubt in my mind at all. "It looked a little different, but I think it had just been cleaned up a little, some of the creepers cut back or something."

"And we were married, like properly and legally, and you were pregnant?"

"Yes." I was absolutely certain.

A slow smile spread across Jake's face. He leaned in to kiss me. "You don't think I'm crazy?" I asked him just before his lips met mine.

"No. I'm a wolf, you can fly out of your own body, and you can see into the future. Perfectly normal stuff." His lips melted against mine.

We stood there in Charlie’s hallway, making out like teenagers, for quite some time. This was our wedding night and we would take our time. We tasted and kissed one another's mouths thoroughly for a long time before Jake finally lifted me and carried me towards the stairs. He headed straight for my bedroom and laid me on my bed.

"How tired are you?" he asked casually as he started to undress me.

"I kept some energy for you," I grinned.

"Good," he whispered as he pulled my shirt off. "Cos you're gonna need it."

Edward

At the same moment as Jacob Black slipped inside his new wife for the first time on their wedding night, Edward Cullen switched on Carlisle’s computer in his office. Carlisle was working at the hospital. Rosalie and Emmett were holed up in their bedroom. Esme was reading in the living room.

Nobody saw Edward's sinister smile, or the malicious glint in his eyes as he opened Carlisle's email account. Nobody would question why he was there. Edward, the golden boy, regularly borrowed books from Carlisle’s vast library, or used his computer to access databases to help with whatever studies he was currently passing his time.

While Jacob moved inside his wife, whispering his love and eternal devotion in her ear, Edward composed a vaguely threatening email to his father's old friend, Matthias. He reminded him of a favour long owed and advised him it was time now to pay his dues.

As Bella threw her head back in ecstasy, allowing her husband to passionately kiss her sensitive neck, Edward imagined the moment he would sink his venomous teeth into her milk white throat. He played the scene out in his mind, feeling his venom start to flow as he imagined how she would try to struggle, believing him to be a monster.

Edward switched off the computer as Bella found her first release of the night. Walking to the office window, Edward looked down at the puppy, Brady, who was currently on duty. He knew the dogs were all under orders to monitor his
movements. He knew Jacob had told them to pay attention to his phone calls as well.

The stupid animals had neglected to consider email.

As Jacob sank his head between his wife's legs once more, tasting her warm sweet juices, Edward fantasized about the taste of her hot blood slaking down his throat. He took his time in his imaginings, dwelling on how he would begin with one small taste, to tantalise himself and incapacitate her with his venom. Then, he would feed from select parts of her body, taking only a little blood with each bite.

As the Alpha wolf's life generating seed shot deep within his chosen imprint, Edward thought about how beautiful his life partner would look once death had claimed her and her eyes glowed red.

And as Jacob lay beside Bella, stroking her hair back from her face and kissing her softly, Edward left his father's office and took up his usual nightly position at the piano.

His demonic plan had been set in motion.
Layla Call towel dried her thick black hair, taking in the sleeping form of her husband as she did so. A smile came to her lips as her eyes ran down his lithe body. His dark hair was messed up and his face was relaxed and peaceful. He lay on his stomach, one arm thrown above his head, the other stretched out across the bed. When he woke, he would be alert the instant he realised that arm wasn’t Protecting her.

Layla had wakened early and been unable to go back to sleep. She had slipped out from under Embry’s arm and showered, slightly reluctantly washing off all traces of their love making from the night before. No matter how often their bodies joined together, no matter how many times they made love, she cherished each and every memory.

Thinking back to the night before made her smile more widely. It was always an exciting time when a new imprint occurred. Last night had seen not only Jake and Bella join in tribal matrimony, but Quil had also finally met his imprint. Layla knew how genuinely happy Embry was for both his old friends. He had spoken to her many times of how lonely a life it was for unimprinted wolves, and how badly they longed to find their partners. Embry was particularly happy for Jake.

Layla knew all the wolves respected Jacob Black enormously. She herself had always been slightly nervous of him. Layla was shy, and Jacob was very serious, severe even. He was polite and civil whenever they spoke, but in the two years she had known Embry, Layla hadn’t once seen a trace of the sunny natured boy her husband spoke of.

Until last night, that was.

The Jacob Black of last night’s bonfire was very different. For the first time, Layla had seen his features soft and happy. She thought the transformation was remarkable. He had seemed relaxed and there was absolutely no doubt to anyone watching that he was head over heels in love with Bella Swan. There was equally no doubt that Bella felt the same way about him.

Layla had almost felt sorry for Lisa. Almost, but not quite. It was difficult to think of any of the wolves being with anyone other than their intended imprints. Other girls just didn’t exist outside the pack bubble.

Reflecting now, Layla conceded that Embry had always been right. Jake had needed to imprint to soften the hard Alpha edge. For the first time, this morning Layla found herself thinking that she might actually enjoy the evenings her husband had long planned for. He had spoken time and again of how nice it would be to spend time with Jake and his imprint, when they finally met. Up until now, Layla had found the prospect slightly alarming, but she definitely liked Bella and had been slightly awed by how deftly she handled Jake.

Layla was roused from her reverie by Embry starting to stir. As she had known he would, he sat bolt upright the instant he realised she wasn’t in bed with him.

"Right here," she told him. His eyes raked over her. She was wearing only a towel after her shower, her hair still damp. Layla saw her husband’s eyes blacken with lust and felt her body respond. Knowing he didn’t need to patrol until after lunch left them with an entire morning alone. That realisation turned her on even more and she saw Embry’s nostrils flare.

Sitting up in bed and throwing the blanket on the floor, he beckoned to her with his finger.

Smiling wickedly, Layla allowed the towel to drop to the floor at her feet. She had a perfect hourglass figure and she knew how much Embry adored her curves. She watched as his dick stood to attention under her gaze, no touch necessary for her eager and willing husband. Climbing onto the bed, she began to crawl up the mattress towards him, watching his eyes widen slightly as she approached.

It was a good hour for Embry and Layla.

"I think most of La Push heard that," he told her finally, pride and embarrassment mixed together in his voice. Layla turned to face him. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed and her hair wild. It wasn’t often that Embry allowed his wolf to dictate what happened in their bedroom.

"What brought him out to play?" she asked. "Not that I’m complaining."

Embry shrugged and smiled at her. "Maybe the combined effects of last night and you taking control this morning."

All the wolves had been insatiable the night before, the knowledge that their Alpha was mating with his new wife affecting them all. The girls had been tipsy, too, feeling the effects of the ceremonial wine in ways the wolves didn’t. Only Emily had abstained, pregnant as she was.

Embry had noticed Jake keeping a close eye on how much wine Bella was drinking. She had only taken a few sips before passing her glass to Jake, telling him it had a strange taste and she wasn’t taking any chances after Sue’s tea.

Another hour later, freshly showered and both starving, Embry and Layla sat down to eat before they had to part ways for the day. Embry had to cover the Cullens for the afternoon, and Layla had to work.
"Can we invite Jake and Bella round for dinner soon, Layla?" Embry asked her. He knew she was nervous of his friend. It made him laugh, it was so ridiculous, but then again he had known Jake his whole life. She surprised him by being relaxed in her response.

"Yes, I'd like that," she told him. "I really like Bella. Any girl who can handle Jacob Black gets my respect anyway," she added with a small laugh.

"You know there's nothing scary about him unless you're a bloodsucker." It was a conversation they had had many times. "And I suspect Jake has more reason to be nervous of Bella than the other way around." He grinned, remembering Jared's memory of how docilely Jake had followed Bella's orders at Charlie's the day they returned from the mountain.

Other than Jake himself and Billy, nobody had been happier than Embry when his old friend imprinted. Embry had been around Jake's entire life. He had seen his friend grieve for his mother, although he had been too young at the time to really offer much in the way of support. He had watched Jake struggle and act out when he learned his fate and he had completely understood. He had witnessed through respectful eyes how Jake won the fight for dominance with his wolf.

Embry had seen into Jake's heart on many occasions. What Jake kept from most of the pack, he at times allowed Embry and Quil to see. Embry had witnessed his Alpha's deep loneliness and his longing to find his life partner. He had seen his frustration at having to settle for brief encounters with faceless girls whenever he needed comfort or a physical release.

Embry, like all the wolves, understood only too well the threat the Alpha couple were facing. He had experienced the need for a rightful Alpha to run a wolf pack. An Alpha-by-default was largely ineffective. It was up to Jacob and Bella to ensure the future of the Quileute wolf pack. Jake had to sire sons; Bella as his imprint had to be their mother.

For that reason, Bella's safety was currently the greatest priority of each and every wolf. Every single one of them would do whatever was necessary to ensure their pack could continue to Protect for generations to come.

And if Embry had been right in his suspicions last night when he had danced with Bella at the bonfire, he knew her safety had just become even more of a priority.

He told Layla of his suspicions now. Her hand froze on her way to her mouth and she almost dropped her toast.

"Jesus, Embry, they've only known each other a few days!"

Embry shrugged, unconcerned. "Doesn't matter, Layla. They won't be bothered about that. They're the Alpha couple."

Layla didn't look convinced. "Well ... could you be wrong? I mean, surely Jake would know first?"

"Of course I could be wrong. And if I am right, Jake knows. He'll have known immediately. Maybe Bella knows, too, I don't know. If I'm right, they'll tell us when they're ready," Embry reached for his wife's hand across the table. "Keep this to yourself for now, okay?" He knew he could rely on her.

"I will," she assured him.

Half an hour later, Embry kissed Layla thoroughly and left the house to phase. It was noon, the day after Jake and Bella's joining ceremony. He had a shift at the Cullens house to do. He phased in the woods and checked to see who else was there. Seth was at the Cullens. Embry knew he and Seth had been selected to cover Jake's absence deliberately. They were the two wolves most likely to tolerate the stench. Brady had covered the house the night before and missed the joining ceremony. That was however only because Katy had been grounded. She and Brady had been caught in a heated make out session behind the school when they should have been in Math. Katy's parents wouldn't have allowed her out to the bonfire and not wanting to go without his imprint, Brady had volunteered.

Embry saw that Paul and Collin were also phased. Collin was grumbling about being the only non-imprinted wolf left in the pack. Embry knew Quil was supposed to be patrolling with Paul and Collin showed him his conversation with Quil earlier.

**Quil** - *Aw c'mon man, I'll cover for you when you imprint.*

**Collin** - *I've just run a four hour patrol, Quil. I want to eat, and sleep.*

**Quil** - *Fuckin' leech could waltz straight past me right now, and so long as he stayed away from Donna I'd give him my blessing.*

**Collin** - *Fuck off, Quil.*

**Quil** - *Thanks, Collin. I owe you one.*

Embry chuckled. It was all very Quil. Paul weighed in.

_No fuckin' way are Quil and Donna getting the use of my house. Fuckin' place still stinks of Jake and sex with the wrong damn girl. I've taken Rachel six ways from Sunday in every room in the goddamn place. Still hits me in the face every time I walk in the door. It fuckin' sucks._
Embry - I still can't believe you agreed to that. I mean I'd give my life for Jake, but no fuckin' way would I let him have sex in my house.

Paul - Rachel asked me to let him. Said if he didn't blowoff steam with Bella he'd end up not thinkin' straight and gettin' hurt.

Embry understood an imprint's powers of persuasion alright.

Collin - Do you think Bella's safe?

Paul - We're gonna keep her safe, kid.

Collin - Yeah but if the leech does something stupid, hurts himself or whatever, it hurts Bella, right?

Embry - Right. But if he harms so much as one hair on her head, Jake will not stop until he finds a way to rip him apart.

Collin - Yeah but what about the Mark? Can Jake survi...

Seth - SHUT THE FUCK UP!

The wolves collectively recoiled from Seth's unusual outburst until they remembered. Edward could currently read Seth's thoughts and therefore the pack mind. They defaulted into what they had been doing since the Cullen stake-out began.

Thinking of sex.

Paul - That is gonna be one horny fuckin' century old virgin if he spends any more time in our heads.

Collin - Howdo you knowhe's a virgin?

Paul - Are you kidding me?

Seth - Seriously, guys, shut the fuck up. I can see him and he's starting to look pissed.

Embry let Seth know he was on his way to relieve him from duty. It was going to be a long day.

Bella

The day after our joining ceremony, I woke up slowly. My eyes were heavy with sleep and I had a hard time forcing them open. I couldn't remember the last time I felt so groggy on waking.

The effort I made to open my eyes was rewarded when the first thing I saw was Jacob's face. He was lying on his side facing me, propped up on one elbow as he gazed at me. His hair fell partially over his face and his brown eyes were soft. They were melted pools of dark chocolate.

"Morning, sleepyhead," he said with a smile. His voice sounded slightly hoarse, bringing back memories of his guttural cries the night before and making me smile. "You only just made it. I nearly had to say ’afternoon’," he amended.

"What time is it?" I asked, a little shocked.

"About half eleven or just after," he told me.

I gaped at him. The ceremony must have taken more out of me than I had fully appreciated, and perhaps I still hadn't recovered from losing blood. I had slept for over ten hours, and I felt like I could have slept for another five.

"Well ... how long have you been awake?" I asked.

"A while. I woke about eight. You were completely out," Jake told me. "I made us breakfast but uh, well you were still out so I kind of ate yours, too. Sorry. I'll make you some more. But I didn't want to be away from you so I came back to bed and then I fell asleep again. I woke up about quarter of an hour ago. I've been watching you sleep and you are so beautiful." He leaned in to capture my lips in his.

My hands automatically headed towards him. One hand tangled in his hair while the other snaked around his waist as he pulled me closer. I vaguely thought that I hadn't brushed my teeth in way too long, but as his tongue was already dancing in my mouth I decided it evidently didn't matter.

I moved even closer to him, residual aches from our activities the night before making themselves known. I didn't care. My body was wide awake now. Every sense and, it seemed, every nerve ending was responding to Jake's touch. Our kiss deepened and I hooked my leg over his waist. He rocked into me with a moan and I felt how wide awake his own body was.

Pushing at him, I got him to roll onto his back and climbed up so I was straddling his hips. Leaning down, I began to kiss his chest, making my way slowly down his abs to his perfect V. Jake's breathing had deepened and I could see him
standing to full attention. When I took him in my mouth, I heard him hiss and felt his fingers twist into my hair. It wasn't long before he asked me to stop.

"I don't wanna cum like this," he explained, pulling me back up his chest. "I need to be inside you. And I've done nothing for you yet."

"Are we in a rush?" I asked, kissing his chest again. I knew that drove him wild and he ground his hips up with a groan.

"No," he shook his head. "I don't need to do anything today, it's just us. But it's been hours," he complained. "I'm not gonna last long if you keep doing that and I want you to cum too."

I looked up at him. "It's been hours?" I repeated in amused disbelief. "Jake how many times did you take me last night?"

"That was last night. It was hours ago," he protested. He pulled me further up his chest and positioned me so that my breasts were over his mouth. He swirled his tongue around one nipple, using his hand to knead my other breast. His other hand slid down my back to cup my ass. I wriggled against him when he bit down on my pink bud, trying to gain some friction. Jake immediately moved his hand round from my ass and began to move his fingers in slow circles around my clit.

I could feel the fire he never failed to ignite begin to run wild through my body. The heated touch of his hands and his mouth were overwhelming all my senses again. I felt the rush of my juices and Jake's hips jerked under me in response. "You're right," I moaned. "It has been hours."

Lifting me easily, he lowered me onto his erection. His movements were gentle but I wasn't having that. I slammed myself down on him and he hissed loudly.

"Fuck, Bell!" His voice caught in his throat when I started to ride him hard. I leaned back a little to control the angle, using my hands behind me for support. Jake raised his knees to provide some further support and began to thrust up into me in time with my own movements.

He moved his hand between my legs again, circling my bundle of nerves with his dexterous fingers. His touch was almost rough and it was bringing me alarmingly quickly to the brink.

I continued to ride him hard. I was becoming desperate for my release. Jake was biting his lip and his eyes were darker than I had ever seen them as they devoured me. I wondered vaguely what he saw and guessed I looked wild, with bed hair and my body out of control. Whatever he saw, he clearly liked.

The fire ripped through me and I came hard, yelling his name and convulsing around him. Jake moved his hands to my hips and moved me even harder over his pulsating erection a few more times. With a roar, his body jerked and I felt his cum shoot into me. I leaned back against his legs for a moment, watching him watching me as we both shuddered with the aftershocks of our passion.

We were both still panting and shaking when I finally flopped onto his heaving chest. Jake's hands ran up from my hips, up my sides and finally tangled in my hair. "You look so fuckin' sexy when you cum on top of me like that," he said. His voice was low and husky and made me tingle all over.

"Good position then?" I asked him and felt his chest shake with laughter under me.

"Excellent," he confirmed. "But Bella I haven't found a position with you yet that's not good." I smiled against his chest, wholeheartedly agreeing.

We lay there for some time before Jake suddenly asked, "No dreams last night, honey? No out of body experiences or anything like that?"

"No," I told him. "Not that I remember. But there is something I need to tell you about." I propped myself up on his chest and looked at him. "I realised last night, at our ceremony. I didn't want to tell you until we were alone and then we kind of got distracted when we got here," I confessed. "I know who the woman is on the beach." Jake looked at me questioningly. "She's ... your mom, Jake. I've been talking with your mom in my dreams."

I waited, holding my breath while he absorbed that. His expressive eyes widened in shock and disbelief, then gave way to a deep sorrow. Finally, he nodded his head and his mouth pulled up on one side.

"That kind of figures," he said. "I always knew she had a way of checking up on me." His eyes were still pools of sadness and I tried to remember everything Sarah had told me, especially the times she had mentioned her only son. "She told me you would protect me."

Jacob tightened his arms around me. "Of course I will," he stated confidently. "Did she ... say anything else?"

My heart broke for him. "She said you would protect me, and that which belongs to us. I think she meant our dads?" Jake said nothing but I thought I saw recognition flicker through the sorrow in his eyes. "Then she said I need to fight, too, because you can't do it on your own and we're stronger together than either of us are individually. That was the first time I met with her. The second time, she said we need to fight together and listen to our instincts." I vowed to myself that I would
find Sarah Black again, and bring back a more poignant message for Jacob.

While I had been speaking, the sadness had gradually ebbed from Jake's eyes and been replaced with something softer. "You know what they say," he eventually said. "Mom's always right. I think we should listen to her."

"Me too," I agreed. I searched his eyes. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I mean, it's not everyday you hear a message from beyond the grave but, I think I'm used to weird stuff by now." He kissed my head. "I'm glad you worked out that it's mom. Do you think you'll see her again?"

"Yes, I do. I think she has more to tell me. Don't ask me how I know that because I have no idea."

"I think you'll see her again too," Jake told me. His voice was barely a whisper when he spoke again. "Tell her I love her. And miss her."

"Of course I will." I tightened my arms around him, trying to give him some small comfort. "She knows anyway, but I'll make sure to tell her." He kissed my head again and we lay there in silence for a while.

When my stomach started to growl, Jake laughed and I knew he had put our conversation behind him. "You've been spending too much time with the wolves, honey," he told me. "C'mon, you've not eaten since last night. Let's get you fed." Pulling me out of bed, he asked, "What do you want?"

"You're cooking?" I asked dubiously.

"Of course I am. What, you don't think I can? I'm a wolf, Bells. I need to eat all the time, remember? I can make toast, sandwiches or cereal," he finished with his trademark grin.

I laughed as I thought about it. Usually I ate cereal for breakfast but it just didn't sound appealing that morning. I pulled on an oversized T-shirt while Jake pulled on his jeans. We walked down the stairs hand in hand.

"Seriously, Bells, what do you feel like?" He lifted me and sat me on the kitchen counter, looking at me expectantly. "I don't know. Toast."

"With?"

"Um, coffee."

"I meant what do you want on your toast."

"Nothing," I shook my head. "Just dry toast."

"Dry toast and coffee," he repeated, looking at me strangely.

"I don't feel like anything else just now." I shrugged. "Dry toast and coffee's good. I'm not a big breakfast person."

Jake hesitated for a moment before getting to work. I watched as he moved easily around Charlie's kitchen. Damn, he was stunning. His blue jeans were slung low on his hips. His abs rippled as he moved, and the grace with which he executed even the smallest of tasks was beautiful to watch. He caught me ogling him and smiled, but carried on what he was doing.

I sat at the table with my pitiful breakfast and ate the toast quickly.

"Would you like more?" Jake asked me. "You wolfed that down," he added with a cheesy grin. I groaned at his terrible joke but nodded. That dry toast had been just what I needed. As he started to make more, I raised the cup of coffee to my mouth. I loved the smell of fresh coffee in the mornings. I inhaled deeply. The aroma hit me and my stomach churned. I put the cup quickly on the table. What was that all about? I loved my morning coffee.

"You okay?" Turning my head, I saw Jake looking at me with concern.

"Uh, yeah, I just felt a bit ... I don't know, the coffee smelled funny."

Jake stopped what he was doing, watching me closely. "Bells, we need to talk about something," he said very seriously. I looked at him expectantly. Exhaling sharply, he put the fresh toast on my plate and handed it to me. Sitting opposite me at the table, he began to fidget.

"Just spit it out, Jake," I told him as I started shovelling the toast in my mouth. Damn, it tasted good. My husband made excellent dry toast, I acknowledged.

Jake had the air of someone trying to work out the best way to say something. "Your dream," he said suddenly. "Where we were at the cottage? You said we were married, and you were ..." His voice tailed off.
"Pregnant," I supplied helpfully. "What about it?"

"Well, let's suppose that's not in the too distant future. I mean, it won't take long to get the cottage fixed up. So that would mean we'd be having a baby. Soonish."

I paused with my hand on my way to my mouth, looking at him. "Okay?" It came out sounding like a question and he shifted nervously on his chair.

"How do you feel about that?" he asked. He was watching me very carefully.

"About us having a baby?" I thought about it. I had never really considered myself to be particularly maternal, but the prospect of having a child with Jake felt ... natural. "That sounds right," I told him, slightly surprised by this revelation.

Jake's face was the epitome of relief and I smiled at him. I guessed it must have been a big deal for him, to know that I was prepared to have his children to pass on his wolf gene.

Jake waited until I had finished my last mouthful of toast before pushing his chair back from the table and holding his hand out to me. I immediately stood and went to him. When I was straddling his lap, Jake looked into my eyes with an intensity that took my breath away.

"Bella, honey, there are things that you need to know about being my imprint," he began.

"Things you're only sharing with me now?" I asked. I was only teasing but he looked instantly concerned.

"Uh ... yeah. Fair point. I didn't think about it to be honest, Bells. I thought there would be plenty of time. Um, you know I'm Alpha, and I'm also my dad's only son, right?"

"Yeah," I nodded, slightly surprised by this line of conversation.

"So, it's up to me to pass on the wolf gene. I have to sire a son. Otherwise the wolfpack dies out."

"Really?" I asked. "What about the other guys?"

"Well they can produce wolves, but every pack needs an Alpha. My generation has seen firsthand what happens when a pack is run by a wolf who doesn't have the birthright. Sam did the best he could, but he just wasn't born for it. It showed, and without a true leader, any pack would be vulnerable," he explained. "So it's up to me to produce the future Alpha. And uh, as my imprint, you obviously play an important role in that."

"I would hope so," I teased him. Jake's lips twitched but he was still in serious mode.

"Honey, every Alpha in our history has sired a son pretty much as soon as he's met his imprint."

"That's not true," I told him. Jake looked at me in surprise. "Your dad had twin girls first."

"Dad wasn't Alpha," he pointed out patiently. "And mom wasn't his imprint. He never phased, Bella. He obviously had the wolf gene and he passed it on to me, but his situation was different. He never phased, his father never phased, I guess the urgency wasn't there. But I'm running the biggest pack in our tribe's history and believe me, my wolf feels the urgency to pass on his genes."

"So, your wolf wants to get me pregnant?" I asked.

Jake shifted uncomfortably under me. "It's a little more than that. Bella."

The phone rang, and I started to move away from him. Jake caught my hand.

"Wait, Bella, leave the phone."

"I can't, Jake," I told him, pulling my hand free. "Hardly anyone knows where Charlie is. This might be something important for him. It might be mom!" I realised in horror that she had probably been phoning for updates on how Charlie and I were faring.

I answered the phone, aware that Jake was jiggling his leg impatiently where he sat.

"This is Forks Hospital calling," a female voice said. "May I speak with Charles Swan, or his next of kin please?"

"This is Isabella Swan, I'm listed as his next of kin," I told her.

"Ah Ms Swan, thank you. Mr Swan has an appointment with Dr Greer next Thursday at one o'clock."

"Yes, that's right," I told her, frowning at Jake who had stood and was now pacing around the room.

"Dr Greer is unable to see Mr Swan next Thursday after all, and has asked me to reschedule his appointment for Wednesday at three o'clock instead."
"Sure, that's no problem," I told her, grabbing the phone pad and scribbling the new appointment down. "I'll make sure he gets the message and he'll be there on Wednesday at three."

"Thank you very much, Ms Swan." The line went dead.

Turning back to Jake, I started to cross the room towards him when my vision suddenly swam. I grabbed onto the countertop and put my hand to my head. "Whoa!" I said.

"Bells?" Jake was beside me in an instant.

"I don't know what that was," I gasped when the moment passed. "I was fine and then all of a sudden the room started to spin." I shook my head and looked into his concerned eyes. "I'm okay, Jake. Give me a minute."

I headed to the bathroom and splashed cold water on my face. Looking in the mirror, I could see how tired I looked. I was tired. I felt exhausted. I reached my hand out for my toothbrush, realising suddenly that it wasn’t there. It was at Jake’s. My gaze fell on my wash bag and the room began to spin again for a whole different reason.

I sank to my knees on the floor, my eyes wide with horror. Jake must have heard something because he threw himself through the doorway and sank to the floor beside me.

"Bella? What’s wrong, honey? You’re chalk white!"

"I - Jake, I’m such an idiot!" I told him. I started rambling. "It’s your fault too, though! You just turned up here on your bike and told me to get on it with you. I didn’t get the chance to pack anything! And then you packed my things when we were moving me and Charlie into your place, and how the hell did I not realise when I was getting ready for bed? I take it every night!"

My mind raced frantically through the last few evenings. The first evening after our trip up the mountain was the day I had been wounded by Jake’s fight with Edward. I certainly hadn’t been thinking about my nightly regime that evening. The second evening we were unexpectedly at Rachel and Paul’s, and last night had been our wedding night. I thought further back and realised the night on the mountain probably wasn’t the first I had forgotten, either. I had been so distracted by how Edward had affected me and then meeting Jake ...

Looking fearfully up at Jake, I blurted it out. "I’ve not been taking my birth control pills, Jake. For at least a week, I think. That’s," I swallowed hard. "It’s more than enough for me to have gotten pregnant. And I don’t know how many times we’ve made love …"

I shot to my feet and grabbed my wash bag. Pulling the strip from it, I popped a pill out. My hand was on my way to my mouth when Jake stopped me with his own hand on mine.

"What are you doing, Bella?" he asked me gently.

"I need to start taking this again, Jake!"

He slowly took the strip of pills from my hand, and placed them back in my wash bag. Prying open my hand, he removed the tiny pill that was there and set it down on the side of the sink. He was searching my face the entire time.

Jake pushed my hair back from my face and cupped my cheeks in his large, hot hands. He looked directly into my eyes when he changed my life, again.

"It’s too late, Bella. You’re already carrying my son."
Half an hour had passed since Jacob had told me we were going to be parents. We were lying on my bed, my head on his chest as he combed his fingers through my hair.

When he had first broken the news, I had rambled incoherently, shock and denial coursing through me. I had strenuously argued that there was no way he could know that, that it was too soon for anyone to know, that I'd only missed a few pills and anyway, how could he possibly know?

Jake had held me and sshshed me, and finally simply picked me up and carried me to my bed, where we had lain ever since. At some point, I had stopped my tirade and he had started to talk. I tried to listen carefully despite the numb shock that was worming its way into my brain.

"Honey, every single Alpha wolf in our history has had a son nine months after meeting his imprint. It's that fast. Alpha meets imprint, and bam! She gives him a son. I guess I should've known better, but the last Alpha was nearly a hundred years ago. I kinda thought birth control had advanced since then and it honestly never occurred to me to pack it for you. I don't know, Bells, maybe there's a greater Power at work here. Seems to me like you're meant to be pregnant. I guess it's just another wolf thing," he finished on a sigh.

"But how do you know?" I still wasn't clear on that point.

"How do you know the woman in your dream was my mom? How do I know how to shift into a wolf? How did you manage to predict scenes from our future? I don't have the answers, Bella, but I believe it. I just know. It happened the first time we made love after I attacked Edward and hurt you. My wolf went fuckin' nuts over that, Bella. That was the first time he started to get anxious about his offspring."

I raised my head to look at him. "You never mentioned that," I accused him.

"Honestly, honey, I just fought it down. There was so much else happening, and you'd already dealt with so much. I didn't pay enough attention. But when we made love at my dad's that night ... I can't explain it. I felt something, like a connection or something between us but it was different to the imprint." He frowned and I knew he was trying to put something supernatural into words. "I guess it felt like we made something together. I was so worried about you that I didn't give it much thought. And it crossed my mind, but there was just too much to think about that night. My wolf was doing happy dances though."

"He knew?"

"Yeah. He's the supernatural part of me. He's a sneaky bastard sometimes," Jake smiled at me but I saw the concern in his eyes. "Anyway, it was only this morning while you were sleeping that I really had the time to stop and think. I mean, I've had the suspicion for a few days, but today I started paying attention to what my wolf was telling me and why he's been so happy despite the threat to your soul. And ... then I realised that I can actually smell him."

I just about jumped off him in shock. "You can smell him?"

"Yes." Jake was very definite. "He smells like a puppy. In a good way. With a combination of you and me mixed in."

I knelt beside his prostrate form, staring at him open-mouthed. Jake's wolf had knocked me up to continue the Alpha lineage. He knew the exact moment it had occurred, and Jake could smell a puppy. I shook my head in an attempt to clear it.

"Bella?" Jake sat up slowly so that he was facing me. "Honey, I know this is a shock, and it's sudden and we hadn't planned this or discussed it. But it's done now. I honestly think this is the way things are supposed to be. You're scary me though. Do you ... I mean, can you deal with this?" He was looking at me intently and I realised he must think I was rejecting the whole thing.

"I'm in shock, Jake," I told him. "I mean, up until now I haven't ever really given motherhood any serious thought. One day, in the future, I think I'd vaguely presumed I would have children but I wasn't expecting to wake up today and find out I'm pregnant! But ... " My hand moved unconsciously to my abdomen. "We're having a baby? You're absolutely certain?"

Jake moved his hand to cover mine. "I'm absolutely certain," he told me. "Our son is growing inside you, right now."

I felt my mouth widen into a smile at the same time as I registered the bubble of happiness that was rising in my heart.

"Oh my God, Jake," I whispered in awe. "We're really having a baby!" Jake's smile was beginning to answer my own, but when I frowned suddenly, his face fell again. "Jake how do you feel about this?" I asked him. "I mean, this is a huge responsibility for you, too."

He rolled his eyes at me. "Bella I run a wolf pack, Protect my tribe, will one day take over that tribe, and look after my disabled father. Are you seriously asking me if I'm ready to shoulder responsibility?"
"No! I know you have a lot to deal with. But we didn't plan this. Are you ready for it?"

Jacob sat back against the headboard of the bed and pulled me with him. "Bella I have been ready for this for years," he told me very seriously. "When mom died," he swallowed before continuing. "She was the heart of our family. And after she was gone, things were just never the same. When I was younger, I used to try and imagine that she was still with us. That I would come home from school and she'd be there, ready to nag me to do my homework and make me dinner. Then when I phased and found out about imprinting and passing on the Alpha gene, I started dreaming about different things. Having my own family. A wife that I could guarantee a lifetime of unconditional love. Kids that would never know the kind of loss I did. And the more time that passed without finding you, the more I wanted that life. Now you're here, trust me honey, I'm ready."

His speech finished, he waited for my reaction. I nodded slowly. It made perfect sense.

"So, you're happy with this?" I checked. He gave me a goofy grin.

"More than happy. Kind of freakin' out about your reaction, though," he told me.

"I'm fine," I told him. And I was. My own smile spread across my face again and I saw the profound relief in Jake's eyes as he pulled me in for a lingering kiss.

"At least you know why you've been so tired and emotional," he pointed out after a minute.

"No, I think that's still from the blood I lost the other day," I told him. "It's too early for pregnancy symptoms."

"Uh, Bella? That's an Alpha wolf you're carrying."

"Meaning...?"

"That he's gonna make himself known."

"Great," I murmured, but I couldn't stop my grin from spreading.

We spent another hour lounging on my bed and talking about this latest turn of events. Jake was in a big rush to talk to the rest of the pack about helping him to fix up the cottage. He wanted us moved in and legally married long before the baby arrived. I agreed with every word that came out of his mouth. Talking soon turned to kissing. Kissing started hands wandering, and before long we were tangled in a sweaty post-coital heap on the floor.

"How did we end up on the floor, exactly?" I laughed when I realised where we were.

"Rolled," Jake answered with a grin. He lifted me so that I was sitting on the edge of the bed. "Let's get something to eat, honey, you've only had dry toast today." I nodded, feeling hungry, and pulled on the same oversized T-shirt I had worn earlier. Jake fastened his jeans.

"Take two?" he asked as he sat me up on the same countertop as earlier. "What do you feel like eating?"

"Toast again. With cheese. And chips. And some water to drink, I'm parched."

"Coming up." Jake chattered as he set about making us both a plate of food. He was running through a list of things we needed to get for the cottage and his mind was clearly racing ahead to when the baby arrived.

Through his infectious excitement, though, I detected something else. He was almost fierce in his planning and there was a tension about the way he moved that hadn't been present earlier.

"Jake, come here," I told him finally. He crossed the kitchen towards me and I wrapped my legs around his waist. "What's wrong?" I asked him. "I can tell something's bothering you so don't deny it."

He sighed and averted his gaze for a moment. His jaw clenched. "Edward," he said finally, meeting my eyes again. "He wants you, Bells. He won't get anywhere near you, I can promise you that. But he can still hurt you. I won't feel really happy until I've eliminated that threat."

"You don't really think he'll try and harm himself with a wolf there all the time?" I asked and he shook his head.

"I don't think he will, no. Although if he decides to, there's not a damn thing any wolf can do. If anyone hurts him, it hurts you. The most we could do is go in as a pack and restrain him. But I don't want to have this hanging over us. I need to find a way to get that piece of your soul back to you, Bella." Pulling me tightly to him, he said, "It's not just about you anymore either, do you understand that? The entire pack will instinctively want to Protect our child. Not one of them will tolerate any threat to him. You're going to find them all a bit ... overbearing, when this gets out."

"Do they know already?" I was curious.

"I don't think so. Like I said, I already had a kind of suspicion last night. I wanted them to be careful with you." I laughed, remembering how Quil had asked if I was made of porcelain before throwing me around. "But I don't think they picked up on it. They probably just thought it was the imprint making me feel protective. I will need to tell them all though, honey. This
"I think he'll be fine," I told him. Jake looked at me dubiously. "He's been great so far," I reminded him. "The whole wolf and imprint thing, and us getting married under tribal law. None of it's really bothered him as much as either of us expected it would. Let's give him the chance to react before we start worrying. He told me last night he feels he's missed out on family life and wants me to stay around here and give him grandchildren."

"All true," Jake conceded, kissing me lightly. "And we do have bigger things to worry about, with Edward and your soul connection to him. Promise me you'll meet with Sue soon and practise the Spirit thing, Bella." He was so serious. I smiled and rubbed his arms.

"Of course I will. Your mom told me to fight, to help you. That's exactly what I'm going to do, Jake," I promised him.

"'Kay," he smiled at me. "Now let's get you fed before you pass out from hunger."

An hour later, we had eaten and I had packed a bag of clothes and toiletries to move up to La Push. I tore the page from the phone pad with Charlie's new hospital appointment and stuffed it in my jeans pocket before turning to Jake.

"Ready to go!" I announced.

"Remember you're not coming back here," he told me. "So do you have everything?"

I nodded. "I do." We had had this discussion over lunch. Now that I was pregnant, Jake didn't want me to leave the reservation at all until the situation with Edward had been resolved. He had been apologetic but told me that the entire wolf pack would be nervous if I ventured over the treaty line.

"There's enough going on without my whole pack being agitated, honey," he had said. "I mean if you really need to go off the res, we can arrange it, but only for emergencies."

I had agreed, prepared to do whatever was necessary to ensure my own safety and that of our unborn child. If it made Jake's life easier by keeping his wolves happy, that was an added bonus.

Jake took my bag from me and led me out to his car. Less than half an hour later, we were at Billy's cabin. Rachel was there. She raised her eyebrows at Jake when she saw him. "Back already?" she asked. I didn't think I would ever get used to the speculation about our sex life. Jake pulled me down on the couch beside him and grinned at his sister.

"Got news to share," he told her. "And it couldn't wait. You two ready?" he asked our dads. He really was just going to break it to them like this, I realised. I braced myself. Jake looked from Billy, to Charlie, to Rachel, and then to me.

"Bella's pregnant," he blurted out.

A stunned silence followed. I watched Charlie closely as his face turned bright red. He looked furious and I was suddenly afraid I had overestimated his tolerance levels. He opened his mouth a couple of times, shut it again, then blurted out, "Did you know, Bella? Is that why you two really broke up?" Turning to Jake, who had started to tremble slightly next to me, he muttered, "Nobody expects you to take on another man's child, Jacob."

"Dad!" I exploded, the penny dropping. "This is Jake's baby!" I was completely offended and my temper was rising. So was Jake's, apparently.

"Bella is carrying my child, Charlie," he said acidly. "He was conceived three nights ago, under this roof. He will become the Alpha of the Quileute wolf pack one day, if his generation is forced to phase."

Had he not just insulted me, I would probably have found Charlie's facial expressions amusing. His mouth fell open, red turned to purple and back to red again, and he looked completely startled. Floundering, he turned to Billy for support.

Billy's eyes were swimming with unshed tears. "You knew when it happened?" he asked his son. His tone was almost reverent.

"Kinda," Jake told him. "I mean, I felt something, and if Bella hadn't just been hurt through her connection with Edward, I would've paid more attention at the time. It's just been nagging in the back of my mind since then, but this morning while Bella was asleep I had time to think about it." He paused and smiled at me. When he continued, the pride in his voice was unmistakable. "I can smell him."

Charlie made a choking sound. Nobody paid any attention. Billy's tears began to brim over unashamedly. "You knew when it happened?" he asked his son. His tone was almost reverent.

"You're carrying a special child, Bella," she told me. "He will ensure the future of the tribe's Protectors." She smiled then. "He's also the first of a new generation of Blacks!" Crossing the room, she hugged first her brother, then me.

"Congratulations," she whispered to us both.

Jake was positively beaming. His father had wheeled himself towards us to offer his own congratulations. Having
accepted them, I turned to Charlie. I was deeply touched by Rachel and Billy's reactions, and more than a little pissed at my own father. To his credit, he looked sheepish.

"Bella, I'm ... I don't know what to say," he told me. "I'm still not used to all this wolf business. I'm sorry for jumping to a human conclusion," he said with an air of finality. I raised one eyebrow at him. "So you're ... three days pregnant. And you know it's a boy."

I nodded happily and he sighed. "Well, congratulations both of you. I guess I've been looking forward to having more of a family life so this is good news. A shock, but good news. Sorry, son," he added to Jake who gave him a slight nod. He was still pissed, I knew, but I doubted it would be an issue for long.

"What about Edward?" Rachel asked suddenly. Jake turned to her, very serious.

"I need to sort this out. I mean it was a priority anyway, but things cannot stay the way they are. I gotta find a way to get that piece of Bella's soul back to her. I might need your help with the records and legends, Rach."

"Anything," she told him promptly. "And I can speak for Paul when I say that no harm will come to Bella or your child."

"I know," Jake nodded. "I need to go get the pack together straightaway and fill them in. I guess there's no way to avoid Edward knowing about it." He frowned. "Unless I Alpha order them not to think about it."

"Take away their ability to think?" I was horrified and he grimaced at me.

"I know. I hate it, too. But there's no way of knowing how he'll react to this Bella, and he can hurt you. None of the wolves will mind. In fact some of them would probably ask me for the order if I don't give it. It's for the best, I think." Kissing my forehead, he told me he needed to go and call the wolves together. "Rachel are you staying here?"

"Yes," she nodded. "I need to work for a while later but I can call Sue and ask her to be here."

I looked between them. "If this is for me, I'm fine," I told them. Jake looked at me doubtfully. "Jake, seriously, I feel fine. I'll rest when dad and Billy don't need me. I'll practise everything Sue's taught me and if she does come over later, I'll ask her to show me what's next. But I don't need a babysitter."

"I'd just feel happier if you weren't alone, Bells," he told me. "Dad and Charlie aren't mobile and Edward can still harm you."

"And what can Rachel or Sue do if he does?" I challenged him.

"Get you whatever you need," he replied firmly. "Bells, just indulge me on this for now, okay? this is all new and I need to keep you and our son safe until I work out what the hell to do about Edward."

"Fine!" I huffed. I hated feeling that he was going to have people at my beck and call but I also understood that if I argued, his life would be more difficult. I went with him to the door of the cabin where he pulled me in for a lingering kiss.

"Bella, I will fix this so that you can have your freedom back," he promised me. "I just need some time to figure it out." I nodded at him and pulled him down for another kiss.

"It's fine, Jake. I'll do whatever I need to do." He kept his eyes on me, backing down the stairs and halfway across the front yard before he turned to jog into the forest. An urgent howl ripped through the air moments later and I knew he had summoned his pack to him.

Going back into the house, Rachel looked at me wryly. "If you think one wolf is protective, Bella, wait till you see how the rest will react," she told me. "You are going to be driven slowly insane over the next nine months."

Terrific, I thought.

Jacob

Jacob hurtled through his forest towards the meeting point. The instant he phased, he had checked in with Embry at the Cullens. Embry had nothing to report and the Alpha asked him to phase back to human as soon as the pack were assembled. He didn't want Edward to overhear the conversation that would be taking place shortly. The thought of the fucking leech having any influence over the wellbeing of his imprint and child was making Jake feel physically sick with fear.

Embry picked up on his fear.

You okay man?

Never better Em. Things just got more complicated though.

Embry - I'm phasing straight out, Jake.
Jake understood. Embry knew about the baby and realised his old friend was struggling to control his thoughts. Jake was confident Embry's own thoughts were under control. He wasn't worried about him.

The pack were assembling rapidly, responding instantly to their Alpha's summons. He detected rumblings of surprise that he was back so soon after his joining ceremony and cursed Edward Cullen for cutting short both his claiming and his sort-of honeymoon. He would make all that up to Bells with a proper honeymoon, he vowed.

**Sam** - *Everything okay Jake?*

Yes and no. I have something important to tell you all. Bella is carrying my child.

Shock and excitement rippled through the pack. They all knew the legends. They all knew it would be a boy. The Alpha to their own future offspring. Congratulations and vows of Protection came at him from all sides.

*This situation with Edward cannot be allowed to continue. I don't want him finding out about this. It gives him too much incentive to harm Bella. He knows what hurting her would do to me and therefore all of you. Not only that, but he would ensure the demise of any future packs if he decides to try anything stupid. You will not think of my child or Bella's pregnancy while phased.*

The pack all bowed before him. Not one of them resented the order. As Jake had predicted, Seth and the younger wolves were grateful for it. There were no loopholes and no get out clauses in the order. The Alpha issued unbreakable commands. Sam's commands had been riddled with gaps that Jake had been adept at finding, but an order issued by Jacob Black was absolute. Nobody would think of the unborn child in wolf form.

*Any questions?*

**Paul** - *How are we handling this? Are we taking over the Cullen shifts you've been doing? Or are we watching Bella for you?*

A mixture of both. I still want to do as many of the Cullen shifts as possible myself and I need to be able to see and hear Bella at all times. But I'll need to be researching our records, and spending time with Bella while she trains with Sue too. Anyone got a problem with taking on the Cullen shift?

Other than general complaints about the stench of leeches, nobody did.

**Brady** - *Jake what happens when Bella starts to show? Edward will see it if you're there and we're watching her. It'll be over by then. I don't care how! do it but this is not dragging on for months. OK, you can all phase back to human for a while except Sam and Quil. Who's patrolling?*

**Seth** - *Me till four o'clock.*

OK. Give me ten minutes before phasing back in. I want to talk to Sam and Quil alone.

When it was only Jake, Sam and Quil in the pack mind, he turned to the newly imprinted wolf first.

**Quil** - *Horny as hell.*

*I got that.*

**Quil** - *I need her to know, man.*

Yeah, I know. Just pick an evening and tell dad which one. She'll be fine with it all, Quil. It's easy to say, but it honestly will be okay.

Satisfied that Quil's head was as much in the game as could be expected within 24 hours of imprinting, Jake told him to phase out. He turned to Sam.

*I need to know you've got my back on this one, Sam.*

**Sam** - *I do. Like you said, it's the pack's future at stake here. Whatever is needed, Jacob.*

*No hesitations, Sam. Not a single fuckin' one. If it comes to it and there's an opportunity to end this once and for all, whatever the circumstances, I need you behind me.*

**Sam** - *I'm there. You have my word on it.*

Jake knew he could make it an order but he saw his Beta's mind was absolutely clear. Whatever was necessary to protect Bella and her child, Sam would do. Satisfied, Jake let Sam go and howled for Embry. The instant he phased in, Jake
issued him with an order to think of nothing related to Bella until he had spoken to him again. They would meet later. Jake would confirm Embry's suspicions and give him the same command as the rest of the pack.

Jake phased back to human and headed home to Bella.

A/N: Next chapter tomorrow or Saturday.
A/N: Thank you as always to MistC and niamhg for beta reading.

Three days had passed since I had found out about my pregnancy. As Jake had predicted, our little Alpha puppy was already making himself known. He didn't like coffee, and he wasn't too keen on fish. I hadn't actually been sick yet, but my stomach churned at the mere thought of either of them.

I was tiring quickly. I slept deeply at night. When I woke, I was groggy and grumpy until I had eaten something and showered. After that, provided I avoided coffee and fish, I could function properly until lunchtime when I needed a nap.

My emotions were all over the place. The same night I had discovered I was to be a mother, I had been drying dishes in Billy's kitchen when I was suddenly gripped with fear over Edward Cullen. Sobbing and hysterical, it had taken Jake twenty minutes to calm me down.

I knew he was worried sick about Edward having a part of my soul. I completely understood that while losing me would be devastating for him, losing our child as well would have catastrophic consequences for the pack. As Rachel had warned me, the wolves were almost unbearably protective of me.

The first morning that Jake had returned to the Cullen house, Embry had been responsible for my welfare. He and Jake had convened in Billy's living room and discussed the details. Jake wanted to be able to see as well as hear me at all times and had wanted Embry phased in the living room. With Charlie's recliner there as well, there was no room for an enormous wolf. I thought it was ridiculous and unnecessary. Jake had stubbornly refused to change his mind and we almost had our first big fight.

In the end, Embry had pointed out that Jake's order to the wolves not to think of me would be rendered worthless if they were around me in wolf form while he could see them in the pack mind. Reluctantly, Jake had modified his plan. Whichever wolf was on duty would be with me in human form and would only phase if they needed to alert Jake to any problems. If I went anywhere, even on the reservation, I would be accompanied by a pack member at all times.

The pack were tripping over themselves to be on baby Protection duty. I tried to curb my irritation. I knew my safety was of the utmost importance to the entire tribe. I also knew that my hormones were beginning to rage out of control and at least a part of my reaction was caused by my pregnancy. But every time I wanted a glass of water or a book to read and was told to sit while they fetched it for me, I had to fight the urge to throw something.

Sue's meditation techniques were keeping me sane. She visited each afternoon. I had discovered I could access my Spirit at will. With practise, I had mastered the ability to close my eyes, focus myself quickly, and find it. Every time, I was awed by its beauty. And every time I surfaced to reality again, I was amazed by how much time had passed. What seemed like mere moments was in reality several minutes.

So far, I had been simply a passive observer. I could find my Spirit and revel in its mystical light. Sue wanted me to do more. She wanted me to try and manipulate it. I wouldn't be able to protect it, she said, if I couldn't exert some control over it.

I had no idea what she meant. Sue herself had no personal experience of Spirit roaming and together, we floundered in the dark. Rachel was working on translating the sparse details of the precise meditation techniques her ancestors had used to Protect their Spirits.

Jake spent long days at the Cullens and came home tense and exhausted from the effort of keeping his thoughts under control. Unable to Alpha order himself not to think of our baby, he had to spend hours curbing his mind. I plainly saw the strain when he came through the door each evening and I hated it.

Layla had been spending increasing time with me, keeping me company while she studied for her college course. Her opinion of Jake, which had surprised me at first, clearly fitted the man who was coming home in the evenings now. The carefree, relaxed man I had been with for several days was buried under a hard, severe mask which I detested.

Desperate to help him somehow, I devoted myself to simply being his wife. Even that was hindered by living with our fathers and the almost constant presence of other wolves or imprints.

Really, I was climbing the walls while battling fatigue and hormones, and Jake was tense and worried constantly.

On the third day, I had had enough. I was ready for Jake when he came banging through the door of the cabin.

"We're going out," I informed him, showing him the basket of food I had in my hand. He skidded to a halt, his face a picture of surprise. I marched straight past him to the door and outside. He caught up with me on the porch.

"Where are we going exactly?"

"Beach. Cottage. I don't care. Embry's at the Cullens and Layla's inside with our dads. Everyone's covered. Come on."

I began striding across the front yard. Jake came up behind me and grabbed the basket from me. I turned to him in irritation. "It's not that heavy." He shook his head at me, saying nothing. I knew not to push him on that point but crossed my arms and followed him.
my arms in annoyance anyway.

"Where would you prefer then? Beach or cottage?" he asked.

"I don't care!" I rounded on him. "As long as we're alone and can talk undisturbed. And as long as I can make you feel better and make you smile again! I feel like a prisoner, and you are so worried. I want you to relax!" I was practically yelling by the time I had finished, aware that my hormones were out of control but unable to stop.

"Yeah. This is relaxing," he told me solemnly. I saw a glint of amusement in his eyes and my own lips began to form a smile despite my mood. Dropping the basket unceremoniously on the ground, Jake reached out to me.

"C'mere." I stepped into his arms and felt the heat of his tight embrace. I sighed against his chest and felt his lips brush my hair.

"The cottage was looking kinda cleaner when Jared and Brady were there earlier," he murmured. "Will we go there?"

"Yes please," I told him.

"Kay. Wolfback? That way when I phase I can tell whoever's there just now to clear out." I nodded and he led me to the treeline.

"What about the basket?" I asked. "Will I carry it?"

Grinning widely for the first time in three days, Jake phased and picked it up with his mouth. I shook my head, laughing at him, and clambered onto his back. Within minutes, we were approaching the cottage. Jake had been right when he predicted that the pack would clamour to help us. From what he had told me, over the last few days there had been at least two or three of them at work at any given time.

"Wow," Jake said when he had phased back. "They've been busy!" They certainly had. The boarded up window was still boarded up, but the creepers growing across the front of the cottage had been cut back and the door was freshly painted a deep green colour.

Inside, the living room had been cleaned up. The old couch had been removed and in its place was the couch from Charlie's living room. I laughed when I saw that and Jake smiled at me.

"Your bed's upstairs too. The guys knew I wasn't gonna last long without being alone with you and since the couch and bed weren't needed at Charlie's just now they er, borrowed them for us."

We had a quick look around. The bathroom faucets were working and someone had scrubbed it clean. Jake told me that Kim and Mai had been helping with the cleaning while Layla kept me company. Tears sprang to my eyes at the effort everyone had been expending on my behalf and I felt ungrateful for all my irritation of the past few days.

Jake looked at me in concern as the tears spilled over and I started sniffling. "I'm fine," I told him. "Just overwhelmed and pregnant." God, I still wasn't used to saying that.

Jake pulled me close and held me tightly to him. "You're part of the family now Bella, I keep telling you that," he told me seriously.

"I know, I'm just not used to it and I don't know how I'm feeling right now. I know it's just hormones but I keep crying and getting mad at things that wouldn't usually affect me so much." I sniffed and looked up at him. "This evening was supposed to be about making you feel better," I told him ruefully.

His eyes softened as he looked back down at me. "Honestly Bells, I feel better just knowing that you care enough to want to make me feel better," he said. Ridiculously, that made me want to cry again.

"I am such an emotional mess!" I nearly stamped my foot, I was so frustrated at myself.

"But a beautiful one," Jake told me, leaning down to kiss me. I felt him harden immediately and smiled against his lips, grinding into him.

"Don't do that unless you feel up to following it through," he warned me. His voice was low and deliciously husky. I pulled back in surprise to look at him. "It's been too long, Bells," he said. "I know we've been making love at dad's, but needing to be quiet ... I can't do what I want to do with you." I shivered involuntarily and felt myself grow wet. "Is this what you had planned?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Yes." My throat felt dry as I stared up at him. There was an atmosphere building between us that was new. An intensity, an electricity, was forming and practically crackling in the air. We stared at each other for a few moments. Jake's eyes were dark and the fire in them made me shiver again. I needed his hands on me. Reaching behind my back for one of his hands, I moved it to my breast.

Jake moved faster than anything I had ever experienced. I was suddenly against the wall at the far side of the room, my legs around his waist. His kisses were almost ferocious and his desperate need made me cry out in pure ecstasy.
mouth moved to my jaw and he bit down slightly before moving to my neck where he bit me harder. I yelped slightly at the pain while feeling my underwear soak through.

My breathing was already laboured. It became ragged when Jake pulled at my shirt so hard half the buttons pinged across the room. My bra was unsalvageable by the time he had ripped it off, too. Hitching me further up his chest, Jake put his mouth to my breast and bit down hard again. He already knew the effect that had on me but this time, I went crazy.

I tugged and pulled at his shorts, utterly desperate to feel him inside me. The position I was in wasn't aiding my endeavours. "Take them off!" I practically yelled at him. Lifting his head to look into my eyes, Jake's chest rumbled with a primal sounding growl. He set me on my feet and tore both our clothes from our bodies before lifting me up again.

Biting more than kissing, with a continuous growl sounding in his chest, Jake's mouth worked its way over my entire upper body. My hands tugged at his hair and I was pretty sure I must have hurt him sometimes but we were both beyond caring about any pain. I felt his erection straining towards me and my own juices were dripping from me as my body keened for him.

Lowering me to the ground, Jake sank to his knees and tilted my hips so he could access my clit with his mouth. He continued to use his teeth, grazing and nibbling as I yelled his name.

"Take me!" My voice sounded almost savage to my own ears and Jake again moved too fast for me to process. I was spun around and bent at the waist, my hands placed on the wall for support. Jake sank himself inside me, moaning my name loudly as soon as he was fully seated. He started pounding into me so hard my knees began to shake.

Both of us crying out and cursing, it didn't take long. My vision blurred as my body convulsed. My legs gave way and I screamed out his name. Jake followed me straight over the edge, grasping me so tightly around my middle that there was no doubt I would be bruised. I felt him tremble and explode and then I was spun around and held tightly in his arms.

"What was that?" I gasped, squeezing my eyes shut and re-opening them in an attempt to focus.

"Are you okay?" Jake tilted my chin to make me look up at him and I nodded.

"Hell yeah I'm fine," I assured him. "But what was that?"

Jake smiled wryly. "A combination of an uptight Alpha and his pregnant imprint, I guess. You sure you're okay?"

"Positive," I said. We stood gazing at each other for a moment until I started to grin. "The big bad wolf is quaking," I teased him.

"Yup," he agreed, unashamed. "Reduced to putty by a tiny woman." He shook his head in mock disgust and I smiled happily at him.

"At least I have my Jake back," I said.

"Ah Bella," he moaned as he buried his face in my hair. "I'm always your Jake. Just sometimes worrying about you is gonna get in the way. Especially when we can't just be alone together when I need you."

"I hate seeing you like that," I told him. "All severe and angry."

"I'm not angry with you," he said quickly. "Never with you."

"I know. But I still hate seeing it. I want to help you feel better but it's difficult when there are other people around all the time."

Jake nodded into my hair. "Yeah. Last night I had to work really hard not to ... well, do what I just did to you, right there in dad's cabin in front of Charlie."

I laughed and felt him chuckle a little. "I'm not joking."

"I believe you."

Jake began gathering our clothes together, apologising about the state of my bra and shirt as he handed them to me sheepishly. We relocated to the kitchen, where I unpacked the basket I had brought. Over dinner, we talked seriously about how things were developing.

Edward had needed to hunt that day. Jacob had insisted on accompanying him, and had been revolted when he watched the leech stalking and feeding from a deer.

"I mean I know as wolves we do eat forest kill when we have to Bells but there was something different about it. He was enjoying the hunt. He's a predator. It wasn't just necessary nourishment, he was playing a game and the deer was terrified." He shuddered. "I hate to think what he would be like toying with a human." His expression was both disgusted and fearful.

"It's not going to happen," I told him firmly. "They're vegetarians, as they call it. And I have so much protection in place it
"I know you hate it, and I'm sorry to force it on you." He sounded like he meant it and I reached for his hand across the table.

"Jake I'll put up with it, for you and our baby. But I wish I could do whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing with my Spirit so that all these precautions would be unnecessary."

"Tell me how you're doing."

"I can find my Spirit easily. I know where it is now. But I can only watch it. Sue wants me to access it but neither of us knows how, or what that involves exactly. Rachel found an account in the legends that suggested I should be able to get inside it and from there bring it anywhere I want it to go. That's what the Spirit Warriors did, allegedly. But I have no idea how to do that and Sue can't tell me."

Jake looked thoughtful. "How about we practise together," he suggested. "Every big breakthrough you've had before has been with me. It's worth a try."

I smiled at him. "I was going to suggest that after dinner."

"Eat up then," he ordered me. "And we'll get to work." He lowered his head to his plate again.

"Yes, Alpha!"

Jake's head snapped up and he looked at me with the same fire in his eyes as he had had before. "Fuck, Bella," he groaned.

"What?" I was bewildered.

"My wolf liked that. You being submissive."

I snorted. "Well tell your wolf I don't do submissive. I was joking." My plate was empty and I stood to bring it to the sink. I never made it that far. Jake's wolf decided to use the table to prove he could make me very submissive. I decided that, sometimes, giving the wolf his own way was actually quite wonderful.

"Focus, Bella," Jake laughed at me forty minutes later. "You're supposed to be going into a relaxed, meditative state you know. Your heart rate keeps going through the roof."

I peeked at him through one eye. "How am I supposed to relax and meditate when the same hands that are holding mine right now just did that to me?"

I shut my eye again, feeling him shake with silent laughter under me. I was straddling his lap in my favourite meditative position. Trying harder, I found the rhythm of my breathing and felt myself slipping deeper into my own subconscious.

There it was. As before, I could find my Spirit and look at it easily enough, but had no idea what to do next. Surfacing after what seemed like a few minutes, I was shocked once more to find I had been about half an hour.

"That's such a weird part of it," I told Jake as we prepared to head back to his dad's cabin. We had toyed with the option of staying the night at the cottage but knew both our dads were liable to need assistance in the night. "It really feels like no time at all."

Jake shrugged. "Maybe time just passes differently when you're under." He shut the door and reached for my hand. "Bells why don't we meet here every evening after my shift at the Cullens? We can practise helping you control your Spirit and have some time alone together. It'll also give us a chance to see what needs done still and give me an idea of what I need to be organising before we move in."

"I can do some of the organising too," I told him. "I really need more to do. Jake. I'm quite capable of cooking and cleaning and most of the time I get told to sit and rest. I understand why but I am so bored!"

"You've been tired too, honey," he pointed out.

"Yes but I would like to be able to do some light jobs if I want to."

Jake looked at me for a moment. "Okay, but if any of the guys think you're looking tired or unwell, you know they'll get even more protective. They've all been doing a good job of keeping their distance from you, Bella. I know it feels to you like you're under constant surveillance, but trust me they all want to be right next to you at all times. They like smelling the baby," he added with a smile and I pulled a face.

"I noticed." I had caught several of the pack members sniffing the air around me over the past couple of days. Their treatment of me was almost reverent, but firm. It both endeared and infuriated me. I sighed. "Just promise me that I'll be allowed to lift a pan and put some food in it for you and our dads without someone insisting on doing it for me."

Jake squeezed my hand. "Fine. Ready for me to phase?" I nodded and we headed back to his dad's.
That night, as was becoming the norm, I fell quickly into a deep sleep, safe in Jacob’s arms. For the first time in days, I dreamed.

I was lying in a bed in Jacob’s arms, just as I had been when sleep claimed me. Lying across his naked chest was a tiny sleeping baby, his blue romper showing him to be a boy. He had a shock of jet black hair and tiny, perfect fingers. I was stroking his fingers and Jake had one hand protectively on his little back, while his other arm was wrapped around me. Looking up, I saw tears glistening in his eyes.

“He's perfect,” he whispered to me. I couldn't have agreed more.

The scene changed too soon, and I found myself back on the beach.

“Sarah!” I looked around and there she was.

“Hello Bella. We don't have long, remember that sweetheart.”

“Jake wanted me to tell you. He loves you, and he misses you.”

“I watch over him every day Bella. I watch over you all. Tell him I love him with everything that I am. Tell him that in the days ahead I will be fighting for him. And remember Bella, you can always find me here.”

“Sarah, wait!”

She was gone and, as I had known I would be, I was out of my body and looking down at myself. I was breathing peacefully in Jake's arms. He was awake, watching my sleeping form. Shocked, I saw tears falling freely down his cheeks as he lay with one hand resting gently on my abdomen. "He won't harm either of you. I won't allow it. I can't lose you now," he was whispering. My heart splintered and I wanted to go to him to give him comfort.

At the same time, I felt the tug pulling me towards the window and I knew what was about to happen. My soul was going to go to Edward, to find its lost piece. I understood that this was my chance to gain control over my Spirit.

Concentrating hard, I fought the pull. Jake. Stay with Jake. I repeated it like a mantra as I fought against what my very soul wanted me to do.

His eyes looked up suddenly and it seemed as though he was looking straight at me. With every ounce of inner strength I had in me, I focused on the man I loved with all my heart. He continued to look at me. I wondered what he could see. Finally, his eyes grew drowsy with sleep. As I watched him and struggled to stay with him, I became aware that I was seeing him through a mild glow.

I'm inside my Spirit. I'm looking out from it. I'm inside that beautiful light.

I re-focussed my attention. Instead of looking out, I took stock of what was immediately surrounding me inside the ethereal glow. A surge of understanding and joy flowed through me and I believed that what happened next was completely within my own power. With one final surge of exertion, I forced myself back down to my body. It was a slow journey, but I made it.

When I opened my eyes, it was 5am. I had been in my Spirit for most of the night. A smile formed on my lips as I understood what had just happened. I had controlled my Spirit. More than that, I had seen inside it. I knew its secrets.

Sitting up in bed, I looked down at the sleeping man beside me.

“You won't lose me now,” I whispered to him. “Because I know what I have to do to fight for my soul.”

Edward

Edward slipped once more from his father's office. Everything was arranged. All he had to do now was wait patiently until Wednesday afternoon. It was now the early hours of Sunday morning. It had been almost too easy. His two greatest fears had been unfounded.

He had worried the most about Alice. She and Jasper were arriving the next day from Alaska. He had assumed she would be able to see his plans and had spent hours conniving over the best ways to persuade her to co-operate without alerting Jasper. Instead, she was in a state of hysteria over the disappearance of Edward's future. Shadowed by the wolves as he was, they had reached the conclusion that she couldn't see him around them. It was very convenient, and satisfying.

Edward had also worried that Matthias would call Carlisle about the questions Edward had been asking of him. The aged vampire was the only one who had researched in detail what happened to a person's soul when they became a vampire. He was a greater coward than Edward had hoped. Edward's mind reading abilities had served him well over the last century. There were few creatures of the night that he didn't possess some useful knowledge about. In Matthias' case, it was his involvement in the disappearance of a young medical student that Carlisle had taken under his wing forty years earlier.

She had been very promising and Carlisle had taken a personal interest in her education. He had introduced her to Matthias, who had been unable to resist the pull of her blood. Not quite his singer, she had nonetheless been very appealing. Carlisle had been devastated by her disappearance two weeks later and had vowed to avenge her. Matthias,
like the coward he was, had helped Carlisle head the search for her body.

Edward had quietly met with him at the time and assured him his silence would come at a price. The time to claim that payment had now arrived.

Matthias had sent him all the information he needed. He had also agreed to come to Forks on Wednesday to help him set his plan in motion. Their agreement was that Matthias' debt for Edward's silence would be considered settled. Edward of course knew his father's old friend would not make it back out of La Push.

He caught his reflection in the window. The refractions of light made his image disjointed and incomplete. Just like his soul. But not, he thought, for much longer.

According to Matthias' information, while Edward was drinking from Bella, the two pieces of her soul would attempt to reunite. When her soul was in its most vulnerable state, his own warped soul would feed from hers, just as he fed from her blood, and replenish itself. It would all happen in an instant, when her soul imploded under his venomous attack. Edward smiled as he thought about how Carlisle would react if he knew the truth. In turning Esme, his singer, the great doctor had saved his own soul while condemning hers.

And then, once his soul was complete for the first time since Carlisle had turned him one hundred years ago, Edward would finally have a chance at the one thing vampires never believed themselves to have.

Redemption.
I woke on Sunday morning to Jake nuzzling my neck. I had gone back to sleep again and had no more dreams.

"Hey," I murmured sleepily, turning into his warm chest.

"Morning beautiful," he told me. "Were you out of your body again last night?"

"Mmhmm, and you were looking straight at me till you fell asleep."

"I thought so," he breathed.

"Did you see me?"

"No. I just ... kind of knew that you were there."

"Well you were looking right at me."

"I didn't want to fall asleep but I couldn't fight it any longer. I felt so peaceful, knowing you were staying with me and not going after the other part of your soul. Did you ... I mean, just before that ... I was ..."

"You were upset," I said gently. "You're more frightened than you're letting me see."

Jake was silent for a minute. When he finally answered me, his voice was slightly hesitant. "Bella I am frightened. I am so proud of you for how well you've handled everything. Learning about all the supernatural stuff, me, Edward, the baby... I guess I'm just trying to not make things tougher on you. And I'm kind of used to dealing with things on my own too."

"You haven't been alone, Jake," I told him. "Not ever." I propped myself up on my elbow to look at him. "I saw your mom again last night. Her words have been right there with you through it all."

"You're more frightened than you're letting me see."

Jake squeezed his eyes shut. I gave him a moment before kissing his eyelids, one after the other. "Yes. I'm here for you now, and your mom has always been watching over you," I whispered.

His arms tightened around me and he pulled me close to his body. "But what if Edward does something I can't stop, Bella?" I held my breath and waited. This was the first time he had shown any real vulnerability. Oh, I knew he was worried sick about Edward's hold over me. But he had never let me see his naked fear before. After having seen him cry the night before, I wanted him to open fully up to me. "What would I do if I lost you and our baby now?"

I pulled back to look him in the eyes. "You won't," I told him. "I learned something last night. I learned how to control my Spirit."

"I can't explain it. That's kind of looked at what was around me, instead of just looking out. And then I realised that I can influence what my Spirit does. I want to try something today with Sue. I think that while I'm in my Spirit form, I can Protect myself. Does that make sense?"

"No. But I'll buy it anyway," he told me. "I guess in a way it's the same as what we do when we phase into our wolves. It's not as conscious a process as you're describing, but we do access another form of ourselves which allows us to Protect ourselves and others."

We lay together, lost in our own thoughts for a while before Jake asked, "What did my mom mean when she said she'll be fighting for me in the days ahead?"

"I don't know. I lost contact with her right after that."


"It worries me," he said. "Why would she need to fight for me? What's gonna happen that would make her do that? Can you ask her?"

"If I'm right about how to control my Spirit, I can ask her today," I told him.

"It's a little weird, you know," he blurted suddenly. "You, talking to my mom who's been dead for years, bringing me messages back."
I sighed. "Just as weird as everything else that's been happening over the past ten days, Jake."

He grinned at me and leaned in to kiss me. I deepened it quickly and he rolled us so he was on top of me. I felt him standing to attention against my leg and my body immediately began to respond.

I had my legs wrapped around his waist and he had his mouth attached to my nipple when he suddenly groaned and raised his head. He looked towards the bedroom window.

"Guard wolf?" I guessed and he nodded.

"Quil, reporting for duty." Jake checked his watch. "He's twenty minutes early."

"They're always early," I grumbled.

"They want to be near you," he reminded me. "I'm sorry honey but you really are just gonna have to put up with it."

"I know, I know," I sighed. "Let's get you fed then before you have to go."

Five minutes later, Jake was in the shower while I prepared a quick breakfast for him in the kitchen, where Quil was hovering around me. He was no doubt hoping to receive his second breakfast of the day while performing his guard duty. I opened the fridge and immediately clamped my hand over my mouth and nose. Something smelled off and it made my stomach churn.

Racing to the bathroom, I burst unceremoniously through the door and heaved over the toilet.

"Bella?" I was vaguely aware of Jake turning off the water under the shower. It seemed to go on forever, even though I knew my stomach must have been almost empty. Jake came to my side, sweeping my long hair back and holding it out the way.

Finally done, I collapsed back against him. He rubbed one hand up and down my arm.

"You okay, honey?"

"Jake?"

"Yeah?"

"Is it really necessary for the guys to hear this kind of thing?"

"Uh ... they won't say anything, Bells. They'll be professional about it."

I turned to look at him. "Professional guard wolves?" His lips twitched and I rolled my eyes, getting unsteadily to my feet. I brushed my teeth and washed my face while Jake dried what water hadn't evaporated from his body heat. He was watching me all the time. Finally, he came up behind me.

"I am sorry it has to be like this, Bella," he murmured in my ear. "We'll find a way to fix it, I swear." I pulled his neck down so I could kiss him. "Fast," he added.

By the time we got to the kitchen, Quil had sniffed out whatever it was in the fridge that had offended the baby so much, and disposed of it outdoors. I acknowledged that having someone with a heightened sense of smell around might be useful over the coming weeks, making him laugh.

Jake had to leave soon after that. We arranged to meet at the cottage at 4pm. I would bring dinner, and we would have two hours together until we had to go to the beach. Donna would hear the pack's secrets that evening and, assuming she accepted the imprint, she and Quil would have their joining ceremony.

I soon discovered that Quil was a ball of nerves. It had been four days since he had imprinted and it was, he assured me, killing him that he had to wait so long.

"Do you think she doesn't like me, Bella?" he asked. He had stopped calling me 'darlin' almost as soon as he had imprinted. "This is the first evenin' she's agreed to see me." He was frowning, his leg jiggling.

"She's been working, Quil," I pointed out to him. I knew Rachel and Layla had both already had this conversation with him. "You've seen her for lunch every day. She's been with you all afternoon, right up till she's had to go to the hospital to work her late shift. She likes you."

"Wish I'd been nicer to her at school," he mumbled. His leg almost looked like it was going to start vibrating.

"From what I've heard, you were nice to her. You just avoided her whenever you could," I reassured him. "Jake told me, you were never rude to her."

"Coulda read more of her notes though," he argued. "I just ripped most of them up."
"I couldn't help the laugh that escaped me. "That was because Jake and Embry were merciless with you," I told him. "Jake's told me all about it, and Rachel too."

"Yeah but what if she's holding it against me Bella? What if she hates me?"

"Quil, have you kissed her?" I asked curiously.

"Coupla times," he admitted.

"And you've been spending every afternoon with her," I reminded him.

"Yeah."

"She doesn't hate you. Quil she wouldn't have let you kiss her if she didn't like you, okay? And let me tell you something else. I knew something was missing from my life before I even met Jake. I would totally believe that Donna knew you were the one for her, back in high school."

"Do you think?" He visibly brightened at that.

"It wouldn't surprise me," I told him.

"She did kinda hint at that yesterday," he admitted.

"There you go then!" I said, slightly exasperated.

"But what if she freaks out, runs a mile?" he asked.

"Quil has any imprint ever freaked out?" I hoped I was right in guessing that none ever had. I was fairly sure Jake would have told me about it.

"Gonna be a first time," he muttered and I smiled at him.

"It will be fine. This time tomorrow you'll be married." I was relieved when that made him smile.

The phone rang then, bringing a halt to our conversation.

"I'll get it," I said. I had phoned both Renee and the hospital the day after our joining ceremony to give them Billy's phone number. I thought there was a good chance it might be Renee calling.

"Is Jacob there?" an unfamiliar female voice asked abruptly when I answered.

"No, he'll be out all day," I responded. "Can I take a message?"

"Are you Bella?" she demanded.

"Um, yes I am. And you are -?"

"Leah. I take it you know who I am. I need to talk to Jacob. It's important."

Quil, who had naturally heard her, crossed the room and gestured for me to give him the phone.

"Hey Leah it's Quil. What's up?"

He frowned as he listened for a minute. His frown gave way to an amused smile and he glanced over at me.

"Yeah I've got a good idea what that's about. You want me to tell you and save you the bother of finding somewhere to phase?" He paused, presumably until he received his answer. "See it's like this Leah. Bella's knocked up. Baby wolf is kinda making us all a bit crazy. That's probably what you're feeling. I'll let Jake know and he'll call you later, 'kay? Hey but don't phase, Jake's at the Cullens and we're all under orders not to think about it. Edward's not to know."

He listened some more. "Yeah I dunno Leah. I'm just the messenger. Jake'll call you."

After hanging up, he turned to me. "Damn, Bella. Leah can feel that baby all the way to Oregon. Powerful little sucker."


"Ah c'mon Bella, don't do that. I wanna impress Donna tonight, not turn up to our joining ceremony covered in bruises."

"You heal fast," I reminded him heartlessly. "So what did Leah say?"

"She's had this strong feeling like she has to come home. She figured something must be wrong with one of the pack. She thought it might be Seth, phoned Sue but nobody was home so she called Jake. It's the same pull we're all feeling to you. We need to Protect the little guy."
"I noticed. So what happens to Leah now?"

"I dunno. Jake'll sort it out. Hey Bella you want some lunch?"

"Yeah, I'll make it for all of us."

"Nah I'll do it." I could tell he was aiming at nonchalance. I narrowed my eyes at him and he visibly balked. "I'm just lookin' after the baby," he whined.

I knew Jake had told him to allow me a bit more freedom so I headed straight past him and into the kitchen. Quil shadowed me and I turned on him in exasperation.

"Go and sit down, Quil! I'll bring food out in five minutes."

Grumbling, he headed back to the living room. I knew he would be listening intently but I was grateful for a few minutes alone.

I was putting cooked meat in some sandwiches when the nausea hit again. Dropping my knife, I bolted for the bathroom, barely making it before the sickness started.

I was slightly shocked when I felt hot hands on my neck, pulling my hair back for me. Quil dropped to the ground beside me, rubbing my back. I was about to protest that he really didn't need to do that when another wave of nausea rolled over me.

Finally done, I stumbled to my feet to rinse out my mouth. Quil was faster than me, moving at wolf speed to get me a glass of water. I took it from him gratefully, but was mortified that he had just witnessed that.

"Um, Quil I'm good here. Really. You can make lunch, I'll be out soon."

"Yeah, can I just ... you know, check he's okay?" Quil asked, bending down as though to sniff at my abdomen.

"Quil get out!" I almost yelled it at him, shoving at him to try and move him towards the door. He raised his hands in surrender and backed out of the bathroom. Slamming the door after him, I sat on the toilet lid and began to sob.

The door opened again.

"Quil get out!"

He fled. I knew it was just my hormones, but the fact that one of Jacob's friends had just seen me being violently sick was upsetting me enormously. I knew it probably wouldn't be the only time something like this happened, either.

Finally cried out, I brushed my teeth and made my way back out to the living room. Charlie, Billy and Quil steadfastly avoided eye contact. With a vague gesture towards the kitchen, Quil mumbled about sandwiches if I felt like them. I took myself into the kitchen and stayed there until Sue arrived half an hour later.

"Hello Bella," she began breezily when she came into the kitchen. She looked closely at me and turned to shut the door behind herself. "Are you alright?"

I nodded miserably. "Just ... I'm kind of sick today and crying a lot. I yelled at Quil earlier cos he wanted to be with me when I was throwing up and I think I'm freaking the three of them out." I jerked my head towards the door.

"Ah," Sue said understandingly. "Three men, including one very over-protective wolf, are not the best people to be handling a newly pregnant girl."

"Jake wants one of the pack around me at all times when he's not there but I feel so awkward sometimes." My tears weren't far away again and I groaned in frustration. "Distract me, Sue, tell me about your day."

Sue began to chatter about the various herbs she had been collecting that morning. "My daughter assures me most of it is mumbo jumbo," she told me. "But I don't need scientific proof that my medicines work."

"Oh Leah phoned here this morning," I told her. I explained the conversation she had had with Quil. Sue looked thoughtful when I had finished but if she was thinking something, she didn't share it with me. Instead, she asked how I was progressing with my Spirit. I filled her in.

"Bella that's wonderful!" I sensed her relief. "Alright, I think now we need to move onto strengthening your Spirit. You said you think you know how?"

"I can try," I said. I knew that Rachel's translation had described the Spirit Warriors using their 'wills of iron' when Protecting their own Spirits. I didn't think my own will was made of iron, but I knew I would fight to the end for Jake and our child.

Sue waited with me while I accessed my Spirit. I entered the beautiful light and knew I had a choice. I could find Sarah there. Or I could focus my will and strengthen it.
I opted to find Sarah first. I instinctively found my way to that part of my subconscious where our beach existed.

"Bella time is running out." Her voice carried a warning and I knew she wanted me to be strengthening my Spirit, but I was stubborn.

"Jake wants to know why you would have to fight for him."

"I do not know what will happen Bella. I cannot see into the future. But you face great, great evil, sweetheart. I will be fighting on your side, whatever happens. Now go! A plan has been set in motion and you must learn how to control what your soul wants. Go, Bella."

As always, I felt I was left with more questions than had been answered, but Sarah's urgency alarmed me. I left her.

For a while, I practised exerting control over my Spirit. I left my body and fought its pull towards its missing part. The pull seemed stronger somehow. It took me some time to realise that was because Jacob was close to Edward today. They were both calling to my soul, pulling it in the same direction. I was glad. It gave me the opportunity to fight, to flex my will and control my Spirit.

I moved away, fighting their pull in the opposite direction. When I was struggling to hold myself there, I focussed on the glow surrounding me. Concentrating hard, I saw it start to flicker a little. It glowed more brightly for the briefest moment before I lost control of it. I tried again. The same thing happened.

Some time later, I felt that I simply couldn't fight the pull any longer and quickly returned to my body. I felt drained when I opened my eyes.

"What happened this time, Bella?" Sue asked immediately.

I explained it all to her. "When the glow brightens, that's my Spirit gaining strength," I told her. "It's just like Rachel described. I can feel it. It's very, very hard to do though."

"Keep practising Bella. You're nearly there," Sue told me. "Now, do you think you can eat something before going to meet Jacob?"

"What time is it?"

"It's almost three thirty," she smiled. I gaped at her. I had been under for over two hours. The longest yet.

"Sue I'm sorry!" I knew she had other places to be that afternoon, and of course had to be at the evening's bonfire.

"No, Bella, this is more important than anything else right now," she told me very seriously. "Now, can you eat?"

Half an hour later, with some soup lining my stomach and a hastily thrown together dinner for Jake, I was driven to the cottage by Paul. He had relieved Quil from duty sometime while I was in my Spirit.

"Fucker wouldn't leave," Paul shook his head. "He'd sit beside you all day if he could. I told him, it was my turn," he grumbled. "But he fuckin' growled at me. Shithead already had hours with you and I got the short shift."

We pulled up at the cottage and Paul got out his door. "Jake isn't here yet," he told me. "I'll wait with you till he gets here."

"You don't think I can manage five minutes alone?" I asked him wryly. He just looked at me. I rolled my eyes and walked past him.

"Don't be difficult, Bella," he told me.

"What are you all going to be like after the baby arrives?" I asked as he opened the door and ushered me inside.

"Well just look at this way," he said. "You'll have eight eager and willing babysitters. Anytime you want to go out or have some time to yourself or with Jake, that kid'll be well looked after."

Paul carried the basket of food to the kitchen for me. As I busied myself emptying it out and setting the table, he lay on his back under the sink and started fiddling with something.

"What are you doing?" I asked him curiously.

"Just checkin' this is done properly," he told me. "I was in a rush to finish it before going on patrol this morning. I'm just making sure it's finished okay."

I flopped down on one of the chairs and started to sniff. "Paul I'm sorry for being so touchy about you know, the guard duty thing. You're all working so hard to basically make me a home with Jake, and I've been really ungrateful." Tears were flowing by the time I'd finished. Paul was frozen to the spot, staring at me. I thought I saw his cheeks flush.

"Uh, yeah. Everything's fine under here and ..." his voice tailed off and he averted his eyes. I realised he was
uncomfortable with my emotional outburst and snorted.

"This is a ridiculous situation," I said. "You've all got some kind of supernatural pull to my baby, but none of you can handle the pregnancy stuff."

"Yeah. I mean, if you were Rachel I'd know how to make you feel better, but ... oh thank fuck, here's Jake." Paul shot to his feet from his position under the sink and I heard the front door open and shut again.

I was smiling at the kitchen door when Jake came through it. He didn't even look at Paul as he strode across the room and pulled me up into a hug.

"Yeah you can leave making her feel better to me," he finally told his pack brother.

"I'm out," Paul said. "See you later, Bella."

"Thank you, Paul," I told him, meaning it. He waved his hand over his shoulder on his way out.

Jake's mouth was on mine before I even heard the front door shut. Fire ripped instantly through my body, almost buckling my knees. The day's emotions and nausea were forgotten as I kissed him back and ground against him with every ounce of passion I had in me.

Almost an hour later, sweating and exhausted, Jake finally collapsed on top of me. We had gradually made our way upstairs to the large studio room, where my bed from Charlie's house waited.

"Jeez, Bells," he panted. "You really are a wildcat." He inspected deep scratch marks on his arm. They were healing already but I was horrified.

"I'm sorry!" I gasped. "I don't know what happened, I just got carried away. It all felt so good!"

Jake was laughing. "You don't need to apologise for that. Trust me. I think I might be starting to like your new hormones though."

I smiled at him. "You'd be the only one!"

Over dinner I told him about my morning with Quil and my outburst with Paul. He listened sympathetically but refused to yield. I needed a wolf with me at all times. We talked for a full hour as we ate and washed up afterwards. By the time six o'clock approached, I had told him of my meeting with Sarah and my experiences with my Spirit. He had told me of his day at the Cullens. He was growing increasingly uneasy.

"Edward is up to something, Bella, I just know it." A deep frown was etched on his face and I traced it with my fingertips, hating it. "I just wish I had some idea what it is he's planning," he finished.

Wanting to take his mind off Edward, I told him about Leah's phone call. Something sparked in his eyes as he listened, and as soon as I'd finished he reached for his cell phone.

"Leah? It's Jake."

She must have launched straight into a lengthy explanation because he fell silent, listening while he ran his fingers absent through my hair.

"Do you want to come home for a while?" he asked eventually. "Cos if you do, it might actually be really useful." He listened again, looking at me. A smile formed on his lips. "How do you feel about guarding the baby full time until this is all over? I'll warn you though, Bella's emotional right now. She's giving the guys hell. You might be able to deal with it better." He winked at me and I mock scowled back at him. "Yeah, you'd be with her in human form all the time that I'm not. When I come home, you get the fuck out." He listened for another moment and then laughed. "Sure, sure, Leah. See you tomorrow then."

Hanging up, he grinned at me. "Bells honey, if you thought the guys were giving you a hard time, you're gonna love Leah."

"Leah's leaving college to look after me?" I asked in disbelief.

"Not like that," he protested. "She's feeling a really strong pull to come home. She feels that she needs to be here, Protecting. It's the baby she can feel, and it's distracting her. Leah's usually got great control over her wolf, but she nearly phased in class today. She needs to get out of the city and come home before she does something stupid. And maybe having a woman with you instead of the guys will make this easier on you, Bells. I mean, Leah's not exactly girly, but she might understand how you're feeling a little better. It works for everyone, honey."

I had to admit the thought of having a woman witnessing my bouts of sickness and emotional outbursts was more palatable than the current arrangement.

Twenty minutes later, Jake and I arrived on First Beach hand in hand. It was a chilly evening but it was dry. The bonfire was roaring. We were among the last to arrive and as we sat down together I saw each and every pack member shift their positions subtly. I suspected they were angling themselves downwind of me so they could smell the baby. Despite myself, I
Quil and Donna were sitting next to Billy. Quil looked like he might be suffering from some kind of nausea himself. Donna was looking around curiously. She seemed to suspect something was going on, but her eyes shone whenever she glanced at Quil. Charlie was, I noticed in amusement, sitting on his recliner again. He had a beer in hand and I rolled my eyes at him.

Settling myself between Jake's legs, I saw Seth approach us with a can of soda and a bottle of beer. He tried to pretend he wasn't sniffing the air around me as he handed me the soda. I felt Jacob shake with laughter behind me as he took the beer. I settled comfortably back against Jake's chest and soaked up his warmth. He wrapped one arm around me and inhaled deeply himself. I wondered if I would ever get used to being scented.

A couple of minutes later, Billy began to talk. His voice carried clearly through the October night air as he wove tales of monsters and magic. Most eyes were trained on Donna, who was enthralled as she listened. Quil was fidgety and agitated next to her, and I watched as she rubbed his arm soothingly, instantly relaxing him.

It took over an hour to reach the crux of the story. The air was full of expectancy as nine wolves, seven imprints, five Elders, the Chief, and Charlie, waited for Donna's reaction. Her eyes widened as she listened to Billy explaining that the legends were true, and she was currently in the company of the Quileute Protectors. She scanned the assembled crowd, clearly assessing with new eyes the sheer size and bulk of the men.

"Wha- Why am I being told this?" she asked finally. Even from where I was sitting, I saw Quil start to tremble hard.

"Easy, Quil." Jake spoke from behind me. His voice was too low for Donna to hear, but even my human ears heard the warning spoken in Alpha tones. Quil's eyes flickered to Jake and he nodded slightly.

"I'm a wolf, Donna," he blurted out. "And ... I imprinted on you." He cringed as he waited for her judgement.

Donna visibly jumped slightly. "You're ... and I'm ..." Quil nodded at her. The air was electric and I was grateful that this wasn't how I had learned about Jake. I thought this should be a more private moment for any couple.

A sob escaped Donna and Quil's face crumpled with concern. He pulled her into his chest, hugging her tightly to him. I couldn't hear the words he spoke in her ear, but she nodded and allowed him to pull her to her feet. They began to walk along the beach.

"They'll be fine," Jake said confidently.

"I think so too," I agreed. "But what a way to find out! Poor Donna."

Jake shrugged behind me. "Is there a good way to find out? Poor Donna."

A buzz of conversation went up around the bonfire as everyone speculated over what would happen next. Nobody was in any doubt that Donna and Quil would be Joined shortly.

Sue approached while we waited. She had had an idea, she said, involving Leah. Jake quickly filled her in and broke the news that Leah would arrive home the very next day. Sue's smile revealed how happy she was about that.

"Leah will be better for you, Bella," she told me. She looked at Jake severely. "I know you boys didn't see her softer side much, but believe me when I say that my daughter is not the bitch you all think she is."

Jake had the grace to look slightly embarrassed.

An hour later, Quil and Donna re-appeared. They were hand in hand and the smile on Quil's face was blinding. A shout went up around the pack, followed by laughter.

Jake snorted. "They're supposed to wait till after the ceremony!" I turned to him, confused. "They reek of sex," he whispered in my ear.

"Oh!" I pulled a face as I remembered that privacy wasn't a concept the pack knew much about. "We didn't wait," I pointed out to him.

Jake grinned at me. "That was different."

"Was not," I told him. "I guess wolves and imprints are just horny together," I said with a smile, remembering our earlier activities at the cottage.

Jake laughed behind me. "You have no idea."

A relaxed observer this time, I thoroughly enjoyed the joining ceremony. Donna looked shyly radiant as she gazed up at Quil. He looked like he would explode with emotion as they combined their fires, completing their union. Hoots and shouts of congratulations went up around the pack and the dancing began.
Jake held me tightly to him as we moved to the music. The low drum beat was sensual and built in intensity as Jake moved us faster and faster to its rhythm. Even at speed, he was careful with me, always protecting our baby. I noticed a change with all the pack members. Unlike on the night of our joining ceremony where they competed with one another as to how fast they could spin me or how loudly they could make me squeal, they were now very cautious in their handling of me.

Dancing around the bonfire, surrounded by a family who loved me and who I was daily growing to love just as much, I felt utterly safe. It was difficult to imagine how anything could possibly bring me any harm when I had so many Protectors all taking care of me. Added to that, I knew just how to strengthen my Spirit against a harmful attack.

I felt like nothing could hurt me.

Four hundred miles away

Matthias hung up his phone and smiled to himself with satisfaction. One more vampire willing to join him on Wednesday.

Matthias did not trust Edward Cullen one iota. He had always been sneaky, using his powers of mind reading to manipulate those around him. The rest of the Cullens, with the possible exception of Rosalie, believed him to be something of a golden boy. They trusted in his outward facade. Matthias had seen the other side of him forty years earlier.

Like all vampires, Edward was inherently selfish; and like all vampires, he had learned to become a good liar. He was also cunning, with a brilliant mind that would have ensured him a good human life. As a vampire, his brilliancy lent itself to intricate deceptions and double crossings.

No, Matthias did not trust Edward. He had given him the information he needed, and agreed to help him execute whatever plan he had on Wednesday. But he did not believe he would then be allowed to walk away. Matthias was sure the wolfpack was either larger than Edward had hinted, or more deadly.

Matthias had seven centuries worth of friends, comrades and acquaintances. Many were intrigued by the opportunity to observe a pack of werewolves in action.

He had an army of fifteen vampires, himself included, ready to descend on La Push on Wednesday. He had chosen his companions well. Six of them owed Edward Cullen some debt. They were all more than willing to rip him apart, should he attempt to double cross Matthias.

A/N: I think we need a little drama, don't you? Just one more chapter, and then it all begins...
A/N: I wasn’t going to post this till tomorrow but since you’re all amazing and have brought this story to 850 reviews, here you go:

Thank you to MistC and niamhg for beta reading. Also a massive thank you to feebes, who helped me iron out some wrinkles in the plot over this and the next few chapters. This chapter, and in particular the next two, would be quite different without feebes’ input.

Finally before we start the chapter, last Friday I had a long chat with the very entertaining astridt244, who has started a blog for interviews with fanfiction writers. She asked me about all things Twilight, wolfpack, writing and a whole lot of other things too. The interview has now been posted up on astridt244 interview fanfiction writers (dot)blogspot(dot)com - Remove the () and the spaces for the first part, and it should take you there for anyone who wants a peek at Astrid’s blog or inside my head. It might not be for the faint hearted though. Just sayin’. Cursing a-plenty and sex with Jacob Black featured strongly lol.

Monday morning dawned, finding me encompassed in Jacob’s arms. I smiled when I realised that even in sleep, he had placed one hand protectively over my abdomen. I placed my hand over his and remembered the dream I had had two nights earlier. Our tiny baby boy lying asleep on his father’s chest, Jacob’s strong arm around me.

I was absolutely certain that I was glimpsing our future lives together. Surely, I thought, if I could see our future, Edward could pose no threat to us. I sighed happily, shutting my eyes and re-living each dream I had had.

In my first vision, Jake had brought me to the driftwood tree on the beach and told me it was ready. I was certain that he meant our cottage. Curious, I wondered when that would occur. It would be any day now, I realised.

Next had been Jake carrying me over the threshold of our cottage on our wedding night. My stomach was slightly swollen from pregnancy. Perhaps, I thought now, that would be just a few months away.

And then there was the dream of us with our baby. I wanted that so badly, my heart ached for it. I remembered the way Jake’s large hand had easily encompassed our baby’s tiny back, and the tears in his eyes as he had whispered of our child’s perfection.

"What are you thinking about, Bells? I know you’re not sleeping."

I opened my eyes to see Jake watching me curiously. He had wakened and propped himself up on one elbow to watch me. I smiled at him. "I was remembering my dreams, the ones that tell me our future. Us, married in our own home, with our baby."

Jake smiled widely. "You looked happy."

"I want it, Jake. I want that future, with you," I told him.

"Me too, Bells. And we will have it," he added firmly. I looked up at him as he hovered with his face close to mine.

"I felt so safe last night," I confided. "With you and all the pack around me. It's hard to believe Edward will ever be able to hurt me or our baby."

"We still haven't severed the connection though, Bella. I'm not trying to scare you honey, I'm just being honest. He can still cause very real damage to you if he gets hurt in any way. I mean, anything. A hunting accident, a run in with another leech. Leah's tongue," he grinned suddenly. "And speaking of Leah, she'll be here at some point today. Knowing her, she won't waste much time. She'll probably go see her mom, then come straight here. Don't take anything she says too much to heart, okay? I'll tell her to go easy on you but yeah, she can be ... unpleasant."

"Great," I muttered. "I'll look forward to that."

Leah didn't waste much time. She arrived before noon, accompanied by Sue who was looking as though all her dreams had just come true. Embry was guarding me that morning and he was simply sitting quietly, chatting with Billy while keeping one eye on me. I was administering Charlie’s medicine and laughing at his account of a botched burglary he had happened upon years ago, when the door opened.

Looking up, my eyes met those of a breathtakingly beautiful native girl. Tall and slim, her sinewy limbs hinted at strong muscle underneath her copper skin. Her eyes were dark and intelligent and lined with beautiful lashes. Her face was at first an unreadable mask. I watched as the mask slipped and something like awe crossed her features.

"Oh my God," she breathed. She had stopped in her tracks and Sue was watching her curiously.

"You can feel something, Leah?" It was Billy who posed the question. She seemed to drag her eyes from me to look at her Chief. When I followed her gaze, I saw Billy regarding her with great interest.

"I can," she confirmed. "The baby, he's ..." She hesitated, apparently at a loss for words. I held my breath, desperate to
hear whatever she had to say about the child who grew within me. "I can't explain it," she said eventually. "I need to talk to Jacob. I explained this to him before, years ago. I ..." She paused, looking hesitantly at Charlie.

"Charlie is in the loop, Leah," Billy assured her. "Please, tell us what you know."

"I don't know anything." Shaking her head, Leah sat down with Sue beside her. I took a seat too and Leah looked at me for a moment. "I guess you know I'm Leah, and I know you're Bella, so let's consider the introductions done. It is nice to meet you, though." The way she said it sounded like it surprised her.

"It's nice to meet you, too," I told her and she inclined her head in acknowledgement.

"When I first phased," she began, "I ... struggled." Sue and Billy nodded their understanding. They seemed to know this part of the tale. "I was the first, the only female wolf in known history, and I couldn't understand why. I thought my life was over, that I was a genetic dead end. And I kicked against it. Jake understood how I felt. It was similar to how he had felt when he first phased. I mean, it's not like we were great friends or anything, but I could see that he understood how I was feeling.

"Anyway, after about a year, I settled down. And right about the same time, I became aware of something nagging at me. I can't explain it in words. I showed it to Jacob when he took over as Alpha. I felt like, I was here for a reason. That I had a specific role to play. I've always hoped that once I could find out what that role is, and fulfill it, then I can give up my wolf.

"After I left for college, I pretty much quit phasing. I've really only been checking in every now and then at set times, making sure I'm not needed for anything. And to be honest, I'd kind of forgotten about that feeling. But over the last few days, I've been going out of my mind in Oregon." Leah paused and looked straight at me before continuing. "I felt something when I came in here, Bella. It's your baby. My ... my purpose, is to Protect your unborn child. I can't explain how I know that, or what exactly is going to happen now, but ... I'm needed here."

Her eyes looked suspiciously moist as she finished and she blinked hard. I wasn't really sure what to say but she didn't seem to expect anything, either.

"Leah when you say you felt something," Billy probed. "Was it like a pull? Or a connection?"

"No," she shook her head. "It was a sense of peace, like I've found where I'm supposed to be. That's how the woman in me feels, anyway. My wolf, though ..." Leah slumped back in the couch. "Oh the guys are gonna love this," she groaned. "My wolf feels maternal. And you," she rounded on Embry whose mouth had dropped open slightly. "Shut the fuck up!"

"Didn't say a thing," he muttered.

"Yeah well I'm here now, so you can get lost," she told him harshly. I felt my eyebrows raise but Embry just grinned.

"I've missed you too, Leah." Turning to me, he asked, "You okay Bella? Do you need anything?" He looked like he hoped I did and I knew he didn't want to leave the baby.

"I'm fine, Embry. Thank you," I told him.

He nodded and started to go. He snorted quietly and muttered something that sounded like, "Maternal fuckin' wolf." Leah let loose an alarming growl before turning back to me.

"Would you mind if we talk alone, Bella?" she asked me.

"No," I told her. "I was just going to make lunch anyway. Will we talk in the kitchen?"

"That works for me." She got to her feet and strode towards the kitchen. Sue and Billy were deep in conversation by the time I joined her. Charlie was just looking confused.

"So tell me why I'm here," she said as soon as I had shut the door. "I mean, I know my side of it. But why did Jake need me to babysit you? I know the guys will have been clamouring." She swung herself up onto the kitchen counter and sat there dangling her long legs, watching me while I prepared some sandwiches for everyone.

"I've been hormonal. Like, very," I confessed. "And when I've been throwing up and the guys ... well, Quil, really, came into the bathroom with me, I lost it and yelled at him. Um, I've been objecting to my every move being monitored and I've been crying a lot. I hate being like that but I haven't been able to help it. They haven't really known what to do with me. So I think Jake thought we would get on better together."

Leah barked a laugh. "I can imagine having Quil around when you feel sick would make you feel worse," she said. "Look, Bella, I don't do girly gossip or anything like that. And I run my mouth off sometimes. But on the whole, I agree that I would be the best person to be here with you. Plus, I was being honest out there." She jerked her head towards the living room. "My wolf feels maternal towards your baby. Not in a possessive, she-wants-him-for-herself way though. It's more that, she needs to look after her Alpha's unborn child. Does that make sense?"

"I actually think it does," I told her. "You're the only female in the pack, and Jake is your Alpha, so your wolf wants to take on a mothering role to his offspring. Um ... how do you think that will work after the baby's born, though?" That concerned
me a little. I could cope with my baby having multiple uncles, but I hadn't anticipated competition as a mother.

Leah grinned and shook her head at me. "No, this is a short term thing, Bella. It's probably tied up with the whole Cullen threat. And about that," she rolled her eyes. "Seriously, how is it that the Alpha of a wolf pack can imprint on the same girl who is a bloodsucker's singer. How fucking up is that? Really, it could only have happened to Jacob." She shook her head.

I wasn't feeling reassured. "Are you sure?" I checked. "That you won't have some kind of pull to Jake's baby when he's born?"

"Yes," she was very definite. "I get how that would freak you Bella and I can't tell you how I know. I just do. My wolf was created to Protect the future Alpha from threat, in utero." She shrugged. "And honestly Bella, I won't be here by then. As soon as my Spirit tells me my job here is done, I'm going back to Oregon and giving up my wolf."

She hopped off the counter and picked up a plate of sandwiches to bring to the living room. I put my hand on my arm to stop her. "You just mentioned your Spirit?"

"Yes," she said. "When I first phased, I had so many anger issues." She shook her head. "My mom encouraged me to meditate to try and work through them. I found my Spirit, just the same as you have. That's actually when I started to notice that nagging feeling. It's all connected, Bella, just don't ask me how."

Leah stayed with me throughout that day. Sue remained with us for an hour after lunch and I accessed my Spirit again. I didn't look for Sarah, instead heeding her warning that time was of the essence. Concentrating hard, I felt the glow surrounding my Spirit brighten and thicken. Expending every last ounce of energy, I managed to maintain it.

"You're doing so well," Sue told me before she left. "Practise again this afternoon, and again this evening. You'll have it mastered in no time."

Leah was intrigued by what I was doing. She was able to access her own Spirit and had been unaware that she could actually strengthen it. She felt it might be useful when she decided to give her wolf up and stated that she would give it a try once her job with me was done.

At four o'clock, Leah accompanied me to the cottage. I had found myself liking her. She could be abrupt, but she was gentler than I had been led to believe she would be. She gave me more distance than the guys did, while still keeping close watch over me. She did scent the air around me, but she did so with such a beautiful smile on her face that it was difficult to feel annoyed or awkward about it.

We arrived before Jake again. "We don't keep our Alpha waiting," Leah explained wryly. She looked around the cottage, laughing when she saw the garden.

"Does mom know about this?" she asked.

"I don't know," I admitted. "Jake did mention she might be interested in it but I haven't actually mentioned it to her. I don't think he has, either. She's more than welcome to any of the herbs she could use, though."

"I'll let her know now. Jake's coming. Don't worry, I won't let mom interrupt your evening," she added with a grin.

The front door opened downstairs and I heard Jake bound eagerly up the stairs. When he appeared at the top, he met my eyes and strode across the room to pull me flush against his body. After kissing me soundly, he turned to Leah.

"Hey," he said to her. "Thanks for coming, Leah."

"We need to talk," she told him unceremoniously. "I don't mean right now, but soon. Bella can fill you in on everything I told her but I'd like to talk with you about it in person."

"Tomorrow morning?" he asked. "Can it wait that long?"


"Oh we will," I responded cheekily and she laughed. "See you tomorrow Leah. And thank you."

As Paul had done the evening before, Leah simply waved me off on her way out.

I looked up at Jake and saw his eyes weren't full of the worry and anger of the past few days. I was surprised. Just being around the Cullens put him on edge, and the strain of curbing his thoughts constantly had caused him to be tightly wound up at the end of every shift he had done.

"Today went well?" I asked him. He pulled a face.

"As well as it can, I guess. Edward didn't deliberately antagonise me today and it was easier to keep my thoughts under control knowing that Leah would be with you. I take it that went better than with the guys?"

"Much," I told him. His stomach growled and I grinned at him. "Tell you about it over dinner?"
"'Kay."

As we ate, we shared our day's news. I told him about how Leah had responded to the baby and how well my Spirit control had gone. He told me that he had met Alice and Jasper Cullen, newly returned from Alaska.

"I actually liked Jasper," he told me. "We had quite a long talk and he assured me they would all be keeping close tabs on Edward. I don't know, I felt better about everything while I was talking to him." He frowned then. "I dunno Bells. I felt really calm, more so than I've felt for days."

"Well that's good, isn't it?" I asked him. "If you felt you could trust him enough to make you feel better." I thought Jasper must have been exceptionally sincere if Jake trusted him.

"I guess so," he said doubtfully. "I'm kind of second guessing myself now, though. I mean he's still a leech. I don't know why I thought I could trust him." His face was forming a deep frown again.

Pushing my plate aside, I went round the table to sit on his lap. "I hate this frown," I told him, tracing it. "I know you're not going to stop worrying, but let's forget about it all for a few hours." Leaning into him, I began to kiss his neck. His hand tightened on my hip and I knew he was ready and willing to allow me to distract him.

The Cullens

"It's so good to have everyone together again," Esme beamed as she looked around her assembled family with pride.

"We need to know what's been going on," Jasper drawled. "What we've heard doesn't merit a wolf being stationed outside at all hours. And Jacob Black is pissed as hell."

"Did you manage to control his mood?" Carlisle enquired.

"Of course I did," Jasper said, sounding slightly offended. "But don't underestimate how angry he is with us."

"With Edward," Rosalie corrected from her position across the room. Edward sighed, exasperated. She just would not let up. She wanted the entire family to have left already, and what was worse, Carlisle was getting ready to do just that.

Not that it mattered, he supposed. After Wednesday, his soul would be intact and his family could stay or move on. It didn't matter. What happened to Bella was not important. He hoped she survived the change, but ever since she had allowed herself to be defiled by the disgusting dog, he knew she would no longer sing to him. If she survived the change, she would make him a good companion. If not, so be it.

Edward felt his excitement peak as he thought of that exquisite moment when his teeth would break her skin and he would have his first taste of her warm, delicious blood. He saw Jasper look at him sharply and heard him wonder what was with Edward that evening. He cursed inwardly. He would need to be more careful around his brother.

Over the next hour, Alice and Jasper carefully questioned their family on every detail of the past ten days. They learned of the extent of Edward's obsession with Bella Swan in the early hours after finding her. When they heard of the night he had been convinced she was in the house, they both frowned at him.

"She was here," he ground out through his teeth.

"Sure, Edward," Rosalie said acidly. "She was flying invisibly through the air." It was a heated exchange they had had before.

"Alice, can you shed any light on matters?" Carlisle asked her.

"None," she wailed. "I haven't been able to see Edward for days. It's because of the mutts outside!"

"But you can see everyone else," Jasper pointed out. "If your vision was blinded by the proximity of the wolves, you wouldn't be able to see any of the others either."

The assembled group fell silent. The obvious implication was that Edward's demise was looming.

"Could you see me today, Alice?" he asked. "Can you see what I'll be doing tomorrow, or the day after?" Only he knew it wasn't an innocent question. It was vitally important that she knew nothing of his plans for the day after next.

"Not much," she admitted, "which is why I think it's tied up with the dogs."

"When did Edward disappear from your visions, exactly?" Carlisle wanted to know.

"He began to flicker almost as soon as he first saw Bella Swan. The glimpses that I have been getting have reduced daily."

"Well let's hope it is tied up with the wolves," Esme said.

"How do we return Bella's soul to her?" Jasper asked. "Carlisle, can Matthias help?"
"He believes so. He arrives here on Wednesday afternoon. I'm hoping to persuade Jacob Black to meet with him, on neutral territory. Perhaps you could assist us there, Jasper."

Jasper agreed, while looking curiously at Edward. His excitement had spiked again at the mention of Matthias' arrival.

"I want to get this over with," Edward explained, reading Jasper's mind. "I want to return Bella's soul to her and be free to continue with my own ... existence."

Only Rosalie, who was looking for it, detected the lie.

**Bella's POV**

Tuesday passed much as Monday had. I woke in Jake's arms after a long night's sleep. Fatigue continued to shadow me. The night before, after Jake and I had made love, he had carried me upstairs to bed. When I awoke on Tuesday morning, I was disorientated to find myself in his bed, in Billy's cabin. I jerked to a sitting position, rousing Jacob from his slumber as I did so.

"How did I get here?" I gasped.

"I carried you," he told me sleepily, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. "C'mere." He pulled me back down to lie on top of him. "Mmmm, that's better." His voice was thick with sleep and I smiled against his chest.

We lay together peacefully for a few minutes. "Fuck," he said suddenly. "Leah's here."

"She did say she'd be here early," I reminded him.

"Yeah. She did." Groaning, Jake rolled us so he was lying on top of me, the bulk of his weight supported on his elbows. "I gotta go, Bells."

"I know." I reached up and pushed his hair back from his face. "I'll get you both some breakfast."

While Jake and Leah talked in the kitchen, I served them food. Leah had already eaten, she said. She still managed to devour half of an enormous omelette. I shook my head, wishing I could eat like that and maintain her figure.

"Wolf metabolism," she told me. "I'll miss it when I quit."

"Are you sure you'll be able to quit phasing once Bella and the baby are safe?" Jake asked her curiously. Leah simply shrugged.

"Yeah."

"How do you know?"

"How do you know you'll never cheat on Bella?" she fired back at him. He visibly bristled and she smiled sweetly at him.

"Exactly."

Jake left too soon to go to the Cullens' home. Leah and I passed the day pleasantly enough. When I ran to be sick, she gave me my space but had a glass of water waiting for me when I returned. She allowed me to prepare food and do some light housework without comment, but when I tripped over a chair leg she was by my side in an instant, steadying me.

We spent an hour in the kitchen together in the late morning, just talking. We shared information about our Spirits and I was intrigued to hear that she could also access her Spirit, and speak with her deceased father.

"I've never told mom," she warned me. "I think it would open a whole can of worms. You know, wanting messages passed back and forth. Seth knows because of the pack mind, but he's been good at not asking me too much."

"Jake and I decided not to mention it to Billy or Rachel just yet," I told her quietly. I felt a little guilty about keeping from them that Sarah was communicating with me, but Jake had been strong in his belief that it would upset them too much. "Maybe once this is all over, Bells, he had told me. We can think about it then."

"It makes sense, Bella," Leah said now. "It would upset them, and they would want you to pass messages to her. You need to be focussing on what will help you and Jacob move forward in your lives, not communing with someone who's been gone for years."

After an hour or so of chatting, Leah suddenly grew quiet.

"What's wrong?" I asked her, curiously.

"I was just wondering if you would mind something," she said hesitantly. I gestured to her to continue. "Would you mind if I put my hand on you? Over the baby? It's just to see if I can feel anything."

"Go ahead," I told her, genuinely not minding. She smiled, apparently delighted, and placed her hand over my lower
abdomen. I felt the heat of her touch and kept my eyes on her face, wondering what she would feel.

A soft expression came into Leah's eyes as she met my gaze. "I can feel him," she said. She looked overwhelmed. "He's strong."

"What do you feel?" I asked her curiously. Not even Jake had said he could feel anything when he placed his hand over my abdomen.

"I feel his energy," she told me. "I think it's his tiny Spirit. It kind of ... buzzes in my hand."

Instinctively, my hand went to my abdomen. Needless to say, I felt nothing.

"This is why I phased in the first place, Bella," Leah told me quietly. "To protect my Alpha's child, the future Alpha. To ensure he lives despite the evil you both face. I know it."

"Why you?" I was genuinely curious. "Why not Seth, or Embry, or any of the guys?"

"I think because only a female wolf could feel the maternal pull," she said. "I mean the guys can love their child, but the love of a woman for a child ... it's unsurpassable. And for some reason, your baby needs me to fight for him."

"Leah? I asked her. "I want you to tell me straight. Do you think I'm going to survive?" I couldn't think of any other reason why Fate or the Spirits would decide my baby needed an alternate mother.

"Bella I honestly don't know what's going to happen," Leah told me sharply. "I'm not looking into the future or anything like that. I'm just telling you what I feel. I'm here because the future Alpha of the pack needs me to fight for his survival. That's all I know."

The rest of the day passed. I practised exerting my will over my Spirit again. I could move away from the pull exerted by Jacob and Edward, while strengthening it. It was truly becoming easier to do and my mood was positive when Leah accompanied me to the cottage once more.

Jake was in good spirits, too. He had spent more time with Jasper that day, and was feeling calmer again. He had agreed to meet with Carlisle's old friend, Matthias, who claimed to know how to return my soul to me.

Our mood was almost celebratory that evening. Looking around our cottage, we realised there was very little left to be done. It was already clean and habitable, and just a little decoration was required now. I felt guilty that I had personally done so little, but Jake was adamant that the pack had been enjoying having something to do.

We ate, we talked, we made love, we dreamed of the life we were poised to build together. And when it was time to go back to Billy's, Jake stopped me by the front door and kissed me deeply, his tongue dancing with mine.

"What was that for?" I asked with a smile when he finally pulled back.

"Because I love you. Because you make me happy. Because I can't wait to start the rest of my life with you and our baby," he replied sincerely.

The next day was Wednesday.

It was the day our lives were ripped apart.

A/N: Phew! Finally. Coming up are the chapters I've been looking forward to the most. Yay! When would you like the next one cos, you know, it's all written and beta-ed...
I woke alone on Wednesday morning. Jake had left a note on the pillow telling me he was phasing with Leah for half an hour and would hopefully be back before I even read the note. I smiled and lay in bed for a few minutes longer, trying to decide what my body wanted. I quickly decided that food wasn't an option and headed into the shower instead.

By the time Jake and Leah came in, I was in the kitchen making breakfast for everyone. Leah seemed even more serious than usual but then I hadn't seen her around Jake much. I thought it may be being around her Alpha that had that effect on her.

We spent some time planning the day. Charlie's hospital appointment was at 3pm. None of the pack would be available to bring him. Jake was meeting with Matthias and Carlisle, and was bringing most of his wolves with him. Those who weren't with him would be guarding the reservation, and me.

"It's probably unnecessary, Bells," Jake reassured me when he saw my concern. "I'm just showing them our muscle, that's all."

"Leah and I can bring Charlie to his appointment," I told Jake, but his eyes instantly clouded with concern.

"Honey I don't want you off the res without me. There must be another solution."

"Jake I'll be fine with Leah," I protested. Leah, however, was shaking her head.

"No way, Bella," she told me. "I value my hide too much. No way am I going to be responsible for you on Cullen territory." Turning to Jake, she asked, "What about Rachel or Kim? I can help get him in the car and an orderly can help at the other end. They would just need to drive."

"Fine." Jake got out his cell and began texting. "Paul's car's got more leg space than Jared's. Charlie would be more comfortable in it. I'll try Rachel first."

Rachel's reply was almost instantaneous. She would come round at 2:15 to collect him.

Jake kissed me on his way out. "See you at the cottage later, honey."

"Be careful, Jake," I pleaded. "Stay safe with this vampire. We don't know anything about him."

Jake smiled and kissed me again. "I promise I'll be careful."

Leah's serious demeanour remained after Jake had left. I finally asked her what was wrong.

"I don't like not knowing about Matthias. That's my brothers going to meet with him today," she told me. "I mean, Seth is literally my brother, but the rest of them are like brothers to me as well. I'm just a little worried, Bella, that's all."

I wasn't convinced she was being entirely honest.

I spent most of the remainder of the morning practising strengthening my Spirit. It was becoming easier all the time. Access the beautiful glow, fight the pull to Jake and Edward, concentrate on making the glow brighter and thicker.

I had scarcely eaten all morning. Breakfast was upended in the toilet. Toast mid-morning had the same fate. I finally managed to hold down some lunch and spent some time chatting with Leah, Charlie and Billy.

Sometime just before 2 pm I began to feel drowsy. The fatigue hit me hard sometimes and I had no other option but to give in to it. I yawned widely and Charlie noticed.

"Go for a nap, Bells," he told me. "No point fighting it. I'll tell you what the doc says when I get back."

"Okay," I agreed. "I really need a sleep." Charlie patted my hand as I passed and I smiled at him. We had been getting to know each other gradually over the past few days and I liked it. I didn't think we would ever had a stereotypical father/daughter relationship, but I wasn't sure it mattered. Having some kind of relationship was better than nothing.

I went to lay on Jake's bed and fell asleep almost instantly. I woke with a start some time later. I was fairly sure a howl had wakened me. The cabin was almost eerily quiet. I was used to the bustle of several people being there. Even when nobody was moving around, or only pack members moving at wolf stealth, the hubbub of conversation or the television was continuous during the days. Yet I was met with total silence when I awoke.

Stretching, I called out to Leah. I knew she must be around somewhere. A fate worse than death would be meted out to her by Jacob if she left me unattended. I listened for her answer, frowning when it didn't come.

I walked slowly out of the bedroom and headed to the living room. Checking my watch, I saw that it was 2:45. I had slept
for an hour, and Charlie would be on his way to the hospital with Rachel.

Going into the living room, I saw Billy sitting in his wheelchair. His head was tipped back, his eyes were shut, and his mouth had dropped open. A light snore confirmed he had fallen asleep. The television was off.

"Leah?" I whispered. I didn't want to waken Billy and I knew she would hear me anyway. There was still no answer. I stood in the middle of the living room, wondering where she was. The bathroom door had been open when I passed so I knew she wasn't there.

Shrugging, I decided the mystery would be solved sooner or later. I was parched and wanted a cup of tea. I made my way into the kitchen, smiling to myself at the solitude. It had been days since I had had some time completely alone.

I had just put the water on to boil when my phone beeped in my jeans pocket. Pulling it out, I saw a text from Rachel.

*Need help. Car broken down just before the interstate. Charlie having some kind of seizure. Please come immediately!*  

Frowning, I tried calling her while I grabbed my truck keys and a bottle of water from the fridge. There was no answer. Fear for Charlie gripped my heart and I flew out of the cabin and towards my truck. I didn't know where Leah was and I knew Jake would be furious when he heard I had left the safety of La Push. But his sister needed help and my father was ill. The wolves were all with Jake as he met with Matthias and Carlisle. I didn't see any other option.

One hour earlier

Leah sat cross legged on the floor of Jake's bedroom. Her eyes were trained on the sleeping form of her Alpha's imprint, but her mind was elsewhere. She was grateful for these minutes of solitude. She needed time to think. Bella had come in here fifteen minutes ago. When Leah had heard her heart rate drop and her breathing become steady in sleep, she had crept in, hoping for some peace. Billy and Charlie were talking ten to the dozen in the living room and she couldn't hear herself think.

Leah was deeply, deeply worried. She hadn't expected what she had seen when phased with Jacob this morning. Trusting her as he was with his wife and unborn child, he had held nothing back from her. Leah had seen the extent of his love for Bella and his son. She had seen how all-consuming his imprint was. Her wolf had bowed down before its strength. Everyone had always known that the Alpha's imprint was by definition the strongest, but nothing had prepared Leah for this.

Jacob was utterly desperate to release Bella from the hold Edward had over her. He was prepared to do absolutely anything that was necessary to achieve it. Including walking his entire pack into a meeting with an unknown vampire.

Leah didn't trust the Cullens. She was frightened by Jacob's willingness to meet with Matthias that day. She was inclined to believe that the unprecedented calm Jasper seemed to be able to bestow on her Alpha was some kind of bloodsucker's trickery. She had been shocked to see that Jacob had actually reached the same conclusion himself.

Leah knew about the Mark. She knew that if the worst happened and they were unable to Protect Bella from harm, Jake would likely die with his imprint. Leah was absolutely certain, certain beyond any doubt, that she had phased two and a half years ago because she was destined to Protect her Alpha's son, thus ensuring the next generation of wolves had a true leader.

The only reason she could think of for having this Fate, was if Bella was going to be under an attack so terrible that she would be unable to protect her own child. And if Leah was right, that meant Jacob's life also hung in the balance. If the baby was to survive, Bella obviously wasn't in any immediate danger, but Leah had seen that morning how desperate Jacob was, and how willing he was to do absolutely anything to resolve the situation.

Leah was very much afraid that her Alpha was going to end up making a foolish mistake. Perhaps not now, but in the months to come. She hung her head in dread and despair. She could only pray to whatever deity may exist, that she was wrong.

Jacob raced towards the meeting point. He had most of his pack with him. Leah had obviously been left behind with Bella. Brady and Collin were patrolling the perimeter line, just incase Edward decided to take advantage of the pack being distracted by Jacob's meeting with Matthias.

Jacob sincerely hoped bringing his six remaining wolves with him was overkill. The arrangements had been clear. Carlisle, Jasper and Matthias would meet the Alpha at the place where the treaty had first been drawn up. Technically a part of the reservation, it was so close to the treaty line as not to matter for today's purposes. Matthias would share what he knew with Jacob. Arrangements would be made to do whatever needed to be done to retrieve Bella's soul from Edward. The Cullens would leave the area immediately afterwards. Edward would not join in their meeting today, incase his presence incensed the wolves.

What troubled Jacob the most was that the Cullens got nothing from this arrangement. They were helping their enemy and losing their home. He had asked Carlisle about it the day before. The doctor had said only that he wanted to ensure any damage done by his family was undone before they left the pack in peace. Jacob had believed him and felt calm and confident in the doctor's sincerity.
But then again, Jasper had been there too. Jacob was becoming increasingly convinced that that leech could control his moods.

Jacob knew there was a problem before they reached their destination. Call it a sixth sense or a premonition. Dread began to pool in the pit of his stomach and he skidded to a halt, commanding his wolves to stop with him. As one, they stopped mid-stride and waited for their Alpha. They had seen his doubts gather and take shape.

Sam, come with me. The rest of you stay back. If this is an ambush, it'll be better if they think there are only the two of us. You can surround them and attack that way if necessary.

The wolves had varying opinions on that, but Jake was in no mood to tolerate an open-ended discussion. This was how it was going to play out, and he would make it an order if he had to.

The Alpha and Beta of the pack made their way more cautiously to the meeting place. They scented the air carefully as they went. When they were close enough to detect the leeches, it was the opposite of what Jacob had been expecting.

There are only two of them! Carlisle and Jasper. What the fuck happened to the other one? He's the one that knows what we have to do!

Anger flashed through him like lightning and he took off towards the waiting Cullens at a flat out run. Sam struggled to keep up.

Phasing to human at the last minute, Jacob bellowed towards the leeches. "Where is he?" He felt his anger begin to dissipate and struggled to hold onto it. "Stop that!" he hissed at Jasper. "I don't know what the fuck you do, but you're fucking with my head and you need to stop it now!"

"Not your head, Jacob, your emotions," Carlisle confessed. "Jasper can influence emotions. I'm sure you'll appreciate how alarming your anger can be when it is directed at us."

"He's still doin' it," Jacob said. His voice was more docile than before but the expression on his face clearly showed that he was unhappy at being manipulated.

"I'm sorry, Jacob," Carlisle apologised. "We don't want any incidents and you are not going to like what I have to tell you, so Jasper will continue to keep you calm for the moment. Matthias has not arrived as arranged. I don't know where he is. I've been unable to locate him. I am deeply sorry, I hope you believe that. I will continue to attempt to find him, but I think for now the best thing is for my family and I to leave."

Jacob was struggling to muster his anger but he felt like he was in some kind of a fog. Shaking his head violently, he looked almost helplessly at his Beta, who was still in wolf form. Finally phasing into his own wolf, he took off at a fast run away from the Cullens until he felt his anger begin to return.

Fuckin' hell!

The pack had seen the conversation through Sam's mind link. They now had confirmation that Jasper could manipulate even their Alpha's emotions.

Paul - What do we do now, Jake?

Jake never had the chance to respond. Fear and anger flashed through the pack mind as Collin, at the opposite end of the reservation, detected a fresh leech trail. No, not one leech, nor two or even three.

Collin - They're fuckin' everywhere, Jake! There are loads of 'em! We're outnumbered!

Fall back! Do NOT try and take them on by yourself!

The Alpha order was bellowed. There was nothing quelling his rage now. Jacob howled for Leah. He needed every damn wolf he had and provided they kept the leeches away from the inhabited part of the reservation and a close eye on the perimeter line, he knew Bella should be safe at his dad's cabin.

Leah exploded into the pack consciousness and they all thundered in the direction of the invasion. The bloodsuckers seemed to be fanning themselves out around the perimeter line and an uneasy feeling grew in the pit of Jacob's stomach again.

They have inside information. They know where the border is. Edward must be behind this. Leah! Get the fuck back to Bella!

Sam - Jake, Leah is still your fastest runner, and one of your most vicious fighters. She'd be better with us.

Leah - Jake no! Let me Protect the baby. It's why I'm here.

Goddammit!
Jacob struggled with the decision. His heart wanted Leah with Bella and his unborn child. He believed Leah when she told him her purpose was to protect the future Alpha. But his mind, the fighter in him that now faced an unexpected battle, knew how lethal Leah was against leeches. He tossed his head as he ran, instinct warring with intellect.

Focussing deep within his soul, Jake looked for Bella. The part of him that had known she was hurt and frightened that dreadful day he had attacked Edward, was registering nothing now. Bella seemed to be safe.

Leah, you will stay with us. Seth, go to Bella. Stay phased though, I want a link to her.

Seth wheeled around and thundered off in the opposite direction. Even running at top speed, he wouldn't be at the cabin for almost ten minutes. That left Bella un-Protected for a full quarter of an hour.

Rachel was laughing as she drove. She and Charlie Swan had been getting to know one another quite well since he had moved into her father's home with Bella. For all he was quiet, he had a dry sense of humour that Rachel appreciated. Charlie, for his part, found Rachel so like her mother that she was a joy to converse with. She made him feel nostalgic for idyllic days long gone, when he and Billy would take their girls out on dates together.

Charlie's hospital appointment was in less than half an hour. Rachel knew she didn't have a prayer of helping him out of the car and into the hospital when they arrived. She hoped a hospital orderly could help to transfer him into a wheelchair when they arrived. She thought that it was bad luck that Charlie's rescheduled appointment coincided with the entire pack needing to back Jacob up.

That thought brought a slight frown to Rachel's beautiful features. Her foot eased up slightly on the gas pedal. Am I being paranoid? Checking her surroundings, Rachel realised they had already crossed the treaty line and were outside the pack's Protection. Hesitating, she wondered whether she should just turn around. Charlie's appointment could be rearranged and perhaps it was better to be cautious. Undecided, she drove a little further.

Howls reverberating through the forest behind her finally made Rachel's mind up. Something had clearly gone wrong. She braked and turned the car around.

"What's going on?" Charlie asked from beside and a little behind her. His seat had been pushed all the way back to allow for his cast.

"I'm bringing us back home, Charlie. You can call me paranoid all you like and I'm sure the pack will give me a roasting for this later, but something feels off."

Charlie looked at her in surprise. He was a damn good cop and his instincts were telling him nothing. He opened his mouth to ask her what she was talking about but ended up gasping in pain when she hit the brakes with such force that he was thrown awkwardly forward against the cast on his broken leg.

The police Chief and the Alpha's sister stared open mouthed through the windshield at the figure standing in the middle of the road.

"Edward!" Rachel gasped. Throwing the gears into reverse, she never even got the car in motion. Edward's form blurred as he ran to the back of the car and began pushing it off the road.

Rachel had the blood of the wolfpack running in her veins. Had she been male, as the first born of the twins she would have been Alpha. Just because she was a woman didn't mean she hadn't inherited some of the necessary traits. Her mind raced at top speed. She was defenceless against a vampire and the man next to her was immobile. They had no way to outrun Edward Cullen. She knew of his mind reading abilities. There was no way of outwitting him.

Co-operate, she told herself. Locking her door against him would be useless. She ignored Charlie, who was barking instructions at her. All of them futile. As soon as the car drew to a stop, Rachel opened her door and stepped out.

"A sensible decision, Rachel," Edward intoned. Extending his hand to her, he asked her for her cell phone.

"Why?" Rachel dared to ask.

"You can give me it, or I can take it," was the only response she received. Trying stubbornly to steady her shaking hands, Rachel reached into her pocket and handed the leech her cell. She watched as he did something to her phone at supernatural speed.

"Now, Rachel, what will I do with you and Charlie?" Edward displayed his razor sharp teeth in a twisted smile.

By the time Rachel's phone sounded the ringtone she had assigned to her brother's imprint, Rachel Lahote, nee Black, was lying crumpled on the ground.

Seth watched as his pack drew ever closer to the incoming leeches. Although part of him wished he was with them, he knew guarding Bella and her child was of the utmost importance. The rest of the wolves were almost upon the intruders. One, a short male with flowing brown hair, stepped to the fore before any wolf could launch itself in combat.

"I am Matthias!" His voice rang clearly through the air. "I wish to speak with Jacob Black. We have not yet crossed the
treaty line and are therefore immune to an attack."

Seth felt Jacob phase out and watched through the pack mind as his leader strode, unashamedly naked, towards the speaker. "You're wrong, bloodsucker!" he spat out. "Our treaty is not with you. And as Alpha of this pack, I declare it void. Give me one good reason not to give my pack the command to attack."

"You are outnumbered," Matthias stated.

Jacob scoffed. The pack may be outnumbered but they were a well honed leech killing machine. There were few doubts in the pack mind. A rapid count of the bloodsuckers had them numbering fifteen. It would be a tough fight, but the pack would be the victors.

"I wish to speak with you independently of the Cullens," Matthias offered.

Jacob crossed his arms over his chest. "You have ten seconds."

"Edward Cullen has a plan in motion for this afternoon, one which I was requested to help him execute. Carlisle and the rest of the family have, to my knowledge, no awareness of this plan. I can offer you all the information I have, in exchange for the opportunity to study your pack," Matthias said.

"Why in the hell would you want to study my pack?" Jacob asked, clearly bewildered.

"I am a 700 year old vampire, Mr. Black," Matthias explained. "I have not had my curiosity piqued for at least 400 years. In my time, I have studied all manner of legends and folk lore and probably possess more knowledge on the facts behind mythical creatures than any other being in existence. I have never once had the opportunity to observe a pack of Shifters. I would ask you to allow me to learn your ways, in exchange for information regarding Edward Cullen, and the soul of your imprint."

Seth neared the red cabin. Before he ever got there, he knew he was too late. He detected only one heartbeat, which he recognised as Billy Black's. Bella's truck was gone. A fresh trail of her scent led to where it had stood in the Blacks' front yard.

Get Jake to phase back!

Hating what this would do to his Alpha, Seth nonetheless knew that he had to let him see it. He saw through the linked mind as Jacob turned his head to look in surprise at his pack. The wolves had simultaneously all started yipping and barking at him.

Narrowing his eyes at Matthias, Jacob said, "Don't move!" He shimmered and became his wolf, instantly seeing what Seth was showing him.

The dread and terror that raced through the Alpha wolf drove him to his knees in front of his enemies. The whole pack were crippled by the force of his pain. They staggered under the weight of it and whines emitted from several of the wolves.

Matthias took one step forward. "I presume Edward Cullen has executed his plan. I have information that you need, Jacob. Just give me your word that I can study your pack and I will share everything that I know with you."

White hot rage seeped through Jacob Black's veins, eliminating his fear. With a vicious snarl which began as a wolf and ended as a man, he covered the distance to the ancient vampire on two feet. One huge hand circled Matthias' neck and he began to squeeze. With pure Alpha dripping from his tones, Jacob bit his words out. "Start talking. Right. The fuck. Now."

A/N: Next chapter tomorrow or the day after.
Chapter 27: Chapter 26 Your Soul Is Mine, Bella

A/N: I have one last request please, before the hitmen arrive for me. And that is ... Trust me.

Matthias talked rapidly. He had not survived for seven centuries by forming loyalties or emotional bonds. He wished to secure his own survival, and he hoped for an opportunity to win favour with the wolfpack which paced before him.

With one gesture, Matthias dispersed the vampires accompanying him. Their instructions had been clear. Back Matthias up if needed. Do what they want after that. If that included destroying Edward Cullen, so be it.

With his eyes firmly on the huge Alpha who towered over him, Matthias offered his information. He spoke of Edward's hold over him and how he had longed to be free of that debt. He explained how Edward had contacted him a week ago, asking for information on the reasons why a vampire required a piece of his singer's soul. Matthias detailed what he knew. The vampire's soul would feed from the singer's, at the moment when the human soul imploded. This repaired the vampire's warped soul and was considered to allow even such an abhorrent creature of the night, a chance of redemption in the afterlife.

The ancient vampire watched Jacob Black's eyes fill with horror and dread, only to be replaced by a rage even more primal than before.

"So Edward believes if he bites Bella, he can use her soul to complete his own," he concluded. Matthias inclined his head in affirmation.

"She's missing," Jacob stated. His eyes searched the vampire's. "There was a window of fifteen minutes where she wasn't guarded. She drove away in that time. What do you know about that?"

"Only that Edward is behind it. I don't know exactly what his plans are, Jacob. I was asked to meet with you today with Carlisle. Those arrangements were made through Edward. He told me only that my presence was required to execute his plan. He knew you would bring your entire pack with you to meet with an unknown enemy."

"Why weren't you with Carlisle?" Jacob demanded. He was growing impatient, both man and wolf keening for Bella and his child.

"Because I knew Edward would double cross me. He told me you have a small pack. Clearly, he lied about that. I believe that he thought you would attack before listening. He probably presumed that as soon as I told you about what he had planned for Bella's soul, you would destroy me on the spot. He has underestimated your leadership, Jacob. And as he can read minds, that leads me to believe that you have exceptional self control. Again, I ask you for the opportunity to study your pack."

"We'll get back to that. Do you know where he is? Where he might have lured Bella?"

"No. Carlisle is the best person to help you there," Matthias told him. He watched curiously as a dark silver wolf whimpered suddenly and jerked as though in physical pain. He continued to watch as Jacob's head whipped around towards him. The wolf approached his Alpha, cowering as though afraid of being reprimanded for stepping out of formation. Matthias observed, fascinated, as the leader's shrewd gaze flickered to his other wolves. In unison, they bowed their heads to him while shifting uneasily. Jacob turned back to the silver one, nodding his permission.

An enormous man, smaller than Jacob but still impressively built, appeared in place of the wolf. The panic on his face was unmistakable.

"It's Rachel, Jake. Something's happened. I can't explain it. I can feel it."

"Where is Rachel?" Matthias asked sharply. Who she was didn't matter. She was clearly important. This had Edward Cullen all over it.

"Off the reservation," Jacob replied quickly. "She's bringing Bella's father to a hospital appointment." Understanding snapped in his intelligent eyes. "Do you know anything about that?" His tone was ferocious as he glared at the vampire who boldly stood his ground in the face of Alpha fury.

"I know nothing about it. But you can rest assured that if Bella's father needed to leave the reservation at the same time as you and your pack were unable to provide Protection, Edward is behind it."

"Then they're heading to the hospital. We'll start in that direction and scent them from there. Let's go!" Jacob clapped his brother on the shoulder. "We'll find them, Paul. I swear on my own fuckin' life, we'll get the girls back."

One final thought occurred to him. Turning back to Matthias, he steeled his nerves before asking, "If Edward does manage to bite Bella, can she survive it?"

"No. It will be death or turning."

"She's pregnant."
Matthias rarely revealed emotion. He had seven centuries of practise refining his facade. Yet even he could not hide his shock at this latest bombshell. Turning a pregnant woman was the kind of evil associated with the darkest of vampires, not a member of the Cullen family. "Does Edward know?"

"He didn't. He might now. What happens to the baby if he bites her?"

"Find her." It was all Matthias could say. Jacob nodded, exploded into his wolf and raced at the head of his pack in the direction of Forks. He never saw the old vampire shake his head in disgust at Edward's actions. He never saw him take off in the direction of the Cullen home.

**Bella's POV**

I pushed my truck to its limit to reach Charlie and Rachel. I had tried again and again to call her. She wasn't answering. I began to wonder why she had texted instead of calling. My instinct was telling me that something was off. I drummed my fingers against the steering wheel as I drove. I had no way of contacting Jacob. I didn't know where Leah had disappeared to. Each and every wolf was busy. Rachel wasn't answering her phone.

I knew even before I saw Paul's Chevy at the roadside that things were not as they seemed. I knew that it wouldn't be anything good that happened when I pulled up behind the car and got out of my truck. Almost in slow motion, I took one step, and then another. Rounding the side of the car, I saw Rachel first. Her body was lying crumpled on the ground. I cried out and ran to her, stopping only when a frantic banging sounded in my ears.

Looking up, I saw Charlie pounding on the window with his fists. His face was panic stricken and he was gesturing wildly for me to run. His eyes widened and he looked past me at something that was apparently approaching me from behind.

Spinning on the spot, I came face to face with the boy who had haunted my nightmares and hidden in my closet.

"Edward!"

"Bella," he smiled crookedly at me. "Today brings me all kinds of surprises." His smile contorted into a disgusted grimace. "You're pregnant."

Jacob let some of his fear in as he ran. He knew it was handicaping his wolves, and that Paul's own terror was fuelling their agitation, but he needed to deal with some of it. He knew he had to face it before it could incapacitate him. Steeling himself, he allowed it to seep through his mind.


He felt it, the moment her fear spiked. He let loose a howl that split the air with its agony. Bella had realised she was in danger. The light in his soul that was his Bells flickered in terror.

_Edward has her._

Carlisle knew it was Matthias before he even opened the door. He opened his mouth to greet his old friend, and stopped when he saw the look in his eyes.

"Where is Edward?" Matthias demanded.

"We don't know," Carlisle admitted. "We've been unable to find him this afternoon."

"Your fortune telling pixie? She doesn't know where he is?"

"Alice has been unable to see Edward for days. We think because of the involvement of the wolf pack in his immediate future," Carlisle explained. "Am I correct in saying you are not late for our meeting, but had no intention of turning up at all?"

Matthias spoke rapidly again. Without detailing exactly what hold Edward had over him, he filled in the gaps in Carlisle's knowledge. He told the horrified doctor everything he had told Jacob Black, and informed him that not only had Edward manipulated the afternoon so that he could get Bella alone, but that the girl was with child.

The entire clan had gathered while Matthias spoke. Esme had clutched her hand to her chest, as if her dead heart could ache at this news.

"How? How is it possible? Edward wouldn't..." she whispered.

Carlisle put his arm around her shoulders. "He has, Esme. That much is clear."

Rosalie stepped forward. Her face was frozen in a mask of pain. "Bella is carrying a baby?"

"She carries the heir to the Quileute wolf pack," Matthias confirmed. "If your... son, should inflict any harm on the girl or her child, then so help all of you." He turned to go, pausing only to allow Rosalie to shoot past him.
"Rose!" Esme called after her. It was too late. As fast as the wind, Rosalie had already gone.

Alice sank to the ground and buried her face in her hands. "Rosalie's future has just disappeared too!" she wailed.

Bella

I tried to rein in my sobs as I hung uselessly over Edward's back. He had slung me onto his back and was running with me, piggy back style. His icy hand gripped my wrists around his neck like a vice, his other hand round my ankle like a manacle. I was pinned against him, and helpless. He felt like ice and marble as he flew underneath me. Motion sickness had quickly hit me and I had had to shut my eyes.

Every few seconds, Edward would stop and rub my back against a tree before taking off again at such speed that the trees around me blurred. I battled with the nausea that was rising in the pit of my stomach as I tried to work out what he was doing.

I got there eventually. He was leaving a false trail. He wanted to lead the pack away from our real destination.

I knew Jacob would feel my fear. I could only pray he would find me before it was too late. I had no idea where we were going. I could only guess at why I was being whisked away like this. I tried to find my Spirit. I wondered if I could leave my body and somehow alert Jacob to my whereabouts.

I quickly realised that I may have become good at accessing my Spirit in the safe confines of home. Doing so while petrified in terror was not so easy.

Edward came to an abrupt halt, swinging me onto my feet. My legs instantly buckled under me and I collapsed to the ground, retching into the grass. When I finally looked up, I saw that we had reached a meadow. Edward was standing some distance away from me.

"Bella," he sighed my name sadly. "This should have been so different. I should have brought you here as my singer. I would have stayed with you through the necessary agony. And then we would have embarked on our eternity together." Sighing again, he took one step towards me. I flinched automatically away from him.

"Instead, you allowed yourself to be contaminated by that dog!" he stormed. His nose wrinkled in disgust. "You reek of him. The puppy that grows within you reeks of him." My hand flew automatically to my abdomen.

Oh God no no no.

"Edward please," I sobbed. "Don't harm my baby. I'll do anything you want, but please don't hurt my child."

His eyes were as cold as his body as he looked back at me. "I care nothing for your child, Bella. Why would I?"

I kept quiet, trying to will my mind to work. There had to be something I could do, something I could offer him, to persuade him to allow my child to live. I became aware of him watching me with curiosity. Well that was better than ice, I thought.

"How intriguing, not to know what you are thinking," he mused. "Tell me, Bella, how do you keep me out of your mind?"

"I - I don't know," I told him hesitantly. That was news to me. Could I use it, I wondered? It would mean he couldn't know if I attempted to access my Spirit form again. I thought again about leaving my body and trying to find Jacob. Would Edward be able to do anything if he felt my soul? I shut my eyes. Fear again incapacitated me and I was unable to find what I was looking for. Where are you? I thought in desperation.

Opening my eyes again, I screamed when I saw Edward's face right in front of mine. I used my hands to push myself backwards in the grass. I hadn't heard him approach. He cocked an eyebrow at me and inched closer to me. Jacob's words came back to me. He was playing a game ... I hate to think what he would be like toying with a human.

Anger flashed through me. I would not be played with like that. Setting my jaw, I kept very still, refusing to back away from him. He would do whatever he wanted with me anyway. I was damned if I was going to allow him to have a sick kind of fun first.

Curiosity returned to his eyes and his mouth quirked up into a crooked smile once more. "I hope you do survive the change," he told me. "You will make an interesting companion."

"How can you possibly know that?" I fought to keep my voice as steady as I could. "This is the first conversation we have ever had, Edward. I know you think you have some kind of a claim on me but you don't. You have a piece of my soul. Please, let me have it back and let me go. If you hurt me, the entire wolfpack will hunt you down and destroy you, you have to know that."

"Ah but Bella, the only wolf with the motivation to hunt me to the ends of the earth is Jacob. And as I am certain you know, if you do not survive the change, he dies too. It is that abhorrent Mark you have that connects him to you so tightly. It's as well I don't need to breathe, Bella." His eerily golden eyes glinted. "And even if you do survive the change, you will become your mate's mortal enemy. This is, I believe, a win-win situation for me."

"Let me go Edward," I begged him, another sob ripping at my throat. "Let my baby live. I'll come back, in 9 months. I'll give myself over to you if that's what you want. Just please let my baby live."
"Give your dog nine months to plot against me? Oh no Bella, after my brilliant plan worked so seamlessly this afternoon, Jacob will never allow me to remain unharmed in the vicinity. Besides, I went to so much trouble to get you alone today, I will not waste this opportunity." He inhaled deeply and grimaced. "I must admit, the moment of tasting your blood is less appealing now than I had imagined. It smells ... disgusting."

"Then don't do it," I pleaded.

"Oh, but Bella," he breathed. "As unpalatable as it may be, I must bite you and infect you with my venom. There is no other option for me."

"Why?" I was fairly sure I didn't want to hear the answer but all I could think about was stalling for time.

"Because," he responded with that crooked smile. "Your soul is mine, Bella."

I summoned every last ounce of my determination. This moment, right here, was what I had been practising for. This was why Sue, Jacob and Leah had all worked with me to help me access my Spirit and learn to strengthen it against an attack. Come on, Bella! I told myself desperately.

Focusing on the memory of Jake's eyes, his smile, his hand holding mine, I shut my eyes. I felt an icy hand brush my hair aside and tried to bite back my hysteria. Find it, Bella!

A frozen hand clamped over my mouth, preventing me from screaming. Razor sharp teeth cut through the flesh of my throat.

I was too late.

The pack thundered through the reservation lands, headed by their terrified and incensed Alpha. Paul, not usually the fastest runner of the pack, was behind Jacob by only a snout's length. His limbs ached and his muscles burned but fear for his imprint drove him on. Closer to the roadside than they would usually dare, the wolves raced in the direction of Forks.

Seth, having had a head start, got there first. Through the pack mind, they saw the moment he detected two vehicles at the side of the road. Paul's Chevy and Bella's truck. As one, the pack watched and listened with baited breath.

Two heartbeats. Rachel's and Charlie's.

Paul's knees weakened in relief. His stride faltered momentarily when Seth saw her lying on the ground. But she was breathing, and her heart was beating, and that was all that mattered. Charlie was leaning out of a smashed window, vainly trying to haul his body through.

The pack lost contact with Seth and knew he had phased back to human to offer his help. They were less than two minutes away. Racing towards their destination, each and every wolf felt their Alpha's heart break. Bella's truck was there, but she was not. Any slim hope he had had of intercepting her or managing to head Edward off before he got far with her, was gone. A leech had his pregnant imprint. There was no way this could end well.

Skidding to a stop beside Rachel, Paul phased to human and checked only to ensure that she was safe to move before pulling her into his arms. Sobs of relief racked his large body as he held her to him. Pushing her long black hair away from her face, he saw a nasty bruise. She had sustained a blow to the head.

"I gotta get her to hospital," he told anyone who was listening.

"Take Bella's truck." Jake's voice was terse with strain. "The keys are still in it." Paul stood, swiftly pulled the pants from around his ankle and yanked them on. Bending to pick up his motionless wife, he paused only long enough to look into Jacob's eyes.

"Find her, man. End this."

Jake nodded his agreement and headed towards Charlie, who had been pulled from the car by Seth and Brady.

"He took her, Jake." The police Chief's eyes were wild and he was rambling. "He was waiting in the road and he hit Rachel in the face. I think he used her cell phone to get Bells here. He ran off with her. He broke the car locks so I couldn't get out. He has her! And the baby... He has about a five minute head start."

"We're on it, Charlie." Jacob's voice was grim. "Seth and Brady will bring you back to dad's." Turning to them, he clipped his words out. "Let dad and the Elders know what's happened. The rest of us are going after Bella."

Exploding into his wolf with an enraged growl, Jake summoned his remaining pack members and they took off after the cloying scent of leech.

It didn't take long for them to realise that Edward had laid false trails. Snarling viciously, Jake split his pack up, sending wolves out in all directions until they found the right one. He knew five minutes was more than enough for Edward to place enough distance between Bella and the pack that there was nothing they could do. He knew she was still alive because her light in his soul continued to flicker in fear. There was no pain, though, and for that he was grateful. At least she wasn't...
being tortured, or suffering.

Dancing in circles, the pack crossed and recrossed an elaborate trail. They could see their Alpha becoming more and more frustrated and angry with each passing moment. As one, they longed to find something that would give them some clue as to which direction to head in.

It was Leah who found it. She seemed to have an uncanny ability to scent the baby and she darted north suddenly, diving deeper into the forest for several hundred metres before calling out.

*This way!*

The pack all turned in her direction and raced against time. Leah was the fastest and it didn't take long for her to gain a substantial lead. She focussed on her inner Spirit as she ran, convinced that she was close to her destination. Listening to her instinct, she increased her lead on the rest of the pack. Jake wasn't far behind her.

The six wolves accompanying Jacob saw through his mind when Bella's terror peaked suddenly. The moment of fear was followed almost immediately by excruciating pain.

*NO!*

It was Jacob who yelled it, but they all echoed him. They knew Bella had just been bitten. The last slivers of hope were gone.

Lowering his head and baring his teeth, the Alpha began to charge harder onwards. It only took seconds for the leech's poisonous venom to reach Jacob's Marked imprint. The pack watched in horror as their leader's massive frame jerked, quivered, and fell heavily to the ground.

His front paw twitched.

And stilled.

*A/N: I am hiding in the hills. I'll peek back out to post the next chapter ... soon ...*
I had heard that in the moments before death, a person's past life flashes before them. Highs and lows from their existence passing at breakneck speed through their mind's eye. My experience was the opposite. In the moments before my certain demise, I had glimpses of a future life that should have been mine.

*Jake taking me to the driftwood tree on the beach, telling me it, our cottage, was ready.*

Two hands joined ceremoniously together. One large and russet, the other small and pale. Gold wedding bands on our fingers.

*Jake carrying me over the threshold of our cottage, setting me on my feet and kissing my lips. His hand moving protectively to my swollen abdomen.*

*Holding my newborn son for the first time. Feeling his tiny fingers latch onto mine. Falling in love with the child I had created with the husband I adored.*

*Lying in the protection of Jake's arm watching our baby sleep on his chest. Tears glistening in his eyes as he whispered of his son's perfection.*

*Smiling at Jake's pride as he watched our son take his first step. Instinctively reaching out to catch the little boy when he stumbled, off balance.*

*Laughing as I watched Jake run along the beach, dangling our toddler son by his feet. Listening to the child's squeals of delight as I rubbed my swollen belly and wondered when our baby would arrive.*

*Making up with my husband in our marital bed after a silly row. Feeling him move inside me and knowing that no amount of anger or misunderstanding could erase the love we shared.*

In less than a second, each scene flashed before me. I felt hot tears flow from my eyes at the future we would not know. A kaleidoscope of colours blinded my inner eye as the pain from Edward's razor teeth seared my throat. I felt the sting of his venom begin to enter my bloodstream. My life's energy began to seep away and I realised he was draining my body of blood.

Shutting my eyes, I whispered Jake. There was nothing I could do. I had no way to fight this.

"Bella!"

The urgent voice wasn't in my head this time. It was as real, as palpable in my ears as my own ragged breathing.

My eyes flew open in shock. Was Sarah coming to help me Pass over to Death? My vision was blurred from tears and pain, a rainbow of colours still dancing behind my eyes. I made out her form, standing in front of me. She seemed to shimmer around the edges, much like Jake did before he phased.

"Fight, Bella! This is not over. **Look!**"

Sarah threw her arm out, pointing at something to my side. Something in my peripheral vision drew my attention. Turning my head painfully, I saw Edward standing a metre away from me. How strange, I was sure from the pain in my throat that he had still been biting me. I blinked my eyes to try and clear my vision. Red blood dripped from his mouth and chin. **My blood.** His eyes were wide in horror and fear.

"What have you done?" he gasped out.

Trying to raise myself on my elbow, I realised I was completely spent. My head fell back to the ground as my eyes fluttered shut.

The wolves were in uproar. The pack mind was a cacophony of noise and confusion.

*He's still breathing!*  
*His heart is still beating!*  
*What the fuck happened?*  
*Jake! Come on man, wake up!*

*Leah get back here NOW!*
That last was from Sam. The she-wolf's stride never faltered as she tore in the direction she had already been heading in.

*He's still alive, Sam! That means Bella is too. And that means I still have to Protect the baby.*

**Sam - Leah we don't know anything for certain. STOP!**

**Leah - You're not my Alpha, Sam.**

Quil was whining and pawing at the massive wolf lying deathly still on the ground. His ribs rose and fell, proof that he continued to breathe, and his enormous heart still beat in his chest. But he was completely unresponsive. Where his mind had been, there was now a blank hole.

**Sam - Come on, we need to bring him home. Collin, Embry, phase back and help me lift him.**

**Embry - No.**

Shock reverberated in the pack mind. Embry never refused to follow an order, whether it was issued by Jacob or Sam. He more than any wolf, with the possible exception of Seth, respected and adhered to the natural pack hierarchy.

**Embry - That's not what Jake would want, Sam. He'd want us to go to Bella. And if we're too late and can't help her, he'd want us to avenge her.**

Quil and Collin showed their agreement. Jared was indecisive. Sam bared his teeth at Embry, who shook his massive head at his Beta.

**Embry - No, Sam. I'm going after Leah. If we can't help Bella then Jake dies too. And there won't be anything stopping us from ripping Edward fuckin' Cullen to pieces.**

Spinning, Embry took off after his pack sister. Quil followed closely on his heels. They were Jacob Black's wingmen, and they would fight for him to death and beyond.

**Bella's POV**

I was out of my body, looking down at the meadow. My body lay on the ground, a deep gash evident on my neck. I looked lifeless, but I knew that wasn't the case. I wasn't dead, but I was hovering close to it. I wondered how much of my blood Edward had actually drained.

Edward. He also lay on the ground. He was twitching and writhing as though in agony. His eyes were staring straight at my Spirit, as though he could see me. As I watched him, I saw something rise out of his body. It was a black, burned looking carcass of a Spirit. Attached to it was a small, brilliant light.

His soul. My soul. They are joined.

I watched in horror as it rose towards me. I remembered Edward's words. **I must bite you ... Your soul is mine.** This was what I had been strengthening my Spirit for, I realised. Concentrating as hard as I could, I strengthened and thickened the outer glow of my Spirit. I watched as it glowed more radiantly around me and prayed it was enough.

Edward's blackened, charred Spirit came towards me, guided traitorously by the piece of my own that it possessed. With no idea what was going to happen, I could only hope my focus would hold.

In the instant before Edward's Spirit reached mine, the outer glow of my Spirit suddenly exploded into brilliant light. I had the sensation of warmth enveloping me, holding me tightly in a way reminiscent of Jacob's hugs. Emotion overwhelmed me as I understood that even now, when I was a hair's breadth from death and physically nowhere near my love, the power of his imprint was Protecting me. His Spirit was with mine.

The black abomination hit the outer perimeter of my Spirit and recoiled immediately. I watched in fascination as the blinding glow around me extended slightly and gently removed the piece of my soul from Edward's, returning it to its rightful place. My soul was complete once more.

Again and again Edward's Spirit attempted to invade mine. Each time, it was repelled. I felt my Spirit join with Jacob's, each drawing strength from the other. I remembered Sarah's words. **Together, you and Jacob are stronger than either of you are individually.**

After what seemed like an interminable time, the black abomination retreated, returning to its proper home once more. Edward screamed in agony on the ground the instant his soul re-entered his body. His writhing and thrashing continued and he began to moan inhumanly as though in torturous pain.

I realised that the sensation of being warmly enveloped was beginning to disappear and I knew Jacob's Spirit was now leaving. I cried out to him. **Don't go!**

**Come back to me.** His voice was merely a whisper on the breeze.
A blur streaked across the meadow, stopping beside Edward's agonised body. Horror filled me again when I recognised the blonde girl I had first encountered at the store in Forks. Rosalie!

"Destroy me," Edward pleaded with her. "The pain! It's ... worse ... than tu - turning."

His sister looked at him dispassionately. "Is she turning? Have you changed her, with a baby growing within her?" she asked him coldly.

"I tr - tried. Her ... body ... rejected ... ve - venom. Turned ... effects on ... m-me. Help me, R - Rose."

"No," she said finally. "You deserve this, for what you have done." Turning away from him, she knelt beside my body. "What happened?" she breathed. Rosalie reached out a hand and touched the wound at my neck. Lifting her fingers to her face, she looked at the blood as if it were her enemy. "I can do this," she said aloud. Her voice was strong with resolve. Placing one arm under my knees and the other around my shoulders, the vampire lifted my bleeding body and began to carry me away from the meadow.

My body pulled at my Spirit. Blackness surrounded me.

The russet wolf's eyes flew open and he snarled viciously, almost causing the three burly men carrying his heavy frame to drop him. Setting him down, Sam, Collin and Jared phased instantly into their wolves.

Sam What happened?

I don't know. Bella's still alive. The imprint Protected her from the venom. My Spirit met hers. We fought off Cullen's soul together. I don't know how it all happened. She's in a meadowsomewhere. She and the baby are still alive but so is Cullen. Leah! You found her?

Leah - I think so. Just ahead.

Embry - We've got Leah's back, Jake.

I'm on my way.

Jacob watched Leah as he ran in her direction. She whipped through some undergrowth and arrived in the meadow. Edward's body lay thrashing on the ground. Bella was nowhere to be seen.

Leah - One of the others has been here. Rosalie.

FUCK!

The hope that had been growing in Jacob's heart splintered again as he pushed his body harder, faster through the forest. What the hell did Rosalie want with Bella?

Leah - I've got the scent, Jake. I'm on it.

Jacob veered off course to head in the direction Leah was now going. His mind was all over his wolves. He watched Leah's route, he watched Sam, Collin and Jared bringing up his rear, and he watched as Embry and Quil arrived in the meadow.

Quil - We're here man. Can we rip him apart?

No. Bella's soul was returned to her but I don't want to take any chances. Stay with him till we find Bella.

Quil and Embry stationed themselves by the agonised leech, who begged them to destroy him. Knowing he could read their minds, they let him see what they wanted to do to him. What they planned to do when Bella was safe. His screams escalated.

Bella

(Blackness)

Leah was fast. She was closing in on Rosalie, she was sure of it. She checked in with her Alpha.

Jake? What do you think?

Let's just see how it plays out. If you need to take her down to get Bella, don't you dare hesitate.

Driven on by his fear and worry, Jacob wasn't far behind Leah when she finally sighted the blonde leech ahead. Rosalie, sensing the wolf behind her, came to a dead halt. She turned slowly to look at the grey wolf who was speeding towards her.

"I have no harmful intentions." Rosalie's voice rang clearly through the forest. "Bella has lost too much blood. Edward's
Leah paused only long enough to confirm that she and Jacob were of the same mind. Phasing to human, she strode naked towards her natural enemy.

"We have sufficient medical care to look after her on the reservation. I will take her now."

"She is pregnant," Rosalie argued. She cocooned Bella's body protectively in her arms. "The baby can survive. Carlisle knows what to do."

Leah's stride never faltered. "So do we. Bella is one of us. She belongs with us. I will take her now," she repeated. Stopping closer to the vampire than she was comfortable with, she extended her arms to receive Bella's limp form.

Rosalie looked as though she would argue. Her grip on Bella tightened and she took the smallest of steps backwards. After a hesitation however, she nodded curtly and placed the tiny woman in Leah's arms.

"Leave now," Leah commanded her.

"Please," Rosalie begged. "If there is any doubt about the baby ... please, contact Carlisle. He will be able to help you."
Leah inclined her head and the vampire turned on her heel and ran.

Leah sensed Jacob's approach. She knew she didn't want to witness her Alpha in the vulnerable state he would be in now. Laying his imprint gently on the forest floor, she phased into her wolf and backed away. Her eyes never left Bella until Jacob was by her side. Then, she turned and ran wolf home. She and her mother had work to do to ensure the baby's survival.

Bella

(Blackness)

Jacob didn't know what had happened. He knew his Spirit had flown to Bella's when she needed his Protection, leaving his body and scaring the shit out of his pack. He knew Bella's soul was intact again, and that the venom hadn't harmed her. How that could be, he neither knew nor cared. That was a puzzle for later. Another puzzle was why the wolves couldn't see his mind when he was in his Spirit form.

Right now though, all that mattered was the woman lying unconscious on the forest floor. He approached her softly, almost reverently. That she was still breathing, that her heart was still beating, was a mystery and a miracle. He felt the sob escape him as he reached out to touch her beautiful face. She was so cold under his heated touch, colder than usual. She was weak. How weak, he couldn't tell. The wound in her neck was still trickling blood. Jacob ripped some material from the shorts around his ankle to try and staunch the flow. Pulling on what was rest of the shorts, he lifted his imprint and began to carry her home.

Bella

(Blackness)

Paul clenched his jaw tightly. The plump little nurse fussed around Rachel, checking her IV and vital signs. When he had carried Rachel's unconscious form into the hospital, the doctor performing her initial examination had commented on the hard blow to her head. Paul had seen the little nurse take in his muscular form and reach her own conclusions.

It had taken every ounce of self-control Paul possessed not to phase in anger on the spot. Reminding himself that all that mattered was Rachel, he tried to block out the judgemental stares the nurse kept levelling at him.

Rachel's eyes had opened once. She had screamed NO and lapsed back into unconsciousness. It hadn't really helped Paul's case with the nurse, who seemed determined not to leave the room and leave him alone with his wife.

The ward door opened and Paul could have cried with relief when Donna walked through it.

"Paul!" she cried out. "I saw Rachel's name on the admissions board. How is she?"

"She has been unconscious for at least half an hour," the little nurse said. "A head trauma, cause unknown." She glared at Paul, who saw Donna raise her eyebrows.

"I know the family, Lorna," Donna said. "Why don't I take over here? I'm sure you must be due a break." Lorna hesitated. "I think the cafe have just had a new delivery of donuts," Donna added innocently. Paul would have grinned at the speed with which Lorna exited the room, had his imprint not been comatose on the bed in front of him.

"What happened?" Donna asked in a low voice.

"Edward Cullen. Please tell me you know about the Jake-Bella-Edward thing."
Donna nodded quickly. "Quil filled me in the day after our joining ceremony."
Edward got to Bella. He used Rachel and Charlie to lure her off the res. He seems to have hit Rachel, hard enough to knock her out good." His voice cracked as he continued. "Tell me she's gonna be okay, Donna.

Donna Clearwater had been born to be a wolf's mate. She may have been new to the pack, but she had the instincts of an imprint. Swiftly picking up Rachel's medical notes, she scanned the entries.

"All her vital signs are perfect. Doctor Wilson has ordered a cat scan to check brain activity but there's a delay getting that done. I'll go and check up on that."

She left the room swiftly, leaving Paul alone with Rachel. She heard him say his wife's name on a low moan just before the door swung shut.

Bella

(Blackness)

Charlie Swan was in a state of near hysteria. His daughter, his pregnant daughter, had been whisked away by a vampire, right under his nose. He had been powerless to stop it happening. Rachel had been dealt a blow to her temple so hard it had made Charlie wince inside the car. His leg ached, his head thumped, and nobody was giving him any answers.

Billy had listened in wide eyed silence to Seth's version of events. He had wheeled himself immediately to the phone and called the Elders. One by one, they had arrived in the cabin. Seth and Brady remained phased outside, the younger wolf coming in from time to time with updates. None of them had been good so far.

Jake had collapsed, seemingly unconscious. Billy's face had drained of all colour but he had continued to chair the meeting with the Elders.

Jake had regained consciousness and said Bella was still alive. The two men had exchanged looks of profound relief, until Brady had added that Bella was still alone with the bloodsucker.

Leah had found Edward but another of the coven seemed to have taken Bella.

Finally, Brady burst through the cabin door, almost throwing it from its hinges in his haste and eagerness to tell them that Jacob had Bella and was most likely on his way home with her.

Billy shut his eyes and hung his head slightly in silent prayer. Charlie blinked back tears. Brady told Sue that Leah needed her to get her bag of medicines. She was out the door before he had finished speaking.

Bella

(Blackness)

Jacob held Bella securely in his arms as he raced on foot to his father's cabin. He knew the pack would have everything under control. Whatever Bella needed would be ready and waiting by the time he reached there with her. Please don't be too late.

He could hear her heartbeat slow as it strained to pump whatever blood remained in her body. Her breathing was ragged and seemed to be worsening. Her body felt limp and lifeless.

Stay with me Bella. Don't leave me. I can't live without you.

Jacob was grateful for the Mark he had given her, joining their souls so intricately. If Bella died, taking their child with her, he did not want to survive without them.

Bella

(Blackness)

A/N: Can I come out yet? Or ... should I wait another chapter ... or two ...?
*Chapter 29*: Chapter 28 The Ticking Clock

A/N: I got hungry in hiding so I tried to find a wolf to Protect me. Unfortunately they were all already imprinted. So I'm back in hiding. Thank you to MistC and niamhg for beta reading … fast.

Bella

I didn't know how long I had floated in blackness. It felt like an eternity. It felt like no time at all. Blackness and nothingness surrounded me. It was above me, and below me. I welcomed it. I knew no pain. No fear. No threat. No dread.

Jacob was almost home. Relief that Bella was still breathing in his arms and her heart was still beating, mingled with a worry so deep it should have crippled him. Only the desperate need to get Bella and his child medical attention kept his body moving.

As he approached his father's red cabin, he knew there were too many people there. Of course the tribal Chief would have assembled the Elders, he realised. The Alpha's imprint had been bitten by a vampire. That was a serious event and the Council would need to convene to discuss how to document and handle it.

Jacob was in no mood to face them. It could wait for another day. He only needed Sue. She would know how to help Bella. He detected that she was there, with Leah. Banging through the cabin door, Jake made eye contact with nobody but instead brought Bella straight to his room, laying her out gently on his bed and covering her cold body with the blanket.

"Sue!" he called out. She was right outside the door and came straight in.

"She was bitten?" she asked fearfully.

"The venom was repelled. Don't ask me what happened. I don't know. She's lost a lot of blood, Sue. A lot."

"Has she regained consciousness at all?" Sue asked urgently. Jake shook his head, no longer trusting his voice.

"I need to know her blood type. And then I need to know exactly what happened."

Bella

I continued to float in the blackness. Sometimes, I felt a pull. A tiny, almost imperceptible pull. But by the time I had registered it, it was gone again.

Donna quietly slipped into Rachel's ward and shut the door firmly behind her. "Paul?" He didn't take his eyes off his wife, but nodded his head for her to continue.

"They've found Bella," Donna whispered. "He took too much of her blood but she's still alive and she isn't changing into one of them."

"The baby?" Paul asked, glancing at the young nurse for the briefest of moments.

"I don't know," she shook her head. "But I need to go now. I have blood and fluids for her, and an IV apparatus. I'm smuggling them down the back stairs. Seth is waiting there to bring me to La Push. Do you need anything before I go?"

"I'm fine, Donna. Will you be back?" Paul infinitely preferred Donna to Lorna.

"As soon as I can," she assured him. "Technically I'm still supposed to be working my shift. I've just said I have a family emergency and need to go for a while."

Paul nodded his head and returned his full attention to Rachel. He thought that Quil's imprint was pretty damn amazing. She had harassed a doctor somewhere in the hospital until he had given a time for Rachel to go for her cat scan. Within the hour, Paul would know whether his wife had sustained any brain injury.

Bella

I knew there was a reason I should try and find my way out of the blackness. I knew there was more than one reason. I knew they were good reasons. I couldn't remember what they were.

Sue set up the IV apparatus and set up blood and fluids for Bella. There was no way of knowing if the baby had survived the attack. It would be a few more weeks before Jacob would be able to hear the little heart beat. It was too early in the pregnancy to detect the fetus any medical way. Sue's main concern right now was keeping Bella alive.

Jacob looked like it was costing him every ounce of willpower he had to remain at the other end of the bed while Sue worked over Bella. Sue looked into his eyes when she was finished, and her heart almost broke. He looked at her with so much hope, pleading with her for good news. She knew she had to be honest with him.

"I don't know, Jacob," she told him, her hand on his shoulder. "I think we just need to wait and see, now." She had to bite back her tears when she saw his fear and pain in response to her words. He nodded and she left the room quietly,
knowing he needed some time alone with his wife.

Bella

More blackness. How long had I been floating like this? How long could I float like this? Nothingness continued to swirl around me.

Billy Black rarely raised his voice in anger. But for Andrew Mase on the evening that his pregnant daughter-in-law was bitten by a vampire, he made an exception. Andrew was Layla's uncle and an Elder. Ever since his niece had been imprinted on by Embry Call, Andrew had believed he should have more of a say in Council matters. In reality, he was a sub-Elder, one of the three lower ranking Council officials. His mouth and opinions frequently caused him to clash with Jacob. Billy usually tried to keep out of it.

"Do we have any idea of the effects of the bite, Sue?" Old Quil asked when she returned from Jacob's room.

"No. Jacob is certain that the venom did not infect her," she replied.

"Of course he'll say that!" Andrew scoffed. "She is his imprint. He isn't going to admit to having a ... a fledgling leech in his bedroom!"

"There was no indication that she may be turning," Sue told him, more acid in her voice than most people in the room had ever heard before. That alone should have been enough to deter Andrew, but he was not a wise man.

"I say she is a threat until we have proof that she remains human," he persisted.

"There is a wolf in the room with her," Billy pointed out. He was willing himself to stay calm. As tribal Chief, he did not have the luxury of allowing his emotions to run his affairs. "There are likely to be several more wolves around this cabin at all times until this situation is over. What harm do you think she could possibly inflict?"

"So you admit she could be turning?" Andrew gloated.

"No, I do not. I am simply telling you that in the highly unlikely event that the Alpha of the wolfpack has failed to detect a vampire turning, there are enough Protectors around to keep us all safe." Heat was seeping into Billy's voice despite himself. He was glad that Charlie had asked Sue for a herbal sedative and gone for a nap. If the police Chief had heard this conversation, he would have looked for his gun.

"And the child she is carrying?" Andrew pushed. "How do we know that the venom has not infected it? Should we consider a termination?"

Billy thumped his fist on the table at the same time as two burly men charged through to Jacob's bedroom. Billy's uncharacteristic roar partially drowned out the noise of the scuffle as Brady and Jared forcibly held Jacob back from flying at Andrew Mase with deadly fists.

"Get out of my home!" Shaking with rage, Billy only barely stopped himself from spitting on the sub-Elder as he scrambled out of the cabin.

Bella

There was that pull again. It was so small. Miniscule. Baby sized.

Baby sized.

Baby.

Baby!

Sam crept in to Jacob's room as midnight approached. Quil and Embry were still with Edward, he told him. The leech continued to writhe in agony and the wolves would be happy to destroy him.

"No," Jacob said. "I can't risk anything else harming Bella. She's not strong enough to sustain any type of injury. Either bring him somewhere and keep him there until I decide what to do with him, or ask the wolves to rotate staying with him at the meadow. I don't care which one."

"Okay Jake, I'll keep you informed. Is there any change?" Jacob shook his head. "Have you eaten?" Sam asked. Jacob again shook his head.

Sam left the room and returned shortly afterwards with a plate of leftover dinner and a jug of water. He left it by the bed and left again.

Bella

My baby was the reason I had to find my way out of the blackness. It was one of the reasons. The other was ... connected. Connected by love. That was important. I knew that instinctively.
Love.

Baby.

Jake!

Rachel's scan revealed no obvious brain injury. The doctor said it was just a waiting game, now. When she came round, he would be able to run tests. He also said, if the reason for her coma was traumatic, she may not want to come around.

Paul knew being struck by a leech would be traumatic enough. He began to talk to his wife, reassuring her that she was safe, he was there, he was Protecting her, he would never leave her alone again.

Rachel's eyes fluttered open just before dawn broke. They focussed on her husband and she smiled at him.

"You look like hell," she told him. He just laughed and kissed her.

Bella

Baby. Jake. Find a way out. I was looking for the pull now, waiting for it. What direction did it come from? I felt it eventually. Could I move towards it? I found that by willing myself to move, I managed easily enough. The closer I moved towards the pull, the stronger it became.

I waited to see some light. Light at the end of the darkness, was that not how this worked? I saw nothing. Blackness all around. I knew I was close to the pull, though. I could feel it. I was no longer moving of my own volition. I was being pulled by a force stronger than I was.

I hit the pull. It took me in its grip and swirled me up into a vortex. Spinning and tumbling, it pulled me to I had no idea where.

Jared and Sam had relieved Quil and Embry shortly after midnight. Seth and Brady took over at noon on Thursday. Edward's body continued to jerk and twitch on the ground. His screams had long since faded, being replaced by hideous moans. There was no doubt that he was in indescribable agony.

Bella

I was on a mountainside. Was this where Jake had brought me? Looking around, I couldn't tell. There was no sign of the cave, or the fire. No indication that a lake was nearby. I turned around to see what was behind me.

"Sarah!"

She was there, watching me. Not her light, or her Spirit. Her human form, as she had been in the meadow. She smiled sadly at me.

"Am I dead?" I thought I understood suddenly. This was heaven, and Sarah was here to greet me. Sadness overwhelmed me. I had lost the fight. I had left Jake and taken away his chance to be a father.

Sarah's answer surprised me and caused relief to flood through me. "Not yet, Bella. But you are closer to death than to life. This is the place of Passing. From here, most go onwards. A few choose to go back."

"I want to go back," I said immediately. Sarah nodded, the sad smile still on her lips.

"Believe me Bella when I say that I hope you will. But it is not going to be easy. Your body is weak and you have not had much practise controlling your Spirit."

As she spoke, I became aware of another pull. It was strong. I looked in the direction I felt it and saw an arched bridge, bathed in a golden light.

"That's the way onwards, isn't it?" I asked, pointing to the bridge and becoming aware that I had a physical form, here.

"Yes," Sarah told me. "It will pull you towards it. You will need to resist it."

"What lies beyond it?" I needed to know.

"I cannot tell you that, Bella. It is different for us all. Different, but the same. You will see for yourself one day. I sincerely hope, that will not be today," Sarah told me.

"How do I get back?" I asked.

Sarah smiled sadly again. "You need to find that within yourself, Bella," she told me. "I do not have the strength here to help you. Your body is in the wrong place for me to assist you. Part of my human essence lingers where your body rests, which is why you can see me here. But not enough. My essence needs to be stronger for me to guide you out."
"Where am I?" I wanted to understand. "Am I inside my Spirit?"

"Yes," she confirmed. "You are more deeply within your subconscious than you have ever been before. Try and find your way up. For Jacob. For your child. For your future. Fight, Bella! Fight the pull."

Her voice had become more urgent and I realised I was moving unconsciously towards the bridge. With an effort, I pulled myself back again. Panicked, I saw that Sarah was starting to fade.

"Where do I go?" I cried out towards her receding form.

"You need to find it within yourself." Her voice echoed as she disappeared. I was left standing alone, resisting the pull to the bridge.

Jacob sat by Bella's side constantly. He carefully replaced the blood and fluid bags when they ran out. He whispered to her of his unending love. He prayed that she would return to him. He dozed occasionally. He ate and drank little.

By Friday morning, there was no change.

Jacob refused to see anyone. Sue was allowed in to give medical attention. Sam as his Beta had been reluctantly allowed in when needed. But everyone else had to stay out. On Friday morning, Leah insisted on coming in.

"I can help, Jacob," she told him.

"How?" His voice was broken.

"I don't know," she admitted and he glanced at her. "Can I ... feel for him?" she asked. Leah knew better than to attempt to touch his imprint without his permission at a time like this.

"You can feel him?" Jacob suddenly remembered his conversation with Bella a few days earlier. "The buzzing in your hand. She told me. She was excited about it." Very aware suddenly that he was speaking of Bella in the past tense, Jacob bit down hard on his lip and averted his eyes from Leah.

Leah thought she would never forget this moment. Her strong, decisive Alpha, sitting broken on the floor, his shattered heart on his sleeve. "Yes," she told him, trying to keep her voice steady. "I can feel his Spirit in my hand. Can I try?"

Jacob moved silently aside, still holding Bella's fragile hand, and made room for Leah. Gently, she placed her hand over Bella's abdomen, smiling as she did so.

"He's still strong, Jake," she whispered. "He's alive."

Jacob placed his head on Bella's stomach and began to sob quietly. Leah touched his back gently, and left.

Bella

The pull to the bridge was intensifying. I struggled to stay as far from it as I could. I had explored around the mountainside. There seemed to be nowhere else to go. I could cross the bridge, or I could stay here resisting its pull indefinitely.

I couldn't find any other way out.

Edward's body was consumed with white hot flames. This was worse than the turning. He had thought the three days of agony he had endured to become a vampire was the most unbearable pain in the world. Now, he realised, he had been wrong. He would have taken that pain and welcomed it. At least his human body had been capable of passing out from the pain. His human brain hadn't been able to fully comprehend the enormity or the horror of it.

The only other thing he had to focus on was the minds of the wolves. Each one of them wanted to tear him to pieces, little parts of him at a time. They wanted to bite off small chunks of his marble flesh and make him watch them burn.

Right now, that sounded preferable to the searing white agony that coursed through every abnormal cell of his body.

Edward thought he knew what had happened. It was a phenomenon he had never heard of before. He wondered if Matthias had known it would happen. Bella's soul was Protected by the wolf's imprint. Apparently, so was her body. The poisonous venom had been rejected instantly. The effects of it had been reversed by some black magic he had never heard tell of before. And so he, a vampire, was actually being turned by his own venom.

Turned into what?

He had no idea. What did vampire venom turn a vampire into? He was only 48 hours into the necessary 72. 24 more hours of this agony.

Bella started to scream again.
I had tried to focus within myself, to find my Spirit. Then I realised that if I was already in my Spirit, perhaps I would see a glow surrounding the mountainside. I couldn't. I believed Sarah when she told me I was inside my own subconscious and had to find my way out. I just didn't know which way to go.

I was frightened. Every time I tried to find a way off this mountain, I stopped concentrating on the bridge. When I re-focussed my attention, I was closer to it. It was becoming harder and harder to move away from it.

I started to shout for Sarah.

Jacob watched as Sue fussed over Bella. She checked her vital signs and calculated how much blood and fluids had been pushed into her veins. With a small sigh, she disconnected the IV and removed the access needle from Bella's hand.

"What are you doing?" His voice was hoarse and sounded ready to snap with tension.

"She has had enough blood and fluids, Jacob. Giving her more would be ... frankly, a waste of time. There is no medical reason for her not to have wakened up." Sue swallowed hard. She hated herself for asking her next question, but it was the only thing she could think of. "Are you sure...?"

"Absolutely certain. Do you think I wouldn't know?" Jacob's fists clenched at his sides and he had to fight hard to rein in his temper. He knew he had been pushed to the limits of what he could emotionally endure. "There is no way she's turning, Sue," he finished more quietly. "I would know. I would smell the changes. I would feel it, inside. She is still human."

Sue nodded. It was good enough for her. "I can make a medicine, something with revival properties. You would need to feed it to her on a teaspoon, a little at a time."

"Anything," Jacob begged her. She had no doubt that he meant it.

"I'll be right back then," Sue said, leaving him alone with his wife once more.

Bella

Sarah returned in brief spells. Each time she could only tell me to fight the pull.

But the pull was growing stronger, and I was growing weaker. The bridge loomed ever closer.

Charlie and Billy had never sat in such prolonged silence before. They had nothing to do but wait. There was nothing to say. The good news they had received was that Rachel was fine, and would be home by that evening.

The other news they waited for, that they hardly dared hope for, was that Bella would also pull through. Death, though unthinkable, was not the worst case scenario.

The worst would be if Jacob was wrong. If she woke a vampire. Because really, it wasn't such an extreme possibility that he was deluding himself that her body had repelled the venom.

A human had never repelled vampire venom before.

The clock continued to tick.

Bella

I was close to the bridge. Too close. With an enormous effort, I dragged myself as far back from it as I could. I was almost immediately pulled forwards again.

Jacob, I sobbed.

Leah was exhausted. She hadn't slept at all on Wednesday night. She felt instinctively that it was within her power to help Jacob, to help Bella, to help the baby. But she had no idea how.

Flopping onto her bed in her mother's house, Leah shut her eyes and accessed her Spirit again. It had told her nothing throughout the day. Only what she already knew. That she was to Protect the baby. That suggested to her that Bella would survive this.

Leah couldn't stop the nagging certainty that she had to help somehow.

Finding the beautiful light that glowed within her, Leah entered her Spirit. She had never tried to manipulate her Spirit before, and had never attempted to leave her body. In truth, she was a little frightened of that idea. She simply relied on it to calm her and direct her. And, very occasionally, she spoke with her father. She couldn't control when that happened, usually.

As she mulled over the events of the past 51 hours, Leah felt herself grow drowsy with sleep. Her Spirit's outer edges glowed more brightly, and she heard her father calling to her.
Sarah was weak when she came again. Tears streaked her cheeks and I could tell she felt as useless as I did. She begged me to keep fighting. She told me my body was gaining strength and if I could only find my way back, everything would be okay.

The bridge drew closer still.

Jacob had fallen asleep. In the 57 hours since he had brought Bella back, he had left the room only to go to the bathroom. He had hardly eaten, scarcely drunk. Attempts to get him to keep his strength up were harshly rejected. How could he think of sustaining his own strength when his wife and child lay so close to death in front of him?

If iron will could keep them alive, Bella would be awake and in his arms already. Jacob had rarely felt so useless since phasing as a wolf.

He had patiently administered the medicine Sue had given for Bella. Propping her up against his chest, he had tilted her head slightly and angled the teaspoon into her mouth. When he felt her reflexively swallow, he repeated the procedure. He had no idea how long it had taken to get it all into her. Nor had he cared. He had been grateful for something to do that may help her, rather than just sit uselessly by her side.

It had made no difference.

Bella was so cold. So, so cold. Jacob had finally climbed onto the bed beside her and held her gently against his body to warm her. The proximity, the scent of her, the memory of her now lifeless limbs wrapped fiercely around him in passion, had finally cleaved through his heart.

He didn't know how long he had cried for. He knew his dad had come in at some point. He knew Billy had tears streaming down his own cheeks as he took in the sight in front of him.

Finally, Jacob had succumbed to sleep. His dreams, unsurprisingly, were uneasy. His mother was there and she was calling to him. She needed something but he couldn't hear her. He didn't know what she wanted. His sleeping body began to jerk restlessly as he struggled to work out what he had to do to help her.

He flew to a sitting position, his wolf reflexes waking him the instant the cabin door banged open. He detected Leah running through the living room and along the hall. His bedroom door crashed unceremoniously open as Leah all but threw herself through it.

"You need to get Bella up the mountain, where your mom's ashes are scattered," she cried to him. "Right fucking NOW!"

A/N: Alright, I know, there's only so long I can drag it out … So that's the last cliffy, I promise. Or, you know, for now … :P And just so as you all know, I am incredibly humbled and grateful that this fic has already reached 1000 reviews. So thank you all, so very much, for your amazing support.
*Chapter 30*: Chapter 29 Finding My Way Home

A/N: Bloodthirsty wenches! Here you are. Thank you to niamhg and Mist, as always, for beta reading. I'm sorry about the formatting for last chapter and this one. This site deletes things like line breaks and I've not found a way round it yet. Hopefully it's easy enough to follow when it changes perspective. This should be the last chapter where it chops and changes between characters so much.

Jacob didn't even hesitate. The words were no sooner out of Leah's mouth than he was off the bed with Bella in his arms. Bringing nothing other than the blanket she was wrapped in, he raced from his father's cabin and headed to the mountain.

Jacob didn't know why he should be doing this. He knew only that Leah had been frantic, and that her urgency had been very real. He knew, too, that doing something, anything, was better than sitting in the confines of a suffocating room.

At wolf speed, Jacob flew through La Push in the early morning darkness, and headed up the mountainside. He became aware that having not eaten much for two days, he was feeling weaker than he should. He pushed through it. It didn't matter.

Within twenty minutes of leaping from the bed, Jacob was laying Bella in the blanket in the mountainside cave. Wrapping himself around her to keep her warm, he began to wait.

Bella

The bridge was so close I could almost touch it. Part of me wanted to touch it. There was nothing threatening about it. It was inviting. Whatever lay on the other side was not something that would harm me.

Still, though, it wouldn't be my future with Jacob, either.

Wearily, I hauled myself back again. It was hardly worth the effort. I was instantly pulled almost to where I had been before. It seemed inevitable. How long before I gave up? How long before it just sucked me towards it? It would be so easy, so easy to just take one step, then two, and be on that bridge.

A blinding light flew over the bridge towards me. It was something strong, a powerful force. It swooshed towards me, grabbed hold of my hand, and pulled me with it as it swept away from the bridge.

I had no option but to go with it.

Mid-morning, Embry and Quil arrived at the mountainside cave. They carried Bella's basket, filled with food and drink from Sue. A backpack contained warm clothing for Bella and more of Sue's revival medicine.

They sat with Jake for a while. Little was said. They let him know his sister was home and doing fine. She was safe. Paul refused to leave her side. Jacob could understand that only too well.

They told him that Edward still writhed in agony in the meadow. Only six hours from now would mark the end of the three days the venom needed to take effect. The wolves were taking bets on what would happen at the end of those three days.

Jake was fairly sure it would be some kind of self-destruction. He had seen the charred soul and was certain it couldn't survive another round of venomous attack. Just in case he became another kind of monster, though, he told the wolves to keep him secure for now. Use as many wolves as necessary, he said.

The three men watched Bella. Her chest rose and fell steadily and her heart beat rhythmically. She could have been sleeping, except that her entire being looked limp and faded somehow. Her body seemed uninhabited.

Bella

At some point, I realised the powerful light pulling me away from the bridge was Sarah. The physical form I had seen here before was swathed in a brilliant glow.

I relaxed and trusted.

Rose stood mutinously in front of Carlisle and Esme. She was almost a century old and she felt like a scolded child. She was also pouting like one, she realised.

"Rose, please," Esme begged her for the hundredth time. "Tell us what you know."

"I told you what I know," she replied coldly. "I've been telling you what I know since the day Edward set eyes on Bella Swan. We should have left before any of this happened."

"Where is Edward, Rosalie?" Carlisle asked patiently, not for the first time.

"I don't know," she answered, telling herself she was being honest. She very greatly doubted that the wolves hadn't found him.
"We can't leave here without knowing where he is," Esme tried.

"Yes. We can. Edward made his arrangements without any reference to us." Rose's voice was growing heated again, as so often over the past few days.

"And you are no longer concerned about his obsession with Bella Swan?" Carlisle was shrewd. He knew Rose would only stop worrying about Bella if Edward was no longer a threat to her. Rose narrowed her eyes at him.

"I am no longer concerned about anything to do with him." She turned on her heel and walked out of the room.

**Bella**

Fog. Fog all around. Sarah was gone but so was the mountainside with the bridge. I hoped that meant I was no longer on the edge of Death. I felt cold. I longed for the warmth, for the sun. For my sun.

The 72 hours expired. Sam, Jared, Brady and Quil stood around Edward's body in the meadow, their hackles raised and their deadly teeth bared. They were all on edge, with no idea what was going to happen next. They were poised to do whatever they needed to in order to contain him. They longed to rip him to pieces, but were wary of his connection with Bella. They had no proof yet that the connection had been severed.

Edward's body stopped twitching and jerking. His eyes flew open. He let out one long, bloodcurdling scream and threw his hands in front of his face as though in self protection. He stilled.

Quil - *What. The fuck. Was that?*

Sam - *I think he's gone.*

Stepping forward, Sam lowered his muzzle to the body on the ground.

Jared - *Careful, Sam. We don't know what the fuck he is.*

Sam - *He's gone. I'm certain. We need Jake.*

Quil - *Ah hell. Leave Jake be, man.*

Sam - *No. I'm not making this decision on my own.*

Quil - *Let's just burn him to fuckin' pieces, Sam!*

Sam - *NO! If he's still connected to Bella, we can't touch him.*

Sam let out a howl that told Jacob he was needed. It only took a few seconds for him to phase in. He said nothing and the wolves whined at his pain. Sam showed him Edward's body lying on the ground.

*Take a piece out of him. Let's see what happens. Nothing that would destroy him though.*

Jacob didn't add, "or Bella". He didn't have to. He watched through the pack mind as Sam nipped at Edward's hand, taking a small chunk out of the side of it. With bated breath, they all watched through Jacob's eyes as he focussed on Bella's hand.

Nothing happened. The sigh of relief was palpable. The wolves watched their Alpha struggle with his next decision. He wanted to be the one to rip the leech apart. He wanted to savour it, and light the match himself. But he couldn't, literally could not, leave Bella right now. Quil was in a helpful mood.

*We'll bring him to you, Jake. There are enough of us. We can carry him between us.*

Jared and Brady shuddereded at the thought of their human skin being in contact with a filthy bloodsucker. It would take a week's worth of showers and some serious imprint fucking to eradicate the memory of such an atrocity. They were more than willing to do it, though.

The russet wolf clawed at the ground in anticipation. He knew what this journey would cost his brothers and he was deeply grateful. He had just one more request.

*Send someone for Paul. He has a right to take revenge for Rachel.*

**Bella**

Fog and cold. This was worse than the blackness. I ached, somehow. And I was so, so cold. There was no pull this time and I didn't know what to do. I was sick of feeling helpless. I was done with being frightened. I felt anger and frustration rise within me. They pooled somewhere in the very centre of me. They built, and built.

Four enormous native men walked at a rapid pace up the mountain. They carried a rigid lump of ice on their shoulders.
Sunlight peeked through the clouds occasionally, causing a myriad of sparkles to appear on the surface of the dead leech. All the men were wary. This was something they had never seen or heard of before. In their experience, bloodsuckers needed to be ripped apart and burned. Lying ominously still wasn't associated with the demise of a vampire.

Before starting on their journey, Sam had howled for Embry, who had raced to get Paul. Embry stayed with Rachel while Paul headed up the mountain. He was there before them, pacing in human form with black death in his eyes. He wanted revenge. He was only sorry that the leech didn't appear to be responding to pain.

Jacob emerged from the cave where Bella lay, entrusting her to Quil while he did what he had to do. Sam, Jared and Brady kept a respectful distance, watching while the two wronged men prepared to take their vengeance.

Jacob and Paul phased into their wolves. Paul's anger and hatred combined with Jacob's pain and seething rage, creating a storm of animalistic emotion. As one, they launched themselves on the prostrate form of Edward Cullen. They gave over to their wolves completely. This, most deadly of all their enemies, would be nothing more than a hideous memory within a few minutes.

Pointed teeth ripped marble from marble. Claws raked at hair and gouged at eyes. Piece by piece, their enemy was eliminated. Paul adhered to the natural pack hierarchy and eventually stepped back to allow his Alpha to finish the job. Jacob ripped Edward's head from what remained of his torso, phased to human, and took the match offered by Paul. He lit the leech up and spat on the pyre.

Turning to go back to Bella, a noise behind Jacob caught his attention. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw his pack brothers line up by the fire. Almost ceremoniously, one by one they followed his example and spat on the remains of Edward Cullen.

Bella

My anger and frustration reached boiling point. I couldn't contain them anymore. They needed to find an outlet. I had to find a way out of this fog. I had to find my way back to Jacob. I became aware of a warmth growing inside me, despite the cold of the fog. I was grateful for it. I concentrated on it. It seemed to be guiding me, pointing me in a particular direction.

My pent up emotions exploded and I shot in the direction I had been shown.

By the next morning, Jacob was at breaking point. Some part of him had thought that at the end of the 3 days, there would be a breakthrough of some kind. It hadn't happened. Another part of him had hoped that the message to bring Bells to where his mom's ashes were scattered would lead to some miracle or other being performed. That hadn't happened, either.

As the sun rose on the fourth day, Jacob began to wonder how long he could take this. He had talked to her until his voice was hoarse. Words of love and adoration had fallen out of the cracks in his heart and through his lips. He had pleaded with the Spirits and Sarah. He had given Bella more of Sue's medicine and water to keep her hydrated, administered painstakingly slowly on a teaspoon. He had lain silently with her in his arms, drinking in her scent as though it may be the last time he could.

Leah arrived at noon. It was Sunday, almost four full days since Edward had whisked Bella away. She brought further supplies of food and drink for Jacob. She had been finding it very difficult to stay away from the baby, but she knew her Alpha would not tolerate her presence other than only occasionally.

Jacob greeted her gruffly. "Is he still alive?"

Swallowing hard, Leah knelt down beside him. Her hand had barely made contact with Bella's abdomen when she gasped and pulled it away again.

"What?" Jacob demanded. He was in no mood for social pleasantries.

Leah placed her hand over the baby again. "He's ... he's fighting!"

Bella

Driven by my own anger, I flew through the fog. It began to clear. I cried out in relief when I saw Sarah's light waiting for me on our beach.

Leah left within an hour of arriving. She had had to tear herself away from the miraculous child who seemed for all the world to be fighting for his mother. He had always had a strong Spirit, but the energy she had felt from him had been like a jolt of warm electricity. She had tried to explain it to Jacob, her heart aching when he hung on her every word as though they were lifelines in turbulent waters.

Finally, she had made herself leave. Jacob needed to be alone with Bella. Leah understood that. She headed home and sat her mother down for a serious discussion. This was not mother to daughter. This was Spirit Warrior to Medicine Woman.
Alone once more, Jacob pulled Bella close to his body again. "He's fighting for you, Bells," he whispered in her ear. "Fight with him, honey. He has my blood. Listen to his instincts if you can. Please, Bells." Over and over, he repeated the words like a mantra.

At some point, Jacob entwined his fingers through Bella's. He raised their joined hands to his lips and held them there. He shut his eyes and began to silently pray again.

Bella

"You helped me back, Sarah." There were no words to express my gratitude. I knew she understood. I could tell by the way her light twinkled.

"Yes. Jacob moved you to the place where my human essence is the strongest. It gave me enough power to bring you back. I've been waiting for you to find your way here."

"Something showed me where to come," I told her. "I was angry and then something helped me use my emotions to break through the fog."

"That was your child, Bella," Sarah said gently.

I was filled with awe and wonder as I realised that what she said was the truth. I had been filled with impotent rage and my baby's tiny Spirit had helped me channel it.

"How is that possible?" I breathed.

Sarah laughed. It was a happy sound. "That is Jacob's son you carry, Bella. He's strong, and he's determined."

"So I can just make my way back as normal now?" I asked her eagerly.

Sarah grew serious again. "Yes, but you may find it more difficult because your body is still weak. Trust your instincts. I think more help is coming to you. And, Bella?"

"Yes?"

She smiled then. "You've won."

With Sue by her side, Leah shut her eyes and found her Spirit. She felt her mother take hold of her hand. The simple gesture comforted her. Leah was terrified of what she was about to attempt. Her instincts told her it was necessary.

Allowing her experiences of phasing to guide her, she allowed her Spirit to float out of her body. She saw her human form lying on her bed. Sue held her hand and watched over her carefully. Leah's fear left her. This was not a bad experience. She felt peaceful somehow. She headed for the mountain.

It took no time at all. She paused outside the cave, knowing Bella's Spirit was inside. She could sense it. She could sense more than one Spirit on the mountain. There was light, and there was darkness here. Leah's focus was only on Bella, though. Apparently, so was Jacob's. Leah heard him murmur to his love that he could feel her, she was getting stronger, please find her way back to him.

Feeling like a voyeur, Leah knew she had to enter the cave.

Bella

I couldn't control my Spirit. I had left Sarah and found myself looking down on my body, and Jacob. My heart broke for him and I longed to return to him. My Spirit floated uselessly around the cave. I couldn't find the way back into my body. Jacob looked at me sometimes, as he had done in his bedroom the night I learned how to control my Spirit. He whispered to me and I longed to whisper back.

I sensed other Spirits around me but saw nothing. I felt Leah before she entered the cave. I could see her. I looked at her in wonder. Her Spirit was so strong and beautiful.

"Follow me, Bella," she told me. "Just concentrate on me, and follow."

I did.

Jacob finally fell into an exhausted sleep, his hand still entwined with Bella's. The sun dipped on the horizon and the cold early November air cooled further still. His dreams were haunted. Chocolate brown eyes turned red as he gazed into them.

"Bella," he moaned aloud in his sleep. He squeezed her hand tighter.

A heavy rain began to fall outside the cave, large drops spattering noisily on the stony ground. Jacob slept through it.

A strong wind picked up, howling through the crevices of the mountainside. Jacob slept through it.
A night bird called out loudly from a nearby nest. Jacob slept through it.

Bella's fingers twitched in his hand. Just the slightest movement, Jacob's eyes flew open and he stared in disbelief at the girl lying beside him. Her head moved slightly, a frown marring her ashen face.

"Bella?" he heard the shock and hope in his own voice.

Her tongue darted out to wet her dry lips. Without daring to take his eyes from her, Jacob reached for a bottle of water. Holding it to her lips, he placed one hand under her head to raise it slightly so she could drink. The water was icy from the cold air and Bella coughed as it slid down her throat.

"Bella?" Jacob whispered her name again. He felt her head move a little in his hand and held his breath as he waited.

Her eyes fluttered open and their chocolate pools met his agonised gaze.

"Jake," she murmured. Her tongue was dry and her throat sounded constricted, but she was awake, and she knew him, and he couldn't help the floodgates that opened. Trying to be as gentle as possible, he gathered Bella's weakened body into his arms and heaved great racking sobs into her neck.

Bella was completely spent. Sarah had been right; her body was weak. She felt worn and exhausted, but she raised her arms and wrapped them around Jacob's waist, sshhing him as her own tears fell with his.

"I'm sorry," he said eventually. His face was still buried in her neck. "What do you need?"

"Don't be sorry," she whispered. She couldn't summon her voice but she knew he would be able to hear her anyway. "I only need you."

They clung to each other for a while longer, until Jacob remembered that Bella needed care. Handling her as though she would break, he sat back against the cave wall and pulled her gently into his lap. Tilting the bottle at her lips, he watched her drink slowly from the bottle. He couldn't have taken his eyes off her if he tried.

"How long have I been out?" she asked eventually. "It felt like a long time and I know that means it was even longer here."

"This is the start of the fifth day," Jacob told her, resting his head on hers. "Fuck, baby." His arms tightened around her and he squeezed his eyes shut against the pain. His mind knew it was over, that Bella was awake and alive. His heart would take longer to heal.

"I'm here, Jake." She understood. He had spent four days believing her to be dying. "And our baby's fine," she told him. "He ... helped me."

She was shocked to feel him nod against her head. "Leah said he was fighting," he told her.

"She helped me too. Is she still here?" Bella tried to sit up.

"Sshh honey, we'll talk about it all later."

"Edward?" she asked fearfully.

"Gone. Destroyed. He's ashes on the wind. Your soul is complete again. He can't harm you any more."

"It's over, then?" Bella needed to hear it from Jacob.

"Yeah, honey." He smiled a little for the first time in nearly five days. "It's over."

For half an hour they sat together in the cave, shocked and disbelieving. They hardly spoke. They simply existed together, her safe in his arms. Finally, Jacob shook himself from his reverie.

"I need to bring you home," he told her. "Sue needs to see you. You have to get checked over, see what you need. You've been to hell and back, honey."

"No," she corrected him. "I've been to the edge of heaven and back." She smiled a little. She would tell him the whole story, but not now. Now was for rest, and wonder.

At 10 pm on the fifth day after Edward had bitten Bella, Jacob Black strode through La Push carrying his imprint cradled in his arms. He was exhausted and emotional. She was weak and frail. But they were both alive, and they were together. Their baby was safe. Nothing else mattered.

Jacob used his foot to nudge open the door to the red cabin. He stepped into his father's living room and saw Billy, Charlie, and Old Quil all listening to Sue's account of what had happened on the mountain with her daughter an hour before. As one, they looked up when he entered. As one, their mouths fell open in shock.

Bella turned her head to look at Charlie. "Hey, dad," she managed.
Charlie Swan, Chief of Police, stared in disbelief into his daughter’s chocolate brown eyes, and then buried his head in his hands. Sobs heaved through his body. Sue crossed the room and stood behind him, one hand on his shoulder. Her own eyes were glistening with tears as she smiled at the scene before her.

Billy met his son's eyes, and gave him a slight nod and smile. Jacob knew how overwhelmed his father felt. He returned the nod, inclined his head to Old Quil, and carried Bella through to his bedroom.

Half an hour later, Sue had checked Bella over thoroughly and prescribed rest and nourishment. She prepared a herbal tea, assuring Bella there was nothing in it that should cause her any problems. Smiling widely, she left the young couple alone.

Jacob climbed into bed beside Bella. He couldn't leave her, even for a moment. He couldn't go to speak with their fathers, even though part of him felt that he should. He realised that he didn't yet believe this to be real. He was afraid that leaving her would make her vanish in a puff of smoke.

Instead, Jacob wrapped his arms gently around her frail body, and held her throughout the night.

A/N: You have no idea how happy I am to post this chapter! I think we need a breather, yes? Some sweet, lemony goodness? I'm on it...
*Chapter 31*: Chapter 30 Duties

A/N: To those of you who were worried about poor Bella ... Don't worry, Jake is sweet. He doesn't expect a sexathon before she eats lmao. Thank you as always, to MistC and niamh~)

Jacob woke several times throughout that night. Despite his exhaustion, he would waken with a jerk wondering if the girl in his arms was just asleep, or had left her body again. The steady beat of her heart and the rhythm of her breathing reassured him that she was alive. He would run his hand gently down her arm and she would murmur his name or a small smile would form on her lips. Relief would flood him. She was still here, with him. He could sleep again.

When he awoke at 8am, Monday morning, Bella’s eyes were already open. Raising himself onto his elbow to look down at her, Jake really took in her appearance. Her hair was filthy and matted. Her face was gaunt and translucently pale. Dark circles were etched under both her bloodshot eyes. She looked terrible.

She was beautiful.

Raising one hand, Bella’s fingers traced under Jake’s eyes and ran along his cheekbone.

"You look awful," she murmured.

"So do you," he smiled back at her.

"I bet."

"Are you hungry?" he asked. Bella nodded.

"Starving, actually," she confirmed.

"You haven't eaten for over four days," he reminded her. "You were hydrated through an IV, and I tried to keep you drinking on the mountain, but you've had no food. What do you feel like?"

"I should probably start with some soup or something."

Jake nodded and made to stand up. Frowning, he looked back at her. "Will you be okay while I make you something?"

"I don't think even I can get into any trouble while I'm laying in bed," Bella told him. Jake started to say something, but stopped and cocked his head towards the door.

"Leah's here," he said. "I don't need to leave you alone."

The door cracked open and Leah popped her head round it, wrinkling her nose as she did so.

"Okay you two seriously need to shower," she informed them. Bella flushed and Jake shook his head at her.

"Don't worry about it Bells. That's Leah's way of saying she's happy to see you back."

Leah smiled and crossed the room. "You," she said to Jake, "go and make your girl that soup. Give her some of mom's tea too. The revival stuff. And then get your ass in the shower."

"And the chances of you getting the soup and tea while I stay with Bella are zero, I take it," Jake checked with her. Leah just raised an eyebrow.

With Jake gone, Leah sat on the bed and met Bella’s eyes. "Thank you," the prodigal imprint said quietly. Leah simply nodded and asked for permission to check the baby. Her hand on Bella’s abdomen, she smiled softly.

"He's so strong," she said. "There's no doubt that he's an Alpha."

"He helped me find my way back too," Bella told her.

"It was definitely kind of a team effort," Leah grinned. "But there will be time for all this later, Bella. Right now you need to get your strength back."

"What's actually wrong with me?" Bella wanted to know. Leah let out a laugh.

"Let's see. You're pregnant for a start, which is taking up a lot of your energy. Then you got bitten by a vampire who drank most of your blood. You needed a transfusion to keep you alive. Your Spirit went awol for days. You've eaten nothing for all that time. And you're probably a bit dehydrated too."

"I get the picture," Bella said with a half smile. "But I'm going to be okay?"

"Mom says you'll be just fine," Leah reassured her. "You gave us all one hell of a scare, Bella."

"I'll say," Jake came through the door carrying a tray. His eyes went immediately to Bella, checking she was still there. It
would take time for him to relax, he knew.

"I'll help Bella here," Leah told him. "Get in the shower."

While Jake was in the bathroom, Leah spooned soup into Bella's mouth, waving aside her protests. By the time Jake came back, Bella had some sustenance in her and was ready to sleep again. Leah left them in peace.

At 10am Billy tapped on the door. Jake had heard Embry help him and Charlie earlier, and he knew he had to talk to the dads and meet with his pack. He knew there were decisions to be made about the rest of the Cullens. Sighing, he looked down at the sleeping woman in his bed and slipped out of the room.

Charlie and Billy were waiting in the living room with Embry and Layla.

"How is she?" Charlie demanded. Jake sat down and began to talk.

"She's fine. Or she will be. She's been through a lot. Her Spirit has been through too much really, and her body's had no food for days. So she needs to rest and build up her strength again. But she's okay. So's the baby."

"Jacob we need to know exactly what happened," Billy told him. "Not just for our own peace of mind, but for the tribal records. This is a significant event in the tribe's history and it needs to be properly recorded."

"I understand that dad, but it can wait a couple of days. I'll tell you all now what happened, but the official scribing is gonna have to wait." Jacob was flatly determined. Billy knew better than to push him. He sighed. The Elders would have a field day and it would be up to Billy to appease them. Truly, though, he understood how his son felt.

"You know that Edward bit Bella," Jake began. "I don't know if we'll ever really know what happened. It looks as though she was Protected by the imprint. The effects of the venom literally reversed. Her body rejected it and turned it back on Edward. My Spirit left my wolf and went to Bella. I don't know how that happened and I wouldn't know how to do it again. Together we kept Edward's soul from feeding from hers. At the same time, we got back the piece of Bella's soul that Edward had. Her soul is intact now."

"I honestly don't know what happened to Bella after that. I want to wait till she's stronger and can tell me where she was for those four days. And as for Edward, after three days, he ... died, or whatever it is that happens to a leech. Some of the pack brought him up the mountain. Paul and I ripped his remains apart and burned them. He's gone. Bella and the baby are alive and safe. And that's all I care about right now."

Billy looked thoughtful. Charlie looked stunned. Embry and Layla just looked happy. Embry caught Jake's eye and smiled at him. They would talk about it all another time. For now, it was enough that Bella was going to be alright.

"I wonder if every imprint is Protected from leech venom," Billy said. "You all talk about your souls joining and the deep sense of Protection that goes with that. I wonder if it's very real, that imprints are quite literally Protected from vampires. It would make sense, since the girls are needed to continue the pack generation after generation."

"I think that's a theory we won't be testing, dad," Jake told his father wryly just as his stomach growled loudly. "You okay Charlie? Anything you want to know before I go and eat an entire cow?"

"I want to see my daughter," the police Chief grumbled. "Can't walk through there though."

"I'll bring her out later if she feels up to it," Jake promised. He stood to go into the kitchen but Layla waved him down.

"Let me make you all something," she said. "Go to Bella."

Jake didn't need to be told twice.

Three days passed and Bella grew slowly stronger. Jake had his work cut out keeping her visitors to a minimum. Charlie asked for her to be brought out at least three times a day. The entire pack wanted to reassure themselves that they could still smell her baby. Leah was almost constantly in the cabin in her own need to be around the child. The imprints all brought food, flowers and various other items they thought might help Bella recuperate.

"A hot water bottle?" Jake asked after Donna left from her visit. "Seriously?"

Bella laughed. She had been smiling and laughing throughout that day and every time she did, it made Jake's heart soar. "Maybe she thinks you leave my side for more than sixty seconds at a time," she teased him. Jake just smiled at her. He knew he was being overprotective. He had told her she was just gonna have to put up with it for a while. She didn't seem to mind, anyway.

Jake threw the hot water bottle in the corner of the room and looked Bella over. She had insisted on washing her hair and it was clean and brushed. The circles under her eyes were gradually disappearing. Her cheeks already looked a little fuller and had more colour. Her hand when he held it didn't feel quite so fragile.

Bella was definitely on the road to recovery.

Jacob leaned forward to kiss her lips softly. He had scarcely touched her, other than to hold her in his arms to warm her.
and comfort himself. He had been so afraid of hurting her, or draining her energy, that he had kept physical contact to
hugs only. At first, he had been so grateful she was here, and alive, and awake, that he hadn't needed anything more. But
today, he felt his wolf beginning to stir. His imprint had been bitten by a leech. The cloying scent of Edward Cullen had left
a slight trace on her throat that set his teeth on edge. His wolf wanted to eradicate that with his own scent.

Jacob knew he was going to have a fight on his hands. Bella’s throat had recovered well from the deep bite Edward had
inflicted, but it was by no means fully healed. There was no way Jacob was going to give in to his wolf and Mark her there,
at least not until she was absolutely, one hundred percent recovered from this ordeal.

For now, he just leaned in to kiss her very gently. When he withdrew, Bella frowned at him. “Get back here,” she told him
sternly. “That's the first time you've kissed me since I woke up and it wasn't even a proper kiss.”

Jacob raised an eyebrow at her but couldn’t hide his smile. “You're supposed to be resting,” he reminded her.

"I'm going to start thinking you don't want to kiss me," she pouted.

"Please tell me you are not serious," he said in disbelief. She just grinned at him and he shook his head, knowing she was
playing him. "Fine," he told her. "But if Sue tells you you've regressed, remember you only have yourself to blame."

Cupping her cheeks in his hands, Jacob leaned in and kissed her deeply. He took his time, parting her lips with his
tongue and slowly exploring her mouth. When he pulled back, Bella’s eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed. Jake
grinned at her. "Maybe I was wrong, Bells," he told her. "Maybe more kissing is exactly what you need." Bella laughed and
pulled his head back to hers.

That afternoon, Jacob had to leave Bella for a few hours. He couldn't put the Elders off any longer. He had to meet with
them so that the events of the past week could be officially scribed and documented into the tribe’s histories. In addition,
he needed to meet with his pack. He knew they all wanted to hear everything that had happened directly from him. They
had pieced together the parts involving Edward, but Bella’s experiences were still something of an unknown to them.

There was also the issue of the Cullens and Matthias to deal with. The Cullens had sent word that they were ready to leave
the area. Carlisle had however requested information on what had happened to Edward. Rosalie had contacted them
separately, asking for news on the baby. Matthias had also been in contact, reminding Jacob of his desire to study the
pack.

Reluctantly, after lunch on the third day, Jacob carried Bella through to the living room. He kissed her deeply, and left her
with Layla and Emily looking after her. Rachel was also there. She had fully recovered from her own ordeal, but Paul was
almost as overprotective of her as Jake was of Bella. Layla and Emily solemnly promised to look after both girls, and
Charlie. Billy accompanied Jacob to Old Quil’s home, where the official scribing would take place. Embry and Quil also
accompanied them, incase any of the Elders antagonised Jacob beyond his endurance. Right now, his endurance was
low.

For over two hours, Jacob talked and answered questions as best he could while Quil slouched against the wall and
Embry stood behind his Alpha. Billy saw his son was on edge, although he disguised it well. Jake began by explaining
Edward's successful plan to get Bella alone.

"You were with Bella when she took the phone call rescheduling the appointment?” Andrew Mase asked, disbelief evident
in his voice. Jacob confirmed that he was. "And you didn't see through it?” Andrew persisted.

Jacob gritted his teeth. "A woman claiming to be from Forks Hospital phoned and asked to reschedule an appointment.
There was nothing unusual about that."

"Is it safe to say you were distracted at the time? I've seen firsthand how pack members are with their imprints. My niece
is a wolf's imprint," Andrew reminded everyone, with a significant look at Embry. As if anyone needed reminding. Jacob
very greatly doubted Embry would ever have let Layla's uncle see the more passionate side of their relationship. This was,
however, typical of Andrew Mase.

"Yes, I was distracted," Jacob answered him impatiently. "I was attempting to explain to Bella that she was pregnant with
the future Alpha of the pack." "Let's move on," Billy said hastily, seeing his son beginning to tremble slightly. "So Edward had lured Charlie from the
reservation ...?” he prompted.

It went on and on. For the most part, the Elders were understanding towards the Alpha's current state of mind. Without
being wolves themselves, they had plenty of experience of working with the pack. They were aware that Jacob Black was
deeply concerned about his pregnant imprint. Not only that, but he was still in the early days of an Alpha imprint. And she
had sustained a leech attack. Mostly, the Elders sought only to learn and document the facts.

Only Andrew and, occasionally, Rick Leveson, took it upon themselves to goad him. Jake stuck to the basic facts and
attempted to get through the scribing as quickly as possible. His hard Alpha mask was in place. Only Billy saw the pain
when his son talked about the most frightening parts of the saga.

Jacob fared better than Billy at keeping his emotions in check when he recounted Bella’s version of Sarah's involvement.
By the time he had finished describing the golden bridge and his mother's assistance, a pin dropping would have sounded deafening. Jake's mask almost slipped when he glanced at his father and saw silent tears streaming down his cheeks. They had already had this conversation, but Billy was as affected by the re-telling as he had been the first time.

Jake clenched his fists and tried to ensure his voice was steady as he continued. Finally, his tale drew to a close and he waited for any questions that hadn't already been asked. He was tightly wound up and was glad his next move would be to phase. This was one of those times when only a mind blowing fuck would settle the virile wolf down. As his imprint was too frail for that to be an option, the next best thing was to give over to his angry wolf. Hell mend the pack, he thought ruefully. He saw Embry and Quil exchange glances and knew they had picked up on his mindset.

When it seemed that there would be no more questions, Jacob stood up to leave.

"Just one more thing," Andrew called after him. Jacob froze. He knew this would be nothing good. Willing himself to keep his temper in check, he turned back to face the man he loathed almost as much as any leech.

"What?" he barked.

"Bella was bitten by a vampire while pregnant. She has survived and remains human. But we know nothing about the baby."

Jacob hoped to fuck that Mase was not going where he thought he was with this. He felt his body begin to tremble and saw Quil peel himself away from the wall, ready to restrain him if need be. "We know the baby is safe," he ground out. "And that's all we need to know."

"I disagree," Andrew pushed on. Sue, who was sitting next to him, placed a hand on his arm, trying to convey to him that this was not the time. "How do we know the baby has not been infected by vampire venom?"

Embry and Quil shot to Jacob's side. They were just a fraction of a second too late. The Alpha was already leaning across the table, his face right in Mase's.

"What exactly do you think has happened to my child?" he snarled.

Andrew swallowed but stood his ground. "Do you have a plan in place if the child turns out to have been infected by the venom?"

Quil caught Jacob's arm as it swung for the punch. Shaking himself free and growling at his pack brother, Jake turned back to Andrew. "If you believe for one second that my imprint was Protected from the venom but my son, the future Alpha of the pack, was not, then you have no place on this Council." Turning, Jacob crossed the room in a few long strides. Just as he reached the door, Rick Leveson called after him.

"What about the rest of the Cullens? What happens to them now?"

"You leave them to me and my pack and you stay the fuck out of it!" Jake threw over his shoulder as he slammed out of the door. Embry and Quil caught the door on its rebound and threw themselves through it after him.

Jacob raced into the trees and for the first time in a very long time simply burst through his clothing straight into his wolf. His mind was a brilliant flash of white hot rage and he felt the phased pack members recoil.

Collin - Oh fuck.

Jared - Jesus, Jake, what the fuck happened in there?

Embry and Quil were right behind him. They showed their brothers and sister Andrew Mase's idiocy while Jacob howled for the remaining wolves to phase in. He raced blindly into the forest, neither knowing nor caring where he was going. Where he wanted to go was straight home to Bella, but he knew he had to calm down and meet with his pack first.

The wolves assembled at the meeting point and waited for their leader to get his anger under control. He was snarling as he ran flat out, channelling his rage into his limbs. Not one of the pack wanted to antagonise him. They simply waited.

Finally, driven by his need to be close to Bella, Jake arrived at the clearing where his wolves were assembled. He didn't sit with them, but instead moved in continuous restlessness around the open space. The younger wolves shifted positions uneasily every few seconds.

Jake quickly showed them everything they needed to know about the events of the past week. It was much the same information he had just given the Elders. This time, he communicated it in memories and visual flashes. Most of the wolves had already seen Leah's involvement, but he asked her to show it again so that everyone knew all of it.

Any questions?

There were none. Nobody dared to make a query or voice an opinion. Not while Jacob Black was in this mood.
treaty is finally over. They will leave without seeking retribution, or we will destroy them all. Sam and Embry, you're coming with me but we'll wait till tomorrow if I go this afternoon I'll just rip them all to pieces.

Sam and Embry showed their assent. There was a flavour of something in Sam's mind. Only Jacob detected it. He wasn't at all surprised.

*Does anybody have a fuckin' clue what the blonde bitch wants?*

**Leah** - Jake she genuinely seemed frightened for the baby. I think maybe she was a mother before she was turned. Or maybe she was pregnant, or wanted a child. It felt like it was personal to her.

*How do you feel about dealing with her, Leah?*

**Leah** - *Without you?*

Jake let her see his trust. Overwhelmed, Leah bowed her head to her Alpha. She would consider it an honour to deal with this on his behalf.

*Take Seth with you when you go. Alright - Matthias. He wants to study the pack. I won't tolerate that but I don't trust him either. He knows about us, hell he brought a whole fuckin' crypt load of leeches with him right to our doorstep. I need to meet with him to work something out that keeps him happy and away from our people. How do we contact him?*

**Paul** - *He said he'd be in touch in a few days.*

Jacob didn't like that. He would have much preferred not to sit about waiting for a leech to call but he couldn't see any other option.

*Anything else we need to deal with right now?*

**Sam** - *Jake ... I know Sam. Alright, one last thing. I know the past week has sucked and I haven't been phased much to give you any guidance. You've all given me a lot of trust and loyalty during it and I want to thank you for that. It's not been easy for any of us and even though I literally wanna rip something apart right now I do get how much you've all been through for me and Bella over the past week. I know I speak for Bella as well when I say, thank you.*

Ripples of different emotions appeared in the pack mind. They would have done it all over again without any thanks. Then again, to have their uncertainties and fears acknowledged by their Alpha even when he was so clearly upset, was appreciated.

*Right, all of you fuck off. Except you, Sam.*

When the Alpha and Beta were alone together, Jake probed into his brother's mind. Sam didn't even try to stop him.

*You've absolutely decided.*

It wasn't a question.

**Sam** - *My time's up, Jake. I've lost sight of what we represent. Embry and the others were right. They knew you would have wanted us to leave you and help or avenge Bella. I was thinking of the fact that the Elders would want your body kept safe for examination.*

Jake's wolf snorted. His heart had still been beating and Sam wanted to dispose of his body.

**Sam** - *Not dispose of it, Jake.*

*I know, I know. The legends say that the wolf always instinctively knows when it's time to quit. You're absolutely certain of your decision, aren't you?*

**Sam** - *I am, and it's just like the legends describe. I just know it's the right time for me to go.*

*Does Emily know?*

**Sam** - *Of course she does. She's happy about it.*

*Good. When are you quitting?*

**Sam** - *I'd like to come with you to the Cullens tomorrow. They started all this. They triggered my phase. It seems fitting that seeing them off is my last duty.*

*Fine. You know I'll still be your brother, Sam. I think I speak for all the pack when I say that. If you're struggling with*
Sam - I will. Jake can I tell the others myself?

Sure, sure.

Sam phased out. Jake realised he had no clothes. Rolling his wolf eyes, he howled for Brady to continue patrolling, and detoured by the cottage where he had left some shorts. A quick look around confirmed very little needed to be done before he could move Bells in. As he raced back to her, he decided it would very soon be time for that trip to the driftwood tree to tell her it was ready. Despite his mood, he felt a smile curve his lips.

A/N: Next chapter, probably tomorrow.
With Jake gone to meet with the Elders and the pack, I was fidgety and restless. I teased him for his over protectiveness, but in reality I was as dependent on being with him as he was on being with me. When he left, I put on a brave face but inside I was screaming for him to stay. I knew that Edward Cullen was gone. I knew I was alive and safe. But it was only when Jake was with me that I allowed myself to believe it.

Emily and Layla fussed around me, Rachel and Charlie. When we protested that Emily should be resting, she impatiently informed us she was in the "good" stage of pregnancy. She certainly looked like it. She had a healthy glow about her, and she was buzzing with energy. I hoped it wouldn't take too long for me to feel that way.

I was grateful for Sue's medicines. She had carefully selected herbs that should have no unwanted side effects. She had prepared one tea for my stomach, to reduce my nausea. That way, when I ate something to raise my strength I had a chance of actually keeping it down. She had another to restore my energy, which seemed to be working wonders. I still had big dips each day where I needed to sleep for hours, though.

After a while, Layla asked me to re-tell what had happened during the days I was unconscious. I had already given her some of the details, but the third time I had yawned during the telling Jake had quite rudely asked her to leave me in peace.

Very aware that Rachel was listening, I told my story. When I reached the part about meeting Sarah on the mountain, I had to also tell them that I had been communing with Sarah before then. I watched as Rachel's eyes grew wide and filled with tears. Abruptly, she stood and left the room, heading for the kitchen.

Berating myself for not having told her the story when we were alone, I followed her.

"Rachel I'm so sorry," I began but she waved her hand for me to be quiet.

"It's not what you think, Bella," she told me. "I'm not upset because you're talking about my mom. It's something else. I - I saw her too." She looked at me apprehensively. I sat down heavily opposite her at the kitchen table and she continued. "When Edward knocked me out, I had dreams. Or, I thought they were dreams. I saw my mom. I talked with her. I don't remember many details. It wasn't as vivid as the experiences you describe. But when I woke up, I thought I'd been dreaming the whole time I was out and that was maybe an hour at most. Paul told me I had been unconscious for most of the day. I think maybe I accessed my Spirit, Bella."

My mind was racing. It made so much sense to me that the first born Black child would have the ability to be like her ancestors. Had Rachel been male, she would have been Alpha of the wolf pack instead of Jacob.

"I think you probably did, Rachel," I told her finally. "You should talk it over with Paul and Jake. Leah can probably help, too."

Rachel nodded. "I will. Speaking of Leah, Bella ... what happened with her?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "She just keeps telling me we'll talk about it when I'm stronger." I rolled my eyes. Everybody wanted to wait till I was stronger for something or other. "She came to me on the mountain, in her Spirit form. She guided me back to my body when I was too weak to do it myself. I know she returned to her own body quickly after that because Sue was here telling our dads and Old Quil when Jacob brought me back. But I think something else happened between her helping me and getting home, that she hasn't told me about."

"She's been very quiet," Rachel observed. "Like she has a lot on her mind." Shaking herself out of her thoughts she said, "I guess we'll find out eventually." She smiled at me then. "How are you doing anyway, Bella? It's hard to get a moment to talk with you properly with my brother growling at everyone who comes within ten metres of you."

I laughed. "Yeah, he's kind of killing the whole 'protect the imprint' thing at the moment. But to be honest, I need it just now. I don't feel safe somehow, unless he's right here with me."

"I can understand that," Rachel murmured.

"But on the whole, I'm a lot better. I feel stronger. I can walk without passing out." I cringed as I remembered my first disastrous attempt, two days earlier, when I insisted on walking to the bathroom on my own. "I don't need to sleep as much, and I don't tire as easily. Definitely on the mend."

"I'm sure my brother disagrees," Rachel grinned. "I don't blame him, though. Paul's almost as bad. Thinking that they'd lost us ... I don't think Jake in particular will get over that quickly, Bella. At least for Paul, it was over within a few hours. Jake spent more than four days believing you were dying and taking his child with you."

"I know," I nodded. The truth was that I was desperate to have some time with Jacob in the cottage. Although he hadn't left my side, there were always other people around and Jake had Billy, the Elders, the pack and the Cullens looking for him.
day and night. I knew he badly needed some time alone with me.

More than three hours after he had left, the cabin door opened and Jake came in. My smile froze on my lips when I saw the expression on his face. He was tightly wound up and seemed only barely in control of his wolf. His smile when he looked at me was strained and when he pulled me into his arms I felt the tension in his body.

"Take me to the cottage," I whispered.

Jake jerked back from me and looked at me very seriously. "I can't, Bells," he lamented.

"Yes, you can," I told him firmly.

"No, I - you don't understand," he began. I cut him off.

"I do understand. And you won't hurt me..."

Jake cut me off this time, lifting me into his arms and marching me towards his bedroom. Setting me on the bed, he knelt in front of me. His eyes were burning with anger and want.

"Bella my wolf is this close to taking over me," he tried to explain. "You have no idea what he wants to do ... If I bring you to the cottage, and we're all alone out there, I Can't. Control. Him."

"Jacob Black are you telling me that you honestly believe your wolf would hurt me?" I moved his hand over my abdomen. "Or his child? I know he won't. And I also know that even if he wanted to, you wouldn't let him. You're not dangerous to me, Jake, can't you see that? I know your wolf is aggressive and he can be vicious. But never with me. I don't think he can be."

Jake was looking at me doubtfully. "That's a fire I'd rather not play with, Bella," he told me seriously.

"You need me," I told him. "Your wolf needs me. And I need you. Fighting it is only going to make things worse for you, Jake."

He looked at me long and hard, then hung his head for a moment. I could tell he was battling what he wanted against his fear of harming me. I waited for the decision I knew he would reach. Eventually, he looked up at me. His eyes were softer now.

"How can you be sure he won't hurt you, Bells?" he asked me quietly.

"Because he needs me always. I know you worry about what Sam did to Emily. But you are the Alpha. Your wolf is wiser and you, the man, are stronger." I spoke with all the conviction that I felt and saw a small smile form on Jake's lips.

"You are amazing," he whispered, leaning in to kiss me softly.

"I won't be if you don't take me to the damn cottage," I answered. Jake barked a laugh and stood up.

"Wait here then. I'll be back in a few minutes." He shot out the room. I heard voices and some movement in the cabin. Jake returned quickly and threw a few of our clothes into the backpack he had come back with. Swinging me easily into his arms, he strode out of his room, through the living room and out the cabin. I caught Charlie's eye and flushed, cursing that my sex life always seemed to be paraded in front of him.

Jake sat me in his car and I protested that he wasn't taking me on his wolf. He just looked at me and shook his head before going round to the driver's door.

"Sometimes I think you enjoy putting yourself in dangerous situations," he grumbled as he started the engine.

"I don't!" I protested. "I told you, your wolf won't hurt me."

"Well let's not actually bring him face to face with you right now, 'kay?"

"Fine," I huffed. "I do like him, though."

"Oh he likes you too, honey. Believe me," Jake grinned. I smiled as I settled back in my seat for the short ride to the cottage. This felt like Jake n Bells again.

Jake carried me from the car straight to the bedroom, laying me down on my old bed. Tossing the backpack on the ground, he climbed onto the bed beside me. He looked down at me very seriously.

"What do you want to do here, Bells?" he asked me.

"I want to make love with you," I answered immediately. He set his jaw.

"Bella, three days ago you were at death's door. You don't have your strength back."

"Did I say I want to fuck you while swinging from the light fixtures?" I demanded. "I said, I want," I raised his hand to my lips
and kissed the back of it, "to make love," I leaned up and kissed his lips gently, "with you," I finished against his lips.

Jake groaned and moved his lips against mine. I could feel how taut with tension his body was and I hated it. I wanted him to relax, to take me, to let me show him that I was his and here for him. I ran my hands up his arms, over his shoulders and down his back. He seemed to be holding his breath, but when my hands reached the bottom of his rib cage he suddenly expelled it and pulled me into his arms.

I kept soothing him, rubbing his shoulders and back as we kissed. His tongue snaked into my mouth and one fist tangled in my hair. Bit by bit, I felt his muscles begin to relax until he finally allowed his body to sink on top of mine, supporting a lot of his weight on one elbow as he lay over me.

"Bella," Jake groaned and for a moment I thought he was going to stop me. Pulling back to look at me, I saw his eyes were full of lust and uncertainty.

"I want you," I told him. "I know you can smell me." He swallowed hard. "I'm strong enough for this, Jake. You won't hurt me. I can handle it."

After just a moment's hesitation, he gave a slight nod and returned his lips to mine. This time, he hitched my leg further up his waist and ground his erection into my centre. Feeling just how much he needed me elicited a loud moan from my mouth. Jake ground against me again and his kiss became more urgent.

I tugged at his T-shirt, pulling it up. He broke our kiss only for the split second it took him to whip it over his head. His lips were back on mine, his hand on my ass pulling me tighter into him as he continued to grind against me.

Jake's other hand found my bra clasp. He freed my breasts and began kneading first one, then the other. I whimpered when he tugged on my nipple. His mouth made its way from my lips, down my jaw and neck, and to my breast. Once there, his lips and tongue took over from his fingers, sucking and pulling at my nipple while his hands pulled my shirt and bra off.

When we were both topless, I began working on his belt buckle. Once it was unfastened, I pulled open the button and reached into his jeans to find what I wanted. Jake hissed and bucked into my hand when I wrapped my palm around his straining cock. His fingers deftly unfastened my own jeans and he yanked my panties off with them as I kicked off my sneakers and socks.

I was naked under him and my body was on fire. I wanted his naked body on mine and started to tug at his jeans. He kicked them to the floor and began kneeling down my body until he reached my core. He inhaled deeply and placed his mouth on my clit. "Bella," he moaned, sending vibrations through me that made my hips jerk and a gasp escape me.

Jake worked between my legs, licking and nibbling. He seemed to be taking in great lungfuls of my scent too, which I had never noticed him do before. I couldn't wonder about it though while he was so expertly bringing me to where he wanted me to be. To where I needed to be. His long fingers slid inside my soaking centre and he twisted them as he stroked them in and out of me. His mouth never let up on my clit and I felt myself race towards a powerful climax.

Shuddering and moaning, I found my release as Jake continued to slowly stroke me with his fingers, bringing me down gently from my high. He kissed his way back up my stomach and chest and gazed at me.

"You are so beautiful," he smiled at me. He definitely seemed more relaxed but there was still something bothering him deeply.

"Take me, Jake," I told him. "I want you to."

He kissed me gently and shook his head. "I don't think I can, Bells."

"Jake we've been through this. You won't hurt me!"

"It's not just my wolf wanting to play rough, Bella." He bit his lip and his eyes travelled to my throat. I knew immediately what the problem was.

"You need to Mark me," I whispered to him. Jake avoided eye contact and I continued. "Where he bit me. You can smell him on me and your wolf hates it."

Finally meeting my eyes, Jake nodded. "I'm sorry Bells. I've got it under control, I swear. As long as I don't breathe too much round the other side of your neck..."

"That's ridiculous," I interrupted him. "Just do it, Jake. Mark me and make me yours again."

"What? Bella don't be ... I can't bite you there, you haven't even healed fully from where he bit you. I can't!!" Jake was clearly horrified but I was positive I was right.

"Jake, if your wolf needs to do something to me, I think you need to start listening to him," I told him seriously. He shook his head at me. "No, really," I persisted. "I want you to do it. Stop being stubborn."
"Bella, it will hurt you. You've already been through hell." Jake looked at me curiously. "But what makes you think I should start listening to what my wolf wants with you?"

"First, it really didn't hurt before. Not as much as you would think anyway. And the way I see it, you wouldn't have imprinted on me if you weren't a wolf. That means I'm your wolf's imprint, and he knows what's best where I'm concerned," I explained.

Jake looked a bit stunned. His eyes moved back to the bite mark on my neck and he touched it gently with his fingers. "Does it hurt?" he demanded.

"A little," I told him honestly. "But not so much that I don't want you to Mark me there."

Jake took a deep breath, then let it out again. "I want you so badly, Bells," he admitted.

"Then have me." I repositioned my legs around him so that I could draw him closer to my centre and he groaned.

"You're not making this easy," he told me. I just pulled him in for a kiss.

**Jacob's POV**

My wolf was howling. That damn leech scent on his imprint was driving him out of his fucking mind. He needed to Mark Bella, and Mark her good. Her body under mine still felt too thin and I knew she had a lot of strength still to regain. I had to get between her legs so that her scent could soothe my wolf and eliminate the cloying scent of leech. But after she came, and I moved back up her body, I knew if I entered her my wolf would break free and make me bite her.

My jaw was literally aching with the effort not to latch onto her throat. When she actually asked me to bite her, to Mark her and make her mine, my wolf roared in victory. Between them, they were going to be the death of me.

I let Bella pull me in to kiss her while I tried to make my decision. Fuck, I wanted her. But if I started making love to her, I would Mark her. I wouldn't be able to help it, I knew that. Did I do what I thought was the right thing and give Bella more time to heal? Or did I give in to the demands of my imprint and wolf?

Bella angled her hips differently as we kissed and the tip of my cock slid just inside her inviting folds. *Fuck* I couldn't hold out. Without any further thought, I pushed all the way inside and began moving slowly in and out of her. I might have given in, but I wasn't going to be rough with her today. Bella moaned in satisfaction when she felt me moving in her and the sound made my dick twitch.

Picking up pace just a little, I made the mistake of getting lost in Bella and breathing in. My wolf went nuts when Edward Cullen assaulted my nostrils. I felt my fingers twist in Bella's hair, moving her head to the side so that her throat was open to me. She turned her head still further, exposing the site of her wound for me to Mark.

She really wants this! I stared at the spot on her neck for a moment, slowing my movements. Was I really going to bite her now? I felt Bella rock her hips, asking me to give her more. That did it. I heard my own low snarl and closed the distance between my teeth and her throat. Biting through her flesh, right on the wound, I began to suck voraciously while I pushed harder into her.

I heard Bella cry out and her fingers twisted into my own hair. She raised her hips again and I started to thrust harder and harder. She was everywhere. I felt her walls convulse around me and the scent of her juices filled my nostrils. There was no more leech. My teeth withdrew from her neck and my tongue began to lap at the wound. Inhaling tentatively, my wolf growled in satisfaction when all I could smell was Bella and I combined.

A few more quick thrusts and I spilled my seed into her, overcome with emotion suddenly as I realised that a few days ago, I hadn't thought I would ever do this with her again. I buried my face against the same spot in her throat that until a few minutes ago had made my skin crawl. It comforted me now.

"Sshhh," I heard Bella whisper to me. Her hands were rubbing my back, soothing me and I realised I had given over to tears again. *Fuck* that was becoming a habit. Reading my mind, Bella murmured, "It's okay to cry sometimes, Jake, especially after everything you've been through."

"Everything I've been through?" I asked her in disbelief, getting myself under control again. "What about you?"

"I cried plenty while I was under," she told me. She looked radiant. She looked better than she had before we made love. I looked at her neck and saw that the new wound looked cleaner somehow than the old one.

"Does it hurt?"

"No. It actually feels better than it did. It was ... cold, before."

"Good." I smiled at her then. "You're right, you know. I do need to listen to you when you side with my wolf."
"You need to listen to me, period," she mock scolded me. Laughing, I lay beside her and wrapped her in my arms.

"I am so damn glad you're here, honey," I told her.

"Me too, Jake. Me too."

We lay in silence for a few minutes. Bella seemed to be deep in thought. I asked her eventually what was on her mind.

"The baby," she said, making me smile. "I know he'll sleep in with us for a while, in this room," she told me. "But when he's bigger, there isn't a bedroom for him in the cottage." I thought about it for a minute. She was right, but the upstairs studio that we were in was big enough to convert into at least two rooms. I decided to get that organised before we moved in. It wouldn't take long with all the pack on board.

I realised suddenly that Bella had fallen asleep while I was making those plans. I smiled into her hair, inhaling pure Bella with more than just a hint of me when I breathed in now. I watched as she turned closer into me and hitched one leg over mine in her sleep. I listened to the steady rhythm of her heart beat and I concentrated on finding the faint scent that I knew to be my son.

Tightening my arms around her, I shut my eyes and sent a silent but heartfelt prayer of thanks to my mother, for bringing my wife and child back to me.

A/N: So, after a lot of to-ing and fro-ing on this decision, I'm going to start winding this fic down now. There is just sooooo much more I can write, so many more story lines and characters I want to develop. It's just too much for the one fic so I'm stopping this one shortly. I have a sequel which is going to start where this leaves off, but I need some time in RL first. Ya know, family, parties, holidays etc. So after a couple more chapters, Ties will be done "sniff" but the story is definitely not over. I just need a couple of months away from it to be, er, normal lol.
Waking naked in Jacob's arms was my own personal heaven. I doubted anything that lay on the other side of that golden bridge could beat this. I stretched languorously and wrapped my arm around his waist, my leg across his thigh. He tightened his hold on me and kissed my hair.

"Hey, sleepyhead," he greeted me.

"Did you sleep?" I half sat up, realising it was dark outside. Jake had switched on a downstairs light which shone up the stairs, partially illuminating the room.

"No. You were out for three hours but it gave me time to think."

"Tell me." I knew something had happened that afternoon which had brought his wolf roaring to the surface. I could still feel some tension in his body although he was definitely more relaxed than before.

He told me. He talked about the meeting with the Elders and what Layla's Uncle Andrew had said about our baby. I scoffed at that.

"What does he think happened? That the venom didn't get past my throat but somehow ended up infecting the baby?"

Jake shrugged. "He's just a dick, Bella. He likes to make out like he's important because Embry imprinted on Layla. Actually he was a dick before then, but he got worse when he started to think he's sort of pack family now."

"Nice guy," I murmured. Jake carried on with his story. I was surprised about Sam quitting, but Jake wasn't at all.

"The legends say that for every wolf, there comes a time when the wolf feels his job is done. Then the man just knows it's time to leave his pack. We don't really have any descriptions of how it works, but Sam is feeling that way. And to be honest Bells, some of his decisions lately have been off, even for Sam. I mean he never was the type to act first and think later, but recently he's not really been thinking like a wolf at all."

"So you're okay to be a wolf down?" I asked him.

"Yeah I think so," Jake said thoughtfully. "I mean if the Cullens really are gonna leave, there's not much need for a pack at all." He was silent for a moment before adding, "Mind you Matthias could be a problem. But we'll be fine without Sam, honey."

"Why would Matthias be a problem?"

"He led 15 leeches right to La Push, Bella. And he wants to study the pack. No fuckin' way I'm agreeing to that, but I don't like so many bloodsuckers knowing we exist, and where we are." He frowned. "I'm gonna have to talk with him. Then there's the Cullens," he sighed. "I need to meet with them tomorrow."

"Are you going to tell them about Edward?" I asked.

"Yes. I mean there's no reason not to, and hopefully it'll be enough of a warning that they'll just leave without any problems. But if we need to take them out, we will."

"You did have a lot to think about," I told him. I moved so I was lying on top of him. "Are you okay? You were really uptight when you got back from meeting with the Elders and pack."

"I'm better," he grinned at me. "Something to do with making love with you. And," he continued with a wink, "not everything I had to think about was leeches and problems. I had other things on my mind too."

"Oh yeah?" I raised my eyebrow and Jake shook his head in mock disgust.

"Get your mind out of wherever it is," he scolded me. "I was thinking about the little guy. Where he's gonna sleep and what we need to get for him."

I smiled and leaned in to kiss him. "So where is he going to sleep?"

"I'm gonna build a wall, look." He rolled me gently onto my back and leaped from the bed. Striding naked across the room, he showed me the area beyond the stairs he wanted to section off. "Put the door here, and that's a whole new bedroom. It won't take long. Then we can decorate it like a nursery, and put whatever he needs in there. He can move in when he's old enough to not have to be beside us."

I was sitting up, my arms wrapped around my knees upon which my chin was resting, watching him. He was so excited talking about his son and I found myself grinning like a loon. It was hard to believe that just a few days ago, we almost lost one another.

"I love you," he told me back. His eyes were soft with his love, and dancing with happiness. I couldn't stop my smile as I looked at him. Leaning in to kiss me, he stopped just before our lips met and murmured, "How are you feeling? After making love?"

"Like making love some more," I told him.

Jake closed the final distance between our lips, his hands going to my hips. I clasped my hands behind his neck and lay back on the mattress, pulling him down on top of me. There was no uncertainty this time as Jacob took my body, which I gave to him gladly. No words could ever describe the way this man made me feel. My body was sent to dizzying heights while my heart poured out my love for him. His eyes mirrored adoration back at me as his powerful body reached its own high. Shuddering and moaning through his climax, Jake finally rolled onto his side, cradling me to him and whispering nonsensical words of love in my ear which made me smile.

"C'mon honey," he said after a while. "We need to get back to our dads." His stomach punctuated his need to leave with a loud wolfish grumble, causing us both to laugh.

Back at the red cabin, we found Sue fussing around Billy and Charlie. Layla and Emily had to leave to be with Embry and Sam, she explained, and Paul had brought Rachel home earlier too. As we lay in bed a few hours later, I asked Jake the question that had been bothering me since then.

"What are we going to do when we move in to the cottage, Jake? I mean, you need to be here for Billy, and my dad still needs someone around him most of the time. We can't just move out and expect the pack to look after them for us."

Jake was tracing patterns on my arm with his fingertips. "I think it'll work out fine, Bells," he assured me. "I've talked with dad about it. He brought it up himself actually, right after we imprinted. He really only needs help in the mornings and evenings, and me or Paul can cover that between us. And he wouldn't be alone much, honestly. He's the Chief. There are always people in and out, and the imprints are forever bringing him food and baking. He's not as dependent as you might think. And Charlie's on the mend, honey. We can wait till he's completely recovered if it makes you feel better."

"Okay. I'll talk to him about it, see what he wants. He has kind of said that he's managed fine without me all this time and doesn't want to be fussed over now." I snuggled closer to Jake's comforting warmth. "I can't wait to move in," I told him, licking his chest with a smile.

"Me neither, honey. Especially when you keep on using your mouth on me there. You know what that does." He pressed his erection into my leg, just incase I was in any doubt as to what it did to him.

"Mmmmm," I told him, grazing my teeth over the place I had licked. Jake lifted me easily off him, turned me around so he was spooning me, and held my arms firmly in place. I was effectively trapped, unable to move.

"Sleep," he ordered.

"But I think making love with you is better medicine even than Sue's," I whined.

Jake laughed against my neck. "You're way too noisy," he informed me. "Charlie's next door, remember?"

"Fine," I huffed, but wiggled my ass against his erection anyway. He growled low in his chest. It vibrated through me, thrilling me further. I was getting more turned on by the second.

"Bella Swan, if you do not go to sleep, I'm going to the couch," he told me. "You know how much I always want you but you still need to rest."

"I'll be cold if you go to the couch," I complained.

"I'll make you the hot water bottle Donna gave you," he replied, heartlessly, I thought.

I knew when I was defeated. I gave in to the sleep that was always ready to claim me.

The next morning, I woke before Jacob. Turning slowly in his arms so as not to waken him, I lay and watched him sleep. His face, so often tense and serious these days, was relaxed and peaceful. Some of his thick black hair had fallen over his closed eyes. I gently pushed it back, and watched as a small smile curved his lips when I did so. My name fell from his lips in a whisper, but he kept on sleeping.

I thought about everything he had been through lately. Finding out about my connection with his mortal enemy, which had turned out to be a very real, physical connection. Forcing himself to stay away from me and take on the majority of the shifts watching Edward Cullen. Day after day he had spent in such close proximity to his greatest adversary, reining in his temper because of me. I thought about the torment he must have endured in the hours and days after I had been bitten, and my heart felt as though it would rip under the thought of his agony.

Yet here we lay together, alive and with our futures ahead of us. This brave, loyal, fierce, beautiful man who was also capable of so much love and affection lay in peaceful slumber next to me. I realised a lone tear was trickling down my
cheek. I didn't know what I had ever done to deserve Jacob Black, but I sure as hell wasn't going to argue about it.

He blinked his eyes open, one hand automatically reaching for me while the other rubbed sleep from his face.

"Good morning, beautiful," he pulled me closer to him.

"I've been watching you sleep," I greeted him and he smiled, his eyes shut once more.

"What were you thinking?" His voice was husky and sexy.

"That I don't deserve you."

Jake’s eyes flew open. "That's really dumb," he told me seriously. "I would think you could do way better than to be stuck on a tiny reservation for the rest of your life, with a guy who runs about furry half the time and fixes up engines to make ends meet."

I was startled. "That's not the way I see things," I protested.

"I know," he smiled at me. "Which is why I haven't made a big deal out of it. But you saying you don't deserve me is bull. It's the other way around."

"We'll have to agree to disagree on that one," I told him.

"Sounds fine." He yawned. "What do you want to do today while I'm at the Cullens?"

"I would really like to have a chance to talk with Leah," I said. "Something happened while she was on the mountain helping me, didn't it?"

"What? I don't know," Jake frowned at me. "What makes you think that?"

"She's been different since I got back. Quieter, more serious. Hasn't she told you?"

"I haven't asked her anything about it," Jacob admitted. "I was so worried about you, then yesterday with Andrew fuckin’ Mase and everything ... She didn't show me anything while we were phased together yesterday." He thought for a minute. "It would have been easy for her to hide something from me though. She's good at controlling her mind, and I wasn't looking for any signs that she might have been trying to keep something hidden. What do you think it is?"

"I don't know," I shook my head. "It's just a feeling I have. Rachel thinks so too."

"'Kay. Dammit, I hope it's not anything bad. I shoulda paid more attention."

"Oh don't beat yourself up, Jake," I told him. "It's probably nothing, and if Leah thought it was something that you really needed to know, she would have told you already."

"I guess, but honey I'm gonna have to start spending more time with the pack. I've been awol for days, and even before that I was with you most of the time, then at the Cullens. There's a whole lot of pack business I've let drop." He looked at me ruefully. "I'm gonna have to get back in the game."

"It's fine," I promised him. "But first you need breakfast." I clambered out of bed and yelped when he smacked my butt.

"Sorry," he grinned at me. "It was too tempting."

After breakfast, Jake headed out with Sam and Embry to meet with the Cullens. They had arranged to meet at the treaty line, even though Jake actually considered it to be void. He just said it was as neutral a place as he could think of.

I had phoned Leah and she had promised to come over to Billy's while Jake was gone. She arrived shortly after Jake left, looking as introspective as she had over the last few days. Taking a seat with me in the kitchen, she cradled the drink I gave her between her hands and told me I looked much better. I confirmed I was feeling that way, and Leah proceeded to stare at me thoughtfully for a while before beginning to speak.

"I know you didn't ask me to come over to be sociable," she said finally. "You felt it too, didn't you? On the mountain?"

It was my turn to fall silent. I had a horrible feeling that I did know what she was talking about. It was something I had shaken off as being a figment of my imagination, or a hallucination caused by my weakened Spirit.

"I felt ... other Spirits, yes," I told her cautiously. "Leah I was so out of it. You know that. I was weak, and exhausted. I've been hoping I was delusional, or something."

"No," she shook her head. She was very certain. "I was there, and I wasn't weak, or delusional, or exhausted. It was real. Do you know what it was?"

"One of your ancestors?" I asked hopefully. I couldn't face the possibility that it might be something else.

"Come on Bella," Leah said scathingly. I didn't blame her. "You must have felt my ancestors. There were several there. I'm sure you felt them."

"I didn't feel them. I was only there on the mountain helping you. I didn't feel anything else."

"Aren't you curious at all about who was helping me up there?"

"I'm not."

"You have to be." She and I shared a look and I saw in her eyes some of the genuine genuine concern I had hadn't seen in her for some time.

"I know," I told her. "I'm just not curious."

"I'm not concerned about your curiosity. I'm concerned about your lack of any feeling at all."

"I'm not feeling anything at all."

"Everyone feels something."

"Not me." I looked her straight in the eye. "I wasn't feeling anything."

"I wasn't. You felt something."

"I didn't." I shook my head. "I was only there to help you. I wasn't feeling anything else."

"You have to be feeling something."

"I'm not." I was so sure I could feel it on my face, but she wasn't buying it. She was still looking at me as if she were seeing into my soul, trying to read me like a book.

"I'm not." I told her. "I'm not feeling anything at all."
Sarah was there, and others that I wouldn't even begin to know who. This was different.

We sat in silence, staring at each other for a while. Neither of us wanted to say it out loud. Neither of us wanted to think it might be so. But both of us knew the truth.

Jacob stood at the treaty line, barefoot and barechested, his arms folded as he watched his enemies approach. Sam and Embry flanked him, one to each side and a little behind him. All three men wore only shorts and glowers.

"Jacob," Carlisle inclined his head in greeting. Esme held his hand while Emmett brought up the rear. Showing their muscle, Jacob thought. As if the pack would worry about one strong leech.

"Your wife wants to talk with us too?" Jacob asked Emmett.

"She's worried about Bella and the baby."

"We're touched," Jacob said sarcastically. "They're fine."

"She hoped to talk to Bella."

"Not gonna happen."

Carlisle stepped in before things between the two younger men could get heated. "Jacob we are here for information on Edward's whereabouts."

"He's ashes and dust." Jacob didn't see the point in sugarcoating it. Esme gasped and doubled over under some pain. Jacob shifted uneasily. Fuck if the leech wasn't making him feel bad.

"Is Jasper around somewhere?" he asked suspiciously.

"We aren't fools, Jacob," Carlisle answered him. "You specifically told us not to bring him. He isn't anywhere near."

"Dammit," Jacob muttered, watching Esme. She was, he realised, a mother who had lost a child. Not quite the normal family unit, but still. He sighed. "Look, Edward bit Bella, okay? In the process of whatever happens when a ... one of your kind bites a human, her soul joined together again. That meant he wasn't tied to Bella anymore. The venom reversed or something. After three days he died or whatever the fuck you things do."

Jacob had been watching Carlisle carefully and he was beginning to feel uneasy. The doctor's face had become increasingly concerned and it wasn't a fatherly kind of worry.

"Vampires do not die," he said slowly. "If Edward was reinfected by our venom, then he was not destroyed, Jacob. He was changed into something else."

"Well whatever it was, he's gone now. We burned him."

Carlisle was thoughtful. "I hope you're right, Jacob," he said finally. He sighed heavily. "Then all that remains is for us to say goodbye. We are ready to leave. Rosalie would like an opportunity to speak with someone. She ... has a personal interest in this matter. She was deeply shaken when she heard that Edward had taken Bella while she was pregnant. I believe she has something she wants to give for your child," he finished with a smile.

Jacob was sure as fuck not going to accept anything from a leech for his son, but Esme looked as though she was trying to cry and couldn't. She clung to Carlisle, who had wrapped one arm around her. "One of my pack will speak with her before you leave," he said. "But she's not getting close to Bella."

"Understood. Rose will be here in an hour," Carlisle agreed.

"Fine. Leah will be waiting." Jacob's eyes bore deep into the doctor's as he asked, "You'll be leaving for good? Never coming back?"

"We will be leaving and it would not be prudent for us to return within living memory. We obviously do not age. None of your generation need to be concerned about us."

"That's not good enough," Jacob barked. "You living here makes our gene carriers phase. Ten lives this time, who knows how many next time." He took a step closer to the three leeches. "You will not return to this area, ever. There is no longer a treaty. My descendents will not adhere to our forefathers' mistakes. This ends today. There is no place for you here."

Carlisle sighed heavily. "There are few places we can comfortably live..." he began.

"Well those few just reduced by one," Jacob told him. "You stay the fuck away from this area, and I will allow you to walk away right now. Leah will meet with Rose in one hour, and then all contact between us ceases." Backing up, Jacob signalled to Sam and Embry that they were leaving. Only when the Cullens had left though, did the wolves turn their backs.

Back in wolf form, Sam and Embry filled in Quil and Jared who were patrolling. All the wolves were unanimous in their
beliefs. The Cullens would leave and not come back. Jake was inclined to agree.

I hope so anyway.

Embry - Shit, man! Can you believe that's it over? We all phased cos they were here. Now they're going, the rest of the boys on the res should be safe from phasing.

The phased wolves' moods were euphoric, Jake most of all.

It's all over now The leeches are leaving, Bella's safe, she has her soul back and the baby's okay.

Deep happiness and satisfaction radiated from the Alpha. His future with his imprint and child stretched before him, unmarred by anything other than the occasional nomadic leech. Matthias still needed to be dealt with, but Jacob wasn't overly concerned about that. For now, nothing was going to mar his joy.

Embry - So when are you gonna propose to Bella then?

Jake showed the phased wolves his plans.

Quil - That's gonna guarantee a yes, man.

The wolves all laughed. There was little doubt that Bella would accept Jake's proposal. They were quite simply meant to be together, and nothing could stand in their way.

Leah

Leah smelled the blonde leech before she saw her. Not having to pretend to be human, deep in the forest waiting for a wolf, Rosalie was standing eerily still. Her beautiful face was frozen in a mask which was entirely unreadable. Leah came into sight and the two women stood a considerable distance apart, watching one another warily.

“What do you want?” Leah asked finally.

“First, I would like to know that Bella and the baby are safe.” Rosalie’s vampiric tones rang clearly through the forest.

“They're fine. The baby's strong, and Bella is recovering by the day. Anything else?”

Rosalie took a deep, unnecessary breath and expelled it again. “I looked through Edward's things. I knew your pack would have found him and I presumed he would be gone. I was curious. He kept to himself so much.”

“Go on.” Leah was impatient to get out of here. Unlike Rosalie, she needed to breathe, and the scent was vile in her nostrils. It felt like the sweet bleach smell was burning all the way down to her lungs.

“He was obsessed with his soul. He had books, essays, letters on the subject. He had acquired a phenomenal amount of information... I read a lot of it. I'm not convinced he's gone.”

“Our Alpha burned his remains himself. He's gone.” Leah was giving nothing away.

“He took steps to protect his soul. I've seen enough to know that souls can be manipulated. Edward had a part of Bella's, which she apparently regained. If it's possible to split and reunite a soul, don't you think it would be possible to influence what happens to it after its body is destroyed?”

Rosalie sounded earnest and Leah hesitated. She knew better than Rosalie just how well a soul could be manipulated and influenced. And she knew what both she and Bella had detected on the mountainside.

“What do you think has happened?” Leah finally demanded.

“I don't know. But I do know that Edward was very, very clever. And he was diabolical. I have a feeling that it's not as simple as destroying his body.” Rosalie was out of her depth, afraid that she was sounding like a lunatic. All she knew was that her gut was telling her that Edward knew more than he had ever let on.

Leah sighed. She was going to have to talk to Jake about this after all. Fuck when would he and Bella be left in peace. “I'll pass the information on,” she told the leech. “No offense, but if that's all you wanted to say, I need to get some fresh air.”

“There was one more thing.” Rosalie hoped her next gesture wasn't about to be thrown in her face. She pulled a small parcel from her pocket. “A long time ago, I bought this trinket for the baby I hoped to one day have. I've always kept it. A reminder of... another time. I went to see someone yesterday. I suppose you would call her a priestess. She has blessed it. It is supposed to protect the child from supernatural harm.” She extended her arm across the treaty line.

Leah hesitated. She knew there was no way in hell that Jake would allow his child to possess anything that had once belonged to a bloodsucker. But then again, Leah had been born to Protect the future Alpha. Her instincts had been right so far. She knew she should trust them now.
Taking two steps forward, Leah reached out her hand. Her overheated fingers touched ice as she took the small parcel from the blonde vampire who stood in front of her. Their eyes met and understanding flashed between them. They may be mortal enemies. But both women would protect Bella’s child from evil at all costs.

Rosalie nodded once, abruptly, and was gone.

A/N: I keep forgetting to confirm this and I know it’s been worrying some readers so here it is: *Leah will NOT be imprinting on Jacob’s child!* Her role is a figment of my imagination and as far as I know it is an entirely new pack dynamic. Feel free to keep guessing lol, but there will be no child imprinting. Ever.
A/N: First, I'm sorry for not replying to last chapter's reviews. I resemble a vampire at the moment. Chalk white and shivering - fluey virus. Anyway, I've pushed through it because you're all amazing, to finish this fic.

Second, some of you have been really worried about the baby. Can I just say that having Edward somehow take over or manipulate the baby's soul honestly never even entered my head as a potential storyline. I just can't go somewhere like that. I know it's a spoiler to say, but that idea really gave me the creeps! Not gonna happen.

Third, I know this is a long note, but there's a longer one at the end. PLEASE READ IT. I will not be held responsible if you don't :D

And finally, as always, thank you to MistC and niamhg. Yet again, you have both been absolutely fantastic at reading for me, supporting me and putting up with my last minute mind changes and twists. Thank you.

I stood and walked around the table to Jake's chair. He looked like he was about to explode and I didn't blame him. I stood behind him and placed my hands on his shoulders, rubbing my thumbs in soothing circles. He leaned back into my touch and I bent down to kiss the top of his head. He had just had an avalanche of information thrown at him.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" he asked Leah harshly. The she-wolf set her jaw. I caught her eye and shook my head slightly.

"Don't antagonise him." I said.

"I didn't know for certain. I still don't," Leah defended herself. "It was a feeling, was all."

"A feeling that you didn't think was important to share with me?" Jake was pissed as hell. I felt his muscles start to ripple under my hands and I began rubbing his shoulders more firmly, willing him to calm down. He settled under my touch.

"Jake, Bella was so weak when she first woke up. And you wouldn't see anybody at first. Then you had the Cullens, and the Elders, and Matthias all hanging over you. I don't know anything for sure! And there's no indication that it might be harmful."

"You saw it too?" Jake's voice was gentler as he addressed me.

"I felt something, the same as Leah," I confirmed. "Neither of us actually saw anything. But I was weak. I kind of thought I must have imagined it until Leah told me she had felt it too."

Jake shook his head. "And Rosalie said she thinks Edward found a way to protect his soul after his body was destroyed."

"She didn't really know, but she was afraid of that, yes," Leah confirmed.

"Fuck!" Jake stood up abruptly and began pacing around the small kitchen.

"Jake it doesn't necessarily mean anything," I pointed out to him. "I think we know that everybody has a soul. It must go somewhere after we pass. So Edward's deformed soul may be on the mountain."

"On my mountain," he growled, but I saw him relax slightly. "With my mom," he added with a frown. He turned to Rachel then, who had been sitting quietly since saying her own piece. "She was okay?" he asked her seriously.

Rachel nodded, her eyes moist. "She was fine, Jake. I thought it was a dream and I don't remember it that vividly."

Jake sat back down again, pulling me onto his lap. He looked around at us three women and sighed. "So Edward's soul has probably survived, and it's up on the mountain but weak."

"Very," Leah confirmed.

"And Rachel, you can access your Spirit the same as Bella and Leah."

"Yes, I think so. I want to try and learn how to control it, same as Bella did," she said eagerly.

"Well I don't see that there's much we can do," he finally said doubtfully. "Rachel it's obviously up to you if you want to learn more about your Spirit. As for Edward, if he's weak and deformed, I don't see that we should really be worrying about him."

"I think we need to think about it," I told him firmly. "We don't know what we're dealing with, Jake. Best case scenario, Edward's soul stays harmlessly on the mountain with the other Spirits watching him, and whatever's in that package stays hidden in a drawer somewhere. Worst case, maybe one day it might prove to be something we need."

I felt Jake shift under me. He hated this. "Jake I'll bring it to Charlie's and hide it somewhere, okay?" I told him. "I won't..."
"Bella's right, Jake." It was Rachel. Her voice was quiet, but firm. She was clearly used to handling a volatile wolf. "From what I hear, that vampire really does seem to care about the baby. That won't be something harmful."

Jake muttered something about it still being from a fuckin' leech and damn women were ganging up against him, but he gave a curt nod. "I don't want to know what's in it. I don't want to know where it is. And I sure as hell don't want my baby having it unless it absolutely fuckin' essential," he growled.

"Our baby," I corrected him, "will not get it unless there is no other option. I can't even begin to imagine what kind of situation that might be, so will you please stop growling about it."

Jake said nothing, but the rumblings in his chest stopped. I saw Rachel and Leah exchange amused glances as they stood to leave. On her way out the door, Rachel turned back to me.

"Bella, I was hoping to spend some time with you practising accessing my soul," she told me.

"Of course!" I told her. "Leah and I saw each other on the mountain and we had thought about trying to meet in our Spirit forms again. You could join us!"

Jake snorted and I looked at him, offended. "What?"

"The three of you are going to be flying around La Push in your Spirit forms?" he asked, his lips twitching.

"Leah thinks it will help her when she gives up her wolf," I explained. "And Rachel wants to practise."

"And you?" he asked, amused. I just rolled my eyes at him. He knew I enjoyed being in my Spirit form. He was just being an ass. "Most girls go shopping, or to a bar or something. But nooo, my girl and my sister bond by flying around out of their bodies."

"And my boyfriend runs around the forest on four paws," I retorted. I looked up at Rachel and Leah, who were watching the exchange and obviously finding it entertaining. They were both smiling widely as they left.

A few more days passed. My strength seemed to have returned entirely. Other than a few bouts of nausea every day, and the need to nap most afternoons, I felt like myself again. I had spoken to Charlie about moving into the cottage with Jake. He had simply told me to do it. He wanted no fussing, he said. He only needed moved a few times a day, and fed. Just the same as Billy, he assured me. It could all be managed without anyone actually living in the cabin with them.

And so when Jake came in from patrol one afternoon, his eyes sparkling, and asked me to go to the beach with him, I knew exactly what was happening.

We walked along the shore hand in hand. As in my dream, Jake could scarcely contain his excitement. He was bursting with the news but said we needed to wait till we got to the tree. I was laughing. I knew what he was going to tell me and to make me wait till we got there seemed silly.

When we reached the tree, things changed from my dream. Instead of swinging me around in his arms, Jake pulled me round the far side of the log and pointed. I stopped in my tracks, stunned. A picnic blanket lay on the sand with a basket.

"We're here for a picnic?" I asked, laughing.

Jake grinned down at me. "Couldn't be too predictable, could it?" he pointed out. Shaking my head, I let him pull me down onto the blanket.

"Is the cottage ready, though?" I asked curiously. He just told me to be patient.

We ate and drank. Rachel had prepared sandwiches and a salad for us. Jake refused to allow me to look in the basket, instead fetching everything I wanted from it himself. He sat with his back propped against the tree while I leaned idly into his side. The November chill couldn't touch me, even with the sea breeze blowing in, as long as I was with my sun. We chatted as we ate, just enjoying one another's company. I bit back my curiosity about the cottage. I was certain that was why we were here, but Jake clearly had a plan and I was happy to go with it.

Finally, Jake declared the basket to have no more food in it. He had of course eaten most of it himself, but I had had my fill. His eyes were dancing as he picked up the basket and positioned it between his legs. Reaching in, he brought something out in his hand and turned to face me.

"You know why we're here, right?" he said.

"The cottage is ready," I grinned.

"Yup. So here's the thing. I didn't want it to just be like your dream, okay? So we're gonna play a game."
“A game?” I laughed.

“What’s so funny about that?” he asked, mock offended.

“The big scary Alpha wants to play a game,” I deadpanned and he tutted.

“You could show a little appreciation, you know. It took me ages to come up with all this.”

“Okay, okay. What do I have to do?”

“Just pull stuff out the basket, one at a time, and see if you can guess what I’m trying to tell you.” He was so excited that I couldn’t help but laugh again.

Alright,” I agreed. “But what’s in your hand?”

“That’s uh, not part of the game really. That’s for later.” I looked at him curiously as his cheeks flushed a little. “Start!” he commanded.

Putting my hand into the basket, I felt a few different objects. Curious, I lowered my gaze to them but Jake pulled my chin back up.

“Don’t look!” he ordered me.

“Fine!” I pulled out a tiny pair of baby socks and looked up at Jake’s beaming face.

“That’s an obvious one,” he conceded. “I can’t wait for us to bring our baby home. Okay, next!”

Smiling, I laid the miniature socks out on my lap and smoothed the material. I was actually deeply touched at the sight of them. Looking over at Jake, my smile widened.

“Look!” I held one of the socks against his hand. “Our baby’s foot is going to be smaller than your finger!” Our eyes met in wonder and Jake leaned in to kiss me.

“Like I said,” he murmured, “I can’t wait.”

“Me either.” Placing the sock back in my lap, I reached into the basket again. This time I pulled out a book. My eyes snapped up to Jacob’s. “Wuthering Heights?” I asked in disbelief. “This is my favourite book!”

“I know,” he said calmly. “And you needed a new copy. The one you have is falling apart.”

“How did you know though? That it’s my favourite, I mean? We’ve never talked about it!”

Jake simply shrugged. “I pay attention, Bells. The one you have is completely battered, and you must have read it straight through three times while you were recovering from being bitten. The only other book you read more than once was Pride and Prejudice.”

My mouth was probably hanging open. I had no idea Jake noticed things like that. “Wow,” I managed finally. “Thank you. But … why’s it in here?”


“I want to sit by the window and read while I’m waiting for you to come home from patrol!”

“Yes!” He was apparently delighted I’d figured it out for myself. “I like that idea. That I’ll come home and find you waiting for me, doing what you love. Okay, next.”

Still slightly stunned, I reached back into the basket and pulled out a spoon. “A spoon?” I looked at him questioningly. He grinned at me sheepishly and I rolled my eyes. “You’re looking forward to all the cooking I’ll be doing for you. Neanderthal.”

Jake cocked his eyebrow. “We’d already agreed I’m a caveman, remember?”

“Ooh I remember,” I murmured, shivering slightly as I thought of our first trip up the mountain.

“Focus, Bella. Next!”

I reached into the basket and pulled out a small book. Opening it, I saw it was an empty pocket sized photograph album. I thought for a moment and then smiled in understanding. “Memories,” I told him. “We’ll be making memories together in the cottage.”

Jake nodded enthusiastically. His eyes were still dancing. “You, me and kiddo. Next!”

Laughing, I reached back in. I knew what the next object was as soon as my palm closed around it. Holding it up, I told him, “Key. That’s symbolic of us moving in.”
"No, that's just to go on your keyring," he told me, reaching into my pocket and pulling out my small bunch of keys. He attached the new key firmly to the keyring and put it back in my pocket, grinning at me. "I've got the other one. We'll go straight there after we're done here."

"What else is in there?" I asked curiously. I put my hand in and pulled out a small wooden carving. It depicted a wolf sitting back on his haunches, looking up. A crescent shaped moon was shaped at the tip of the wolf's nose. "Okay I know you're the wolf," I told him. "So this is to show that your wolf will be with us always?"

"I hope not!" he protested. "I mean I like him a lot, but I hope he tells me his time is up one day so I can live a normal life with you." He took the carving from me and traced his finger gently around the crescent moon. "I'm the wolf," he confirmed, "But the moon is you."

"Me?"

"Yeah. You know you tell me I'm like your personal sun? Well, you're like my gravity. You keep me grounded. I don't fly off the handle like I used to, or not much anyway. And when I do, I just need to be near you to come back to earth again. So I thought the moon kind of represented gravity, and I need you close to me always." He looked at me a little shyly. "I made it myself."

"You made this?" I took it carefully from his hand and looked at it.

"It's not that good," he said. "I didn't have a lot of time so it's quite rough. If you like it, I'll make another one, a bigger one. We can put it on the fireplace."

"I love it, Jake," I told him. "It's perfect." Still looking bashful, he returned the kiss I gave him.

Pulling back, he seemed a little nervous when he said, "Are you ready to go to the cottage?"

"Yes!" I jumped up enthusiastically, putting my abdomen in line with Jake's face. He grabbed my hips suddenly and buried his face in my stomach, inhaling deeply. I laughed. He just couldn't get enough of the scent of our child. "I'm a little jealous, you know," I told him.

"He smells amazing," Jake smiled as he put everything back into the basket. I saw him put something in his pocket and remembered the object that had been in his hand earlier.

"What is that?" I asked curiously. Jake took my hand and squeezed it.

"You'll find out soon."

I rode wolfback to the cottage. This was something I didn't think I would ever tire of. I knew Jake was going carefully because of the baby. Part of me wanted him to be reckless and wild, and tear through the trees with me. I told him as much when he phased back to human outside our cottage. Laughing, he pulled me to him.

"I'd love to, honey, but let's wait till after the baby's here. We'll get someone to babysit and I'll take you for a wild ride. I promise."

"I'll hold you to that," I told him. Turning towards the cottage, I raised my eyebrows at him. "Will we?"

"Hell yeah," he breathed. He used his key in the front door and pushed it open, before standing back to let me through first.

Stepping over the doorway, my eyes widened. The November afternoon was drawing to an end and the daylight outdoors was dimming. Candles were lit all along the hall floor inside the cottage, illuminating a path up the stairs to the bedroom.

"When did you do this?" I demanded. I couldn't help but worry about the fire hazard but Jake was shaking his head at me.

"Emily and Sam helped me out this afternoon," he told me. "Follow the candles, honey."

Mesmerised, I followed the trail along the hall and up the stairs. Jake followed at a distance behind me, blowing the flames out.

I hadn't been in the cottage since the day Jake told me of his plans to build a new bedroom for our baby. When I reached the top of the stairs, I instantly saw that it was all completed. The large studio room was smaller, a wall separating part of it. The candles led not that way, but to the open patio doors and outside. I shivered as the cold air blew in, but knew Jake would warm me soon. Following the trail of candles, I found myself in the garden. It had been cleared of weeds, herbs had been cut back, and a table with two chairs had been placed exactly where I had wanted the seating area to be. The candles led straight to it.

I still had my back to Jake, looking around at the garden in the dusk, when I heard his husky voice in my ear. "Sit down, Bella."

I sat and waited for him to join me. Instead, he locked his eyes on mine, reached into his pocket to retrieve the mysterious object, and dropped down on one knee. My hand flew to my mouth of its own accord.
Jake took my other hand in one of his. His eyes were brimming with love and hope. "Bella you know I love you with all my heart. My life before you came was empty. You've heard the story. I was waiting for you. I waited over three years for you to find me, and I don't want to wait any longer. Having you in my life these past weeks has been the most amazing time of my life. Well, apart from the whole getting bitten thing. But we are exactly right for each other. Without wolves and imprinting, I would still have fallen in love with you when I met you at Charlie's that day. You are exactly what I need. You accept me just as I am, without judgement. You make me laugh, you make me mad, you make me happy, and you make me crazy when I'm not right here with you. Without the supernatural stuff, I would still be so fuckin' happy about the baby we've made. And I would still be here, asking you to commit to spending the rest of your life with me."

He opened his other hand, and showed me the ring that was nestled in his palm. The small gold band held a trio of three square diamonds, the middle one slightly larger than the other two.

"Jake!" My tears weren't far away, and I knew it wasn't just hormones this time.

"If you don't like the ring, we can change it," he said in a rush. "I just got one I thought would suit you."

"It's perfect!" I told him. "When did you ...?"

"I've not been patrolling all day every day, honey," he smiled at me. "Can I ... put this on you?"

"Please," I said, tears beginning to overflow.

Jake slid the ring on. It was very slightly loose on my finger but in no danger of falling off.

"The rest of our lives, Bells," Jake said triumphantly. I could only laugh and simultaneously cry. He moved forwards, still on one knee, and nudged my legs apart so he could fit between them. Standing, he brought me up with him and kissed me hard. I felt all his love, all his passion, in that kiss. I returned it with equal ardour and felt rather than heard the groan that came from deep within him.

"Bells," he whispered against my lips as he began walking us towards the bedroom. And in that moment, nothing else existed. It was just Jake, and Bells, and a lifetime of love promised between us.

A/N : For those readers, and I appreciate that will be the majority, who like a happy ending to stories ... please consider The Ties That Bind Us finished. Jake and Bells are getting married, they got through the thing with Edward, their baby is safe (with his OWN little soul!). Edward’s soul lingers weakly on a mountain and Matthias never bothered to call back. This is Jacob and Bella’s happy ever after.

That said, an epilogue will be posted up tomorrow. I need your attention, please! The epilogue ends on a mother effing b*tch of a cliff hanger. It will be the kicking off point for the rest of this story BUT I will not be able to start posting the sequel for at least 7 or 8 weeks. So, in other words, if you don’t want to be left hanging for a couple of months, please don’t read the epilogue.

If you do ... well, you were warned. If you choose not to, I would like to say thank you SO much to everybody who has read, reviewed, PMed, or added an alert/favourite to this story. I never thought I could write something that was more loved than my first fic, Worthy of the Wolf, but this story has frankly blown it out of the water and I am so grateful to everybody who has taken the time to read and review.
This is just a quick note to say that the sequel to Ties will start to be posted up within a few hours. It's called Bonds of our Souls and will be on my profile later today.
This is just one helluva huge THANK YOU to everybody who took the time to vote for *Ties* in the non-canon awards.

Your votes brought it to joint first place for the Best Romance category, and second for the best Bella/Pack Member category.

I'm honoured, shocked, giddy and excited. This is the first time I've gone through the awards process and *Ties* was up against some phenomenal stories and writers. So once again, THANK YOU. I've said it before and I'll say it time and time again…

*My readers are the best :D*
Chapter 37: Update

As a result of ffnet's recent crackdown on story content, Bonds of our Souls was deleted today. This also coincides with Google docs crashing and leaving me without the first 25 chapters.

Can I access the chapters and re-post? Yes, I could.

Am I going to? No, I'm not.

I firmly believe in signs. Seven months writing, four first place and two runner-up awards, three contest first place wins out of four entered, and thousands of reviews... I call that a successful and very rewarding run. I think this is my sign to stop writing though.

I'm deleting the epilogue of Ties so that it stands alone, and calling it a day. I would like to say a massive and very heartfelt thank you to everyone who has been with me for the past seven months. You've made me smile, made me laugh, and yes, sometimes made me cry. I've learned loads about myself and had the time of my life entertaining all of you. I leave with some real friendships and the knowledge that some of the bravest people I have ever had the honour to know, read fanfiction! You know who you are;) 

So once again and for the last time: thank you to all my readers.
Here I thought I was the one who was supposed to pull on your emotions with my writing...I spent a great deal of yesterday in tears, not so much because of Bonds being pulled but because of the avalanche of truly touching and beautiful messages you sent me.

I started the day with my teddy bear in the corner; but as the day went on and more and more PMs came in both here and on other sites, I quite literally melted into goo.

So here's what I'm gonna do: I'll finish writing Bonds, and it will be posted on JBNP. I'll put it up on other sites eventually. After that, I still think I'm done with writing fanfiction. (Sorry/ That may change when BD2 is everywhere lol.) But for you, for the readers who have put up with my inane ramblings and freak outs and knee jerk reactions and have still stayed with me...I'm completing Bonds. Chapter 28 was already written and has just been posted on JBNP.