

Worthy of the Wolf

Story: Worthy of the Wolf

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Author: jusobele

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Summary: Winner of three awards including Best Breakout Story, the "No Matter What You Love" Award, and Best Edward Cullen. Bella blames the Cullens for Jacob's transformation into his wolf, and allows her love for her best friend to grow. When Edward seeks to wipe out the wolfpack with the help of the Volturi, how can Bella and a young Alpha protect the people they love?

Chapter 1: Chapter 1

PROLOGUE

I lay curled into a ball on my bed gasping for breath. A dam had burst in my psyche. Each new realisation washed over me with all the force of a tsunami, sweeping away my preconceived notions and leaving broken pieces of emotional debris in its wake. Wave after relentless wave hit me, and as I gasped for breath between each one, I was aware of the very foundations of my recent beliefs cracking and crumbling under the onslaught of revelations. The horror of my epiphany was fuelled by broken snippets of conversations racing through my memory at breakneck speed.

"It's the reason we exist – because they do." Jacob.

The Cullens knew. Knew their presence would trigger the wolf gene. And still, they came. *Selfish*.

"I wish you would have told me that you were so afraid. You didn't need to be." Jacob. *Kind*.

"Control yourself. I could kill you. Do I always have to be the sensible one?" ... him. *Cold*.

"If this is how you're gonna react, I'll freak out more often." Jacob. *Warm*.

"It will be as if I never existed." ... him. *Liar*.

"I won't lose you, Bella. Not for this." Jacob. *Love*.

"You're not good for me, Bella." ... him. *Pain*.

"I'm not good enough to be your friend anymore." Jacob. *NO!*

It ripped through me like fire, the realisation that my sun, my Jacob, my best friend, had had his life destroyed, his future taken from him, by the boy (no, Bella, the one hundred and seventeen year old vampire) I loved. Hadn't Jacob sacrificed enough? Lost enough? His mother - gone; his sisters - gone; his father – well, not gone, but as tribal chief his responsibilities as a father were at times conflicted; his future dreams - gone; the girl he loved - ...

No, not gone. *I'm here Jacob*.

Anger coursed through my veins. Anger at the Cullens for their selfishness. Anger at myself for my own selfishness. Oh yes, I could see that now. Wallowing in self pity, worrying my father, my mother, my best friend with my lifelessness. Disgust conjoined with the anger when I thought of how I had used Jacob to heal myself with absolutely no regard for his burgeoning feelings for me. The power of these new emotions drove me off my bed and into a frenzied pacing around my room.

I no longer knew how I felt about ... him. I was just as afraid as ever that I was broken and could never love another. But I could also see that I had been dazzled and blinded. And of three things I was absolutely certain.

Firstly, Jacob Black did not deserve this fate. Secondly, I had failed abysmally as his friend. And thirdly, I was going to do whatever I could to ease his pain.

I grabbed my truck keys and headed to La Push.

***Chapter 2*: Chapter 2**

A/N: This is my first attempt at writing a fanfiction so please bear with me while I get the hang of the basics! This chapter is just doing a little scene setting before I get the story started.

Of course, I do not own anything Twilight related. Sadly, not even a wolf.

Chapter One – The End of an Era

It had begun the previous morning. I can't say that it started out just like any other morning because really, even in my bizarre existence, it was definitely a strange day to begin with. I had just realised that my best friend was a werewolf and I had driven over to La Push, revolted and angry at discovering he was a monstrous killer. Jacob had quickly set me straight on that one, and then we had the conversation that slowly began to counter-spin my world on its axis.

"I don't understand. What's happening in the woods? The missing hikers, the blood?"

His face was serious, worried at once. "We're trying to do our job, Bella. We're trying to protect them, but we're always just a little too late."

"Protect them from what?"

"Bella, honey, we only protect people from one thing – our one enemy. It's the reason we exist – because they do."

I stared at him blankly for one second before I understood. Then the blood drained from my face, and a thin, wordless cry of horror broke through my lips.

Jacob was a werewolf because vampires exist? My personal sun had been transformed into an angry, bitter shell of his old self because of the proximity of vampires? Jacob belonged to Sam and was avoiding me because of ... the Cullens?

The rest of the day had passed in something of a haze, each new revelation adding to my dazed state.

Laurent – dead.

Jacob - in danger, chasing vampires.

Victoria – after me.

Paul – ready to attack me in wolf form.

Jacob – protecting me ... in wolf form.

Emily – her scars, the devotion between her and Sam that was so painful for me to see.

By the time I stumbled into my bed that night, my mind was already in overdrive. I curled up in my bed, Jacob's earlier words piercing my heart. *"You're such a hypocrite, Bella."* Was I? If I wasn't, how could I have been so disgusted by Jacob this morning, when I had been so ready to accept ... him ... even before I knew he was a so-called vegetarian?

My mind was spinning and reeling, trying to fuse everything together in a way that would allow me to accept both today's revelations, and my former beliefs. But whichever way I looked at it, I kept coming back to one thing.

"Bella, honey ... It's the reason we exist – because they do."

Oh, I remembered it all. The stories Jacob had told me that day on First Beach, of the cold ones and the wolves. There was no doubt in my mind that the Cullens knew their presence here would trigger the wolf gene in the Quileute tribe. And yet, they came. *Selfish*. Inexcusably so. The lives of mere boys ruined, future choices ripped from them, who knew how many lives affected, by one seemingly insignificant decision by one family of vampires – to return to Forks. A *complication*, that was what ... he ... had called the Quileutes.

All night I struggled to find some justification for what the Cullens had done, some good out of Jacob's life being irrevocably transformed this way. I found none.

It must have been around midnight that the conversations started playing back in my mind, voices literally sounding in my head and holding up both of the boys I loved for inspection. Horror coursed through my veins as I came to the ultimate realisation – that Edward was possibly not the perfect romantic hero I had imagined him to be. (Did I just think his name?) My shattered heart railed against this fact, desperate in its attempt to justify my recent behaviour and cling onto the notion of my eternal love for my Romeo.

But deep inside, in that tiny but oh so crucial place in my heart that Jacob Black had mended and begun to inhabit, I knew the truth. Edward (definitely thought his name that time) was cold and selfish, and had dazzled a teenaged girl – that would be me - into believing his love for her was enough to transcend humanity, family ties, and *decency*.

Around 2 a.m., guilt began to burn through me as I thought of how Charlie must have suffered these past months, watching

me descend into an abyss of despair. I thought of Renee, far enough away from me to feel utterly helpless as her only child in so many ways ceased to live. I thought of Jacob, who had been so persistent in his attempt to fix me while asking for nothing in return.

The anger began sometime around 4 a.m. The disgust shortly after that.

By the time the sun had risen, I was in a frenzy of self-loathing and determination to make amends to the people I had hurt. I was still in love with Edward; that wouldn't change overnight. But I was able to see that he was not as perfect as I had believed. I could see the flaws in his facade, and the naivety with which I had allowed myself to be drawn into the relationship. I recognised that this was an important shift in my feelings, that the Edward phase of my life was beginning to draw to a close.

I was not in love with Jacob, and I was not prepared to leap from one supernatural relationship into another – not even I was that naive. But when I looked, really looked, at Jacob's life I could see the unfairness of the cards he had been dealt. Who cared for Jacob? Who looked out for Jacob's best interests? Who was Jacob's sun when his world seemed cold and hostile? Maybe, just maybe, I could bring some comfort and nurture to Jacob's world. Maybe I could make some amends for my recent behaviour by treating Jacob with the friendship and loyalty he deserved. I would be completely honest with him. And who knew? Maybe, one day, I would be ready to move on with my Paris.

Maybe.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3

A/N: Here's a little more scene setting and my first foray into interactions between characters. Let me know what you think!

Chapter Two – Okay, no more fruit

Billy didn't seem surprised to see me when I arrived at the red cabin.

"Come on in Bella. Jake's out on patrol. Guess it's okay to tell you that now, huh?" His eyes twinkled a little as he referred to the secrecy of the last few weeks.

"Yeah, I thought he might be. Uh, Billy, is it okay if I just – make myself at home?" I knew it would be, but wanted to ask anyway, as if it would somehow make what I planned to do more official.

"Of course it is Bella. Jake said you'd probably be spending time here till that leech is caught."

Victoria. Right. I'd kind of forgotten about her in all the drama of last night. I froze for a moment, then shook it off. I was here for a reason.

"So if we invite Charlie up, I'll make us all some dinner then," I stated.

Billy grinned. "I'll never say no to an offer like that, Bella."

As far as I was concerned, that was it sorted. I would be a regular feature in the Black household, and I had pretty much free rein to do whatever was required to make Jake's life easier.

Billy took off mid-morning to attend a council meeting, and I got to work in earnest. I wasn't surprised to find, in a house inhabited by a wheelchair-bound man and a teenaged boy, that everything was pretty much in disarray. I straightened up the small living room and scoured the bathroom before turning my attention to the kitchen.

I was halfway through scrubbing the floor when the porch door banged open.

"Bells?" Jake bounded into the kitchen and stopped in his tracks when he saw me.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Earning my keep." I couldn't help but smile a little at his look of utter confusion. "Jake, if you and the rest of the pack are out at all hours to keep me safe, the least I can do is help out a little."

Jacob looked cynical. "So are you going to clean Paul's kitchen too? Cos you know, after yesterday that might not be the best idea."

I rolled my eyes. "No, Jacob. Since I'll be pretty much staying *here* over spring break, I just want to pitch in a little. It's no big deal." I took in his appearance. He was filthy from the forest, his bare feet were muddy and his hair stuck out at all angles. He also looked exhausted. "Jake go and clean up, and I'll make you lunch."

"Oh-kay?" He looked uncertain, but went to follow my orders anyway.

Two minutes later, Jacob yelled from the bathroom. "Hey, Bells, were you in here? Where's my towel?"

I rolled my eyes again and yelled back. "Over the towel rail, Jacob. Where else would I put it?"

"I dunno. I usually just sort of drop it when I'm done."

"I noticed."

A snort was followed by a brief silence, then the sound of the shower running. I found myself smiling again as I shook my head and set about preparing a mountain of sandwiches.

When Jake came back into the kitchen, freshly showered and dressed in jeans and a black T-shirt, he still looked a little uncertain. I felt bad that he was clearly so thrown by something as simple as me making him sandwiches and tidying up a little, but I was pretty sure I knew how to relax him. I gestured to the huge plate of sandwiches and the pitcher of juice and said simply, "food".

As I'd thought, Jake's eyes lit up and he sat down immediately. As he ate, he chattered about his recent patrol and how impressed Embry had been that Jacob had managed to let me in on the pack secret despite Sam's orders. I found myself, as so often in Jake's company, listening intently to his easy chatter and relaxing somewhat.

When he had finished his sandwiches – in a ridiculously short amount of time – I handed him an apple to eat while I washed up. Jake stared at the apple, then at me.

"Uh – Bells?"

"Yeah."

"What's this?"

"It's an apple, Jake."

"Uh – okay?"

"You eat it, Jake."

Jacob put the offending apple down on the table and said firmly, "no, I don't."

"I've looked in these cupboards *and* your fridge, Jacob Black, and I know the junk you've been eating. You need to keep your strength up."

"Bella," Jake said seriously. "Werewolf. Strength is kind of inbuilt these days."

I narrowed my eyes. I may have been on a massive 'I've been a crap friend' guilt trip, but I could still play dirty. "Fine, but if you want me to make a dessert for after dinner this evening, you'll take that apple."

"I'd take the apple, Jake," said a deep voice from behind me, making me jump. I whirled round.

"Embry! Jeez, don't sneak in like that!"

Embry grinned. "Sorry, Bella, keep forgetting about wolf stealth."

I turned back to Jake, who was standing with his arms folded across his chest, looking mutinous. I picked up the apple and waved it around annoyingly. "Take the apple, and I'll make dessert this evening. Your choice, Jake!"

"Fine!" He grabbed the apple from me and I went back to gathering the dishes, feeling smug. Embry sniggered and muttered something I didn't catch, then I heard a sort of popping noise and Embry yelled, "What the fuck, Jake!"

Spinning around, I saw Embry standing there, some pulp and juices running down his cheek. What was left of the apple lay squished at his feet.

"JACOB BLACK!" I yelled. "DID YOU SERIOUSLY JUST THROW THAT APPLE AT EMBRY'S HEAD?"

He had the grace to look slightly sheepish, but couldn't stop a very Jacob-like grin spreading across his face as he said "hey! I promised to *take* the apple. You didn't make me promise to *eat* it."

I stood there for a moment with my mouth open before suddenly, unexpectedly, and for the first time in literally months, bursting into laughter. It felt so damn good and I didn't know whether I was laughing because of Jake's childishness, the fact that I'd made him grin again, or something else entirely. I didn't care, it just felt so good to laugh freely. I vaguely registered Jake looking slightly shocked, and the next thing I knew I was enveloped in his hot arms, being lifted off the floor into an enormous bear hug.

"Having no dessert tonight would be a small price to pay for hearing you laugh like that, Bells," he whispered in my ear. "But no more fruit, 'kay?"

"Kay."

Jake seemed to feel he had to keep me company that afternoon but after Embry left, clutching the wrench he had come to borrow, Jake looked completely exhausted. I was worried about him and insisted I would be fine cooking dinner while he slept. He had looked torn between needing to sleep and wanting to keep me company, until I told him I would be there every day during spring break. He visibly brightened at that, and went off to his room.

Billy arrived back just as I was finishing my blitz of their kitchen. He didn't comment on my endeavours – I actually wondered if he even noticed, not that it bothered me – but he did ask me to join him when I put a pile of sandwiches in front of him. He looked serious, and I sat down quietly, waiting for him to say whatever he needed to.

"Bella," he began, and his wise black eyes were more serious than I had ever seen them. "I need to ask. Is your involvement with the Cullens over?"

I instinctively wrapped my arms around my chest. I couldn't meet his shrewd gaze. "They left," I whispered.

"It wouldn't be the first time they returned here," he replied wryly. "Bella." His voice was commanding, forcing me to look at him. When I did, I saw not Billy Black, Charlie's oldest friend and Jake's dad, but the Chief of the Quileute tribe. "Is your involvement with them over?"

I couldn't speak. I nodded miserably. They weren't coming back, that had been made very clear to me.

"DAD!" Jacob's voice thundered from his room. His bedroom door slammed open with so much force that it shook the small cabin slightly. Jake appeared in the kitchen, eyes blazing with fury, fists clenched, shaking hard. "Is that really necessary?"

"Jacob the council needs to determine ..."

I never did find out what exactly the council needed to determine – although I could hazard a guess – because Jake's face contorted into Sam's hard mask as he spat out "The council! Right, *dad* – whatever the council wants, the council gets, isn't that how it works?"

"Jacob I am the Chief of this tribe and I have a responsibility to keep our people safe." Billy spoke quietly, but somehow his voice carried more power than all of Jacob's yelling.

"Yeah yeah, I know, *Chief*. Never mind that Bella is your best friend's daughter, or your son's – friend." Jake placed a strange emphasis on the word "friend" and a look flickered across Billy's face. For a moment I thought it was sorrow, but that made no sense. I had no time to dwell on it as Jake continued bitterly, "and last time I checked, it's *me* who's out there keeping your people safe."

I stood up, not wanting to witness this painful moment between a man and his son who had always been so close, but Jake misunderstood my intentions.

"Yeah, c'mon Bells. Let's give the *Chief* space to air his *responsibilities*."

I trailed out to the garage after Jake and watched as he banged a few tools around.

"Jake?"

"Yeah Bells." His voice sounded heavy, and I hated it.

"You usually get on really well with your dad. What's up?"

He was silent, and as I watched a muscle working in his jaw I realised he'd lost all the boyish roundness to his face. This was the face of a grown man, and it still wore that hard mask that I hated so much. The maturity to his face was completely at odds with his current very teenagerish attitude, and my heart ached for all that had been cast upon him.

"You know you can tell me anything, right?"

He looked up at that, and smiled. Not his bright, beautiful smile – not *my* smile – but it was better than that dreadful mask. Then he sighed heavily.

"S'just that he *knew*, Bella. He knew everything. He knew I was going to morph into a giant dog from the moment the first bloodsucker ... I mean Cullen set a toe around here. I mean of all the kids around here, I was the one that was most certain to phase, and he's my *dad* Bella, and he told me nothing."

Wow. That was a lot to process. I started with the most obvious question. "How could he have known for sure?"

"Cos of our family, Bella. It's in my blood. I'm supposed to be the Alpha of the pack. I don't want it, told Sam to keep it, but that's not the point. The point is that because I'm supposed to be Alpha, I was always going to phase when a blood vampire came calling. You'd think that seeing as how he's my dad and all, he'd have warned me or something, but it's against tribal law and of course that's more important than ... well, me." Jake looked down at his feet and kicked some dust. Before I could think of anything to say, he continued, on a roll now. "And Bella, it isn't just me he's lied to. If dad had told Charlie the truth about *them*, maybe – " he looked at me, obviously not entirely sure how to proceed. "Well, maybe you wouldn't have been so hurt by them. You know, Charlie could've grounded you, or forbidden you to see him or something. Or if he'd told *me*, maybe I could've ..."

"Jake, wait!" I couldn't let him continue with that. "I don't think that anything you or my dad could've said would have kept me away from..." I paused. I could do this. I took a deep breath, swallowed hard, looked straight into Jacob's eyes and said firmly "Edward."

Jake looked momentarily stunned, which I misinterpreted. "Oh come on Jake, when have I ever really listened to you? Or my dad?"

He laughed a little at the truth of that. "No, that's not ... Bella, do you realise that in one day you've actually laughed, *and* said his name? Keep up that rate of recovery and you'll be nearly normal by summer!"

I rolled my eyes for the umpteenth time that afternoon while wondering once again just how it was that Jacob Black knew me so well. My thoughts were cut short when his demeanour changed abruptly and he stared at me. It was as if he was trying to see straight into my soul and I was vaguely aware that it should probably make me feel uncomfortable but it somehow didn't. Probably because it's Jake, I thought.

"Why is that do you think?" he demanded abruptly.

"What? Why is what?" I was lost.

"Why suddenly now? Why are you suddenly starting to get over him now?"

"I'm not over him," I denied automatically. "But I guess ... well, it's kind of hard to explain ..."

"What is?" Jacob was still staring at me intently and his voice was hardly above a whisper.

"I just got to thinking how *unfair* it is that you ... and Embry, and Jared, and Sam, and Paul – well okay maybe not Paul, he might deserve it – but you've all just sort of had your lives completely screwed up and it's not just your dad who knew what would happen, Jake. *They* did, too. And they still came here, which in itself kind of disproves a lot of what I thought about them." My voice tailed off.

Jacob stared at me a little longer and then said, "Huh."

"Huh?"

He grinned. "Yeah, huh. That wasn't what I was thinking but seeing as how you're mad at the vamps cos they've made me phase, I can live with that."

I had a feeling I had missed the whole point of the latter part of that conversation.

Dinner passed relatively uneventfully. Jacob and Billy seemed to put their differences on hold for the sake of the food, which I was grateful for. I really hated to see them at odds with each other. It was further testimony to the damage the Cullens had caused here at La Push. Now that I was aware of what was going on though, I began to notice little things, like how Billy shifted uncomfortably in his seat when Charlie commented again on Jake's newest growth spurt. I wondered how difficult it was for him, being the keeper of so many secrets and being bound to maintain those secrets from everyone, even his own son and his best friend.

Billy handled himself better than I did, however, when Charlie suddenly asked "exactly how much *do* you eat, Jake? I know you're growing and everything, but it's not natural you know." I promptly choked on my food, fortunately severely enough to distract Charlie from his train of thought about what was natural and what was – well, supernatural.

Several times during dinner, while Billy and Charlie were talking sport, I looked up at Jake and caught him watching me with an expression I had never seen before. I was used to him looking at me with affection, but this was different. There was a level of *adoration* that I had never seen in anyone's eyes before. It didn't unnerve me somehow, but I warned myself to be careful with Jake. I could give him no guarantees and make him no promises. I just hoped my friendship would continue to be enough. Or maybe, from the relish with which he was eating that apple pie, friendship and dessert.

Despite his earlier row with Billy, as I hugged Jake goodnight after dinner and headed home, I thought he looked more content than the last few times I'd seen him. Was it really this easy to make Jacob happy? Just by being there and looking after him a little?

When I fell into bed that night, exhausted after two sleepless nights in a row, I felt slightly more at peace with myself. A wolf howled close by as I drifted into a dreamless sleep.

The first few days of spring break passed easily. Once I had done everything I could possibly think of in the Black home, the goal of which was to make Jake's home life as comfortable as possible, I began to pass my time when Jake was patrolling, at Emily's. I found myself liking her immensely. She was warm and funny, and the devotion she showed to not just Sam, but all the pack, was inspiring to me. She dedicated hours each day to baking and cooking for them. I quickly began to help out and before long I found myself enjoying being able to contribute to the pack dynamics in this small way.

Emily seemed to enjoy having another female around who knew about the pack. She spent a lot of time filling me in on some of the finer details of pack life. There was so much to learn. Jake had explained about the pack mind, but Emily spent hours detailing how it made each of the wolves feel, having no privacy and no peace. I quickly realised she was so much more than just a cook for the pack; they came to her, confided in her, looked for her comfort or advice. She told me about Sam's ability to issue Alpha commands which the other wolves were basically unable to ignore, and how guilty it made him feel sometimes when he had to force one of his pack to do something against their will. She told me about their supernatural healing abilities, and the kinds of speed they could attain. I had to smile at that one – at least Jake would approve of *one* aspect of being a wolf.

And then, she told me about imprinting.

A/N: From the next chapter onwards, I'm going to start playing around with timelines and take Bella's future in a totally different direction to the books. I'm starting to have fun, but reviews would be great!

Chapter 4: Chapter 4

A/N: Wow, thank you to everyone who has reviewed, added an alert or added this story to favourites. I had a freak-out moment after posting the first two where I thought nobody would like this story, so it's been amazing to get some feedback:-D

I forgot to tell you at the start of the last chapter that I own nothing Twilight related. I still don't.

Chapter Three – Freaky Supernatural Shit

At first, I didn't think imprinting sounded so unusual. So it was a bit like love at first sight, maybe a little stronger. Maybe it was something like what I felt for Edward. But as Emily began to tell me her story, I could see the pain in her eyes as she described her inability to resist Sam's devotion.

"I know it must sound strange to you, Bella," she said. She seemed nervous. "I mean, he gave me these scars, and he had been dating my cousin, my best friend, until he met me." She looked at me and I realised she was waiting for some sort of judgement.

"Emily!" I snorted. "You do know about me, right? In love with a vampire, my best friend is a werewolf. I'm not really the best person to be judging what is or isn't *strange*."

She smiled at that. "Fair enough. I guess both of our lives have been affected."

I wanted to know more about imprinting. Emily described how it happened the first time they saw their intended imprint after phasing. She talked about the gravitational pull the imprinted wolves feel, their amazing capacity to love and protect not only their own imprints, but those of the other wolves, too. She told me that as far as they could tell from previous pack histories, every wolf would imprint eventually. I looked up at her sharply at that.

"So Jacob will ... imprint, one day?"

Emily looked at me quietly for a moment. "We think all the wolves will end up imprinted, yes," she said eventually. After a moment's silence she asked, "Would that be a bad thing Bella?"

"What?" I felt flustered. "No! I mean, I want Jake to be happy, and if finding an imprint makes him happy, then I guess that's what I want for him. But he would still be able to be my friend, right?"

Emily smiled. "I have a feeling Jake will *always* be your friend, Bella."

I nodded, trying to convince myself that I was satisfied with that. It was just going to take some getting used to, the idea of Jacob being imprinted on someone else.

"Emily told me about the imprint thing today."

We were sitting together on the couch, half watching a movie. I was lost in thought, and Jake kept nodding off. I had finally decided to ask for his opinion on the whole imprinting phenomenon. I didn't expect his reaction.

"WHAT?" He leapt off the couch as if it was on fire and towered over me, fists clenched. "Why the hell would she do that? That is really not her fucking place!"

"Jake!" My voice was sharp. Not only was he over-reacting, but I was starting to notice his cursing was getting pretty frequent. I didn't feel intimidated despite his size and obvious anger – this was Jake, for crying out loud – but he shouldn't just go flying off the handle like that. "Why wouldn't she tell me? She was just telling me about being a wolf, what it's like for you guys and everything, and it came up. I was just wondering what you thought about it – the whole idea of looking at a stranger and your whole world revolving round her. Sorry I brought it up!" I crossed my arms and glowered at the TV screen.

Jake was quiet for a moment, then sat down again. "Sorry." He bumped me with his shoulder. "I think I just over-reacted."

I snorted. "Just a bit." I looked at him out the corner of my eyes and asked again. "So – what do you think of it?"

"I think ... the whole thing is pretty fucking confusing."

"Jacob Black will you watch your mouth."

"Sorry Bells. Guys cuss all the time, it rubs off."

"Mmhmmm. So what's confusing?"

"Well, it's just ... the *pull* you feel, makes you want to – be around her like, *all* the time, and it hurts, I mean really, actually, physically hurts when – she's not right there beside you. But then when she *is* there, and the wolf in you, he just wants to touch her, stroke her hair, kiss her, but you can't because she won't ... It just sucks, really."

I was openly staring at him. His whole face was contorted with pain and confusion as he stumbled through this explanation. He saw me staring and seemed to struggle to rearrange his facial features into a calmer mask.

"Jake, how...? It sounds like you know the feeling. Have you ...?" My blood started to thunder in my veins although I wasn't sure why.

Jacob interrupted me, looking sullen. "Direct line to Sam and Jared's thoughts, remember." He was quiet for a moment before asking, "What do you think about it, Bella? Imprinting, I mean?"

"What, like, a girl's perspective?"

"Yeah I suppose."

"Well, I talked to Emily about it and she seemed to think it was unavoidable. Like, if a wolf has imprinted on you, their devotion is so strong that you can't resist."

"See that is so fu... sorry Bells, messed up."

"What is?"

"There's no *choice*. It's like, her free will is gone. She can't *choose* who she's going to spend her life with. Some freaky supernatural shit goes down and *bam!* She's obligated to a wolf whether she likes it or not. I mean imprinting is supposed to make you unbelievably happy." He snorted derisively at that. "I just don't see how *forcing* a girl to be with you can make either of you happy."

I thought about that for a while. I could see where he was coming from. I could also see he was upset about it. Time to be the comforting friend I had promised myself I would be. "Oh Jake come on. I doubt any girl you imprint on will feel *forced* into anything. She'll be damn lucky to be your imprint," I said confidently.

Jacob twisted in the couch so that he was looking directly at me. "Bella? What is so great about me that a girl who otherwise wouldn't feel *that way* about me, would suddenly feel deliriously happy about having to be with me? Tell me, Bella, because I can't see it. I'm tied to La Push, couldn't move out or go make a future for myself if I wanted to. Not just because of the pack, but because I have no choice but to take over as Chief one day. I spend half my time as a huge furry monster, and have a temper I can hardly control. It's not that great a deal for a girl, Bella."

I *absolutely hated* seeing Jake like this. All his natural happiness seemed sometimes to be being slowly sucked out of him. I was determined to make him feel better. "Ah come on Jake. What's with the pity party? What's so wrong with being tied to La Push? You love it here! And *despite* being huge and furry, you are actually beautiful."

"Sort of," he interrupted with a half grin.

"No, I said "sort of" *before* you phased. There's no sort of about it now," I teased him. "You're also very loyal, and kind, and funny, and smart. There is absolutely no reason for your imprint *not* to fall in love with you for you, for who you are. So don't worry about it being some sort of obligation thing, Jake. Really."

Jacob looked intently at me for a while, and then sighed. "But how would I *know*, Bells? I mean, really, really believe that she loved *me*?"

I thought about it. I wasn't sure why this was so important to him but it obviously was. I was kind of inclined to think that he should just deal with it when it happened so I said the first thing that came to mind. "Well, maybe you could just not tell her about the imprint thing until she's already in love with you."

Jacob looked at me cynically. "Like, *lie* about it?"

"Well ... not lie exactly, just not tell her until you were sure of how she felt."

"Lie," he said firmly. I shrugged my shoulders. I actually thought that if the imprint was this all-powerful thing like Emily had made out, then when Jake imprinted he wouldn't really care about all this. I let him think in peace for a while. Finally, he said, "So you think if I leave things to happen naturally, and she falls in love with me and then I tell her about the imprint, that would work out?"

"Oh I don't know Jacob! Yeah, why not? I don't really fully understand any of this, okay? It was just an idea."

"Huh. Maybe not a bad one though." Jake settled back into the couch and put his arm round my shoulders. He pulled me close and planted a kiss on my hair. I snuggled close to him, glad that he had relaxed a little. "So I make her fall head over heels in love with me before telling her anything," he said firmly. "I can do that." After a moment, he said, "hey Bells?"

"Mmm."

"You talked about my looks before my personality there. I didn't think you were that shallow," he snickered.

"Shut up Jake."

If spring break had started relatively peacefully, it was not destined to continue that way. I had quickly fallen into a pattern – wake up, have a quick breakfast, head to La Push, spend time with either Jake or Emily, do tons of cooking and a little housework, head home again late in the evening. I was aware of feeling peaceful whenever I was in La Push. The hole in my chest still throbbed and ached a lot of the time, and I was still ridiculously sensitive to "music and mush" as Jacob called the things that made me wrap my arms around myself, but I was definitely feeling more *alive* than I had in a long, long time.

Jake, on the other hand, was struggling. When we were together, he was usually calm and sometimes his old smile, my smile, would light up his whole face; but on the occasions that I saw him at Sam and Emily's house, he always seemed angry and aggressive – so much so that one day, Sam sent him out on an extra patrol to work some of it off. When I asked Jake about it, he replied tersely that the fucking red-headed leech was still fucking out there, and it was fucking pissing him off.

Emily had a more controlled explanation. "He's protective of you, Bella, and she's after *you*. This is personal for Jake."

It wasn't just Jake, though. All the wolves, even Sam, seemed to be becoming increasingly edgy. Emily had an explanation for that, too. "It's the pack mind, Bella. Jake's upset and angry that they haven't caught her, so they all feel it." She really was like an oracle sometimes.

Just over half way through spring break, tragedy struck. Harry Clearwater had a fatal heart attack. In the midst of the grieving, both Quil and Harry's daughter Leah joined the wolf pack. Quil's phase had been anticipated, but shockwaves reverberated through the pack as the first female warrior in history joined them. And not just any female, but Sam's ex-fiance, Emily's cousin.

Jake exploded through the red cabin's front door after his first phase with Leah. "Fuck!"

I leaped out of my skin at the sudden explosion and Jake looked immediately contrite. "Bella I'm so sorry. It's Leah, jeez she's a bitch!" I listened to his tirade for a few minutes. I had given up trying to get him to tone down his language, when he got angry he just didn't seem able to help it and as much as I hated seeing this side of Jacob, I recognised that he had too much on his plate and needed to let off steam. Finally, though, I thought it was time someone put this in some perspective.

"Jake sit down and listen to me for a minute." He did. It amused me sometimes, how docile the big, bad wolf was around me. "Jake, try and see this from Leah's point of view." He immediately opened his mouth. "Don't interrupt me, Jacob Black! Jake, in the space of a year, Leah has lost her fiancé to her *cousin*, she's just lost her dad, and now she's the only female *wolf* in a rather large pack. Come on Jake, what does she have to be happy about? I mean, no offense but you're not exactly sunshine and light sometimes, and you have less to complain about than Leah. I'm not saying your life is easy right now, but is it really as difficult as Leah's?"

Jake huffed a bit about how she could at least *try* and keep some of her opinions to herself, but I hoped I had got through to him a little and that he would give Leah a bit of a break.

The day after Harry's funeral, Victoria once again crossed into tribal land. Paul was patrolling and his howl had the rest of the pack instantly ripping off their clothes and tearing into the forest. Two hours later, Jacob returned home, where I was waiting anxiously with Billy. Although I felt safe in La Push, I was still terrified of Victoria, and hated that the wolves were all in daily danger because of me.

Jacob strode into the small living room. His dark brown eyes were almost black as they smouldered fiercely. He crossed the room in three strides and pulled me into a tight embrace, resting his head on mine.

"Jacob?" It was Billy's voice. I felt Jake's head turn in his father's direction, and nod. "Well done, son."

I looked up at Jake, hardly daring to hope. "She's gone, Bells. I told you we'd keep you safe." Pride and a hint of possessiveness were evident in his voice and I hugged him tight, unable to express what I was feeling any other way. Relief, gratitude, and a whole lot of pent up fear came bursting out of me in great, racking sobs. Jacob just continued to hold me, stroking my hair and murmuring in my ear that I was safe, she was gone, I was safe, ssshhh honey. I felt safe there in his arms, and it seemed as though he was somehow absorbing all my turbulent emotions into himself and diffusing them as he held me and rhythmically stroked my hair. I gradually became aware of a sense of peace creeping over me. It was almost like Jasper's ability to numb emotions, but where Jasper could mask emotions only for them to resurface once he stopped exerting his power, this was so much deeper, almost like a cleansing at the level of my soul.

Finally, I stood back and looked into Jake's eyes. "Thank you." For destroying Victoria; for saving me in so many different ways; for somehow making me *feel* again.

"No problem Bells," he grinned. "A lifetime of servitude in return will be fine."

Of course, the pack threw a bonfire that night to celebrate. The mood was vastly different now. Excitement and pride were evident on each of the wolves' faces and the story of Victoria's demise was told over and over throughout the evening. It turned out that Leah was the fastest wolf in the pack and had shot ahead of the others like a bullet to catch up to Victoria. Furthermore, her anger made her vicious, and she was pissed enough at the world to keep Victoria down despite her inexperience, until Jake arrived a couple of minutes behind her. According to the rest of the pack, Victoria put up one hell of a fight, but Leah and Jake had ripped her apart between them by the time any of the others arrived at the scene. I was

proud of Jake, but not surprised that he had been one of the wolves to take her down. Leah, on the other hand, was something of a surprise to me. I decided to thank her personally.

"Don't bother," she shrugged. "I did it for myself. Jake's head is a pain to be in, all he does is whine about the danger you're in. At least now he'll have less to whine about."

I took a deep breath, remembering the scolding I had given Jake just a couple of days ago. "Nonetheless, Leah, without you she would still be hunting me. So I do owe you my thanks." She remained silent and I scurried back to Jake. He grinned at me. "Fun, isn't she?"

As the evening wore on, the air grew chilly and I huddled closer to the bonfire to keep warm. Jacob came up behind me and sat down, pulling me against his chest, between his legs, with his arms wrapped around me. I was startled by this proximity but Jake just held me tightly to him and told me I'd heat up soon. I had to admit, I was so warm and comfortable in his arms that I chose to ignore the intimacy of the position, and when the obvious comparison popped into my head and I thought of a cold, marble embrace, I was surprised by the shudder that ran through my body. Jake just held me tighter.

Physical contact was something that had been creeping up between Jake and I over the past week. He generally held my hand now every time we were walking somewhere together; and yes, I liked the feel of his large hot hand completely encompassing my own smaller – and invariably cold – one. When we were watching TV, he would put his arm around me and I would snuggle into him and yes, I liked that too. He was so warm and comforting. In the back of my mind, I knew that we needed to have a talk about it. I was scared of hurting him by leading him on and I had promised myself that I would be honest with him, but there hadn't been much time for us to be alone for a serious chat when he wasn't falling over from exhaustion. And if I was being honest, I hadn't exactly prioritised it. Soon, I told myself.

As I sat there, feeling warm and a little sleepy, I looked around the bonfire at the pack members, Emily and Kim. Quil appeared to be admiring his biceps. Jared and Kim were wrapped up in each other. Embry and Paul were arm wrestling and Leah had already left. Emily and Sam appeared to be having some kind of animated discussion. As I watched them, Emily pointed in our direction without turning her head. Sam looked in the direction she was pointing, saw me watching, and said something to Emily which caused her to look quickly over at me. She sat down abruptly and said nothing more while I was watching.

"Hey Jake?" I whispered.

"Mmmm." He sounded sleepy.

"What's going on with Sam and Emily?"

"Lovers' tiff," he replied quickly.

"I thought the imprint stopped them arguing or something?"

Jake snorted. "Nah, it's just Emily, she doesn't usually get bothered by much. Being imprinted doesn't stop you arguing. I'm pretty sure I'll spend my life arguing with my imprint."

I said nothing, unsure of how to reply to that. I tried not to think of Jacob with an imprint, it just wasn't something I felt comfortable with – probably for entirely selfish reasons.

"Jealous of my imprint, Bells?" he teased.

"Sure, sure," I replied. "You wish."

He breathed his next word so quietly against my hair that I would have missed it if Paul and Embry hadn't stopped yelling at each other at that point.

"Yeah."

I decided it was time for Jake and I to have that talk.

A/N: Hope you enjoyed! I have a couple of Big Family Days ahead so unlikely to get another chapter up before Friday but I will try. Reviews might help;-)

Chapter 5: Chapter 5

A/N: Well here it is, the next installment which I hope you all enjoy. I'm amazed by how many people have added a story alert for this, and I would like to again thank everyone who has reviewed. Don't forget to let me know what you think of this one!

Chapter Four – Shut Up, Edward

I was nervous by the time Jake and I got back to the red cabin. I knew he would be expecting me to get straight in my truck and go home but I wanted to air a few things to make absolutely certain that I wasn't sending him the wrong signals about how things were between us. So when we reached his home, I asked him if I could come in for a little while.

"Sure, sure Bells. You don't need to ask you know, this is like your second home these days."

We went inside and I automatically started picking up Billy's empty beer cans and tidying some papers he had left lying around.

"You don't have to do that." Jake's voice was quiet and when I turned round, he was leaning with his shoulder against the wall watching me intently.

I shrugged. "I know. But I don't mind. It feels like maybe I'm helping you a bit, that's all."

Jake didn't say anything and when I came back from putting the cans in the kitchen, he was still in the same position. I started twisting my hair in my fingers nervously. I so did *not* want to have this conversation. Not only would it potentially hurt Jake, but it could very well involve me having to talk about my feelings, something which I preferred to avoid when possible.

Jacob crossed the room slowly, almost as if he was afraid of making me bolt if he moved quickly or suddenly. He stood in front of me and removed my fingers from my hair, twisting them through his own fingers instead.

"What's on your mind Bella?" He spoke quietly and I was again reminded of someone trying not to make a hurt animal bolt.

I sighed heavily. Now or never. I held up our intertwined fingers and said, "This." I was staring at our feet, unable to meet his eyes.

"What about it Bella?" Still in that soft voice.

"Jake ..." I stopped, not sure how to continue. We were both silent for a few moments until Jacob said, "Bella my eyes aren't on my toes, can you look at me please?"

Cringing, I lifted my head and looked into his eyes which showed only resignation. He searched mine for a moment and then sighed. "Bella, didn't we talk about this already?" he asked. "At the movie theatre?"

"Yes, but..."

"And I told you that as long as it doesn't bother you, it's *my* problem if this means something more to me than it does to you, right?"

"Yes, but..."

"And I also promised you that you can count on me never to hurt you, right?"

"Yes, but..."

"And"

"JAKE!" He stopped and looked at me expectantly. I sighed again and led him to the couch. "It's not just holding hands anymore though, is it?" We sat down. "I mean, it's all the ... the hugging, and..."

"Friends hug, Bella."

"But tonight, Jake. At the bonfire."

"You were cold," he said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"I know but, don't you think that it could be, I don't know, misinterpreted as something else?"

"Misinterpreted by who?"

"By *you*, Jake!" I was getting exasperated.

"And I already told you that I know your feelings, and my own feelings are my problem."

I didn't really think we were getting anywhere. "Jake, I don't want to hurt you. I don't want you to *get* hurt because you think we're going somewhere different to where we are. And I think all this hand holding, and hugging, and *stuff*, is just going to end up with you thinking that we're going somewhere other than just friends."

There. It was out. Jacob seemed to be deep in thought for a moment and then he said, "Look Bells, I get that you care about that kind of thing, but truth is that I happen to *like* holding your hand and hugging you, even if it does mean a bit more to me than it does to you. So as long as you're comfortable with it, I don't see the problem. And for your information, any *stuff* you've been doing certainly hasn't been with me so you don't need to worry about me getting the wrong impression over that." He grinned at me cheekily and then said, "And the only place I think we're going just now is bed." I spluttered and he added, "separately, of course. C'mon Bells, it's late, and I want to spend all day with you tomorrow before school goes back." He stood up, quite deliberately pulled me up into a bear hug, and then led me out to my truck.

The next day was the last day of spring break. I wanted to make the most of my last full day in La Push. I felt real sadness that I would need to reduce my time there from tomorrow.

I had spent some time last night thinking over what Jake had said. I really did like the comfort he brought me when he held my hand or pulled me close to him, so I decided that even though it seemed a little unfair, I would just accept that he genuinely didn't mind about the discrepancy in our feelings. I was fairly sure this status quo wouldn't last forever but if Jake was fine with the situation, that was good enough for me.

When I pulled up to the red cabin, the front door was practically wrenched off its hinges and Jake came bounding out wearing cut off jeans and a face-splitting grin. He pulled me into his signature bear hug and asked what I wanted to do that day.

"I really don't mind, Jake. Anything you want to do?"

"Most of the pack are at the beach, we could join them till lunch then do something just the two of us? Sam's relaxed the patrol schedule a lot since we're not chasing the red-head anymore so nearly everyone's there."

And that was how I ended up at First Beach on the last morning of spring break, sitting with Kim and Emily and watching Jake and most of the other guys play football along the shoreline.

As Kim and Emily chatted about anything and everything, I took to people watching. The pack dynamics were beginning to fascinate me. Sam was clearly the leader in everything that they did, whether in wolf form or human. Jared, Emily had told me, was his Beta, and it was obvious that the rest of the pack showed him a certain amount of deference. But I was starting to notice the way most of the pack gravitated to Jacob. It was as if, even though Sam was issuing the orders, there was a natural tendency amongst the wolves to gather around the rightful Alpha.

I couldn't tell whether or not Jacob was aware of it, but he certainly seemed at ease surrounded by all the pack members. I watched him move with a grace that astonished and impressed me as he threw himself into a game of football that would put most professional athletes to shame. His well defined muscles rippled and glistened with sweat, and he looked completely relaxed as he enjoyed this rare chance to forget about all his responsibilities. I found myself mesmerised as I watched him, wondering if he knew how absolutely, achingly beautiful he really was. His beauty was of a totally different kind to Edward's (funny how I could think his name so easily now). Where Edward's appeal had been all about pale and unobtainable, Jacob's was more *real* somehow. And, I couldn't deny it, Jacob was incredibly sexy and sensual in a way that Edward just ... wasn't.

"Earth to Bella!" I jerked my eyes away from Jacob – yes, okay, I had been staring – and met Emily's amused gaze.

"What?" I felt flustered, and could feel the blush spreading not just across my cheeks, but down my neck and onto my chest as well.

"If you can tear your attention away from Jacob for a moment, would you mind helping me carry the cooler from the car? We brought drinks but forgot to bring the cooler onto the beach."

"Of course!" I leapt to my feet, still embarrassed at having been caught ogling my best friend. Well, I thought defiantly, he is beautiful, it would be strange *not* to want to watch him.

As Emily and I crossed the beach to reach the car park, Emily was chattering away about what she and Sam had brought for refreshments when I caught sight of someone stomping in our direction across the sand. Leah. Emily ceased her chatter the instant she saw her. I tried to catch Leah's eye as she passed to say hello, but she brushed by as if we weren't even there.

Wow, I thought. I heard Emily sigh.

By the time Emily and I returned to the beach, struggling to carry the enormous cooler between us, Leah had drawn Sam aside and they were deep in conversation. As Leah had just finished patrolling, the conversation was most likely a de-briefing, but I noticed Emily watching them carefully. This was the first time I had seen Sam, Leah and Emily in the same vicinity and it was clearly a very awkward triangle. I wondered how strange it was for Emily now, knowing that her lover and

his ex-fiance shared each other's innermost thoughts on an almost daily basis.

Jacob appeared beside us, having noticed us struggle with the cooler. Of course he carried it easily one-handed, and grabbed my hand with his free one. My fingers noticeably tingled under his touch, causing my hand to jerk involuntarily. Jake looked at me uncertainly and began to loosen his grip on my hand. Realising that he must think I was still freaking out about the amount of physical contact between us, I firmly tightened my fingers round his and grinned up at him, watching him visibly relax as he grinned back.

I was pleased to see that when Jake put the cooler down and began handing drinks round the girls and those pack members who were taking time out of the game, he manoeuvred it so that Leah wasn't sitting completely separately from the rest of us. It seemed he had listened to me, at least to a certain extent, and I was relieved for her. I observed her as she drank from her can and what I saw pierced my heart.

Leah was putting on a very good show of acting like *The Bitch Who Didn't Care*. Anger came off of her in waves and her scowl was etched permanently on her face. But I, who until very recently had to literally hold myself together, recognised the signs of her heartbreak. Every time Sam's voice boomed across the beach, Leah's head twitched in the opposite direction as if trying to shield her ears from his voice. When he ran across her line of vision, she winced ever so slightly and lowered her gaze away from him. Yet at the same time, while she sat with her back firmly to Emily, her upper body seemed to betray her by following Sam, her torso almost imperceptibly swaying and turning to face whichever position he was in relative to her. I doubted even the wolves with their enhanced senses would pick up on any of these things, but my sensitivity to the subtle nuances of heartbreak allowed me to see how utterly and completely broken this girl was.

I shifted my attention to Sam when he came over to join Emily. He was so wrapped up in Emily that it was slightly sickening to watch, and I couldn't help but feel a little angry at their insensitivity towards Leah who was, after all, only a few feet away. Leah apparently felt the same way as she stood up abruptly and stomped past them. Sam raised his head to look at her as she passed, allowing me a good look at his face. I gasped slightly at the expression in his eyes. Those eyes, which must once have looked upon Leah with love and admiration, were now deeply entrenched with pity and guilt. I shuddered at the thought of ever seeing someone who had once loved me look at me like that.

"Bella?" I turned to Jacob and he raised his eyebrows, asking me what was wrong. I shook my head and mouthed "tell you later". Wolf hearing and all. He nodded, drained the rest of his can, stood up and stretched.

"Want to come to our tree?"

"Yeah, sure." I took his outstretched hand and he hauled me to my feet, of course keeping hold of my hand as we set off. I realised that I wouldn't have it any other way and chuckled slightly.

"What's funny?"

"I was just thinking that after kind of freaking out last night, if you stopped holding my hand like this I would be really mad at you," I admitted, peeking up at him.

A very Jacob-esque grin lit up his face. "See? I *do* know better than you what's best for you."

"OK, dad," I said dryly.

"Hardly," he retorted, indignant. I laughed.

"I can't believe school's back tomorrow," I sighed. "I'm really going to miss this." Miss Jacob, miss our banter, miss the sense of *home* that La Push somehow created for me.

Jacob was very serious as he replied. "That's actually kind of why we're going to our tree. I wanted to talk to you about that."

I looked up at him questioningly. He took a deep breath. "I was kind of hoping you would keep visiting. I mean, I know with Victoria gone and all, you don't *need* to be here. But I thought that maybe you could, you know, still come after school? Like we did before, remember? I mean we won't be working on the bikes, but you could still come over, we could hang out and do our homework together. When I'm not patrolling I mean. Or some days I could come to Forks, 'slong as dad doesn't need me for anything."

"I'd like that Jake," I said. And I really, really would. I wasn't sure why we needed to go to our tree – the place reserved for our most serious discussions – to establish that, though. Reading my mind as always, Jake attempted an explanation.

"Sjust that, it's not going to be easy for me. I mean, I've got so used to having you around all the time and now that you need to go back to school and away from me ... well, it's just – going to be tough for a while."

I was startled. I knew that Jacob wanted more from our friendship than I did, but what he was describing was akin to how I had felt the days Edward went hunting. Reading me again, Jake said, "Stop freaking out, Bella. I'm not going to tie you to our tree to keep you here or anything. I just nee – *want* to be around you."

"Is that healthy, Jake?" I asked quietly.

He sighed. "Yeah, look who's talking. Can you just promise me that you'll not disappear off the radar for, like, weeks at a time or anything?"

I squeezed his hand and managed a quiet "yes."

"So," he said, in a blatant subject-changing move. "What was up with you staring at Leah and Sam earlier?"

"She's so broken, Jake. And you should have seen how Sam looked at her! Like he felt sorry for her and felt so guilty."

"Yeah, he does," Jacob agreed. "It's always there in the back of his mind. He feels terrible for hurting her."

"I can't stop thinking about how awful it must be for her."

"Well she makes it pretty awful for everyone else Bells."

I shook my head. "I hope she makes Sam suffer."

Jacob looked at me intently. "He can't help it Bella. We can't help how we feel about our imprints. It's literally all-consuming. Leah can see that now, surely that must help her."

"Yes I'm sure it warms her heart that her ex-fiance's love for her cousin is all-consuming," I said sarcastically.

"Bella you don't get it. Without our imprint, we can't focus, can't relax. It's not the same as having a crush or even being in love. It's like, your world can't turn without her. And when the world doesn't turn, that's not good. Basic physics. Don't blame Sam. I know it sucks for Leah and I really am trying to be nice to her, but there's nobody at fault here."

"Except the Cullens," I said quietly. Jacob stared at me with blatant disbelief. "It's true, isn't it?" I said. "If they'd never come here, you would still be a normal 16 year old boy. The others, too – you'd all just be leading normal lives. Leah and Sam would probably be married by now. I wouldn't be some kind of walking empty shell. None of this would have happened."

Jake shrugged his shoulders. "And I wouldn't have these amazing abs." I rolled my eyes but he continued. "And ~~we~~ wouldn't be where we are right now, I don't think, Bells. I mean, sure we would have been friends because of our dads, but you wouldn't have come looking for me to help you heal -" I nearly jumped out my skin in surprise at that one - and that's what made us form the bond we have now. And you're not an empty shell by the way, Bella. Have you looked at yourself lately? Your cheeks have more colour, your hair's thicker, your smile reaches your eyes most of the time now, you laugh more, talk more – I don't mean to me, but to other people too, the whole pack have noticed it. I don't know what's caused it – well I have an idea – but I have to admit, it's good to see Bells."

"Wow." I couldn't think of anything else to say. Jacob had just demonstrated yet again how well he knew me, and how observant he was when it came to me. Then something struck me.

"So are you feeling happier now about the whole wolf thing? Seeing as it gave you those amazing abs," I teased.

Jake laughed. "Would I *choose* this life? Hell no. Would I want it for anyone else? Hell no to that too. But, well, we get the cards we're dealt Bella, and it's up to us to make the most of it."

Yes, the glass was always half full with Jacob Black.

After lunch, Jake asked me what I wanted to do that afternoon. Again, I had no preferences so he told me that he had made a promise to me that he had to fulfil. Curious, I asked what it was.

"Cliff diving," he said matter-of-factly.

Oh. Yeah. That.

The truth was that ever since the night of my "epiphany", I had absolutely and completely lost the desire to hear Edward's voice. And since that was the only reason for all my insane adrenaline seeking in the first place, I hadn't even thought about Jake's promise to take me cliff diving.

"Actually, Jake, I don't mind about that. We don't need to. Anything else you want to do?"

"Aw c'mon Bells, I need to keep all the promises I make you. It's a matter of honour," he said mock seriously. "Let's go cliff diving."

Dammit, he really wanted to. I tried to back out with a few excuses. I had no swimsuit – no problem, I could wear an old one of Rachel's. It wasn't exactly summer yet, the water would be freezing – no problem, I had my personal space heater. Charlie would kill me if he found out – who would tell him, and that didn't stop me riding the motorbikes anyway, so what's the *real* problem Bells?

I took a deep breath. I had promised myself to be honest with Jake and nothing he could say would be undeserved. So I spilled it all out. How I had discovered that thrill-seeking – no, okay, deliberately putting myself in harm's way – resulted in hearing *that* voice. Hence the motorbike project ...

That was as far as I got when Jacob, whose face had been looking increasingly thunderous, suddenly jumped up and burst out of the cabin, blurring round the edges. Apparently, this was the final piece of insanity that had caused him to realise that I wasn't worth his efforts. I leaped to my feet and ran out the door after him, yelling his name.

From nowhere, a golden voice said, "Be careful Bella. Give him some time."

"OH SHUT UP!" I yelled back. Then, I stopped dead in my tracks. Rewind. I just heard Edward's voice, and I told him to shut up. I just heard Edward's voice, and I *told* him to *SHUT. UP?*

And, I realised, even more than that, I didn't *want* to hear his voice again. Oh! What if I'm stuck with it? What if, for the rest of my life, anytime I'm in danger – which seems to happen to me quite a lot, if I'm being honest – I hear him? That could get quite irritating, actually.

Focus, Bella! Find Jake!

I looked around, yelling for him, hoping against hope that I hadn't just caused him to give up on me for good. I yelled his name again. Nothing.

"Jacob I'm *sorry!*" I yelled. "If you'll just *listen* to me, I can finish what I was saying. I don't want to hear him anymore Jake, and I just *did* and..."

A snarl from behind me caused me to turn round in relief. Relief which was, as it turned out, short lived. An enormous russet brown wolf stood several feet away, its massive body quivering, teeth bared in a truly ferocious snarl. Jake was *pissed*, and no doubt Edward was about to put in his two cent's worth. I waited. Nothing.

"You there?" I asked Edward, vaguely aware that talking back to the voices in my head was probably more than enough to have me committed. Jake cocked his head questioningly to the side. Testing the waters, I took a step in his direction. Still nothing. I sighed in relief, and turned my attention fully on Jacob, who had at least stopped snarling and quivering.

I poured out the rest of my story to the attentive wolf, how the motorbike project had started as an insane mission to hear Edward's voice, but Jacob had begun to heal me and had become as essential to me as the air that I breathe, the sun that warms me. I told him everything, right up to what had just happened with "Edward". And then, I waited for a response, and as I waited, I took in Jacob's wolf form. I had only seen him once before, in the meadow, and I hadn't known he was Jake then – not to mention the circumstances were rather stressful. He was, I noticed now, indescribably beautiful. I longed to run my hands through his fur, bury my face in his neck and inhale the scent that I somehow just *knew* would be a mixture of earth, wood and something else that was essentially just Jacob. *The scent of home.*

Wait, what?

Just at that moment, Jacob covered the ground between us in three large strides. He nuzzled my side as if trying to push me, and looked up at me expectantly.

"You want me to do something?" He nodded. I searched his beautiful brown eyes for some clue. He bent his head and nipped gently at the leg of my jeans, then looked back up at me again.

"You want me to get you clothes!" I realised. He nodded and sat down. I ran into the cabin and into his room, found a pair of sweatpants, and ran back out with them. Jake stood up, loped over towards me and reached for them with his mouth.

I have no idea what possessed me at that point, but I suddenly whisked them away from his mouth and took a few steps back.

"What if I don't give them to you?" I asked tauntingly. Of course I knew that he could get them easily if he wanted to, and I had no intention of not handing them over, but just for a moment, the devil had gotten into me.

Apparently, he had gotten into Jake, too, because the enormous wolf barked what sounded like a loud laugh ... and phased back to human form.

My eyes travelled south of their own volition and my jaw fell open.

Oh. My. God.

A/N: Next chapter: hopefully Sunday.

Chapter 6: Chapter 6

A/N: For probably the first time in history, my kids have spent Saturday afternoon playing nicely together. My muse has flowed. So here you are, a day early. I hope everyone enjoys this.

Chapter Five – Fade to Black

Ten minutes had passed since a very naked Jacob Black had materialised before my eyes and I was clattering dishes around his kitchen in a highly agitated fashion, stubbornly refusing to make eye contact (and *definitely* avoiding crotch level gazing) while Jake completely ruined his attempts to apologise by being entirely unable to hide his laughter. He was, thankfully (I was fairly sure I was thankful for it) now wearing the sweatpants I had brought him.

The truth was that I was feeling completely and utterly confused. Seeing Jacob in all his glory – and he *was* glorious, even my inexperienced eyes could see that - had evoked a very strong reaction from my body. I literally ached for him and to add to my mortification, I wasn't sure whether Jacob could smell my arousal. I felt feverish and my sweaty hands were trembling. I was angry at myself for feeling that tears were imminent but why I should be crying was a mystery. I really needed some time alone to try and work out what the hell had just happened to me.

"Aw Bells honey, c'mon. I shouldn't have done it and I've said sorry. You did sort of ask for it though. And the look on your face was hilarious!" Jacob was saying. I hadn't really heard much of what he had said over the past few minutes.

I didn't think I could get myself under control while he was there so I curtly told him I was going to the bathroom. Once there, I started splashing cold water on my face and wrists before sitting on the edge of the bath and taking deep breaths.

Bella, this is Jake! I told myself firmly. *Your best friend. And you're in love with Edward.* But I already knew. Who the hell was I kidding?

I must have been in the bathroom for ages because eventually there was a soft knock on the door.

"Bells, honey, I'm so sorry. Please come out."

Damn. Jacob was beating himself up. I stood up on trembling legs and crossed to the door. Inhaling shakily, I opened the door to face him. He was standing outside looking truly stricken, obviously thinking he had gone too far. The moment I emerged, he opened his mouth to speak but I held my hand up to stop him. I took his hand, and led him slowly out of the cabin and into his garage before turning round to face him.

"Bells?" He sounded worried. I shook my head.

"I just feel more comfortable in here," I explained. "Sort of – like this is where it all started or something." Jacob said nothing, and I hated the look in his eyes. He was obviously expecting me to start clutching at my sides again to hold myself together, or something. I averted my gaze so as not to see that expression in his beautiful eyes.

"Jake I – I truthfully don't know what's going on with me just now."

Again, he said nothing and I sat down on the chair he had brought into the garage for me all those weeks ago. He pulled over a box, turned it upside down and sat on it in front of me. He was still watching me warily. Damn, this was hard. I tried to organise my thoughts but since I wasn't completely sure of what those thoughts were, I didn't have much success.

"I'm," I tried. And failed. Jacob still said nothing. I tried again, my gaze still averted. "Things are changing," I blurted out.

"What things?" he finally asked.

"I don't ... I *think* – that maybe I'm ... starting to feel – differently, about you. But it's all happening so damn fast and I don't – I can't keep up with my own emotions! Does that make any sense?"

I finally looked up at him and was stunned to see that he looked like he was fighting back tears. He shook his head hard, as if trying to clear it, and then said, "This isn't what it should be like". He sounded *bitter*. I didn't understand that. Then he sighed heavily and stood up.

"Bella," he said. "I think that maybe you should go home."

WHAT? Wasn't this what Jake wanted?

"Jake I don't understand."

"Look Bella, believe me there's nothing I want more than for you to decide that I'm the one for you. And if you do decide that, I will honestly be the happiest guy in the state. But you're obviously confused and – I want you to think, really, *really* think about how you got from 'I'll kill myself just to hear Edward's voice in my head' to 'I want Jacob' in like, two weeks. Take your time Bella. I can't – this has to be right. Call me when you know what you want." His voice was scarcely a whisper by the time he had finished that speech and all I could see when I looked into his eyes was a seemingly bottomless pool of pain.

Oh, God, I thought. *I was supposed to be helping him, not causing him more pain.* I had failed Jake, again. And it tore at my heart.

I somehow managed to keep the tears at bay until I was out of sight of the red cabin. I hadn't wanted to cry in front of Jake for one reason alone – it would make him feel guilty. I had promised myself that I would do what I could to make his life better, and yet somehow I had been the cause of that dreadful expression in his eyes. I knew that that would haunt me.

I had no idea what had just happened. One *stupid* moment of teasing, and my world had come crashing down again. I couldn't deny any longer that my feelings for Jake were evolving rapidly, but even though I wasn't exactly coherent trying to explain it to him, the very last thing I had expected was for him to tell me to leave. And tell me to leave in pretty much the same breath as he stated that he *wanted* me to want him. Confused didn't even start to cover how I felt.

I pulled the truck over to the roadside and allowed the tears to flow. It was useless trying to drive half-blinded. I was still in La Push and I knew that I risked one of the pack seeing or hearing me, but on balance that seemed better than swerving off the road.

For the second time that afternoon, I lost track of time. A wolf howling repeatedly in what sounded like severe pain finally pulled me out of my bubble of misery. I leapt out of the cabin, wondering who it was and whether it meant there was a vampire around. A rustling in the trees to my left made me jump. After a moment, Quil emerged.

"Hey Bella," he said, sounding utterly miserable.

"Quil – who was that? Who's hurt?"

He looked very uncomfortable for a moment and then said, "Jake wants me to bring you home safely Bella. Come on, let's go."

"Quil who *was* that?"

"Nobody is in any danger Bella. One of the pack phased and saw something in Embry's mind that upset him, that's all."

"Quil, seriously? It sounded like he was in agony!"

"Yeah, he'll be fine, really Bella. You know Jake would kick my ass if I lied to you. C'mon, let's get you home."

I knew that was as good an explanation as I was going to get, and I was actually grateful for his help. As pathetic as it made me feel, if I had to pull the truck over every few minutes, I wouldn't get back to Forks before dark.

The drive home was mostly quiet, the silence punctuated by my sniffs and Quil tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. As he pulled up outside Charlie's house, I decided to swallow my pride and ask him. He was, after all, one of Jake's oldest friends.

"Quil why would Jake ask me to leave when I told him I think I'm falling for him?" The words came out all jumbled together, I was so embarrassed to put my heart openly on my sleeve.

Quil was quiet for a moment before he turned to me. "Bella you really need to work this out with Jake. But I can tell you that this whole wolf thing – it affects Jake more than any of the rest of us. Because he's Alpha, or should be, everything is heightened. He's the strongest, has the most heightened senses, and his emotions get intensified too. So getting the chance to love you would be like, all his Christmases come at once and then some; but being hurt by you would be ..." He tailed off and then said, "Actually I can't think of anything bad enough. So just – be sure."

I nodded. As old as it now sounded, I had no intention of hurting Jake ever again.

I was relieved when Charlie phoned shortly after I got home to say that he needed to work an extra few hours that evening to clear a paperwork backlog. I badly needed time to myself to try and work out what had happened over the past fortnight. I cooked dinner for later, left a plate in the microwave for Charlie, and headed upstairs to my room. I lay back on my bed, closed my eyes and allowed thoughts of Jacob to wash over me.

I remembered Edward telling me once that vampires forget most of their human lives but every memory after their change is clear. I was experiencing something like that – albeit selectively – dating back two weeks. I found that everything Jacob had said or done over the last fortnight seemed to be deeply ingrained into my memory. I had already been vaguely aware of it but it was only now that I was consciously trying to think things through that it struck me as being a little odd. I thought about the others – Emily, Embry, Quil and the rest of the pack – but it seemed to be only Jake who was so vivid in my mind.

I sighed. I still wasn't sure what it meant.

I tried to think backwards through the past two weeks. I had clearly been enjoying all the physical contact between us, more so than usual and okay, being honest it wasn't *just* the comfort factor that I had been craving. I remembered how my hand had literally tingled under his touch just this morning. The feel of his arms around me as he hugged me tightly to his rock hard chest – *so safe*. The way I had relaxed against him at the bonfire last night – *so right*.

I groaned and rolled over on my bed. Memories began to wash over me.

Friday

Jacob had been hunting the entire day. Victoria had been dancing around the perimeter of the treaty line, apparently knowing I was there, and Jacob hadn't wanted to give up the chase. He and Embry had chased her almost to Canada before realising she had somehow evaded them, yet again. Emily had called me at Billy's house to fill me in, and told me not to expect Jake at the end of his shift.

I had little else to do for the rest of the day so I began to cook. I made that evening's dinner, including extra for Embry which only seemed fair seeing as he had been on the same wild goose chase as Jake all day, to keep me safe.

Once the meal was prepared, I started preparing some extra meals with the intention of stocking up the Black's freezer for the days I couldn't be here once school started back. The heat from the oven had made the little kitchen stifling and I had tied my hair messily back from my sweaty face and opened the window to allow some air in. I was standing at the window, eyes closed, enjoying the breeze on my overheated face when I heard a small noise behind me.

Opening my eyes and turning, I saw that Jake had come home. He was standing in the kitchen doorway watching me, and the expression on his face had made me grasp the kitchen counter for support. Love, happiness and a kind of awe radiated from him and as he walked fully into the kitchen I had thought for a moment that he was about to grab me and kiss me. With an instinct born from months of denial, I had swiftly turned away from him with the excuse of getting him a drink. When I turned back to face him, disappointment was written all over his face.

Disappointment which had mirrored my own. It was only now I asked myself, *why did I suddenly want Jake to kiss me? And why had I stopped it from happening?* I was fairly sure the answer to the latter question was my stubborn belief that I must love Edward. I was no closer to answering the former.

Sunday

I had spent most of the day at Emily and Sam's, again not having much else to do. Kim was also there and I decided to really try and get to know these two wolf girls. I knew I liked them both very much, but I hadn't really made much effort to establish a friendship with them. I found that I would have been proud to count these two women amongst my friends and consequently spent that afternoon beginning to get to know them. I soon discovered that although Kim seemed initially shy, once the initial ice had been broken, she and I actually had quite a lot in common and as a result it was easier than I had anticipated to feel at ease with her. I was already relaxed around Emily, and by the time Jacob finished his patrol and came to pick me up, I was laughing freely with them and even swaying a little to the music on Emily's radio.

Jacob's eyes widened as he took in the picture of me dancing in Emily's kitchen, laughing with the girls. I didn't blame him. I had all but banned music in his garage and had ripped the stereo out of my truck in the aftermath of Edward leaving. I hugged the girls good bye and arranged to meet up with them again the next day during Jake's patrol. He watched this exchange with such a tender expression in his eyes, and I had positively basked in it.

I was growing to love making him happy. It was so easy to do. Any small effort on my part to take care of him or integrate myself into pack life was met with so much appreciation and pride, it nearly hurt. And now I had to ask myself, *why had it become so important to me that I was the source of Jacob's happiness?*

Tuesday

Jacob had really thought that they had her. Victoria had come too close to Paul while Jake and Jared were also phased, and the three wolves had immediately run to surround her, gradually closing in on her. It was probably their confidence that let them down. They were, all three, so sure they had her that Paul took his mind off the game for a moment to summon the other wolves. They had been after her for so long that Paul thought it should be a whole pack effort to finish the job off.

That moment was all it took for Victoria to find a weakness in their attack and she got past them. Jake, of course, hadn't given up and had redoubled his efforts to chase her down, but she had the advantage in the water and she made it to the cliffs before he could catch up to her.

Jacob had come home in an absolutely foul temper. He was taking their inability to catch her as a personal failure and I hated seeing him feel so angry and useless. The need to make him feel better had overwhelmed me and I had persuaded him to come down to the beach with me.

We had walked down to the shore line and I had removed my sneakers and socks. Jake was of course already barefoot. What started out as a walk through the water's edge soon turned into jumping over the waves as they crested close to shore. We were soon both thoroughly soaked and laughing like a pair of carefree children.

I had felt so proud and happy that I could turn his mood around and make him laugh again. I had been struck again by the simplicity of it all. In a world of monsters and magic, all it took to make Jacob happy was to *be* there with him, for him. I had even thought that I could grow used to spending all my time with Jake, my sole goal to make him happy. *Why?*

Today

And then, of course, there was the way my body had reacted to seeing him this afternoon. Blood had thundered through my veins, my palms had grown sweaty, my core had ached for him and it felt so *right*. Even with Edward, I had never felt so out of control, as if my body could just take over and make all my decisions for me. It was probably lucky for Jacob that the sheer force of my reaction had kept me rooted to the spot. I had only managed to bring myself out of my tidal wave of lust when Jake had grabbed the sweatpants from me. Flustered, I had relocated my gaze to his eyes and found him looking at me with a mixture of embarrassment, amusement and what I was fairly sure was a lust to match my own. That was when I had turned and fled into the small kitchen.

It was now obvious to me that my body had simply been a little quicker than my brain to catch on to the truth of the matter.

I sat up on my bed. There really was no question about it. Somehow, over the course of two weeks and following *months* of catatonic behaviour, I had simply fallen out of love with Edward Cullen, and straight into love with Jacob Black.

What I didn't know was how, or why. And that had seemed pretty important to Jake. "Really, *really* think about how you got there," was pretty much what he had said. And the simple answer was that I didn't know. Perhaps it had been creeping up on me gradually. I had been lost and broken after he phased and was avoiding me; maybe that should have clued me in. Even before that, I had balked at the mere thought of him giving up on me.

But deep inside, I wasn't convinced. This avalanche of new emotions really all seemed to have occurred over the last two weeks. I had been spending a lot of time in La Push, but then I had spent almost as much time there when Jake was fixing up the motorbikes and not once had I felt anything like this.

I went round in circles for a while before deciding that I didn't think it mattered. Of course it seemed important to Jake but I was sure when we talked that through he would explain why it was so important and we could work on it from there. It seemed quite simple to me, really. I was in love with Jacob Black; and I was pretty sure that he was in love with me too. Now all I had to do was tell him. I felt excitement course through me as I imagined different ways of telling him. I knew he was due to patrol this evening; I decided to be waiting for him when he got back home.

For the third time in the same day, I had lost all track of time. Charlie yelled from downstairs that he was home and, my decision made, I realised that I was hungry. I went down to join him for dinner.

"You're in a good mood Bells," he remarked as I hummed to myself while setting cutlery on the table. I knew that he would be as surprised as Jake had been to see me enjoying music, but I could see that it pleased him.

"Mmhmm."

"Anything to do with all the time you've been spending in La Push?" he asked, 'innocently'.

I smiled at him. "Could be."

"Good," he replied. We sat down to eat and he asked after Billy and Jake. We chatted about how I had been spending my time in La Push for a while and then Charlie asked, "Have you seen Leah Clearwater while you've been there? I saw her at the store the other day and boy, she looks like she's been to hell and brought back the ashes."

My fork clattered down onto my plate and I stared open-mouthed at Charlie. This morning at the beach flashed through my mind.

Jake – looking at me with so much love and affection.

Leah – so utterly, incredibly broken.

Sam – so much guilt and pity in his eyes.

My breath caught in my throat.

I can't be with Jacob.

Spots danced in front of my vision.

He'll imprint and leave me.

The room began to spin.

You're not good for me, Bella.

Fade to black.

A/N: If you and my kids are nice to me, I might manage to get another chapter up over the weekend; otherwise, Monday. Let me know what you thought of this one!

***Chapter 7*: Chapter 7**

A/N: Hopefully this should answer all those imprinting questions:-) Or most, anyway.

Chapter Six – Bella Figures It Out

R U OK? Charlie told dad you fainted.

It was an hour since I had passed out on the kitchen floor, and 10 minutes since Jake's text had come in. I was sitting on my bedroom floor, leaning against the bed, staring at the text with absolutely no idea of how to respond.

When I had come round, Charlie had been kneeling on the floor beside my head, and naturally worried sick. He had been all for putting me into his cruiser and taking me to the hospital with sirens blaring, but I had managed to convince him that I'd been feeling slightly off for a little while and just needed to lie down. He had tried to insist on bringing me to get checked out so I played dirty and mentioned my time of the month. He backed straight off, mumbling about me having to call Renee when I felt better. I just needed to get back to my solitude. This latest revelation was too much.

I had no more tears left to cry. My ability to fall in love with supernatural entities who then abandoned me would have been laughable if they didn't insist on ripping bits out of me when they left. Well okay, Jake hadn't left yet, but once he imprinted...

I pulled myself up shakily and fell face down onto the bed. I felt exhausted, and I didn't think I could take anymore today. Sleep came quickly.

I hadn't been dreaming much over the past two weeks. I had been so proud of my progress. Tonight, of course that was going to change.

Jake was standing before me in the forest, all the love and adoration in the world in his eyes. I was walking towards him, smiling happily with only one thing on my mind. I wanted to feel his body close to mine, press my lips to his and let Nature take Her course. I reached him and he pulled me close to him. His body heat burned through my shirt and I reached up to pull his face down to meet mine. Our lips were mere millimetres apart when he suddenly looked over my shoulder. Then, he was gone. I ran through the forest calling for him. Finally, I saw him ahead, his back to me, walking away. I screamed his name and he turned to me. His eyes held pity, guilt and regret as he shook his head at me. I realised he was holding somebody's hand. She turned around and I found myself face to face with ...

Inevitably, I woke up screaming.

Jake had been holding *my* hand. But I had red eyes. I was a vampire.

Of course I couldn't sleep after that. I thought again about how to respond to Jake's text. I squeezed my eyes shut. I had to face him. I couldn't – *wouldn't* – leave him without answers. And I had promised him that I wouldn't disappear off the radar for weeks on end. I wasn't sure how I was going to handle this new heartbreak, but I promised myself that I would *not* return to the lifeless state I had been in after Edward left. Jacob had worked too hard to fix me up and I owed him that much.

Finally, I texted him back.

I'll be fine. Give me a few days?

It was the best I could give him at the moment. My phone buzzed almost immediately with a reply.

Can I come over? Worried.

Trust Jacob. It really didn't matter how much I hurt him, he would still come running if he thought I was in trouble. It was typical that I finally learned to appreciate him as he deserved, and would need to keep him at a distance. I texted back.

Please give me some time. Don't worry.

Again, his reply was instantaneous.

Tell me if u need me.

Oh Jacob, I thought miserably. If only you knew.

School went back and I forced myself to throw myself into it. All of it. That included talking to people at lunch, agreeing to a Port Angeles shopping trip (oh joy), and pretending that I cared how Jessica's date with Mike had gone.

I smiled brightly for Charlie, made small talk over dinner – although I think that made him a little suspicious – and even went so far as to put on the radio in the kitchen while I was clearing up after dinner. The tears were never far away. I knew that to the rest of the world, I would look as if I had made large strides towards getting over Edward. Only I knew that life was entirely meaningless because the world had, to all intents and purposes, ceased to turn. Remembering Jacob telling me that that was how it felt for a wolf to be without his imprint, I wondered drily if that meant that I had imprinted on him.

Monday became Tuesday.

Tuesday became Wednesday.

Wednesday became Thursday.

By Thursday evening, the effort of trying to stop myself from falling into an irreversible depression was taking its toll. I could see the dark circles under my eyes in the mirror. My appetite had all but disappeared and my limbs felt leaden. I was no closer to finding the courage to face Jake and I knew I was running out of time. I had promised him *not* to disappear like this and I was going to keep that promise. I was going to have to dig deeper than I ever had before to get through our first meeting.

I picked up my phone to send him a text saying that I would see him on Saturday, when the doorbell rang. Charlie was working on a late shift. I put my phone down and went to answer the door.

If I had had any idea who it may have been at the door, I certainly wasn't expecting Leah Clearwater. She glowered at me, brushed past me and marched into the kitchen, sitting at the table.

"Uh, Leah?" I was absolutely stunned. I stood awkwardly beside the table, watching her warily. She regarded me calmly before asking,

"Are you in love with Jake?"

I gaped at her. "Um, Leah, look I don't really know you and – well I know that whatever I say is going to be shared with Jake the first time you phase with him so ... I think this is something between me and Jake?"

Yeah, okay, it came out like a question. I was a little intimidated by Leah.

She said simply, "that's what I thought." She stood up. "You need to come with me and tell Jake how you feel." She said it as a statement of fact and headed for the door. Oh no way!

"Leah, I'm not going to La Push with you now," I protested. She whirled round to look at me, arms folded.

"Bella I'm doing you a favour, trust me."

I shook my head, blood rushing to my cheeks. I may have been intimidated by Leah but there was no damn way she was going to drag me off to La Push to face Jake this evening. Leah watched me for a moment and seemed to reach some kind of conclusion. She came back to the table, pulled a chair out for me, and sat down herself. That option being preferable to going to La Push, I sat down and waited. She seemed to be struggling with what to say. Finally, she spoke.

"You've really helped me Bella." Well I wasn't expecting that. "Since you stuck up for me, all the guys have been going a bit easier on me. That makes my life a bit easier. So ... thank you." It looked like it took a lot of effort to say the last bit.

"You're welcome Leah but I don't understand how me talking to Jake can have ... oh! Pack mind, right!"

Leah smiled ever so slightly. It softened her features.

"So," I reasoned, "the guys heard what I said in Jake's mind and realised how hard it is for you?" I leaned forwards over the table, cupping my chin in my hand. I was slightly surprised that some of the pack – Paul in particular – would be so sensitive.

Leah snorted. "Hardly," she said drily. "Jake just *really* wants to impress you." She snorted again and then took in my blank expression. "OK look," she explained. "You know Sam's Alpha and he can issue orders that we all have to follow whether we like it or not. Well Jake's *supposed* to be Alpha, and even though technically he can't issue an Alpha command, it's like ... if he feels really strongly about something, we can't disobey him anyway. Well not that we *can't* ... it feels more like an honour thing, that we *won't* do anything that would anger our leader, or rightful leader I suppose. So when he projected to the pack that you kind of understood me and thought he should cut me some slack, he also projected that he was determined to do just that. Of course his reason was to keep you happy, but it turned it into a sort of – fact, if that makes sense. Cut Leah some slack or Jake will be upset." She shrugged. "It has made my life easier Bella, and I do appreciate that you don't just bow down before Saint Emily." She sounded bitter again by the end of her last sentence.

I was completely enthralled. I had been right then, that day at the beach. The rest of the pack *did* recognise that Jake should be Alpha. I found myself wishing that I could witness first hand the natural progression of Jake becoming Alpha. I felt the tears, never far away, threaten to well up and took a deep breath to try and banish them.

"I'm glad Leah," I said. "But – why are you here?"

"To make you talk to Jake," she said simply. "He's ... he needs to see you. Call it repaying a favour to you."

"Leah believe me making me talk to Jake will *not* be doing me a favour."

"Bella believe me," she echoed back to me, "yes it will." She folded her arms again. "I know you love him. If you didn't, you would just have told me that when I asked you. And I see how you are with him too. I've practically watched you fall in love with him, we all have. You know how he feels about you, he's been crazy about you for ages. What's the problem?"

I didn't really want to tell Leah, of all people, what the problem was, so I sat sullenly in my seat and said nothing.

"Bella!" She said sharply. "Tell me."

"No."

"Look Bella you can stand up now, walk out to your truck, drive to La Push and find Jake moping in his garage. Or I can *drag* you outside, phase, throw you on my back and drop you at his feet in his garage. It would probably be easier on everyone if you just go yourself, but this has to end NOW."

"Leah I am NOT going." The notion of Leah forcing me into doing something I didn't want to was making me angry. Funny that Alice never had that effect on me; or maybe that was Jasper's doing.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't be with Jake, and that's just all there is to it."

"Why not? Bella you're being ridiculous."

She was really antagonising me now. "Leah, drop it."

"No."

"Leah!"

"NO!"

Finally seeing red, I yelled at her, "Leah I WILL NOT end up like you!"

The silence that followed was deafening. Regret crashed over me. What a lousy thing to have said. I opened my mouth to apologise when Leah's face suddenly split into the widest smile I had seen her wear.

"I told him," she crowed. "He was so sure you'd work it out." She made a noise that may have been a rusty laugh and stood up. "Bella, you need to talk to Jake okay. One way or another."

"Work what out? Leah don't you dare just walk out of here!" Yes, I was still riled enough to talk to her like that.

She turned to face me and said, "I really wish I could tell you Bella, it would make everyone's life so much easier." She thought for a moment and then said, "okay look ..." She screwed her face up in concentration. "No that won't work either." She sighed, then opened her mouth again, closed it again.

I had seen this before. The night Jake sneaked into my room.

"Leah?" I asked slowly. "Have you been Alpha ordered not to tell me something?"

She actually grinned. "For someone who can be really dense Bella, sometimes you're actually quite astute. Not Alpha ordered exactly. More of a strong desire from Jake." She winked at me and left.

I stood in the middle of my kitchen for a few minutes, trying to clear my head. I was mortified that I had lost my temper and yelled that at Leah; I was stunned at her reaction; and I was proud of myself for having stood up to her. More than anything though, I was curious as to what it was that Jake had not-ordered her not to tell me. It had to be something big, I knew. And it had to be something that would affect my decision to tell him I loved him. Something that would make Leah think it was worthwhile admitting my feelings to him without the risk of ending up in the same situation as her.

Oh!

Oh!

I found myself sitting cross-legged on the kitchen floor with my head buried in my hands, my legs unable to bear my weight any longer. The thought had lodged itself in my mind and although I tried to beat it down, not raise my hopes only to have them dashed, the pieces began to click into place.

Jake's reaction when I told him Emily had told me about imprinting. My exact words had been "the imprint thing". That was when he had flipped.

His face, contorted with pain when he had described the effects of imprinting.

Jake begging me to keep visiting regularly, and then telling me of the pain of not being around an imprint.

I wasn't sure how a few pieces of the puzzle fit – Jake asking me to leave to sort my head out being a very big enigma to me. But I was beginning to believe it.

Jacob Black had imprinted on me.

Oh!

"Bella?" I heard his husky voice.

"Oh for God's sake," I groaned into my hands. "I got rid of Edward's voice, am I going to hear yours now?"

"Bella, I'm right here!" I jumped as his voice sounded in my ear, hot breath fanning my cheek as he spoke. I looked up and there he was. In my kitchen. Crouched down on the floor beside me.

"Wha-? How?" I spluttered.

He smiled at me sadly. "I was phased when Leah left here. She kind of gave me a verbal kicking. Let myself in. You look like hell."

I snorted. "So do you actually." And he did. He looked gaunt; or as gaunt as a werewolf *can* look. His eyes looked sunken into his skull and the circles etched under them were black.

That sad smile again. "It's been hard without you."

My voice was a whisper. "Why didn't you tell me, Jake?"

"You told me not to." He half-laughed at himself. "Maybe that wasn't your best idea after all, Bells. Did the plan to make you fall in love with me before telling you work though?"

"Utterly and completely."

We sat there on the floor just looking at each other for a while. He really did look like hell. I reached my hand out to trace the circles under his eyes. He closed his eyes and inhaled sharply at my touch, then reached up to twine his fingers through mine. He put his other hand on the small of my back and scooted me across the floor to close the distance between us.

And then, very softly, sitting between his legs on my kitchen floor, Jacob Black kissed me for the very first time.

Emily's POV

I took the latest batch of muffins from the oven and set them on the counter to cool. The pack would be here soon and they would be hungry. Ravenous more like, I thought to myself with a smile.

I hoped Sam had had an easy patrol today. His responsibilities were weighing heavily on him at the moment; mainly his power over the pack. Or, more specifically, lack of since Jacob had joined the pack.

I thought back to the night of Jake's first phase. Jacob Black had always been known as a happy, easygoing kid and Sam hadn't expected any trouble from him when he phased. Sam had never had any trouble controlling the wolves on their first phase – even Paul with his infamous temper hadn't posed Sam too many problems. A snarled command was all it took to stop them from going crazy when they realised what had happened to them. So when Billy had called to say that Jacob had phased, Sam went alone. Less than ten minutes later, I had heard him howl for back-up. It turned out that Jake had been pissed, and was out of control. He hadn't attacked Billy thankfully, and had had the sense to get into the forest and out of sight, but he had turned on Sam and it had taken Jared, Sam and two roared Alpha commands to hold the pup down.

Sam had been more shaken than I had ever seen him following that episode. He had seen Jake's need for Bella in his mind, and was afraid for the girl. Remembering his own attack on me, Sam had tied Jake up tightly in Alpha commands, ordering him to stay away from her. I had thought Sam had gone overboard on the commands, until he told me that he could sense Jake's will was phenomenally strong and he didn't know how much it would take for Jake to break through Sam's commands.

The day Jake had imprinted on Bella, Sam had again not expected any trouble. There were five wolves to one leech in that meadow, and Sam had planned on using the kill as a training exercise for the pack. Everything was going to plan until Jacob had looked in Bella's eyes. He instantly became consumed with his need for her and was on the brink of leaving formation when Sam had been forced to put every ounce of his power into the Alpha command to Jake to get his head back in the hunt. Unbelievably, Sam felt Jake's very strong will begin to break through the command. Knowing this would lead to uproar amongst the pack, and with a leech very much on the hunt close by, Sam quickly pointed out to Jake that Laurent had been after Bella and it was his responsibility to keep her safe. Jake's head had quickly jerked back in the direction of the leech and the hunt was on.

Sam had been shocked by how viciously Jake had ripped the leech apart. He was concerned about Jake's temper and felt that he should learn to control it before seeing Bella again. To make this decision regarding a fellow pack mate's

imprint was virtually impossible and so Jake was allowed to sleep outside Bella's house every night to give him some sense of closeness to her. Jake had been in so much pain in those two weeks and Sam worried constantly that he would find a way to break the commands. He was convinced that it was only Jake's inexperience and overall confusion that had kept the commands in place, but of course it was only a matter of time before Jake found a way around them. Only I knew that Sam hadn't been surprised.

The two weeks that Bella had spent here during spring break had seen Jacob more relaxed overall, despite his ferocious hunting of Victoria. However, Sam had quickly noticed that when Jacob wasn't expending all his energy on trying to work around Alpha commands and see Bella, he had a focus that easily surpassed Sam's own. During Sam's time as Alpha, he had learned how to keep some of his thoughts private, which was how he had managed to hide his concerns about Jake from the rest of the pack. During one patrol with Jake, however, he realised that without apparently trying to, Jake could access pretty much all areas of Sam's mind. Sam had quickly phased back and had avoided patrolling with Jake since then.

Jacob was generally considered by the pack to be being an idiot with regards to Bella. I personally was very worried that the girl, already badly damaged, could be unnecessarily hurt if Jake wasn't honest with her soon. I knew from firsthand experience how overwhelming the effects of an imprint were. And while Bella's obsession with the Cullen vampire had muted the effects on her when the imprint had first occurred, we had all watched her over spring break daily fall more and more in love with Jacob. His stubborn insistence that he wanted her to fall in love with him independently of the imprint was, frankly, ludicrous. It was impossible to separate the two. The night the pack had caught Victoria, at the bonfire, I had tried to convince Sam to explain this to Jacob so that he could tell Bella the truth, but the fact was that Sam was avoiding any confrontational situation with Jacob until he knew whether he could remain as Alpha, or would need to submit to Jacob.

Sam had consulted the council about this. As so often, they simply didn't know the answer. There had been no previous case of a rightful Alpha phasing after an Alpha was already in place. The biggest current problem was that Jacob was only 16 years old, and in so many ways was not ready to take over the pack. He didn't even *want* to take over the pack, but Sam was becoming increasingly convinced that there was no other option for either of them.

I sighed heavily. I sometimes wished I had been spared this destiny. Of course I would never admit as much to Sam – it would have destroyed him – but ever since Leah had phased, adding to Sam's stresses, the tension around the pack had been palpable.

Part of me wished that Jacob and Bella would be in a position to take over from Sam and I, sooner rather than later.

Bella's POV

The kiss – that amazing kiss – which had started soft and uncertain, didn't last that way for long. Jake waited only until he was sure that I was kissing him back, and then tangled his fingers into my hair, angled my head for easier access to my mouth, and kissed me with an almost rough passion that turned me to jelly in his arms.

My body responded at the same time as my brain stopped working. I almost leapt on top of Jake as I attempted to straddle his hips but of course he was faster than me and the next thing I knew, I was flat on my back on the kitchen floor with Jake lying on top of me, keeping up that passionate assault on my mouth. I registered a large bulge pressing against my thigh and then suddenly I had been hauled upright at werewolf speed. My head span from the sudden change of position and I felt Jake put his arms round me to stop me from falling.

I heard a voice say, "Bella are you alright?"

I was completely flustered. What exactly had just happened there? One moment I was in heaven, kissing Jake with abandon while he was pressed on top of me; now I was upright and dizzy and hearing voices again – bizarrely, my dad's this time. I felt Jake's chest move as if he was chuckling. I turned my head and sure enough, there was Charlie, looking extremely concerned.

"You're not feeling faint again are you Bella?"

"I think she is feeling a little weak Charlie," said Jacob. "D'you want me to bring her up to bed?"

I squeaked against Jake, vowing to find a way of hurting him once I had recovered full use of my senses and bodily functions.

"Maybe you should son," said Charlie seriously. I heard him mutter something about bringing me to see one of *those* doctors if he had to, as Jacob swept me bridal style into his arms and marched out of the kitchen with me. He carried me upstairs and put me on my bed, promptly climbing on top of me.

"Jake!" I hissed. Well at least I had recovered my voice, I thought.

"Hmmm?" he asked as he began to kiss my neck. My pulse was racing and my body was on fire for him but my *dad* was downstairs. I pushed at Jake and he immediately pulled back from me.

"What's wrong honey?" His voice was thick with lust and my eyes almost rolled back in my head at the sound.

"Charlie!" I blurted. Jake nodded at me and sat up.

"Sorry Bells," he said contritely. "Sjust, I've waited *so long*."

"I know," I whispered, sitting up too, to face him.

We sat there watching each other for a while longer. Finally, as my body began to cool ever so slightly, I asked him the question that had been eating at me since Sunday.

"Why did you ask me to leave, Jake?"

He jerked back from me slightly and I did *not* like the look that crossed his face. It was anger, and pain, and something like resentment.

"Do we need to do this now, Bells?" he asked.

I sensed something was seriously off, and I wanted to know what was bothering him before anything – progressed – between us.

"Please, Jake," I asked him. He stood up and walked a few paces away from the bed. His back was to me when he spoke.

"I think it's the imprint, Bells," he said quietly. His voice was so full of pain that it made my heart bleed. "I think you only *think* you love me, because of the imprint." He turned to face me. "I love you so much Bella. And you've been – blinded or something, *again*, by some fucking supernatural *thing*." He looked me squarely in the eyes as he whispered, "You don't really love me, Bella, and it kills me to know that."

A/N: OK, so this is where I wanted our two main characters to be for the story to really start progressing. Let me know what you think:-) Hopefully daily chapters throughout the week.

Chapter 8: Chapter 8

A/N: Huge thanks to everybody who is taking the time to read this story. I've had a massive amount of story alerts added over the weekend which has made me very happy. So for a bit of light relief, here you are, a less angsty chapter for you to (hopefully!) enjoy.

I keep forgetting to tell you all that I don't own anything Twilight related. Sorry about that. But really, if I did own Jacob Black, I would not be spending any time at all daydreaming at my laptop, so I would have thought my lack of ownership was kind of obvious;-)

Chapter Seven – If I Was You, Jacob Black

"Bells?"

I was still sitting open-mouthed gaping at Jacob after his little speech about how I didn't really love him and it was just the imprint duping me in to it.

I shook my head at him. "Did you really just say that?" I asked incredulously. I could feel my temper flaring for the second time that evening, although something was telling me to tread very carefully with Jacob's feelings right now.

He looked a little taken aback, then slightly mutinous. "Bells I – okay, seriously Bella, *less than three weeks* ago you were wanting to jump off cliffs to hear the leech's voice in your head. And I'm supposed to believe that in the space of a couple of weeks, you've completely forgotten about him, decided you're in love with me, and that just happened all by itself? Not even a week ago you were telling me *again* that I shouldn't get the wrong idea. Can you blame me for thinking that maybe you've been helped along by a bit of magic?"

"The honest truth Jake? I don't know, okay? Things *have* changed quickly, I told you that on Sunday and I guess I understand now why you wanted me to take time to think about things. Did the imprint help me work out how I feel about you? Maybe. Maybe it sped things up a little. We'll never know. But it was happening anyway, Jake, and you know that. You know that I need you, that you're my sun, that I never wanted you to give up on me. You know that I fell apart when I didn't see you after you phased. You know that just being around you has always made me happy. So have I fallen in love with you? Yes. Is it because of the imprint? No! I think that maybe the imprint made me see things more clearly, or maybe sped the natural process up a bit, but I am absolutely certain Jake that it would have happened anyway. It might just have taken longer. So if I was you, Jacob Black, I would just accept that the girl you've supposedly wanted for months is sitting here telling you that she loves you."

I folded my arms and looked at him expectantly, rather proud of that little speech. I had been watching Jacob intently the whole time I was speaking and he was definitely giving serious consideration to what I was saying. I just hoped it was enough to convince him because I *really* wanted to kiss him again. As I watched him, I saw him relax and I breathed a sigh of relief. He wasn't going to get all stubborn on me. Then I saw a glint of mischief in his eyes and he said slowly, "I'm not sure Bells. I think in this case, actions speak louder than words."

I grinned foolishly at him. "Completely on my wavelength, Jake," I told him as I leaned into him.

This kiss was different from our first kiss. Jake didn't take control the way he had in the kitchen. This kiss was almost lazy as we savoured each other's mouths, tongues intertwined, taking our time. We were relishing the moment, both of us knowing we had all the time in the world together. As Jake pulled me closer to him, tongues still dancing together, and I felt his heated body warm me through both our clothes, I thought that this, right here, was the most perfect moment of my life so far.

All too soon, Jake had to leave to go on patrol. We were the epitome of teenagers in love as I walked him to my front door, hand in hand, smiling goofily at each other. He kissed me again at the door and we lamented together that we had school the next day and it would therefore be a whole 19 hours before we saw each other again.

My face was split into a wide grin when I shut the door behind him and turned round to go back up the stairs. Charlie was leaning against the living room door post, obviously trying to hide a grin. He raised his eyebrows at me.

"Uh-huh. Anything I need to know Bells?"

"I think you've worked it out already dad." I couldn't wipe the silly grin off my face.

Charlie allowed his own grin to spread across his face. I began to head up the stairs. He called after me, "he'll treat you right Bells."

"Sure, sure."

School dragged by the next day. All I wanted was to be in La Push. Kissing Jake, and confessing that I was in love with him, had ignited something in me that felt exciting and scary all at the same time. I wanted more of it, whatever it was. And I had no doubts at all that Jake would be only too willing to give me more of it. I couldn't think of anything else all day. Jake's *hot* lips pressed hard against mine, his tongue dancing a delicious tango with my own, his hands twisting in my hair and my shirt as he pulled me ever closer to him...

I was desperate to spend more time exploring these wonderful new sensations. With Edward, there had of course been so many rules and boundaries. There were no rules with Jake and I was pretty damn sure that he wouldn't be imposing any boundaries either. That thought sent another thrill through me. We would be moving at *my* pace, and the mere thought of that made me feel powerful. Now that I had experienced something different, cold and marble really didn't sound very appealing at all. When I shivered with Jacob, it was because he made my body thrill. When I had shivered with Edward, it was because I was – well, cold.

The day was made slightly more bearable by the never ending stream of text messages from Jake, which I read and surreptitiously replied to under my desk whenever possible. Most of them were straight forward and sweet, along the lines of "miss you Bells". But every now and then he would send something like "thinking of what I want to do with your lips tonight", and I would start to tremble in anticipation.

Finally, *finally*, the last bell rang and I was the first person out the classroom door (without even tripping over my own feet on the way).

I leapt into my truck and gunned it to La Push. I knew Jake would already be home from school by the time I arrived and sure enough, he was waiting on the front steps for me. He was at the truck with the door yanked open before I had even unbuckled my seat belt. I laughed as he pulled me out of the truck and into his arms, kicking the door shut with his foot and then backing me up against it as he kissed me hard. I threw my arms around his neck and kissed him back with everything I had. My hands tangled in his hair as his right hand found skin under my shirt. The heat of his hand felt as though it would brand my skin and I loved it. I never wanted to stop kissing him. I wanted that hand of his to keep wandering and maybe let my own hands do some wandering of their own.

A snigger alerted us to someone else's presence (although truth be told, I was already too far gone to really care) and Jake pulled away from me slightly.

"Guess this explains why Jake was smiling during Physics today," laughed Quil. Jacob and I grinned at each other and after a moment Quil said, "yeah, I'm still here". I burst out laughing and he groaned. "Oh fuck, happy Bella and Jake may be harder to stomach than miserable Bella and Jake. Alright, I'm gone."

"Oh Quil wait!" Jake called after him. He turned to me. "Are you working tomorrow?" I nodded.

"10 till 4," I confirmed.

Jake asked Quil to swap a patrol shift with him which would allow Jake to pick me up from Newton's after my shift and give us the rest of the evening together. Quil agreed and I yelled my thanks after him. Spending time with Jake was, quite literally, all I wanted to do.

Yes, we were sickening. That weekend, we spent every possible moment together. The pack's reactions to us being together were variations of an "I told you so" theme. We couldn't have cared less.

We didn't have a lot of time to be alone. Between Newton's and Jake's patrolling schedule, that first weekend only allowed us a few hours here and there to be together, but we made the most of it. Billy was usually at Jake's house, and although he seemed delighted that Jake and I were finally together, there was still a tension between them that Jake kept saying he would tell me about eventually, but didn't want to think about right now because he was too happy with me.

And happy he was. It shone out of him. His eyes were bright and his smile was infectious. His mood was impossibly sunny and it was almost like having the old Jacob back again. Well, the old Jacob, with an amazing body and extreme body heat.

His body heat was turning out to be a good thing. We hadn't talked about the physical side of our new relationship but I was enjoying it immensely. Every time we managed to be alone, we would immediately begin to make out, and each make out session saw us progress a little further in our explorations of each other's bodies. With both of us being so inexperienced, everything was still fairly innocent, but I was getting dangerously close to losing my top. As our make out sessions tended to be in his garage or on the beach – the two places we had a chance of being left alone for a while – it was getting chilly. So yeah, werewolf body heat was good.

When we weren't making out – or, in other words, when we weren't absolutely alone together – we were just Jake and Bells. We were relaxed in each other's company, and chatted about anything and everything that was light and entertaining. On Sunday evening, we were in my kitchen organising dinner for ourselves and the dads, who were watching football in the living room. Jake, of course, kept trying to distract me. His werewolf stealth put him at an unfair advantage.

I was stirring sauce when he snuck up behind me again, swept my hair aside, and planted a hot kiss on the back of my neck. I instantly dropped the spoon into the pan. I had never been kissed there before and the combination of the new sensation and the heat of Jake's lips sent a jolt of electricity straight to my core and turned my legs to jelly.

Jacob, of course, noticed. I felt the smile on his lips as he kissed me there again, slower this time. I shut my eyes, holding my breath. The sensation was almost too much but I wanted *more*. Jake snaked one arm around my front, lifting the hem of my shirt so that his hand could touch the skin on my stomach. With his other hand, he gently moved my hair completely aside and over my shoulder, and started kissing all the way across the back of my neck, down to the top of my spine, and

as far as he could along my shoulder until my shirt got in the way. *Stupid shirt.*

I was putty in his hands. My breathing hitched and my legs were trembling. When he pressed his body against my back and I felt his arousal, I moaned aloud. Jake stopped what he was doing for a moment, then whirled me round in his arms and began kissing me senseless. I kept pulling him closer to me, he was never close enough and I kept pulling him tighter and tighter against me. His hand was still under my shirt, on my back now, and he began moving it round my ribcage, up a little, then a little higher still, and *finally*, his hot hand cupped my left breast and began kneading it through my bra. I moaned again and when Jacob responded by biting not-very-gently on my bottom lip, I thought the combination of all these wonderful sensations combined with his overwhelming heat was going to make me self combust.

I was out of control and my body was being ravaged by a fire that only Jacob could put out. The feelings he evoked in me were bittersweet and I just kept wanting more, more, *more*. Even the knowledge that our dads were mere meters away from us, separated by a narrow hallway and a couple of thin walls, couldn't stop me. Everything about Jacob was intoxicating – his heat, his scent, the roughness of his hands against my smooth skin, his soft lips which moulded to mine in all sorts of wonderful ways. I couldn't believe I had ever doubted what I could feel for Jacob. I had never experienced anything like this in my life, and I knew that if I lived until I was 100, I would never get tired of this exquisite torture.

Jake finally pulled away. I wasn't having that and I tried to pull him back down to continue kissing. He kissed me quickly, then kissed along my jaw and down my neck, where he stopped his ministrations and just inhaled deeply. Then he said against my neck, "I think the sauce is burning."

Crap! I whirled round to check on it and sure enough, it was sticking to the bottom of the pan. Not only that, but the spoon I had dropped in it was still sunk in the bubbling mixture. A quick check revealed that the sauce really wasn't salvageable. I sighed as I called through to the dads that it would need to be pizza for dinner tonight.

"What happened to what you were cooking?" asked Charlie, appearing in the doorway.

"I burnt it," I said crossly.

Charlie looked surprised, then looked me up and down and then turned his attention to Jake. I saw the cogs turn in his brain and he finally said, "uh-huh. You kids leave this door open now." He went back to his game, leaving me mortified and Jake smirking smugly.

"Lose the grin, Jacob," I ordered him. "*That* was embarrassing."

"Not as embarrassing as if he'd caught us though," Jake said nonchalantly. I got the impression he really quite enjoyed the fact that he could make me lose control so completely even when I knew our fathers were close enough to walk in on us.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "This is your fault you know."

He held his hands up innocently. "Hey! What'd I do? All I remember doing," he said with a wicked glint in his eyes, "was this." He grabbed me, spun me round, whipped my hair out the way and started kissing the back of my neck again. I groaned. He was going to be the death of me.

After the pizza had arrived and been demolished (mostly by Jake of course), Charlie didn't put up too much of a fight about allowing us to go up to my bedroom. Door to be left open, naturally.

I had brought the radio upstairs with us from the kitchen. I *really* needed to get a new CD player and start building up my music collection again. I was starting to enjoy music more than ever, and Jake and I were dancing ridiculously around my room to a song that was playing. I couldn't help but compare the *fun* Jake and I had with the way I had always felt on egg shells around Edward.

Beaming at Jake, I commented on how easy it was to be with him. He pulled me to him and whispered "easy as breathing, Bells" against my lips before taking full advantage of the power he now knew he held over me, and reducing me to jelly.

The next day was Monday and school got in the way again. To make the day in school even more tortuous, Jake didn't have to patrol that evening and Charlie would be working the late shift. That meant that Jake and I had six hours to be alone at my place this evening and, although we still hadn't discussed anything, I was determined to at least lose my shirt and hopefully more. I didn't expect any resistance from Jake.

I also wanted to talk. I really wanted to know what was going on with Billy. The tension between them following Jake's first phase hadn't dissipated and I knew it would be preying on Jake's mind. I also suspected there was more that I didn't know and I knew he would tell me everything if I asked him to this evening. It saddened me that things weren't great between Jake and his dad because they had always had an incredible relationship, but I was confident that I could help Jake work through whatever he was feeling towards Billy for not having told him the truth about his heritage.

I had also been thinking about college. This was my final semester in school and I really needed to start thinking ahead. I didn't know what I wanted to do but I would need to sort it out fast. I wasn't entirely sure how the imprint worked; I knew that Jacob needed to be close to me as much as possible and I didn't know if that meant I couldn't move away from Forks. Not that I wanted to, especially now I was with Jacob and he still had to complete school; but Charlie was going to start

pressing me to make a decision soon. So that was also on the agenda for this evening's conversation.

Mostly, though, I just wanted to make out.

By 6pm, we had had a heated make out session (my shirt was still on because Jake's stomach had started to growl uncontrollably) and we had cooked and eaten dinner. Jacob had, of course, tried to use his new weaponry and assault my neck again but wary of burning dinner two nights in a row, I had threatened him with not feeding him at all that night if he kept distracting me.

After we had cleaned up the dishes I asked him if we could talk. He had looked so disappointed that I had to laugh, and promised him more physical activity afterwards. We were laughing together as we stepped out of the kitchen into the hallway, when Jacob suddenly whipped his head round towards the front door, made a noise that *really* sounded like a menacing growl, and began blurring around the edges.

"Jake!" I yelled, alarmed not by his growl or seemingly imminent phase, but by his sudden change in mood. He squeezed his eyes shut, apparently trying to gain some control over himself, and hissed through his teeth, "leech!"

The door bell rang and he pushed me protectively behind him, muttering to himself about getting me out of there. I was quaking behind him. I had been so certain that with Victoria gone, I would never set eyes on another vampire again. Why did I have this ability to attract supernatural entities?

Slowly, Jacob turned to face me. The expression on his face was unreadable. "I recognise the scent Bella. It's one of *them*. It's a Cullen."

"What? Which one?" Without really thinking about anything other than the obvious, which was that I was in no danger after all, I marched past him and threw the door open.

Standing outside, nose screwed up as if trying to eliminate an offensive smell and looking utterly confused, was Alice. Her eyes widened when she saw me and she demanded, "Would you mind explaining to me how you're still alive?"

I was absolutely speechless. Part of me wanted to throw my arms around her for the sake of our lost friendship, but another part of me (probably the part that he was gripping tightly from behind me) knew that that would *not* go down well with Jacob.

"Bella!" shouted Alice. "Your future disappeared *three days* ago."

"What?" I felt completely confused. Why would my future have disappeared? I had been right here for the past three days. Having the time of my life, actually.

"Oh God," Alice sank to her knees on the doorstep. "He saw it in my mind. I thought you were *dead*, Bella. Edward. He's gone to the Volturi."

A/N: Please let me know what you thought. Reviews make me even happier than story alerts;-)

Chapter 9: Chapter 9

A/N: WOW! I guess Bella's decision to go to Volterra was never a popular one then! I couldn't agree more;-)

A big thank you, as always, to everyone who takes the time to read and to review. When I decided to try my hand at writing a fanfic, I never imagined my first story would attract so much attention and I'm hugely flattered by it.

I don't own anything Twilight related. And if I did, this would have been Bella's decision.

Chapter Eight – Bella's Decision

"Alice, I – what?" My mind was in overdrive. I had just been about to have a heart-to-heart with my boyfriend, followed by what I had sincerely hoped would be a passionate make out session; and here was Alice – who I had never expected to see again - on my doorstep, telling me that not only was I dead, but I had been for three days; Edward had gone to meet the head vampires in Italy; and Jacob was vibrating so hard behind me that it felt like he was approximately 10 seconds away from phasing. I shook my head to clear it. "Why would you think I was dead and *why* would Edward go to the Volturi and *Jacob please stop growling!*"

I turned to him and saw his expression was murderous. The thought that he was about to attack a Cullen on *their* territory hit me and I knew I had to get him out of here. I opened my mouth to ask him to leave until I had sorted this out with Alice, but at that moment he turned his eyes on me and I knew there was no way he would leave me alone with her. I was shocked by the fear in his eyes, fear that I knew did not stem from facing a vampire, but from what my reaction to seeing her might be.

I turned back to Alice who was still kneeling on the doorstep and spoke to her more sharply than I had intended, concern over the possibility of Jacob attacking her over-riding my manners.

"Alice! *Why* would you think I was dead and what is Edward doing at the Volturi?" I knew they had, once upon a time, been his suicide plan. I was failing to make any connection between my supposed death and any kind of suicide plan though. Edward had, after all, left me.

She turned her stricken face to me and said, "Bella he's going to ask them to kill him."

"*What? WHY?*" I demanded.

"Because he thinks you're dead!" she snapped back. She stood up at vampire speed and Jacob immediately threw himself in front of me. Alice glared at him and wrinkled her nose again.

"You need to leave, *leech*," Jacob snarled at her. Alice looked momentarily shocked, then gaped at me.

"A *werewolf*, Bella? NOT good company to keep!"

"Alice for crying out loud, will you please tell me what is going on with Edward?" I felt Jacob's eyes burning into me but I wanted answers from Alice.

"How many times do I have to explain it, Bella?" she snapped at me. "Your future disappeared, which usually means a human has died, Edward saw that in my mind and has gone to the Volturi to ask them to kill him. I still don't know why your future disappeared!" She was looking suspiciously at Jacob.

"But *why?*" I felt like a child, asking for answers to questions that I didn't understand, and I was getting angry that she wasn't explaining it to me.

Alice sighed. "I don't think he ever intended to outlive you for very long, Bella. He loves you too much."

That did it for Jacob. He whirled to me, pushing me back into the hallway as I yelled at Alice, "he *left* me, Alice!"

"For your own good, Bella! You didn't really think he meant it, did you?"

I tried to force my way past Jacob, who was refusing to accommodate me. "Alice – explain!"

"He was so afraid of one of us hurting you, Bella. So he left to keep you safe." I was aware of Jacob snarling and growling but my mind was on a mantra.

He left for my own good, he didn't mean any of it, he's going to kill himself because of me, ohmyGod NO!

I sank to the hall floor and put my head between my knees. This could not be happening.

"Bella." It was Jacob's voice. Barely a whisper and full of so much pain. I raised my head to look at him, realising that my eyes were blurred with tears.

"He's going to get himself killed because of me," I whispered. Jacob's face hardened. I stood up again to face Alice.

"What can we do to stop him?" I asked her quietly.

"*WE* are doing nothing Bella!" Jacob snarled.

I turned on him. "He will *die* because of *me* Jacob!"

"He's already dead, Bella! He's not been alive for a hundred years!" he yelled back.

Alice spoke. "We can go to Volterra. There's a chance ... if he sees you, Bella, he'll change his mind. If I go alone, he'll just think I'm trying to fool him, to get him out of there alive. But if he sees *you*, that might work. Go and pack a bag now, Bella, and *please* tell me you have a passport!"

"Bella is NOT going anywhere with you, leech!" Jacob looked truly frightening and I realised again how imperative it was that he got out of here without attacking Alice. He turned to me and the look in his eyes nearly broke me. "Please Bella, I'm begging you not to go."

I looked into his beautiful brown eyes, the eyes that always told me exactly what he was feeling, and the sheer terror and pain that I saw there was like a punch to my gut. The need to eliminate that dreadful expression in his eyes gave me the strength I needed. This had gone too far. "Alice," I said, without taking my eyes off Jacob's. "I am *not* going to Italy with you." Jacob's whole body sagged in relief. "But," I added, for his benefit, "I can't just sit back and watch Edward kill himself because of some mis-information about me. So, again Alice – what can we do that does not involve me leaving Forks?" I moved in front of Jacob to face Alice.

Her face was stricken. "Nothing, Bella. He'll be there soon. We need to leave now – together – if we have any chance of saving him."

"Oh for God's sake Alice there must be something!" I cried.

"Can't you just phone him?" put in Jacob.

Alice scowled at him.

"No, *dog*," she said rudely. "He's destroyed his phone."

I saw red. "Alice Cullen do *not* insult Jacob in my home! Now you phone Carlisle and get him to contact the Volturi immediately. Tell him he has to convince them to convince Edward that I am alive. I don't know how he'll do that and to be honest I don't think I care. But surely someone can think *something* around Edward that will make him believe you were wrong!"

Alice looked like I had just slapped her. Jacob, who was still behind me, had put his arms around me as soon as I told Alice not to insult him. I could practically feel the relief coming off him in waves. He was still trembling and I was so afraid of him losing control and breaking the treaty that I began rubbing my thumb in circles on the back of his hand in a small attempt to soothe him. Alice, of course, noticed. She narrowed her eyes.

"Bella," she said sadly. "It's obvious what's going on here. Edward doesn't mean anything to you anymore."

Oh I was not having that! "What is going *on* here Alice, is that your brother left me and if it hadn't been for Jacob, I would have never gotten over that rejection. Jacob and I are together now and when you see Edward you can tell him that I'm enjoying all those human experiences he wanted me to!" I knew that last bit was spiteful but I had a strong suspicion that Alice was trying to manipulate me into feeling guilty. "I think you have a call to make Alice," I finished quietly.

"Bella I don't think you understand," she said. She looked at Jacob with disdain. "I don't think I can see past *him* and his pack of mutts. They must have something to do with me not being able to see you anymore. Your new boyfriend has led to Edward thinking you are dead, making him want to kill himself. You are not dead. Edward needs to know this, and he needs to hear it from you. Besides I can't call Carlisle, he and Esme are hunting."

There was so much wrong with that little speech that I didn't even know where to begin. I could feel Jacob about to erupt again and I squeezed his hand tightly to try and signal to him that I had this one.

"Alice," I said evenly. "Firstly, I have already asked you not to insult Jacob. As always, you have disregarded my wishes. I will ask you one more time, please do *not* disrespect him in my home. Secondly, Jacob has nothing to do with Edward thinking I am dead. *You* made the mistake Alice, not Jacob, and not me. I do not want Edward to kill himself because of me, but only because I don't need to live with that guilt. What Edward needs to hear is that you made a mistake, and that I am alive and happy. If he wants to talk to me on the phone to confirm that, that's fine." Jacob stiffened behind me and I squeezed his hand again. "But that's as far as I will go Alice. When Edward ripped himself out of my life and left me alone in that forest, the damage he did was irreversible. Jacob saved me, and I will not hurt him by going on a suicide mission to save Edward because of your mistake. And finally, Alice, send Emmett or Jasper to find Carlisle, you must be able to see where he is for crying out loud."

I was breathless by the time I had finished. Never would I have believed I could have spoken to a Cullen like that, but with Jacob behind me I felt I could have taken the whole family on. I felt pride in myself, similar to when I had stood up to Leah,

and I thought fleetingly that Jacob really did bring out the best in me. I would need to tell him that later.

Alice looked at me hard and I could see her disbelief. Finally, she turned to go. I called after her.

"Alice please let me know what happens."

She turned back to face me. "I will Bella. But I don't think the news will be good." By the time I had blinked, she was gone.

Slowly, I turned to face Jacob. We stood staring at each other for a few moments. I was studying his face and eyes, looking for any remaining vestiges of the pain and fear I had seen there, wondering how badly he had just been hurt. He looked like he was studying my face and eyes too, looking for something.

Jacob spoke first. "You chose me," he whispered.

I smiled at him. "Of course I did."

"For a minute there ... I wasn't sure," he confessed.

"I got that," I said wryly. I sighed. I wanted to be mad at him for not trusting me but if I was being honest with myself, I couldn't blame him. He had seen the state I was in for months after Edward left and I knew it would have been all too easy for him to convince himself that the imprint had confused me. I supposed only time and the building of trust would persuade him that he was my whole world now. "Jake," I said slowly, "you do know that the only reason I wanted to do something to help was because I don't want his death on my conscience, right?"

"Pff. He *is* dead, Bella, you keep forgetting."

"Jake you know what I mean."

"Yeah," he said and he pulled me into a hug as he kicked the front door shut. "As much as I think you're deeply nuts for caring about a corpse, I do know what you mean."

We stood there for a while, just hugging, needing to feel close to each other. I knew Jake had been badly shaken by the possibility of me leaving tonight; and I had been affected by Alice's sudden appearance and the ensuing drama – including the revelation that Edward loved me and had left to protect me. I didn't yet know how I felt about that, but slowly, I began to feel annoyed with Alice for ruining my plans for the evening. I sighed against Jake's chest.

"Sup Bells?" he murmured into my hair.

"I had this evening all planned out," I told him, looking up at him. "And Alice has kind of spoiled it."

"Yeah, you wanted to talk. We can do that now," he said, leading me into the living room but I was shaking my head.

"I think we've had enough drama for one night Jake," I said. "I wanted to know about Billy, and talk about the future a bit, but the mood's gone. Damn Alice and her melodramas!"

Jake chuckled. "Don't look now Bells, but you've just insulted a Cullen," he teased.

I smiled back at him. "Must be something to do with your influence," I said.

"Hey don't blame me," he laughed, throwing himself onto the couch and pulling me onto his lap. "You were the one who told her to get lost." I snickered, amazed again by the courage I had found.

"It seems to be you that gives me courage though, Jake," I told him. "I mean, I would never have stood up to anyone before, but I stood my ground with Leah the other day too, over you," I could hear the pride in my own voice and Jake smiled at me.

"I saw that in her mind," he said. "I was proud of you. And tonight, too." He skipped a beat and then asked, "Was it very hard to say no to Alice, Bella?"

I looked straight into Jacob's eyes. I wanted him to be absolutely certain about this. "It's hard to know that he might die. I *do* care about him, he was my first love and I suppose I'll always have a place in my heart for him." Something flickered in Jake's eyes and I continued quickly. "But going to Volterra, where all the head vampires live, would have ended up with me being killed. I looked into your eyes Jake, and saw that losing me would kill you too. So it was a choice between saving both of us and maybe leaving Edward to die; or killing all three of us and probably Alice too. So to answer your question Jacob, no it wasn't hard. I love *you* Jake. Choosing you was not a sacrifice, or – well it wasn't even a choice, really. It was a given fact." I chewed on my lip and then added, "I do hope he's okay though."

Jake rubbed my back and kissed the top of my head. "If you had gone Bella," he said in a voice that sounded tortured, "I don't think I could have ever forgiven you." He sounded as if he was confessing a terrible crime and when I looked up at him, he looked guilty.

"I wouldn't have blamed you Jake," I told him and kissed him deeply. It only took a minute for all thoughts of Edward and Alice to be erased completely from my mind.

This kiss was different to any other that we had shared. Where before there had been a lot of passion, and attraction, and hormones - this kiss was just about love. We poured out our love for one another and I felt Jacob's relief that I had stayed with him, *for* him, as he cupped my cheek in one hand and ran the other through my hair. We kissed like that for a long time until, finally, Jacob pulled away and hugged me tightly to his body. We sat silently for a while, each of us thinking over the events of the evening.

Eventually, Jake turned on the TV and we found something mindless to watch. I wasn't watching at all. I was still thinking through what had happened. The more I thought, the angrier I became. I realised that Alice must have been right and Jacob somehow masked my future. She had jumped to conclusions, as had Edward, and his decision to run straight to the Volturi was just typical of how he would react.

Alice should never have come here, I decided. She should have contacted Carlisle in the first instance and asked him to exert his influence on the Volturi. Surely Edward's demise could be avoided with a simple explanation. For the first time that I could remember, I felt impatient with Edward's and Alice's flair for theatrics.

Then there was the matter of Edward allegedly leaving me for my own good, despite still loving me. A couple of months ago, hell, even just a few weeks ago, I would have thrilled at that knowledge and yeah, okay, I would probably have run off to Volterra with Alice to try and save him. But now, it just plain aggravated me. Who the hell did he think he was, making a decision like that without consulting me? If he had just talked to me about it, we could have worked it out and none of this mess would have happened. He wouldn't be chasing his own destruction for no reason and I wouldn't be worrying about him.

Then again, if he had never left, I wouldn't be with Jacob now and that made all the pain and heart ache worthwhile. Thinking of Jacob, I remembered again that Alice entirely ruined my plans for this evening. I was growing sulkier by the minute.

"Bella," asked Jake curiously, "what on *earth* are you thinking about? I've been watching you for ten minutes and you've looked angry, angrier and just plain pissed."

I sighed as I turned to him and explained my conclusions about Alice and Edward's behaviour. "She should never have come here to try and drag me into this," I finished. "And she's ruined all my plans for this evening."

Jacob frowned at me. "You said that earlier too, honey. We can talk anytime you like. You want me to tell you about Billy now?" He picked up the TV remote to switch it off.

"No, I don't feel like talking anymore tonight Jake," I said. Feeling suddenly shy – something which didn't happen around Jake very often – I said, "there was something else I wanted to do this evening, though."

"What's that honey?" He was playing with my hair and didn't seem to be paying full attention.

I leaned forward and whispered in his ear, "I wanted you to take my shirt off."

That got his attention.

Twenty minutes later, I was lying underneath Jacob on the couch. My shirt was on the floor beside his and our kisses were fevered and desperate. My body was more enflamed than ever and the noises coming from Jake's throat were the sexiest sounds I had ever heard. Jacob started to kiss down my neck and chest and began teasing my nipples through my bra with his hot mouth. Just when I thought there was no sweeter sensation than that, he roughly pulled down the fabric of my bra enough to take my skin directly into his mouth and my lower body bucked up against him of its own accord. My nails were digging into his back and an almost feral sounding groan issued from Jacob's mouth.

As his mouth continued to make love to my breasts, Jake's hand began to move down my side towards the waistband of my jeans and I started to feel torn. I wanted more, *God* I wanted more, and I knew Jake wouldn't stop as long as he was sure that I was okay with what we were doing. But I also knew that I wasn't ready for any further intimacy than this and I was afraid that if I allowed this to continue any further, I wouldn't be able to stop.

In tune with me as always, Jake pulled back from me and looked into my eyes. "We can stop anytime, Bells." His voice sounded so husky and laced with desire that I almost threw caution to the wind, but I knew I wasn't ready for more than this yet.

With a Herculean effort of will power, I sat up and scooted away from Jake, readjusting my bra to cover me. He looked disappointed and I gave him a quick kiss. "I need to stop now, or I won't stop at all," I told him.

Jacob grinned at me. "Not stopping at all would be fine too, Bells."

"I'll bet it would, Jake," I said, "but don't you think we should – I don't know ... " When he looked at me like that, it was difficult to remember why I wanted to stop.

He cupped my chin in his hand and looked deeply into my eyes. "We are not doing anything that you don't one hundred percent want," he said firmly.

I smiled at him. "What about what you one hundred percent want?" I asked him.

He smiled back. "I one hundred percent want what you want. Simple as that."

Easy as breathing.

Late that night, after Jacob had left, I lay awake for a long time wondering how it was that I had learned that Edward still loved me, and all I could think about was Jacob. Jacob filled my every thought, my every dream, and my every hope for the future. All I could muster for Edward was the sincere hope that Alice had found a way to save him.

Jake's POV

Running patrol that night, I still could hardly believe that Bella had chosen me over the bloodsuckers. I was elated, to say the least. And not only had she chosen me, not only was she in love with me, but this evening's events had more or less convinced me that the imprint wasn't completely responsible for the remarkable about turn in her feelings.

The way the physical side of our relationship was progressing was like my wildest dreams coming true, too. OK, I'd had to take a lot more cold showers over the past few days, but it was so worth it. I was bowled over when Bella had wanted me to start undressing her earlier. It wasn't even a heat of the moment thing either, she had actually *planned* it. I was doing all kinds of happy dances inside.

I had never been happier in my life. I hadn't even known it was possible to *be* this happy.

I knew I was going to have to tell her what the council wanted soon. I had planned on telling her tonight; hell she had even been going to ask about it herself tonight. It was, after all, at the root of the problems I was having with dad just now. Of course the leech's arrival ruined that and then, well, my girl hadn't felt like *talking* anymore and who was I to argue with that?

I just hoped it didn't ruin everything.

A/N: As always, please let me know what you think. There are so many details still to come in this story that I haven't completely decided on yet and some of your reviews really do get me thinking about future chapters, so please do tell me your thoughts, I love to hear them.

Chapter 10: Chapter 10

A/N: As always, thank you for taking the time to read and review. And as always, I own nothing Twilight related.

Chapter Nine – What The Council Wants

School again dragged by the next day. Added to my impatience to see Jacob was my concern over Edward. My cell phone was practically an extension of my hand all day as I checked it approximately every 30 seconds for messages from Jake and Alice (in that order). As always, Jake failed to disappoint and kept up a regular stream of messages throughout the day which, I noticed with a secret smile, were getting a little more daring in their content.

Alice, on the other hand, remained silent.

By the end of the day, I was exasperated with her for not at least letting me know if Carlisle had managed to contact the Volturi. Jake had asked me to meet him by our tree so I knew he was going to tell me all about Billy. I made my way there straight from school, leaving my phone in the truck since my undivided attention was all Jake's for the next few hours.

When I reached the beach and saw Jacob sitting by our tree waiting for me, my heart literally leapt in my chest. He was stunning. His black hair, which was growing out a little, was blowing into his eyes with the sea breeze. His body was perfectly sculpted, and best of all was the smile, *my* smile, which lit up his whole face as he jogged across the beach to meet me. Wrapping his arms around me, he kissed me as though he hadn't seen me for a month. I returned the kiss with equal fervour until we were both breathless and had to pull back.

"Hi," he grinned at me, putting his arm round my shoulder and steering us in the direction of our tree.

"Hi," I laughed back at him.

We swapped stories about our day and Jake even asked with a reasonable degree of civility whether I'd heard anything from Alice. All news from our respective days exhausted, Jake finally sighed and gave me a look that told me I wasn't going to much enjoy this conversation.

"So, um, Bells," he began. He scratched the back of his neck and his left leg started to jiggle. I raised my eyebrows. I had expected him to give me a tirade of Billy's wrongdoings, but it seemed as though Jake was trying to decide on the best way to break something to me. I waited for him to spit it out.

"OK, so," he finally continued. "You know that the day dad asked you about whether you still have any contact with the Cullens, I got pissed and – yeah. Well, it's more than just me thinking that dad should have told me about the whole wolf thing. Although," he added with a frown, "I still can't believe he didn't say anything about that. But that's only a part of it." He took a deep breath and looked at me worriedly.

"Oh Jake just tell me," I told him. "It can't be *that* bad."

"Yeah well wait with that judgement till you've heard me out Bells," he said drily. "OK. You know I'm supposed to be Alpha, right?"

"Mmhmm."

"Which I don't want. I mean, I'm 16 Bella, what the hell do I know about running a wolf pack and co-ordinating leech attacks? I get that Sam had to learn on the job, but he's older than me, and he took on one wolf at a time, I'd be taking on an established pack and I'm one of the youngest... they'd eat me alive, Bells! Anyway, it's just too much responsibility and I don't want it. I don't think I'll *ever* want it, to be honest."

"Well what does Sam think?"

Jake laughed darkly. "He seems to be kind of avoiding me Bella."

"Really?" I was surprised.

"Yeah. Last I spoke to him, he was fine with staying on as Alpha. I think he was relieved. I mean, my head was all over the place with you not knowing about the imprint and everything. But I don't know what he thinks now cos like I said, he's avoiding me or something." He frowned. "Anyway, the way the council see it, I'm the rightful Alpha and there is no other option than for me to take up the role. Dad agrees with them; it's a matter of family honour, apparently," he said bitterly.

"Wow," I was surprised again. "Really? Your dad wants you to take over as Alpha?" Jake nodded. It didn't seem fair. Jake had had more than enough responsibility cast on him at too young an age. He had cared for his father, physically at least, from a very young age; and become a wolf and protector aged 16. To add to those burdens by insisting he become Alpha before he felt ready seemed unfair, especially if Sam was happy to continue in the role. It didn't sound like Billy to try and force Jake into a role he didn't want and I said as much to Jake.

"Yeah, I know," he said. He sighed heavily and looked out over the water. He looked like he was shouldering the world,

and I reached out to take his hand. He looked back at me and smiled. "There's more," he said quietly.

"OK." I was ready to listen all night if I had to.

"See – you're my imprint, right?"

"OK." I wasn't sure how I fit into this tale.

"So – um, here's the thing Bells. When Emily was telling you about imprinting did she – mention tribal law?"

"Tribal law? No," I shook my head.

"Um, well, according to tribal law, an imprinted couple are kind of – a married couple." He cringed, looking like he was bracing himself for a violent reaction from me. I looked at him, stunned for a moment, and then burst out laughing. Jake looked slightly offended. "I'm serious, Bells!"

"Jake, really? We're technically married in the eyes of your tribe?"

"Yeah," he was looking puzzled at my reaction.

"Sorry, Jake," I apologised, trying to contain my laughter. "It's just – wow! I mean, the last thing I ever wanted to do was marry young but at least *I'm* of legal age," I snorted.

Jake grinned. "Didn't we agree that age is just a number?" he said mock-angrily.

"OK, OK. So – we're married in La Push. What does that mean?" I asked.

Jake immediately looked uncomfortable again. "Well, as the Alpha's – mate" – he looked at me apologetically at the use of that word – "the pack would be honour bound to protect you at all costs. And, according to tribal law again ... that needs to be done on our own lands." He was cringing again.

My brain took a moment to catch up. "Soooo..."

"So the council want you to move in with me on the res, and me to take up my mantle as Alpha," he said in a rush.

I stared blankly at him for a while, then snorted. "Oh-kay? And Billy is – supporting this?"

Jake looked me straight in the eyes. "Billy all but promised the council that you would have moved here by the end of next month," he confirmed. "That was why he was so insistent on finding out whether you're still involved with the Cullens. He needed to know what the chances were of them crossing the treaty line to come get you."

"Wow." It was so much to take in. "Jake, you know there's no way I can move ... I mean, we're both still at school, we couldn't even begin to support ourselves. Charlie would freak! And ... we're too young anyway Jake!" I was starting to panic a little.

"Bella calm down," he said. "I know all of that. It's just – trying to persuade dad to convince the council is – well, yeah."

I was stunned. I couldn't imagine Billy trying to impose this on either Jacob or I. It just didn't seem like him. "Jake why would your dad insist on us doing this?"

He rolled his eyes. "Family honour. Pride. Superstition."

"Superstition?"

"Yeah. Apparently there was a previous case of an Alpha wolf whose imprint lived outside of the reservation before their wedding. She got injured in an accident and someone somewhere decided it was a punishment to her mate for not looking after her properly. That's why an imprinted wolf is automatically considered married, to enable him to move a woman onto the reservation immediately. A wolf can't function without his imprint so it's essential the imprints are kept safe." Jake sighed. "It's mostly pride though Bells. When mum died and dad was left disabled – he's never felt – well, I don't think he's really felt like he's the man he used to be, or something. I mean he's still Chief and all, but there's a limit to how much power he really has these days, and of course he can't get around much without help which he hates. Then I phase, and not only am I future Chief, but rightful Alpha. I think in his mind, it kind of raises our family up in the eyes of the tribe again, or something like that. Then, I go and imprint on his best friend's daughter, and suddenly Billy Black's future looks brighter."

I shook my head at him. "Charlie will kill him."

Jake grinned. "I'm counting on it."

"So – what happens now?"

"Well, I just need to keep telling them no."

"Them? You need to answer to the whole council?"

"Just dad for now, but he can play dirty. Yeah, he can make me stand up in front of the whole lot of them and argue my case. Won't change anything, though."

My temper, never far away these days it seemed, flared again. "That's just so wrong Jake!" I said heatedly. "Isn't it enough that you need to be a wolf at all? Why try and force you into a – an *arranged marriage*, and – make you *move in* with me?"

Jake looked at me strangely. "It wouldn't exactly be a hardship for me, Bells," he said. "You *are* my imprint, and I've loved you regardless of the imprint as well. It would make me pretty damn happy, actually." He looked at me a little shyly. "During spring break, when you were cooking and, you know, looking after the house and everything – I know we didn't say much about it but dad and I both loved it. But I know it's not what you want. And we have plenty of time."

"Jake, I-" I was starting to feel a bit panicky. I loved Jacob, of course I did, and I envisaged a whole future ahead of us. But we were *so young*.

"Bella!" Jake said firmly. "I am *not* asking you to do this, or even to consider it. If you agreed to marry me legally, or move in with me, you would be doing it for all the wrong reasons. I know you, and I know you don't want this. I just want you to be aware of what's going on is all. My dad's kind of pissed at the moment that I'm not even willing to discuss it. He thinks if he has to go back to the council and tell them I'm being difficult, he'll lose face with them."

"Well then tell them it's me! Tell them I won't agree to it! There's no need for you to take all the slack by yourself, Jake."

He shook his head. "I'm keeping you out of it Bella. Or as much as I can, anyway." He hesitated and then said, "This is the first time that a wolf has imprinted on ..."

"A paleface," I finished for him. I had already wondered what the council would make of that. "Is that another problem for you?" I hated to think I could cause him any problems, but he shook his head again.

"No, they can't argue with an imprint Bells. But that won't stop them gossiping so I'm not going to give them any fuel." He sighed, sounding frustrated, and kicked at the sand. "The whole situation is ridiculous," he said. "First, none of us are told what's going to happen to us, even though the signs are usually pretty clear. Then, as soon as we imprint we're expected to grab the girl and shack up with her regardless of what she thinks about it. And if we don't do what we're told, we're dishonouring our families, the tribe, our ancestors, whoever. First thing I'm going to do when I'm Chief is change a whole lot of laws," he added confidently.

I laughed. "Can you just do that?"

He grinned at me. "Well look who else will be on the council with me Bells. Quil, Seth, maybe Sam. How much resistance will they put up? And if they do, I'll Alpha order their asses."

I laughed again, marvelling how even in the face of so much pressure, Jacob could still stay light hearted. Then I thought of something. "Hey Jake, that day you got mad with your dad – we weren't even together then. Why would he be thinking about me moving to the res if we ... oh God you weren't supposed to just – *seriously*, Jake?"

He looked sheepish. "Yeah. Grab you and drag you here with me. Like that would work with *you*," he added with a grin.

I snorted at how ludicrous it all seemed. I knew that Billy and the council were deeply traditional and placed a lot of importance on tribal laws and legends, but this seemed a little extreme. Jake seemed to think so too. It did however make me think of something else.

"Jake," I said hesitantly, not sure if now was a good time to bring this up. "Have you thought about – well, I graduate soon and I know Charlie will be expecting me to go to college so... How will that work?"

"*Charlie* will be expecting you to go to college?" Jake questioned, looking at me incredulously. "Isn't it what you want too, Bells? I mean I'd just assumed you'd go. I was kind of hoping you'd tell me exactly *where* you're going soon, though."

"I haven't really applied to too many places," I confessed. "I'm not sure what I want to do and – well how does it work anyway Jake? With the imprint."

Jacob's face took on a determined look that I recognised as spelling trouble. "You will not jeopardise your future because of the imprint Bella, or because of me, or anything else for that matter. Do what you need to do, and I'll handle it. Just promise me you'll come back to me," he added seriously.

I was taken aback. I didn't want to leave him, and I certainly didn't want him "handling" any pain that was caused by me. I frowned.

"Seriously, Bella," he repeated. "You have to go and get your education."

"Well then I'll go to Seattle, or somewhere nearby Jake. And if I'm too late to apply this year, then I'll work for a year and go next year."

Jake pulled me to him and kissed me. "Just send out your applications Bella," he said. "And we'll take it from there."

We walked slowly back to Jake's house, hand in hand and still discussing how Jake was going to handle the situation with his dad and the council. We had agreed that he needed to speak to Sam in the first instance to determine whether Sam was happy to remain as Alpha. We had also agreed that as the council were unable to actually force Jake to either become Alpha, or kidnap me to the reservation, he really just had to keep refusing them. We both knew he was stubborn enough to do it, but I worried about the additional pressure it would put on him and I hoped I may be able to somehow enlist Charlie's help with Billy.

When we arrived at the red cabin, Billy was watching TV and I saw that Jake was immediately on edge. *This is bad*, I thought.

"Hello Bella," Billy said brightly. "Are you here to make us dinner tonight?"

Jake rolled his eyes and said he would go and get something from the freezer. I went with him into the kitchen and was pleased to see that they had been making the most of the cooking I had done during spring break. Most of it was gone, and I decided to come over a day and make some more. A plan began to form in my mind and I asked Jake when he was on evening patrol again.

"Tomorrow," he said pulling a face. "I was going to tell you, I won't be able to see you at all tomorrow."

"That's okay," I said brightly. "Maybe I'll come here anyway and see you afterwards."

"I'll be late Bells," he said ruefully. "But I promise I'll make it up to you on Thursday."

"Well I can wait till you get back tomorrow," I said. "I wouldn't mind seeing Emily so I'll come to La Push anyway." I hadn't seen too many of the pack or their imprints for over a week, and I was also hoping that Billy might be receptive to listening to me if I was cooking for him.

Jake's face lit up. "That'd be awesome, Bells."

Dinner passed uneventfully but I was hyper-aware of the tension between Jacob and Billy. I had no idea how this could be resolved but I vowed I was going to try. They had always been so close, and I knew it must hurt them both to be so at odds. It was, I thought sadly, further evidence of the damage caused by the Cullens.

Thinking of them, I wondered idly whether Alice had contacted me yet. I decided to check my phone, which I had left in the truck, after Jake and I had cleared away the dinner dishes. Jake, however, had other ideas as he tugged me in the direction of his bedroom when we had finished in the kitchen.

"What about Billy?" I hissed.

Jake grinned at me. "He'll not move from the TV till he goes to bed. Besides, as far as he's concerned, we're married, remember?"

I burst out laughing as I allowed Jacob to lead me into his bedroom and shut the door behind us. He led me over to his bed and suddenly I felt nervous.

"What's wrong Bells?"

I gulped involuntarily. "It's ... your bed, Jacob."

"Last time I looked," he teased. "Bella we don't have to do anything. I just thought ... you know, we could make the most of having a bit of time to ourselves."

I knew I was being ridiculous. What difference did it make if we were making out on a bed, a couch, or the sand? Still, it seemed significant somehow. Jake planted a soft kiss on my lips. "Do you want to go back out to the living room Bella?"

"No," I said firmly. "I was just being silly." I grinned and pulled his head back down for another kiss, which we quickly deepened. Jake eventually pulled me down onto the bed, lying on his back with me straddling his hips. I could feel he was already aroused, which turned me on immediately. Jake's hands quickly began to travel my upper body, his right hand pushing my hair back from my face while his left hand stroked down my arm and then up under my shirt. He squeezed my right nipple hard and I couldn't help but grind my centre against his hard length. The groan he made was guttural sounding and made me want to do *that* again. After I had ground against him a few times, Jake cursed loudly and rolled us over quickly so that he was on top of me, resting between my legs and grinding against me hard. Everything was happening so fast, the sensation was leaving me breathless and I doubted I would be able to stop us today.

Just as that thought entered my mind, a panicked sounding howl sounded through the evening air. Jake's head shot up in the direction of his window and he said "*FUCK!*" He turned his gaze on me, his face flushed and his eyes slightly unfocussed. "I gotta go Bells, I'm so *sorry*. I don't even know who that was, so just wait here till I can get news to you about what's going on okay?"

"OK Jake," I agreed breathlessly. "Be careful!" I called after him as he darted to his bedroom door. He just grinned over

his shoulder at me and took off running out of the cabin.

Slightly embarrassed, I made sure my clothes weren't too rumpled before going back into the living room. I wondered if this might be a good time to try talking to Billy. First, I decided, I would check my phone for any word from Alice.

I fetched my phone from my truck and saw that I had missed some calls. There was only one voicemail. It was Alice.

"Bella! Call me back please, as soon as you get this message!" She left the number and I sat up in the cabin of the truck while I called her back. Under the circumstances, I didn't want to have this conversation in front of Billy Black.

Alice answered on the first ring. "Bella! Where have you been? I *hate* not being able to see when you're going to call!"

"Hi Alice. Did you get word to Edward?"

"I'm in Italy now Bella. We found Carlisle and he managed to contact Aro. I had already begun the journey incase I was needed for anything. Edward wanted proof of your being alive. Aro has a gift, if he touches your hand he can see all your thoughts and memories. It's impossible to lie to him. So he touched my hand and saw you, alive and with Jacob. Edward saw it in Aro's mind at the same time as Aro saw it in mine and Bella, he hasn't taken it well."

"What do you mean he hasn't taken it well Alice? He's still alive though isn't he?"

"He's still alive Bella; but Aro likes to collect pets. Vampires with special abilities. It's also a crime punishable by death to allow a human to know about our kind. So he made Edward an offer to allow you and all of us to live and Bella, he accepted it."

"What kind of an offer Alice?" I asked, dread settling in my heart.

"Bella – Edward has joined the Volturi. For the sole purpose of destroying the wolves."

A/N: I was so excited yesterday when this story reached 100 reviews:-) I appreciate each and every one.

Chapter 11: Chapter 11

A/N: Once again, I'd like to thank each and every one of you who reads this story, and an extra thank you as well to those of who have reviewed.

I own nothing Twilight related - it all belongs to Ms Meyer, who I would also like to thank for creating such a wonderful world and characters for me to have so much fun playing with :-D

Chapter Ten – The Wolf Pack Reacts

I sat there in the cabin of the truck for a long time after ending my conversation with Alice. She had few details to give me. Edward was hell bent on destroying the entire wolf pack, and it transpired that one member of the Volturi, a male vampire called Caius, had something of a grudge against werewolves as well.

Alice's inability to see the wolf pack rendered her blind as to the possible outcomes of a battle against the Volturi, but from what Edward had told me before and what Alice told me tonight, the wolves stood little chance against an entire army of gifted vampires. There was no way of knowing yet whether the Volturi would attack in a few months, a few years or a few decades, the passage of time meaning so little in the vampire world.

Alice had angered me by not understanding my fear and anxiety. She and the rest of her family were safe; and, allegedly, so was I. The wolves seemed to be of no concern to her. I had been too shocked by her news to object too much.

The question now was: how the hell did I break this news to the pack? While I could blame the Cullens for the wolves phasing in the first place – their destruction would be, at least in part, my fault.

No tears fell. I was too deeply in shock.

I think I must have fainted at some point because the next thing I knew, I heard an anxious, familiar voice say my name with urgency; and then I was lifted in warm arms and carried out of the truck. I realised I was shivering and snuggled into the warmth that was carrying me.

I heard voices but couldn't seem to process what was being said. I was shaking all over and breathing rapidly and irregularly. Then I was being carried again and placed on something flat and soft. I protested weakly about losing the warmth, but there was no response for a while. The warm arms finally came again, lifted my head and put something to my lips, and I heard that comforting voice tell me to drink.

Liquid slid past my lips and down my throat, burning on its way and making me cough. Warmth rubbed my back as more liquid was poured down my throat. I coughed again and my eyes opened.

"Bella!" The voice that I now recognised as Jake's breathed my name, relief seeping through his tone. "Fuck Bella you looked like you were in full blown shock! What in the hell happened?"

I tried to sit up, fell back against Jake again when I realised how dizzy I was, and then put my head between my knees. "I'm gonna be sick Jake."

With werewolf speed, Jake ran to get a bucket from somewhere and held my hair back from my face as I vomited, and vomited, and vomited into the bucket. Tears came at some point and as Jake held my hair back with one hand, rubbed circles on my back with the other, and *sssshhhh*-ed me, I couldn't help but think about highly *unattractive* this was. Then I started laughing at the utter inappropriateness of such a thought at such a time.

I was laughing and crying all at the same time, and then I was clinging to Jacob like my life depended on it.

"BELLA!" I looked up at him, surprised that he had bellowed, and saw the confusion and fear in his eyes. I was hysterical and was going to have to get myself together to tell him.

"What happened?" he demanded.

I gulped a few breaths, then saw the glass of liquor on the drawers beside his bed, grabbed it and gulped it down. Feeling slightly calmer, I began to talk.

"Alice called, Jake." He stiffened and I realised that he thought he had just witnessed me having an epic breakdown over the Cullens. "Not what you think," I told him quickly. I took a deep breath. "The Volturi, that Edward went to. They're so dangerous, Jake. They have vampires, gifted vampires, Alice said they can track anyone, find anyone, torture in hideous ways... The price of Edward allowing me to know about them was death for all the Cullens and me."

"No fucking way is any leech harming you Bella!" Jacob exploded.

"Let me finish! Edward's gift – mind reading – is apparently a valuable one. So they offered him a deal. If he joins them, they spare his life and all of his family; and mine."

I took another deep breath and then looked Jacob squarely in the eyes. "He agreed, Jake, on the condition that the entire Volturian guard come here – to destroy the wolf pack." My voice was a whisper by the end and I squeezed my eyes shut

and bowed my head.

I felt the bed move as Jacob stood up. *Oh God he hates me for bringing this on his family.*

I finally raised my head to look at him. He was standing at his window, arms folded, deep in thought. I could see his profile. His face looked hard.

"Jake?" I whispered. "I am so sorry."

He turned to look at me. "What are you sorry for Bells? You've done nothing wrong."

"This is my fault, Jake! It's because of me – Edward went to the Volturi because of *me!* And now because I'm with you, he's hell bent on revenge, that's what this is Jacob!"

"*NO!*" Jacob's voice reverberated through the room. He knelt in front of me and took my face roughly in his large hands. "You were pulled into a world that you should never have been included in Bella. These are the repercussions. But it is *not your fault*. I need you to believe that, Bella." He looked at me long and hard, then finished by saying, "but we're going to have our work cut out now. You need to understand that."

I wasn't entirely sure what he meant but I was prepared to do whatever he needed me to do so I nodded.

"We need to go and see Sam now honey. And I think bringing my dad would be a good idea." He frowned, murmured something to himself that I didn't quite catch, then shook his head and said that he would leave that up to Sam. He looked at me and said, "Are you okay to go now? You look – terrible, actually."

I was sure that I did but whether from the liquor, Jake's calm confidence, or both, I was feeling a little better. I told him I'd clean up in the bathroom quickly, and he told me to meet him and Billy in the living room when I was ready.

In the small bathroom mirror, I could see that my hair was tangled, my skin blotchy and my eyes wild. I splashed cold water on my face, brushed my teeth with Jake's toothbrush, and went out to the living room. Jake was sitting forward on the couch with his elbows resting on his knees and his hands hanging down between them. Billy looked aghast and I felt my legs begin to tremble again.

Billy looked up at me and said, "Bella it is imperative that you move here to La Push now."

"Seriously dad?" Jake snapped at him. "You want to bring *that* up right now?"

"Jacob," Billy said calmly, "we need to talk."

"Right now, dad, the priority is these Vol- whatever they are."

"We will talk at Sam's," Billy said in the same calm voice. But his voice belied his face, which showed real horror.

Jake sighed and pushed Billy's wheelchair out of the cabin. As he helped Billy into my truck, it being easier than the Rabbit for transporting three people and a wheelchair, I remembered the howl from earlier which had sent Jake running into the forest.

"Jake who was it howling earlier? Is everything okay?"

He looked over at me and shook his head. "New wolf phased, a kid called Collin. He's at Sam's now, he was a bit of an ass." He frowned. "Sam's pissed at me right now actually."

"Why?" asked Billy and I simultaneously.

Jake sighed. "Sam was already phased when I joined them. Collin had been following Sam's orders and then ... when I phased, I kind of argued with Sam about where Collin should go, and he did what I suggested instead of following Sam's orders."

He was still frowning, and his frown turned into an all-out scowl when Billy muttered, "That's because you're Alpha, stupid kid."

I had a feeling this was going to be a long, difficult night.

When we arrived at Sam's, it seemed that most of the wolf pack were there already. Embry and Paul were sitting at the kitchen table on either side of a boy I didn't recognise, presumably Collin. Sam was talking on the phone, and Kim and Emily were preparing food. Seth looked like he had just arrived and was being filled in by Jared on who the new guy was. I realised that only Leah and Quil were missing, and figured it would be kind of awkward for the former to hang out at Sam and Emily's home.

Sam hung up the phone and turned to Jared. "That was Old Quil. Seems like Brady Fuller is about to join us too; Quil's there now but one of us needs to get over there."

"What? Why are we having more kids phasing? This kid here is only 13!" exploded Paul.

"I think I might have an idea." Jake spoke quietly but the whole room went quiet and turned to face him. I was again struck by how the entire pack seemed to defer to their rightful Alpha. "Jared, you get over to the Fuller place. Sam, you need to stay here so I can fill you in on ... developments."

Jared immediately stood to leave. Sam took two giant steps towards Jacob, effectively closing the gap between them and opened his mouth as if to object. At the same moment, Jake drew himself up to his full height and I noticed for the first time that, as massive as Sam was, Jake was actually bigger. Sam shut his mouth again and looked over to Billy.

"Why is he here Jacob? No offense Billy, but with potentially two new recruits this evening, pack business needs to take priority over any council issues." I looked sharply over at Billy. I didn't think Sam meant it, but he had more or less just dismissed the tribe's Chief. Jacob's words from earlier resonated in my head. *There's a limit to how much power he really has these days.* Billy looked outwardly calm but something was burning in his eyes.

It was Jake who answered. "I thought our Chief might be able to give us some insight. He's read everything the tribe has on our pack's history. I think it might be time we, as a pack, started paying more attention to previous events too." Jake was speaking calmly and there was nothing accusatory about his tone at all, but I saw Sam flinch ever so slightly as if he had been admonished.

I looked over at Billy again and saw him looking at his only son with so much pride in his eyes that it nearly brought tears to my own. Jake's words again came to my mind. *Not only am I future Chief, but rightful Alpha ... it kind of raises our family up in the eyes of the tribe again.* And then I got it.

It wasn't just Jake who had suffered in this world. Billy Black had lost everything too. His wife, his mobility, his two daughters; and now he had had to relinquish a large portion of his authority to Sam Uley - authority which rightfully belonged to his son. And it was clear to me, witnessing this scene, who ought to be in power. Jake may have felt unprepared for the role of Alpha but it seemed that he was slipping into the role without even trying to or, I suspected, even being aware of it.

Sam seemed to shake himself slightly and then asked, "OK, you mentioned developments. Let's hear them."

"Just you and me for now, Sam," said Jake. "Let's go outside."

Once again, Sam looked annoyed that Jacob was telling him what to do, but once again he obeyed.

Jake kissed me on the forehead as he walked past and gave me a quick smile, reassuring me. I stood there awkwardly for a moment before deciding to make myself useful. I made sure Billy was comfortable and brought him a drink, then joined Emily and Kim making sandwiches.

Emily looked at me in concern. "Are you alright Bella? You look ..." she trailed off.

I tried to smile at her but could feel tears coming again. Every person in this room was in danger, if not doomed. I shook my head and asked her, my voice cracking, to wait for Jacob and Sam to come back inside.

They weren't long. Sam's face was thunderous as he exploded in the cabin door, making everyone jump. Jake came in behind him, strode to me and pulled me close to his side. I knew it wasn't good.

"Everybody find a seat," Sam ordered. "That includes you two," he told Emily and Kim, who looked surprised at being directly included in what was obviously pack business, but complied. "Seth, call Leah, she needs to be here. We'll fill in Quil and Jared when they get back." Sam sat at the head of the kitchen table and I wondered if it was significant that Jake kept us standing, off to one side of the table with his body angled slightly in front of mine. Everyone else pulled up chairs or stools and Billy had also joined the pack at the table.

Sam put his head in his hands, then ran his hands through his hair before sitting back in his chair. "We'll wait for Leah, she won't be long." He looked directly at me for the first time, and I flinched at his hard expression.

"Sam." Jake's voice was quiet but carried a warning. It reminded me of the quiet authority I had noticed from Billy before. Like father, like son, right enough, I thought. For the third time that evening, Jacob's words came back to me. *It is not your fault. I need you to believe that, Bella. But we're going to have our work cut out now.* I realised at last what he had meant. He didn't see this as being my fault and he wanted – no, needed – me to have faith in him. But the rest of the pack would blame me.

Panic rose in me and I began to tremble. How could I stand here in front of the entire pack and face their blame for the destruction that was being brought on their heads? Jacob tightened his grip on me, feeling my body quake and as he did so, I remembered how I had stood up to Leah, and Alice, and had attributed my courage to Jacob. With him beside me, I did have courage. With him beside me, I had torn a strip off a vampire. With him beside me, I could face the wrath of the pack.

I swallowed hard, realising how dry my mouth was, and straightened my back and shoulders. I was Jacob's imprint, I was the rightful Alpha's intended mate, and I belonged by his side. Not cowering behind him, but standing alongside him. I stepped to the side and slightly forward so that he was no longer shielding me, and reached for his hand. We would face this, together.

Jake looked down at me and I saw his surprise as he studied my eyes. Surprise which was quickly replaced by a fierce pride, reminding me of how Billy had looked at Jake just twenty minutes earlier. Remembering Billy, I looked over at him and saw that he was watching Jacob and I with a small smile on his lips. He caught my eye and nodded ever so slightly. I nodded my understanding back at him.

I was a part of this tribe now.

Leah exploded unceremoniously through the front door, but broke stride slightly with widened eyes as she took in the scene before her. Most of the pack was congregated with serious faces around the table. The tribal Chief and the Alpha and Beta's imprints were also at the table. Leah's eyes found Jake and I standing together to the side of the table and, after the briefest of hesitations, she came and stood on my other side. My shock was mirrored on Sam's face.

"There's no room at the table," Leah said tersely. "What the hell's going on?"

Sam began to speak. "It seems there is a large coven of highly dangerous vampires residing in Italy. One of them bears a grudge against werewolves." Some of the pack began to shift in their seats. "Edward Cullen," Sam spat his name, "went to this coven to ask them to destroy him. He did this because he believed Bella to be dead." Most of the pack turned to look at me briefly before turning back to Sam. I lifted my chin, bracing myself. I felt Jake tighten his grip on my hand and Leah, sensing something, seemed to move slightly closer to me.

Sam continued. "Alice Cullen visited Bella last night and saw her with Jacob. She went straight to inform Edward and the Italian coven of Bella's alliance with us. Edward has joined the coven, and is coming to seek his revenge. They intend to destroy us. I think it is safe to assume that the rest of the Cullens will join with Edward."

All hell broke loose. Most of the wolves began shouting simultaneously but it was Paul's voice which resonated the loudest.

"Fucking leech loving *bitch* will kill us all, and our families!"

The room fell silent. I didn't understand why at first. I heard Leah suck in her breath and saw her head turn sharply towards Jacob. I looked up at him and saw murder on his face.

Jacob looked directly at Paul and snarled "you insult my imprint?"

Paul actually shrank back in his chair, and quietened.

Jacob looked around the room, holding everyone in his piercing gaze, and then spoke. "Bella was involved with the Cullens. We all know this. Edward's – *obsession* – with her is *not her fault*. He left her, yet he cannot accept that she has moved on. Bella has asked for none of this, and she certainly didn't want the –" He turned to me for help which I quickly supplied, "Volturi, coming here. What we need to focus on now is finding out exactly what threat we face, and how to overcome it."

The pack exchanged looks with one another and I noticed several of them looking back and forward between Sam and Jacob. It was Sam who finally spoke, "Jacob you cannot blame the pack for feeling that Bella has brought this danger to us."

"Oh get over yourself Sam." Everyone turned to Leah in shock, myself included. "She's not the first girl to have gotten involved with the wrong guy." I was sure everyone heard exactly what she meant. "And it's hardly Bella's fault that the guy she fell for first was a sparkler; or that the guy who imprinted on her is a wolf; or that the two are mortal enemies. This has happened, and Jake's right. We need to figure it out, not bitch about who's to blame." She folded her arms and stared down the rest of the pack, who then continued to look back and forward between Sam and Jacob, waiting for one of them to give some indication of how things were going to proceed.

It was Billy who finally spoke. "Does anyone else have anything to say?"

Embry hesitantly raised his hand, as if he were answering a question in school. Jake nodded at him to speak and I saw in his eyes that he was hoping that one of his oldest and closest friends would have his back.

"I just want to say that I agree with Jake and Leah. It's not Bella's fault that the Cullens got so obsessed with her. We all know it wasn't just Edward. Alice treated her like a plaything, and mom and dad vamp encouraged it all." I was surprised the pack seemed to know so much about the Cullen family dynamics and made a mental note to ask Jake about it later. Embry hadn't finished. "Our job is to protect. We didn't do that great a job of protecting Bella before. The leeches got close to her, singled her out and drew her into their world when they all should've known better. We stood back and watched it happen. I say if we're looking to blame someone, we should be pointing the fingers at ourselves too. And that's all." He seemed embarrassed by his outburst and although I didn't necessarily agree with his logic, I was grateful for his support. I didn't think I'd ever heard Embry say so much all at the same time before and wondered how difficult that had just been for him. I was also aware that he had carefully included *all* the wolves in a timeframe during which only Sam, Jared and Paul had actually transformed. I wasn't sure, but guessed that he had done so in an attempt to minimise the insult it must be to Sam for his wolves to side with Jacob.

I saw Jake look his gratitude at Embry, and Embry's slight nod of acknowledgement.

Seth spoke up. "I'm with Jake and the others. We need to solve this, not fight about it."

Sam sighed, then looked at me. "Bella? Do you have any influence at all with the Cullens?"

I swallowed my horror at having to speak in front of pretty much the entire pack at a time like this, reminding myself that with Jacob at my side, I could do anything. I shook my head. "I doubt it, Sam. I'm so sorry this has happened, for what it's worth, and if there *is* anything I can do, I'll do it gladly. But like Embry said – I was probably more of a, a hobby or a pet project. I doubt I can influence any of them. I do have a phone number to contact Alice, though, if that helps at all."

Jake squeezed my hand in support and even Leah moved so that her arm lightly brushed against me.

"So," Sam said after a moment's thought. "Where does that leave us?"

"With a huge fucking coven of leeches to kill," Paul replied with a grin that was too excited for my liking. The rest of the pack began to hoot and holler their approval. Only Emily, Kim and Billy seemed to mirror my concern, although Collin didn't seem to quite understand what was going on at all.

When the pack finally quieted, Billy spoke again. "It is my opinion," he said, looking towards Sam, "that we probably have some time to prepare. What we have seen of the vampire world suggests they rarely do anything in a hurry. There are three key things the pack needs to consider." Sam crossed his arms, apparently annoyed that Billy had the audacity to suggest anything to do with the pack. I found myself growing irritated with Sam.

"Firstly," said Billy, "there needs to be a great deal of research done into the Italian coven. I'm assuming that the reason I'm here this evening is that Jacob guessed that earlier packs had gathered some information on threats to our people." He looked at Jacob, who nodded his confirmation. "You're right son. There is a lot of information on the largest known covens. I will make sure it's all made available to you.

"Secondly, Bella's safety is paramount. As Jacob's imprint, she *must be kept safe*. You all know the importance of this, even more than I do." He looked around the pack, allowing that to sink in, and I saw a few shudders of horror as they thought of whatever torture would be inflicted on Jacob and the pack mind if something were to happen to me. "Jacob, son—"he turned directly to Jake. "Bella *needs* to move to La Push. I understand how you feel on the subject but we can work something out that takes both your wishes into account. This is exactly the type of situation I've been afraid of Jacob. Any informed vampire will know that the best way to take down a wolf pack is to destroy an imprint. Away from La Push, Bella is a sitting duck. I am truly sorry, Bella," he added, looking at me.

I waited for Jake to give him an impatient refusal. When it didn't come, I looked closely at Jake's face and saw that he was entirely conflicted. *Oh, crap.*

I had no time to say anything because Billy suddenly thumped his fist hard on the table, making everyone jump again. "And *thirdly*." His usually quiet voice was booming now. "**THE PACK MUST CHOOSE THEIR ALPHA!**"

A/N: I'll try and get another chapter up tomorrow but it's a busy busy day ... Then the weekend is pretty crazy as well ... So I'm promising at least one and hopefully two chapters before Monday, and then (hopefully!) daily chapters next week.

Chapter 12: Chapter 12

A/N: Once again, a huge thank you to everyone who has been following this story. The last chapter alone has been read by more than 500 people and I'm so excited about having you all read what's coming up over the next chapters - tons of action ahead!

Meantime, I'm as nervous as Bella about taking That Step in our relationship, this being my first fic:-) So the little bit of lemon at the end of this chapter was fuelled by a couple of glasses of wine. Be nice!

Chapter Eleven – Promises

Billy's outburst was met with a deafening silence as the room absorbed what he had just said. I had absolutely no knowledge of what had previously been said on the subject between the pack members but as I looked around at their downcast eyes, I guessed that it was a subject none of them liked to voice an opinion on.

It was Jacob who finally spoke. "Nothing needs to be decided tonight. I think we all have enough to think about. Sam, would you mind filling Quil and Jared in? I need to bring Bella home. I would suggest everybody takes tonight and tomorrow to think things through, and we have a pack meeting on Thursday evening."

Sam, who was looking like he would like to put his fist through the nearest wall, nodded tersely. Jake looked at me and jerked his head towards the door.

The drive back to the red cabin was quiet. Jake, Billy and I were all deep in thought. When we arrived, Billy turned to me and said, "Bella, I think we need to consider bringing Charlie into the loop." Jake's head jerked round in surprise. Billy sighed heavily. "He will never agree to you moving to the reservation if he doesn't know the truth. And it may be wise for Charlie to consider moving here himself, too." As Jake and I looked at each other wordlessly, Billy seemed to be deep in thought. Finally, he shook his head and said, "Let an old man sleep on it. Jake, bring me inside please and then take Bella home. It's been a long evening."

I waited in the truck for Jake to come back out, leaning my head back against the seat. I felt absolutely hopeless. And despite the displays of solidarity earlier from Leah, Embry and Seth, I couldn't stop myself from feeling guilty.

Jake leaped back into the truck and looked at me. "Stop feeling guilty, Bells," he said with a wry smile.

"Sure, sure," I replied with a small smile of my own. Jake took my hand and kissed it, then held it in his as he drove silently one-handed through La Push.

Halfway to Forks, I finally spoke. "Can you beat the Volturi Jake?"

I didn't think the answer would be yes, but I still felt ice in my gut when he shook his head. "Bells if they're a huge coven with sadistic gifts, I don't think we stand a chance in a straight fight."

My free hand flew to my mouth. Jake turned and grinned at me. "In a *dirty* fight, however, we might have an edge."

"What? What are you talking about Jake?"

"I don't know yet to be honest, Bells. But we're damn good at what we do and there must be a way to take them down. You heard what dad said. A smart vamp would know to take out an imprint. And what dad didn't say is that taking out the *Alpha's* imprint would cause double the damage. There must be something a smart wolf should know about taking down a coven of vamps."

It made sense; I just had no idea what a coven's Achilles' heel would be. I also didn't know how the wolves would figure it out. I asked Jake how he planned to learn what he needed to but he just shrugged.

"I'll start with the tribal records I guess. Hopefully there'll be something in there. If not, I'll think of something."

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I twisted in my seat to face him. "Jake – are you aware that you're slowly taking on the responsibility of the pack?"

He glanced at me in surprise. "No, Bells, I'm really not. It's just – this is personal, you know?"

"Mmhmm," I smiled at him. "Whatever you say Jake."

We had just arrived at my place and Charlie's cruiser was outside. I asked Jake, "Do you think your dad meant it? About telling Charlie?"

"Just one more thing for everyone to think about I guess," he replied on a sigh. I nodded. I didn't even know where to start with all the things we suddenly had to think about. I sighed too and got out of the truck.

Charlie was, predictably enough, watching a match. He acknowledged our presence with a wave and didn't remove his eyes from the TV. I rolled my eyes and brought Jake into the kitchen with the intention of feeding him some of Charlie's

leftover pizza.

As soon as we were alone in the kitchen, Jake took me in his arms and hugged me close. "Are you scared Bells?" he whispered.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully. "Yes. I know I *should* be scared, but ... I don't think it's all sunk in yet. You?"

Jake was silent for a moment before answering. "I'm scared of not knowing what we're facing," he admitted eventually. "But for you – for *us* – I'll find a way to get us all through this. I promise."

"You can't promise me that, Jake," I whispered.

"I just did, Bells."

After Jake had demolished the last of the pizza, we headed up to my room. I almost laughed when I remembered freaking out earlier over being in his bedroom. So much had happened since then and it seemed so insignificant now. I remembered our passionate – albeit brief – encounter on his bed and my face flushed.

"What you thinking Bells?" Jake asked curiously.

My flush deepened, knowing that I had been caught. "Earlier. In your room."

Jake put his arms around me. "What about it?" There was a mischievous glint in his eyes now.

I grinned at him. "It needs a re-play."

Jacob laughed, picked me up and literally threw me onto the bed. He lay down next to me and twisted some of my hair around his fingers.

"I want you Bella," he said quietly.

I gulped. I obviously knew where we were headed. But was I ready? I said nothing, but looked into his eyes which held so very much love, adoration, hope, and yes, lust. I trusted this boy – man, really, for all his young age – completely. I loved him with all my heart. I wanted to spend my life with him. What was holding me back?

He kissed me softly on the lips. "I don't mean right now, honey. Just – when you're ready. I'm ready too, 'kay?"

I nodded. He leaned forward to kiss me. After a minute I pushed him away gently and he looked at me curiously.

"I do want you, Jake," I whispered. "I think I'm just – scared."

"You don't need to be scared with me honey, you know that. What are you scared of?"

"Just – I don't even know! Our first time. *My* first time. It hurting. Not being any good," I cringed at the last bit.

Jake put his finger under my chin and turned my face to look back at him. He was smiling a little. "I don't think you need to worry about the last bit," he said. "I've been dreaming of you for – well, way too long actually. And the rest – we'll be in it together, okay?"

I nodded again and leaned into his kiss, which he quickly deepened. As we lay side by side on my bed, Jake's right hand quickly moved from my hair down my side to the hem of my shirt, and under it. Once again, the sensations that shot through my body as his hot hand seared my skin and his lips and tongue played with my mouth and my neck felt unlike anything I had ever experienced before. He took his time, lightly rubbing circles on the skin of my back before finally fumbling with the clasp of my bra and pushing it out the way so that my breasts were free for his hand to explore.

He suddenly grabbed the back of my thigh and hitched my leg over his waist, allowing him to grind himself against my centre. I pulled back from him, frowning.

"Is this fair to you Jake?" I whispered. He looked at me in confusion and, embarrassed to be discussing this, I explained as best I could. "Well, you're obviously um – you want me, and I'm kind of not ready for *that* so – should we be doing this?"

Jacob snorted with laughter. "Trust me Bells, I'm having the time of my life," he grinned. "Lots of dreams coming true here." He moved his mouth down to my neck and nibbled at my skin (making me moan) before saying, "I'll just have another cold shower later. Me and the cold jet stream are becoming quite good friends."

I snorted too when I realised what he was saying. "Too much information Jacob."

I could feel his lips curve into a smile against my neck. "You're the one that asked, Bells."

A moment later he ground hard against a particularly sensitive spot, and I pretty much forgot why I had thought stopping would be fairer on him.

We tumbled around on the bed for quite some time. I found it difficult to relax completely with Charlie downstairs, which

Jacob seemed to sense and so we stayed (mostly) dressed. But every time one of us would pull away, it would only take moments for us to resume kissing and touching. It seemed that whenever we were alone, we couldn't get enough of one another. I had never felt so desired, so *wanted*, before, and Jake wasn't the only one having the time of his life these days. When I was alone with him like this, everything else, every other worry, faded away.

Finally, Jake sighed into my hair. "I need to get going soon Bells," he said sorrowfully. It was almost midnight and I knew he had school the next day followed by a long patrol shift. I nodded my head, although inside I was screaming for him to stay, stay all night and hold me in his arms.

"I wish I could stay," he murmured and I smiled at him echoing my thoughts. After a silence, he said, "If you *were* to move to La Push Bella, we could do this every night."

"Um, Jake? I thought we'd decided against that?"

A heavy silence followed. I lifted my head to look at him. He was staring at the ceiling and had that conflicted look again that he had worn at Sam's house.

"Jake?"

"Bella ... it might turn out that you *have* to move." He turned his head to look at me, propped himself up on his elbow and looked earnestly into my eyes. "My dad was right, Bella. If anything was to happen to you – it would absolutely destroy me." He shuddered. "The impact on the pack mind would be catastrophic. The leeches could just walk right in and take us all out in minutes. Giving them an opportunity like that would just be plain stupid. And Embry was right earlier; the pack has done a piss poor job of protecting you up until now. That stops right here. You *will* be protected properly, and – I know it's not what you want, Bells, but at least until this threat is over, you would be a thousand times safer in La Push."

"Jake," I said severely, "we both know that the Volturi might not decide to come here for forty or fifty years! Do I need to go into hiding for that length of time? That's ridiculous!"

"Bells, honey, they might come next week, okay? I don't think they will, but we – / can't take that chance. If anything happened to you..." he trailed off, shook his head, and buried his head in my neck. "At least think about it, Bella," he pleaded.

I sighed. It was so late, and Jake looked as beat as I felt. I kissed him and told him I would think about it.

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Having spent a few days at school in restless excitement, the following day was spent deep in thought. In English (first period) I mulled over the threat of the Volturi. My reaction so far had been fairly knee-jerk – first the shock, then fear both for the wolf pack, and over their reactions. I realised now that I may not need to simply sit back as a passive observer. If Alice was right that Edward still loved me, perhaps I could talk to him, and explain about Jake and I being imprinted. The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that this may make a difference. Of course, there were problems, such as the death threats that had preceded Edward's deal with the Volturi. But, I thought, one step at a time.

I turned to the back of my notebook and began writing down my plan. Step One: call Alice. She must be able to contact Edward. Step Two: talk to Edward, explain everything to him, from the moment he left until now. When he realised that I was now truly with my soulmate, surely he would reconsider.

By second period – Biology – I was feeling a little more optimistic. I turned my attention to the promise I had made Jacob last night, to think about moving to La Push. I realised that if my plan to convince Edward to spare the wolves worked, then such a move wouldn't even need to be considered. But, I had promised Jake to think about it so think about it I would.

Of course, there were some obvious problems, Charlie being the biggest. Then there was school – I was in my final semester and surely graduating took precedence over a threat which I was becoming increasingly convinced could not be imminent. There was Jake's age to consider – legally, he was still a minor, even if his maturity (usually) far exceeded that of men several years his senior. Our inability to support ourselves was also a fairly major concern.

Despite all that, though, being with Jacob really *was* as easy as breathing. Being in his company always felt like the most natural thing in the world, I was confident in his love for me, and with the exception of our young ages, I couldn't think of any reason why moving in with Jake wouldn't be anything other than wonderful.

I chewed on the end of my pen before writing Step Three in my notebook: discuss graduation with Jacob. After our discussion about college yesterday, I was certain he would want me to graduate. Perhaps he would agree to postponing my move until then.

During recess, I called Alice. She answered on the third ring. "Bella? Is everything okay?"

"No Alice, of course not. Your brother wants to come here and kill my boyfriend and his family. I need to talk to him Alice. Can you give me his phone number, or get him to call me or something?"

There was a silence on the other end of the phone.

"Alice?"

"I'm not sure, Bella," Alice replied hesitantly. "Edward ... well he's with the Volturi now. He – he's shutting himself off from the rest of us as much as he can."

I wasn't going to give up that easily. "Alice please," I begged her. "I *need* to talk to him."

"Are you going to take him back?" Alice's voice was suddenly hopeful. "No, I would have seen that and I *still* can't see your future. I can't tell you how frustrating that is, Bella."

"Alice! I am *not* going to take Edward back! I'm with Jacob now, I *love* Jacob, and Edward needs to understand that he left me, he left me *broken*. Jake put me back together again, and we fell in love. We're happy together. If Edward does anything to hurt Jake, or any of his family, it will kill me Alice. He needs to know that!"

I fell silent and crossed my fingers, hoping my outburst would be enough for Alice to relent and tell me how to contact Edward. Finally, she sighed.

"I'll find a way to let him know, Bella," she said. "It's the best I can do. For what it's worth, Edward's decision has torn the family apart. Esme, Carlisle and Emmett are furious with him."

"And the rest of you?" I asked. "Whose side are you on, Alice?" I had to know. Embry's observation that I was no more than a plaything had cut me more deeply than I liked to admit.

"Bella it's not about taking sides..."

"It's *exactly* about taking sides, Alice!" I shouted. "Either you agree that Edward should come here with the Volturi, or you don't!"

"Bella, I..." Alice's voice tailed off.

It was all the answer I needed.

After school finally ended, I made my way to La Push. I had planned to cook for Billy and Jake, then visit Emily, and that was exactly what I was going to do. I arrived at the Black's home and quickly busied myself in their kitchen. Billy wheeled himself in to join me, and I put him to work peeling vegetables. It was strangely companionable and neither of us felt the need for small talk.

Finally, Billy asked me the question I had been waiting for. "Bella, have you given any consideration to moving here?" He was all business.

I looked at him seriously. "I was hoping to graduate first, Billy. But I've not discussed that with Jake yet."

Billy nodded thoughtfully. "That could work. I doubt there's any immediate threat, although it will be important that the pack waste no time in their training and research. But for you, staying in Forks until after you graduate should be feasible. Talk it through with Jake."

I felt relieved. I knew Billy's blessing was important. The decision could be postponed and I could still graduate. And in the meantime, perhaps Edward could be worked on.

"Jake has a lot on his plate just now," I commented to Billy. I watched his reaction closely. He gave nothing away. "He's only 16," I added.

Billy looked at me. "Really, Bella? You think he's an average 16 year old kid?"

I half-laughed. "No! But that was kind of my point. He's had to deal with so much. Too much. And he deals with it all so well but I think ... he seems kind of, I don't know, wound up sometimes. Not with me, but – he gets frustrated, being told what to do and having so many responsibilities..." My voice trailed off. It was impossible to ask Billy directly to cut his son some slack.

Billy sighed heavily. "The boy certainly has a lot of responsibilities," he said almost absently. Then, in a stronger voice, he asked me, "Bella, do you believe in destiny?"

"I – I'm not sure, Billy. I mean, I know this whole imprint thing is supposed to be destiny, a wolf's imprint has been created specially for him. So yeah, I guess I do."

"It seems to me, Bella, that Jacob's life has been pre-destined. From too young an age, he had to face loss and responsibility. He was forced to mature before his years. And then for you, his imprint, to have been involved so directly with a coven of vampires – I don't believe that's coincidence, Bella. You are also not of native blood, which is highly unusual for an imprint, to say the least." Billy fell silent for a while. I left him to his thoughts. Finally, he said quietly, almost as if he had forgotten I was there, "My son has a role to fulfil."

"Billy?" I asked quietly. He nodded at me to speak. "You and me – it's our job to support Jake, right?"

Billy agreed immediately. "I think –" I hesitated, and then decided *what the hell*. "I think Jake knows what he has to do. But you know how stubborn he can be. I think if we, or anyone really, keep telling him what he should be doing ... we'll just achieve the opposite."

Billy looked at me through narrowed eyes for a moment, and then began to chuckle. "OK Bella, no more pressure on him to take up the role of Alpha. I promise!"

I grinned at Billy Black, my partner in crime. We would be there for Jake, no matter what. When he became Alpha, Billy and I would be there for him. And whatever lay ahead with the Volturi, we would be there for him too. But our role should be supportive; not judgemental or critical.

I just needed to check one more thing. "The council?"

Billy harrumphed. "They will be difficult," he admitted. "But once they see what Jacob will surely become – there will be no more problems."

It was around 8pm that my phone rang. I had finished preparing a number of meals for Jake and Billy's freezer, and I had headed over to Emily's once Billy was settled comfortably in front of the TV. I had expected there to be some tension at Sam's house, but I was beginning to realise that although the wolves constituted the pack, the imprints also had roles to play. I was determined not to hide away from them but, as Jacob's imprint, to face them head on. Emily, however, appeared to take matters into her own hands and pulled me into a hug the moment I crossed the threshold. Sam greeted me tersely and I replied with a smile and my head held high.

Emily sat me down with a cup of tea and some cake and began to fill me in on the day's events. Apparently Brady had phased in the early hours of the morning and he and Collin had required a lot of babysitting and feeding. Emily looked tired and when I looked closely at Sam, I could see his exhaustion too.

I had just asked if I could help in any way when my phone rang. My phone showed an international number. I answered with some trepidation, hardly daring to hope that it would be Edward.

It was.

And so, sitting in the wolf pack's Alpha's home, I began my attempt to negotiate the pack's future with my vampire ex-boyfriend.

"Bella, love, you have fallen into the wrong hands," he said sadly. I took a moment to marvel over the fact that his voice, once like a drug to me, now held no appeal. I longed for the husky, playful tones of the man who held me in his arms and kissed me like there was no other woman in the world.

"No, Edward," I began to explain. "You left me, Edward."

"Because I love you!" he said plaintively.

"Either way, Edward, you left me and you wanted me to move on. Now I have. I love Jacob, Edward. *I love him*. And you want to come here to destroy him?"

"He is an abomination, Bella! A monster!" I saw Sam jerk impatiently in my peripheral vision.

"And you, Edward?" I asked him heatedly. "What does that make you?"

"Bella," his moan sounded so broken. "I cannot survive without you."

"And I cannot survive without Jacob, Edward!" I said heatedly. "I'm asking you to leave us in peace."

There was a long silence. Finally, in tortured tones, Edward said, "It's too late, Bella."

"NO! Edward, it's really not!" I protested. "Try! Try and convince them to change their minds."

"I'll try Bella. I promise I'll try."

The phone went dead.

I went to the beach to think. It was the only place – other than going home, but I had promised Jacob I would see him after he had finished patrolling – that I could think of where I was pretty much guaranteed, at this time of night, not to be disturbed. I knew the best I could hope for was for Edward to try and persuade the Volturi that we weren't worth the trouble. The worst? Complete annihilation.

Jake found me sitting shivering on the beach, late into the evening. He sat silently beside me and pulled me into his warmth. I turned into his heat and laid my head on his shoulder.

We didn't speak.

Finally, Jake tilted my face up to meet his and kissed me deeply. After all the drama and all the tension, something snapped inside of me at his touch, and I pushed him back into the sand, straddling his hips. I kissed him with fervour, my hands running over his perfect abs, up his arms and into his hair. Jake's own hands snuck inside my top and almost ripped my bra off. He sat up, pushing up my shirt, and began kissing my breasts. The contrast between his hot mouth and the cold evening air drove me insane and I began moaning loudly.

Jake flipped us over so that he was on top of me. The desire to feel him overcame me and I ran my hand down his sides, round the front of his jeans, and – deciding I wasn't feeling brave enough to unbutton his jeans *yet* – I began feeling the large bulge through the fabric. Jake bucked against my hand and, feeling incredibly powerful, I began stroking him through his jeans.

The noises coming from Jake's throat as he kissed me with abandon were turning me on beyond belief. I was pretty sure he could smell me but I couldn't find it in me to feel embarrassed. I sensed that he was completely at my mercy and, in a moment of bravery, began fumbling with the buttons on his jeans as he mumbled incoherently against my breasts that I didn't have to, he was fine, I didn't need to *fuck Bells!* – this latter as I took his enormous erection in my hand and began inexpertly stroking him.

A moment later, Jake's hand had somehow moved inside *my* pants, and he was stroking me through the fabric of my underwear. Once again, the new sensation was almost unbearable and yet I wanted *more*. I was so incredibly wet, and he was so incredibly hard. I thought fleetingly about how well we would *fit* together, and then his fingers slid under the fabric of my panties and I cried out in ecstasy. I stroked him harder; he slid one finger inside me; I stroked him harder again.

We were both incoherent, moaning and sighing as we kissed and *felt* and mumbled our love for one another. Under my hand, Jake felt like a wound up spring that was waiting to explode. I imagined I must feel the same to him, as he flicked my clit and made me cry out.

Jake continued grinding one, then two, fingers into me, massaging my clit with the heel of his hand. I continued stroking him while I bucked my hips against his hand. I could feel the most delicious sensations washing over me, and in no time at all I was moaning his name against his lips, as he kissed me wildly with his free hand tangled in my hair.

A release began at my core and spread all over my body and I shouted Jacob's name as I came, shuddering and trembling; Jake began bucking into my hand and after feeling him pulse, warm liquid shot out of him and over my stomach and breasts.

We lay together, panting as we tried to regain control over our bodies and our breathing. Jake laid his forehead against mine and, half laughing, said "hi honey."

"Hey," I responded breathlessly.

"Wow," he whispered against my lips. He lifted his head to survey the mess on my stomach and sheepishly said, "Sorry."

I was too embarrassed to tell him that the very obvious evidence of the success of my ministrations was making me feel like a goddess. I settled for saying, "I'm not sorry. I'm glad you – you know."

I hid my face behind my hair but Jake pushed my hair behind my ear and, half laughing at me, said,

"I'm glad you, *you know*, too. But we need to get out of here before Paul or one of the new puppies shows up."

That made me shoot to my feet, but the sudden gravitational change made me stumble. Laughing, Jacob caught me from behind and kissed me on that wonderful spot on the back of my neck which made my knees buckle. His voice was husky as he spoke into my ear, "I didn't think it was possible, Bells, but doing that just made me want you even more." I couldn't speak, but stood there trembling as he slowly straightened first my clothes, then his own.

Finally taking my hand, Jacob led me along the beach and I wondered just how it had come about that the boy I had first met as a shy teenager here on this very beach, had become this magnificent man who could reduce me to jelly at a touch, a kiss, a few words.

Jacob drove me home in my truck, where a shower was very much my first priority. Jake couldn't stay as he wanted to start reading through the tribal records. Sitting in the truck outside Charlie's house, I had offered to help, reading being something of a strength of mine, until he had pointed out that they would be mostly written in Quileute. He had teased me that I could help him *in other ways*, until I had blushed and tried to push him away.

He pulled me back into him and kissed me until my head span. Our hands were freer on each other's bodies now and when I rubbed his thigh (having *no* intention of going higher while sitting in my truck outside Charlie's house) he groaned into my lips. "Fuck Bells."

I pulled back to look at him and saw sheer lust and want in his gaze. The expression made me shiver in anticipation and I told him seriously, "I'll be ready soon Jake. I promise."

As I stood under the shower ten minutes later, cleaning off the evidence of Jake's desire for me, I thought of all the promises that had been made in the last 24 hours. Jake's promise to keep me safe; my promise to consider moving to La

Push; Billy's promise to back off Jake a little; Edward's promise to try and reverse the Volturi's decision; and my promise to Jake to finally make love with him.

I realised that the only promise I had little faith in was that which had been made by Edward. I could only hope I was wrong.

A/N: I don't think Bella or I are going to be let off the hook for much longer. I'm going to switch off my laptop now and face your reviews in a few hours! As always, let me know what you think!

Next chapter hopefully up on Monday.

Chapter 13: Chapter 13

A/N: Tons to say today before the chapter starts so please bear with me for a moment!

First of all can I say a *massive* thank you to feebes86 who is now beta reading for me and made some fantastic suggestions to help this chapter flow better:-D

Second, a HUGE disclaimer. According to an internet search, there is a Native American cultural center in Oregon called Tamastlikt. I know absolutely nothing about it other than its existence. I've borrowed its name and shamelessly flaunted it to suit me. Erm, that may be a common theme over the next couple of chapters so, yeah ...

Third, absolutely loads of new readers over the weekend. Thank you, thank you, thank you to each and every one of you. Your reviews and feedback make my day, every day!

Finally, as always, I hope you enjoy this chapter. This story is so much fun for me to write and this has been one of my own favourite chapters so far.

Chapter Twelve – Oregon

The next day after school, as was becoming the norm, I headed straight to La Push. After our encounter on the beach the night before, I was more eager than ever to see Jake. I had all but decided to take that final step in our relationship as soon as an opportunity presented itself. I had also received a text from him earlier in the day which said he thought he might have found something already in the tribal histories and I was anxious to hear what it was.

When I arrived at their home, I found Billy and Jake at the kitchen table, poring over documents. Jake came over to give me a hug and a kiss. When I looked into his eyes I knew that I wasn't the only one who kept thinking about what we had done together. I felt myself start to come undone as he lingered over our kiss. It absolutely thrilled me to know that he had been thinking of me like that.

Billy cleared his throat and I turned to him, embarrassed. He looked amused; but his voice was all business when he said, "Think we might be on to something here Bella."

"Oh?" I sat down next to Jake, opposite Billy and looked at the documents. They were clearly very old and as Jake had said, written in Quileute. I was fascinated by their pristine condition. Somebody obviously knew how to care for parchments.

Jake pointed to one of the documents in front of Billy. "We found this quite quickly," he said. "It's a legend of a woman – not a wolf, but a human from the tribe – who could protect the pack from the malicious so-called gifts of bloodsuckers. According to the legend, one leech that got too close to tribal territory could inflict extreme pain using some sort of mind control. It incapacitated the entire wolf pack; but then this woman showed up and she somehow protected the pack from the pain. They managed to destroy the leech. It goes on to say that she used her gift a number of times over the course of her life but the details are a bit patchy. Jasper and Edward had some kind of mind control things that they could do, didn't they Bella?"

I shook my head. "I don't think it was mind control. Well, Jasper maybe. He could affect emotions, calm you down if you were angry or upset, enhance your happiness, that sort of thing. And Edward can read minds. Well, everyone's except mine," I added proudly.

There was a loud clatter as Billy dropped his mug. I nearly laughed as I looked back and forward between him and Jake. They had identical expressions of shock on their faces. "What?" I asked confused.

"You could block Edward from getting into your mind," Jake said slowly.

"Not on purpose," I clarified. "We had no idea how it happened but yeah, he never got anything from my mind." I looked back and forward between them again and the penny dropped. "Wait! No! I don't know how it happened! I'm not – I mean I can't protect anyone else from it! I'm not like the woman in the legend!"

Billy looked significantly at Jacob. "The woman was the Alpha's imprint, Jacob."

"Yeah I got that dad," Jake replied drily before saying to me, "Bella, dad talked to Old Quil last night and he thinks there's more details about this woman in the Tamastlikt library in Oregon. A lot of our documents were given to them years ago. We've obviously kept everything that refers to the wolves but she was an important member of the tribe and Old Quil thinks the papers at the library might tell us more."

"I'm not sure I understand why it's so important Jake," I said.

"It's a start is all Bells," he told me. "It means that when the leeches come with their creepy *gifts*, there might be a way of blocking them. I need to investigate all our options and this is as good a start as any."

I wasn't feeling convinced about how useful this information was and I had a horrible feeling that too much importance had

just been placed on my ability to block Edward from my mind. But I knew that Jake was right and we had to start somewhere.

"Bella," Billy was saying to me, "the pack need to discuss this tonight but my feeling is that someone needs to go to the library to read the documents. Assuming Jacob is the one to go, I think you should accompany him. Jacob will need to do the actual reading of the documents but I have a feeling your opinions on the content will be valuable. You've had more direct contact with vampires; you may pick up on details that Jake misses."

All kinds of objections popped into my head. The trip would take a few days at least, meaning I would need to miss some school. Since I was in my final semester, there was no way Charlie would agree to that. However, such a trip with Jake would also mean that we had each other all alone for a few days. In light of the sexual explorations we were currently enjoying so much, I simply said "okay." Jake looked at me with his mouth slightly agape, clearly having been expecting Bella-esque objections. I grinned cheekily at him and saw his eyes widen when he realised where my mind was.

After dinner Jake left for the pack meeting. He had questioned me thoroughly over dinner about what I knew of the Cullen's gifts. I was afraid my answers were woefully inadequate. All I had been able to tell him was to reiterate that Edward could read every mind but mine; Alice could see everyone's future but the wolves; and Jasper could enhance or dampen emotions. I could tell that he was frustrated with our collective lack of knowledge and I vowed to find a way to be more helpful to him.

While Jake was at the meeting Billy continued to pore over the documents and I kept busy with cleaning and tidying. More than once I caught Billy looking fondly at me and I was struck by how much I felt like a member of his family. That reminded me of Charlie and I sat down with Billy to talk.

"What's on your mind Bella?" he asked.

"Charlie."

"Ah," Billy pushed the paper he had been looking at to the side. He sat back in his chair and surveyed me.

"Does he need to know, Billy?" I asked.

He sighed. "Yes, I believe he does Bella. I wanted to tell him everything when you were with Cullen. The council over-ruled me. But with this threat hanging over us now and the danger we are all in, it seems ludicrous to keep him in the dark. What are your thoughts on the subject?"

I cringed slightly. Telling my dad that I had knowingly gotten involved with a vampire and that my current boyfriend was a werewolf didn't sound like a good idea. But I also knew that if anybody had a right to know the truth, it was Charlie. "As much as I know he'll kill me, I hate that he could be in danger and be kept in the dark about it so yeah, I understand that he should be told."

"Leave it with me Bella. I have much to discuss with the council. I'll have an answer for you soon."

He had no sooner got the words out of his mouth when the cabin door crashed open and Jake came storming in. I leapt up from my seat as he slammed the door shut. His face was thunderous.

"Trouble?" Billy asked mildly.

"Sam!" Jacob spat. He looked like he wanted to kick and punch but instead he came to me and pulled me into his arms. He buried his face in my neck. I held onto him tightly feeling the tension in his muscles and wondering what had just happened to wind him up like this.

Finally, he let me go and sat heavily at the table pulling me down into the chair next to his. He looked across the table at Billy and said, "Sam has his head in the sand dad. He thinks the leeches won't come anytime soon and that there's nothing we can do to prepare for it other than patrol and mock fight."

"And the others?" Billy enquired.

"Embry, Quil, Leah and Seth are all with me. Paul's with Sam, naturally. Jared didn't say much. I would've expected him to be with Sam but I'm not sure. He just kept saying he needed Kim to be kept safe. The new pups haven't a clue; they'll just go with the majority."

"So you have the majority on your side," Billy stated.

"I won't split the pack dad, especially not now that we need every wolf we have," Jake growled. I looked at him in surprise. It was the first time I had heard him make any indication that he was prepared to step into a leadership role.

Billy caught my eye and I knew he was thinking the same thing. He rolled himself away from the table and said, "Nobody mentioned splitting the pack Jacob. I'm just pointing out that Sam doesn't currently have the support of his pack. He'll come round. Now I'm going to bed." And with that he wheeled himself out of the kitchen. I suppressed a smile when he winked at me as he passed.

"Tell me what happened Jake," I asked him.

"Well we started just sharing opinions on what the threat is exactly. We all agreed it'll be a big coven and a nasty fight. Then Sam started going on about tightening the patrol schedules and having us all doing extra shifts and some fight training." He snorted. "If a huge coven is heading our way we'll smell them as soon as they cross the state line! Having us all doing extra patrols is a waste of damn time and energy. I want to use the time for researching what kinds of tricks the leeches might have up their sleeves, so I told them about the legend we talked about before. Sam just dismissed it as a wild goose chase. Then when I said that even if it *doesn't* help us, it might point us in the direction of something else, he got all Alpha on my ass telling me I don't know what I'm talking about. Well I don't really but then neither does he. When I pointed that out to him all hell broke loose. Next thing I know everyone's yelling at everyone else and ... yeah, I kind of shouted an order for everyone to calm down ... then Sam got in my face telling me it wasn't my place to tell his pack what to do." He sighed. "It's gonna get ugly Bells. I can feel it inside me. It's like I can't... not won't, but actually *can't*... take him being my Alpha anymore."

"Are you going to step up?" I asked quietly.

Jake turned his head and looked out the window long and hard before answering. "Embry and Leah asked me to this evening. But what the fuck do I know about running a damn wolf pack Bella?" His eyes were full of apprehension when he turned to look at me.

I rubbed his arm. "Maybe it'll just happen by itself, Jake. I saw you the other day with the pack and it seemed to just come naturally to you. I think it's a good thing that you're anxious about it. You're not just jumping into it as your birth-given right. That tells me that you'll be a careful leader when the time comes. Just let it happen naturally, okay?"

Jake nodded and then with the first smile since he had come home, he scooted his chair back. Then he pulled me out of my chair and onto his lap. "So um... about our road trip Bells," he said. "When can we go?"

"Are we going?" I asked him in surprise. I was pretty sure he had just told me that Sam had vetoed the whole idea.

"Yes," he replied firmly. "And the sooner the better, Sam might have his head up his ass but I need to protect my tribe."

I need to protect my tribe.

I smiled at the boy who wasn't even aware of how quickly he was becoming a man and answered, "Tomorrow."

Charlie wasn't happy when I told him the next morning that I was heading off for a few days away with Jake.

"How many days of school will you be missing Bella?"

"Dad, I told you," I said guiltily. "This is *for* school. I need to get to that library for a project." I crossed my fingers that Charlie wouldn't decide to phone the school to ask why I needed to go out of state to research a school project.

"With Jake?" he asked. His arms were folded and mistrust was written all over his face.

"Well yeah... um... he needs to do a similar project so he kind of thought um... we should do it together?"

Charlie narrowed his eyes and I instantly regretted my choice of words. "I'll just bet he did," he muttered and I cringed. "Well what does Billy say about this?" he asked. "In fact never mind I'll just call him now."

I breathed a sigh of relief. Billy was more practiced than me at covering up this sort of thing. Hopefully he would say something to make the idea sound more palatable to Charlie. I ran upstairs to pack my backpack.

Five minutes later I was sitting on the edge of my bed in near hysteria. I had decided tonight was the night with Jacob. A quick perusal of my closet had revealed absolutely nothing appropriate to wear. No slinky nightdresses, no sexy lingerie. For probably the first time in my life I regretted my utter lack of interest in feminine clothes.

I was forced to settle on the newest and therefore least holey tank top and shorts that I owned. I vowed to myself that I would rectify this situation at the first opportunity.

I leaped into the shower and shaved everywhere I could think of. I blushed when I finally went back downstairs and found Charlie looking at me suspiciously as if he knew what I had been doing and why.

"Well," he said, "Billy reckons you're doing Jake a favour here helping him not to flunk his English class. He also said that what you kids are working on sounds like a really original project. So ... I can't say I'm happy about this Bella but I trust both of you." I cringed inwardly and decided that as well as thanking Billy, I would need to beg him to speak to the council sooner rather than later about letting Charlie in the loop. "So just... be careful on the road and ... yeah, just be *careful* okay Bells?"

"Yeah, um, promise dad." I was mumbling at my feet definitely *not* wanting to analyse too much what he meant by being careful.

The doorbell rang and I ran to it knowing it would be Jake. He looked stressed when I opened the door. I knew he had to

swap some patrol schedules to take off on this trip and he had teased me earlier that Sam was pissed as hell. Seeing him look so uptight made me determined to relax him. Tonight. A thrill ran through me at the thought.

That thrill quickly turned to a chill of dread when Jake's eyes flickered over my head and I realised Charlie had come up behind me with a severe look on his face.

"Dad!" I started to protest but he held his hand up to quieten me.

"Just a minute Bells," he told me and his tone said that arguing would be futile. "Now look here Jacob, I've spoken to your dad and he's convinced me that this isn't just some ploy to get Bella alone in a cheap motel room." Oh if only the ground would open up and swallow me whole. "But just so as we're clear – *do not get my daughter pregnant*. And drive safely."

He patted my shoulder awkwardly, mumbled something about enjoying myself and turned on his heel. I peeked up at Jake expecting to see him looking even more stressed. Instead, he looked like he had quite enjoyed that encounter. I rolled my eyes and went to grab my backpack which Jake threw into the back seat of the Rabbit.

I had to admit I was a little disappointed. I knew Charlie would never ever have agreed to it but a part of me had been hoping Jake would turn up with his motorbike.

"Sup Bells?" Jake froze as he was about to get in the driver's door, looking at me.

I smiled reassuringly at him. "Nothing Jake, I was just thinking this would have been even more fun on the bike."

He laughed, "Yeah I thought about that too but Bells, Charlie only just agreed to this. He would've never let me take you away on the back of my bike!"

"I know." I grinned at him. "Next time maybe!"

We started the journey in a state of mutual excitement. Despite the seriousness of the reason behind our journey, this golden opportunity to spend a few days alone together had infected us both with a kind of giddiness. It almost felt like going on a vacation together.

I quickly found out that Jake had been thorough in his preparation for the trip. We would be driving all day today staying overnight somewhere close to the library. Then we would have all day tomorrow in the library to find and research what we were looking for. Another overnight tomorrow and then the long drive home on Sunday. Jake refused to tell me where we were staying. All he said was that his dad had convinced some of the elders that the trip was being made to help ensure the safety of the tribe and some money had been made available to us.

We made a stop for lunch but Jake was keen to press on quickly so we didn't linger. When we got back to the car Jake asked me to look in his bag which was on the backseat beside mine for a bottle of water. I snorted when, rooting about in his bag, I saw a large box of condoms. I pulled them out and waved them in front of him. Jake actually blushed.

"It's just in case Bells!" he protested.

"Best to be prepared," I said solemnly replacing them in his bag.

"Absolutely."

Knowing that it wasn't just me who had planned this and knowing that in just a few hours we would be alone in a motel somewhere, ready to consummate our love had me squirming in my seat.

"Jake?"

"Mmm."

"Hurry up and get us there."

Jake looked over at me in shock and then put his foot to the floor.

During the drive there we talked about what little we knew. All we really had to go on was a rough timeframe and the fact that this woman was repeatedly referred to as "angel" which we assumed had come about due to her ability to protect the tribe. Jake would be spending the day tomorrow poring over documents in the hope of finding something else about her. My role was a little less clear but I was ecstatic just to be along on the trip.

Several hours later Jake finally pulled off the interstate and after a couple of wrong turns found his way to a little row of log cabins set about a mile from the main road. I stayed in the car while he went into the first cabin in the row which was significantly larger than all the others. There was a sign saying "Reception" in the window. He was back a few minutes later with a key and a huge grin.

"We have the one at the end of the row," he said. "I've booked us breakfast in the morning at 8:30 – that okay?"

"Of course," Now that we were here I was starting to get very nervous. A surreptitious check of my watch showed that it wasn't quite 5 pm. We had several hours to kill now; several hours absolutely alone with nothing to do other than find

dinner somewhere. My palms grew sweaty and my heart rate doubled. I saw Jacob look at me and knew he could sense my anticipation.

The little cabin was perfect. It was basic but clean and comfortable. The small kitchen contained all the essentials, the bed was definitely big enough to accommodate a werewolf and the bathroom and small living area were equally ideal for a couple of nights away from home.

I turned to look at Jake and saw that he was standing awkwardly in the middle of the living room, looking nervous. It struck me suddenly that this would be *his* first time too and he was bound to be as scared as I was. That knowledge gave me a little confidence and I shyly told him I was going to take a quick shower and would be back soon.

I had a *very* quick shower and then wondered what to do next. I wasn't brave enough to walk out of the bathroom wearing just a towel; but if I came out fully dressed I worried I would give Jake the wrong message. I had made up my mind and nothing was going to stop me from seducing Jacob Black, right now!

In the end, I pulled on my tank top and shorts, checked my reflection in the mirror, took a deep breath and opened the bathroom door.

Jake looked up from the tourist brochure he had been looking at and froze like a deer in headlights. As he sat on the bed just staring at me, I began to wonder if I had made some kind of horrible mistake. Then his eyes travelled my body and when they reached my eyes again, the hungry look in them gave me my confidence back.

I walked slowly over to stand in front of him. My heart was hammering and my mouth felt dry but I had never felt so sure of anything in my life. Jake lifted one hand and placed it on my hip. His eyes were searching mine, questioning what I wanted.

"I love you, Jake," I told him and then just so that there would be absolutely no doubt, "I want you." I lowered my head and kissed his lips before climbing onto his lap and straddling him. The moan that came from his mouth sounded almost desperate and the next thing I knew I was lying on my back with my head on the pillows. Jake's mouth was attacking my stomach as his hands pulled my tank top up over my head. He kissed up my ribcage and between my breasts before pulling my left nipple into his mouth.

My hands were under his shirt feeling the hard muscles on his back and shoulders, then I trailed them around his ribs to the front to feel his abs. Each time he nipped or pulled on my nipple a jolt of electricity would shoot straight to my centre and I would grind my hips up against him. None of our previous encounters, not even last night on the beach, had prepared me for the passion and determination that was rolling off of Jacob in waves.

He pulled back and whispered, "I want to see you Bells." He slowly pulled down my shorts, watching my face carefully as he did so to gauge my reaction. I knew he wanted to look at me and I also knew that I had absolutely nothing to fear from Jacob, so I resisted the urge to cover myself up. I was glad I had when Jake's smile showed me that he was pleased I felt confident enough with him to allow him to see me absolutely naked.

Jake's eyes slowly travelled my body but instead of feeling self-conscious, I began to feel enflamed. The lust was so evident on his face and I now wanted to give him all of myself, to give him what I knew he had coveted for so long.

He began kissing down my stomach, whispering against my skin that he loved me. He kissed over my left hip and down the inside of my left thigh. I bent my leg at the knee and he instantly pulled it over his shoulder, kissing back up my thigh until he reached my entrance. My eyes which had been closed flew open at the sensation of his hot tongue running up inside my folds, from my entrance to my clit. My hips bucked wildly into his mouth and I cried out as he repeated the action this time swirling his tongue around my clit.

"*Fuck!*" It was out of my mouth before I had time to think about it and Jake's shoulders starting shaking with laughter.

"That good, Bells?" he asked from his position between my legs. I opened my mouth to reply when he began assaulting my clit with his tongue in earnest and all that spilled out my mouth was a loud moan and another profanity.

Jake inserted first one, then two fingers into me as he kept working my clit with his tongue. I thought vaguely that if I had known it would feel quite *this* good, I wouldn't have waited more than 5 minutes after we got together to do this.

My hands were pulling none too gently at Jake's hair and he had to use his free hand to hold down my hips which kept bucking entirely unbidden by me. A coil in my stomach began to clench. I felt wild and out of control as my passion built to a crescendo and when I came, I came screaming his name and further profanities. My whole body spasmed and trembled as it rode out its climax. As the last waves of pleasure washed over me I opened my eyes and saw Jake looking at me with a mixture of happiness and want.

I reached for him and he climbed up my body kissing me fiercely and allowing me to taste myself on his lips. I realised that he was still wearing his jeans and protested. Laughing, he pulled them off and then leaned over the side of the bed. I was about to protest again when he came back up clutching the box of condoms.

I watched fascinated, as he opened one and rolled it onto himself. He positioned his body on top of me and between my readily-parted legs. I braced myself for the pain I knew was coming and Jake immediately noticed. He frowned and stroked my hair.

"We don't need to do this, Bells." I could hear strain in his voice and quickly reassured him that I wanted to, I wanted *him*- I was just afraid of how much it was going to hurt.

"I'll go slow baby," he murmured into my ear as he positioned himself against my entrance. I could feel his body trembling ever so slightly and realised again that Jake was as nervous as I was. I rubbed his back soothing him and he began to guide himself into me. The sting as his large erection entered me made me tense a little but his husky voice saying, "Fuck you're so warm and *tight*" in tones of pure lust made me shiver and relax a bit more.

Jake reached my barrier and raised his head to look at me. I tried to show him in my eyes *howmuch* I really wanted him. All of a sudden he pushed through and then stilled. He held me and sssshhhed me as I cried out in pain. The pain was worse than I had anticipated but began to fade quickly. When Jake began slowly rocking in and out of me it was soon replaced by pure pleasure.

Jake was making guttural noises in his throat that were turning me on beyond belief and as he picked up pace I felt that coil in the pit of my stomach start to clench again.

"M not gonna last long Bells," he gasped into my ear but the only response he got was a loud moan as my walls started to clench around him.

"Fuck Bells *fuck!*" I came apart at his obvious pleasure and yelled his name again. Jake thrust wildly into me a few more times before tensing and groaning my name. His thrusts slowed dramatically and he all but fell on top of me, sweat beading his forehead and his eyes screwed shut. I stroked his hair until he finally opened his eyes to look at me.

We smiled at one another and kissed for a while, reassuring one another of our love. Finally Jake went to dispose of the condom and when he came back, he lay beside me and asked if I was hurting.

"No," I shook my head still unable to wipe the smile from my face. "It hurt at first but only for a little while. It was wonderful Jake."

He beamed at me clearly pleased just as his stomach rumbled. I burst out laughing and started to climb off the bed.

"Hey!" Jake protested. "Where are you going?"

I turned back to look at him. "You're hungry! I was going to get dressed so we can find dinner."

Jacob caught my hand and yanked me back down onto the bed. "I have other appetites too, you know," he grinned.

An hour later, even Jake agreed that he had to eat. I stood up to get dressed and Jake burst out laughing.

"What?" I asked immediately self-conscious. Jake grinned and pointed over to the mirror.

"You look like you've just had tons of sex," he told me. "And it looks good on you, by the way."

I looked in the mirror and he was absolutely right. My hair resembled a bird's nest, my cheeks were flushed and my eyes sparkling. I laughed and shrugged. "Well I *have* just had tons of sex! And," I added wincing slightly as I began to walk, "I think I'm feeling it."

"I'm sorry Bells, are you okay?" Jake asked me sweetly.

"I'll live."

Twenty minutes later we were ready to go and find somewhere to eat. As I watched Jake walk out to the Rabbit, he had a swagger to his step that I had never seen before. I laughed at the thought that we couldn't advertise what we had been doing more publicly if we tried.

We found a small diner and spent an hour making inconsequential conversation and exchanging knowing smiles while we ate. Half way through our meal, the nourishment had obviously fortified me as I couldn't wait to get back to the log cabin. When Jake met my eye a moment later I knew I wasn't the only one.

We didn't get much sleep that night. We did, however, learn a lot about each other's bodies. Jake solemnly declared that our discoveries must constitute Biology research, thus justifying our "school" trip even further in Charlie's eyes.

The next morning, after Jake showered and I had a much-needed hot bath to relax my aching muscles, we finally got dressed and ate in the small breakfast room in the reception cabin. We then got back into the car and followed the directions Jake had printed off the internet to get to the library.

It being Saturday morning we had expected the library to be quiet and sure enough there was plenty of available parking. We walked hand in hand up the steps and inside where we both paused to get our bearings.

A few metres from the entrance was a large desk. There were two Native American men standing behind it. The taller of the two looked as if he were hiding some well-defined muscles under his shirt. He stared at Jacob with a shocked expression on his face. His eyes looked Jacob up and down before turning and giving me the same treatment. He then

turned his attention back to Jake again. After another moment or two he whispered something quietly to his companion.

Jake's head jerked round in shock and I felt his body stiffen next to me.

"Jake?" I asked in a whisper.

Jake looked down at me wide-eyed, before bending his head to whisper in my ear, "He just called me *Hania*. In some tribal languages, it means Spirit Warrior."

A/N: As always, let me know what you think! Next chapter Weds; before then if I can manage it! Also - if anybody has a really good knowledge of Breaking Dawn trivia, can you please let me know? I need to check a few small details for next chapter and just can't bring myself to open that damn book lol.

Chapter 14: Chapter 14

A/N: Thank you again to everybody who has reviewed, added alerts for this story etc. I will be honest and say that this chapter gave me all sorts of headaches. None of the characters wanted to behave for me. Or perhaps it was just me. So another huge thank you to feebes86 who beta read for me and came up with all kinds of wonderful changes to make it flow better. Phew! Here it is.

Chapter Thirteen – Gifts

Jake and I stood frozen, gaping at the two men in front of us. They in turn, stood frozen gaping at us. Finally the taller of the men, the one who had identified Jake as being a Spirit Warrior, came cautiously around the desk and approached us. He was tall, as tall as Quil or Seth but shorter than Jacob. His jet black hair was cropped short and his brown eyes were shrewd.

He said something in a language I didn't understand.

Jake frowned, and then offered, "Quileute?"

The man shook his head and replied, "English". He extended his hand to Jake and introduced himself as Elan.

Jake dropped my hand to shake Elan's and introduced himself. I saw both of them look surprised as their hands touched. When Elan offered his hand to me, I immediately understood the surprise. Elan's hand was as warm to the touch as Jacob's or any of the other Quileute wolves.

Elan crossed his arms and surveyed us both closely. Finally he cautiously asked how he could help us. Jacob glanced at me clearly uncertain how he should proceed. We both thought Elan was a wolf and he appeared to be thinking the same thing about Jacob. Saying this aloud to complete strangers however, was not a decision to be made lightly.

"We're looking for information about my tribe's history," Jake finally offered.

Elan relaxed slightly. "I can definitely help you there. What specific information are you looking for?"

"We're interested in the wife of one of the Chiefs. We don't have a name but she seems to have been referred to as an angel in all our documents. We'd like to find any information you hold about her."

Elan and Jake were watching one another closely. I thought I saw a flicker of recognition cross Elan's face when Jake mentioned the word "angel". He turned to look over his shoulder at his companion who had not yet spoken but was listening and watching intently.

"Len?" he asked. I turned my attention to the second man. While I was fairly sure that Elan was a wolf I wasn't so sure about Len. He was significantly shorter than both Elan and Jake. In fact he was only a few inches taller than me. His hair was long and I knew that the wolves preferred to keep their hair short as it affected the length of their fur when they phased. He also didn't appear to have the same muscular build that I knew the wolves possessed.

He inclined his head to acknowledge Elan who spoke to him in their own language for a moment. I felt Jake shift restlessly next to me and guessed that he didn't like this disadvantage of being unable to understand their conversation. I took his hand again and squeezed it a little to reassure him.

Len nodded and disappeared into the rows of bookshelves. Elan surveyed Jacob for a little longer before informing us, "Len knows some relevant documents. He will find some to start you off and prepare a table for you to use. In the meantime, please excuse me."

Elan exited the library rapidly leaving Jacob and I standing staring at one another.

"Wolf?" I mouthed.

Jake nodded, his brow furrowed.

"Len?" I mouthed again.

Jake shook his head.

My mind was racing as I tried to absorb this. I had always thought the Quileute pack was the only one in existence. I realised now that that may have been a very naive assumption. Looking at Jake though, he was as floored as I. I also couldn't help wondering, *how many are there? And can they help us?*

We stood there in silence holding hands and trying to absorb this turn of events. Sometime later Len re-appeared and asked us to follow him. He was staring at Jake curiously and I wondered what his relationship with the pack was. He seemed to know what Jake and Elan were but he was not a wolf himself. He led us to a large table in the far corner of the library where a stack of documents were waiting.

"Hopefully this will be of some help. I believe the woman you are looking for information on is Angeline. I'll be at the desk if

you need anything else," Len told us before leaving us alone.

"Angeline," I breathed. "That would explain the name Angel."

Jake looked at me significantly. "Uh-huh. But what I'd like to know is how they knew exactly who she was and where to find her."

I realised he had a point.

For forty five minutes Jake waded his way through document after document. He quickly found that most only mentioned Angeline in passing and I could see his frustration growing. I was beginning to wonder if the need for secrecy meant that nothing of any significance could have been recorded.

All of a sudden Jake's head jerked up. As I watched him I saw him train his attention in the direction of the library entrance. We couldn't see the door from where we sat but Jake was fully alert and I guessed somebody, perhaps Elan, had just come back in.

Soon I heard what sounded like two sets of footsteps approaching. Elan came into view around the bookshelves but he was not alone. The man who accompanied him was, with the possible exception of Jake himself, the largest man I had ever seen. Power and authority oozed from him. I realised that Jake had risen to his feet and was standing with his arms folded across his chest looking slightly defensive. I stood next to him and placed my hand on his arm, warning him. *Keep your cool.*

The larger man spared me only a cursory glance before taking stock of Jacob. He spoke to Elan briefly and they both nodded. I felt Jake shift his weight and realised again that he hated the disadvantage of being unable to follow what was being said.

Finally the larger man extended his hand to Jake. "I am Akando," he informed us. Jake took his hand and when I saw the mutual attempt to crush one another's hand, I recognised the Alpha-male-to-Alpha-male moment. I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

"I would like to speak with you," Akando stated and it sounded more of a command than a request. I saw Jake's eyes narrow. "However," Akando gave a significant look in my direction, "perhaps a private discussion would be best."

"No," Jake said firmly. "Bella is with me and *whatever* we talk about can be said in front of her."

Akando and Elan both looked stunned but the former quickly recovered and asked, "In that case, would you both like to join me in the back for a cup of coffee?"

Jacob nodded our acceptance and we followed the two men through the library and into a small kitchen, complete with a table and chairs. A pot of coffee was already brewed on the counter top. Elan poured four cups and set them on the table with cream and sugar.

We all sat and looked at each other across the table. Nobody seemed willing to be the first to address the very obvious elephant in the room.

It was Jacob who finally broke the silence. "We thought we were the only tribe with the gene."

Akando smiled slightly, evidently glad that Jake had addressed the issue so directly. "No," he confirmed. "There are several tribes with the gene but very few are currently ... active."

"How many in your tribe?" Jacob asked. We all knew what he meant.

"Myself, Elan and three others," Akando replied. "And yours?"

"Ten including myself."

Elan's eyes bugged out of his head. "*Ten?*" he exclaimed in obvious disbelief. "How...?"

Jacob gave him a wry grin. "We had a coven of cold ones in permanent residence nearby."

Elan let out a low whistle and sat back in his chair. Jake gave the two men a quick summary of the Cullens and the treaty. I noticed that he avoided making any mention of my involvement. When he had finished, Elan whistled again and both men appeared to be deep in thought for quite some time.

Finally Akando looked at Jake and commented, "It must be difficult being Alpha to such a large pack with a whole coven close by."

Jake shook his head, "I'm not the Alpha."

Akando looked surprised and then frowned, "But you have Alpha blood?"

Jake hesitated, "Yes I have Alpha blood and will be Alpha. It's a long story."

"And Bella?" Akando turned his attention to me.

"My imprint," Jacob replied.

Akando scrutinised me. "Please do not be offended," he apologised, "but I need to ask, a white girl?"

Jake nodded again, "It's a first, as far as we know." He looked at me for a moment and I could see indecision in his eyes. I wondered what Jacob was thinking. Finally he turned back to Akando, "Look, I really do want to find out more about you. I mean we've always believed we were the only tribe ... But Bella and I are here for a reason and we don't have a lot of time to waste."

"Of course," Elan responded quickly. "Angeline, did Len find you anything of use?"

"How did you know who she was?" Jacob asked curiously.

Akando smiled, "We make it our business to research our kind. Your tribe has a rich history and Angeline, or Angel as she was known, was gifted."

"What do you know about her?" Jacob asked.

"She was married to a Chief. You can translate that as imprinted to an Alpha. Their reign was during a time of great unrest, a time when there were a lot of cold ones around. You are aware that some leeches have... talents, shall we say?" Jake nodded. "Angeline was somehow able to protect the pack."

"Do any of the documents say how?" Jake asked eagerly.

Akando frowned, "Obviously there are no direct references to anything supernatural. You really need to read between the lines. May I ask why this is so important?"

Jake hesitated for only a fraction of a second before coming straight out with it. "My tribe is under threat from a large coven of vampires from Italy. We are hugely outnumbered. I'm hoping to find something we can use to protect ourselves from them when they come."

Elan's eyes nearly popped out of his head. "You are talking about the Volturi?"

"You know of them?" It was the first time I had spoken since entering the kitchen.

Akando turned to look at me, "Of course! They are like royalty among their kind. They are quite frankly, lethal. My sister has devoted a great deal of time to learning about them as our potentially biggest threat. One of them, Caius, has something of a history with our tribe."

Jake nearly leaped out of his seat. "We need to speak with your sister!" He was almost yelling in his eagerness.

Akando regarded him calmly. "She has already agreed to prepare us all lunch," he said at last. "We can go anytime you are ready."

"Can I ask something?" I was curious. Akando looked at me expectantly. "It's just ... your sister knows about you and the Volturi? And Len, he seemed to know what Jake is but he doesn't look like a wolf himself. How do they know, exactly?"

Akando seemed confused, "I told my sister when I first phased and Len's brother is also in my pack."

Jake stared at him, "You tell your siblings?"

"Of course, you don't?"

"Uh... no... it's... well we try to keep our existence a secret so ..."

"I understand that; however, it's a big secret to keep from family."

"I hear you," Jake said fervently. "You devote a lot of time to researching histories?"

"Not exactly," Akando smiled. "We devote a lot of time to researching threats."

"Again I hear you," Jacob muttered under his breath.

The journey to Akando's reservation was short. Jake and I were alone in the Rabbit following Elan, Akando and Len in Elan's car. They had made the decision to shut the library as Len apparently had information for us too. Jake talked non-stop the whole journey. His excitement was evident and I had the impression it had a lot to do with discovering the existence of other packs, as well as the possibility of help in our quest.

Elan finally pulled up outside a cabin which had been painted a dark blue colour. Moments later, the cabin door opened and a young Native American woman came outside. She was simply stunning. Her raven hair fell straight down her back. Her cheekbones were defined and her lips were full. She stared unabashedly at Jake and me before speaking in her

language to Akando.

"This is my sister Nina," Akando introduced us. "Nina, this is Jacob and Bella. Please, come inside."

The interior of the cabin was clean and tidy. I assumed this was Akando's home, and that Nina lived there with him. No explanations were offered and if the truth was told, I was feeling too intimidated to ask.

Jacob however, was holding his own. He sat on the seat offered to him and immediately began sharing information with Akando about their respective packs. After sitting beside Jake for a moment I noticed Nina had gone into the kitchen and decided to go and offer my help.

Nina smiled at me as I joined her. She was truly beautiful and for the first time ever, I was glad I never had to be jealous of Jake looking at other women.

"Can I help with anything?" I asked her.

Nina gratefully accepted and we set about making soup and sandwiches. Nina confessed that she hated cooking but usually ended up feeding not only Akando but also some of the other pack members. I could relate to that although I enjoyed it and we laughed together over the sheer quantities our wolves could put away.

I was very aware of time passing. Jake and I only had the rest of the day to find something useful to bring home and so far we had nothing. Well nothing other than the awareness of another, smaller wolf pack. Nina picked up on my nerves and told me that Akando had asked her to tell us what she knew over lunch.

When we finally called the men through for lunch, I could tell on Jake's face that he was pleased with the conversation he had been having. He also seemed more relaxed than he had been in the library. All the other men also seemed at ease and I felt relieved that we may be able to return home with something that would help us.

As we began eating, Akando signalled to Len to begin.

"You need to know about Angeline," he stated. Jake and I both nodded for him to continue. "As you know she was the imprint of one of your previous Alpha's. You also know that she managed to protect the pack from the powers that some vampires have?" We confirmed that we did. "What I am about to tell you, I have pieced together by extensive reading of historical documents not only from your tribe but from other tribes as well. At times throughout history, someone, always a female and always an Alpha's imprint has had the ability to protect a pack from a mental attack. I believe that if the Alpha's imprint has the ability to shield the Alpha male, then all the wolves are protected via the pack mind. It appears that the female is only able to shield the pack through the Alpha. She cannot extend her protection directly to another member of the pack."

"So how exactly does this protection work?" Jake asked eagerly.

"I'm not sure," Len confessed. "It seems to be a natural ability to block mental intrusion which can then be extended to her imprint."

"So if, for example," Jake pressed as he glanced at me, "if this female can block a leech from reading her mind, she should also be able to shield her imprint's mind?"

"Yes! That seems to be exactly how it works," Len confirmed.

Jake sat back in his chair and looked at me.

I was absolutely horrified. "Jacob I can't ... I mean, I could block Edward but it wasn't deliberate! I have no idea how to help you block him! And he was never maliciously attacking anyone; it was just something that he couldn't help doing!"

Akando had put down his soup spoon and was scrutinising me intently. "You have blocked a leech from controlling your mind?"

"NO!" I almost yelled. "He could *read* minds not control them! And for some reason he could never listen to mine but that doesn't mean anything!"

"On the contrary," Nina put in quietly, "It means you are a shield. Now you must learn how to use it."

"Wha-? How? I'm not a shield!" I was spluttering and panicky. Jake quickly rose from his chair and pulled me into a tight hug.

"Sssshhh Bells, calm down. We're going to work this all out. This is just a start, remember?"

I looked into his calm brown eyes and felt a little foolish for over-reacting. I could feel my blush spread across my cheeks and he smothered a grin. "Sorry," I mumbled, sitting back down.

"So," Akando said. "You are under threat of attack from the most powerful known coven of vampires. You are also outnumbered and you have a shield who does not know how to use her ability. Is that the situation?"

"Basically," Jacob admitted, "But we *will* figure out the shield thing." He hesitated before asking, "Is there any way of persuading you to fight alongside us? Or share information of the other packs you mentioned? How many other packs are there in existence? And can you tell us of the Volturi?"

Akando chuckled, "So many questions!" He looked seriously at Jacob for a moment and then stated, "Nina will gladly share all the information we have regarding the Volturi and all our brother packs. But Jacob, you are **not** your pack's Alpha. You do not have the authority to forge an alliance with us. I will however, discuss options with your Alpha."

Jacob literally growled. Akando shot up out of his seat and Jake followed suit.

"Akando!" Nina reprimanded him.

"You do not have this authority!" Akando repeated loudly.

I saw a muscle work in Jake's jaw. He glared at Akando and finally growled, "We return home tomorrow. By the day after I **will** be Alpha."

I couldn't stop the gasp that escaped from my mouth. I didn't doubt him. Anger, power and authority were radiating from Jake and I could see that it didn't escape Akando's notice.

"Then we will speak again after you become Alpha," he finally agreed. "In the meantime, Nina will compile all the information we have on the Volturi and other wolf packs. And you," he said, turning to me, "must work on developing your shield."

I gulped having no idea how, or if, that would be possible.

Shortly after agreeing that Jake would return to Oregon in a few days as Quileute Alpha, he and I took our leave. We made the trip back to our cabin in silence. I could see how much was on Jacob's mind. His face was more serious than I had ever seen, and his shoulders were full of tension.

We let ourselves into the cabin and Jake sat down heavily on the couch. For want of anything else useful to do, I got us both a drink and sat beside him.

"Damn, Bells," Jake said, turning to me. Then he snorted. "Sam's gonna love this one!"

"What are you going to do?"

"What I have to. I'll take over the pack and then come back here and try and persuade Akando to fight with us. I'll find out all he knows about the other packs and the Volturi. And then we can kill the leeches and I can live happily ever after with you," he finished on a half-hearted grin.

"Just like that," I agreed. "Do you think Sam will step down Jake?"

"No fucking way," Jake shook his head. He sighed heavily. "He'll not go without a fight. And I don't know if Paul and possibly Jared will submit to me either."

"Do they have a choice?"

"Not if Sam doesn't give up his Alpha status, and I refuse to order any of them to follow me. That would cause more problems than solutions in a battle with leeches." He laid his head back against the couch and cursed colourfully for a while.

"Jake?" I was almost afraid to ask. "What about ... the shield thing? I really don't think I *am*."

"We need to find out Bells. If you are, you can potentially protect the whole pack. I don't know how the fuck it works but there must be a way to find out." He frowned, "I just have no idea how. I mean it's not as if we have a leech in the dungeons to practise on," he snorted.

"What did you just say?" I jumped to my feet, excited.

Jake looked up at me, confusion written all over his face. "Practising on a leech?"

"What if we *can*? Alice told me that Esme, Carlisle and Emmett are on our side. What if they can help us?"

"Do any of them have any mind control things they can do?"

"No," I frowned, "But maybe they can help somehow. Carlisle especially, he lived with the Volturi hundreds of years ago. He must know something or be able to... I don't know, give us some help!"

Jake didn't look entirely convinced but he pulled me down onto his lap. He said in mock-hurt tones, "That's my girl. An entire wolf pack, possibly *two* packs for protection and she wants to fraternise with the enemy. What am I going to do with you, Bells?"

My mind flooded with memories of last night and this morning. I raised an eyebrow at him. Jake grinned, a genuine Jake grin this time. "Is that what it takes to convince you to stay away from leeches, Bella?" He kissed me, growling playfully when I bit hard on his bottom lip. He pulled me closer to him and positioned his knee between my legs, levering them apart and pulling me round so that I was straddling him. He pushed my hair out of the way and began passionately kissing my neck. I started to laugh and he pulled away.

"Seriously Bella? First you want to turn to leeches for help and now you're laughing at me?" His voice sounded hurt but I could see humour in his eyes.

"It's just that you're huge," I began.

Jake laughed, "Glad you noticed honey."

I rolled my eyes at him, "And this couch is no way big enough for what you're planning."

Jake pretended to think about it for a moment and then said, "You're right." He threw us both forward onto the floor, cushioning my fall with his arms. "Now where were we?"

Quite some time later, I had discovered that humming while orally pleasuring Jacob reduced the big bad wolf to a quivering puppy. Before I had time to *really* abuse this power, he discovered that taking me from behind allowed him free access to my clit as well as the ability to hit my walls in all kinds of extraordinary ways. After reducing me to a shaking, panting ball of jelly, we declared that round as a draw.

Not having had much rest the night before, we decided to take a nap after our strenuous work out. I thought drowsily that falling asleep in Jacob Black's arms was my own personal heaven.

Just as I was about to drop into a deep slumber, my cell phone rang on the bedside table. Groaning, I picked it up and answered it.

"Bella?" asked a familiar female voice.

"Esme?" I sat bolt upright in bed.

"Bella! How are you?"

"Uh... I'm okay Esme. What..?"

"Alice called. She doesn't know why but she said she had a vision of me placing this call to you and offering you my help. Do you have any idea what that means?"

I turned to look at Jake who was sitting up now and listening intently. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Um, Esme? Do you by any chance know of any uh... *friendly* vampires who have an ability to affect people using their minds? That might be willing to um... meet with me?" I asked nervously.

Esme was silent for a moment and then said confidently, "Kate, from the Denali clan."

A/N: Next chapter: tomorrow or Saturday.

***Chapter 15*: Chapter 15**

A/N: Damn I had problems uploading this chapter! Can I just tell you all here that this story is also on trickyraven (and soon also jbnp) so if it's not been updated here for a few days, it probably will be there. Am I allowed to say that?

Also, huge thanks again to feebes86 for her help with this chapter.

I forgot to say thank you at the start of last chapter to everyone who offered to help with BD info. As always, what I think will take one or two chapters extends into much more so all that help will be showing up soon!

Hope you enjoy this one!

Chapter Fourteen – Destiny

Talking with Esme again had been a little bizarre. The woman who I had once wanted to be my mother-of-sorts had been helpful and sweet, but I couldn't muster the affection that I once felt for her. All I could summon was a mild twinge of nostalgia for what could have been for the girl I once was. It seemed like a lifetime ago, now.

Esme had told me that Kate could create the illusion of an electric shock when she makes physical contact with someone. As it was an illusion only, Esme was sure Kate's gift fit into the category of mind control. Esme was very clear that she did not want details of why I was asking about this, in case she saw Edward again and he read it in her mind. Her voice was unhappy as she mentioned Edward and Esme being Esme, she apologised on his behalf for his "behaviour" as she called it. The least she could do she said, was to put me in touch with Kate. She promised that Kate would call me as soon as Esme could contact her.

Jake wasn't sure. He absolutely hated the notion of me spending any time with vampires, especially one with a potentially harmful gift.

"If she touches you and hurts you, I can't guarantee I won't rip her hand off," he had growled.

"I can meet with her alone Jake. She won't harm me. If Esme and Carlisle guarantee my safety with her, that's good enough for me."

Jake had growled and snarled some more about fucking leeches keeping their fucking hands off his imprint but even he had to admit that the best way of learning about my so called shield was to test it directly with a vampire.

He worked himself up enough that I decided some relaxation therapy was required. In no time at all he had forgotten all about the fucking leeches as his hands and mouth worked their magic on my willing body. Then my still willing body took all of him in and matched him thrust for thrust as he pounded into me.

When we were both spent, we lay in each other's arms again. Jake trailed his fingers up and down my arm, smiling when goose bumps appeared on my flesh.

"I know it's only been a day Bells," he said, "but I'm really going to miss this."

I kissed him. "I know, me too. And you're going to have to leave again without me," I pouted.

"It'll only be for a couple of days. I promise. Since I'll be going alone, I may as well run as a wolf. It'll be faster, and fun!"

"I thought it was supposed to be you that couldn't be apart from me, not the other way round," I sulked.

Jake rolled onto his back, pulling me on top of his naked body. "I'll make it up to you when I get back," he promised with a lascivious grin.

"Oh sure, with Charlie or Billy in the next room?" Now that I was thinking about it, I really hated the idea that laying lazily and naked in bed with Jake was not something that we could do as a matter of course.

Jake pushed my hair back from my face and searched my eyes, "Is this really bothering you?"

I knew him well enough to know that he was actually quite pleased that it was bothering me. Feeling like a spoiled little girl, I nodded. "Being alone with you like this has been amazing. I don't want to go back to seeing you after school and only managing a few minutes' alone time, if we're lucky."

Jake pulled my head down and kissed me. "You could always move to La Push," he said seriously. "That would give us way more time together. You promised me you'd think about it."

I nodded, remembering that we had never discussed it again. I sighed dramatically, "I had planned on waiting till after I graduate but since you've proved that you're soooo good in bed, I need to re-think."

Jake's eyes lit up, "Seriously?"

Despite my sulky mood I burst out laughing. "No, Jake! How would I explain **that** to Charlie? No, let's wait till I graduate and see where we are then."

It was Jake's turn to pout. "Why wait? What's the point?"

"What's the rush?" I threw back at him.

"Let's see, death threats from a coven of bloodsuckers. Or there is you being a sitting duck in Forks and me being unable to concentrate on anything while I worry about you being a sitting duck. And there is the mind blowing sex. Do you need any more reasons, cos I'm sure I can think of plenty."

"Where would we live Jake? I mean, seriously? You need to be at home for Billy and we couldn't support ourselves anyway. If it comes to it and the Volturi come before summer, fine, we'll come up with something. But can't I stay with Charlie just now and graduate high school?"

Jake couldn't hide his disappointment and I felt guilty but I also knew that in the long term graduation was imperative. I didn't want us to rush into something that we would look back on and wish we had done differently.

"Fine Bella," he huffed. "But if I think there's **any** imminent risk at **any** time, I'll pack your bags myself. You don't have to stay with me. Sue Clearwater would let you stay with her if you prefer."

I kissed him lightly, hoping it wouldn't ever come to such an emergency move, "Fine."

We phoned in pizza for dinner that evening, neither of us feeling like getting dressed or going out in public. As we lazed on the couch, naked and under a blanket, I began to wonder if I **should** consider moving in with Jake. Our intertwined fingers wandered regularly and unselfconsciously across one another's bodies. Our conversation was easy and light hearted. I was completely confident in Jake's love for and commitment to me. My only real fears were that we were young and it would be difficult to support ourselves. I remembered Jake's insistence that age is just a number and I knew that as far as he was concerned, he was right. I vowed to think about it some more.

We both finally fell asleep in front of the TV. Our lack of sleep the night before and the events of the day had caught up with us. I had no idea what time it was when I felt strong, warm arms lift me and carry me. I groaned in protest when I was laid, naked, on cold sheets. But I was quickly enveloped in Jake's warm body and he pulled the blanket over me too. I leaned sleepily into him, kissing his chest. I traced his abs lazily with my hand, loving the feel of his muscles rippling under my touch. I wrapped my arm tightly around him and snuggled into his warmth. As I moved my leg, I felt his erection and snorted.

"You're insatiable Jacob Black."

"Hey it's your fault," he protested. "And are you complaining?"

"Absolutely not," I clambered on top of him and began kissing him all over his face and neck, nibbling on his earlobe and working down to his chest. As he lay under me, I could feel his heart begin to pound and hear his breathing become heavier and more erratic. I absolutely loved having this effect on him. When my mouth reached his heavy member, I looked up at him and saw his eyes were shut and his cheeks flushed dark under his beautiful russet skin.

I knelt between his legs and took him into my mouth. My right hand worked the base of his erection while my left stroked and fondled his balls. His moans and grunts turned me on and I knew the moment he smelled me because he started cursing and tangling his hands in my hair. I took more of him into my mouth and hummed as I had done earlier. I felt the tremor that ran through his entire body as his cursing became louder.

"Bells **stop!**" he finally gasped. I hummed again shaking my head slightly, I wanted to taste him. "Fucking hell! **Fuck!**" He pulsed and spilled into my mouth. I swallowed it all, licked around his tip and looked up at Jake triumphantly. He was still trembling and breathing hard. "Fuck Bells you're gonna kill me if you keep doing that, 'snot a bad way to go mind you."

I laughed as I lay down beside him waiting for him to recover. He frowned at me. "Oh hell no you are not doing that for me and then just going to sleep!"

I started to protest that I hadn't been going to sleep but he was already between my legs, pushing my knees apart and lapping at the juices that had begun to flow while I had been administering to him. He sucked on my clit and finger fucked me hard. I cried out and began to tremble and quake. He had teased me earlier in the afternoon about the deterioration of my language during our love making. This time I was so far gone in ecstasy that I had no idea what was tumbling out of my mouth as I came hard, shaking and panting.

I had barely come down from my high when Jake surprised me by thrusting into me hard. I was still feeling sensitive from my orgasm and yelped as he pounded against my clit, angling my hips so that he could hit my most sensitive spot.

"Oh fuck Jake, **fuck!**" I was going to come again. I was on a whole different dimension of passion and lust, "Fuck me harder, Jake!"

Jake's eyes widened in shock and he growled before picking up his pace and pounding into me even harder. I fell apart screaming. He continued to slam into me until he too came undone, cursing and grunting as he did so.

We were both sweating as Jake fell off me onto his side pulling me flush against his chest. I couldn't find it in me to be embarrassed about my mouth. This was Jacob, after all.

"Can't believe you said that, Bells," he panted. "You are really gonna be the fucking death of me."

"Yeah but you said it yourself," I grinned. "It's not a bad way to go."

When morning came we made love one more time before we knew we had to leave. We took our time, tender and sweet, not knowing when we would have another chance to be alone. I could hardly get my head around how much closer I felt to Jake now. Whereas before he had been without a doubt my best friend, my favourite person and my beloved boyfriend, he was now my lover. We had shared intimacies with each other that neither of us had shared with anyone else and which we both knew would never be shared with anyone else.

Before we finally left the little cabin that we would both remember as long as we lived, Jake pulled me to him for a deep kiss. "I love you so much," he whispered as he hugged me close.

"Love you too, Jake. More than I can say."

The long drive home passed too quickly. I was in no rush to go back. After only two nights sleeping in Jake's arms, I dreaded the thought of my empty, cold bed in Charlie's house. I was also aware that Jake was determined to be the pack Alpha by the end of the next day. We both knew that Sam would not give up the role easily and as we drew ever closer to home, Jacob became more tense and serious.

My phone rang about an hour outside of Forks. It was Kate.

"I've heard a lot about you Bella," she told me in a silvery voice. "Carlisle has asked me to help you as a personal favour to him. What is it that you need?"

No beating about the bush with Kate, I thought. "I was hoping to meet with you to test a theory about my ability to block vampire powers," I stated equally blunt.

"I see. You are aware that if you are unable to block me the pain I inflict on you will be significant?"

"I understand that."

"Fine, where and when would you like to do this?"

"As soon as possible," I stated quickly. "Um..." I faltered thinking that Charlie would not be likely to allow me on another expedition anytime soon. "As close to Forks as possible?"

"I can travel down in a few days. I'm sure Carlisle will allow me to stay at their house. I will call you once the arrangements have been made, goodbye Bella."

I hung up the phone and looked at Jake knowing he had heard every word exchanged. His brow was furrowed.

"I don't like it."

"I know," I wasn't sure that I liked it either but if Akando was right and I could somehow shield Jake and therefore the entire pack, then I needed to practise. No question about it.

"If she arrives in a few days, I might not be here. And I **need** to be here so that you can practise shielding me. Len said it doesn't work on any other pack member," he pointed out.

I thought about it for a while. He was right. "Well maybe I can put her off for a few days. Or maybe she won't actually get here till you're back."

Jake nodded his head. We both knew that the exact timing of his trip back down to Oregon depended on how things went the next day with Sam. If Sam refused to submit to Jake, or if Paul or Jared caused any problems and Jake was fairly sure they would, then it may be several days before he could make it back to speak with Akando.

As Jake drove the final stretch of road back home, I watched him closely. I had noticed many times lately that he looked older and behaved in a more mature fashion than his age would imply. Over the last two days however, there had been a further significant change in him. There was a determination to the set of his jaw that had been absent before. His eyes seemed shrewder, as if he had a plan and the knowledge required to see it through. The swagger I noticed after we first made love had settled down but there was a self assuredness about him now which he had never had before. He was I thought, the most beautiful man I had ever seen.

"What are you staring at?" he smiled at me.

"You," I replied confidently. "You amaze me."

Jake turned his head briefly to grin at me cockily. "Yeah we are pretty amazing. Want me to stop the car for a quickie in

the forest before we go home?"

I opened my mouth to scold him; then stopped as I realised the idea was actually **very** appealing. Jake laughed and shook his head. "Believe me I'd love to Bella but the pack will be patrolling in the forest."

That suddenly reminded me. "Oh hell, the pack mind. They're all going to know by this evening aren't they? Everything we've done this weekend?"

Jake looked at me apologetically. "I'll do my best to hide it honey but I really can't promise. I'm sorry. I won't phase till tomorrow if I can help it though; I'd prefer a chance to speak to Sam alone before letting the whole pack find out that I intend to challenge him tomorrow."

I sighed. It seemed silly to worry about the pack seeing Jake and I making love when there was so much else going on but it still made me want to hide away and never face them again.

"They won't say anything Bella," Jake said severely. "I'll kick their fucking asses if they do."

When we got back to Charlie's, the cruiser was there. My heart sank; I had been hoping for just a little more alone time with Jacob before he had to go home. *Dammit, he's created a monster*, I thought, amused at how much I wanted sex from him. Jake gave me a lingering kiss before looking at me ruefully.

"I need to go Bells. Dad will want to know everything we found out and I need to talk to him about taking over as Alpha as well. Do you want me to come in with you though in case Charlie gives you a hard time?"

"No it's okay; he'll probably behave better if I'm on my own."

Jake raised my hand to his lips and kissed my fingers. "I'll call you later honey."

I felt a real wrench as I watched Jake drive away. The last two days had been nothing short of incredible and I didn't want to return to reality. Slowly, I turned to the house to see what kind of mood Charlie was in after my weekend with Jake.

I needn't have worried. It turned out that Charlie had missed me, or my cooking, I wasn't clear on which. And he didn't interrogate me as to sleeping arrangements or anything equally humiliating. He asked briefly if we had found what we needed for our projects and then commented that I looked tired. I quickly informed him that it had been a long journey and escaped to the kitchen to make us dinner, which we ate in relative silence. All was normal.

Jake called just as I was about to crawl into bed early to catch up on a little sleep before returning to school tomorrow.

"I miss you," I pouted by way of answering my phone.

"I know honey," he said on a chuckle. "I miss you too trust me."

"So what did your dad say?"

"Well he's keen for me to go back and talk with Akando about the possibility of them fighting with us. He also wants to know more about the Volturi and of course, your shield. He thinks the same as I do, that you most likely **are** a shield." I still wasn't convinced, but let it slide.

"And you becoming Alpha?"

I heard Jake take a breath on the other end of the line. "Sam's been an ass while we were away. He came to see my dad asking about what kinds of punishment previous packs meted out on wayward wolves." He snorted. "Guess who he's planning on torturing. Anyway considering he thinks I'm immature and irresponsible, he's not going to just submit to me. This is going to get nasty."

"Meaning?" My voice came out as a whisper.

"An ugly fight probably," Jake replied grimly.

I swallowed hard, "Jake," My voice was still no more than a whisper. "Please be careful."

"Bella I **will** win this, honey. I am the fucking Alpha. That's a given. I just wish it didn't have to be this way, especially not now with the threat of the Volturi hanging over us."

"So what happens now?"

"I guess I'll go and see Sam in the morning. I'll try and talk to him first, see if I can reason with him." I could hear in his voice that he considered that to be a pointless exercise. I shut my eyes tightly, trying to rid myself of the mental image of a russet and a black wolf tearing one another apart. It didn't work.

"What are you wearing?"

Jake's sudden change in train of thought threw me momentarily. I recovered quickly.

"Nothing."

"What?"

I laughed. "No, I'm in bed already, so just some old shorts and a tank top."

Jake groaned, "I want to be there with you."

"I'll be here all night," I teased, "Not going anywhere."

We chatted easily for a while longer. When we hung up, I pulled the blankets tightly around me and tried to conjure some warmth. I failed miserably and fell asleep shivering slightly.

At some point in the night, I woke to the feel of a familiar hot hand slide up my leg. I was lying on my side and there was a wall of heat in front of me. "Jake?" I whispered slightly shocked.

"Couldn't stay away," he explained in hushed tones and began to kiss me. My arms immediately snaked around his neck and I pulled my body as close to his as I could possibly get, wrapping my leg around his waist. He ground his ever ready erection into my centre and I moaned. Waking up to Jacob's love was heaven; I wanted to wake up like this every day. His hand was in my hair. He tugged at it to angle my head back so that he could kiss my neck. I moaned again, louder this time, as he grazed my neck with his teeth.

"Ssshhh Bells," he warned. "Charlie's next door!"

"Shit!" I hissed and tried to scoot away from Jake a little. He was too fast for me and used his free hand to pull me back to him.

"I can be quiet if you can," he whispered smiling against my neck.

Somehow, the need to stay quiet made our meeting even more charged. I could sense Jake felt it too. There was an intensity building up between us as our hands roamed and stroked, our mouths kissed and licked. Sighs were muffled against mouth or skin. Moans were stifled and a fire was being stoked.

I was ready to beg when Jake finally pulled on a condom and slid slowly into me. He kissed me and bit down on my lower lip as he swivelled his hips and angled mine. I gasped when he hit a spot inside me that made me tremble. He slid slowly back out and in again several times. The pace was almost tortuously slow and I opened my eyes to see Jacob looking at me from under hooded lids as he slowly retreated, and then penetrated me again.

"Jake," I begged.

"Tell me what you want," he whispered. I looked into his eyes and knew what he wanted.

"I want you to **fuck me.**"

Fire ignited in his eyes and I knew that I had been right. He loved knowing he could make me talk dirty like this.

He pulled all the way out, flipped me over onto my stomach and none too gently pushed one of my legs aside before thrusting into me hard. I cried out, this was what I needed. He ssshhhhed in my ear reminding me of Charlie.

I muffled my cries in the blanket as Jake repeatedly swivelled his hips and thrust deep inside of me. His mouth was hot on that wonderful spot on the back of my neck, his fingers rubbing my clit, and I was in heaven. My orgasm tore through me and Jake had to clamp his hand over my mouth as I began to shout out my ecstasy. I felt his body tense and jerk as he came hard a few moments later. His breathing was heavy and irregular in my ear as he tried hard to control his moans.

I felt Jake's body relax although he was careful not to place all his weight on me as he lay on my back. After a few moments he pulled me round to face him and I laughed at the satisfied grin on his face.

"**That,**" he whispered with feeling, "was incredible."

"Mmmmm," I agreed snuggling sleepily into his warmth and revelling in the feeling of being in his arms.

I quickly began to fall asleep and was only vaguely aware when Jake extricated himself from my arms, kissed me softly on the lips and whispered, "I love you so much baby" before exiting out my window.

Jake's POV

I had never been so happy in my life. The girl I had loved and adored for so long was **mine**, mine in every sense. I no longer had any doubts about her feelings for me. If it was the imprint that had made her fall in love with me, then to be quite honest I was fucking grateful.

Despite all the uncertainty hanging over me and the responsibility of protecting my pack and my tribe from an imminent leech attack, I was unbelievably, ecstatically happy. Even if I was more scared than I would ever want to admit.

It was more than just a superficial feeling of happiness. It was a deep sense of *rightness*. I was where I was supposed to be. Everything in my life up until this point had been to prepare me for where I was now. Whatever lay ahead for me, I knew I had reached a point where I was ready to face it.

I had been unable to sleep when I made the decision to go to Bella. As always, she relaxed and soothed me, and after running home, still in human form because I was avoiding phasing until I had spoken to Sam, I fell into a deep sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, I knew the time had come. It was time to face Sam Uley and take what was rightfully mine.

It was time to embrace my birthright.

It was time to become Alpha of the Quileute wolf pack.

A/N: Soooooooo next chapter should be up here tomorrow ... if it's not... it'll be on one of the above sites! Let me know your thoughts on this one!

Chapter 16: Chapter 16

A/N: Here's the chapter a lot of you have been asking for...

It didn't make sense to make this chapter from Bella's POV like most of the rest of the story has been so I've opted for more of a bird's eye view, just for this chapter.

Can I give a shout out to one of my amazing readers and reviewers, *strengthcomesfromabrokenheart*, for inspiring me to take on this fight in the first place - I hope you enjoy it!

Again, thanks to *feebes86* for beta reading for me; once again, she had some fantastic suggestions to make this chapter better.

Chapter Fifteen – I Will Take What Belongs To Me

The massive black wolf was crouched, ready to leap at the slightest provocation. His eyes were wide, his lips lifted in a snarl that bared his deadly teeth. His ears were raised and his tail stretched straight out behind him.

He was incensed beyond belief.

The larger russet wolf that was responsible for the black wolf's rage was in greater control of his temper. His focus was like steel and it resonated through the black wolf's mind.

I will take what belongs to me.

The russet wolf began to circle the black wolf which was unable to fully comprehend what was happening. The arrogant pup had given up his Alpha status, had offered it freely. Yet now, when the danger was greatest, the threat to their people at its most imminent, he had the audacity to want it back.

Sam growled menacingly.

You cannot lead this pack. You have not built this pack.

Jacob had come to Sam's home only an hour ago, in human form, wanting to talk. Sam had ranted and raged over Jake's disrespect for authority and his blatant refusal to follow orders. When Jake had attempted to tell Sam about finding another wolf pack, Sam was interested at first but as soon as he realised that the younger wolf had discussions with the other Alpha, his temper had exploded.

"You had no right! I am the Alpha of this pack!" he had bellowed.

Jacob's voice had resonated throughout the entire room as he had thundered, "NO!"

Sam had known it was coming. He had discussed it with Emily and he knew she wanted him to submit to Jacob. He had known from the first night Jacob phased that the younger wolf was stronger, the more dominant of the two. Sam had avoided patrolling with Jacob or issuing him Alpha orders because he had sensed, even before Jacob himself had, that when focussed Jake could break an order from Sam without expending any great deal of energy.

But Sam was a proud man. He had been the first wolf to phase. His father Joshua Uley had deserted his family; Sam was not going to desert the pack that he had built up as his own family. The fact that it was not he but his mortal enemies, who had created the pack had not occurred to him. Nor had he fully appreciated that the entire pack, yes including Paul, deferred naturally to Jacob because they sensed he was their true leader.

Jacob had asked Sam to submit to him. Sam had refused. When Jacob came dangerously close to commanding him the older man had run out of the house and phased. He would fight before he would submit to an order from a puppy.

The instant Jake phased, Sam realised his mistake. Jacob Black was no longer a puppy.

Now even through his blind rage, Sam felt something akin to real fear as he watched the russet wolf circle him with a deadly focus. Sam fought to conceal his thoughts from the powerful mind search he was being subjected to. He told himself that he could win this fight. He was the more experienced of the two.

Sam would not submit.

You will not win. It was not a threat that Jacob was issuing. It was a statement of fact. *Ephraim Black's son was not born to follow Levi Uley's.*

Still, Sam would not submit.

Sam! Jacob's voice was a warning and Sam clearly heard the regret. Sam had mentored Jacob, taught him all he knew, guided him through the excruciating pain and all consuming fear of his early phases. Jacob did not want to harm Sam.

Still, Sam would not submit.

Sam barely had time to register the resignation and determination that flashed through Jacob's mind before the huge russet wolf launched himself into an attack. He snarled viciously, his teeth ripping through the flesh at the black wolf's neck.

The black wolf managed to side step enough that the russet wolf was thrown off his attack, the sheer power and weight behind his movement causing him to roll several feet forward. It gave the black wolf enough time to spin around and launch his own counter attack.

The two wolves fought for dominance. Their claws raked into one another's flesh as they rolled in the mud in Sam's back yard. First one would gain advantage and then the other. Their growls and snarls were primal and their razor sharp teeth snapped and bit at one another.

Somewhere, a woman's voice was screaming at them to stop. A voice Sam would recognise anywhere.

Emily.

Sam turned his head momentarily to check where she was. The fear of her being hurt again over rode his need to fight. He realised his mistake as soon as he had moved his head. That split second of lost focus would be all Jacob Black needed to end him.

To Sam's astonishment and grudging respect, Jacob backed up a pace, allowing Sam to ensure the safety of his imprint. Sam saw the reasons in Jacob's mind. Jacob did not want to hurt Sam but he would do whatever was necessary to gain Alpha status. He would not however, allow any harm to fall on a fellow wolf's imprint.

Sam could also see that Jacob would show no such mercy to any of their natural enemies.

Sam also knew that if the roles were reversed he would not have been so noble.

With one mind, the two wolves sped from the yard into the cover of the forest where Emily would not be in any danger from them and their fight resumed.

Never in nature had there been a fight quite like this one. Through their joined minds, they felt each other's pain. One set of claws raked the other's chest and they both felt the fiery pain rage through the wound before their accelerated healing kicked in. One bit viciously and tore at the other's flank and they both felt the jagged sting before, once again, healing began.

They fuelled one another's rage, each feeding off the emotions of the other. Both wolves were strong, angry, determined. Both wolves were hungry for the title of Alpha of the pack. Both wolves were lethal.

But one had the overall advantage. The russet wolf was descended from a strong line of Chiefs and Alphas. While the black wolf had Alpha experience, the russet wolf had Alpha blood in his veins. His mind was the most focussed. His instincts were the most powerful. His need to claim his birthright and protect his people and his imprint drove him with a single-minded passion that the black wolf had never witnessed before.

The black wolf attacked again but the russet wolf was ready for him. Again they fought for supremacy, snarling and growling, biting and clawing. Again the black wolf felt the sheer passion that drove his challenger. He knew he could not match it.

Bedraggled and torn, fur and pieces of flesh ripped off, blood dripping from numerous wounds, the black wolf's struggle became increasingly defensive as the russet wolf ascended into power. Sidestepping and turning, ducking and manoeuvring, the black wolf did his best to stave off teeth and claws that ripped mercilessly at his body.

In the same part of his mind that had registered Emily and known to keep her safe, the russet wolf became aware of other members of the pack joining their consciousness. They were attracted no doubt by the noise of their fight which, he vaguely hoped, could not be heard by human ears.

Jared - Holy fuck!

Quil - Jake's gonna fucking rip him apart!

Leah was there too. She wasn't thinking in coherent words but a strong sense of relief was radiating from her.

Quil was howling now, summoning the rest of the pack. Their Alpha had been challenged. The outcome of this fight would affect them all.

The knowledge that his pack was witnessing this fight renewed the black wolf's determination and he once again attacked, teeth snapping at his opponent's neck. Before his teeth could find any purchase the russet wolf had lowered his shoulder and barrelled into the black wolf's chest, using his immense weight to knock him off his course.

Acting on sheer instinct, Jacob pounced on top of Sam before he had a chance to regain his balance. He pinned Sam under him and used his massive claws and bodyweight to keep the black wolf down, snapping his powerful jaws and snarling aggressively.

Sam knew he had lost the fight. In an ages old signal of defeat, he rolled to his side and offered his neck to his conqueror.

One by one the other wolves had phased until the entire pack was assembled. They watched through the pack mind as Jacob Black's deadly wolf towered over Sam's defeated one, growling and snapping at his neck, never actually biting. Both wolves were torn and bloody. The russet wolf's sides were heaving rapidly as he panted hard. The black wolf's breathing was shallower, coming almost in gasps as he absorbed what was happening.

Jacob - *I won't order you to follow me. But I am asking for you to stay with us. We need your experience.*

You should have thought of that before challenging me! Sam roared internally.

Jacob growled, frustrated. *I need to rule this pack now. It is my time, I can feel it.* What was more, he knew that Sam could feel it too as information flowed back and forth between them. *But you can still have a place in this pack. You would be my Beta.*

NEVER! All the wolves were shocked by the vitriol behind Sam's response.

Jacob was incensed. The rest of the pack was growing restless. Their Alpha had been beaten but was refusing to submit and acknowledge the new Alpha. Collin and Brady began to howl, the youngest pups needing to know who their leader was.

Embry and Quil could feel fire growing within them. They had the strongest allegiance to Jacob and were willing and eager to accept him as their new Alpha. Almost in unison, they began to growl menacingly. They would run the ousted Alpha from their territory if necessary. Leah joined with them instantly. After the briefest of hesitations Seth also joined with them. With a rush of fierce pride in his own ancestry Collin, also a descendant of Ephraim Black, joined the growling pack.

Sam lay in the dirt under Jacob, bewildered as one by one his pack prepared to run him off his own land. Jared joined with the others and Sam knew Brady would simply float with the majority. That left Sam alone with Paul.

And then unbelievably, Paul too began to growl and snarl. He was pacing and incensed. He had a new Alpha and the ousted Alpha was refusing to submit. The anger of the pack was increasing and Jacob was projecting his thoughts loudly at Sam.

I will not command obedience. I will not force you. But the pack is mine now

Sam made a decision. He would not submit to a new Alpha. He would not follow Jacob Black. But nor would he run as a lone wolf.

Sam Uley would stop phasing. He would give up the wolf.

When we need you the most? Jacob began to argue when he felt it, at the same time as Sam realised what had just occurred. Every other wolf in the pack saw it too. Jake backed away from Sam, whining and shaking his head in disbelief. The wolf and the man in him were both unable to process the enormity of what was happening.

Sam phased back to human and lay on the ground, crying out in anguish as the knowledge of what had just happened hit him full force.

The one word that spilled from his lips in a tortured whisper was the last word Jacob would ever have expected to hear under these circumstances.

Jacob gave his first Alpha command to his pack. *Everybody phase back! Except you, Leah! RIGHT NOW!* The collective pack confusion gradually gave way until only Jacob and Leah were left.

I don't need to be here Jake, Leah was protesting.

You heard him, Leah.

What do you want me to do? She sounded almost hysterical. Jacob sighed, realising it was too much for her.

OK. Go home. Jacob felt Leah's relief as she phased instantly back to human.

Jake phased back and knelt naked in the mud beside his old mentor and Alpha who was curled into a foetal position on the ground, arms curled around his knees and sobbing.

"What happened?" Jake whispered. Sam just shook his head moaning and rocking.

"C'mon Sam," Jake stood up hauling the other man to his feet. "Let's get you home."

"HOW THE FUCK DID WE KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THIS?"

Jacob was enraged, pacing his father's cabin angrily, a wild beast contained in a too-small cage. Billy understood his son's anger and yes, his fear. What had happened in the forest this morning was unprecedented and Billy Black wished

futilely that he had answers to give his son.

"It must have never been an issue before, Jacob," was the best he could do. "And we don't know what caused it in Sam either," he pointed out. "It may have been his decision to stop phasing but it may have been the Alpha status being ripped from him." Billy held his breath knowing that either way Jacob would be blaming himself.

Jake sat heavily on the couch, his head in his hands, elbows resting on his knees. "Maybe it was the loss of Alpha title," he accepted. "Dozens of wolves have stopped phasing throughout our history and there are really no records of anything like this?"

"None," Billy confirmed. "But they were simpler times Jacob. Wolves would have phased, imprinted within the tribe, married, had children, stopped phasing and lived out their lives with their families. Perhaps this is the first time such a situation has occurred."

"It makes no fucking sense!" Jake was back on his feet, pacing again. A myriad of emotions was hurtling through him and all he wanted was *Bella*. But how could he face her and tell her this before he knew exactly what had occurred?

On cue he heard the sound of her truck approaching and froze in fear.

"Bella?" Billy assumed when he saw the six foot seven Alpha wolf freeze in his tracks, pupils dilated and body tensed in fear. Jake nodded and Billy knew that if there was ever a time that his son needed some time alone with the girl he loved more than his own life it was right now.

"Sam will need to speak with the elders. Not straight away, but soon. I'll go now and spread the word and get the old records back out to double check."

Jake scarcely heard him. His blood was thundering through his veins and dread seeped into his soul at what he had to tell his beautiful, wonderful Bella. He had no idea how to break it to her.

As if she sensed something was terribly wrong Bella entered the cabin cautiously. Jacob was standing in the centre of the small living room, dwarfing everything around him. She gasped as she took in his appearance.

Blood was matted in his hair and on almost every visible part of his body, which was as usual, almost naked except for his cut-off jeans. Dirt was caked to his skin and bits of bark and leaves clung to him. Bella wouldn't have thought it possible, but his muscles seemed thicker than they had just the night before. She knew he must have fought with Sam. From the power that radiated from the centre of his being she also knew he must have been victorious.

What Bella didn't understand was the look in his eyes. Instead of pride or victory she saw fear and apprehension.

"Jake?"

"Bella," her name was a prayer on his lips and he crossed the room in two huge strides, hugging her tightly to him until she protested she couldn't breathe.

"You fought."

"Yes."

"You won," she wasn't really questioning him but confirming what she had already surmised.

"Yes."

"You're Alpha."

"Yes."

"What happened?"

Jake shut his eyes tightly for a moment before taking her beautiful face in his large hands and coming straight out with it.

"Sam refused to submit. He decided to quit phasing rather than join my pack or go lone wolf. The same moment that he made the decision, something happened. It felt like, cables snapping in his mind or something but... Bella, it broke. Sam's imprint broke. Sam and Emily are no longer imprinted."

A/N: Oooohhhh I've been excited about putting this chapter up. Tell me what you thought please! Next chapter up probably Monday.

Chapter 17: Chapter 17

A/N: Blimey, absolutely loads of reviews for the last chapter - thank you to everyone who took the time, I really appreciate each and every one:-)

Thank you once again to feebes for beta reading.

Chapter Sixteen – Broken Imprint

I stared uncomprehendingly at Jake for a while. I could see the anguish in his eyes and concluded that this must be really bad news. But I didn't understand why. Jake himself had never been a big fan of imprinting and had said on more than one occasion that if he had imprinted on anyone other than me he would have fought it tooth and nail.

"Bella," he was saying now. "Do you understand what this means?"

"I..." Actually no, I didn't. I shook my head.

"It means that there's a good chance that every imprint will break once the wolf stops phasing. That includes **ours** Bells. It also means that Emily has those scars and Leah got hurt for what... no reason? I can't get my head round that Bella." He was sounding frustrated and angry now. "I mean what is the fucking **point** of imprinting if the imprint is just gonna break when we stop phasing. There's no record of this ever having happened before, we had no idea."

"Jake, I understand what you're saying, really I do. But ... does it matter? I mean if two people love each other the imprint doesn't really add anything, does it?"

"Bella, the imprint broke for Emily as well," Jake told me. "I spent half an hour with them earlier and I swear they were like strangers! Emily felt it the moment Sam decided to stop phasing. The imprint broke and she knew! When I got there with Sam she was crying on the floor. I don't... I don't know what they're going to do. It was like ..."

"Like what, Jake?"

"Bella honey... it was almost as if they couldn't stand the sight of each other!"

"Sam and Emily?" now that was weird.

Jake pulled me onto the couch beside him. "What if that happens to us Bella? What if it really was the imprint that made you fall in love with me and then when I stop phasing you realise ..." He didn't finish. He didn't need to.

"Oh don't you start with that again Jacob!" I nearly yelled. "We are *completely* different to Sam and Emily! You know that! We were friends long before you phased. I told you, I was falling in love with you anyway. That's not going to change Jake!" Something else occurred to me then. "And Emily knew! She told me she thought it was strange that she could love him when he scarred her like that and came between her and Leah. It was almost like she had doubts herself. I've never thought about us like that Jake and I never will."

Jake looked at me earnestly. "I hope you're right Bells, I really do."

"I am," I said confidently.

"I just don't get what the fucking point of an imprint is; if it's just gonna break. It's supposed to be this amazing soul mate experience. And it really is! But now suddenly it's a temporary thing?"

I thought about it for a while. "Maybe it's what the wolf needs. With Sam for instance, Emily was calm and gentle. Sam was the first wolf, the Alpha of a new pack. He had too much to deal with. Leah is fiery and temperamental; maybe she wouldn't have kept him calm. Now though Sam can lead a normal life so his other half doesn't need to be so matched to him."

"And us?" Jake whispered.

I leaned forward and kissed him. "We always needed each other. Maybe you just needed me to come to my senses a little faster than I would have."

Jake leaned his forehead against mine. "I so want to believe that Bells."

"Believe it," I said firmly. I was certain that I was right. "Now go and shower while I make you something to eat. And then you can tell me what happened. All of it."

Jake did as he was told and when he was ready he talked me through his day beginning with going to see Sam that morning. He skipped over the details of the fight saying only that it got ugly. As he talked I inspected him until I was satisfied that he was fully healed. He told me that he felt a change inside him being Alpha. It was as if an energy that had always been there had now been unleashed. He didn't feel invincible, just incredibly powerful.

Jake knew that he would need to call his pack together for a meeting and to appoint a Beta. He had been hoping Sam would agree to be his Beta so that his experience could be put to good use but that was out of the question now.

"Who are you thinking?" I asked him.

"The obvious choices are Embry or Quil. I can trust them, rely on them and they'd literally lay their lives down if I needed them to. But I'm actually thinking Leah. She sees things differently, she thinks rather than just reacting. And she thinks fast so she wouldn't be wasting time in an emergency situation. I think her strengths counteract my weaknesses, so as a team we would be pretty damn good. What do you think Bells?"

"I think you should go with your gut instinct and if that says Leah, then she's who you should ask." I was pleased that Leah would be given this recognition. Things had been tough for her, everyone knew that. But with this new twist with Sam's imprint having broken, she was going to have a whole new round of *what ifs* to deal with. And I thought Jake was right, Leah would make a terrific second-in-command.

"How do you think she'll feel about Sam and Emily?" I asked Jake.

He sighed, "She was pretty freaked out Bells. All the wolves were phased so they all witnessed it happen. Then Sam phased back to human and the only thing he said was 'Leah'. What the fuck is that supposed to mean? She saw it through my eyes, they all did. I thought she'd want to hang around to see what he meant but when I asked her to stay she freaked out."

"Maybe you should go speak to her before calling a meeting with the whole pack," I suggested.

"What?" Jake looked appalled, "And say what to her?"

"Just ask how she's doing, Jake! See if there's anything she wants to tell you or ask you before it has to be aired in front of everyone."

Jake looked like he'd rather invite a coven of vampires round for dinner. I burst out laughing at his expression. "Would you like me to try and talk to her?" I offered.

"Would you?" his relief was palpable.

"Awe... big Alpha wolf is scared of girl talk," I teased.

"Damn straight!" he replied, shamelessly.

I laughed again and then sighed in resignation. I knew we would have even less time together now that he was Alpha. "You can't wait too long to get the pack together. They'll all be wondering what's going on. I'll go and see Leah now."

"No."

My head snapped up to look at Jacob. I had never heard him use that tone of voice before. I'd never heard **anyone** use that tone of voice before. My body shivered in response to the authority that dripped from that one little word, spoken quietly in his husky timbre. When my eyes met his, shivering turned to fire. His eyes were as black as coal and an ember of lust was glowing deep within. I stared at him in awe as he scooped me up and carried me bridal style to his bedroom. He didn't even bother to close the door.

Jacob laid me on the bed and started swiftly undressing me. His hands had barely grazed my skin. He hadn't even kissed me and I was already writhing in want. Once I was naked, he quickly stripped off his jeans. As usual he had nothing underneath and his massive erection sprang free.

From the look in his eyes I was expecting a repeat of last night, hot, fast and hard. Jacob surprised me. He lay down beside me and began kissing every inch of my skin starting from my temple and working his way down to my feet. As he moved he whispered my name and words of love that almost brought tears to my eyes. I was being **worshipped**.

The Alpha of the Quileute pack was paying homage to his imprint.

When Jake finally entered me, he moved inside me with a new power. The heat from him seemed more intense than previously and his deep penetration ignited flames within me that had me gasping and crying out for more. I was mesmerised by the expression in his eyes. He was looking at me with so much adoration and need that I was humbled.

We found the perfect rhythm. Gazing intently into one another's eyes, Jacob moved in long, powerful strokes which I met with thrusts from my hips. I was surrounded by his unique earthy, woodsy scent and I had never felt so strong a sense of belonging than I did right then.

My passion built and built and I clung to his shoulders calling out his name as he brought me over the edge once, then twice before he tensed and exploded inside me, calling my name as if it were a beacon. When he was completely spent Jacob finally broke eye contact and buried his head in the crook of my neck. I lay there beneath him for a long time recovering from the intensity of what we had just shared. I realised he hadn't moved and ran my fingers through his shaggy hair.

"Are you okay?"

Jake shook his head slightly against my neck before saying quietly, "Don't ever leave me Bella."

My heart throbbed. This new development with the broken imprint had him scared and confused all over again. And it was just when he was going to need to be stronger than he had ever been.

I pushed at him slightly until he moved off me. I sat up and looked down at him. His eyes were still full of the love and need I had seen during our lovemaking but the fear I had seen when I first arrived at the cabin was back too.

I opened my mouth and poured out the contents of my heart. He was my sun, my air, my everything. I could never contemplate a life without him now. I needed him as much as he needed me. He was my strength when I was weak. He was my comfort when I was sad. More than that, I wanted, needed, to be **his** strength when his burdens grew too much. I wanted to go through my whole life side by side with him, revelling in his love for me and returning it with an equally fierce love and loyalty of my own.

I told him of the feeling of rightness I had just experienced in his arms. I told him how I had never felt like I had belonged anywhere until I was with him.

I told him if I ever thought of Edward or any of the Cullens now, it was with regret that I had ever allowed them near me, or with impassive curiosity as to how they were.

By the time I finished, Jacob had sat up and leaned against the headrest. He pulled me to straddle his hips and gradually the fear faded from his eyes and was replaced with pride and happiness.

Knowing Jacob I doubted he was entirely convinced but at least for now he seemed content to accept the love I was lavishing on him. I finished my speech with a passionate kiss.

I wasn't surprised when Jacob took full advantage of the position I was sitting in and took me again.

Leah wasn't at home. Seth answered the door and couldn't hide his surprise at seeing me. I simply asked him if he knew where I could find Leah and he said if he had to guess, there was a spot close to the beach she went to if she needed to think. He told me where it was and I made my way there. Sure enough Leah was lying on the ground staring up at the sky.

She didn't even look around, "Hi Bella. Did Jake send you?"

"Kind of," I planted myself down beside her. "I thought he should be here but girl talk was too scary for your new Alpha."

Leah barked a laugh, "I'll bet." She turned to look at me, "I don't really do girl talk, Bella."

"Neither do I," I answered truthfully. "But sometimes, maybe it helps."

I left it at that allowing Leah to decide whether she wanted to talk about it. After a long silence she finally asked if Jake had told me about the broken imprint. I confirmed that he had.

"So what was it about Bella? I loved Sam, he loved me. He phased into a wolf, he met Emily, imprinted, broke my heart ... and now just like that the imprint's broken and it's my name he's crying. What the **fuck** is that?"

"Honestly Leah, I'm not sure." I told her the same theory I had told Jake. "Maybe you were just too strong. Maybe Sam needed someone who would, I don't know, listen to him without yelling at him." Leah snorted, "Maybe his wolf needed to be nurtured, not challenged. And maybe Emily fit that role better."

"Why did he say **my** name Bella?" Leah's tone was anguished and I knew this would torment her until she had an answer.

"I don't know. Leah, maybe you don't need this but I want you to know anyway. I'm here, okay? I'm right behind you. I know you can't talk to your other friends, your old friends, not openly and honestly. So... I'm here."

Leah looked straight into my eyes. "I meant it when I said I don't do girl talk, but yeah, thanks."

I suppressed a smile. That was pretty good for Leah. She surprised me by suddenly saying, "This imprint bullshit is gonna be freaking Jake out."

"Yep."

"Oh I get it. I have to do the girl talk but you don't."

I looked at her ready to protest until I saw her smiling. "There's not much I can say Leah. You'll know more about it than I do when you phase with him. But yeah, he went all 'Bella doesn't really love me' again."

Leah nodded, "Even if your theory's right," she said in a tone that suggested she really didn't believe it, "I don't think it would make much difference to you two if the imprint broke."

"Do me a favour and tell Jake that?"

Leah promised she would and shortly afterwards, Jake's distinctive howl summoned his pack to him. After she left I found

myself thinking that, as odd as it seemed she and I may actually become friends. I hoped she would accept Jake's offer of making her his Beta.

I returned to the cabin to wait for Jake, anxious to hear how his first pack meeting had gone. Billy was back by the time I got there and he wanted to talk.

"Jacob told me about the librarian you met in Oregon who researched pack histories. I wonder if he knows anything about broken imprints," he mused.

I was instantly attentive. If there was any way to completely reassure Jake of my love for him I wanted to find it.

"We can always ask," I said enthusiastically. "I'm sure Len would know something; or perhaps Akando's sister Nina. You know Jake has to go back now that he's Alpha. He can ask them while he's there."

Billy looked at me shrewdly. "What do you make of it from an imprintee's perspective, Bella," he wanted to know.

I was keen to share my theory with him and glad to talk through my rather jumbled thoughts on the subject. "I think that Emily always had doubts about it. She told me herself that it was strange how she could feel so much for Sam when he had scarred her and had been with her cousin and best friend. She would never have said as much to Sam but I really believe that deep down she knew it wasn't right. I can't speak for Kim but I know that my experience with Jake is different. I don't have any doubts or any reasons at all to believe that there's something wrong or unreal about what we have." I didn't miss the flicker of relief on Billy's face. "I know with absolute certainty that I love Jake and always will. I'm not completely sure but I don't think Emily could say the same. So," I concluded, "I think maybe the point of imprinting is that the imprint gives the wolf what he needs while he's a wolf; but once he's no longer a wolf he doesn't have the same needs and so the imprint breaks. Maybe that used to not matter; but with Sam and Emily, they both had a lot of guilt over Leah so maybe they need to deal with that in a more normal way."

Billy had been listening intently. "You may not be too far off the mark, Bella," he decided. "If every imprint breaks once the wolf stops phasing though, there would surely be some record of it somewhere in our histories. That's why I think we should be considering what other tribes' packs have recorded."

It made sense, and we talked about it some more while I made us all dinner. Billy called Charlie to invite him to join us and I asked him whether the council had made any decisions yet.

"They'll come around," Billy replied grimly and said no more on the subject.

Charlie arrived before Jake got back so I had to endure endless sports trivia over dinner before Charlie went into the living room and out of earshot. Then I was desperate to find out what had happened at the pack meeting. Jake told me that Leah had accepted the role of Beta and the pack members were all eager to learn about the new pack we had come across in Oregon. They had unanimously agreed that Jake now needed to return for more information and to ask them to fight alongside us.

Embry had suggested that Jacob not go to Oregon alone. Jacob told me that the reason Embry had given was that two heads may be better than one but everyone had seen in Embry's mind that he was concerned about Jake flying off the handle and blowing the opportunity to form an alliance. Jake seemed amused by his friend's fears but I secretly wondered whether Embry was right. Jake seemed to have better control over his temper now but being Alpha had left him with a whole lot of power that he wasn't accustomed to using; and I had seen how easily he and Akando seemed to spark each other off. On balance, I was pleased that Jake had agreed to allow Embry to accompany him.

They would be leaving in the morning. Jake reluctantly told me that he still had to meet with Leah, to give her some orders for while he was away. I knew that meant that he couldn't spend the rest of this evening with me and that I wouldn't see him again until he got back. I missed him already and he was standing right in front of me.

Jake pulled me into his arms and kissed me. "Don't look like that Bells," he pleaded. "I'll only be away two days at the most. Just do me a favour and don't meet with the leech till I get back? I've asked Quil to keep an eye on you so you'll be safe whatever happens but don't go practising getting electrocuted or whatever till I'm here to yell at you about it, 'kay?'"

I promised I wouldn't meet with Kate while he was gone and melted into his kiss. Charlie clearing his throat in the kitchen doorway signalled it was time to go home. Jake walked me out to my truck and hugged me tightly as Charlie took his time opening the cruiser door and buckling his seatbelt.

"I still need to talk to dad as well as Leah honey," Jake said quietly. "So as much as I would love to sneak in your window again tonight, I can't."

My heart sank. I had secretly been hoping for a rendezvous before he left. I swallowed back my misery and aimed for a bright smile. I knew he must be feeling daunted by the task that lay before him now.

"Let me know how it all goes," I told him. "You'll do great, I know you will."

He smiled and kissed me tenderly before letting me climb into my truck. I blew him a kiss and grinned at him, wanting his last sight of me to be of me happy, before he had to go as Quileute Alpha and persuade Akando to fight with him.

All I could do now was hope Akando agreed.

A/N: I know a lot of you were waiting to hear how Emily is doing ... I WILL come back to Sam and Emily, I promise! There's absolutely loads happening for Jake and Bella at the moment and I want to deal with some of that first. But there will be a "meanwhile, back at the ranch" chapter coming up shortly for Sam and Emily.

As always, please tell me your thoughts!

Chapter 18: Chapter 18

A/N: Once again, thanks to feebes86 for beta reading and improving this chapter. And, once again, thank you to everyone who takes the time to read and to review.

Chapter Seventeen – Alliance

Jake's POV

One of the good things, no, one of the fucking incredible things about being a wolf was the **speed**. Nothing on earth compared with the sheer exhilaration of using your own body to reach speeds of close to 100mph. Pushing your limbs to their maximum capacity and feeling the adrenaline and endorphins course through you while the forest whizzed past and the wind caught your fur was amazing. Almost as amazing as when Bella hummed like that...

Jake!

Oh, sorry Embry.

That was kind of how our run had been going so far. I was lost in thoughts of all things Bella and Embry pulling me up short when I got too graphic. Bells would kill me if she knew but I honestly wasn't doing it on purpose or showing off or anything. It was just that I'd been a virgin until 4 days ago and now I'd had sex more than a dozen times in all different positions. My favourite so far was that night when Charlie was just down the hall and she was moaning into her blanket so he wouldn't hear and...

Jake!

Fuck. Sorry man.

Embry was starting to get pissed. He was also a little jealous. Better try and think of something else. Sam and Emily? Nope, wrong choice.

Embry – *What's going on there? Is it really broken?*

I shared my memories with him, letting him see Emily crying on the floor and yelling that she'd known the imprint had broken. I didn't really want to dwell on thoughts of broken imprints but, dammit, too late.

Embry – *Seriously Jake? You're worried about Bella leaving you man? That has to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard.*

Yeah but you'd have said the same about Emily until yesterday.

Embry – *OK. But everyone knows your imprint is different to Sam's.*

Huh?

Embry – *Your head goes Bella Bella Bella Bella which is as annoying as hell. Sam's head goes, well went, Emily Leah Leah Leah Leah. Jared just thinks about Kim but not as obsessively as you think about Bella.*

I really didn't want to think about it. Dad, Leah, Bella herself and now Embry had all told me the same thing, that the love Bella and I had for one another was special in its own right and not dependent on some mystical connection. And I could feel that, of course I could. But the fact was that it kind of felt too good to be true. I'd spent my life coming to terms with the loss of people I loved, first my mum, then Rachel and Rebecca. Then I'd fallen in love with this amazing girl who was in love with somebody else; somebody who turned out to be my mortal enemy. I had spent all those months on Bella's side lines. Now, suddenly she was in love with me and I was the happiest I'd ever been. So yeah, it kind of felt a bit surreal. Incredible, but surreal.

Uh, Jake?

I had forgotten Embry was there and I could feel his discomfort at my thoughts being so personal. That wasn't something we really did as wolves, dammit. Still at least it was Embry and not Paul or one of the pups that I had allowed to see straight into the innermost reaches of my soul.

Shut the fuck up, Embry.

I concentrated again on the feel of the wind in my fur. I loved that feeling. My fur was kind of shaggy because I was letting my hair grow a bit. Of course that was for Bella, I knew she liked it better a bit longer. I loved the way she ran her fingers through it, especially while my head was between her legs and...

Jake!

Fuck.

I decided we'd better use our time to strategise.

Our main priorities were to try and persuade Akando to fight alongside us when the time came, as well as gain information about the Volturi and the other packs. I was desperate to get back home as quickly as possible before that bloodsucker arrived to try and electrocute Bella.

No thoughts of Bella, Jake. Not a single fucking one.

Sure, sure.

I had called ahead so I knew Akando was expecting us. He gave nothing away on the phone and I couldn't decide whether, if the situation was reversed, I would be willing to join in the fight. On the one hand there would be the whole brothers in arms thing going on. But on the other hand would I risk the lives of my own pack for a fight that had nothing to do with us? I was horribly afraid that protecting my own pack, not to mention the imprints would win out over loyalty to another tribe.

As we thought over the topics we needed to discuss with Akando, I became increasingly grateful for having Embry with me. The last couple of days had been overwhelming to say the least and if it hadn't been for Bella I would probably have gone crazy already. Too much had happened. I had taken over as Alpha. I was trying to find a solution to an imminent and deadly leech attack on my tribe. I was feeling guilty about having forced Sam into the decision that broke his imprint. I had found out that imprinting was not the lifelong certainty that we had always believed. I was worried that I wouldn't get home before the leech arrived to see Bella. I knew I was close to erupting over something insignificant. I realised it was a very good thing that Embry had joined me on this trip.

We agreed that we would try and get everything dealt with today. Then we could sleep on the forest floor and head back home tomorrow.

Embry – *So who are the key players here, man?*

I showed him Akando and Elan. There were three more pack members but I hadn't met them. Then there was Len the knowledgeable librarian, and Nina. Embry broke stride slightly when I showed him Nina.

Damn Jake, she's beautiful!

I snorted. *Did you seriously just nearly trip because of a girl? You're a fucking wolf, man!*

Says the wolf who nearly waltzed out of leech killing formation when he looked at a pretty girl.

That was the moment I imprinted! I wouldn't have if it had been anyone else!

We bantered back and forth for a while. It wasn't too long before we reached Oregon. My nerves began to kick in the closer we got to Tamastlikt. I was facing a more experienced Alpha whom I barely knew and asking him to put the lives of his pack at risk for me.

Embry felt my nerves. *Easy Jake.*

I inhaled deeply and thought of Bella. Bella's chocolate eyes. Bella's infectious laugh. Bella's beautiful smile. The touch of her hand. Her breath on my skin. Her scent. Embry knew better than to stop me this time.

Akando was waiting for us at his home. He was alone. He took in our filthy appearances and invited us to make ourselves at home, use his shower, whatever we needed. I really couldn't have cared less but didn't want to start off on the wrong foot so I showered quickly and Embry did the same. Of course our shorts were filthy from having been tied around our legs on the long run but a quick brush got rid of anything that might stain furniture.

Embry and I had eaten on the way but human food was preferable to forest kill so when Akando gave us some food that Nina had apparently prepared for us, we were happy. That was until we tasted it. I remembered Bells saying that Nina didn't really enjoy cooking. I figured it was a good thing that it was wild animals she fed because I didn't think anyone who was really human would survive anything other than the soup and sandwiches she had fed us previously. Again, not wanting to be rude, we ate the lot but I decided that she may have been beautiful, at least according to Embry. I hadn't noticed, but either way she sure as hell couldn't cook.

I really just wanted to cut to the chase and get what we needed before high tailing it back home and to Bella. Akando, on the other hand, was in no apparent hurry and he waited until we had finished eating before bringing up the reason for our visit.

"So Jacob, you're Alpha now." I confirmed that I was and he nodded seemingly pleased. "You said you would be. Did the previous Alpha submit?"

I told him about the fight and the broken imprint once Sam decided to give up the wolf. Akando was as stunned as the rest of us but promised to have Len research it for us.

"I hope Len doesn't mind going to all this trouble for us." Again I was watching my manners. I could not blow this

opportunity. Too much depended on it.

Akando laughed loudly. "On the contrary Jacob, you and Bella caused quite a stir the other day. We're a small tribe on a quiet reservation and very little happens here. Len is delighted to be researching something of value to someone as opposed to vaguely chasing down legends and unconfirmed fairy tales."

I could see his point.

"How is Bella managing with developing her shield?"

I explained about the electric leech and Akando was again surprised. "A leech is willing to help us?"

"Uh," I rubbed the back of my neck. "I'm not actually sure she knows about us. Bella didn't mention anything about me or the pack to either Esme or Kate so there's no reason for them to guess our involvement."

"I see," Akando looked deep in thought. I gave him a few minutes but I was beginning to feel like a wound up spring. So far I had nothing I had come for. A lot depended on the success of this visit. And I was too far away from Bella. I could literally feel the physical distance between us and it felt as though part of my soul was attempting to break away from me to reach her. It wasn't a comfortable feeling and I shifted uneasily in my seat. Embry noticed and glared a warning at me.

"Akando," I finally said. "I really don't want to be rude but I'm under time pressure here. I've got a leech invasion to prepare for. You promised me information and I'm hoping to persuade you to fight alongside us."

I held my breath hoping that wasn't too direct. Akando observed me for a moment before speaking.

"Nina has all the information you need on both the Volturi and the other packs. She will share it with you this afternoon. Len will research the imprinting question for you. As for whether we will fight with you, I have made a decision. I will tell you now that it is not a popular decision with my pack. Jacob I am truly sorry but I cannot endanger my own tribe by entering a war that has nothing to do with us."

I couldn't stop my shoulders slumping in defeat. It was no more than I had expected but I had still been clinging to hope. Stubborn pride immediately rose in me. *I'll find another way.*

Akando was still talking. "We are a small tribe Jacob and the gene is dying out. Only five of us are left; no more are likely to phase in our generation. It is up to the five of us to pass the gene on. If I lead us into a battle where we are outnumbered and at a disadvantage, I risk losing the opportunity to pass the gene on to the next generation. Only Elan and one other are imprinted and they have no children as yet." He shook his head regretfully. "The wolf in me wants to fight beside you Jacob but the man knows better. And as I said, my decision is not one the rest of the pack agrees with."

"I understand." And I really did. I hated it but I understood it. The door of the cabin opened and in my peripheral vision I saw Nina and Len come in. "I can only hope some of the other packs are in a better position to help us. How many packs are there?"

But Akando wasn't listening. He was looking back and forth between his sister and Embry. From the look on his face I knew what had just happened. I didn't even have to look at Embry to confirm it.

Embry was staring at Nina like a blind man seeing the sun for the first time.

"Oh you have got to be **fucking** kidding me!" I exploded startling both Embry and Nina.

Embry looked at me bewildered while Nina jumped and instinctively headed towards her brother. I immediately felt guilty for my outburst. I was an imprinted wolf after all. Embry was one of my oldest friends and I knew exactly what he was going through right at this moment. But on top of everything else that was happening, it felt like just one complication too many for my already overloaded brain.

"Sorry," I muttered to Embry who was once again staring at Nina. I remembered the overwhelming first moments after the imprint occurred and hoped he wouldn't just try and grab her and run off with her. I was pretty sure that wouldn't go down well with Akando, fellow wolf or not.

Nina, for her part, was looking shyly back at Embry and I wondered whether she knew what had just happened. Len certainly seemed to have picked up on it and was attempting to smother a grin as he watched the little scene play out.

Feeling slightly fearful of his reaction because I would probably want to murder any wolf who imprinted on one of my sisters, I looked at Akando. He didn't look entirely happy but I could see something calculating in his eyes.

"Nina, perhaps you could tell Embry about the Volturi and other packs while Jacob and I speak with Len," he finally said.

I wasn't so sure that was a good idea. Embry had a definite vacant look about him at the moment and I didn't think he would be able to absorb much information. I tried to argue but Akando assured me that I would leave with all the information I needed. Deciding to trust him, I agreed to join him with Len in the kitchen.

"This could change things," was the first thing Akando said. Len nodded his agreement.

"Oh-kay?" I wasn't sure how but I was more than willing to listen.

"The first thing we need to do is find out how absolute imprinting really is. Len, have you ever come across a broken imprint in your research?"

"Sure," Len shrugged like it was no big deal. "It's rare but it happens. Only when there are extenuating circumstances though."

Akando and I looked at each other and I could tell that this was as much news to him as it was to me. I kind of spluttered while Akando asked, "What kind of extenuating circumstances?"

"Well I can only read between the lines and make educated guesses. But I did read of one case where the wolf was already married before his imprint occurred. He loved his wife but then imprinted on someone else. He couldn't fight the imprint but always regretted the loss of his wife and the pain he caused her. His imprint broke as soon as he gave up his wolf. Another case was similar, the wolf was grieving the recent death of his lover when he imprinted. Again, he had to accept the imprint but he felt a strong sense of betrayal to his lost love the whole time he was with his imprint. He gave up his wolf and the imprint broke."

Akando looked outraged. "So what in the hell," he asked slowly, "is the point of imprinting in the first place? If it's not to help us find our soul mate, why do we imprint if it can break?"

I told him Bella's theory about an imprint ensuring the wolf has what he needs during his time as a wolf. I added a further thought of my own, that perhaps there was a difference between giving up the wolf entirely and simply quitting phasing. Len looked excited.

"That could be right," he said. "One tribe has documented a lot of relationships which we can assume to be descriptions of imprints. I'll read them again and see what I can come up with." He literally rubbed his hands in glee at the prospect.

Feeling rather traitorous especially after Bella had opened her heart to me about how she felt about me only yesterday, I couldn't stop myself. Attempting to sound casual I asked, "Any known cases of broken imprints when it's the imprintee who was um... previously in love with someone else?"

I could tell that neither Akando nor Len were fooled. They exchanged an amused glance before Len said, "None that I know of but I'll keep it in mind when I'm reading."

I muttered my thanks, mentally kicking myself and wishing I could just get over all this. Seriously, I had major issues I decided.

Akando was speaking again. "Assuming imprints only break then under extreme circumstances, something Len will attempt to confirm for us, we appear to have been taken in a new direction. Jacob, the loss of the shifting gene in our tribe has been troubling our elders for many years. We are, as you know, protectors of the tribe and if we die out the entire tribe is at risk. After you and Bella arrived some of our elders believed it was a sign from the Spirits that they should not be concerned. It seemed to them that the introduction of another pack was an indication that our future was more secure than they had believed. Embry imprinting on Nina opens a new gene pool of shape shifters to our tribe."

Part of me wanted to laugh. Embry had first set eyes on Nina all of fifteen minutes ago and now he was a breeding stud. Still for the sake of keeping Akando on good terms, I nodded sagely and he continued.

"Of course my sister is unlikely to tolerate Embry being sent to battle without the help of our own pack. It seems as if you and my pack will get what you want Jacob. We will fight alongside you."

Holy shit! I reeled slightly from the swift turn around but pushed down my surprise to focus on the matters at hand.

I shook Akando's hand and we began to discuss strategies. The two packs would need to be introduced and we needed to do some training together. We were also unclear as to whether the packs would be able to communicate with one another while phased. There was a simple way to check that and Akando and I went outside to phase.

Akando's wolf was only slightly larger than mine and was a deep brown colour. He actually looked a bit like a grizzly bear. We quickly ascertained that we had no channels of communication when phased which was unfortunate but I was determined to find a way around that.

Back inside, Akando and I agreed that he would bring his pack to La Push the following week. It made more sense to mobilise the smaller pack, plus they would need to familiarise themselves with the territory they would be defending. Waiting until the following week would allow Bella time to practise using her shield as well as allowing Akando's pack time to organise themselves for a trip away.

We went back into the living room to check on Embry and Nina. Embry had lost the vacant look and seemed entirely absorbed in what she was telling him. Mind you, I knew that at this stage of the imprint she could have been reciting the colours of the rainbow and he would have been enthralled.

I wasn't sure what to do about this. I was desperate to get back to Bella. The uncomfortable pull I was feeling was increasing by the minute and I was becoming agitated and restless. Of course that meant that bringing Embry back home

would have the same effect on him. I couldn't insist on him leaving Nina.

I asked Akando quietly whether Embry would be able to stay in Oregon until the pack came to La Push the next week. Akando was not an imprinted wolf but from his experiences with his two imprinted pack members, he was familiar with the torment a wolf felt when separated from his imprint. He agreed that it would be best for everyone if Embry were allowed to remain behind when I returned home.

I tore Embry away from Nina for long enough to agree with him that we would stay in regular communication through phasing. He could pass the information about the Volturi on to me that way. Akando had offered to contact the other packs and Embry was told to let me know if any of the other Alphas wished to meet with me.

I checked that Embry was content with the situation, knowing that he would be feeling agitated at the moment and not sure whether he would need any Alpha guidance. I searched his mind thoroughly for anything that might create problems with Akando, but all I found was a deep sense of relief that I wasn't dragging his ass back to La Push and a profound awe and love for Nina.

Nina seemed at ease with the situation. Akando promised he would keep Nina close to him until Embry's wolf settled into the imprint.

As satisfied as I could be that everything was as settled as it could be for the moment, I allowed my wolf to rip through my skin and pushed myself to my limits to get back to Bella.

It was already late by the time I left Oregon and exhaustion eventually forced me to sleep in wolf form for a few hours on the forest floor. I had vivid dreams of Bella stroking my fur and fondling my face and the instant my eyes opened I was back on my feet and pounding through the forest to get to her.

As I drew closer to Forks I began to realise that by the time I arrived, she would be at school and I wouldn't be able to go to her immediately. My wolf grew agitated and a howl ripped from my throat. Something primal was rising within me at the knowledge that my imprint was being kept from me. I could feel that Jared and Quil were phased and they both registered my mood with a jolt of shock. I was pushing my body faster and harder in an attempt that I knew to be futile, to reach Bella before she left home for the day.

I could see that Quil was close to Bella's home. His job while I was gone was to keep an eye on her and of course he had taken that job seriously.

I'll get her to wait for you. Charlie's gone to work already.

Relief and gratitude flew through me. I watched through Quil's eyes as he reached as close to Bella's home as he dared to go in wolf form before he phased back to human. Words could not describe how much I needed Bella right now. I didn't know whether it was because of the physical distance that had been between us or because of all the pressures I was currently under, and I didn't care.

Quil phased back and told me she was waiting for me. Then he ran the hell away from her home. I told him to go and get some rest and he phased back to human when he was close to his own home.

Within half an hour I was pounding into Forks. My focus was single minded and Jared was attempting to block my thoughts from his mind. I didn't care.

I phased to human and dragged on my shorts. I ran to Bella's door and threw it open knowing she would have left it unlocked for me. Slamming the door shut behind me I began to scent her out. She appeared round the kitchen door and the expression on her face changed from concern to shock as she took me in.

Without words, there were none to say, I grabbed hold of her and pushed her back against the wall. I was consumed by her. Her scent enveloped me and began to soothe me a little. I began ripping at her clothes. I needed her naked body against mine and I needed it now. Her own hands were pulling at my shorts and I kicked them off and lifted her quickly up, back against the wall, legs wrapped around my waist.

Moaning with my need, I began to push into her. I was shocked when I realised through my lust driven haze that she was shoving at me, shouting my name and telling me to stop.

Had I hurt her? Frightened her? I was sure I hadn't been too rough but then I wasn't exactly in control. *Shit... shit... fuck!*

I pulled back out and looked at her, confused when I saw her eyes were almost rolling back in her head with desire. Then I heard the word she was gasping and realised what I had been about to do.

"Condom."

I squeezed my eyes shut trying to gain some control over the wolf. I was pissed as hell that I needed to stop but I knew she was right. Then I heard her say "nightstand" and knew my girl had been prepared. It wasn't something we had talked about but I had just kind of assumed it was my responsibility. Obviously Bella had been one step ahead of me.

I was upstairs and back again in less than thirty seconds, condom on and ready to go. Bella was slumped partially down

the wall, cheeks flushed and breasts heaving. I hoisted her back up the wall and drove into her, eliciting a whimpering cry from her lips. I drove into her again and again, each thrust bringing me deeper inside her and slowly sating my wolf. I heard her cries and smelled her sweet arousal stoking my own fire even more. Her back was arched and her head thrown back in ecstasy when I felt her warm, moist walls clench tightly around me and she screamed and cursed. I drove hard into her a few more times before feeling my own release course through my entire body and I came harder than ever before, swearing and grunting.

Completely spent, I remained inside Bella, my face buried in her neck as she ran her fingers through my hair and panted while trying to regain control over her body. My own breathing slowed and steadied finally and then I heard her sweet voice ask, "Is that better?" I half laughed and told her I was much better before starting to slide her down my body.

Bella gripped onto my arms. "If you let me go right now I'm going to collapse. My legs can't hold me up yet!"

Laughing, I pulled her back up again and carried her upstairs to her bed. She made me shower before she let me into bed with her and I realised, slightly ashamed, that I was filthy from the forest. I had the fastest shower that has probably ever been recorded and went back to find her still naked and waiting for me.

We didn't quit until my stomach's growling threatened to drown out our cries of passion.

A/N: Next chapter tomorrow, and it's Sam and Emily.

***Chapter 19*: Chapter 19**

A/N: Time for some Sam and Emily ... after a little bit of Bella that is. I'm really curious about your thoughts on this chapter because reading all your wonderful reviews, there's a big split in opinion on who Sam should ultimately be with. I also can't believe how many of you were excited about Embry!

Thank you again to feebes for beta reading.

Chapter Eighteen – Perspectives

I watched Jake inhale an enormous omelette in mere minutes and wondered when he last ate. The dark circles under his eyes made me wonder when the last time was that he slept. He was telling me about his trip to Oregon, which he deemed a success. I was listening but while I listened I was taking stock of the bigger picture.

While Jake was away, I had time to think. I remembered the pledge I had made weeks ago, to take care of Jacob and ease his burdens any way I could. Looking at the evidence in front of me now, I could only conclude that I was doing a pretty poor job. Exhausted and starving, Jake was telling me of his initial reaction to Embry's imprinting. He was ashamed of himself for not being more supportive to his friend and pack member. To me it sounded like he was at the end of his tether.

I had been minutes away from leaving for school this morning when Quil had practically beat down my front door. The expression on his face had been strangely anxious as he told me urgently that Jake was on his way and I needed to wait for him. I had started to question him about what was going on but he had interrupted me.

"Bella, Jake needs you to be here."

That was all I needed to hear. I simply agreed.

When Jake had arrived, he looked wild and desperate. He started to kiss me hard and rip at my clothes and my body responded instantly. I wanted him more than I ever had before. I realised he was out of control when he entered me without protection. We had always been careful and a teenage pregnancy was definitely not one of the things we wanted in our lives. I tried to stop him and at first, he didn't even hear me.

What frightened me the most wasn't that I didn't think he would stop; it was that I hadn't really cared. His feral abandon had turned me on beyond reason and he had felt so good inside me, skin on skin. I decided that sorting out birth control pills had just become a priority.

If I had ever needed evidence that a wolf's need for his imprint affected every aspect of his life, it was before me now. The wild desperation on Jacob's face had been replaced with a soft satisfaction despite his exhaustion and hunger. I knew it wasn't just sex either; it was a need to be close to me.

I made my decision. I would move to La Push. I would do it for Jacob.

He was still telling me about his trip. I felt a little smug when he told me that Len agreed with my theory on Sam's broken imprint and I was curious about Jake's added theory. Up until that point I hadn't realised there was a difference between giving up phasing and giving up the wolf. Jake explained that giving up phasing allowed the wolf to lie dormant. The man would age and live a normal life, but with the ability to bring the wolf back at any time it was needed. Giving up the wolf on the other hand, was a decision to reject the wolf and it was irreversible. Jake believed the majority of shape shifters chose to quit phasing so that they could be of service to their tribe at any time it was deemed necessary, but the choice ultimately lay with the man.

When Jake had finished telling me about his trip, I told him about my day yesterday. I had visited Emily after school and spent several hours comforting her. She was a mess. She had decided to go and stay with her sister for a while, until she and Sam were in a better position to work through things. I voiced my concern that Emily had no way of getting to the Makah reservation, where her sister lived with her two young children. Jake immediately said one of the wolves would take her and quickly phoned Quil to ask him to be on standby for that job.

I then told Jake about the phone call I had from Kate while he was gone. She would arrive in a couple of days and spend two to three days with me.

Together, we took stock of where we were. Jacob's first priority was to fill the rest of his pack and Billy in on developments in Oregon. He was now two wolves down. Sam had quit and Embry was with Nina for the time being. That put extra pressure on the remaining eight wolves. Embry was due to patrol the next day but Jacob hadn't been patrolling lately and was keen to scout the territory to familiarise himself with all the most recent scents. He wanted to make sure he could identify new intruders as soon as they arrived. He decided he would spend the next day patrolling.

Kate would arrive the day after that and both Jake and I needed to be with her for a couple of days. It was imperative that she was gone by the time Akando and his pack arrived.

Jacob needed to work out where Akando's pack would stay while they were in La Push. He thought the wolves may be happy to sleep in the forest but they would need access to food and showers; and as the imprints were likely to come with

them, beds would need to be available too.

I could tell that the other pack arriving was going to make things more intense for Jacob. He would need to plan for training schedules. He would also take responsibility for assuring harmony between the two packs. Wolves were territorial by nature. The men could understand the need to work together but Jacob was concerned that when phased, the wolves from the opposing packs may become aggressive with one another. Then on the hospitality side, there would be vast quantities of food needing to be organised and probably a bonfire too.

Just talking about it all made me feel a little stressed. Jake was outwardly calm. When I commented on how well he was dealing with it all, he just shrugged and told me he was fine so long as I was beside him. It was when I wasn't there that things began to overwhelm him.

By now it was one in the afternoon and with a sigh and a stretch; Jake stood up and said he needed to get back to the reservation. He would no doubt be busy for the rest of the day and evening and would be patrolling all day tomorrow. I hugged him tight, vowing to myself that I would find a way to move to La Push sooner rather than later. I knew Jake needed me more than ever over the coming weeks even if he wasn't saying it.

On a whim, I decided that as it was after lunch anyway I would skip the rest of the day at school and accompany Jake to La Push. I wanted to see how Emily was.

He teased me on the drive over. "Who would ever have thought Bella Swan would miss an entire morning of school so that she could have sex?"

I laughed, "Who would ever have thought Jacob Black would **make** Bella Swan want to miss an entire morning of school to have sex?"

He grinned at me but mentioning school reminded me of something I wanted to ask him about.

"Jake, have you been going to school at all recently?"

He looked at me in utter disbelief. "Uh, when exactly do you think I can make it to school?"

"That's what I thought."

"Bella honey, we make sure Brady, Collin and Seth go. But for the rest of us, it's not gonna happen right now."

"Don't you want to finish high school though?" I asked quietly.

Jake shrugged, "Protecting the tribe is too important Bella. Maybe if there's a time that the threats are over, I'll go to community college or something. But right now? It's just not a priority honey. Besides, you know I just want to work with cars and I can do that already."

I thought about it. I knew that on some level he was right but it felt unfair that those members of the tribe who had already sacrificed the most were also expected to give up their right to an education. I wondered how Jake would react if I moved in with him and then insisted on tutoring him. Not well, I decided with a smile.

Jake drove us in my truck to Emily's house and stayed long enough to determine that Sam wasn't at home. Then he left to see his dad with a promise of calling me later that evening. I settled in to spend the rest of the day with Emily.

Emily's POV

I was packing the last of my belongings when Jake and Bella arrived. I saw Jake's eyes widen when he took in my appearance. I supposed my eyes would be bloodshot and swollen from all the tears. My hair was probably matted and I had paid no attention to what clothes I had put on this morning. Jake asked if Sam was home and instead of yelling at him that this was no longer a home, I calmly told him Sam had moved out for the time being.

Watching the naked love in Jacob's eyes as he looked at Bella and told her he would call her later before quickly but tenderly kissing her goodbye, I felt a stab of pain in my heart. I wondered if this was similar to how Leah had felt when she had seen Sam and me together. I wondered if it was how Bella had felt being around Sam and I after the Cullen leech left her.

I invited Bella inside, grateful that she had come to visit again.

I had been at home with Sam the day before yesterday when Jake came round after his trip to Oregon. Sam was exhausted. He had been running extra patrols ever since the news of the Volturi attack and he had been furious with Jake for disobeying him and going to Oregon. I was worried about him, worried about the Volturi and worried about the whole situation with Leah.

All the time Sam and I had been together, the guilt of what we had done to Leah had hung over us. She had been my cousin and best friend. She had been Sam's fiancé and lover. Between us, we had broken her. The natural guilt we felt was curiously dampened. It was always present but never acute. Sam told me that was the effect of the imprint. I had wondered more than once whether that was a good thing. It was the same with my scars. I would look in the mirror and feel

horror at what I saw. Sam would look at me and I would see the guilt in his eyes. But my horror and his guilt were always anesthetised somehow.

Ever since Leah had phased, she used the pack mind to throw up memories at Sam. Promises he had made and subsequently broken. Special times they had shared together and her pain when he had left her. She was angry and bitter and neither of us blamed her. I watched as the guilt grew within Sam and wondered whether it would be better to allow it to surface and deal with it, instead of having it always subdued by the imprint. He was as sweet and loving towards me as ever but sometimes I would find him deep in thought and I sensed that until he could face his own guilt, there would always be a part of him closed off to me. I had begged him to hand the Alpha status over to Jacob. That boy was growing up at a ridiculous rate and now that he had Bella beside him he was ready to take on the world. If Sam was no longer Alpha I reasoned, he could ask Jacob to avoid having Leah and him patrolling at the same time. In such a large pack it was a small request. Sam had promised to think about it.

So when Jake came to ask for the Alpha status, I was horrified when Sam refused him. I saw Jake's facial expression change and heard the authority in his voice when he all but ordered Sam to submit the title. But the next thing I knew, both men were out in the yard, phased and fighting, looking ready to kill one another. After they took off into the forest, all I could do was wait.

While I waited, I began to cook for the enormous appetites of the pack. It was methodical and helped to distract me. I heard one of the wolves howl and it sounded like a summons to the rest of the pack. A short time later, my head jerked round to the window facing the forest when I heard a series of howls the likes of which I had never heard before. I made my way slowly over to the window as what sounded like a gradually increasing number of wolves joined in. The term *baying for blood* came to mind and I shuddered, fear gripping my heart. I had no doubts that Jacob would be the victor in this fight.

I was still standing at the window when I had the sensation of a strong cable snap deep within my being, then another and still another. A series of snaps and I found myself on my knees, gasping as all the affinity I had felt with Sam disappeared. In its place were horror and grief, guilt and regret. Without even having known it was possible, I understood immediately that the imprint had broken.

It felt as though scales had been lifted from my eyes and everything that I had known to be true but not been able to feel came cascading on top of me. Sobs wracked my body as I remembered the look of utter betrayal on Leah's face when the realisation of what I had done to her sank in. Hysteria grew within me as I thought of the hideous scars etched deeply in my face and neck. Over a year too late, I fully grasped the enormity of the implications of that fateful day when Samuel Uley had looked into my eyes.

When the back door opened and Jake half carried, half-dragged, a bruised and bloody Sam over the threshold I could only scream incoherently at them. I registered Jake's eyes opening wide in shock. He looked to Sam for guidance but Sam looked as confused and scared as I was.

Jacob Black, the new Alpha of the pack and future Quileute Chief, had risen to the occasion. He laid Sam out on the couch. Then he helped me to my feet and hugged me to him. I thought briefly that if he told me everything would be okay, I would lose control and claw at him. He didn't. He just held me and allowed me to vent my emotions. The comfort he gave finally allowed me to pull myself together enough to stop screaming and yelling. Jake boiled water, made me tea, and used the rest of the water to start cleaning the worst of Sam's wounds. It seemed as though his ability to heal had already slowed.

Finally Jacob had to leave. Sam and I had barely looked at one another, let alone spoken and I could tell Jake was uncomfortable with leaving us by ourselves. He promised to send someone to check on us later and with a last stricken look at Sam, he left.

When Sue Clearwater arrived an hour later, Sam and I were in the same positions Jake had left us in. We still hadn't exchanged a word.

Eventually, I went to bed. I lay awake late into the night, sobbing and grieving. At some point sleep claimed me. When I awoke the next morning, Sam had gone. He had left a note telling me to take time to think and he would do the same.

Think. All I could do was think. I spent the day alternating between tears of guilt and sorrow and screams of rage and fear. Kim came in at some point in the morning. She tried to get me to eat and I threw the plate across the room. Sue came in again at lunchtime and sat with me, watching over me to ensure I did eat something. I wondered how difficult this was for her; she was Leah's mother after all. I asked her how Leah was handling this and she answered that her daughter hadn't said much. *Typical Leah.* Before leaving, Sue told me that Sam had asked the council for the temporary use of a small cabin on the outskirts of the reservation. The council had readily agreed. It would be payment in return for services rendered.

I guessed which cabin it was and could have screamed at the irony.

Bella came in after school. Since she was probably the only woman I would ever know who understood the pain created by the loss of a supernatural love. I clung to her and sobbed out the contents of my heart. She listened and soothed and stayed with me late into the night.

By the time evening fell I knew I had to leave La Push. This wasn't my home. In the eyes of too many people here I had destroyed Leah's happiness. Sam was no longer a wolf and I was no longer a wolf girl. My home was on the Makah reservation. I would go and stay with my sister and help her look after her two daughters while I worked out what I should do next.

I still loved Sam. I didn't know whether he still loved me. I knew I had to work through over a year's worth of guilt and regrets, as well as come to terms with the possibility of a future without Sam and scars I could never truthfully explain to the outside world.

I began to pack.

Sam

Emily Emily Leah Emily Leah Emily Emily Leah EMILY

It had always been a dichotomy, the wolf versus the man. The wolf adored Emily, wanted Emily, needed Emily. The man knew it was wrong.

The wolf hurt Emily and left her scarred. The man knew it was wrong. The man also knew that it was wrong for Emily to forgive so easily and accept so readily.

Domestic harmony was everything Sam had ever wanted. The man had wanted it with Leah. The wolf chose Emily. The wolf discarded Leah like trash. The man knew it was wrong.

But the wolf was stronger than the man.

Oh, Sam loved Emily. He wanted her and he cherished her. The more time passed, the more her sweet nature soothed and nurtured him. He fell deeply in love with her. But always, always in the back of his mind and in a deep place in his heart, was guilt.

Guilt over Leah. Guilt over Emily's scars. Guilt that he coveted the role of Alpha that was not his.

The wolf quelled the guilt.

When the imprint broke, the whole pack felt it happen. What Sam was fairly sure they had **not** felt was the punishing hand that had reached right into his soul and snapped the first cable that bonded him to Emily. One severed bond was all it took and the rest fell like a house of playing cards tumbling down.

Like a wound ripped open, all of Sam's guilt and regret that had been pushed down by the wolf came exploding up to the surface.

LEAH.

Unable to fathom what had happened, unable to process the indescribable pain of all his previously repressed natural emotions, Sam had lain in the dirt and cried. When Jacob had brought him home, Sam hadn't even been able to look at Emily. He loved her but he had been weak. His weakness had driven a wedge between two girls who had been best friends their whole lives. His weakness had destroyed the heart of one of those girls and the beauty of the other.

Would they ever forgive him now?

Lost in a sea of confusion and regret, Sam had only been vaguely aware of the day passing and Emily retiring. At some point in the evening, he tried to eat but everywhere he turned in the cabin was reminders of what he had done. He wanted only one thing right now. He wanted to know that Leah could forgive him.

Heedless of the late hour, Sam sought out Leah Clearwater. She was at home but awake. Of course she heard and smelled his arrival and stole quietly from her childhood home to meet her old love. With an unspoken understanding, they walked silently together to a clearing in the forest that was once their special place.

Leah turned to him when they arrived. "Sam." Just one word, just his name. Her tone was full of confusion. Sam could barely look at her and she became enraged. "**Look** at me, dammit!"

He obeyed and what he saw made him gasp aloud. Standing straight and tall under the moonlight, Leah looked like a warrior princess. Strength oozed from her and behind the broken hearted look in her eyes, Sam could see again the girl he had loved.

Falling to his knees in front of her, Sam wrapped his arms around her waist and begged her to forgive him. He was asking not for her love, but for her forgiveness. He begged her to understand that he was weak, that a part of him had always loved her, that she knew that because she had seen it in his mind and heart when they were phased together. He poured out all his regrets and all his guilt and as she listened he could feel her body relax and her arms finally wound around his neck as he sobbed against her stomach.

When all his words were exhausted, Leah knelt in the ground beside him. She cupped his face in her hands and made

him look at her. When he did, he knew she had forgiven him and something like peace came to the man for the first time since he had imprinted on Emily Young.

Leah kissed his cheek and whispered the words he desperately needed to hear. "I forgive you Sam." She stood up and gently unwound his arms from around her waist. She pulled him to his feet and said, "Go home to Emily." Then she proudly turned and walked away from him.

Sam stayed in the forest for a long time that night, alone with his thoughts. He never knew that Leah Clearwater, with peace in her heart, spent the night watching over him, protecting him from any wild animals or vampires who may have chosen that night to cross into their land.

Finally, close to dawn Sam returned to the cabin. He still loved Emily but he knew that he had to forgive himself and heal his heart before he could justifiably ask for her forgiveness. He left her a note, feeling cowardly but knowing that if he spoke to her his resolve would crumble and they would once again build a relationship on shaky foundations. He went straight to Billy Black and asked him for use of the small cabin on the outskirts of the reservation that was kept for the Alpha of the wolf pack.

It had never been offered to Sam. He had never expected it. He was never really Alpha.

Billy readily agreed and told him only that if Jacob wanted it sooner rather than later, Sam would need to move out. Sam promised he would only stay a short time, until such time as he could face Emily again.

For the first time since the role of Alpha wolf had been thrust upon him, forcing him to become what he was never destined to be, Sam would be able to find himself again.

Bella's POV

It was difficult seeing Emily like this. When I visited her yesterday after school, I was immediately reminded of how I had felt in the days following Edward leaving. I supposed that in many respects there were similarities. Vampires didn't imprint but Edward had definitely had some kind of supernatural hold over me. I figured I had a pretty good idea of how Emily was feeling. She seemed to think so too and spent yesterday afternoon and evening pouring out the contents of her broken heart.

Today she seemed slightly calmer if still very depressed. I had discussed everything with Jake and we both thought that telling her the truth was best. I told her now about the theory we had come up with regarding the broken imprint and how Len was looking into it. I promised to let her know what he found. For the first time, I wondered what had happened to the imprints in the records Len had referred to.

"I always knew there were unresolved issues about Leah between us." Emily told me the sense she had had of negative emotions being dampened by the imprint. "It was as if the imprint wasn't allowing us to dwell on anything from the past that could cause any problems between us. Now that it's broken, all those muffled emotions are coming back at me full force."

I sincerely hoped that Emily wouldn't ever repeat what she had just said in front of Jacob. I knew that I had never felt anything like what Emily was describing and I was as confident as ever that my love for Jake was not reliant on the imprint being in place. But I also knew that hearing an imprint could smother genuine emotions would panic him.

I was surprised by how ready for leaving Emily was. She had more or less finished packing and was eager to leave. I promised to ask Quil to come for her just as soon as he could. Then, an idea forming in my mind, I asked if Emily knew where Sam was.

To my surprise, Emily started to laugh. She sounded slightly hysterical. "He's staying in the Alpha's cabin."

"The what?"

Emily dabbed at her eyes. "There's a small cabin on the outskirts of the reservation. It's kept for the pack Alpha, Jacob really. Sue told me yesterday that Sam asked to use it for a while. I guess he just couldn't stand to be here."

I was stunned. Jacob had never mentioned a cabin. I wondered if he even knew about it.

"Don't worry Bella," Emily said. "Sam won't need to stay there for long. He can move back in here as soon as I've gone."

My mind was racing, a cabin for Jacob, a cabin ultimately for **us**. And in the meantime, an empty cabin for Akando and his packs use.

Trying to focus solely on Emily, I spent an additional two hours talking with her, listening to her, giving her my opinion when she asked for it. I prepared her some food and watched her play with it. My heart throbbed when she cried and I wondered yet again just how many lives the Cullens would have destroyed before all of this was over.

A/N: And as always, please tell me your thoughts! Next chapter will be up in a couple of days.

Chapter 20: Chapter 20 Kate

A/N: There's something in this chapter that, to be perfectly honest, I never quite got my head around in the books. So I've left it up to Jake to tell you about it. The two bits I'm talking about are in italics and are taken directly from Eclipse.

Another huge thank you to feebes for beta reading. And, once again, thank you for all the reviews. I had a fabulous review from a reader that I couldn't send a message to so an extra big thank you to you, huinsutt99.

Chapter Nineteen – Kate

After leaving Emily that evening I headed to Billy's house. I knew Jake would still be with the pack but I had loads I wanted to discuss with Billy. I busied myself making dinner and when it was in the oven I sat down in the living room to talk with him.

I asked him first of all about my idea of using Sam and Emily's cabin for the visiting pack and their imprints. It would be small but I thought that we could manage provided the wolves didn't mind sleeping in the forest. Billy agreed that it probably made sense and promised me to get word to Sam to ensure he didn't mind.

I then asked Billy about the cabin Sam was in. He confirmed it was kept for the pack Alpha, an acknowledgement from the elders that the role was a demanding one. It was, he told me, small and basic and probably in need of some repair but it was Jacob's whenever he wanted it. He told me that Jacob had been told of the cabin when he first phased but hadn't mentioned it since. I didn't say as much to Billy but I thought Jake probably felt he needed to stay at home to look after his dad. I wasn't sure how Jake and I would manage to move into the cabin with Billy needing round the clock care, but it was enough for now to know that we potentially had a home to live in that wouldn't require one or both of us to be earning a substantial income.

Finally, I asked Billy about Charlie. I didn't see how I was going to move to La Push without major resistance from Charlie. I really thought he needed to know the truth. Billy told me that the council were having a meeting at the start of the following week to discuss a number of issues and Charlie was high on the agenda.

I was beginning to feel impatient. I wanted to be in La Push in time for the Oregon pack to arrive. I decided I would just need to tell Charlie that the tribe had important visitors next week and I wanted to help with the hospitality side. Billy agreed to corroborate my story and promised that he would push the council next week. We both felt terrible for lying to Charlie and knew it would get worse before it got better. In a pitiful attempt to ease my guilt, I phoned him at work and told him to come to the Blacks' for dinner.

I hadn't been certain when Jake would be home. He arrived while Billy, Charlie and I were having dinner. He took in the scene in front of him. I was sitting eating a meal with our dads and I immediately jumped up to get Jake's plate for him. When I saw the look of gratitude and love in his eyes, I wanted to hold him tight and tell him I was never leaving.

Jake looked tired. While our dads watched TV and we cleared up the dinner dishes, he told me about his pack meeting. It had all gone well. The wolves were happy for Embry and relieved about the extra wolves that would be fighting with them. Quil would bring Emily to the Makah reservation tomorrow.

We went out to the garage and I filled him in on how Emily was doing. I suggested the use of Sam's cabin for the Oregon pack and told him I would go the next day after school and prepare the cabin for the two imprints and Nina.

When I asked him about the Alpha's cabin, Jake looked confused for a moment. After just a second, his face brightened.

"Damn! I'd forgotten about that! Yeah dad told me about it the night I phased. I didn't really think much about it to be honest Bells. I can't leave dad alone. But yeah, it's there. Might be a good place to go when we need to be alone," he added suggestively grinning at me.

Jake was sitting in the only chair in the garage and I was on his lap. I stood up and turned myself so that I was straddling him when I sat back down again.

"And what if," I asked kissing his neck, "I want to be alone with you **all** the time?"

He angled his head so that he could kiss my cheek and replied, "I'd say we'd need to find dad a babysitter."

I smiled at him. I was hoping that when Charlie knew the truth, he could be persuaded to move into Jake's old room. Yeah okay, maybe I was grasping at straws but now that I had made up my mind, I really wanted to move in with Jake.

Jake was watching me closely. "Bella," he said slowly. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

I attempted nonchalance. "Well, it would be for my safety of course. But knowing that the cabin's there ..."

"You want to move in with me," he said it slowly, searching my eyes.

I grinned at him, "Can't wait, actually."

"Bells!" Jake hugged me tightly and started babbling. "Fuck I can't believe you've agreed to this! Okay well we need to give Sam some time to get his head sorted. And I know there's some work needing done on the cabin, probably just general maintenance so if the guys help we can get it done in no time. And it wouldn't take long to get your stuff all packed up and moved in. So when Rachel arrives then I'll be free to just ..."

"Whoa! Stop!" I shouted. "Rachel's coming home?"

"Oh! Yeah I forgot to tell you with everything else that's going on. Rachel wants to move back in for a while. And it's perfect cos she can look after dad!" Jake beamed at me triumphantly and I couldn't help but laugh.

"Wow! So ... we're moving into the Alpha cabin together?"

Jake kissed me hard, "Hell yeah Bells."

Our kiss became more heated. Jake began tugging at my shirt and I reminded him that Charlie could come looking for me at any second.

"So we'll stop," he mumbled against my lips, before continuing to pull off my shirt. He kissed down my chest and pulled the material of my bra out of the way so that he could take one of my nipples into his mouth. His hands curved around my butt and pulled me tighter against his erection. I was becoming completely lost in Jacob when he suddenly pulled my shirt back on over my head, stood up and moved to the side of the Rabbit, all with werewolf speed.

I was confused for a few seconds until Charlie popped his head round the garage door.

"It's getting late Bells, we should head home."

I gawked as I realised that dad had been trying to sneak up on us. I turned to Jake who was concentrating hard on a dent on the side of the car.

"Uh, Jake?"

He looked at me with a slightly tortured expression and definite mirth. "Yeah give me a sec here Bella. I'll be out soon."

I looked at him confused until I saw the huge tent in his shorts and realised that he was hiding from Charlie.

I couldn't help the bubble of laughter that escaped my lips and shaking my head, followed Charlie outside.

We definitely needed our own place.

Jake had to patrol the whole of Thursday and I really needed to go to school to catch up after my illicit day off. I received a cryptic text from Jake shortly after lunchtime asking me to meet him in the trees surrounding Forks High School as soon as I could get away. Between afternoon classes I feigned illness and took off.

Jake was watching out for me and found me quickly. He looked strung out and I instantly dropped my bag and went to him, holding him close to me.

"Bella," he said in a tortured whisper. "Something's happened."

My mind went into overdrive. Volturi. Edward. Charlie.

"It's Quil," he continued.

"Quil?"

Jake sat down on the mossy ground and pulled me down beside him. His face was twisted in an expression I didn't recognise.

"He imprinted."

"Oh!" I wasn't sure why this was such bad news. Perhaps because it had taken place on the Makah reservation and with Embry also away in Oregon, Jake was beginning to notice his pack numbers dwindling.

"Bella," Jake turned to me earnestly. "I need you to try and understand this, okay? Because if **you** don't..." he tailed off, frowning.

"Start at the beginning, Jake."

He took a deep breath. "Okay. So I was patrolling an hour or so ago and Quil phased, just long enough to tell me to get rid of anyone else who was patrolling cos he needed to show me something. I was with Brady doing some training runs and told him to go home. Quil eventually phased back in and showed me his imprint. Bella there is **nothing** creepy about it, okay? He's shown me everything that's in his heart and ... Did Emily or I ever tell you that a wolf will be whatever the imprint needs him to be? *Whether that's a protector, or a lover, or a friend, or a brother.* It doesn't have to be like our imprint, okay?"

I could see that Jake was really worked up so I simply nodded. He exhaled sharply before blurting out, "Quil's imprinted on Emily's two year old niece."

"What?" It exploded out of me before I had time to think and I saw Jake's face twist slightly. I thought hard. "Well, what does that mean?"

"It means that Claire will be the best looked after two year old there is... *Quil will be the best, kindest big brother any kid ever had. There isn't a toddler on the planet that will be more carefully looked after than that little girl will be. And then, when she's older and needs a friend, he'll be more understanding, trustworthy, and reliable than anyone else she knows. And then, when she's grown up, they'll be as happy as us.*"

I was silent trying to process this. Finally I asked, "How's Quil?"

Jake shook his head, "Confused."

I could imagine.

"So what happens now?"

"Well his imprint is different to the others. He doesn't need to be with Claire all the time. He thinks he can come home. But I need to tell the rest of the pack and explain it to the council and Akando's pack."

I moved closer to Jake and put my arms round his waist. "It'll work out Jake."

He pulled me tighter and said against my hair, "Yeah, I know, it's just something else about imprinting we've never come across before."

We sat there a while longer talking. Finally Jake stood up and pulled me to my feet. "Are you going back to class Ms Swan?"

I looked at him mischievously, "Only if you have no better ideas."

Jake raised one eyebrow at me. "Oh I have **tons** of ideas honey." He scooped me up effortlessly and backed me up against the nearest tree. "But none of them," he kissed my lips, "are suitable," he kissed my neck, "for school."

"Mmmmm," I wrapped my arms around his neck and closed my eyes, enjoying his kisses. He moved his mouth back to mine and kissed me deeply. My hands immediately started roaming his body and I could feel his arousal against me. I rolled my hips against him and he pulled me tighter to his body.

All too soon he pulled back. I pouted and tried to pull him closer again. He smiled as he kissed me one more time and then whispered in my ear, "Paul's somewhere around here."

I literally jumped. Damn wolf patrols!

"And," Jake continued, "I was planning on patrolling all day so I didn't bring any protection with me."

Frustrated, I cursed my lack of birth control pills. I had already made my appointment though.

"I gotta go patrol again honey," he said ruefully. I gave him one final hug.

"Everything will be okay with Quil," I told him. He looked at me doubtfully and turned to go.

"Hey Jake!"

He turned back around.

"Can I see you?" I had been meaning to ask him since we got together. The day he had phased outside his home was the only time I had really seen him in wolf form and the longing I had felt then to touch his fur and stroke him hadn't dissipated.

Jake looked momentarily stunned and then delighted. He kicked off his shorts and tied them around his ankle, laughing at me when I blatantly stared at him. Then, before I could process exactly what had happened, the man was gone and in his place was the beautiful russet wolf.

He stayed very still as I approached him. I rolled my eyes.

"I'm not afraid of you."

I saw the mischievous glint in his eyes so I was prepared when he darted at me suddenly to try and scare me. I barely reacted and saw the amusement in his eyes. The next thing I knew, I was flat on my back with the enormous animal towering over me.

I slapped his snout gently. "I'm still not afraid of you. But now I'm all muddy!"

Barking a laugh, the wolf lay down next to me and began rolling in the mud as if he was revelling in it. I lay on my side, head propped up on my elbow, laughing at him.

The wolf finally stopped showing off and lay on his side next to me, facing me. Looking into the eyes that were oh so Jake's, I saw happiness and love shining from them. I wondered whether he had wanted to show me his wolf and asked him. He nodded, pushing his snout into my neck in a gesture that mirrored the man's tendency to bury his head in my neck when he was emotional.

I sat up and slowly began running my fingers through his fur. It was thick and soft and beautiful. I saw that Jake had closed his eyes as if he were basking in the sensation. I buried my face in the fur on his side and inhaled deeply. As I had thought he would that day outside his cabin, he smelled of wood and earth and **Jake**.

Finally, I lay down again beside him and snuggled into his warmth. He moved one massive paw protectively around me and I whispered to him that I loved him.

Man. Wolf. I loved them both. They were not separate beings. I understood that completely.

Eventually, Jake stood up and nuzzled me gently. I understood he was telling me that he needed to go and nodded at him. He loped off, looking back at me once or twice before disappearing among the trees.

Feeling slightly bereft, I headed back for my last class of the day. I spent it staring longingly out the window at the trees where I knew Jake was patrolling somewhere. Protecting us all.

After school, as I had promised Jake I would, I headed for Sam and Emily's cabin. I knew that I wouldn't need to do too much work in it as Emily had always kept it clean and tidy. Sure enough, it wasn't long before it was ready for visitors. I found that there were two beds there already and knew that I could bring Charlie's camping bed for the third girl who would be staying. Between the bedding and towels that Emily had left behind and those I could bring from home, there would be more than enough.

When I had finished there, I headed straight home to study. I would be missing school tomorrow to meet with Kate. And next week while the Oregon pack were in La Push, I doubted I would be in school much either. I was grateful that I had studied so hard during the months I had been grieving Edward as I was still ahead in all my classes, but I was too close to graduating to blow it now.

Charlie and I had a quiet dinner together and I took the opportunity to tell him about the visitors that would be in La Push next week. He took it in his stride and commented only that I didn't need to miss school. I told him I agreed, feeling guilty that I would be skipping tomorrow again. I remembered that I had also cut class yesterday, and the reasons why, and blushed furiously.

When I awoke the next morning, I could feel a ball clenching in the pit of my stomach. Today was the day Kate arrived to test my shielding abilities. I felt anxious and distracted and at first I wasn't sure why. It was only when I received a text from Jake that I understood.

Just woke up from one helluva dream about you. Miss you.

I realised with a jolt that it had been nearly two days since we had last made love and that I was feeling frustrated. I stared at myself in the mirror in disbelief. What on earth had he done to me?

As we had arranged, Jake picked me up after breakfast and we headed for the old Cullen house. I saw Jake's nose wrinkle in disgust as we drew closer to it.

"There's still so much stink here! And a fresh scent, that must be Kate. Seth smelled it last night when she arrived."

Feeling nervous, I approached the front door gripping Jacob's hand tightly. A glance at him showed his jaw set firmly, his eyes serious. He was all business.

The door opened and a beautiful blonde vampire with telltale golden eyes appeared before us. She turned sharply to Jacob, her nose predictably wrinkled in distaste.

"What are you?" she asked with fear evident in her eyes. She looked rapidly between Jake and I. Realising what she could be thinking, I quickly stepped forward.

"No, nobody's here to hurt you Kate! Carlisle would never have sent you here if he thought you would be in any danger. This is my boyfriend Jacob. He is... Quileute." I watched her closely to see if that meant anything to her but she didn't react. Either she didn't know of the wolves or she was very good at hiding her emotions.

"Nobody is going to get hurt here," Jacob said firmly and I was sure he intended it as a warning as well as reassurance.

Still looking wary, Kate stood back from the door and let us inside. I felt Jake's tension and rubbed circles in his hand with my thumb.

"I apologise if I over-reacted," Kate said, standing just inside the closed door and surveying us. "This area does not seem

to be kind to... people like me."

Jake tilted his head in enquiry.

"My sister's mate came this way not long ago and hasn't returned. There have been no sightings of him and no word from him," she frowned. "It was one of the reasons I agreed to come here. Irina has been searching around our own territories but he was headed this way so ... Anyway," she said briskly. "You wanted me to show you my power?" She raised an eyebrow enquiringly at me, disbelief apparent on her face.

I was distracted by Jake. He was looking intently at Kate.

"Your sister's mate, what's he like?" Kate seemed confused by the question so he clarified, "I might've seen him."

"He is one of my kind. His name is Laurent." I gasped. Kate turned to me. "Yes, I am aware that you have met him. Have you seen him?"

I was at a loss. I couldn't possibly tell her that Jacob had destroyed him and expect her to help me. I settled for saying "Not recently," in a strangled voice. I changed the subject quickly. "I'm hoping that I'll be immune to your power."

Kate laughed shortly. "Bella, **nobody** is immune to my power. Not vampires and certainly not humans." She looked at Jacob doubtfully, as if she was unsure what category he might fit into.

"Can we please try?" I asked her. Jake stiffened next to me.

Kate looked at me hard. "Carlisle asked me not to delve too deeply into what you want Bella and I will respect his wishes. But you are aware that I am about to inflict intense pain on you?" I tightened my grip on Jake's hand, partly in fear and partly to restrain him. He felt as though he was about to explode. "I'm not sadistic about my use of my power," Kate added. "Unlike others of my kind, I do not enjoy watching someone in pain."

The longer she talked the more I wanted to turn and run away from her. I needed to just get this over with. I let go of Jake's hand, held my own out to Kate and waited.

With one last glance at Jacob, Kate took my hand.

We all waited. Kate frowned and looked like she was concentrating hard. Another moment passed and Jake chuckled.

"Damn Bells!" he said proudly.

Kate let go of my hand. "You didn't feel anything?" Her voice was incredulous.

I shook my head, pleased. "Kate, we have a theory that I am something known as a shield. Do you know anything about that?"

"I've heard of shields," Kate frowned. "The Volturi have a shield." Jake and I exchanged a glance. This was the kind of information we needed. Kate asked me if I could project my shield. When this drew blank looks from both Jake and I, she explained it meant extending my shield to protect somebody else.

"That's what I'm here to try and learn to do, Kate."

She looked at Jake and he nodded, holding his hand out to her. It looked as though the prospect of physical contact with her was utterly repellent to him. Kate seemed to be thinking the same about him.

"Wait!" I shouted just as Kate was about to touch Jake's hand. I looked wildly from one to the other. "What exactly am I supposed to do?"

"Just shield me," Jake said with a half grin.

"You'll just find it within you," Kate advised me. She grabbed Jake's hand and the next thing I knew he was on his knees, yelling and blurring round the edges.

Kate backed up. "What. Are. You." She asked through clenched teeth.

Jake was on his feet and in her face. "I'm your worst fucking nightmare, leech!"

"JAKE!" I admonished him. I realised how utterly naive it had been to assume that Jake would be able to sit back and take a vampire inflicting pain on him. I turned desperately to Kate. "Jacob's a werewolf." Her eyes widened in horror and she backed further away from him. "He won't hurt you ..." I tailed off. I had been about to say "unless you hurt him" but as she had just electrocuted him, that wasn't the best choice of words. I turned to glare at Jake instead. "He won't hurt you." I repeated firmly.

Jake gave me a look that clearly showed he wasn't so sure about that. I ignored him and continued talking to Kate. "I have angered the Volturi and Edward Cullen has joined forces with them to come here, for me." I thought it best to keep the wolves out of this as much as possible. "If I can shield Jacob, he can help protect me."

I was aware I was being very economical with the truth and I didn't blame Kate when she began to laugh mirthlessly. "You think you and a lone wolf can protect one another from the Volturi? This is a waste of all our time."

"Kate please!" I begged her. "Can you just trust Carlisle? Stay and help me?"

Kate looked utterly undecided.

Jake stepped forward, "Help Bella develop her shield and I'll tell you what happened to the leech with the dreadlocks." I turned to him in disbelief. What was he doing?

"You destroyed him," it wasn't a question.

Jake said nothing. He folded his arms over his chest and stared her down.

"Fine," Kate snapped. "But don't expect me to take it easy on you."

Her hand shot out and Jake flew backwards as if he had been tasered. He leapt to his feet snarling viciously and I knew he was seconds away from phasing.

In that moment I realised that if I did not learn to use my shield fast, this was going to get very ugly. I also realised that Jacob had deliberately provoked Kate to give me this opportunity to practise.

He had more faith in me than I had in myself.

A/N: Next chapter on Monday. Let me know what you think!

***Chapter 21*: Chapter 21 Shield**

A/N: As always, thank you to each and every person who reads this story. I usually try and reply to every review but I have a feeling I missed a few of you that reviewed the last chapter. That's a long story involving a cranky baby and an errant husband lol. Anyway, to anybody I didn't reply to, I'll do better this time.

A huge thank you again to feebees for beta reading. A few paragraphs in particular read much better now:-)

Chapter Twenty – Shield

Two hours later, I was no further along than I had been. I was close to tears as I watched Jacob being shocked again and again. I had never felt so helpless in my life.

After Kate had severely shocked Jake a couple of times, I yelled at her about the promise she had made Carlisle until she assured me she would keep her shocks on a low setting. I had my doubts about her sincerity as I watched Jake grit his teeth again and again. He was doing an incredible job of keeping himself in human form but I could clearly see the effort it was costing him. He looked as though he was on the brink of exploding and taking Kate out. She seemed determined to keep him down.

We had tried a number of different strategies but the problem was that I had no idea what it was exactly that I was supposed to be doing and I had a headache developing from all the mental exertion. When I was holding Jake's hand while Kate shocked him, he insisted that he felt nothing in his hand. That really didn't give me any clues.

Kate admitted after a while that she was actually enjoying helping me. I wasn't sure how much of it was the opportunity to torture a werewolf who was responsible for her sister's misery but I suspected that was the primary reason. Either way, it gave her an incentive to stay and help us.

She suddenly announced that I was lacking motivation. With absolutely no warning, she turned up the strength of her powers, forcing Jacob to his knees, and kept her hand on his shoulder continuously shocking him.

I was horrified that Jacob was letting her do it. His face was contorted in pain and the effort he was obviously expending to stop himself from phasing was positively Herculean.

Kate continued to shock him while I tried desperately to find some way of protecting him.

"I'm going to turn it up," Kate warned me. Anger and frustration burst through me. I gritted my teeth and concentrated even harder. Suddenly, I had the sensation of an elastic band swelling out and away from me like a bubble. It expanded in Jacob's direction and his body sagged immediately. He leapt to his feet and Kate took a step back, startled. They both turned to look at me.

"I did it!" I yelled. "I did it Jake!"

He grinned at me and turned straight back to Kate, "Again!"

"No!" I had done it, but I wasn't sure how.

Kate shocked him again. After a lengthy internal struggle, I found the elastic band again and forced it away from me to encompass Jake. He got to his feet, grinning at me.

"I knew you could do it Bells!" He crowed as if my success was a personal triumph to him.

Even Kate looked pleased with me.

We spent another two hours practising. By that time, I was covered in sweat and exhausted and my head was pounding, but I could consistently shield Jake provided I was standing right next to him. Jake looked dishevelled and sweaty and I could hear his stomach growling loudly. I suggested we take a lunch break and Kate told us to meet her back in the house in an hour or so.

Jake and I went out to the Rabbit and he floored it back to La Push, saying he needed to breathe fresh air as well as eat.

"How bad was it?" I whispered.

Jake caught my hand in his and kissed it. "Don't worry about it Bells. You've got it now, that's the main thing. Now we just need to work on you shielding me from a distance. And it would be good to make sure that I really can protect the rest of the pack through the mind link." He frowned. "D'you think Kate would agree to having me and one of the guys around her in wolf form?"

I doubted it but suggested we just concentrate on my ability to shield Jake for now. I leaned my head back against the seat, exhausted and wishing my headache would clear. I couldn't believe how difficult this was.

"It'll get easier honey," Jake assured me, reading my mind as always.

We had a quick lunch at Jake's and he checked in with the pack. While he was phased, Embry was too and he told Jake that Akando had successfully enlisted one other pack of four wolves to help. He also informed him that the Volturi's greatest strengths in battle appeared to be twins who used mind control to inflict horrific pain and dull the senses. Jake was euphoric on the drive back to see Kate. We had nine additional wolves, doubling the size of the Quileute pack; and I could tenuously control my shield, potentially rendering the Volturi's strongest attackers useless.

For the first time it looked as though we may be able to put up some kind of resistance.

The rest of the afternoon was spent testing the limits of my shield. I managed to protect Jake from across the Cullens' vast living room even when Kate's setting was on the highest she could manage. Both Jake and Kate were relentless with me. Every time I began to lose control of my shield through fatigue, Jake would insist Kate increased the strength or frequency of her shocks for a while. She was only too willing to oblige.

"Bella honey the Volturi aren't going to back off cos you get tired," Jake explained when I began to whine. "That's when they'll step up their attack."

I knew he was right but felt profound relief that he was not my Alpha.

Finally, when I literally started feeling dizzy and nauseous, Kate and Jake agreed on something for the first time all day, that I had had enough. While I sat on the floor with my head in my hands, exhausted and nursing my now splitting headache, they made plans to meet again the following morning for additional electric shock treatment.

Jake picked me up bridal style and carried me out to the Rabbit. He put me in the passenger seat and frowned at me as he buckled me in. He climbed into the driver's seat and drove quickly away from the Cullens' home. I noticed through my headache that he kept looking at me. Finally he asked, "Are you okay Bells?"

"Head hurts, wanna sleep," I curled up as best I could in the seat and was in a state somewhere between waking and sleeping when Jake lifted me from the car. I wasn't sure where he had brought me but when I felt him carrying me upstairs I figured it was Charlie's.

He laid me down in bed and sat beside me stroking my hair back from my face.

"Honey what can I get you? You want some Tylenol?"

I nodded, wincing when the movement made my head hurt more. Jake left the room and was back quickly with a glass of water and the pills.

He sat with me till I fell asleep.

When I woke up at six o'clock the next morning, I felt hungry and washed out. My head, however, was better. There was a note from Jake on my pillow asking me to call him as soon as I woke, no matter what time it was.

He answered on the first ring. "Bella!" His relief was palpable. "Are you okay? I'm **so** sorry I had to go. Quil was arriving back and I needed to spend some time with him."

"I'm fine Jake. I didn't expect you to be here all night with me. I'm okay."

He said he was coming straight over and I got up to make us and Charlie breakfast. When Jake arrived, he pulled me into a bear hug and then stood back to look me over.

"I'm fine!" I insisted. "Just don't be such a slave driver today."

Jake looked conflicted. "Today could be our last day to practise Bells," he said seriously. "Are you up to it?"

Truthfully, I didn't feel up to it at all but I knew that it was quite literally now or never. I nodded as Charlie came into the kitchen and we set about convincing him that we were average teenagers, planning to spend a Saturday hanging out in La Push. I had never been a good liar and I was desperately hoping that before long we could start being more truthful with Charlie.

We were finally in the Rabbit and able to speak openly when I asked Jake if he had managed any sleep the night before. He said he had a few hours but would catch up tonight. I hoped he could.

"How's Quil?"

Jake looked worried. "He's really confused Bella. I mean he's **happy**. He absolutely adores Claire and all he can think about just now is making sure she's happy and safe and has everything she needs. But it's like, at the same time he's scared. Cos this is his life now, you know? He just won't look at anyone else now. He's never gonna date or have a crush on someone, or anything really. And he's so mixed up because this isn't how he wants his life to be; but at the same time he worships Claire and wants to be there for her."

I frowned. I didn't fully understand how imprinting on a child worked and I could understand that Quil was confused about it. It seemed as though his future had pretty much been taken from him, even more so than the rest of the wolves.

"Let's just focus on your shield today, Bells," Jake interrupted my thoughts. "We really need to get it perfect today because Kate will probably be away by tomorrow. I'm still hoping we can persuade her to try out the pack mind thing as well. She knows we destroyed her sister's mate though." He frowned doubtfully.

When we arrived at the Cullen house, the front door was lying open but there was no sign of Kate. It looked eerie. Jake and I exchanged an uneasy glance. He moved in front of me so that he could enter the house first. I could feel my heart begin to pound in fear. What if Kate had decided to seek revenge on her sister's behalf? What if she had called Irina to come and claim her revenge herself?

Acting purely on instinct, I expanded my shield to encompass Jake as he crossed the threshold. A moment later he began vibrating hard and growling loudly as a blur of movement shot across my vision.

By the time I had blinked, Kate was across the other side of the room and Jake had himself more or less under control. Kate looked at me apologetically.

"I wanted to test you," she said. "I'm glad his control is as good as I had guessed."

I realised I was standing stock still with my mouth hanging open.

"She jumped out to shock me," Jake explained through gritted teeth. "I guess you were shielding me."

"She must have been. The force of that shock should have knocked you out. I used my highest setting in case the shock made you take your wolf form."

"It would have," Jake told her grimly. "I could **smell** you just inside the door and I guessed what you were doing. For the record, you might not want to ever pull a stunt like that on a wolf again."

Kate shrugged her shoulders. She turned to me. "You were afraid. I could sense it. Did it make it easier to control the shield?"

I thought about it and nodded. "Yes I think it did. It was just instinctive really, it just happened without me willing it."

Kate nodded, pleased. "I spoke to Carlisle last night. He thought adrenaline would give you greater control over your shield. So I think you can assume that in the stress of the battlefield, you will find it easier to manage. Good! Let's get started."

I had to admit that it was getting easier. I was ridiculously proud of myself for having shielded Jake from Kate's surprise attack and I was also relieved to hear that controlling my shield would be easier if I was stressed or afraid. It seemed as if the mere knowledge of both those things gave me even greater control.

My headache threatened to reappear but never materialised and my dizzy and nauseous spells became less and less frequent as the day wore on. We moved outside mid-morning and eventually I could shield Jake from a considerable distance outdoors.

They continued to push me. I was ordered to withdraw my shield from Jake. Kate would then run at him with vampire speed and I had to instantly shield him from a distance. Jake was no longer expending all his energy concentrating on not phasing in response to the pain Kate was inflicting. It seemed as though he was now expending his energy plotting as many ways to make things difficult for me as he could.

At one point, he blindfolded me to see whether I could shield him without seeing him. Without knowing where he was, I could only expand my shield as far as I could in all directions and hope.

It worked.

Each new success fuelled my confidence which in turn made it easier to control the shield. By the time we stopped for a late lunch, I was certain that I could shield Jake in battle.

Jake approached Kate with a serious expression in his eyes. "Kate, on behalf of all my tribe I want to thank you. Without you, Bella wouldn't have been able to learn how to use her shield. I have one more favour to ask though. This afternoon I would like to bring one of my brothers, another wolf, to test a theory that we have. I understand that you don't need to help us this way. I also understand that it will go against all your instincts to have two wolves around you. But I give you my word that you will not be harmed."

Kate looked at him scornfully. "You destroy my sister's mate and then you ask me to help your brother?"

"No," Jake shook his head. "I'm asking you to help my entire tribe and Bella. And your sister's mate was about to kill Bella. That's why we took him out. We had no choice."

Kate looked at me for a moment. "Carlisle asked me to help you in any way you asked. I will do this out of respect to him. Then I will leave. Come back here in an hour."

On the way back to La Push I asked Jake who he was going to bring.

"Seth," he replied calmly. "He's the most level headed and least likely to lose it when the leech touches him. As much as I'd love to bring Paul it would probably defeat the purpose. Usually I'd say Embry but with him being away it'll need to be Seth."

We headed straight to the Clearwaters' home. Leah came to the door and told us Seth had accompanied Sue to Port Angeles for the afternoon.

"Fuck!" Jake exploded.

Leah raised an eyebrow at him, "Trouble, Alpha?"

I was looking at her closely. Something seemed different about her. I hadn't seen her since the day Sam's imprint had broken when she had been angry and confused. Today, she seemed... at peace, happy, almost.

Jake quickly explained about Kate. Leah looked at me with a smile. "I'm impressed Bella!"

"Thanks! Uh, are you okay Leah?"

"Never better," she winked at me and I blinked back at her, confused.

"C'mon then, let's go," she said, walking out her house.

"What? No, Leah, you can't do this," Jake told her. "You'll never keep control. You'd need to let the leech **touch** you." He shuddered at the memory. "And if anything goes wrong with the shielding thing, trust me the pain's a bitch."

"Who else are you gonna ask Jake? Paul? One of the pups? Oh you could ask Jared but he's on a date with Kim today so he'll be pissed before you even start if you drag his ass over to the leech's house. That kind of leaves you with me. Unless you wanna involve Quil, which I don't think is a good idea right now." She folded her arms and stared at him.

Jake cursed. "You'd better fucking keep in control Leah," he warned her. "In fact I'm gonna slap an order on you before we go in there."

"Whatever. I'll meet you there."

"Give us time to get something to eat first."

Jake spent the rest of our lunch break worrying about this development. There was something different about Leah that I couldn't put my finger on. Jake, of course, hadn't noticed. He promised he'd make sure she was okay when they were phased together. I was fairly sure that she was okay. She just seemed happy, which was not a word that was usually said in the same sentence as Leah's name.

Jake brought me back to the Cullen house and left me with Kate while he ran into the trees to phase and find Leah. I could tell he was nervous about leaving me with a vampire; and Kate seemed anxious to get this over with.

While Jake was away, Kate asked me what exactly it was I had done to anger the Volturi.

"I know about your kind," I shrugged. "And I think it was more to do with Edward than the Volturi, or as far as I gathered from Alice."

"Bella," Kate said quietly. "You know you do not stand a chance against the Volturi."

"We're not going to just lie down and take it either though," I shot back heatedly.

Kate nodded. "Fair enough," she was thoughtful for a while and then said, "I won't tell Irina about Laurent. She'll only come here and interfere. I'll leave it to the Volturi to take revenge for her."

I wasn't quite sure what to say to that. "Thanks" didn't seem appropriate considering she was talking about my demise which was, apparently, inevitable.

Kate's head shot round to look out the nearest window, "They're here."

We made our way outside as the two wolves emerged from the tree line. Kate stayed close to the house as the wolves moved slowly in our direction. I could tell they were deliberately trying not to alarm her. I knew Jake would be uneasy with me in such close proximity to a nervous vampire and began walking towards them. As I passed Leah, I caught her eye and nearly laughed when she winked at me again. *What has gotten into her?* I wondered. Watching her move almost lazily towards Kate, she looked positively docile. *Leah, your friendly guard dog.*

I reached Jake and he nuzzled my side. I leaned into him, rather inappropriately realising that it had been three days since we had made love. I sighed and he looked at me questioningly.

"You don't want to know right now," I assured him. I looked back over at Leah. "She seems calm." Jake nodded.

"Alright," Kate called across the yard. "Bella you should move away from him. Let's see if you can shield him from a

distance and protect the other one."

Jake pushed at me slightly and I jogged over to a spot across the yard from him. I extended my shield to cover him and yelled, "Okay" at Kate.

I held my breath as Kate slowly reached out to touch Leah. Leah was lying down and I saw her jerk slightly at the touch which made me think at first that she had been shocked. I quickly realised however that she must just have been reacting instinctively to the touch of a vampire, because although Kate's brow was furrowed in concentration, Leah simply stayed lying at her feet looking reasonably relaxed and a little bored.

Finally, Kate stepped back. She moved swiftly to a point far away from either wolf and nodded at me. "I think you have it, Bella." Jake turned to lope back into the trees and Leah followed after him. Jake quickly reappeared in human form.

"Thank you Kate," he said fervently. He came over to me and without words, pulled me to him in a tight hug. He held me like that for a long time and I realised he must have been more worried about the success of this venture than he had shown to me.

I was thrilled. Knowing that I could play a key part in defending the pack, our families and the tribe filled me with a fierce pride. I thought that if I lived until I was very old, I would never again do something that was so important. The fact that I could be useful to Jake made me feel for the first time like I was worthy of being a wolf girl.

I remembered back to the evening in Sam's house when we had learned about Edward joining the Volturi. I had vowed to stand alongside Jake instead of hiding behind him. I realised now that I could truly do that. I could stand at the Alpha's side and make him proud to call me his mate.

I took him off guard by kissing him fiercely. Jake being Jake, recovered quickly and returned my kiss with equal fervour. The moment was short lived. Jake spun around quickly to face Kate.

"Don't sneak up like that!" he warned her.

Kate scoffed at him. "I wasn't sneaking. You were preoccupied. I just wanted to say good bye to Bella. It was a pleasure meeting you." She placed unnecessary emphasis on that last word. "I'll let Carlisle know how well you managed to control your shield. And good luck." It was obvious that she didn't think luck or anything else would save us. I thanked her and Jake and I turned to leave.

At the last moment Jake turned back to her. "Thank you." She inclined her head at him and turned on her heel.

My pride and elation had given me a new burst of energy and I chattered non-stop in the car on the way home. I saw Jake grinning at me more than once as if my mood amused him.

"What's so funny?" I demanded eventually.

"No, nothing's funny! I'm just glad you feel better is all. I was worried about you last night. You seemed so completely drained and I thought that maybe... well, maybe this was too much for you." He looked at me apologetically.

I crossed my arms and settled back into my seat. "Well maybe if you hadn't been such a... a **tyrant**, I wouldn't have found yesterday so hard."

"A tyrant?" Jake asked in disbelief.

"Yes! Oh Bella's tired, let's work her harder. Oh Bella can shield me from one metre away, let's make her do it from ten metres away."

"Bella," Jake said seriously. "I didn't enjoy that you know. It's just; this is pretty much our only defence. I mean sure the extra numbers help but being able to cut off the leech's mind attacks, that's something that they won't expect. And I'll bet they're so used to being able to control everyone with the terrible twins that the rest of their offense is lazy. This puts us at an advantage and well, we only had the two days to get it right."

"I know," I sighed. "I just prefer you when you're **you**. Warm and loving and my Jacob, not Alpha Jacob."

He reached for my hand and squeezed it. "When this is all over, I promise I'll never be Alpha Jacob with you again."

"You'd better not be," I told him and he laughed, entirely unthreatened. "How's Leah?" I asked him curiously.

"She's great actually. I didn't get all of it cos we were both too focussed on the leech but something happened with Sam and she seems to have, I don't know, moved on or something."

I was glad for her.

"Hey Bella," Jake suddenly asked me. "What were you thinking in the yard, when you told me I didn't want to know?"

I laughed. "Okay I know it wasn't exactly an appropriate time but I was thinking that it's been three days since we made love. And that I've been missing it."

Jake looked at me sharply and then without warning suddenly swerved round to speed back the way we had come.

"Jake!" I cried hanging onto the dashboard as the car fishtailed. "What are you doing?"

"Taking you somewhere we can be alone," he growled.

I wasn't going to argue anymore after that.

Fifteen minutes later Jake turned off the highway and followed a road that was really no more than a track into the forest. A few minutes later he pulled the car over and got out. Before I could unbuckle my seatbelt, he was on my side of the car almost pulling the door off its hinges. He half pulled, half carried me out the car and pressed me up against it.

I recognised the look in his eyes from the morning he returned from Oregon.

"Jake **please** tell me you have protection with you," I said severely. He nodded his head briefly before assaulting my mouth with his own. His hands were everywhere, pushing my hair back from my face, holding me closer to him and pulling at the button on my jeans. Somehow they were around my knees before I could register that he had even got them unfastened.

All of a sudden, he spun me around to face the car and then knelt down to pull off my sneakers and jeans. Standing behind me, he put one hand under my shirt to massage my breasts and used the other hand to push my hair out the way to access the back of my neck. That hand then moved between my legs.

I was already wet, his obvious desire for me affecting me in delicious ways. Jake's fingers were working their magic against my clit. I was moaning and writhing against him and he was whispering my name and *I love yous* between the kisses he was planting all over my neck and shoulders. He was working my body hard and fast and I could feel his own need pressed into my back.

Jake plunged two fingers inside me. I instinctively reached out to hold onto the car and parted my legs more as he began biting as well as kissing and continuing to pump his fingers into me. I felt his body heat behind me and shivered in anticipation.

He withdrew his fingers and once again his hands were everywhere. He was pulling at my nipples, pinching my clit, running a hand down my back, pulling my hair to angle my head back so that he could kiss the front of my neck. I was gasping and moaning with desire and he still wasn't inside me.

Frustrated I begged him. "Jake!"

I heard a faint growl from behind me and he fumbled with the condom he had somehow got out of his shorts and then nudged my legs even further apart. Moments later, I felt him push into me and at the same time he resumed his ministrations on the bundle of nerves between my legs. I cried out and he angled my hips so that I was leaning forward a little, before he began pounding into me.

I couldn't stop the noises that were coming from my mouth. He was burying himself deeply inside me and he relentlessly pulled and pinched at my clit while I gasped and moaned, cursing and pleading with him for more. I was moving my body in time with his thrusts, trying to pull him deeper and deeper inside me.

Acting purely on instinct, I reached between my own legs and behind me, finding his balls and fondling them. I was about to erupt in a mind shattering orgasm when I heard his laboured breathing hitch and he roared my name. We came together in a panting, shaking duet. Long after our bodies had found their release, Jake continued to thrust slowly into me as he came down from his high, and with each thrust after quakes rocked through my body.

Finally, Jake pulled out of me and held me tightly from behind, murmuring words of love and adoration against my skin. My legs were weak and I was trembling from head to foot as I allowed Jake to take the whole weight of my body.

My mind was well and truly blown.

By the time I had recovered the use of my legs and could speak coherently again, Jake had managed to dress me again. I flopped onto the passenger seat of the car while Jake pulled on his shorts and climbed back in the driver's side.

He turned to kiss me and I quickly deepened it. He pulled back to grin cockily at me.

"Not had enough Bells?"

"You know I can't get enough of you," I told him frowning. "It's a problem."

"Won't be a problem for much longer," he said as I kissed him again. "We're moving in together, remember?"

"When?" I pouted as he started the car and began reversing back up the track to the road.

"After Akando's visit," Jake promised me. "We need Sam's cabin for Nina and the other imprints, cos it's bigger. Then as soon as they've gone, Sam can move back in to his own place and we can take the Alpha cabin."

I didn't want to wait that long. The rational part of my brain knew it was only a few days away. But my heart didn't want to listen to my head on this occasion.

I realised Jake was watching me. "You can move in with me now if you want to," he told me. "Dad won't mind. You know he wants you kept safe in La Push. And he considers us married," he added with a grin.

I nodded. "I really do want to Jake," I told him. "I just don't know what to tell Charlie."

As it was, that didn't matter anymore. Charlie had just figured it out.

A/N: No surprises then, next chapter is all about Charlie. And then the other wolf pack arrives:-) This is going to be an exciting week, I can tell!

Chapter 22: Chapter 22 Charlie Knows

A/N: 500 different people here on fanfic read the last chapter within 12 hours of it being posted. That absolutely boggles my mind. In a very good way. So here you are, I got it ready a little earlier than I'd planned, because you're all so nice to me:-D

As always, a huge thank you to feebes for beta reading.

Chapter Twenty One – Charlie Knows

Charlie Swan thought that life was good. He had a decent job, a steady income and a nice home. His daughter was doing well at school, rarely gave him any trouble despite being a teenager and had a nice boyfriend who was crazy about her. Charlie would have liked to find a good woman to share his life with, but on the whole he was doing fine.

As he drove through Forks, he smiled to himself as he thought of Bella and Jake. They had been going to great pains to tell him their plans this morning at breakfast. The cop in him knew that probably meant they were up to something. But they were both good kids and provided they stayed on the right side of the law, which he was sure they would, he wasn't too worried.

Of course he knew their relationship was more physical than he would have liked. And he knew that Jake was a minor. Not that you would think it to look at him, or have a conversation with him. Charlie had decided to turn a blind eye to that technicality. His daughter was happy again and that was all down to Jacob. So as far as Charlie was concerned, Jacob Black was something of a hero.

In fact, the only time he had been concerned about them was when they came up with that cock and bull story about why they had to go to Oregon together. Charlie had been damn sure it was just an excuse to have a **private** weekend together and he was equally damn sure it had been Jake's idea. But Billy had promised him that there really was research to be done and well, he just knew to trust the Chief of the Quileute Tribe.

Billy and Charlie were both Chiefs and they both understood that sometimes, keeping people on a need to know basis was a good idea. Charlie was sure Billy wouldn't allow the kids to do anything dangerous or stupid so he had reluctantly agreed.

Charlie sometimes wondered exactly what it was he didn't need to know about the kids on the res. He couldn't remember the kids of his own generation having such a growth explosion when they hit their teens. So whatever it was wasn't "just genes" as Billy had vaguely told him. No, in the past year, more than half a dozen boys from the res had just exploded. Jake was the biggest and Charlie was fairly sure he was some kind of leader. Anytime Charlie saw Jake without Bella these days, he was with a crowd of the other kids and they all seemed to look to Jake for approval or something. The phrase *leader of the pack* had sprung to Charlie's mind on more than one occasion recently. The fact that the boy with the strongest Quileute blood in him was the biggest and the leader seemed kind of significant.

Obviously, Charlie didn't need to know. He was happy with that. As long as there was nothing going on that was illegal, it wasn't his business. And he was confident there was nothing illegal happening. These were good kids, nice kids. Charlie had heard the rumours, gangs, steroid use, cults, whatever. He didn't believe any of it.

Charlie pulled the cruiser up outside Newton Outfitters. He needed some more fishing tackle. He'd had too many odd jobs to do this morning to go fishing, but they were done now so he was planning a full day's fishing tomorrow if things were still quiet at the station.

Mike was working in the shop. He was another good kid and when Bella had first moved back Charlie thought there might be something there but of course Bella had gotten all wrapped up in that strange Cullen boy. Charlie shivered at the thought of **him**. Something about him sometimes raised the hairs on the back of Charlie's neck.

Anyway, Bella was with Jake now and on balance, Charlie preferred Jake to Mike. That was no reason not to be friendly to the kid who was following him around the store apparently trying to score points with the Chief of Police, or the father of Bella Swan, whichever his motives were.

And then Mike blindsided him.

"Is Bella feeling better now, Chief Swan? I've been worried about her, missing so much school and all."

Charlie was confused. He knew Bella had taken last Friday off to go to Oregon. If he was right and she hadn't needed to go for her own school project, she might have feigned sickness to account for her day off. But that was only one day.

Just like that, a crack appeared in Charlie's good mood. His cop instincts kicked in.

"Uh, I think she's feeling fine Mike, thanks for asking. I've been working a lot so I've lost track a little. She's just missed what, a few days here and there?"

"Yes Chief, just last Friday, then Wednesday and Friday this week. And then on Thursday she took sick in the afternoon but she only missed one class. She must have felt better because she came back again. I guess the fresh air must have

helped her, it can do that of course."

Charlie's mind was racing. Wednesday off school; Thursday skipped a little in the middle of the day; Friday off school. He couldn't make sense of that. Bella definitely wasn't sick, Charlie knew that. In fact, she'd never been healthier in his opinion. She had been positively glowing recently.

"So she just got some fresh air on Thursday, huh?"

"Yes sir. Well I guess she did, I mean when she came back she was kinda muddy, like she'd been sitting out in the forest or something. Well, lying down actually, she had some twigs in her hair and...." Mike trailed off and cleared his throat, perhaps realising at the same time as Charlie what one explanation could be.

Forks High School was right next to the forest that ran between Forks and La Push. A horrible suspicion began to form in Charlie's mind. Oh surely not. His Bella meeting Jake in the forest midway through the school day Lying on the ground Returning to school afterwards ...

Oh hell no!

Charlie shook his head, trying to clear it. That wasn't Bella. She wouldn't be cutting class to go meet her boyfriend for ... **that**. No, there had to be another explanation.

Charlie paid for his supplies and headed to the diner for some lunch. When he got there, he saw one of the young kids from La Push, Brady, sitting with a ridiculous amount of food before him. Charlie wondered again what went on with those kids. He was sure Brady was only about 13 but no bar in town would have thought to ID him. As he was thinking this, he saw Brady begin to tremble.

Charlie's eyes narrowed. Jake had done the same thing a few weeks back. It was when he had first started avoiding Bella. Charlie had dropped into Billy's on his way home from work one day to return some fishing tackle he'd borrowed and had casually asked Jake to give Bella a call. Jake had started trembling hard and Billy had yelled at him to get out. Jake had raced out the cabin and Billy had practically thrown Charlie out five minutes later.

Charlie settled down to watch Brady and realised the kids in the next booth were talking about him. It was the usual gossip, steroids and the like. It seemed to Charlie that Brady was reacting directly to what the kids were saying, which was impossible since they were keeping their voices low and were way out of earshot. But it looked for all the world like whenever they mentioned the words 'drugs' or 'steroids', Brady would glare at them and take deep breaths as if trying to get himself under control.

After a few minutes, Charlie was absolutely convinced that Brady could hear every word those kids were saying. He must have bat like hearing, Charlie decided. All of a sudden, Brady threw some money on the table, stood up and began to storm out the diner. As he passed Charlie's table, the Chief stood up and stopped him. He just wanted to check the boy's temperature. He put a hand on the kid's shoulder and asked if he was alright.

Brady was trembling so hard he was almost buzzing and his body heat seared Charlie's hand through his shirt. Just the same as Jake, whose shoulder Charlie had clapped dozens of times. It was the same as Sam Uley too. Charlie had shook his hand to thank him for finding Bella in the forest the night the Cullen boy left her and he had been running the same kind of temperature.

Brady looked alarmed at being stopped by the police Chief and nodded quickly. Charlie let him go.

Charlie sat in the diner for a while pondering over the evidence. He knew something was going on with the Quileute kids. He knew they all seemed to have abnormally high body temperatures and sudden ridiculous growth spurts. He knew they began to shake when they got upset. And Charlie knew for a fact that Jacob Black never worked out in a gym, yet he had thick muscles all over his body.

Charlie had heard all the legends that were told and retold around the La Push bonfires. He had always enjoyed them, old wives tales and superstitions that entertained everyone. Now, though, he had to wonder if there was any truth somewhere in the stories. Oh, he didn't think there were wolves and cold ones, but ...

Cold ones. A memory came to him. Edward arriving to take Bella to the prom. He had reached out to shake his hand and when Edward had grasped it the Chief had almost recoiled from the icy temperature. He remembered too the way his hair had stood on end sometimes around Edward.

No, he was being ridiculous. Charlie shook his head. Wolves, there had been a lot of wolves howling lately. And it wasn't just wolves the legends talked about; they were described as shape shifters. The way Jake had been shaking that day, was it possible his shape was about to...?

Definitely being ridiculous.

And yet, despite his common sense telling him that he was crazy to even consider that there might be truth in his musings, Charlie Swan was a damn good cop. He had learned long ago to trust his instincts. Right now, his instincts were telling him that he was onto something.

Need to know indeed. If his daughter was somehow mixed up in all this, Charlie decided that he now needed to know.

Twenty minutes later, Charlie arrived at Billy Black's home. He sat himself down on the couch and glared at his old friend. "Talk."

Billy hesitated. Of course he knew exactly what Charlie meant but Billy hadn't been given the go ahead from the council. Then again, he **was** the Chief of the tribe. He knew that the implications of giving Charlie information were far reaching. Some of the wolves' own families knew nothing about them. If Charlie were told, they would all need to be told too. The council would never tolerate a paleface knowing if members of the packs' families didn't. On the other hand, Billy firmly believed that every parent had a right to know what their children were involved in.

"You know there are secrets in the tribe Charlie," he began.

"Secrets that are apparently affecting my daughter."

"I know." Billy sighed. He made his decision. "Let me make some calls first Charlie, then we'll brew us some coffee and talk."

Billy phoned Old Quil and asked him to come over, saying only that Charlie Swan was there needing answers. He knew that Old Quil's corroboration would make the story more believable. But then, just in case, he also phoned his sister, Collin's mother. He would have preferred Jake to be here but in his absence, his cousin would do just as well. Collin agreed to come to his uncle's home in a couple of hours. That should give enough time to tell the story and answer Charlie's initial questions. Or deal with his initial hysterics. Whichever.

Billy brewed the coffee and began to tell Charlie that all those superstitious legends were actually true. Old Quil slipped in and sat down quietly just as Charlie was hearing that Bella's boyfriend was the Alpha of a wolf pack. Furthermore, Bella was the mate that had been chosen for Jake by the Spirits.

Charlie's face had been growing increasingly ashen as the story went on. Billy noticed and swapped his coffee for a beer.

It all came out, wolves and vampires, treaties and imprints, Volturi and shield. When Bella's involvement with the Cullens and their true identity was revealed, Old Quil took the beer away and gave Charlie a tumbler full of strong liquor.

By the time they were finished, Charlie was slumped back in the couch, his face a deadly pallor as he tried to absorb everything he had just heard. Collin Littlesea arrived and at Billy's request, cheerfully offered to show Charlie his wolf. Charlie shook his head. That was something he definitely did **not** want to see just yet. Collin, visibly disappointed, was about to head home again when Bella and Jake arrived. They were both laughing as they walked in the door, Jake's hand resting lightly on Bella's waist as he held the door open for her. They saw Charlie at the same time and stopped in their tracks. The laughter died on their lips as they took in his ashen face and dazed expression.

"Dad!" Bella started towards him, understanding that he had just been told the truth.

Charlie held his hand up to stop her. "Isabella Marie Swan, not one word." He rose unsteadily to his feet. "You and I are going home." He glared at Jake, who was watching him warily. The hand that had been on Bella's waist was now wrapped protectively around her. "You are not coming with us."

Charlie swayed slightly as he walked out the cabin. Billy mimed "drinking" to Jake, who looked outside the door to see Charlie heading for the cruiser.

"Uh, Bells honey you'd better drive your dad home. Take the Rabbit if you don't want to drive the cruiser. Collin, run in the trees along the side of the road and make sure they get home okay."

Bella managed to convince Charlie that he was in no state to drive and that, as Chief of Police, he would really be best not to try. He was surprisingly agreeable to having Bella drive him and they set off.

Bella was a ball of nerves. Charlie didn't speak the whole journey, but stared resolutely ahead. Bella caught the occasional flash of reddish brown fur through the trees and knew Collin was following Jake's instructions concisely.

Once they were home, Bella sat with Charlie in the living room and waited for his fury to unleash upon her. A few times, he would catch her eye, open his mouth, and then close it again shaking his head. The tension in the room grew until Bella thought she would scream.

Finally, she stood up. "I'm going to make us dinner dad. Tell me if you want to talk."

Bella's hands were shaking as she prepared their meal and Charlie noticed it when she put his plate in front of him. He caught hold of her hand and held it.

"You spend your free time with werewolves and vampires and you're scared of me?" he asked her.

She shrugged. "I can handle the supernatural but not your disappointment." Bella felt the tears sting her eyes as she said that.

"I'm not disappointed about anything other than you lying to me, Bella," Charlie told her.

"I'm sorry, dad," Bella whispered.

Charlie sighed. "I know. Billy told me you've been nagging him to tell me. Bella how much danger are you in?"

"What did Billy tell you?"

"As far as I know, he told me everything. There's a coven of malicious vampires coming to destroy the wolves. Edward is with them and he wants you. You're some kind of defence weapon?" Charlie half laughed. "I can't believe we're even having this conversation." He pushed his plate away and strode to the fridge to get a beer.

"That's about it, dad. I'm not a weapon though. I'm a shield. I can protect Jake from certain types of vampire attacks, and through the pack mind he can then protect the other wolves."

"Right. Mind control and mind links. Billy covered that, too."

"So you know everything."

"And Jake is... your soul mate?"

Bella nodded. "Something like that, it's called an imprint."

"And you're okay with this?"

"Of course! Come on dad, you know Jake. He's still Jake. And you've said it yourself, he's good to me. He's good **for** me."

They talked through some more details but Charlie was feeling overloaded. Bella understood all too well. She remembered how she had felt when she first found out about Edward; and then again about Jacob. To learn about both in the same day would be truly overwhelming.

Eventually, worn out from testing her shielding abilities all day and then the evening on tenterhooks around Charlie, Bella went to bed.

She was hardly asleep when the door bell rang. Charlie had a pretty good idea who it would be. Sure enough, Jacob Black stood on his doorstep. Charlie opened the door wide and walked into his living room, grabbing another beer on the way.

Jake closed the front door and followed Bella's father into the living room. He sat down opposite Charlie and poured out the contents of his heart.

He told Charlie of the love he had felt for Bella, even before he phased. He explained how the imprint strengthened his bond to her and intensified his love. He vowed he would take on the Volturi and win, to keep Bella safe. He promised to never do anything to hurt her, and to devote himself to her happiness for the rest of his life.

He talked about his role as wolf and protector. He admitted he had railed against it at first, but had come to accept and even welcome his role as Alpha to the pack. He described some of his responsibilities and duties. He confirmed that he had all but dropped out of school, for the time being at least.

And then, he asked for Charlie's blessing to continue to see his daughter.

Charlie had just about had enough for one day. He stood up and looked Jacob directly in the eye. "That girl upstairs is the most important thing in my life, Jacob. I can see that you feel the same." He held his hand out to the young man and told him, "I trust you to keep my daughter safe, no matter what the cost."

Jake took Charlie's hand and promised he would. "She would be safer on the res, Charlie. I'm not just saying that to get you to agree to her moving in with me. We've been talking about that lately and we want to move in together. But that's not why I'm saying this. She would, genuinely, be safer."

"Then move her there. And, son?"

Jake waited.

"Make sure Edward Cullen is destroyed. Make sure he never gets near my daughter again."

"You can count on that, sir. I'm planning on doing it myself."

A/N: Next up, the Oregon wolf pack arrives. Tomorrow or Thursday.

Chapter 23: Chapter 23 The Incomers

A/N: This chapter is going up a day earlier than I'd thought because feebes is fabulous and got it back to me very quickly despite having to work. And also because this story has hit 500 reviews. Which yet again, made me very happy.

Can I give a shout out to one of my reviewers who I couldn't reply to personally - wishfulphoenix. Your review made me laugh. My kids would sympathise. I've put them to bed early a couple of times so that I can finish a chapter.

Chapter Twenty Two – The Incomers

The morning after Charlie had learned the truth about the wolf pack, I cautiously met him in the kitchen for breakfast. He had let me off quite lightly the evening before, but I thought he might have a lot more to say after having had the opportunity to sleep on things. He surprised me.

"Jake came around last night."

"He did?"

"Yeah, he's a good kid, Bella. He's convinced me that you'll be safer with him in La Push so... just pack some things and move straight up there and we won't say any more about it. I'm going fishing with Billy today. I guess as long as you don't cut any more classes and you still come and see me, well you're an adult now."

"Wow."

"Yeah," Charlie looked at me slightly ruefully. "I'm gonna miss having you around the place, Bells."

"Oh dad I'll visit all the time and you can come up for dinner anytime you like. It's only twenty minutes away."

"Yep," Charlie cleared his throat. The conversation was getting a little too emotional for his tastes. "Well, I'll be going now. See you later kiddo." He leaned over and kissed my head briefly before exiting as fast as he could. I was left sitting slightly stunned, at the kitchen table.

I called Jake.

"Hey beautiful," he answered his phone.

"Hey Alpha," I responded. He laughed and I said, "Dad's on his way to yours. He's going fishing with Billy. Um, he told me to pack and move in with you."

"Yeah, I spoke to him last night. It's just safer for you up here."

"Uh-huh."

"It is!"

I laughed. "I know, and **you** know that I can't wait to move in with you. It's just hard to get my head round dad basically telling me to move in with you."

"You know he loves me, Bells," Jake said cockily.

"Sure, sure."

"So when d'you wanna do this? I need to patrol but if you don't want to wait till I've finished I can get Collin to come and help you move your things. Um, there's not much room though. You'll need to stay here at dad's until Sam moves out of the Alpha cabin. And it's a really small cabin, Bells."

"That's okay, I don't need much. I really have to work later." I had swapped a couple of shifts with Mike lately to free up my time for the Oregon trip and training with Kate. "Maybe I could just pack some things now, leave them in my truck and then come to yours after my shift?"

"That would work. What time d'you finish?"

"Three."

"Perfect. I'll be finished patrolling by then. I'll come and meet you from work at three."

And just like that it was arranged. I would be moving in with Jacob.

It didn't take me long to throw some things into a bag, clothes, toiletries, school books. I remembered the panic I had before the Oregon trip and realised I had never rectified the lack-of-sexy-lingerie situation. I was heading to Port Angeles

later in the week for my appointment to organise birth control. I didn't feel comfortable seeing the doctor here in Forks, who was a regular customer at Newton's, hence the trip further afield. I decided to use the trip to Port Angeles to buy a few items for Jake's benefit.

My shift at Newton's dragged by. Three o'clock seemed as though it would never arrive. Business was slow and Mrs Newton decided that it was a perfect time to take inventory. It should have been an easy task but I was so distracted that I had to keep on starting over.

Finally, shortly before three, the shop door opened and in strolled six and a half feet of muscled, russet skinned perfection. I practically flew to him and he lifted me off my feet, grinning at me.

"You ready?"

"Almost, let me just finish up a couple of things and I'll be out."

I turned to go into the back shop but Jake spun me back around again and kissed me. He ran his tongue slowly across my bottom lip and then whispered in my ear, "Don't be long." He turned around and sauntered from the store, leaving me speechless and quivering. That kiss had definitely held a promise of things to come.

I stumbled to the back of the shop and stammered my goodbyes to Mrs Newton, who was too preoccupied in the latest waterproof gear catalogue to notice that I was probably drooling. Then, I grabbed my jacket and ran from the shop.

Jake was leaning against the side of my truck waiting for me. His eyes were smouldering as he watched me approach and I knew he had one hell of an afternoon planned for us. Just the thought turned me on even more. As I got closer to him, I saw his nostrils flare as he smelled my arousal and he abruptly stood up straight holding out his hand to me.

"Keys," he demanded. I wasn't going to argue with him. I was fairly sure it wasn't illegal to drive when intoxicated by hormones but common sense dictated that I not attempt it. I fumbled in my jacket pocket and handed him the truck keys before climbing in the passenger door.

Jake pushed the truck to its full fifty five mile an hour capacity the whole way to La Push. He paused long enough to get my bag from the truck, frowning as he saw how small a bag it was.

"I know I said we wouldn't have much space Bells but you could have brought more."

"I can get more from Charlie's any time."

Neither of us was really in the mood for talking as Jake opened the cabin door. He tossed my bag on the floor as I stepped inside, then slamming the door closed Jake pulled me to him. He began kissing me fervently. One hand was in my hair, the other around my waist and I was bent backwards enough that I was relying on him to support my weight.

While still kissing me like that, Jake began walking me backwards towards his bedroom. I let him hold me up and guide me, kissing him back with a passion that easily matched his own. I wrapped my arms tightly around his neck. I wasn't sure exactly how, but my shirt came off and shortly afterwards, his did too. His skin felt good against mine and I groaned a protest when he pulled his chest away slightly, until I realised he was only dispensing with my bra.

When we were both topless, he suddenly lifted me up and I wrapped my legs around his waist. We were at his bedroom door by then. Jake swiftly kicked it open and barrelled us both through it. I was placed on his bed and he began pulling off his jeans. I started wriggling out of my own jeans but Jake was faster and they were soon on the floor with my panties and sneakers.

Jake lay beside me and pulled my leg up over his waist. His hand stroked down my leg, from hip to ankle and back up again as he kissed and licked at my neck and jaw. My own hand was tracing the muscles on his arm and shoulder, feeling them move and flex as he moved his hand round from my thigh to my centre.

I moaned as he inserted one, then two fingers inside me and began moving them slowly in and out, curling his fingers as he reached as deep as he could while circling my clit with his thumb. His movements were slow, almost lazy, and I ground against his hand trying to increase the friction. Jake refused to alter his pace and I decided two could play at that game.

I moved my hand to his attentive member and rubbed the back of my hand languidly up his shaft. When I reached the tip I rubbed the pad of my thumb very slowly round in a circle. Then I took him in my hand and stroked him lazily, waiting for his reaction.

I didn't have to wait long. Jake groaned and bucked into my hand. I slowed my pace even further and felt him smile against my mouth.

"Are you teasing me, Bella?" he asked without moving his lips from mine.

"No more than you're teasing me!" I protested, our lips still joined.

"Mmmm. But you're so damn wet. I want to take my time and enjoy it."

"You do that," I told him and slowed my pace further still.

Jake laughed against my lips and we stayed like that for a while, tormenting one another and slowly building intensity. Jake finally seemed to have had enough of the teasing. He picked up his pace so suddenly that my eyes flew open and gasped as his fingers began to drive into me and his thumb worked my clit at a fast pace. I responded by stroking him harder but he quickly knocked my hand away.

"I wanna come inside you baby," he breathed. I was in no position to argue as my climax made my whole body convulse and I called out his name, throwing my head back wantonly and shuddering as he bit my neck.

Jake slowed his movements to let me ride out my pleasure and then wasted no time in putting on a condom and thrusting into me. I loved the feeling of his taut body moving over mine and I ran my hands over all the muscles I could reach. As always, his moaning and cursing elicited strong reactions from my own body and my walls began to clench around him as his movements became less coordinated and he thrust wildly into me, bucking his hips and driving us further up the bed.

Finally spent, Jake wrapped his arms round me and held me tightly, murmuring his love for me between kisses. I was in a state of total euphoria when he finally pulled away enough to look at me. He smiled.

"You're glowing, Bella."

"So are you," I told him.

We spent another hour in bed, talking easily and making love again before deciding we'd better get up and start organising dinner for Charlie and Billy. As I moved around the kitchen, preparing enough food for myself, two grown men and a teenage werewolf, Jake "helped" by making suggestive comments and obstructing my way so that he could kiss me at every opportunity. And he found a lot of opportunities.

Finally exasperated, I put him to work setting the table and preparing a token salad which would no doubt remain virtually untouched. As I watched him move around the kitchen, hair frequently falling into his eyes and brow furrowed in concentration, my heart sang. I was so deeply in love with him and I couldn't imagine being anywhere else than by his side.

I walked over to him and hugged him. His arms snaked around my waist and he planted a kiss on my forehead.

"Now who's distracting who?"

"I love you," I told him simply.

"I love you too Bells."

Billy and Charlie arrived for dinner and after a day's fishing their appetites were huge. Even the salad disappeared. After dinner, Billy announced that he would be spending a few days with Charlie.

"Don't want the old man to get lonely while he adjusts to you being gone, Bella," he told me with a wink. I knew he was clearing out to give Jake and me some space and gratitude warred with embarrassment as I saw Charlie look everywhere but at us.

After our dads left, I insisted we clear up the dinner dishes before heading back to the bed that Jake kept tugging me towards. He was equally determined however, so we compromised with a vigorous round on the kitchen table mid-clean up.

The next day was Monday and after waking up in Jacob's arms and having breakfast with him, I didn't want to go to school. Surprisingly, it was Jake who insisted that I go. He told me sternly that I was too close to graduation and at least one of us needed to complete high school. I knew he was right and reluctantly went, but I spent most of the day dreaming about the life Jake and I had ahead of us. They were the best daydreams I'd ever had.

After school, I headed first to Sam's house to make up the beds for the guests who would be arriving later that day. Billy had told me over dinner the day before that Sam was happy for Akando's pack to utilise his cabin, which was larger than the Alpha cabin Sam was currently in. With Emily away, Sam was free to move home whenever he wanted, so I decided to cook something for him as a thank you for allowing us the use of his bigger cabin. I tried to push down my impatience to have Sam move back home. Jake had told me that the Alpha cabin needed some renovating and repairs done but I was curious to see it for myself sooner rather than later.

When I arrived at Sam's house, I was surprised to find Leah and Sue already there. The beds were already made and Sue was making a list of food that we would need over the coming days. It was a long list.

"Hello Bella!" Sue greeted me cheerfully. "Seth's taking me to the store to get the groceries. Meantime I've left enough food in the kitchen for this evening. Could you and Leah get started on it while I shop?"

I replied that that would be fine and before long Sue had gone, leaving Leah and I alone for the first time since the day Sam's imprint broke.

"So Bella, you look happy. Living with Jake agreeing with you then?"

"It's only been a day!" I told her. Then I grinned. "But yeah, it's amazing."

I watched Leah as she peeled and chopped vegetables and finally had to ask her. "What happened?"

Leah looked sideways at me. "Is this more girl talk?"

"More like, keeping up to speed, you seem happy too Leah and at peace somehow."

"Sam came to see me." Leah filled me in on what had happened between them. "It gave me the chance to hear what I've always known. That Sam did love me and still does in a way. It wasn't him that chose to reject me, if that makes sense. It was the wolf making its demands. And believe me; I know how powerful the wolf can be. Hearing him acknowledge that, it just seemed to give me some kind of ... closure I guess."

"Do you still love him?" I asked curiously.

"I'm not **in** love with him," Leah told me firmly. "I'll always care about him but I don't want him back." She shook her head and laughed a little. "I never thought I'd say that!"

"I'm pleased for you Leah," I told her honestly. Then I added, "At least the imprint breaking did one of you some good!" Secretly, I thought she was the one who most deserved it.

Two hours later, with enough food cooking to feed a small army and more being prepared in Sue's kitchen, we felt organised enough to greet the incoming pack. Jake had stopped by Sam's house an hour earlier, looking a little dejected. He finally admitted to me in a whisper that he'd thought I would be alone and was planning on seducing me until he'd caught Leah's scent alongside mine. From the amused look on Leah's face when she came back into the kitchen, I was pretty sure she'd heard his confession. I expected her to make a sarcastic comment but she simply continued wordlessly with what she'd been doing.

I was beginning to see the real Leah emerging and I liked her immensely.

As the afternoon wore into evening, Jake's pack gradually arrived at the cabin. Leah had left to patrol, but the seven boys sat around on the porch waiting for the Oregon pack and Embry to arrive. Everyone was hungry and Kim and I had our hands full keeping the younger wolves away from the food.

Just as I was beginning to worry that the food would be spoiled if it wasn't taken off the heat soon, all the pack members simultaneously turned their heads to look along the road. Jake stood up and positioned himself in front of the others, signalling me to join him. The Alpha and his mate would greet the incoming pack first.

My ears detected nothing at first but eventually, I could discern the rumble of engines. Three cars came into view and a glance over my shoulder showed me that the entire pack were on their feet. They all looked relaxed and curious.

The first car was being driven by Akando. Embry and Nina were with him. Embry shot out the car first, practically dragging Nina behind him. Jake and Embry man-hugged and the latter looked like he was glad to be home. He excitedly began introducing Nina to the rest of the pack. I saw again how utterly beautiful she was. She seemed slightly overwhelmed by the large number of new names and faces to familiarise herself with but graciously greeted everyone in turn while Embry looked proudly on.

Akando and Jake shook hands and by that time, the other two cars had emptied and introductions were made. Elan's imprint was a pretty young woman called Abey, who seemed to be looking out for Nina a little. I wondered if she was the den mother, like Emily had been.

The first single man had dark brown hair cropped close to his head and was the only one who wasn't smiling. He was introduced as Matt, which was apparently shorter for a lengthy native name that I didn't think I would ever remember. He gave off a distinct impression of being unhappy to be there and he instantly reminded me of Paul. I noticed Jake assessing him carefully as he shook his hand and welcomed him to La Push.

The other unimprinted wolf was called Hotah. His skin was a slightly lighter shade than the rest of his pack and he had grey-green eyes. I later found that his name meant "white" and his mother had been a white woman. It was difficult to tell ages because of the shape shifters' rapid maturation, but I guessed that Hotah was younger than the other pack members, perhaps Seth's age. Again, I noticed Jake assessing him and made a mental note to ask him for his thoughts on these two wolves later this evening.

Nick and Anna were the other imprinted couple. They were both friendly and warm and I smiled as I realised, on first impressions anyway, that they really were perfectly matched.

Once all the introductions had been made, Collin and Brady started whining about being hungry. Brady in particular, who was due to take over patrolling from Leah shortly, was insistent that he needed to be fed as a matter of urgency. Jake rolled his eyes and agreed that the packs could get to know one another better over a meal.

With thirteen wolves and five imprints, including Kim and myself, to be fed, there was no way we would all fit around the table in the cabin. As it was a mild evening, everyone settled on whatever surface they could find to sit on outside. Kim and I began to fill plates and hand them around for people to eat on their laps. Abey quickly came to offer her help. Nina and Anna followed her lead. With the five of us, the food was quickly served and we joined our wolves outdoors to eat.

The noise was raucous. Embry seemed ecstatic to be back with his pack and with his imprint by his side. He was more talkative than I had ever heard him and I noticed, pleased, that Nina seemed enraptured by him. The looks they gave each other were filled with pure love.

Nick soon emerged as the joker of the Tamastlikt pack and had the younger wolves in stitches with animated stories of times one or other of the wolves had almost been seen by unsuspecting members of the general public. He had a flair for dramatising stories and I could tell he would be the life and soul of the bonfire Jake had planned for the next evening.

Matt spent most of his meal looking surly and addressing no-one. His own pack paid him no heed and the Quileute wolves instinctively gave him a wide berth. I did notice that if he looked at anyone, it was Nina. The look in his eyes reminded me vaguely of an expression I had seen somewhere before, but I couldn't put my finger on when or from who.

Hotah bonded immediately with Collin and Brady, confirming my suspicion that he was younger than the rest of his pack. Jake had made sure to keep all the patrols short for this evening. He wanted all members of his pack to have a chance to be around the new pack before they all phased together the next morning. To do this he had each wolf on a two hour patrol, one at a time, throughout the night. It would soon be time for Brady to go and relieve Leah from duty. Leah, being Beta, was on the first shift so that she could be available for the rest of the evening in case Jake needed her once the initial introductions turned into strategising.

Akando and Elan were immersed in conversation with Jake and Embry. Kim and I began clearing the plates away and preparing dessert for everyone. Abey swiftly put Nina and Anna to work washing and drying the dishes, while she made sure everyone had drinks. I could tell she was going to be invaluable over the next few days. After tonight, I had planned to feed the wolves in stages rather than try and have them all together, but with extra hands to help I decided to talk to Jake about that. He may feel it would be better for bonding purposes to keep everybody together at meal times.

I made sure to serve Brady first so that he could eat dessert before leaving and I checked that the plate I had put in the oven to keep warm for Leah hadn't been inhaled by one of the younger wolves when I wasn't paying attention.

I sat down with Nina to chat with her. She was very knowledgeable about the Volturi and began to fill me in some more. Embry had already given Jake details of Jane and Alex, the twins with the strongest powers. Nina began to tell me about the leaders – Aro, Marcus and Caius. I remembered some details from what Edward had told me all those months ago, in Carlisle's office. I listened in fascination as Nina described Aro's ability to read a person's memory by touching their hand.

A sudden hush replacing the cacophony of noise made me look up. The first thing I saw was Leah, standing close to the tree line as though she had just emerged and had begun to approach us. I followed her rapt gaze and saw Akando, on his feet now and gazing back at her. Leah was dirty and dishevelled from the forest, yet Akando was staring at her like she was the most beautiful and precious thing he had ever seen.

I looked back and forward between them. I was fairly certain that an imprint had just occurred but I couldn't work out which one had imprinted on the other. There seemed to be a hum of energy in the air between them and out of the corner of my eye I saw Collin and Hotah shift uneasily as though affected by it.

I turned my attention to Jake. His expression was a mixture of fascination and amusement. He looked over at me and seeing me staring at him, came across to crouch down in front of me.

"Who imprinted on who?" I whispered.

Jake's eyes were bright as he answered, "They imprinted on each other. It's anyone's guess what will happen now!"

A/N: I'm so excited! Lots of action ahead! Yay! Please keep telling me your thoughts, because I love to hear them:-D

***Chapter 24*: Chapter 24**

A/N: So this is a day late because I couldn't log in. I hope you enjoy it!

I'd like to say thank you again to everyone who is reading and reviewing. I'm totally overwhelmed by the support you all give me. I've been hearing stories from some of you about "flaming" reviews which has made me realise how lucky I've been. So once more, thank you all.

And, again, thank you to feebes for beta reading.

Chapter Twenty Three – Surprise Attack

The hush that had fallen over the two packs gradually subsided into chatter as everyone attempted to absorb what had just happened.

For the Oregon pack, their Alpha had imprinted. He finally had a mate. For the Quileute pack, Leah, who had been broken by their former Alpha until very recently, had found her happiness.

It was truly a momentous event.

Akando walked slowly towards Leah and they moved together into the cover of the trees, seeking privacy from the two curious packs as they both faced their future. Jake began an animated discussion with Elan, who was Akando's Beta.

Abey helped me to clear the dessert dishes and as we began washing them up, we got to know one another a little better. I had been right in my assessment of her as den mother. She wanted to know how I managed juggling school with looking after nine wolves. I had to confess that I didn't; Emily had been the one to look after the pack and I was still settling into my role as Alpha's mate.

It was something I had been thinking about, what my role was. The wolves had all naturally gravitated to Emily and she had looked after them all. I remembered the day during spring break when I had realised that she was so much more than just a chef to the pack. She had been a sympathetic ear and a trusted friend. With Emily gone, the pack would feel her loss sorely. I was aware that I hadn't stepped up yet. With school and shield training, I hadn't had the time but I was determined to find a way to do more for the pack than I had been.

Abey was curious about the various pack members and I realised that she was gathering information. The decision to come here and help us affected her entire tribe. I answered all her questions carefully and honestly and was pleased when she did the same.

She confirmed that Hotah was generally immature and a bit skittish and tended to be given few responsibilities. Including Brady and Collin, that meant there were three wolves that were potentially a little irresponsible. I knew Jake would worry about what role to give them in battle, and hoped he and Akando could either find an appropriate job for them to do, or leave them out of it altogether for their own safety.

Abey also confirmed that Matt was something of a loose cannon. He was volatile and unpredictable; another Paul. Abey hinted that Matt had feelings for Nina and I wondered if that would prove to be a problem for Embry.

Nick, Elan and Akando were all strong wolves and good men, she said. I assured her that the same applied to the rest of Jake's pack.

Abey promised to do all she could to help me with the hospitality side of their stay. She was certain Nina and Anna would also be happy to pitch in. I expressed my gratitude and we went back outside to join the packs.

The rest of the evening passed without incident. The two packs gelled well together and even Paul was on his best behaviour. Matt kept to himself, speaking only when spoken to and keeping his responses short and surly. I could tell he was going to be a problem.

It was late before Akando and Leah returned. The former was apologetic to Jake as they had planned on beginning to strategise that evening. Jake, who knew all too well the power of an imprint, was relaxed as he accepted the apology. I caught him grinning at Leah who actually blushed. I was happy for her.

By the time everyone began to turn in for the night, I was ready to sleep on my feet. The two Alphas made plans to meet back at Sam's cabin at eight o'clock the following morning. Abey, Anna and Nina were shown their beds and I promised to return early the next morning to help make breakfast before going to school.

Back at Billy's, Jake and I had a lot to talk about. As we got ready for bed, we compared notes on our initial observations of the pack and found our opinions were similar. Crawling into bed, I was surprised when Jake said that he felt sorry for Matt.

"Why?" I asked sleepily. I couldn't remember him ever having said the same about Paul.

"He's really in love with Nina. He must hate Embry." Jake climbed into bed beside me and wrapped his arms around me.

"I thought he liked her and Abey kind of confirmed that. But do you really think he's in love with her?"

"Mmhmm."

"How do you know?"

"He looks at her the way I used to look at you, when you were with Edward."

I thought about it. I remembered thinking that the look in Matt's eyes was familiar but hadn't been able to place it. It came back to me now.

"At prom! Last year! You turned up and I was with Edward and ... you did! That's the way you looked at me." I was half sitting now, looking down at him. "You weren't in love with me then though."

"Pff. I was so. Maybe not as much as now but I did know that we were meant for each other." He pulled me back down and into his arms and I tried to process what he had just told me.

"So when **did** you fall in love with me then?" I was curious.

"Probably on the beach the day I told you about the cold ones."

"Seriously Jake."

"I am serious. Maybe it was a foreshadowing of the imprint. I don't know. But I knew that day that you were made for me."

"Well ... how hard was it? Seeing me with someone else?"

Jake thought about it for a moment. "Well I was jealous, obviously. I kind of just hoped that the relationship would run its course and I would have a chance. I don't know how I would've handled it if you were still with him after I'd phased though. Probably not well," he admitted.

Not knowing what to say, I settled for kissing him. Jake seemed happy enough with that and quickly darted his tongue into my mouth.

"It's late," I told him.

"Mmhmm," he bit lightly on my lower lip.

"We need to be up early tomorrow."

"Mmhmm," he traced my top lip with his tongue.

"Tomorrow will be even busier than today."

"Do you want me to stop?" He ghosted his lips over my jaw and kissed my neck.

I put my arms around him, "No way."

The next morning was little short of crazy. Before we finally fell asleep, Jake had set an alarm for seven o'clock. He had to literally carry me out of bed and dump me under the shower before I said anything other than a stubborn "no", on repeat.

By the time I had a shower and drank the coffee that Jake had ready for me, I felt a little more awake. I was amazed that Jake seemed so refreshed. He told me that he was used to only getting a few hours' sleep, and that he seemed to sleep very well when I was in his arms.

We took my truck as I would need to go to school later and reached Sam's cabin well before eight. I found Abey already up and ready to help make breakfast. I showed her where everything was and we got started. The packs slowly arrived. Akando and Leah showed up together to both packs' amusement. I wondered where they had spent the night and decided Jake would see it in Leah's mind and could tell me later.

I was keeping a close eye on the time as I threw food onto plates to feed the packs. I had to be at school by nine and I needed recess and lunch hour to finish an assignment that I hadn't had time to complete. I could feel my temper begin to rise and was becoming a little tetchy with Collin, who kept asking for more.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Jake striding towards me. He put an arm around my waist and propelled me through the kitchen and out the door.

"Go to school Bells," he told me. "We'll manage here."

Gratefully, I kissed him and jogged to the truck. I felt hot and sweaty as I climbed in and thought ruefully that it already felt as though I'd been awake and working for hours. This was going to be a long week.

It was not an easy day in school. I struggled to stay awake in all my classes. My assignment was thrown hastily together

and I cringed as I handed it in after lunch, hoping it would somehow pass. Mike wanted me to work another shift for him this coming weekend, to repay one of those he had swapped with me. I reluctantly had to agree.

When the final bell rang, I trudged outside intending to head to my truck. I was vaguely aware of a bit of commotion in front of me but wasn't really paying attention until I heard a familiar husky voice shout my name.

My head shot up in response to that voice and a number of girls in my vicinity looked at me in disbelief.

And there he was, leaning against his motorbike with his arms folded. He was wearing jeans which accentuated his powerful legs and a black T-shirt which clung to every muscle on his chest and upper arms. He seemed oblivious to the stares and giggles of every other girl in the school, and a warm smile lit up his whole face when my eyes met his.

My day just got better. I literally ran to him and he swung me up so that I was sitting side saddle on his bike. He kissed me hard, ignoring every other person in the parking lot. I was pretty sure they were all staring.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him breathlessly. "I thought you'd be busy with the packs till much later."

Jake's eyes were dancing and I could tell that his day had been better than mine. "I wanted to show you something. C'mon, we're going on the bike."

"What about my truck?" I squeaked as he lifted me off the bike again and began fastening a helmet on my head. "And what's with the helmet?"

"I promised Charlie I'd keep you safe. That means no stupid risks. And I'll drop you off at school in the morning so you can get the truck tomorrow." He climbed on the bike and I happily hopped up behind him, sitting as close to him as I could get and holding on tight.

I had no idea where he was taking me and I didn't care. I simply held onto him and enjoyed the ride. He took the highway for a while, and then turned onto a track. I wondered briefly if he was taking me for a tryst in the same location as Saturday and the memory sent a rush of hormones straight to my core. I felt the bike swerve slightly and Jake's chest shook under my hands as though he were laughing. I rolled my eyes even though he couldn't see me and grinned under my helmet.

Finally, Jake brought the bike to a stop. It seemed that he had stopped only because the road narrowed and the bike wouldn't fit along it. He pulled off my helmet and swept me into his arms for a kiss.

"Next time you decide to get horny on the back of my bike, can you warn me in advance?" he asked with a grin. "It was a little distracting."

"But now that we're here" I said, running my hands over his abs.

Jake looked at me strangely. "Uh, honey we're going that way." He pointed up the path, "About half a mile."

Oh. So we weren't here for sex. My face must have fallen because Jake lifted my chin to look into my eyes. "You know we have a home to be alone in," he said and I could see his amusement. "We don't need to sneak off into the forest anymore."

"But I liked it," I mumbled.

Jake burst out laughing, "Me too, honey. Okay, I promise I'll remember, seduce Bella in the forest as regularly as possible. Today though," he said sounding a little rueful, "I wanted to show you something else. And uh, are you okay because both the packs are there."

I knew he was telling me that they would be able to smell me if I was turned on. That knowledge quickly dampened all my ardour and I gave him a dirty look. "That just killed the mood, Jake."

He was still laughing as we set off along the track. As we walked, Jake was clearly getting excited about something and as usual, his mood was infectious. He finally stopped and asked me if I was ready. Not entirely sure what I was supposed to be ready for, I nodded anyway and he gently pushed me in front of him and through some greenery.

We emerged into a meadow not unlike that which Laurent had found me in. The sight in front of me made my jaw drop open.

Thirteen absolutely massive wolves were roaming around the meadow. I could immediately tell which wolves belonged to the visiting pack, as their physique was slightly different than the Quileute pack. They looked burlier somehow, reminding me almost of bears. Their haunches were thicker and it appeared to my inexperienced eyes that where the La Push wolves were built for speed and power, the Oregon pack were built for brute strength. They were the wolf equivalent of Emmett.

As I watched, I realised that the wolves weren't just roaming. They were working together in pairs or small groups. Some invisible force seemed to be directing them. And incredibly, where one of Jake's pack was matched with one of Akando's, there seemed to be a channel of communication between them.

Quil and a light grey, almost white wolf who I assumed to be Hotah, passed in front of us. Quil feinted slightly to the left before lunging suddenly to his right. Hotah moved to his left just before Quil lunged, effectively cutting off Quil's movement.

I turned to Jacob who was watching them with all the pride of a father.

"They can hear each other?"

Jake grinned at me, elated. "You'll never believe it, Bells. Akando and Leah share a mind link. Provided they're both phased, it opens up both packs to each other's minds. We figured it out as soon as they both shifted this morning. It's incredible. They have the most amazing connection in their minds. They can connect us all or use a different channel to shut us all out. I'll bet when the packs are connected, we can shield them too!"

I continued to watch the two packs as I absorbed this information. I knew it was excellent news. Two of Jake's greatest concerns had been the lack of communication between the packs and the fact that we could only shield the Quileute wolves. I was as elated as Jake.

I was completely mesmerised by the beauty and symmetry of the scene that was unfolding before my eyes. I was only vaguely aware when Jake told me he was going to phase back in. He moved away from me to strip and phase and three things happened very fast.

First, a huge black and brown wolf from the Oregon pack charged suddenly in my direction, teeth bared in a snarl. Next, a dark silver Quileute wolf, who I knew to be Paul, appeared out of nowhere and barrelled into the black wolf side on, knocking him off his course and rolling him over and over on the ground. Finally, Jake burst through his clothes and phased into his enormous russet wolf. He moved protectively in front of me, enraged and snarling viciously.

The whole episode took less than five seconds. It took me a further five seconds to realise that one of the Oregon wolves had apparently been about to attack me and Paul Lahote had saved my life.

Jake was out of control, snarling and snapping at the black and brown wolf which was now cringing on the ground, apparently under an Alpha command. Bewildered, I looked around for some clue as to what was happening. Every wolf had stopped what they were doing. Some were pacing but most were still. All were watching as the largest of the visiting wolves, presumably Akando, slowly approached Jake's wolf. Leah was flanking Akando. As I looked at her, she locked eyes with me and jerked her head in Jake's direction.

Understanding her, I moved to his side and put my hand on him. I slowly moved up to his head, which turned slightly in my direction. He didn't take his eyes off the wolf on the ground.

"Jake," I whispered. "It's okay, I'm okay, I'm not hurt." I couldn't make any sense of what had happened and was getting no clues from watching the other wolves, but I did know that I was fine and Jake needed to calm down before the tenuous relationship with the visiting pack turned sour.

It didn't look like he was going to.

A/N: I know, it's an evil cliffy. You can blame Bella, she's a danger magnet. But since this couldn't get posted up yesterday, you won't need to wait too long to find out what happened... I promise! (Unless there are any more gremlins in the ff system, that is.)

Chapter 25: Chapter 25 Reasons

A/N: Ooohhh I know that was an evil cliff hanger. Here is your answer. Just to flag it up, it starts with Jake's POV and backs up a little to the start of the day initially.

Thanks again to feebes for beta reading (and convincing me not to leave you with an even more evil cliffy at the end of this one). And thank you as always to everyone who reads and reviews.

Chapter Twenty Four – Reasons

Jacob's POV

The day couldn't have gone any better. I had started the day with a number of concerns about the current situation. I was particularly worried about the lack of communication between the two packs and also about how my group would react to having other wolves in their territory. I had warned them all against antagonising our visitors and stressed the importance of us all working together, but Paul and the two younger pups worried me. Paul was volatile. Brady and Collin were young and might not know how to channel their agitation.

I had managed a quick word with Leah and she was tight lipped but seemed relaxed. She promised to keep an eye on the pups while I watched Paul. Then we had all gone into the forest to phase.

Akando and his pack were already in wolf form and when I phased I could hear nothing from them. Then I felt Leah join us, and all of a sudden five unfamiliar minds were linked with my own pack's. I could tell every single wolf was as stunned as me.

Leah and Akando instantly recognised that they shared some kind of imprint link. They had fun for a short while playing around with it, and when Leah discovered that they could zone out and be alone in each other's heads, she was ecstatic. I quickly decided that I didn't want to know why she would want a private frequency.

And yeah, okay, I was a little jealous that I didn't have something as cool as that with Bells.

Strangely, the shock of finding that Leah and Akando could connect us all seemed to speed up the bonding process a little. I couldn't detect any agitation coming from Paul or Collin. Brady was a little skittish but then again he usually was. Hotah was also a little too excited.

Matt worried me. His mind was a dark place. It was even worse than Paul's. I recognised the same undertones that had haunted my mind in the days when I first phased and had to stay away from Bella. He was desperately, mindlessly in love with Nina and everybody knew it. He absolutely loathed Embry for imprinting on her, and once again, everybody knew it. I registered Embry's jolt of shock as he realised how deep Matt's hatred for him ran.

I couldn't help but shudder as a series of *what ifs* ran through my mind. What if I hadn't imprinted on Bella? What if she hadn't fallen in love with me? What if, fuck, another wolf had imprinted on her? I wondered if my mind would be as haunted as Matt's was. Jared cheerfully told me that yes, it probably would have been, I was already heading that way before Bella accepted the imprint.

Matt saw it all in our minds. I apologised to him for poking through his head, showing him my own love for Bella in the days before we were imprinted. I then wondered if I'd made a mistake as I saw his resentment that we had found our happy ever after together.

Once everyone had finished examining everyone else's minds and we all felt we knew what we were dealing with, Akando and I regrouped. This development with the pack minds made everything a whole lot easier and we agreed to spend some time working out which wolves worked the best together. Every wolf would ultimately have their own job to do in battle, but it made sense to know who to keep close together and more importantly, who to separate.

Matt and Embry were kept as far apart as possible.

As the day progressed, it started to become clear which wolves worked well and which needed an extra eye kept on them. Akando kept Hotah alongside him for the time being. Elan and Nick could work with anybody, as could most of my pack. Matt and Seth turned out to be a good pairing, and I was proud of Seth's ability to diffuse the other wolf's temper and draw him into some kind of co-operative effort.

Leah kept Brady with her and I worked with Collin. There were no problems. Paul was more comfortable with his own pack, but could work with Elan or Nick without antagonising them too much. Of course, we were only under very relaxed circumstances today and I was well aware that when we made training more intensive or were in a real battle, the dynamics would be different. But I felt that we were off to a great start.

We ran some patrols, set up some mock fight training and allowed the wolves the day to familiarise themselves with each other. I was on an absolute high when I left to get Bella. It never entered my head that, with me right next to her, it might be a dangerous place for her to be.

Not being phased when it happened, I hadn't seen what was in Matt's mind when he shot towards her out of nowhere.

Exploding into wolf form had been an instinctive response to my imprint being in danger. Through my own rage and fear, and the confused melee of the other wolves' minds, it took me a while to focus in on Matt.

Defiance and anger were all I could read from him. Had I been in greater control of myself, I would have been able to probe further and find his reasons for wanting to attack my imprint. But I was beyond reason at that point and aware only of the need to keep myself between Bella and Matt. I gradually became aware of Akando's calm voice telling me it was all just a mistake and Matt would explain himself. Leah was willing me to listen and I realised Paul had backed right away from Matt although he was still angry with the visiting wolf.

Bella was stroking my fur and talking to me gently and the combination of her soothing and Akando's calm authority gradually began to penetrate my blind fury. I tried to focus. I could still only feel Matt's rage and defiance. Trying harder, I caught something like embarrassment, as though Matt realised he had made a mistake but was attempting to hide it.

Akando ordered Matt to show me what had happened. I sensed that was the last thing Matt wanted to do, but he had to comply with the Alpha order. He began with re-playing this morning when I had filled both packs in on what had happened with Kate. I had shown them Bella's ability to shield me and then Leah. I had let the Oregon wolves know that I was fairly sure they would be protected too. He let me see his relief that the Volturi would not be able to gain the upper hand by using their sadistic mind control. He showed me briefly his envy that the girl I had adored had finally seen me the way he longed for Nina to see him. A glimpse of his hatred for Embry rose again at that point but he pushed it back quickly and went on to his reaction when I went to get Bella. I had either missed it amongst the cacophony of other thoughts or it had been after I had phased back to human. He clearly thought I was an idiot for bringing a human girl, especially one who was responsible for all our lives now, into such a large pack of phased wolves.

In light of what had happened, I had to concede that he had a point.

He had, unknown to me, been watching Bella as she stood watching the wolves. He had considered her to be a little scrap of a thing and suspected that she would panic under pressure. He worried that she would frighten easily and lose control of her shield, putting us all at risk. So he had decided to test her. It was an incredibly stupid thing to do, and he must have acted too fast for Akando to put an order on him. He showed me that his intention had been purely to scare her to see how she would react. I felt Akando's irritation with him and showed him my own scorn.

I turned to Paul who told me that he didn't understand Matt's intentions and saw only that Bella was in danger and I wouldn't be able to phase quickly enough to stop it. Paul also showed me that as the day was wearing on, he was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his agitation over the visiting wolves in check and wasn't able to focus on all the new voices in his head at once.

I turned to Bella and nuzzled her side to let her know I was fine. I felt her relax in relief. *So much for showing the packs off to her*, I thought.

Trying to find the silver lining, I thought of a few things that I now knew. Firstly, Matt was an idiot. I saw Akando's agreement and Matt's flare of temper in response.

Secondly, however, Matt had been right about one thing. Bella's safety was more important than usual now that she was our main defence. I had been careless to bring her here. Her protection had just become every wolves' top priority. I felt a general agreement from both packs.

Thirdly, Bella's role when the battle came was clear, she was our shield. I had already known that she wouldn't exactly be sitting on my back during the fight. She would obviously need to be kept at a distance. This episode had just highlighted how quickly things could escalate out of control and that was in a friendly situation. Serious consideration needed to be given to how and where Bella would be placed during the ultimate showdown. Again, I felt the packs agree.

Fourthly, things were clearly not going as smoothly as I had previously thought. Paul was beginning to struggle with having the extra wolves in his mind. It wasn't just the number of wolves, it was the fact that some were from an opposing pack. I saw Matt, Collin, and even Jared agree wholeheartedly and then Elan let me see some discomfort too. We would need to work on getting everyone used to having the wolves from both packs in their minds for prolonged periods and under extreme conditions.

Finally, Paul's savage protection of Bella came as a surprise to me. I sensed in his mind that there was more to it than protecting a fellow wolf's imprint, or even protecting our shield. I had a vague sense that there was something else there but knew Paul wouldn't want it aired in front of everyone so I blocked it quickly. I would remember to ask Paul about it at a more appropriate time.

Akando suggested we finish up for the day to allow all the wolves to calm down. He let me see that he was pleased with how the day had gone, despite the last twenty minutes or so. I agreed that everybody could do with a break now, but let it be known that we would step the training up the next day.

I nudged Bella back towards the trees and followed her as she went into their cover. I phased back to human and hugged her close to me, relieved that she was okay. Of course she wanted to know what had happened so I told her all of it, from what Matt had been doing to the difficulties the wolves were having, to how her safety was even more of a priority now. Then I suggested we head home for some rest before making a start on preparations for the bonfire.

That was when I realised I had no clothes because I had shredded them when I had phased so suddenly.

Bella's POV

The mental image of Jake riding his bike naked had me in hysterics. He was trying to look irritated but I could see the amusement in his eyes. I thought part of my hysteria may be a delayed reaction to what had just happened with Matt. I had to agree with Jake that Matt was an idiot. Hadn't he known how Jacob would react? Paul's protection of me was a surprise, but Jacob had been standing right next to me. I asked Jake about that.

"I really don't know Bells. We all know Paul's impulsive and volatile, but I think this guy is gonna make him look like a kitten. And he really hates Embry. He doesn't even try to hide it," Jake frowned.

"What does Embry make of it?"

"Well he got a shock earlier when he realised how deep it runs. But to be honest Bells we're all just gonna have to live with it for the next few days."

"Jake?"

"Yeah honey."

"How **are** we getting home?"

Jake laughed, "Well I can phase and ask one of the guys to bring me a pair of pants. Or," he paused and looked at me hopefully, "I can phase and you can ride on my back."

"What?" I squeaked.

"Aw c'mon Bells it'll be fun. I'll not go too fast I swear."

I gulped. I could tell he really wanted to do this. Memories of the motion sickness I had when Edward carried me on his back surfaced and I felt sick just thinking about it.

Jake sighed, "OK honey, I'll get one of the guys ..."

"No!" I interrupted him. "You want to do this, so we'll do it. Just don't you dare let me fall off!"

Jake rolled his eyes at me and then phased. He crouched down so that I could climb on. It was still a considerable distance onto his back and I struggled to find a position that I felt secure in. Finally, I told him I was ready and he rose slowly to stand. He set off at a walk initially, gradually building speed until he was running at what I thought was a fast pace but was probably only a fraction of what he could achieve.

It wasn't scary. It was exhilarating. I could feel the wind in my hair, similar to when I was on my bike. Or rather, when I was on my bike without a helmet, in the days when Jake wasn't quite as safety conscious as he apparently was now. I could feel the sheer power of Jake's muscles working beneath my body and the fact that I knew he was capable of much more than this was staggering.

Trees whipped past us as Jake tore home. The wind was cold on my face and even stung my eyes a little. I loved every second of it.

Finally, when we were as close to Billy's as we could safely go without being seen, Jake came to a halt and lay down. I slid off him, my legs a little shaky. I knew he would need pants and told him to wait where he was while I got them for him. Ten minutes after that, we arrived home together.

Home. I knew this wasn't really our home; it was Billy's and our future home lay somewhere on the outskirts of the reservation. But knowing that I could always come back to Jake at the end of each day, and wake in his arms each morning, filled me with so much happiness that I felt my heart would burst.

Reading my mind in a way that only Jacob could, he pulled me into his signature bear hug and told me of the joy he felt at the thought of building a home with me. We melted into a kiss and broke apart only when we realised that my cell phone had been ringing insistently in my jacket pocket for several minutes.

"Somebody really wants to talk to you," Jake stated the obvious as I fumbled for the phone. It began ringing again almost as soon as voicemail had cut it off. It was an international number.

I looked at Jake, frowning. "I think it must be one of the Cullens. Edward, maybe Alice."

"Better see what they want," Jacob's voice was curt.

I answered the phone and shut my eyes as the last voice I ever wanted to hear again said my name.

"Edward," I looked at Jake whose jaw was clenched. He mouthed, "What does he want?" at me.

"Bella," Edward said again, "Aro has made a decision. The Volturi guard will mobilise within the week. I must meet with you, love."

"What? No way, Edward! You brought this ..." I trailed off as I saw Jacob making frantic motions to me to stop talking. He paced around the living room a little, obviously thinking furiously.

Edward was speaking but I was so pre-occupied watching Jacob that I only caught snippets of what he was saying. Apparently, he was going to arrive under separate cover from the Volturi. He hoped to be in Forks by the end of the week, while the Volturi would take at least an additional few days to arrive.

Jake's head had snapped up when Edward said he would be arriving so quickly and he motioned for me to give him the phone. I handed it over, confused.

"Edward," Jacob said in a serious voice. "This is Jacob Black. I am the Alpha of the wolf pack now." Edward apparently interrupted him and Jacob rolled his eyes in response to whatever he said. "That's none of your damn business. Tell me this: can you keep Bella safe from the Volturi?"

I exploded and started yelling incoherently. Jake shushed me and when that didn't work he stepped behind me and clamped a hand over my mouth.

"No, she's not in agreement," Jake said candidly. "But I'm trying to do what's best for her. Can you or can you not keep her safe?" There was a pause while Edward responded and then Jacob said, "Good. Call me when you arrive in Forks and we'll arrange for her to be handed over."

He hung up the phone and released me. I went wild, kicking at him and screaming incoherently.

"**Bella calm down!**" he finally roared at me. The shock of him yelling at me like that quietened me long enough for him to explain.

"Of course I'm not going to hand you over to him Bella! Don't be ridiculous! But he'll believe that I would do it because it's the sort of decision **he** would make on your behalf. Then you and I will go to meet him at the treaty line and you can shield my thoughts from him."

"But – why?" I was bewildered.

"Because," Jacob said grimly, "I'm going to lead the Volturi guard into a trap by feeding Edward false information."

A/N: My kids are on mid-term break now and I have an Alpha head cold. So in other words I'm not sure how regularly I'll be updating for the next week. There will definitely be a few chapters but maybe not as frequent as usual. Back to business the following week though, I promise!

Chapter 26: Chapter 26 Bonfire

A/N: Thank you to everyone! Feebes for beta reading; and all of you for reading and reviewing.

Chapter Twenty Five – Bonfire

Once Jake was certain that I had gotten over my fit of hysterics, we had a lot to discuss. The knowledge that the Volturi could be here as early as next week was sobering. Jake had only a vague outline of a plan but he was convinced there must be a way of using my shield to enable him to feed false information about the pack to Edward.

He was talking freely as we got ready for the bonfire. Ideas spouted forth becoming more refined as he discussed them and I clearly saw the Alpha of the pack forming plans to ensure the safety of his wolves, his imprint and his tribe.

The most pressing issue Jake needed to decide was whether to tell the packs tonight. I was inclined to think that this evening was about relaxing and bonding; after the incident with Matt this afternoon, I felt that the two packs needed time to settle down together. Jake was very serious as he answered me.

"Bella all those guys and Leah are literally putting their lives on the line here. They have a right to know what they're facing and when. The timing of this sucks. It would have been great for tonight to be about just having some fun. But Akando hasn't brought his pack here to socialise. They'll all want to know about this. I would too, in their shoes."

When he put it like that, I felt a little shame faced for being so shallow; but I guessed that was why **he** was Alpha.

"I'll tell Akando first of course," Jake continued. "And we'll decide how to break it to the others."

When we arrived at the beach, Akando and Leah were sitting slightly apart from the others. Only Embry and Nina, Brady and Matt were still to arrive. Quil, who was patrolling, was also absent. I wondered how he was. I hadn't seen much of him since his return from the Makah reservation. I guessed it must have been difficult for him to have the two packs in his head today and I decided to try and find an opportunity to speak with him later this evening. I didn't know whether he would want to pour his heart out to me but I figured that letting him know I was here wouldn't hurt.

Seth, Jared and Paul had already started the bonfire and uncovered the pit that was used for barbeques at these events. Jake added the cooler of fish we had raided from Billy's freezer to the pile of boxes and coolers already there. Then, he went to tear Akando away from Leah.

Unable to resist the opportunity, I sat down next to Leah with a grin and she scowled at me.

"More girl talk I take it?"

"You're not fooling me, Leah. You're glowing."

A beautiful smile replaced her scowl and I clearly saw the girl Sam had fallen in love with. "It's just ... wow!" she told me.

"Yeah," I agreed. "Imprints are wow."

Leah pulled a face. "For the imprinted couple," she pointed out. Then she added, "Usually."

"Usually?" I assumed she meant Sam and Emily, but they had been happy together until the imprint broke.

"Have you seen Quil?"

I shook my head. "Is he not happy?"

Leah sighed. "Yeah, he's happy... kind of... when he's not freaking out about never being able to live a normal life."

I thought about it for a while, telling myself again to find an opportunity to speak with Quil this evening. Then the penny dropped.

"Leah I'll talk about Quil with Quil. Right now I want to talk about you, but nice try."

She grinned at me sheepishly. "I don't do gushing Bella. But ... it's good. He's strong, he can handle my shit, and he sort of balances me I think. With Sam, I was always the sparky one, the one that over-reacted and lost my temper. But with Akando, we're both kind of feisty and it feels more equal somehow."

"Wow is right!" I told her. "In 24 hours you've got that much already?"

"Direct access to his mind, Bella," she told me as if I were a two year old.

"Oh yeah, right."

Leah snorted. "You know Jake wishes he had a mind link with you," she grinned.

"Jake wishes I was a wolf?" I was startled.

"Did I say that? I said he wishes that you and he had a private frequency that you could talk to each other on. Although judging from the look on your face, I should've kept my mouth shut."

"Well we do have a mind link, I wouldn't be able to shield him if we didn't," I said petulantly.

Leah rolled her eyes, "Whatever Bella. Hey where did they go anyway?"

I hesitated. This was a wolf matter and it was up to Jake or Akando to tell her. My face must have given something away.

"Is it bad news?" she asked in a muted tone. Despite her low volume, I saw Elan and Jared, who were tending the barbeque slightly to our left, turn their heads in our direction.

"I don't think they'll be long," I told her, hoping she would drop it. I had no idea what the best way was to break the news to two packs of wolves and their imprints that Armageddon was on its way to La Push.

Leah watched me closely for a moment and then nodded. "I'm going to help with the bonfire," she said as she stood up.

As I watched her go, I caught sight of Matt arriving on the beach. He looked so sullen that I wondered if he had been Alpha ordered to attend. Nick casually handed him a drink which he took without so much as a thanks and then, as if sensing my eyes on him, he looked directly at me.

Despite being tempted to avert my gaze, I lifted my chin and stared back at him. I had done nothing wrong. He had made a stupid decision and it had turned sour. I refused to be intimidated by him.

My resolve wavered however when he suddenly began walking towards me. It was one thing to have a glaring contest; an actual conversation was different.

Matt sat beside me and stared out over the water. He took a long drink before speaking.

"You can control your shield?"

"I can cover Jake, yes."

"And you think it can be extended to cover us?"

I hesitated. We didn't know that for a fact and there wasn't any way of testing it that I could see.

"Jake is certain it will cover both packs," was what I finally settled for.

Matt nodded. "That's good enough for me." I looked at him, surprised, but he paid no attention. "They're malicious, you know," he went on. "The Volturi, they're sadistic and they'll stop at nothing to get what they want."

I shivered. "How do you know so much about them?"

He didn't answer but I saw his gaze flicker further up the beach. When I followed the direction he was looking in, I saw Nina laughing as Embry walked behind her along the beach. His arms were around her waist and he was planting kisses all over her hair. The picture of the happily imprinted couple made me smile, but then I wasn't in love with either of them.

I realised suddenly how Matt knew so much about the Volturi. Nina had studied them. Matt must have spent a lot of time with her, prior to Embry imprinting on her. When I looked at him again, his face was twisted in pain and hatred. It reminded me of the way Leah used to look and my heart ached for him.

"You really love her don't you?" It had blurted out my mouth before I could filter it and I cringed slightly as I waited for his retaliation.

Instead of cutting me down, Matt shrugged. "She's happy," he said. "That's all I ever wanted for her." He started to stand up.

"But you wanted her to be happy with you," I said quietly.

Matt paused and looked down at me, seemingly undecided. Finally, he gave an abrupt nod before stalking away.

I was in a pensive mood as I watched the bonfire get under way. Jake and Akando still hadn't returned so the rest of the wolves were oblivious that this evening would be anything other than an opportunity to unwind and have some fun.

The imprinted couples stuck together. Embry and Nina, Elan and Abey, Nick and Anna, Jared and Kim. I suspected that when Jake and Akando returned, they would naturally gravitate with Leah and me towards the other couples.

But then there was Matt, broken hearted and bitter. Quil, who was still on patrol but would never fit in with the imprinted couple scene. And of course, the hole that been left by Sam and Emily. I couldn't help but wonder again whether imprinting was such a good thing. I felt highly relieved that Jake and I had found our happy ever after without hurting anyone else in the process. I pushed down thoughts of Edward, deciding he was hardly an innocent victim.

By the time Jake and Akando returned, the bonfire was roaring, the smell of barbecued fish, meat and vegetables was thick in the air and the conversations were flowing. The youngest wolves were play fighting in the sand and looked for all the world like young animals testing their strength against each other while the older wolves indulgently tolerated them. The imprinted couples remained together, while the unimprinted wolves arm wrestled, chatted over food, or in Matt's case, sat alone looking sullen.

I was people watching. On the whole, the two packs seemed to gel together quite well. I noticed Embry throw the occasional glance in Matt's direction. At one point, he made as if to stand up and said something to Nina, who swiftly shook her head and pulled him back down beside her again, looking at Matt with something like sympathy on her face.

Just as I was wondering how that triangle would play out over the coming days, Jake flopped down beside me on the sand and immediately pulled me into his side. In the absence of werewolf senses, I hadn't heard him coming and I beamed at him as I snuggled into his warmth.

"Miss me Bells?" he asked with a laugh.

"Of course, what's the verdict?"

Jake leaned down to whisper in my ear, "Food first."

I nodded. It made sense. Feed the packs before settling down to business. I looked over at Leah and Akando and had to smile at the sight of him kissing her tenderly before whispering in her ear and leading her away from the rest of us.

Jake whispered in my ear again. "Leah will be told first. She's his imprint and my Beta. She has a right to know."

I nodded again. I thought it was fitting that Leah, who had so often been the innocent victim of circumstances, was now being shown this respect.

The food was eaten as fast as it became ready and the crowd grew more and more raucous. Jake, despite guarding a secret that would surely change the mood of the entire evening, was relaxed and every bit the leader and the host.

Half an hour after they had left, Leah and Akando returned. The whistles and cat calls of the two packs alerted me to their presence. I turned to look at them and found myself staring openly as they approached, hand in hand, along the beach.

Akando walked straight and tall as always. From what my human eyes could see at a distance, his demeanour was serious. Leah moved proudly beside him, her head held high and with an air of determination. I was fairly sure that even if I hadn't known their secret, I would have recognised the power they exuded. Together, they looked invincible.

I looked around the rest of the company. I saw that Embry, Elan and Seth were all watching them closely, as if they too had recognised the authority that flowed from the newly imprinted couple. I felt Jake stiffen beside me, his wolf seemingly threatened by the display of solidarity between his Beta and the opposing Alpha. I realised for the first time that this was a potentially difficult situation.

Just as that thought occurred to me, Leah looked at Jake and inclined her head ever so slightly, a silent agreement with some plan I was not privy to. I felt Jake relax a little and wondered what I didn't yet know.

Another half hour passed. The food supply had dwindled and the wolves' hunger was sated for the time being. The packs both seemed relaxed and even Matt was in conversation with Seth and Quil, who had been relieved from duty by Collin.

As if in response to a signal, Jake and Akando simultaneously rose to their feet to address the two packs. A hush immediately fell over the crowd. Everyone could see that their respective Alphas meant business.

When Akando and Leah had arrived back at the beach, it had crossed my mind that Jake may be slightly out of his depth. The Tamastlikt Alpha could be an imposing figure and I knew that Jake had been nervous going to ask for his help only a week ago.

As I watched Jake now standing next to Akando, I felt a little traitorous for having even considered that Jake may not be able to match him. Both men oozed Alpha power, neither seeming more dominant than the other. If either or both of them were feeling threatened by the other, there was no outward indication of it as they looked seriously around the gathered group.

Jake spoke first. "Edward Cullen contacted Bella this evening." His voice rang strong and clear through the evening air. "He will arrive in Forks by the end of this week. The Volturi are expected next week. This battle has come to us sooner than we had expected but we are not unprepared by any means. We will have to train harder and work faster but we will win this." Jake turned to look at Akando, who began to address his own pack.

"We will remain in Forks until this is over. We will spend our time training with the Quileute pack and co-ordinating the arrival of the Kootenai pack. I will send word to all your families tomorrow."

Jake and Akando surveyed the group before them. "Any questions?" That was Jake. Akando didn't look like he would have offered.

"Why is Cullen coming early? What does he want?" asked Jared.

"Bella," Jake replied simply.

"Is that a problem?" It was a curt question from Matt.

"Absolutely not," Jake told him. "But we will use it to our advantage. Having Bella here means Cullen will meet with us on our terms. It also gives us the opportunity to feed him misinformation about the size and skills of the pack. Of course he'll be told nothing about visiting packs. And I believe it should be possible to use Bella's shield for a double bluff. Tell him one thing, let him read something else in my thoughts that he will assume to be the truth. Bella and I will figure that out between us."

"Fightin' dirty, Alpha?" grinned Paul.

"You'd better fucking believe it," Jake responded grimly. "Don't think for one minute they'll be fair with us."

"How will that work in practise though?" Seth asked. "I mean, why does Bella need to shield your thoughts if you **want** Edward to read them? And won't he be able to read all your thoughts then to know you're bluffing? I don't get it."

Akando's face clearly said, "My point exactly," although he said nothing.

It was Leah who answered. "That's the genius of it. I think that if Edward believes that Jake has found a way to block him from his head, but then Jake makes it look like he hasn't quite mastered it and he slips up occasionally, Edward will be gloating. I don't think it would even occur to him that it's a trick."

Jake smiled slightly at Leah and I saw his gratitude for her support. I guessed there had been some disagreement between the two Alphas over this point. He turned to look at me. "What do you think Bella? Will he buy it?"

I thought about it. "I don't know how exactly we would achieve it. But yes, if he thinks initially that you've somehow blocked him out, he'll try and find a way around it. And if we can make him think that he gets through at a time when you are thinking something specific before I cover you again ... yes, he would buy it."

I didn't say that I had no idea how to make this work in practise. I didn't have to; Matt said it for me.

"If, if, if," he muttered loudly enough that even I heard him.

"Bella and I will work out the details," Jake said severely. "But our main focus needs to be training. We need to ensure that both packs are completely comfortable working in each other's minds. And I mean," he continued, surveying his own pack, "that you all need to be as comfortable with Akando's wolves as you are with each other and vice versa. I know it's not easy. But we don't have a choice now. Are there any other questions?"

"What about the other pack?" Nick asked. "Can we shield them? Communicate with them when we're phased?"

"Presumably not," Akando replied shortly. I was getting the impression that he wasn't in favour of asking his pack's opinions. I remembered Jake telling me that he had vetoed coming to help us despite opposition within his pack. It seemed he had a different style of leadership.

"We need to work something out there," Jake acknowledged. "I have some ideas, but Akando and I need to discuss that between ourselves first. We'll keep you all up to speed." He looked around the group, "Anything else?"

"Yeah," Paul got to his feet. "How many leeches do I get to kill?"

Whoops and hollers sounded from around the packs and Jake laughed, "As many as you like Paul. Just leave Edward for me."

I jumped, startled and immediately cursed my human reflexes. I hoped nobody had noticed. Everyone seemed too preoccupied with the new state of affairs and I felt relieved until Jake appeared at my side and motioned me to follow him into the trees. I knew he had seen my reaction.

When we were some distance into the forest, he stopped and searched my face. I saw a trace of confusion in his eyes. Finally, he spoke. "Why would you not want me to destroy Edward, Bella?"

"What? No, it's not that! Jacob, I ... I don't want him to hurt you! He destroyed another vampire Jake and he was vicious! You remember I told you how I got the scar on my arm? He destroyed the vampire that gave it to me. And if he can do that, well maybe he can kill you too." I was pleading with him to understand.

He looked at me strangely. "Bella, I don't think Edward is the most dangerous leech we're up against here. And it's because of him that all this is happening."

"I know that Jake and he does need to be destroyed, I know that too. But ... it'll be personal, with you, for both of you. It won't be just a wolf fighting a vampire. And I have a bad feeling about that," I finished lamely. I couldn't explain it. I was terrified by the thought of the only two men I had ever loved, fighting each other to the death.

"Bella," Jacob took my face in his hands and looked into my eyes very seriously. "I told you last night that I have loved you since the first time I saw you after you came back to live here. I watched you fall for a guy who turned out to be a ... a fucking **corpse**. He was a hundred years older than you. He knew how innocent you were and how wrong it was for him to bring you into his world. He did it anyway, because he was selfish. And then he left you and you went through some kind of ... withdrawal or something from whatever it was that he intoxicated you with. You were so completely broken that sometimes I didn't know if I would ever be able to fix you properly. And now, instead of leaving you alone and allowing you to live your life and be happy, he's coming here hell bent on revenge. He's threatening my family, my pack, and my tribe. **I will end this myself.**" Alpha power was dripping from him by the time he had finished and I had never felt so safe and so protected in my life.

Of course, I realised, of course it has to be Jacob that does this.

I stepped into the arms of the man I loved and held him just as tightly as he held me. While he stroked my hair, I told him how much I loved and cherished him. He responded with a kiss that held so much love it took my breath away.

By the time we returned to the bonfire, the initial excitement at the prospect of killing leeches had subsided and each of the wolves were looking sober as they contemplated the days ahead. A general agreement was reached that everyone needed to rest tonight, ahead of the next day's gruelling training. Everyone began slowly clearing up and heading home, or to the forest, to sleep. On an impulse, I stopped Akando and asked if his pack would prefer beds to sleep in now that they were to stay longer.

"No, Bella," was his response. "We need to get to know this forest. We will live in it until this is over." He took Leah's hand and they walked together into the trees.

I felt Jake's warm hand take mine and he began to lead me home. He was quiet and thoughtful during the walk and I wondered just how difficult the coming days would be for him. He needed to keep his pack calm and co-ordinate with a rival Alpha, prepare for even more wolves and all while planning for an invasion of vampires determined to destroy them all. I knew that my role was simply to be there for him when he needed me. I kept silent on our way back to the cabin, allowing him his thoughts.

Once inside, I began putting away the cooler and tidying up a few things that were lying around. I was putting dishes back in the kitchen cupboard when Jake came up behind me and put his arms around me. He simply stood there holding me for a while.

Eventually, I turned in his arms and looked up at him. His eyes were blazing with determination but there was softness there too.

"I swear on everything I have ever known and believed in Bella that I will keep you, my family and my tribe safe," he said quietly.

I put my hand on his cheek. "I know you will."

It hadn't escaped my notice that he hadn't included his pack in his promise and I wondered how heavy he expected the casualties to be. I swallowed hard, refusing to dwell on that while I was with Jacob. I would worry about that in my own time. For now, I was his.

Jake bent his head to kiss me softly. I followed his every lead, submitting to him when he deepened the kiss, when he picked me up and carried me to the bed and when he finally took me.

Later that night, while Jacob slept, I allowed my tears to fall as I thought of the young boys who would be facing the darkest of dangers in just a few short days.

For the thousandth time, I cursed the day I had ever met Edward Cullen. I was determined to do my part in leading him and the Volturi guard into a trap that would give the wolves the advantage. Whatever that took.

A/N: A few of you have asked for outtakes, or other POVs. I would absolutely love to write them but am just concentrating on the J/B side of this story for now. I'll add some outtakes/POVs either at the end, or as a series of one shots when I've finished the main story. Let me know if there's anything you particularly want to read and I'll give it a try. There will be a short Edward POV coming up soon, and a little bit of Embry (see below lol).

Also, seeing as tomorrow is Valentine's Day, I'll be posting a separate J/B one shot (nothing to do with WotW) and if I can get it finished, a short fluffy unbeta-ed Embry/Nina chapter tomorrow as an outtake for this story. So if you get an author or story alert tomorrow... it won't be the story continuing, just a little bit of fun:D

Chapter 27: Embry

A/N: Ooohhhh people, you are making me very nervous. That last chapter was met with cyber silence, more or less, despite more than 600 people reading it so far. I take it you didn't like it? Fair enough! I can handle the criticism as well as the praise, so please do let me know what you think, even if you don't like the way the story is going. There is an epic battle to be fought and the wolf pack needs some support! So do tell me what you do and don't like.

On a brighter note, here's some Valentine's Day fluff. It's not been beta read and it was written very quickly with my kids running around my feet, so I know it's not the best chapter ever, but hopefully you'll enjoy the lighter side step for a moment!

Embry

Embry Call wound some of Nina's hair around his fingers and raised the silken strands to his face, inhaling deeply. The scent should have been new to him; he had only met the girl a week ago. But somehow, right from the first time he had smelled it, it had been so familiar. His very soul had recognised it. The same as his soul had recognised her eyes when he looked into them for the very first time, and had known the feel of her small hand in his.

It was the power of the imprint. His soul knew her soul. He had seen the same thing first in Sam's mind, then in Jared's and Jake's. It was a remarkable thing.

Embry knew he would have to bring Nina to his mom's house sooner or later. He knew Nina was expecting it, since she was here in La Push, and he didn't want to upset her in any way. He just wasn't sure how he was going to explain it all to his mother.

Tiffany Call thought her son was a trouble maker. She didn't know exactly why he was out at all hours of the night, or why he often disappeared for hours at a time and came back filthy. When he had taken off for a full week with no explanation, she had almost barred him from crossing the threshold on his return. He told her nothing and answered none of her questions. He couldn't break Alpha orders and wouldn't betray pack honour. Instead, he endured hours of yelling and accusations and allowed his mother to believe that her only son was a member of a cult, or a drug user, or a member of a dubious gang.

Things at home were strained, to say the least. Embry knew that if he brought Nina home, his mother would ask questions. She would want to know where she was from, how they met, and of course why Embry was so obviously serious about a girl he had met only one week previously.

The questions were all pretty much unanswerable.

Of course, he had told Nina of the difficulties. She wanted to meet Tiffany. She thought that maybe if Embry's mother knew he was seeing a nice girl, she may go a little easier on him. Embry wasn't so sure that his mother would assume Nina was a nice girl, given the opinion she had of him these days.

Embry inhaled the scent of Nina's hair again, and felt himself relax and calm down. He put his hands on her waist and pulled her closer to him. He kept his eyes open until he saw hers flutter closed in anticipation of his kiss. Then, he shut his own eyes, a smile on his lips as he pressed them softly to hers. The world clicked into place the moment their mouths met.

Embry remembered back to the day he had met Nina. He had endured hours of Jake's obsessive inner monologue on the run down to Oregon and had been about ready to phase back to human and run the rest of the way on two feet to get away from it.

Of course, as annoying as it was, Jake's never-ending preoccupation was a very, very good thing; for all the wolves, as well as Jake. The whole pack had been worried when Jake had imprinted on the vampire girl. She wasn't only a leech lover; she was broken. Sam had thought she was broken beyond repair.

Jake hadn't given up on her. Embry had known Jake his whole life, and knew he would have **never** given up on her. Fortunately, Bella had come to her senses and now Jake had a spring in his step and a glow in his eyes that he had never had before.

The Alpha was happy and fulfilled. All of his wolves felt secure.

So Embry was able to endure the run to Oregon, and could only hope that the love and contentment radiating from his friend would one day be his. He hadn't dreamed that it would begin that same day.

Embry knew he was lucky that Nina was so aware of the wolves and their quirks. She had accepted the imprint unequivocally. She held the simple belief that if an imprint had occurred, it was meant to be. Therefore, she and Embry were quite literally made for one another. It had seemed almost too easy. Quil had said dryly that Embry deserved **something** to go smoothly for him.

What hadn't been so easy was spending the first days of the imprint under Akando's watchful gaze. Nina's older brother may have understood imprinting, but he was also determined to protect his sister. Like Embry, they had grown up without

a father and Akando had taken on that role with Nina. He made sure Embry and his imprint had hardly any time to be alone together without a damn chaperone.

It wasn't as if Embry would just have jumped on her! He adored and respected her too much for that. He wanted to talk to her, get to know her. His situation was not like Jake's – there was no prior friendship. He and Nina literally knew nothing about each other and Embry was desperate to get to know her, this girl who would share his life.

And yes, okay, he wanted to kiss her and touch her, and he was hoping that it wouldn't be too long before he shared the kind of physical relationship with her that the other guys had with their imprints. But Akando really didn't need to be so damn over-protective.

Then again, he was Nina's brother, and the Alpha of the pack who were willing to help them out of this mess with the leeches. Embry just had to suck it up.

So, Embry and Nina hadn't had a moment alone until the Saturday. Four days of longing. Four days of trying to have a conversation with the girl of his dreams while Elan, Akando or Len hovered by. Embry was shy at the best of times. He didn't think his conversational skills were sparkling under these circumstances.

But finally, **finally**, on Saturday Nina said she needed to go into town to buy some groceries. Akando had groaned and thrown his car keys at Embry.

"You take her Embry. And be warned. This could make you want to break your imprint."

Delighted, Embry had agreed. He would have agreed to anything for Nina. He was a little confused by the impish grin she gave him on their way out the door. He was learning that Nina may be as shy as he was, but she had a devilish sense of humour. She was also, he was about to find out, devious when she needed to be.

In the car, Nina smiled her beautiful smile at him and tossed her hair back.

"So we'll do this differently today," she announced. "Just go to the store, I'll be quick as I can, then take us somewhere."

"Uh – Nina?"

"I'm a dreadful cook," she stated matter-of-factly. Embry sputtered. He wasn't sure of the protocol here. She certainly **was** a dreadful cook, but she was also his imprint and he knew that insulting your imprint was not a good thing to do. Then again, he thought with a frown, neither was patronising her.

"Not the worst I've tasted," he mumbled.

"Well I'm sure the forest kill is pretty revolting," Nina agreed sagely. Embry chanced a look at her. He was way out of his depth here. Maybe chaperones weren't such a bad thing, he thought suddenly.

"Look," she said evenly. "I can't cook. I know it, you know it, everybody knows it. Usually me going to the grocery store is a big deal. I don't know what to buy, I take ages, I change my mind about three dozen times, and whoever is with me gets mad. Maybe they should just let me go alone!" she finished savagely.

Embry looked at her, surprised. "Why don't they?"

"I don't get to be alone, or haven't you noticed?"

"I thought that was just because of me!"

Nina shook her head. "Well it's partly that. But it's all part of the ridiculously over-protective big brother thing. Anyway, so usually grocery-shopping-with-Nina is at the top of the duties nobody wants to do. Which is why Akando was so happy to let you come with me. So what we're going to do is, get the groceries as fast as we can, then go somewhere alone."

Embry nearly laughed. He was stunned, excited and dubious all at once. Nina wanted to be alone with him. He was ecstatic about that. But if Akando found out that he had abused his trust the only time it had been given ... *Oh, hell, why not?*

"Just one thing though," Nina asked him, "Do you know anything about cooking or buying groceries?"

As it turned out, Embry did. Living alone with his mom all these years had taught him to be reasonably self-sufficient. He couldn't cook like Emily or Bella, but he could cope with throwing some ingredients into a cart and kind of knowing what to do with them later.

And so Nina's weekly grocery disaster turned into quite a fun experience. Embry and Nina revelled in the time alone together, neither of them minding that it was at the store. With the motivation of being able to take this wonderful creature somewhere quiet as soon as they were done, Embry took full advantage of werewolf agility and speed whenever nobody was watching. Before long, they were back in the car and headed to a quiet picnic spot Nina knew of.

The next hour was spent talking, holding hands, and simply enjoying being together. Embry had never had so much fun in his life. He began to see the appeal for Jacob. He had never quite understood how it was that he would prefer to spend

time with a girl than with his friends. Friends who knew about cars, appreciated speed, and could play football. But now, Embry decided, this was much better. Looking into pretty eyes that smiled back at you. Holding a soft hand in your own calloused one. Being listened to like what you said was important. Embry decided that he would willingly give up the engines and the sport completely, if he could have this for the rest of his life.

Towards the end of that glorious hour together, Embry suddenly found himself panicking. Nina had been doing some strange things for the past ten minutes. She had flipped her hair back a lot. She had looked at his lips a few times and licked her own. She had moved ever closer to him and now ...

Oh **hell**. She wanted him to kiss her!

Embry gulped. Of course he wanted to kiss her. He'd dreamed of nothing else for four straight days. It had tortured him that she had been so near but he was unable to make his move on her. Now that it came to it, though, his heart was thundering in his chest and he was more frightened than he had ever been facing a vampire.

Facing vampires was fun. Kissing was supposed to be fun too. Embry wasn't so sure about that right now.

OK. Don't let the wolf pack down.

Leaning in, Embry was amazed when Nina's eyes fluttered closed and her breathing hitched. He kept his own eyes open, not wanting to miss his target. The instant his lips touched hers though, his eyes shut of their own accord and he became lost in the moment.

The sensation of her lips on his was exquisite. Embry thought he could stay locked in this moment forever and be perfectly content. His body took over and without conscious thought, his tongue traced her bottom lip lightly. His heart nearly stopped altogether when Nina parted her lips and allowed him in. He heard his own groan when he tasted her sweet mouth and like the teenaged werewolf that he was, a rush of blood to his groin created the need to reposition himself.

They stayed locked in their embrace for quite some time, tongues dancing and tasting. When Nina finally pulled back, her face was flushed and her eyes were bright. Embry knew the feeling.

"We'd better head back," she said softly. Embry's heart sank. All he could think now was that he wanted to do **that** again. A whole lot more of that, actually. He decided to try one more time before they really had to leave. He was pleasantly surprised when Nina responded as she had before, instead of telling him to get in the car.

They finally left the picnic spot, and drove back to Akando's house. Nina seemed to have a new sense of purpose about her that confused Embry a little. He didn't need to wait long to find out what it was about.

Back at the house, Nina marched inside and found her brother. She told him on no uncertain terms that she and Embry no longer required a chaperone. She informed her astonished sibling that, being imprinted to a wolf, her safety and well being were hardly in jeopardy and she would therefore not be expecting any interference in the future. She then proceeded to unpack the food in the kitchen, leaving Embry and Akando staring at one another, open mouthed.

It was the first time Embry had realised that for all his tough exterior with the wolves, Akando was easily daunted by a strong woman. He had laughed when the double imprint with Leah had occurred.

Akando did indeed back off on the chaperoning a little, and Embry found himself on the receiving end of many more kisses from his beautiful girl. He thought he would burst with happiness.

And now, on the evening of the bonfire, after all the other wolves and imprints had left the beach, Embry Call decided that it really was time to bring Nina home to meet his mother.

Tiffany Call was surprised to see her wayward son come home. She was even more surprised to see him hand in hand with an incredibly beautiful girl. Since when did Embry have a girlfriend? Cogs began to turn in her mind. Late nights, disappearing for days with no explanations. Who was this girl? Where did she live?

Tiffany crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes at her son. If he had been stupid and gotten this girl pregnant, Tiffany herself would make sure he stood by her. No girl deserved the fate she herself had had. Knocked up by a man who refused to even acknowledge his own flesh and blood. At least Embry wasn't married to somebody else. Not that Tiffany had known about his father's marriage at the time.

Nervously, Embry made the introductions. Nina smiled sweetly and said she was pleased to meet Tiffany. Tiffany looked curiously at Embry, made them all a drink, and sat down to find out what was going on.

Between them, Embry and Nina gave Tiffany some details without giving anything away. They hadn't known each other long. Nina's brother was helping Jacob Black with some tribal issues and they were visiting for a while. She was staying at Sam Uley's cabin with two other women from their tribe, while the men from the tribe camped in the forest.

As they talked, Tiffany Call realised that her son was absolutely, head over heels in love with this beautiful girl. Also, the girl appeared to feel the same way about him. Watching their interaction, Tiffany thought that Nina was going to be a very positive influence on Embry. She was sweet and a little shy, but she had a fire that would not allow anyone to walk all over her.

Tiffany wanted to trust Embry. His recent behaviour had made that impossible. But, just maybe, Nina could make the truth behind the secrets and lies come out. She decided to make the young woman as welcome as possible.

Embry watched in awed disbelief as his mom and imprint began to bond. From the confused looks his mom kept giving him, he knew she wasn't buying completely into the story they had given her. But the hostility which had escalated between them of late seemed slightly diffused, at least for the time being.

An hour with Tiffany passed more pleasantly than any other time in Embry's recent memory, and when he decided he should walk Nina back to Sam's place, he couldn't help but give his mom a hug on their way out. Tiffany returned her son's embrace, shutting her eyes tightly and hoping that where she had failed, Nina could help guide him out of whatever trouble he had gotten himself into.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?" Nina asked him as they walked together towards Sam's cabin.

Embry half laughed. "That was excellent, by our standards."

"Good." Nina squeezed his hand. "I hope it helps you at home." She sighed. "I hate being surrounded by wolves. They see and hear **everything**."

"Try having them actually in your head," Embry said wryly.

"Is that a problem now that Akando can read your thoughts about me?" she asked shyly.

Embry hesitated. There was that time this morning when Jared had been idly dreaming of caressing Kim's breasts, and Embry couldn't help but wish it was him with Nina. A low snarl to his right had made him jump round to see Akando's teeth bared at him. Of course Jacob had thought the whole idea of sharing a mind link with a wolf who was imprinted on your sister was so fucked up that it was hilarious. He had been an ass about it really, and Embry half hoped someone imprinted on Rachel when she came home next week. Assuming, of course, they had all survived the battle.

Embry snapped out of his thoughts when he realised Nina's heart rate had increased considerably. Looking at her, he saw her cheeks were flaming red and shit, was she going to **cry**?

"Nina, what – what's wrong?"

"I just assumed ... with the imprint ... oh Embry just forget I said that, okay?"

Embry rewound their recent conversation in his head to try and figure out what he had missed. Nina was upset, that was naturally his fault, and he had no idea why or what to do about it.

"Um, Nina, I don't know what I said wrong. Help me out here?"

"You didn't! I did. Asking about my brother and ... I mean you're not having **those** kinds of thoughts about me and ..."

"Yes I am!" It blurted out his mouth. He looked at her anxiously and was relieved to see she had calmed a little. So, she wanted him to have those kinds of thoughts about her, did she? Wait ... what had she just said about the wolves?

"Nina – why is it a problem that the wolves are everywhere?"

She stopped walking and turned to face him. "Because it means we can never be truly alone," she whispered.

"And um ... would you want to be truly alone? With me?"

In answer, Nina pulled his head down and kissed him passionately. She wound her arms tightly around his neck and closed the distance between them until her body was flush with his. Embry jumped, startled at the sensation and took a small step backwards so she couldn't feel the large bulge in his pants. Nina determinedly stepped closer again.

Embry got the hint. He had no idea how he was going to do it, but Embry Call was going to work out some "truly alone" time with his girl. As a matter of very urgent priority.

A/N: So there it is, just a little sweet luvn for Val. Day. Hope you enjoyed it! I don't expect anyone to review this chapter. I'm quite sure you all have better things to do this evening;-) But please do let me know your thoughts on the "real" chapters when they come. Your reviews make me smile as much as the bouquet of flowers on my table.

***Chapter 28*: Chapter 26 Preparations**

A/N: Well first of all, a HUGE thank you for all the reviews from last chapter. For future reference, if I have a bout of hysterics it's usually because I'm worrying about something. Just ignore it; it will pass.

A special thank you to all the reviewers that I can't respond to personally either because their PM function is disabled, or there isn't a link on the review. To Nimbus2000, don't worry – that chapter is coming! And to anonymousfan, thank you! I've always said that I'm amazed by how many people read this story; that it might actually be brightening someone's day is very touching.

Thank you again to feebees for beta reading. I hope you all enjoy this one!

Chapter Twenty Six – Preparations

The day after the bonfire was Wednesday and another school day. I was impatient with the thought of having to go. There was so much else to think about and deal with that it seemed almost silly to sit in a class room. Jake, who had been very serious since waking up, absolutely insisted that I go. I suspected part of his reasons were to keep me away from the wolves, especially after yesterday's incident.

We repeated the breakfast routine from the day before; although this time, when we arrived at Sam's cabin, the three Oregon girls had already started cooking for the packs and there was less for me to do.

The overall mood was sober and I noticed that Jake still hadn't smiled even once since we got up that morning.

Jake sent Collin to go and collect my truck from school as his bike was still somewhere in the forest. He would bring it home this evening. When it was time for me to leave, he told me that Collin would be in the trees around the school grounds in wolf form all day. When I started to protest that he should be training with the rest of the wolves, Jake told me firmly that my safety as the shield was paramount. Furthermore, Collin, Brady and possibly also Hotah, would be assigned to guarding me during the battle and it was therefore crucial that they got some experience now.

"Guard dog experience?" I asked with a smile. I was trying to crack through the serious expression on Jake's face but his eyes didn't so much as flicker with amusement. Instead, he pulled me to him for a kiss and said that he would see me later that evening.

I understood that I was going to be kept completely separate from any and all wolf training exercises.

I left for another interminable day at school.

Jacob's POV

I watched Bella leave with mixed feelings. My need for her was stronger than it had ever been. My wolf craved her constantly. He needed her right next to me. He needed to know she was safe. And he needed her to help him deal with everything that was going on right now.

At the same time, there was no way Bella was going to be anywhere near the wolf packs today. I could literally feel my blood boiling over the imminent threat to my people. Even if none of the other wolves felt it yet, they would sense it from me when we all phased. I knew it would drive both packs insane. And I suspected that at least some of my pack, those from the strongest blood lines such as Quil, Seth and Leah, would be feeling just as angry as I was.

If yesterday's incident with Matt had proved anything, it was just how volatile a pack of wolves could really be. Angry wolves around my imprint were just not going to happen. No, Bella would spend the day at school and then she would join the other imprints at Sam's cabin and cook for us. I hated how chauvinistic that sounded but if it kept her well away from two packs of angry animals, then I was prepared to be as sexist as necessary.

Seth was patrolling this morning. By nine o'clock, the remaining thirteen of us had finished breakfast and were ready to phase. We ran into the trees, shed our clothes and shifted quickly.

The anger and determination hit us all at once. It seemed that every wolf had his or her own reason to be pissed as hell. Mostly, it was the thought of the Volturi coming to try and wipe wolves out. For Jared and Paul, there seemed to be an intense hatred directed specifically at the Cullens which I didn't fully understand. All the imprinted wolves were also protective of their imprints and the ferocity coming from both Leah and Akando, who were locked in a double imprint, was clearly staggering the younger wolves.

Seth, who was somewhere around the treaty line on his patrols, was just as mad as the rest of us, and I felt his relief that it wasn't just him feeling this way. He was usually so even tempered that he was shocked by the strength of his own emotions.

Akando and I simultaneously shifted back to human. We needed to discuss how to channel all the aggression that was only going to flow between the wolves' minds and fuel it even further. It was easier to talk in human form than to try and communicate above the collective rage that was flowing through the pack mind.

Standing together, Alpha to Alpha, both of us butt naked and surrounded by eleven enormous, snarling wolves, we began to argue.

Akando was inclined to get the wolves to run some of their aggression off. I wanted them to fight. I wanted to see what would happen when emotions were running high and they were all in each other's heads. I wanted to allow the aggression to surface so that I could get some idea of what the Volturi would see before them. If I was right, when the Volturi realised that Jane and Alex's powers were useless, a deadly pack of wolves unexpectedly materialising before them might just make them panic. And that would give us another advantage.

The older Alpha raised an eyebrow as I stated my case.

"I take it you are aware that my wolves are stronger," he said.

"And mine are fast and smart," I shot back.

"You would risk injury so close to the real battle?"

Biting back my irritation, I reminded him of our rapid healing abilities. I was beginning to realise that Akando was used to calling all the shots without reference to anybody else and that he played safe and straight. But I knew that safe and straight wasn't what we were facing and it wasn't what was going to win us this battle.

"My pack will run," Akando stated. "Yours can fight."

My temper was already boiling and I was about to start bellowing at him when Leah's wolf appeared between us. She looked agitated as she motioned with her head for Akando to go into the forest with her.

Irritated, I paced around. My wolf was Alpha, dammit, and he didn't like having to wait around for other people to make decisions.

I didn't have to wait for long. As Leah trotted past me she inclined her head slightly, just as she had done on the beach last night. She had fought my corner again.

Akando huffed a little but agreed that we would try fighting our aggression out, unless it looked like serious damage was going to be inflicted on anyone.

For the first time that day, I could have laughed when we phased back and showed the wolves our plans. Akando's pack was clearly disbelieving and delighted at the opportunity to fight. I thought he must keep them under such tight control that they couldn't wait to unleash some of their aggression. He kept them placid against their very natures!

Leah admonished me. I guessed she wasn't completely on my side, then.

The next few hours were brutal and bloody. Akando and I monitored the fights, ready to step in if any wolf looked like he was becoming overwhelmed. Leah didn't need to be included in that, so using a collective "he" was fine. I was amused to see both Jared and Nick actively avoid pairing off with her. They weren't objecting to fighting with a female.

By the time we stopped for lunch, it seemed that both packs had developed a healthy respect for one another. The Oregon wolves depended on sheer brute strength and would be deadly against even an incredibly strong vampire. My wolves were fast and powerful and fought efficiently. While Akando's pack dove straight in to a tussle, mine waited for opportunities to go straight for the kill.

I wouldn't have said that any aggression was worked off. The pack mind was fuelling it. But the same would have applied if the wolves had been forced to run. At least this way, I had a clearer idea of which wolves worked well together and which antagonised one another. Basically, Matt antagonised everyone except Seth and Nick; and Paul antagonised every member of the Oregon pack except Nick. All the other wolves seemed able to tolerate one another.

Nobody had missed Matt's determination to take Embry down or Embry's anger levels soaring in response. We just worked hard to keep them apart.

During lunch, I remained phased for a while to check in with Collin. Really, I just wanted to see Bella through his eyes. I growled when he pointed out to me that it was raining and she was having lunch indoors. He had no problems to report from her morning. I had to be satisfied with that.

When I phased back, Paul was waiting for me.

"Jake can I talk with you?"

"Yeah, I wanna know what happened yesterday anyway." We both knew I was talking about him protecting Bella.

"Well it's kinda about that." I waited for him to continue. Talking wasn't Paul's strong suit. "Are the pups the best choice for guarding her Jake?"

Guessing that he was thinking them too inexperienced for such an important job, I gave him my reasons. "They're eyes and ears Paul. She won't be that far away from the battle. If anyone gets too close, we'll know and can be there in

seconds. It's also to keep them out of direct fire. They're just kids and they'd be the first casualties."

Paul was silent.

"Spit it out Paul." I wanted my lunch.

"I could do it too. I could look out for her. Not a single fucking bloodsucker would get past me, Jake."

I could see his discomfort but I was confused. I raised an eyebrow at him. "This is the fucking leech loving bitch we're talking about here Paul. Those were your words."

Paul looked as ashamed as I had ever seen him. Then he began to blurt out his thoughts. "What Embry said that night at Sam's house, remember? When we found out this was all going down?" Oh, I remembered. "He was right Jake. I mean the three of us, Sam, Jared and me; we were all scouting around the perimeter of the leech territory like, **all** the time. We heard them talkin' about Bella. We saw them start to bring her in to their crypt. We saw her with **him** in the forest. And not one of us did a fucking thing to stop it. None of us even tried. What if he'd drained her, huh? And then you phase and there's no imprint cos we let her die? And you're the fucking Alpha man; you need your fucking imprint more than any of the rest of us. And well, she's obviously committed to you now. I've seen the way she looks at you. She's crazy about you. So... yeah."

With that out of his system, Paul fell silent. I thought I got it now. "That's why you protected her yesterday isn't it? You feel guilty that you didn't protect her before."

Paul said nothing. He didn't have to. I ran my hand through my hair. "Look Paul I'm glad you've changed your mind about Bella, I really am. I know you'd protect her with your life. You'll still get a chance to, if anything happens during the battle. You'd be one of my first choices to go help the pups. You're one of my best fighters. But that's why I need you in the front line."

Paul thought about it for a minute and then nodded, "Fine. But I want you to know that she'll be kept safe Jake. Jared feels the same as I do. We were shits not to try and stop the fucker getting his teeth into her." I rolled my eyes at the analogy. "It's not gonna happen again, not on my watch," he finished.

I was surprised that Paul was even capable of feeling anything like remorse but I wasn't going to object. I thanked him, he dropped back into his sarcastic comfort zone and we jogged back to Sam's cabin to get lunch.

Bella's POV

Wednesday at school passed as slowly as Tuesday had. I went to Sam's after classes finally finished, to start preparing dinner and catch up on a little homework. When the pack arrived to eat, they were all still serious and a little agitated. Jake hugged me tightly when they arrived but I hardly saw him for the rest of the evening as he and Akando spent most of the evening deep in conversation. Watching them, I saw that they appeared to argue as often as they agreed. Leah and Elan, the two Betas, frequently stepped in if it looked like things were getting too heated. Twice, Jake went outside to get some air; which I assumed, meant to let off some steam.

The first time he went out, I was washing up in the kitchen and by the time I realised he had gone I couldn't see him. The second time, I followed him immediately. He was almost across the back yard to the tree line when I stepped outside but he either heard or smelled me because he turned and came back.

I put my arms around him and hugged him close to me. His muscles were taut and tense under my touch and I rubbed his back, trying to soothe him. He buried his face in my neck and inhaled deeply. As if in response to some kind of drug, his muscles began to slowly relax and the tension began to drain out of him.

Finally, he raised his head and kissed me softly. I returned the kiss and deepened it. I soon felt him harden against me and wondered briefly how much control he currently had over himself. We were in the yard outside a cabin full of men with enhanced senses. I needn't have worried. The Alpha was focussed on his job. He pulled away finally and led me back inside.

Not one word had been exchanged between us.

Jake and Akando's discussions went on late into the evening and once everyone had been fed and the dishes were washed and put away again, I took out my school books and began to study at the kitchen table. I finally fell asleep with my head on the table.

I woke briefly when Jake lifted me and carried me out to the truck. I woke again when he laid me on the bed and began undressing me. When he lay down next to me and wrapped his arms around me, I snuggled into him and planted a kiss on his chest.

"Are you okay?" I asked him.

"Yeah, it's not easy with Akando but I need to keep him on my side. I don't think he would pull out of helping us now but I can't take the risk." His voice was laden with worry.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No. But we do need to talk about how we're going to use your shield against Edward. He could be here the day after tomorrow."

"Okay. Do you have any ideas?"

Of course, this was Jake, and he did. We lay awake talking over his plan and refining it until we both thought it stood a chance of working. I knew I could do what he wanted me to with my shield and he was confident that when the shield was lifted, he could control his thoughts.

The only unknown factor was whether Edward would be fooled.

When we had talked about it from every angle we could think of, Jake kissed me gently. "Today's been a bitch, Bella. But this, having you here, makes it so much better. You have no idea how glad I am that you've moved in."

I kissed him and he ran his fingers through my hair while he made love to my mouth with his own. I pushed him onto his back and began covering his face and neck with kisses until a hint of the first smile I had seen all day began to ghost his lips. Determined to keep the smile in place for a while longer, I began kissing down his chest and abs. He groaned and tangled his fingers in my hair when he realised where I was headed.

By the time I swirled my tongue around his tip and took him into my mouth, he was standing at full attention. His whole body shuddered as I began licking and sucking him, my hand working the base of his shaft and humming the way I knew always blew his mind.

I knew I had **my** Jacob back when he started grunting and cursing like a sailor. It wasn't long before his breathing was laboured and his groans were guttural. Moments after I flicked the tip of his erection with my tongue and twisted my hand, he spilled into my mouth with a loud "Fuck!"

I drank every drop he gave me and then kissed my way back up his taut stomach and hard chest. I leant my forearms on his chest and propped my chin on them, smiling at the wide grin that was now on his face.

"That's better," I told him.

He laughed and the sound was like beautiful music to me. "It's definitely better for me Bells. Not so sure about you though," he said. He flipped me onto my back with werewolf speed, making me yelp and grumble "Show off".

I had pretty much stopped grumbling about ten seconds later.

Thursday morning was a repeat of the first half of the week, breakfast for the wolves, then a long and dull day at school. After school however, I had to head to Port Angeles. My first stop was for birth control pills. I endured that appointment, collected the pills and then headed for the nearest lingerie store.

I stood in the middle of the shop, looking around with a sinking heart. I realised that I had absolutely no idea what Jacob liked. And I definitely had no idea where to begin.

An assistant asked me cheerfully if I needed any help.

"Uh," I stammered. This was embarrassing. There was a reason I had never done this before. Too late now though. I thought of Jake and steeled myself. "I have a new boyfriend and I uh, don't know what he likes."

"Well, in that case why don't you just go for black or red, you can't go wrong there." She began showing me different styles and colours and despite myself, I found that I was having fun trying to picture Jake's face when he saw me in them.

I finally settled for a daring red bra and thong, and a more modest black set. I figured I could see which one Jake responded to the **hardest** before I made any more purchases.

I headed back to La Push and arrived at Sam's cabin in time to help serve up dinner to the packs. Jake gave me a quick kiss before joining Akando for further planning and strategising. It seemed that the Kootenai pack was on stand-by; also, the three Alphas had come up with a workable plan that would eliminate the need for communication or shielding for the third pack.

I settled down to study in the kitchen until Jake was ready to go home.

By the time we headed back to the red cabin that night, I was beyond exhausted. I had no idea how Jake was managing. He got no more sleep than I did and he spent his days running and fighting while I sat at a school desk. I suspected adrenaline may be paying a large part.

Jake told me that his day had been easier than the day before. It seemed Leah and Elan had been working on Akando and, probably more through Leah's influence than Elan's had convinced him that the only option was a brutal fight. The more training the wolves had at managing their aggression while working with an opposing pack, the better.

As we approached the cabin, Jake said that he wanted to call our dads that evening. We hadn't really been in touch with

them all week. I had spoken to Charlie briefly a couple of times but that was it. Jake wanted to make sure his dad would be home before the Volturi arrived. He was hoping to persuade Charlie to move up to La Push too, at least until the threat had passed. We didn't know exactly when Edward was arriving, but it could be as early as the next day.

He picked up the phone as soon as we got into the cabin. I went into the kitchen to make some sandwiches as I'd heard Jake's stomach growl distinctively on the way here. A minute or so later, he appeared in the kitchen doorway.

Leaning his arm against the frame, he said "Hey Bells, there's no answer. Charlie wasn't on late shift tonight was he?"

"No," I told him, "he should be home, with your dad."

Jake frowned and I felt the icy hand of fear grip my heart. He went back into the living room. I followed him and watched as he turned on the TV to a sports channel. He pulled a face.

"There's a big game on. Chances are they've turned it up too loud and can't hear the phone." He kissed my forehead. "Don't worry yet. Jared's on patrol. I'll get him to run by your dad's house and let me know what's happening."

Jake headed for the front door, pulling off his shorts and muttering about old fuckers going deaf. He was almost at the door when a panicked howl pierced the night.

I ran to the door as Jake phased dangerously close to the cabin. He paused for a split second as though listening, before hurtling towards the forest. Almost at the tree line, he suddenly skidded to a halt and came racing back towards me.

Phasing to human, he quickly explained.

"Edward's in Forks already Bella. He's going straight to Charlie's. He must think you're still there. I need to go make sure nothing happens. But you need to come with me; you'll have to shield my thoughts, starting now! Jared's heading for Charlie's and Edward can't be allowed to read anything from his mind. You'll need to ride on my back again." He shifted back into his wolf and lay down for me.

I hesitated for the briefest of moments. This was it. I was about to come face to face with Edward Cullen for the first time since the day he had left me in the forest. And it was absolutely imperative that he read nothing from Jacob's mind. I jumped onto his back and held on tight as he began to hurtle through the forest in the direction of Forks, our fathers and our enemy.

A/N: As always, please tell me your thoughts!

Chapter 29: Chapter 27 That Cullen Thing

A/N: This chapter is for viola1701e, who first encouraged me to try Edward's POV. Thank you as always to feebes for beta reading, and to all of you amazing people who read this story and send me your thoughts:-)

Chapter Twenty Seven – That Cullen Thing

Charlie Swan was having a bad week.

On Saturday, he had learned that monsters really do exist. He had also learned that his only child seemed to have a penchant for dating them.

On Sunday, he had watched his daughter move in with one of those monsters.

On Monday, he had learned the hard way not to call Jake a monster in front of Billy. Those chair wheels really did hurt your toes like a bitch.

On Tuesday, he had eaten burnt pizza for dinner because his new temporary house mate wasn't anywhere near as good a cook as Bells.

On Wednesday, he had spilled coffee all over his uniform and realised the laundry hadn't been done all week so he needed to just mop the coffee off and wear a damp, stained uniform to work.

This was Thursday, and so far it had been okay. There had been no big problems at work. He and Billy had ordered take out for dinner. There was a big match on and the two friends planned to watch it over dinner with a few beers. Charlie missed Bella, and he didn't like to think of what she and Jake were doing all alone up in La Push. But well, she was an adult now and provided she finished high school and didn't get knocked up, he couldn't find too much to worry about. Jake would treat her well. And Charlie just knew that the best person to protect her from all these monsters was Jacob himself.

With a sigh, Charlie flopped onto his couch and popped open his beer. Billy was in charge of the TV remote and had turned the volume of the match right up. Charlie managed a grin. He had always kept the sound more muted when Bells was here, but he agreed with Billy that you got the atmosphere better when it was loud.

Twenty minutes later there was still no sign of their take out. Charlie thought impatiently that he should phone and hurry them up. A man got hungry at work. Right on cue, he thought he heard the phone ring in the kitchen.

"Hey Billy! Turn it down a NO! AAHHH HELL!"

That terrible pass distracted him and by the time Billy had turned the volume down so they could listen, the phone had stopped ringing. Figuring it was something to do with their take out, Charlie got up to call them back.

The door bell rang moments later.

"About time!" Billy yelled from the living room. Wholeheartedly agreeing, Charlie threw the front door open. He just as abruptly tried to slam it shut again when he saw that it was not a delivery boy standing on his doorstep. It was that Cullen ... **thing**. Its irises were an eerie shade of red.

Edward stuck his foot out to prevent the door closing and smiled.

"Hello Charlie. I'm here for Bella."

Edward's POV

I had travelled as quickly as possible to get to Forks, to get to Bella. I was ahead of my own schedule which was, of course, desirable.

I approached Charlie's house with a mixture of great excitement, and trepidation. Of course Bella would take me back. She had been utterly intoxicated by me. I was a drug that she craved and I could give her what she wanted, eternal life, with me by her side forever.

At the same time, she would be justifiably disappointed in me. I had abandoned her. I fully deserved her annoyance and I would accept whatever harsh words she chose to deliver.

I wasn't worried about the dog. I would forgive her for her lapse in judgement. I would never cast it up at her or blame her for it. I had left her unprotected, after all, and she was such an innocent lamb. Of course when the wolf had come knocking on her door, she had simply invited him in.

I would take care of that inconvenience. And then, my beautiful Bella would be turned. I didn't like to dwell on the three days of agony she would necessarily endure. But when it was over, and she was not so fragile and breakable, I would bring her to Italy as Mrs Isabella Cullen. We would live our lives together, honoured members of the elite.

Of course, she may have some objections to the small matter of the diet I was now on. But once she was turned and her

only desire initially would be to slake her thirst that would no longer be an issue.

Everything had worked out marvellously in the end.

Leaving Bella had proved to be the biggest mistake of my existence. I had barely survived without her. And when Alice had seen her future disappear, my despair had been immeasurable. I had no other option but to go to the Volturi and beg for my own demise at their hands.

Aro had seen my potential when I could not, and had refused. I had been on the brink of exposing myself in the middle of the square at midday when Carlisle had sent word to Aro that Bella was alive. She was fraternising with the wolf pack, which now included the great-grandson of Ephraim Black. He wanted her as his mate and my fury at learning this was insurmountable.

I quickly realized that Caius was enraged to learn of the existence of a wolf pack. I read memories in his mind. He had, long ago during his time in America, come across an enticing native girl in Oregon. He had played with her before draining her. He had enjoyed the experience immensely, but his memory was marred by the arrival of a pack of angry wolves hell bent on his destruction.

Of course, he had escaped, and had returned some years later with an army of our kind and decimated the pack. But the memory of the girl's exquisite blood was tainted by the subsequent lengths he had to go to when escaping from their lethal jaws.

I used this knowledge to convince Caius that the La Push wolves were related to those responsible for his experience. It was true, in a way. Dogs were dogs. Aro, of course, read the deception in my mind but didn't think it was worth his trouble to intervene. And he wanted Bella. He had seen my inability to read her mind and thought she would make a fascinating newborn. I had to agree.

And so the deal was made. We would go to La Push. Caius would be pleased by the destruction of the wolves. Aro would have a prize trophy. And I – I would have my Bella. It was almost too easy.

I knew Bella wasn't at home as I approached. I could detect her scent, which was all around the area. There were no fresh trails, however, and I couldn't hear her melodic heartbeat. Charlie was home and he had company.

The television was on and even from outside the house, the din of it hurt my sensitive ears. Charlie and his companion were totally absorbed in the game, and thoughts of their dinner. I quickly determined that the other man was Billy Black. Jacob Black's father. I almost laughed, it was so perfect. Draining his father may be a good way to send a message to the arrogant child who thought he could order me to advise him of my arrival.

Still, he was currently influencing Bella, so it was best to humour him, for now. Perhaps I would save that particular dinner for another day.

Then again, blood was not always like wine. It didn't always taste better with age.

When Charlie opened the door, I saw the horror in his eyes and read his reaction in his mind. So, he knew. That was an interesting turn of events. I was indignant that he considered me to be a *thing*. I was also pleased that my new eye colour frightened him.

I politely told him I was here for Bella. Predictably, he began to bellow and bluster. I heard a wolf howl just as Billy Black wheeled his chair into the hallway. I saw his eyes widen.

"Edward Cullen! Drinking human blood is a violation of the treaty!"

"I have not fed here in Forks. It is not your place to decide whether the treaty has been broken." I turned my attention back to Charlie. "Where is Bella?"

I saw the smug satisfaction on his face and read my answer in his mind. The rabid mutt had moved her across the treaty line. So that was why I was required to phone him on my arrival. I bit back my impatience. Bella was already displeased with me. It would not help matters if I took my frustrations out on her father.

I would meet the dog's terms and accept Bella from him as though she was his to hand over. It was of no consequence in the grand scheme of things. The most revolting stench assaulted my nostrils and I decided it was time to leave, there been nothing to keep me here.

As I turned to go, Billy Black's mind drew my attention. He was wondering why no wolves had arrived to offer the two men protection. It had indeed been a few minutes since I had heard the howl. Concentrating hard, I detected no thoughts that could belong to one of the pack. I was sure, however, that a large mammal was making rustling noises in the tree line and I was equally sure that it was the source of the malodour.

I concentrated harder and my head whipped round in the direction of the trees when I heard the most delightful sound in the world. *Bella's heartbeat!*

It was beating at an accelerated rate, as though she were in some distress. It was also moving in this direction at an

incredible pace. I would have thought that she must be being carried by the dog except that his thoughts had been obnoxiously loud on the few occasions I had been in the same vicinity as him, and I heard nothing from him now.

I listened as Bella approached. She did seem to be being carried by something with paws. I still heard no thoughts. Finally, the paws stopped and with some small noises from her transport and clumsy rustling from Bella, they stepped together out of the forest.

Jacob Black was holding my Bella's hand. Rage boiled within me that I fought to control. She appeared to be clutching his hand tightly and he was rubbing circles on hers with his thumb.

Bella looked filthy and dishevelled. Her hair was like a rat's nest and her clothes were soiled. If I hadn't known how pure her heart was, I would have dismissed her immediately. On the other hand, her eyes were brighter than I had ever seen them and it was very becoming on her. She must be excited to see me.

I could read absolutely nothing of Jacob's thoughts. As they walked towards me I could hear Charlie worrying about Bella being close to me, and Billy wondering what took his son so long to get here. A solid wall of silence met me from Bella and Jacob.

All my senses were on full alert. My natural enemy was striding towards me holding onto my singer, my love. I was certain there was still a wolf in the trees. Jacob's noxious odour was different to the stench that I had detected earlier and which was still there. Even Jacob by himself would be highly dangerous to both me and Bella if he chose to take his wolf form.

Jacob was clearly assessing me as he strode in my direction. He stopped a few feet away and moved slightly in front of Bella, still holding her hand. Bella moved to his side and glanced up at him defiantly. A trace of humour crossed his face and I was enraged by their silent exchange from which I was so thoroughly excluded.

I concentrated as hard as I possibly could while keeping my senses alert. If he was somehow blocking his thoughts from me, I would rise to the challenge and find my way around it. Bella was watching me worriedly. Her brow was furrowed as she studied my eyes and I could hear the fast pace of her heart. She was afraid. I could smell her fear and see her limbs trembling. She had never been afraid of me. Her fear must be for the dog. I hated that she was frightened, but if she saw me as her personal saviour from the source of her fear, the process of winning back her trust would be quicker than I had anticipated.

Jacob continued to rub circles on her hand. He tightened the pressure and must have distracted himself by doing so because whatever he was doing to shut me out of his mind lifted. For the briefest of moments, I saw his gratitude to the old medicine man that had shown him how to keep me out of his head. He frowned then, looking at me sharply. I struggled to keep my expression neutral.

I heard him curse loudly thinking that he had lost control of "it". I would have given anything to know exactly what "it" was. Then he assaulted me with images in an attempt to see whether I could read his mind.

I very nearly lost control of my neutral façade. The images he bombarded me with were of **my** Bella. Bella doing **things**. To him. With him. Rage and thoughts of revenge flooded me and I fought to control myself.

He shifted his weight, apparently pleased and all of a sudden I was shut out again. He looked behind me at the two older men.

"Dad, Charlie, you need to get to La Push now. No arguments Charlie. We'll talk later."

I didn't need to turn round to see the indecision that was on Charlie's face. It was screaming at me through his thoughts. He didn't want to leave Bella when I was here, but at the same time he had total trust in Jake to keep her safe.

"**Now.**" The word was a command issued by Jacob in a tone that brooked no argument. Billy shrewdly thought that his son was up to something and set about ushering Charlie towards the cruiser.

We all watched them leave. I was left with utter silence. I turned my attention to my future bride.

"Bella."

"Edward." She inclined her head in acknowledgement. There was no trace of warmth and I frowned.

"I know you must be angry with me, love."

Bella snorted. The sound was most unbecoming. I realised that I would need to work with her on her manners before bringing her to Volterra. No matter, we had eternity.

"You have no idea, Edward."

I turned back to Jacob. "I will take her now."

"The hell you will. You were supposed to call. We're only here to make sure you didn't harm our fathers."

"Now, later, what's the difference Jacob?"

"There's been a change of plans. We can win this fight now Edward. So we will be fighting."

I laughed shortly, wishing I could read his mind to see how exactly he thought he could win. I was sure it would be a good source of amusement for the Volturi later. "How exactly do you plan on winning, Jacob? Do you know what you're up against? The sheer size of the Volturi guard, their ... talents in battle? How many are in your pack? I believe you make it four?"

I saw Jake's jaw set and suddenly his thoughts were screaming at me again. Apparently, I didn't know about Embry, whoever he was. So they had five. Jake shifted uncomfortably again, and the shutters were down. He was apparently aware that his control was imperfect. Perhaps if I angered him, he would lose control of whatever it was that was keeping me out of his mind.

"And you think four wolves are able to protect Bella, dog? Is her life worth that little to you?" My face and voice were both a sneer. It had the desired effect. In a rush, I received a mental image of a field I knew from my stays here in Forks. In it, the three wolves I already knew with an enormous russet wolf and a grey wolf with black spots on it, were training. I saw that they arrived there every morning at dawn to train. Further, there was some dissent between the russet wolf and the large black wolf that I knew to be Sam Uley, the Alpha. Jacob coveted the role.

The shutters slammed down once more as Jake again shifted his weight uncomfortably. I concentrated on giving nothing away. Inside, I was singing. The stupid pup had shown me where and when the pack gathered, and what their weakest link was. The extra wolf would pose the guard no problems. I could scarcely wait to give Aro this information. Now all that remained was to retrieve Bella.

"Bella, love, please come with me." I formed the crooked smile she loved so much and extended my hand to her. Her eyes widened in horror and the smell of her fear increased for some reason. Jacob looked down at her, frowning, and to my great anger pulled her closer to him.

"Edward, I am not going anywhere with you," she told me slowly. Her voice shook. "You have red eyes, Edward!" she added in a whisper.

Ah, I had thought this would be an issue. A white lie wouldn't hurt.

"I will become a vegetarian again for you, Bella. We will do it together!"

"The fuck you will!" Jake exploded. His control didn't slip this time. Bella took a couple of steps backwards, tugging at his hand.

"When?" I demanded. "You need her out of the way before the Volturi arrive, Jacob."

"I told you to call me to arrange that," he snarled. He was trembling. "And one other thing, stay well away from the treaty line. We've been crossing it a lot. We wouldn't want any accidents." Bella was pulling him towards the trees and I called out her name. It was agony to be so close to her, and unable to touch her. I could smell her blood and it was almost impossible to resist its pull as it sang to me.

I took a step in her direction and without warning, Jacob exploded into his wolf. I was furious that he had done so in such close proximity to Bella, but astonishingly, she didn't even flinch. The enormous animal backed up towards the tree line, keeping itself between me and Bella.

I didn't follow. I told myself it would only be a few more days. In silent agony, I watched my singer disappear into the tree line. I listened carefully for her voice but heard nothing. I waited until her heartbeat had receded too far into the distance to be discernible. And then, I headed back to my former home.

Jacob's POV

I knew the bloodsucking leech wasn't following us but I ran fast anyway. I wanted to get Bella safely across the treaty line. I didn't know what had caused her rush of fear when the leech had asked her to go with him. I knew she would have every confidence that I would protect her. At the same time, I absolutely hated that she had been exposed like that. My original plan had been to meet him at the treaty line for that little façade. I thought through the last half hour in my mind as I charged through the forest, knowing that Bella would not lift her shield until I told her it was safe.

Bella had shielded me and therefore Jared before he could reach Charlie's house. I had deliberately kept dad out of the loop about developments with the Oregon pack and could only hope that he hadn't thought anything while he was around Edward that might contradict me. Like me being Alpha, for instance. I hoped that dad was too pre-occupied with the possibility of becoming Edward Cullen's supper to be thinking anything incriminating.

I was completely confident that Bella had stuck to our plan. Lift the shield when I squeeze her hand; lower it again when I shift my weight. I was equally confident that when the shield was raised, my thoughts hadn't slipped. I had been practising for the last couple of days, which considering I spent most of my time as a wolf with thirteen others in my head, provided ample opportunity. As long as I was completely focussed and only required to hold it for a few seconds at a time, it was easy enough to do.

The biggest unknown was whether Edward had been fooled. The bastard was tricky to read. He gave the term 'poker face' a whole new level of meaning. I also hoped he would heed my warning to stay away from the treaty line. If he got too close we ran the risk of him hearing the wolves. It was unlikely, but I didn't want to take the chance.

Back at the tree line near home, I phased back, realising that I had shredded out of my clothes again. Bella ran to get me pants and soon came back with them. Billy and Charlie had already arrived and they both seemed pissed, she said. I rolled my eyes, *terrific*.

We walked hand in hand towards the cabin. I was just thinking that I wished I knew whether Edward had been fooled when Bella suddenly spoke.

"So I suppose you let him see us together, judging from that reaction."

"What? What reaction?"

"He was jealous and trying not to show it, the first time I lifted the shield."

"How do you know that?" I asked, stunned. I had supernatural senses and I had picked up on absolutely nothing.

"His brow furrowed a little."

"It did?" I was dubious. I hadn't seen it.

"Yes," Bella said firmly. "I spent months walking on eggshells reading his every expression so I would know if I'd made him mad or upset. I know the jealousy sign."

"Wow, anything else? Do you think he bought it?"

"Of course! He was feeling smug. It was in the way his mouth curved. He didn't suspect a thing. You must have kept your thoughts really under control." Bella beamed at me.

I was elated. Edward would lead the Volturi to the field. The five of us would be there, as I had shown him. And then, Bella would shield us and the rest of the wolves would surround them and ambush them.

Now all we needed to know was which day they would arrive.

A/N: Oh I love Jake when he's playing dirty. Let me know your thoughts, as always! Next chapter will be up in a couple of days.

Chapter 30: Chapter 28 Childhood Friends

A/N: Many thanks yet again to feebes for beta reading. And to all my lovely readers. Mommylee, did you get my email explaining that? And for you don't want to know... alright then, here you are;-)

Chapter Twenty Eight – Childhood Friends

We stayed up for a while with Billy and Charlie, talking over the events of the evening. Or, rather, the three men talked while I prepared us all refreshments and thought about Edward.

Seeing him this evening after so many months had been... strange. I hadn't had time to process it on the run to Forks and it was only when we were at Charlie's that my nerves kicked in. Jake, of course, had picked up on them and soothed me with his warm thumb rubbing circles on my hand.

I hadn't expected to feel anything at all. I was completely in love with Jacob and Edward was firmly in my past. My first glimpse of him had horrified me. His crimson eyes glowed in the evening light, telling me everything I needed to know about the hold the Volturi had over my former love. I knew he had never wanted to be a monster and my heart had initially ached for the loss of the values and principles that he had once held so highly.

When he had spoken, the voice that had once been so appealing to me sounded cold and a little too shrill. Jacob's deep, husky voice was a startling but pleasant contrast.

But when Edward had focussed his attention on me, capturing me in his gaze and beckoning to me, I had felt a ghost of the old pull. Safe at Jacob's side, knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that he would give his own life before he allowed Edward near me, I could easily dissociate myself from it. And I realised suddenly that when Jacob had said that Edward intoxicated me, he was absolutely right.

For the first time, I could see that Edward Cullen had cast a spell over me. He had told me of it himself. *Everything about me invites you in.* Had he been aware of it? Did he know my feelings for him were based on his skills as a predator and not real human emotions? Had I really been so willing to give up my life and my humanity because I was **addicted** to him? I shuddered at the thought.

When I returned to the living room with a tray of food, the men were arguing. As I was unable to shield Charlie and Billy's thoughts from Edward, Jake was adamant that they would be told nothing about the battle plan, the visiting wolves or the shield itself. Billy offered no objections when Jake told him simply that it was better if he didn't know.

Charlie wasn't so understanding. He wanted to know exactly what I was involved with, and why Edward Cullen had been at his home wanting me. Jake told him firmly that he would be told everything the following week, but that it was essential he know nothing for now. He was just taking precautions, he said. He added that in his opinion, Charlie should move up to La Push until the danger was over.

Billy suggested Charlie move into the little red cabin. He could have the twins' old room for the time being. By the time Rachel came back, hopefully all threats would have passed and Charlie could move back home.

Charlie grumbled for a while but the encounter with Edward had shaken him. Ultimately, I think the opportunity to keep an eye on me won him over.

My heart sank a little at the thought of Jake and me sharing a home with our dads. While we had once had a passionate encounter in Charlie's house when he was sleeping in the next room, the walls in the cabin were thinner. It wasn't going to happen. My mind went to the bag of new lingerie that was inside my backpack, with my birth control pills. I guessed modelling my purchases for Jacob would have to wait a while longer.

Finally, exhausted after my day at school and facing Edward, I said good night. The bed was cold without Jacob to warm it and I longed for him to come and join me. Sleep claimed me regardless and I began to dream of red eyes and intoxicating scents. In my dream, I was lured into a cold marble embrace and realised only too late that I had left the warmth and sun behind. I began to struggle against the unyielding cold and must have done something right because it gave way to a searing heat that soothed my soul. Familiar dexterous fingers ran through my hair and a beloved, soothing husky voice told me I was safe. I relaxed into the warmth. A hot mouth briefly touched mine, igniting a fire within me. I instinctively puckered my lips, searching for those that could erase all my fears and worries.

A low chuckle sounded and another kiss, this one a little firmer, landed on my lips. My eyes opened and I saw that Jake had literally soothed my nightmare away. Moving my body flush against his, I returned his kiss and began to roll my hips against him.

I was confused when Jacob gently pushed me away. He had never done that before. I remembered that our dads were here but I didn't think that would inhibit my Alpha wolf.

He rested his forehead against mine and looked deeply into my eyes. "Why were you so scared?" he whispered.

"Because you were right," I whispered back. "He pulled me in, Jake. I was like a... a fly in his web. I only just realised it tonight, and it frightened me."

I was wrapped in warm, protective arms before I could blink. "He will never get near you again Bella, I swear it." I nodded against his chest. I knew I was safe. "He will never lay so much as one finger on you. You are **not his**."

I pulled back to look at Jacob. His eyes were blazing despite the tenderness of his embrace.

"I love you Jacob. I don't know what I felt for Edward. It wasn't this. This is real. I belong with you, I believe that. Our love makes sense. It never made sense for Edward to love me or for me to love him, but I never questioned it, not really. All I want now is what we have."

His eyes softened as I spoke and he let out a breath he must have been holding in. I realised how much he had needed to hear that I loved him, especially after meeting with Edward for the first time since he had left.

I put my hand on Jake's cheek and looked straight into his eyes. "I love **you**. Always."

With a smile on his lips, Jake repeated, "Always?"

"Always," I said firmly. I knew beyond any doubt that the boy who had been my childhood friend, my sun when I was in a frozen hell, and was now my lover, would be the man I spent the rest of my life with.

Jake caught my lips in his. This time when I rolled my hips against him, he didn't push me away. He did whisper "dads" in my ear though. It had the same cooling effect.

Friday dawned and I assumed it would pass in the same manner as the rest of the week. Jake quickly set me straight on that, however. Over breakfast with our dads, he very seriously told me that Edward could easily turn up at Forks High School that day.

"Honey we don't even know if he's still enrolled there. He might figure it's a good opportunity to get you alone. He knows I don't go to school there so from his point of view, it's perfect. I hate to say it, but you need to skip all your classes today."

Even Charlie agreed. He had already called into work to say he was taking some time off to deal with a few family matters and could be reached at Billy's in the event of an emergency. He heard Jake out, and then picked up the phone again to call the school to say that I had a fever and would be taking another day off. Of course this was on the condition that I studied at home.

Billy and Charlie took the opportunity to go on a fishing trip. Jake made them promise to stay on the reservation. I made them lunch to take with them. Long before nine o'clock, I was alone in the cabin. With a sigh, I planned my day. I would clean the cabin, I decided. I had been so busy this week that very little had been done. Then, I would make something for Billy and Charlie's dinner before getting a few hours of studying done.

All went to plan and by lunchtime I had the cabin in order and a roast in the oven. I made myself some sandwiches and sat at the kitchen table with my school books. I put on a CD to make myself feel a little less alone and got to work.

An hour or so later, my head jerked round to the window as a series of howls ripped through the afternoon air. I was getting to know the different howls and these sounded mostly angry. There was, however, definitely a wolf in pain, too. Wondering what had happened, I debated whether to go to Sam's cabin. I went to the front door and stepped outside, listening. The agonised howl cut off abruptly and I knew the wolf had probably phased back to human.

As I waited on the porch steps, deliberating, the phone rang. I ran to answer it.

"Bella its Abey, I have an urgent message for you from Jake. He needs to speak to Carlisle? Can you try to contact him and Jake will be at your cabin shortly?"

Carlisle? My initial surprise at the request gave way to dread. If Jake was actively seeking out Carlisle, it must mean one of the wolves was badly injured. Knowing it wasn't the time for questions, I simply answered, "Of course," and hung up the phone.

Grabbing my cell, I called Alice. She answered on the second ring.

"Bella? Oh Bella I'm so glad you called. Edward's future has disappeared! I can't see you, I can't see him, and **why** does Carlisle need to go to Forks when you all keep disappearing there!"

"Alice I don't have time to explain properly, but Jake needs to speak to Carlisle. Is he with you? Or can you give me his number?"

"He's right here Bella and he does talk with Jake, but then he goes to Forks and I can't see why!"

"Can you please put him on the phone, Alice? Jake will be here soon. Edward's probably disappeared from your visions because his near future is tangled up with the wolves' decisions."

"Fine, but if you see Edward, please tell him not to believe the story about the field at dawn. I don't know who told him about it, or why it's important, but it is."

Gulping, I told Alice that I would pass her message on, squeezing my eyes shut as I told the blatant lie. A few moments later, Carlisle's familiar voice came on the line.

"Bella, I'm glad you're safe. We rely entirely too heavily on Alice's visions and with her recent inability to see you, Esme and I have been worried. Does Jacob need some medical advice?"

"I— I think so, Carlisle. He's not here yet, but one of the wolves has been injured. I don't know what happened Wait ..." I broke off as Jake rushed in the cabin door. Holding the phone out to him, I mouthed "who?"

"Matt," he mouthed grimly, grabbing the phone. He began to speak quickly without as much as a hello. "Carlisle, I have an injured wolf who is healing at an accelerated pace. His bones are setting the wrong way and I need to know what to do. I think we're looking at an arm, a few ribs, maybe a thigh bone."

He listened carefully, his jaw set. I could see that whatever Carlisle was telling him was not something he relished the prospect of. Suddenly, his brow furrowed and he began to speak again. "No, that's not a good idea. Your... **son** has brought the Volturi here. They'll be arriving in just a few days, maybe less." He listened again and then barked a humourless laugh. "Are you serious? Carlisle, we're fucking **wolves!** Our nature is to rip you to pieces."

I could hear the urgent tone in Carlisle's voice over the phone, although I couldn't make out what he was saying. Jake was shaking his head furiously as he listened, part refusal and part disbelief. "Well, it's great that you feel bad an' all, but you can't seriously think that you would walk away from this alive? Even if the Volturi don't kill you, the wolves will. I don't care whether your intention would be to help us or not. You're bloodsuckers and we exist because of you; to destroy you. In the middle of a battle, do you really think that any member of the wolf pack will be able to discriminate between a friendly leech and an unfriendly one? The bloodlust will kick in and you will all be destroyed. Thank you for your help with the wolf Carlisle, but there can be no further alliance."

Jake looked as though he was about to end the call, but Carlisle said something that stopped him. His eyes narrowed and he said abruptly, "The Alpha will feel the same way I do about it, trust me." He hung up and threw the phone on the couch. "Fuck! I think he knows I'm Alpha. Dammit he's smart."

"What the hell's happened, Jake?" I asked.

"C'mon Bells, we need to get to Sam's place. They're bringing Matt there. I'll tell you while we drive."

Jake's POV

Everything was coming together. All the wolves were working well, and both packs were united with the common goal of taking out as many leeches as possible while saving our own and each other's asses. I had shown them all the meeting with Edward, and Bella's confidence that he had bought the lie.

Our trap had been set and we just needed a date for following it through. I was hoping Edward would give us that information, for Bella's sake.

We ran through some more training exercises. The two packs were learning from one another. My pack relied on speed and cunning and we taught the Oregon pack to hold back slightly until an obvious killing opportunity presented itself. In return, they showed us how to use our immense bulk to our advantage in an attack.

Every member of both packs had been paired with every member of the opposing pack. Both Akando and I were certain that when we were engaged with the Volturi, all the wolves could now work co-operatively together. Even Matt and Embry had been paired together. Akando had kept a close eye on them but I could tell from their minds that they were united against the imminent threat. They had both coped well and moved on to different pairings.

My mind was wandering as I ran round the field, watching the wolves train. I thought we were ready, and all we needed now was for the vamps to come to us. I was thinking about giving the packs some down time. I wanted some serious alone time with Bella before we went into battle. I was damn sure that all the imprinted wolves would feel the same way.

We didn't know if we would all make it out alive. Making every moment count now had been a prominent thought in everyone's minds over the last few days. I wondered if it would be a good idea to give everyone a day off tomorrow to take their imprints somewhere private.

Embry perked up as soon as he registered my thoughts. He had been trying to find a way to arrange some time away with Nina before the battle. Before he could block it, images of his fantasies swamped his mind. I automatically looked to Akando, but he was preoccupied with Leah.

Just at that moment, a flash of white hot rage flashed through the pack mind and Elan snarled at Matt, yelling at him through the mind link to calm the fuck down.

It was too late. Only an Alpha order could stop him now. Matt ran at Embry, teeth bared in a furious snarl, claws raking through the grass and mud as he flew at his rival faster than I had ever seen any wolf move, with the possible exception of Leah. Embry registered the attack just in time, and side stepped the moment before Matt would have collided with him. The impact that Matt had expected never came, and he rolled several times down a slight incline, gaining momentum as he went.

He crashed against the tree with a deafening thud. The tree splintered along with Matt's bones under the onslaught of sheer mass moving at high speed. At the same time as my pack began howling furiously over the attempt to attack one of our own, Matt's agonised yelp ripped through the air. We all felt his pain as Akando and I quickly assessed the damage.

I realised Embry was crouched as though ready to attack, his wolf enraged and every instinct within him telling him to counter-attack. I barked an order at him and hated that he cringed on the ground under the weight of the command.

Akando was starting to panic. Matt was one of his best fighters and if his bones knit together in the position they were in, we could count him out of any battle. I thought furiously, quickly remembering Bella's belief that Carlisle was a good... well, not man. But he was a damn good doctor apparently and he had knowledge of the supernatural.

I whirled to Leah, who was by far the fastest runner. Sam's cabin was closest. I asked her to get there and get word to Bella that I needed Carlisle. Leah didn't need to be told twice. She was speeding away before I could even get my head around the next task, which was to get Matt to phase back to human. Then I needed volunteers to carry him carefully to Sam's and wait there for Carlisle.

With all that taken care of, I raced home. Bella already had Carlisle on the phone. *Good girl.* He told me we needed to re-break any bones that had already started to set and reset them. *Fucking hell.* That would be up to me and Akando to do and I hoped he had got a grip on himself by then. Carlisle also told me where I could find some morphine at his crypt. I doubted we could get to it. Edward would be there.

Then, the bloodsucker actually said that he felt responsible for all the trouble that was coming to us, and he wanted his family to fight alongside us. For a smart guy, that was really fucking dumb. As if wolves could ever form an alliance with vamps, without ripping them apart in the process. Of course, I had shot it down and in doing so had very likely given away that I was Alpha. I could only hope that wouldn't be a problem. I couldn't worry about it right now.

It was an offer of help and I needed to let both packs know about it, but I was fairly sure that they would all agree with me. It went against our natures.

By the time I had finished filling Bella in, we had reached Sam's. She pointed out that Edward may be at school and not at the crypt and I decided that sending a few wolves might not be a bad idea. We really needed that fucking morphine. I would need to be phased though so that Bella could shield their thoughts.

Most of the wolves were gathered outside the cabin, in human form. The first one I noticed was Embry. He still looked as pissed as hell. I wanted to talk to him but Matt's bones needed attended to immediately. I settled for clapping his shoulder as I walked past, but something in his eyes made me realise that his mood wasn't just about Matt having attacked him. He looked heartbroken. *Fuck, what now?*

No time.

I asked Jared and Paul to head over to the crypt and gave them their instructions. It had to be them; if Cullen was home and saw them, he knew about them already. They were to howl when they got close or if they detected Edward nearby, and I would phase so that Bella could cover our minds. That way, even if Cullen was there, he wouldn't get inside their thoughts.

Then, I ran inside and found Matt on one of the beds. I quickly saw the source of Embry's rage and pain. Nina was holding Matt's hand, brushing his hair back from his eyes with tears in her own. *Oh hell.* Akando was also in the room and I told him briefly what we had to do. I saw the horror in his eyes and I turned to Bella, who had followed me inside.

"Honey this is gonna be brutal. I think you and Nina should wait outside. Send in Elan and Nick to hold Matt down. Can you find something for him to bite down on?"

Bella nodded and raced out to get Matt's pack members. I looked at Nina, expecting her to follow. She glared back at me.

"I'm staying."

"Nina this isn't gonna be fun. There's nothing you can do anyway..."

"I can be here for him!" she interrupted me.

Holy fucking hell. He's not even her imprint!

I looked at Akando for back up. He shrugged. "She'll keep him calmer." My face must have given my thoughts away because he said, "Jake, they've been friends since childhood."

I really didn't have time to argue. But this was not looking good for Embry. His imprint was in here holding hands with the wolf who had tried to attack him. Nina and Matt may well have been childhood friends. But Embry and I had been friends since childhood too. And I knew this was gonna kill him.

A/N: Ah poor Embry. Next chapter up soon! Kids are all back at school after midterm break so I can get lots of writing done this week:-)

Chapter 31: Chapter 29 What I Will Sacrifice For You

A/N: Once again, a huge thanks to feebes who had her work cut out with this chapter, particularly towards the end. Thanks also to viola1701e who tirelessly answers my questions (and challenges me to try different POVs lol). And of course, to all my wonderful reviewers:-)

Chapter Twenty Nine – What I Will Sacrifice For You (Jacob)

The screams from inside the cabin were horrific. I paced around outside with Abey, Anna, and the remaining seven wolves. My shield was extended to cover Jake, who was waiting impatiently at the back of the cabin for Jared and Paul to return so that he could go back inside and help Akando.

Nobody thought Jared and Paul were in any danger. Even Edward, on human blood as he was, would not take on two wolves. But at the same time, we would all feel happier when they were safely in La Push.

Embry worried me. He was as restless as the rest of us, but there was a fear and a crippling pain in his eyes that distressed me. I knew it must be something to do with Nina and it hadn't escaped my notice that she was inside. Was he jealous? Finally, I approached him. Embry was one of Jake's oldest friends. I had promised myself three days ago that I would offer Quil a shoulder to lean on and that had still not happened. I would do it now for Embry.

He literally jumped as I laid my hand on his arm. He was wound up tightly. I jerked my head to the side. I knew we couldn't go far enough away to be out of earshot from the rest of the pack. I didn't have that much faith in my ability to extend my shield. But we may be able to gain a little privacy given that everyone else was preoccupied with what was happening inside the cabin.

I was a little surprised when Embry followed me unquestioningly. We sat on the low wall that Sam had built to separate the cabin from the road and I asked him if he was okay.

Stupid question, Bella.

Embry shrugged a little, his face averted. "It was me he was going for when it happened," he offered. I wasn't convinced that he was looking the way he did because he felt guilty.

"You know Nina's only there because she's his friend," I said quietly, not even knowing whether I was right about the source of his pain.

Embry said nothing. His shoulders were slumped and he was looking at his feet. On an impulse, I reached out my hand and laid it gently on his. Jake rushed round from the back of the house in human form, nodding at me to let me know I could retract my shield, and went back indoors. I turned my full attention on Embry. Once I started talking, the words flowed out of me as the power of my own imprint with Jacob helped me see what was going on here.

"Nina loves you Embry. I've seen her with you. She cares about Matt, I've seen that too. But if she was meant to be with Matt, he would have imprinted on her. He didn't, you did. She knows how much you love her, but right now he needs a friend. When she walks out of that door when this is over, she's going to need you to be there for her. Right now, she's being strong to help him, but it'll be awful for her watching her friend suffer like that. The only thing that will make it bearable is knowing that you're waiting out here for her; that she can come to you and you'll hold her and take her pain away. If you go off on some jealous fit when she needs you, you're going to cause problems over nothing. Embry, you have to believe in your imprint."

Embry raised his head to look at me and I was shocked by the depth of his pain. "If it was you Bella, and another wolf had attacked Jake, where would you be? Would you be in there with the attacker or out here with Jake?" I could tell that he was convinced I would say that I would be by Jake's side, no matter what.

I thought it through carefully, trying to block out the harrowing screams from the cabin. The easy answer was that I would be outside with Jake, but that didn't take into consideration the fact that the offending wolf was a childhood friend.

Embry was watching me almost pleadingly, desperate to find some answer that allowed him to excuse what he evidently saw as Nina's betrayal. Finally, a different comparison came to me.

"I can't answer that exactly Embry because I haven't the bond with any of the rest of you that Nina has with Matt. But," I added slowly, "if I change things up a little ... If I was imprinted on any of the rest of you, and it was Jake in Matt's position..." I thought for another moment before saying confidently, "I would be in there with Jake."

"Seriously, Bella? You would leave your imprint alone to be with the wolf that tried to attack him?" Embry asked me dubiously.

"Why did he attack you though Embry? He was jealous. You know he's in love with Nina.... Look at it through Jake's eyes if you want. He was in love with me before he imprinted on me, right?"

Embry half smiled at me, "Completely in love with you and then some."

"Okay. So let's say he hadn't imprinted on me but still loved me. Then this wolf nobody knows turns up, imprints on me and suddenly I'm in love with this other wolf. **Then**, this other wolf is stupid enough," I bumped him with my shoulder, "to show him his fantasies about me. We both know Jake would go crazy. And if he got hurt over me, you're damn right that I would be inside with him. But it would be killing me to see it and I would come out here afterwards and need the man I love to be here for me, not going off on some half assed jealous fit."

A shout went up at the rear of the cabin and a moment later Jared raced round the side of the little house and went inside clutching some items. They had the Morphine! I waited until Paul also came into view before allowing my shield to shrink back from Jake. I breathed in relief. They had both made it back safely and they had something that would hopefully alleviate some of Matt's horrifying pain.

Looking back at Embry, I couldn't tell whether he believed me but he seemed a little more at ease. "So what do I do now Bella?"

"You go to your girl the second she walks out that cabin and you hold her tight. You tell her you're there for her. And then, when everything's calmed down a little, tell her the truth. Tell her you were hurt and jealous, and listen to her point of view."

Embry looked like he could cope with that. I smiled at him. "It'll all be fine, Embry. Nina accepted your imprint. She didn't hold back from it because of any feelings she had for Matt. So when she tells you he's just a friend to her – believe it!"

Feeling pleased that I had been able to be of use to one of the wolves, I went over to Paul. I was still nervous of the volatile Quileute wolf, but Jake had told me of their conversation and I also knew that Paul wouldn't mess with his Alpha's mate.

He looked surprised at me approaching him. "Hey Paul," he raised an eyebrow at me. "Was he home?"

"Nah, probably stalking high school girls, he doesn't seem to mind the hundred year age gap."

"So you just got in and out, no problems?"

"No problems Bella. No other scents, no sign of any other leeches around, no Edward at home, and no problems breaking into the crypt."

"He'll know you were there though," I frowned. Apart from the fact that they'd broken in, their scent would be all over the house.

"So? What's he gonna do, come up to La Push and ask why we were there?" Paul was looking at me with humour in his eyes. He had a point.

"Okay. Thanks Paul."

"What are you thanking me for Bella?" I was clearly a source of great amusement for Paul.

"For being civil," I shot over my shoulder as I walked away, smiling to myself when I heard his chuckle.

The screams from inside the cabin had subsided a little and I could feel the general relief from the group waiting outside. A short time later, the door opened and Jake walked out along with Elan and Nick. They all looked like they wanted to throw up. I went to Jake and did exactly what I had advised Embry to do for Nina. I wrapped my arms around him and held him close. He put his face in my neck, my sign that he was upset, and inhaled deeply.

"I don't even know if we did that right Bella," he breathed in my ear. I squeezed my eyes shut. I knew what he was thinking. Even if the wolves were victorious, their magical healing abilities didn't cure everything. And no medical attention was available to werewolves.

And we were probably one wolf down for the battle.

I felt Jake stiffen and opened my eyes, turning my head to follow his line of vision. Nina had just walked out of the cabin. Jake's eyes moved to Embry, who was striding purposefully towards his girl. Jake began to move as though to intervene but I tightened my arms around him, trying to keep him in place. He hesitated, and it was long enough for Embry to reach Nina and sweep her into his strong arms.

Nina began to weep; her face buried in Embry's chest as he stroked her hair and held her close. She clung to him like a life raft in turbulent waters and I knew I had been right. Jake and I watched them for a minute before Embry turned his head to me and mouthed "thank you". I grinned back at him.

Jake looked at me confused. "Later," I told him. "What do we need to do right now?"

Jake sighed. "I hate to say it, but I need to meet with Akando again." He pulled me tighter to him and murmured in my ear, "I was really hoping for some time alone with you Bells." He dipped his head and planted a hot kiss on my neck. "But we're potentially one wolf down for the battle, and I need to let him know about Carlisle's offer to fight with us."

"Okay," I groaned, smothering my own sigh. I had been hoping for some alone time with Jake too, but that would just need to wait. "I'll go chain myself to the cooker then."

"That's my girl," Jake said with a grin as he smacked my butt.

I narrowed my eyes at him over my shoulder as I headed into the cabin. Checking to see whether Matt needed anything to make him more comfortable, I saw that Abey had beaten me to it. She joined me in the kitchen shortly afterwards and we set about cooking for all our wolves again.

While we cooked, we talked over meal plans for the coming few days. After a while, Nina walked in. Abey put down her paring knife and gave the younger woman a hug.

"He's going to be fine, Nina."

"I know," Nina said quietly. Her eyes were red and swollen from crying. "It happened because of me, Abey. And Embry's mad at me for staying with Matt."

My head shot up at that. "Embry said that?"

"No, he doesn't have to Bella. I can see it. I can read his eyes."

"He was jealous, Nina," I corrected her. "It's not that he's necessarily mad at you."

"He doesn't need to be jealous of Matt!" she vowed vehemently.

"Of course he doesn't, Nina," Abey soothed. "But maybe he doesn't understand that yet."

"Well he's going to have to!" Nina shot back at her. "Matt's an important part of my life and he's not going anywhere."

"What is your history with Matt, Nina? If you don't mind me asking?" I had a feeling Nina and Matt shared a friendship similar to the way mine used to be with Jacob, presumably minus the imprinting and falling in love part of the story.

"I don't mind, Bella. There's not much to tell really. When my father passed away six years ago, I was heartbroken. Matt lived next door and he was just there all the time. He made me smile when I wanted to cry. He made me laugh when I wanted to scream. That kind of support, it creates a special friendship. Matt wasn't so angry back then. That started when he phased, because he didn't want this life. He had wanted us to be more than just friends but I've never seen him that way. And when he didn't imprint on me, he knew I would never be with him the way he wanted. It changed him. He became bitter and nothing, **nothing** gets through to him now. But I can't give up on him. He was there all the time I was broken. The least I can do is be there for him. He didn't ask for this fate, Bella. I know he's made a lot of silly decisions. Charging at you, and now trying to attack Embry. But deep inside, his love for me is pure and that means he's not all bad."

I had tears in my eyes by the time Nina had finished her tale. It was too painfully familiar. The broken girl. The boy who devoted himself to making her smile and laugh when she wanted to curl up and disappear. That same boy having his future and his dreams ripped from him by the triggering of an errant gene.

Nina hadn't finished yet. "I know it must be weird for Embry. Another wolf is in love with his imprint and I refuse to give up my friendship with Matt. But Matt has been there for me so many times before, and I **do** care about him. I can't just walk off into the sunset with Embry and leave him behind. I just wish Embry could understand that."

It could have been Jacob. If he hadn't imprinted on me or if Edward hadn't left, it could have been Jacob! I knew Jake already empathised with Matt, he had told me that himself, the same night that he confessed that he had fallen in love with me the day he told me about the cold ones.

"Actually," I said slowly, "I might just know who can talk to him Nina." She looked at me curiously. "Jake and I ... well obviously our friendship developed into more, but for a while there it was just what you described. I was broken and Jake was there to fix me. He wanted more; I didn't. Embry has been friends with Jake his whole life. He knows what Jake went through when he was in love with me and I only wanted to be friends. Maybe if Jacob explains it to Embry from **his** point of view, it might make more sense."

"Would he do that Bella?" Nina asked eagerly. "I love Embry, I really do. I want to make him happy. But I can't just turn my back on Matt."

I understood. I promised her I would speak to Jacob and see whether he could help Embry get his head around this situation. And I had to admit, after hearing Matt's story, I was feeling a lot warmer towards him.

Jake again stayed talking to Akando until late into the evening. Without my school books, after the other wolves began to disperse and the cleaning up was done, I found myself with little to do. Abey, Anna and Nina were with their imprints and unavailable for girl talk.

I went in to the room that had been assigned to Matt. He was sleeping when I walked in but an assortment of empty water bottles and discarded bandages lay strewn around. I began gathering them up and heard Matt moan in pain.

Frowning, I went to his side. I knew Akando had given him Morphine injections but nobody knew how much to give him as his body heat would burn it off quickly. His eyes fluttered open.

"Nina?" It was a hoarse whisper.

"It's Bella," I told him. "Do you need any more Morphine or water?"

"Think they've overdone the Morphine a bit," he slurred. "Water would be good."

I went to get it for him and when I returned, he was asleep again. I stayed by his side for a while, ready to give him the water if he awoke. As he slept, I thought about how easily it could have been Jacob in Matt's position. If Edward hadn't left and forced me to learn how to live without him, I would never have seen Jake for the man he was. I shuddered as I thought of it.

Of course, Matt's position was a little different. He hadn't imprinted on Nina and she hadn't been in love with a vampire. But even so, the comparison with Jake made my heart bleed for the broken form of the man in front of me.

Finally, seeing that Matt was in a deep slumber and wasn't going to wake anytime soon, I went back into the living room where Jake and Akando were still deep in discussion. I sat beside Jake on the couch and leaned into his warmth.

He didn't pause in his conversation with Akando, but he pulled me into his side and wrapped his arm around me. I curled my legs up under me and prepared myself to wait the evening out.

The Alphas were talking about Carlisle. They were, for once, in full agreement. There could be no alliance between the wolves and the vampires during the battle. Even assuming the wolves could find it in themselves to trust such an alliance, they could not guarantee their own behaviour in the heat of the battle. Today's events however had raised the question of medical care and Carlisle was the only candidate to provide that.

"His allegiance is with his coven though," Akando was saying. "If Edward belongs to the same coven, Carlisle will not help us surely?"

"Bella's information is that Carlisle, his wife and one of his other sons, Emmett, were disgusted with Edward for going to the Volturi. Carlisle told me himself this afternoon that he feels partly to blame for what's happening to us now. He might be persuaded to help us."

I listened as the two men discussed the pros and cons of asking Carlisle to be available to give medical assistance after the battle. I knew it went against everything Jacob stood for to ask one of the Cullens for help, but to assume every wolf would walk away from a fight with the Volturi unscathed would be arrogant and naïve. And, I thought, it wasn't so different to asking Kate to help me with my shield.

Finally, it was decided that Carlisle should be contacted again and asked to consider not fighting alongside the wolves, but being available with his medical expertise after the battle. As my phone remained on the couch in Billy's house where Jake had thrown it earlier, we would have to return to the red cabin to retrieve it so that we could call Alice again. As Jake pointed out with a grin, I was the only person he knew with a leech on my speed dial.

By the time we got there, it was late and Billy and Charlie had both turned in for the night. Locating my phone which had been moved to the coffee table, I called Alice once more.

"Bella?" her familiar voice answered.

"Hey Alice, I need to speak to Carlisle again."

"He's already left Bella. He's heading to Forks with Esme. They're going to try talking to Edward, see if they can get him to change his mind about the Volturi."

I gasped. If Alice had given them the same message to pass on about not trusting the story about the field at dawn, we could be in trouble. I looked over at Jake, who shook his head at me and signalled me to listen to her.

"They don't hold much hope though. His eyes have been red in all my visions of him since he went to the Volturi. I guess you've seen that for yourself by now. That changes things. Carlisle and Esme plan on helping you instead if they can't get through to Edward."

"Meaning ...?"

"That they feel dreadful about Edward bringing you into our world, and everything that's happened to you since then. They're prepared to give you any help you need." Alice paused and then continued, "Honestly Bella, nobody expects Edward to see reason now, not if he's on human blood. Carlisle and Esme want to give him the chance to come back to the family but they know it's a lost cause. So whatever you need or want from them, expect it to be given." She sighed heavily then. "I just wish I could see the outcome of all this!"

"You can't see Carlisle or Esme anymore either?"

"No Bella. Everybody disappears at dawn on Tuesday. Edward, Carlisle, Esme. All gone from my vision after dawn breaks four days from now."

I looked at Jake, a smile on both our faces. Alice had just unwittingly told us what day the Volturi guard would arrive. Oh I

knew Alice's visions were imperfect and the day could still change if Aro, for example, changed his mind. But it gave us at least some idea of what time frame we were facing.

I asked Alice for Carlisle's phone number, which she readily gave me. Just as I was about to hang up, I heard her say my name quietly.

"What is it Alice?" Jake was looking exhausted and I wanted to get off the phone so that I could join him in bed.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I'm not coming too. I'm sorry that I'm not braver for you."

"I don't understand Alice."

"Aro saw my gift in Edward's mind. He wants me too. And I'm scared Bella. If I come to Forks, I will be destroyed by the wolves or claimed by Aro." Her voice was almost a wail by the end.

My eyes narrowed. "Alice has it occurred to you that the wolves might actually destroy Aro and the guard? That you could come here and survive it?"

"Bella please understand. Nobody has ever withstood an attack from the Volturi. You have no idea..." her voice trailed off.

"You won't give me any further information in case Aro somehow finds out about it," I guessed. "It doesn't matter anyway Alice; the wolves won't accept help in the battle from any member of your family."

"Then I honestly am sorry Bella. I'm sorry you ever had to know about our kind. I will truly grieve for you."

"I'm not dead Alice!" I yelled in exasperation. Jake rolled his eyes at all the dramatics and motioned for me to end the call. I nodded and said my goodbyes, then handed him the phone.

As he called Carlisle, I readied myself for bed. I could hear both our fathers snoring in their respective rooms and was grateful that they were safe in La Push.

Jake joined me shortly. "He's agreed to tend the wounded after the battle," he told me. I could clearly see the relief on his face, and hear it in his voice. "He's also going to be allowed over the treaty line to see Matt when he arrives." He had kicked off his shorts while he spoke and climbed into the bed beside me.

"That's great news Jake."

He nodded and we wound our arms and legs around one another, never close enough. His heat as always seared through my skin and warmed my soul, my own personal sun. I lay my head on his shoulder and kissed his neck.

"What happens now?" I asked in a whisper.

"Well we know we're probably okay over the weekend. If Alice doesn't see anything happening before Tuesday, chances are the Volturi will be travelling for the next couple of days. I'm thinking I should let all the imprinted wolves have some quality time with their girls. We can keep running tight patrols without needing every wolf available all the time."

"What, a sex fest before the battle?" I grinned.

Jake laughed. "That's probably how it'll turn out but not what I meant. We're all worried Bella. We have no idea what's gonna happen. Sure, we have a number of advantages now, but honey we're not all gonna make it back. The girls being left behind without their wolves"

"What?" I sat bolt upright. "You're preparing to **die**?"

"No!" Jake sat up beside me. "That's not what I was trying to say. I meant we all know we might need to give our lives. I said **might** Bella; don't look at me like that! And we all think that if it's us, if we're one of the wolves that don't make it back, well we all want to be sure that we've told our imprints everything we need too before we go. Don't look like that, honey!"

"Well how exactly am I supposed to look Jacob? You're sitting there telling me you want to spend a couple of days with me now because it might be our last days together! How is that supposed to make me feel?" My voice was hoarse and I could hear the edge of hysteria.

"Bella," Jake told me very seriously. "I swear to you that I will do everything I can to come back to you. But I promised I would do whatever necessary to keep you safe and if that means that I give my own life, then that is what will happen. I will sacrifice every fucking one of my pack to keep you alive and unharmed. And every other wolf feels the same. There is nothing we won't do to keep our imprints and our tribe protected." His eyes searched mine intently. Tears were spilling down my cheeks and I was shaking my head vehemently, denying the truth of what he was saying. "You're my mate Bella," he finally said quietly. "Can you be strong until this is over, for me, for the pack, for Kim and the other girls?"

I shut my eyes tightly, knowing what he was asking of me. Everyone would be scared over the next few days. The threat we had been talking about and planning for was imminent. We all understood the risks. We all knew we would suffer losses and injuries. Boys as young as thirteen would be facing centuries old vampires. An entire pack who had no allegiance to us other than a sense of decency was risking their lives on our behalf.

I needed to be more than a shield. I needed to be a source of strength for Jacob and for the imprints. My time to prove myself as worthy of being mate to the Alpha was now.

Taking a deep breath, I swallowed hard. I had been bitten by a vampire and survived. I had been as good as drugged by a supernatural entity before being left with a festering wound and I had survived that too. I could do this, for Jacob. I opened my eyes to look into his, and nodded.

"For you," I assured him quietly.

Jake's concerned eyes melted into deep pools of tender love. A smile of pure happiness played on his lips as he reached out one hand and traced a finger down my cheek and over the curve of my jaw. Tilting my chin, he moved in to kiss me deeply.

The Alpha of the wolf pack took his mate gently that night. Thoughts of our fathers sleeping through thin walls were pushed aside as we joined together in an act of pure love. We gazed into each other's eyes throughout our lovemaking and poured our emotions into one another through the windows of our souls.

That night with Jacob was magical. It was a night I never forgot.

A/N: I've been making myself cry a lot writing this and the next few chapters:-(My husband thinks I'm insane. Next one up in a couple of days.

***Chapter 32*: Chapter 30 Imprint Promises**

A/N: I hope you enjoy this chapter. It's just a little peek behind the scenes before the imprinted wolves go off to battle.

Chapter Thirty – Imprint Promises

"Promise me. Promise me you'll come back."

Jared wrapped Kim tightly in his arms and kissed her hair. "I can't sweetheart."

He hated saying those words, knowing how deeply they would cut through her heart, nor could he lie to her. All the wolves knew what they were facing. They all knew they might not make it back.

Jared moved his hand down Kim's arm and took her left hand in his. He rubbed his thumb over the ring he had placed on her finger an hour earlier.

They both knew it may be the only ring he ever gave her.

Earlier that day, Jacob had gathered all of the thirteen able-bodied wolves together and filled them in. They had medical help available and Carlisle would look at Matt's injuries too. The Volturi were very likely travelling over the weekend and would attack early the following week. Tuesday was currently the most likely day.

Given that they were safe for the weekend, Jake and Akando wanted the wolves to rest and relax. Patrols would be kept up but there were enough wolves to still allow everyone several hours of down time.

Nobody expected the non-imprinted wolves to take on the heaviest patrolling schedules simply to allow the imprinted wolves time to spend with their girls. Surprisingly, it was Paul who volunteered and suggested that was how it should be worked out. Not so surprisingly, Seth was quick to agree and the three younger wolves all joined in too.

Quil asked for permission to go to the Makah reservation to see Claire. He showed the gathered wolves that he had made her a book of sorts, moments of his own life in photos and funny stories. It was in case he didn't make it back and she never knew of him. His intention was to leave the book with Emily to give to Claire when she was older, if necessary.

Jake readily agreed on the condition that he phase to check in at regular intervals and return no later than the following evening. After a little more thought, Jake suggested Quil should bring Sam with him. He had spoken to Sam regularly throughout the week, giving his old Alpha the courtesy of keeping him up to date. He knew Sam wanted to see Emily. He also knew that Sam going to the Makah reservation would leave the Alpha cabin free for him and Bella.

A schedule was worked out which allowed the imprinted wolves to stay away from the hub of the goings on for most of the weekend. Everyone had to phase at set times but were otherwise free to do what they wanted, provided nobody except Quil left the safety of the treaty lines.

Jake called Sam and made the arrangements for Quil to pick him up. Then, with grave faces and heavy hearts, the wolves went their separate ways.

Embry

Embry was feeling happier. Nina had carefully explained her full history with Matt and her reasons for staying with him while he was having his bones reset. Embry noticed the fear in her eyes when she asked him if he could understand. He saw the determined set of her chin when she told him that Matt was a part of her life that Embry would have to learn to accept.

He hated it, but he loved her. He told her how hurt it had made him feel that she had chosen to stay with the wolf who had tried to attack him. She pointed out, the same as Bella had, that the attack had been motivated by jealousy and a broken heart. Not justifiable, but understandable.

And then, early that morning, Jacob had pulled him aside. They had phased together and Jake had shown him everything. His love for Bella before the imprint. His envy of Edward even before Jake had known about vampires and werewolves. How both emotions had intensified after his first shift. His jealousy in the early days, when Bella only wanted to be friends and she was heartbroken over Edward leaving. The rage that had consumed him when he thought about Edward touching Bella intimately, as he had then assumed had happened.

He showed him that while the imprint was responsible for the depth of some of his emotions; he was convinced that it only intensified what was already there.

Jacob understood Matt. Bella understood Nina. Embry didn't like it, not at all, but he could kind of see that the situation wasn't as black and white as he had initially thought.

And most importantly of all, Nina had kissed him and held him tight and whispered of her love for him.

So, when the two Alphas told the wolves to go and spend the weekend with their imprints, Embry had shot off to get Nina.

His mother worked every Saturday so he knew they had several hours to be alone at his house.

Embry was nervous. After the evening that Nina had made it obvious what she wanted to happen between them, he had been walking around with what felt like a permanently raging hard on and trying desperately to find a way to make it happen. He knew that everyone considered him an idiot for showing Matt his fantasies about Nina, but if they knew just how hard he had been working to block his thoughts from both Matt and Akando for the last few days, he figured he would probably be given a medal.

He was prepared. He had protection in his bedroom, which he had even cleaned up a little. Now all he had to do was get Nina from the living room, where they currently were, into that bedroom.

"Uh, Nina ... you know we have a few hours here, right?"

She smiled shyly at him and his heart flipped as he thought that she might be thinking the same as he was. *Damn, how did Jake's first time get started? Oh yeah, Bella had come out the shower and taken matters into her own hands.* Embry racked his brain for the other wolves' memories. Quil obviously didn't count. He didn't think Jared had ever given that away, not while being phased with Embry anyway. Sam's first time with Emily had resulted from comforting her over her scars. Yeah, that wasn't going to help Embry.

Deciding that actions speak louder than words, Embry stood up abruptly and crossed the room to where Nina was sitting. He took her hand and pulled her to her feet before kissing her softly. Nina deepened the kiss and Embry was relieved. He could let her set the pace, they had all afternoon.

His hands quickly wandered to her breasts. He couldn't get enough of them. Her moan when he pinched them through her clothes shot straight to his dick and all thoughts of letting her set the pace went out of his head as he began walking her backwards to his bedroom, never breaking their kiss.

Part of him expected her to freak out when she realised where they were headed. Embry Call had a lot to learn about his imprint. Once in his room, Nina broke their kiss and took a few steps back from him. Then slowly, watching him all the time, she began to undress. Her skirt fell to her feet and she kicked it away. Her top was pulled over her head and tossed beside the skirt. Her shoes were kicked off, and Embry gulped loudly when he saw her reach behind her to unfasten her bra. When it was on the floor with her panties, and she stood before him in all her beauty, Embry finally remembered how to move.

Closing the distance between them in one stride, he crushed her tiny body against him and began kissing every inch of her skin. When he reached her breasts he dropped to his knees in front of her, sucking and fondling her while she ran her hands through his hair, whispering his name.

Embry kissed down her stomach and ran his tongue around her mound. He could smell her juices and the moan she rewarded him with made his stomach clench in anticipation. Running his hands down her thighs and back up again, he held onto her hips as he licked her folds over and over. He loved the noises he elicited from her mouth and longed for the moment he could bury himself deep inside her.

Standing on slightly shaky legs, he again walked Nina backwards, to the bed this time. He sat her on the edge of it and gently pushed her backwards until she was lying down with her legs over the side. She parted her legs for him and he knelt between them, hooking one of her knees over his shoulder as he began to suck and lap at her juices.

Nina's hips writhed and bucked as he pleased her. She cried out when he slowly pushed a finger inside her, feeling her moist warmth around it and longing for a different part of his body to be within her. When Embry was certain she was comfortable with one finger, he inserted a second and continued to lick and suck at her clitoris while he pumped in and out of her.

Finally, when Embry thought he would explode if he didn't bury his dick inside her **now**, Nina came. She spasmed around his fingers and flowed juices into his mouth as she screamed his name. He drank from her, thinking that this was his personal elixir of love. Then, he kissed back up her body and let her taste herself on his lips and tongue.

Pulling back to look at her, Embry had never seen a more beautiful sight in his life. Her face was flushed and her eyes hooded by heavy lids as she gazed up at him. With a smile on his lips, he pulled on a condom and slowly, while still kneeling on the floor between her legs, began to push into her. He saw her eyes widen as she felt the sheer size of him and forced himself to go slowly. When he reached her virgin barrier, he shifted his position slightly so that he could hold her tightly as he drove through it.

Nina cried out in pain and he felt the tear as he pushed past the thin barrier. Almost immediately, a groan came from his own lips as he felt how tight and warm she was around him. Nothing, nothing in the world compared with this and Embry began to push in and pull out in an ages-old rhythm as he enjoyed his imprint thoroughly. Nina's cry of pain gave way to moans of pleasure and her finger nails digging deeply into the flesh on his back added to his own ecstasy.

Gasping love and adoration between thrusts, Embry felt his girl begin to clench even more tightly around his engorged member and it was his undoing. Sinking into her again and again, he heard her scream his name once more as his own orgasm tore through him and he spilled out his seed.

Scarcely able to believe what had just happened, Embry wrapped Nina tightly in his arms, kissing every part of her face and whispering softly of his love. He lifted her further onto the bed and settled in beside her. They lay there, running their hands all over each other's bodies.

Basking in the afterglow of their love, Embry grunted in displeasure when Nina suddenly asked, "Can I mention him right now?"

He didn't like it but would give her the moon if she asked at this particular moment.

"Please don't let him see this Embry. It's just between us. It's our own special moment. And he doesn't need to see it."

Embry promised to do his best to block it from his thoughts, cringing as he acknowledged the effort that would require. But he knew she was right. As much as part of him wanted to show Matt that Nina was his, he knew it wouldn't be the smartest move. And the fact that Nina wanted to keep it as something special shared with Embry alone made him feel warm inside.

Tiffany Call was surprised to find Nina in her kitchen when she returned home from work that evening. She noticed the glow that both teenagers had about them and immediately formed the right conclusions. She wondered why Embry was getting under Nina's feet while she cooked the three of them a meal. He seemed to be watching over her shoulder and double checking everything she did, to the point where the girl got cross and sent him away.

After taking her first bite of the meal, Tiffany understood her son's neurosis and made a note never to allow the girl near her kitchen again.

Leah

Leah's back was pressed against a tree, her legs wound around Akando's waist as he plunged inside her. She had already orgasmed twice and could feel the third hit her with the force of a train. She didn't think she could take anymore and was gasping for breath when her lover finally pulsed and spilled inside her.

Leah loved the way she could be with Akando. Since she had phased, she needed to be careful with her own strength. She had dated a little, a *fuck you* to Sam, after shifting at first. The first guy she had gone out with had almost been injured when she had shoved him with a little too much force against a wall. Of course she had laughed, more with bitterness at herself for being such a freak than with derision at him, but it had gotten a little ugly and the guy may or may not have had a cracked rib when she left him in the street.

With Akando, she could bring all her natural strength to the fore and he matched it and then some. She had quickly decided that her fumbling with Sam fell way short of the real thing, and she was thrilled with the sexual voyage Akando was taking her on.

Their mind link was used regularly too. She knew his soul, and he knew hers. They both knew their bond was stronger than any of the other imprinted wolves because it ran both ways. Leah thought that only Jacob's love for Bella came close to Akando's love for her. Akando thought it was something to do with the Alpha position.

He had quickly learned of her fear that she was a genetic dead end. Not true, he had assured her. He was certain that her destiny was the same as Embry's – to ensure the safety of future shifters for the Tamastsiht tribe. She would need to give up her wolf to do so, he had told her sorrowfully.

Leah had no problem with that.

Now though, she was terrified that one or both of them wouldn't survive the battle. As Akando's breathing evened out and he bit at her neck making her moan again, she tightened her legs around his waist and clung to his neck.

"Promise me, Akando. Promise me if I don't make it..."

"You will Leah!" He didn't like to dwell on it.

"Look at me!" Her voice was a harsh command and as always, he obeyed her. "If I don't, promise me you'll go on to have a family to keep your pack alive. Don't just let it die out because I've gone. You're the Alpha!"

Akando sighed. He hated it when she insisted on making him face harsh possibilities, even when he knew she was right. "I don't know if I can do that Leah. I don't know if I could ever be with another woman."

"You've done it plenty times before," she reminded him wryly.

He flashed a smile at her. "Nobody comes after you Leah."

"Promise me."

He sighed again. "I promise I'll try. And you promise me something. Promise me you won't put yourself in harm's way to save me. If only one of us is to survive, it should be you."

Leah half smiled. He knew her so well. "I promise."

Nick

Nick held Anna tightly to him, his tears spilling onto her hair as she sobbed against his chest. *Of all the fucking times for this to happen.*

It had crossed his mind a couple of times over the past week. There was the faintest hint of an unfamiliar scent around her abdomen and twice he had paused there, wondering about it. But with so much else going on at the moment, he hadn't dwelt on it. *Fool*, he cursed himself now.

When Anna had gone on birth control pills, Akando had warned him. No research had ever been done into the effectiveness of pills against wolf seed, he pointed out. Nick and Anna had discussed it and decided that they weren't too concerned. If Anna fell pregnant, they were ready. If not, she would come off the birth control in a year or so.

She wasn't sure, she said. But she was a couple of days late and that never happened. She was occasionally early, but never once had she been late. And she felt more tired than usual the past few days. That, combined with the new scent, told Nick all he needed to know.

Anna was literally quaking with emotion. "I can't do this on my own Nick! Promise me you'll be here for him or her!" Her voice was almost unintelligible through her sobs.

Nick shook his head. However much he ached to give her that reassurance, they would both know it was a lie. "I swear I'll be careful Anna. I promise I'll do everything I can to be here. And if the worst happens, you won't be alone sweetheart. You know that. They'll take care of you." Wolves always protected their own. His offspring and his imprint would be well looked after, of that he was certain.

It didn't stop his heart from breaking at the possibility that he may never know his son or daughter.

Elan

Elan sat quietly as his wife vented her anger. They had been through this so many times over the last couple of weeks. Outwardly, she had been helpful and cooperative but Abey had always been the strongest opponent to helping the La Push wolves.

"It's not worth the sacrifice Elan!" she was yelling now. "How many of our boys have to give too much of themselves to save Jacob's wolves' asses? Matt's already badly hurt, Hokah is far too young to be involved in this shit, and now you're telling me you all have today and tomorrow off in case you don't come back! What about **our** people? Don't we need you all to come home?"

Elan stood up and crossed the room to soothe his wife. "You know how Akando feels about that. It's all been pre-destined. Embry and Leah were supposed to be introduced to our pack to strengthen the line of shifters. We're honour bound to help them with their own pack."

"Yeah well Akando might think that way Elan but **I don't**. I think we should get the hell out of here and go home." She crossed her arms over her chest, both of them knowing that there was no way that would happen.

Understanding that she was scared more than angry, Elan rubbed her back and murmured reassurances in her ear until she began to relax against him. He hated it when she became upset like this. It didn't happen often and only ever over something huge. He had learned long ago to simply promise her that everything would work out fine.

He couldn't, this time.

Quil

Quil and Sam were mostly quiet on the drive to see Claire and Emily. After the initial pleasantries, they had lapsed into silence, both deeply immersed in their own thoughts.

Quil thought that his former Alpha looked like hell. His eyes were sunken in dark circles and he had lost weight. His hair was growing shaggy and looked unkempt. Quil frowned, thinking to himself that maybe he should reconsider giving up his wolf to break his imprint after the battle.

He hadn't fully decided. He worshipped little Claire and could quite happily devote his life to her happiness. But when he thought of what his own future would be now, it scared him. He didn't even see other girls' faces even though the teenager in him wanted to. The experiences he saw in the other wolves' minds – first dates, first kisses, making love, exploring girls' bodies... they would never be his. He couldn't even consider the possibility that it might be one day, with Claire. He recoiled from that whenever he caught one of the other wolves idly wondering about it.

What had happened with Sam and Emily had shown him that he could give up his wolf and, as conflicted as he was about his imprint, it would break. He promised himself that he would stay in Claire's life as she grew up; but he would build his own life for himself too. He would age and remain an uncle figure for her. If she needed him, he would be there. He couldn't imagine it any other way. But his life would be his own.

For now, he needed to be close to Claire before he faced his destiny. And, just in case, he had the scrapbook tucked into

his backpack to give to Emily. He could only hope it would never need to be given to the child.

Jacob

Jacob had gone back to the red cabin after meeting with the packs and told Bella to pack an overnight bag. He had thrown a few essentials into his own bag and left a note for their dads to say they would be back the next evening. He gave them no further explanation. He wasn't in the mood.

Bella wanted to know where they were going. With a small smile, he told her he was bringing her to their future home. It hung in the air unspoken between them, *if I come home*. Bella's eyes had lit up with excitement although he could still see the deep sadness that had been in their chocolate depths since the night before. They had been at the door when she suddenly ran back inside and came back a couple of minutes later with a bag of cleaning materials.

Jacob had to laugh. "Do you seriously think I'll be letting you clean this weekend Bells?"

She had looked at him severely as she climbed into the Rabbit beside him. "The real question is, do I seriously think you won't spend half the weekend phased to check on everybody Jake? And while you're running about on four paws, what am I supposed to be doing? You told me yourself the cabin's been lying unused for years. I doubt Sam's done anything to improve it if he's been as depressed as you say. So I can get started on cleaning it up while you're being Alpha. Then, when you're being Jake, the floors will at least be clean for whatever activities you have planned!"

Jake raised his eyebrows. "Floors?"

"Is there any furniture?" she shot back.

Jake thought for a moment, then rushed back indoors. He returned quickly with a pile of blankets which he threw into the back seat. "Best to be prepared," he grinned as he started the engine.

It didn't take long to get there. Jake opened the passenger door for Bella as she climbed out the car. He watched her carefully as she took in her first glimpse of what he dearly hoped would be their first home together.

Bella's eyes were soft as she turned to smile at him. "Can we see inside?"

Taking her small hand in his large one, Jake smiled back at her and led her up the three stairs to the front porch. Holding his breath, he opened the door and stood back to allow her to go in first. He followed her inside. Standing behind her, he put his arms around her waist and rested his chin on her head.

Then, he waited for her verdict.

A/N: Next chapter is some J/B quality time (aka a dirty weekend) and I must say I quite like it lol. It should be up in a few days. Please tell me what you thought of this one ... specifically, did you like seeing it from different perspectives? Call it consumer research!

On a totally different topic - I've written something that I don't know whether to put up as a one shot or use the content of it for another multi chapter after WotW is done. Would anyone like to cast their eyes over it and give me their opinion...?

***Chapter 33*: Chapter 31 The Alpha Cabin**

A/N: Here you are, a day earlier than I'd thought because feebes is wonderful. Just a li'l sweet J/B moment and some lovin' before the Alpha goes off to battle. I hope you enjoy it.

Chapter Thirty One – The Alpha Cabin

My first glimpse of the Alpha cabin had been enough to make me fall in love with it. It was reached by a winding road which climbed into the hill above the forest. The track which led to the house itself was overgrown and would be easily missed. It snaked from the road back in the direction of La Push and eventually reached the cabin.

As Jacob had told me, it was miniature and needed work. I wasn't entirely sure that Jacob would fit through the front door without having to stoop. The roof evidently needed some repair. Someone, presumably Sam, had fixed some tarpaulin to a part of it to prevent leaks. The exterior was a faded brown and badly needed painted. Three steps, the middle one sagging, led up to a porch which appeared to run the whole way around the cabin. Part of the fence around the porch was broken.

Its appearance didn't put me off. In fact, it was absolutely perfect. I could picture how it would look with a coat of paint and new fencing, and I knew the pack could take care of the repairs in no time at all.

Desperate to see inside, I asked Jake if we could go in. He followed me through the door, and I knew as he stood behind me that he was apprehensive of my reaction. I surveyed the living room, which the front door led straight in to.

It was small and covered with a thick layer of dust. Footprints through the dust indicated that Sam really had been living like this and I screwed up my nose at the thought of it. A lone chair in the centre of the room was surrounded by beer cans, magazines and general debris. The air smelled musty and definitely not as though it had been lived in. But under the dust, the wooden floor was in perfect condition, and the yellowed curtains at the window were probably salvageable. I paused looking at them for a moment, realising that it was probably Jake's mother who had hung them there. Billy had told Jake that when they were first married, he and Sarah had lived here for a short time.

I wrapped my arms around his, which were still snaked around my waist. "Let's see the rest," I told him. Three doors opened out of the living room. The first led to the kitchen, which was at the rear of the house and was surprisingly bright and airy. I wondered about the enormous window which took up most of the rear wall, but was glad it was there. The view from it was beautiful. It was almost panoramic, and encompassed the forest and some of First Beach in the near distance.

Beside the window was a door leading out to the back of the porch. Jake strode across to the back door, found the key in the lock, and stepped outside pulling me behind him. I watched as he stood on the porch, surveying the landscape. His profile looked almost regal and I saw in the seriousness of his expression what a strong leader, Alpha and Chief he would make. I swallowed back the fears that rose instantly after our discussion the previous night. *Not now Bella.*

A smile was playing at the corner of Jacob's lips as he looked around the view. "Huh!" He started to laugh. "This really was built by an Alpha," he stated matter of factly. He pulled me into his side and put one arm round my shoulders, pointing with that hand.

"There are a few obvious meeting places for wolves around the res," he explained, "and you can see every damn one from here. See that clearing in the trees down there?" I followed the direction he was pointing in and just about made out a patch of land. "And that one over there?" He pointed in a different direction.

I squinted to make it out and was amazed when he said, "Hotah's there now." He checked his watch. "Right on time, too."

"You can see Hotah from here." I stated it flatly in disbelief.

Jake chuckled. "Wolf senses honey, although Hotah's easy cos he's so white. If it was Paul or Seth say, I might not be able to tell them apart so easily. I could work it out though," he added.

I turned to stare at him and he laughed. The wind was blowing in his hair and he looked so carefree at that moment that I had to grin back.

He wasn't finished yet. "There, past the trees, do you see it? That's the field we're going to fight the Volturi in."

I squinted again. The way the land laid, I could make it out easily enough. I felt Jake stiffen beside me and looked up at him. His brow was furrowed in concentration.

"Can you extend your shield to there, Bella? From here?"

"What? No! That's too far, Jake. I haven't tried it anywhere near that distance!"

"But Carlisle said under stress, you would find it easier. Try it now!"

"I – Jake I'll try it but I'm not honestly sure."

Concentrating hard, I pushed the elastic band away. I could feel it getting thinner as it stretched and I thought that at any

moment it might snap. It didn't.

Finally, I broke my concentration and looked back at Jake. He was watching me expectantly. "I don't know," I told him. "I think I made it but I'm not sure I can keep it up for a long time. And if I can't do it, this is too far away! By the time I got closer, it would be too late. No, Jacob, I need to be closer," I told him firmly.

"Bella this is perfect!" he argued, equally firm. "If you think you can do it now, you can definitely do it under duress. And I'll bet none of the leeches even know this place is here. It isn't usually used for long periods of time, and its way too far from the treaty line for them ever to have come across it. There probably isn't a safer place for you to be." In true Jacob style, he was refining his plan as he talked. "Brady and Collin would be able to see any threats coming this way and have plenty of time to get you out. We can mask your trail with the wolves' scents and the leeches won't even be able to track you here anyway. It couldn't be more perfect!"

"But Jake if I can't do it, it's too far away for me to get to you on time!" I protested, panicked.

He sighed, taking in my fearful expression. "Well let's at least think about it," he told me. "Maybe you'll feel better about it after you've slept on it. And speaking of sleeping, I don't believe we've seen the bedroom yet." He took my hand and pulled me towards the door into the cabin again.

We went through the kitchen back into the living room. The first of the remaining two doors turned out to be a small bathroom. The second was the bedroom.

It was really only big enough to hold a wolf-sized bed and a dresser, but a closet was built into the wall. There wasn't currently a wolf-sized bed, but a mattress lay on the dusty floor.

Jacob looked at me ruefully. "Not exactly glitzy is it Bells?"

I put my arms around him. "Wait till I get my cleaning done," I grinned at him.

He pulled a face. "Wish I could've brought you somewhere nicer though."

"You're not insulting our future home are you Mr. Black?" I asked him severely. "It's perfect. Or it will be when it's clean and furnished a little. I do love it Jake. I can picture us living here."

"Really?" he checked.

"Really," I promised him.

"Me too," Jake leaned down to kiss me and then pulled back a little. "I think even I would object to living in it like this, though."

I snorted. "It won't take long to clean it up a bit," I pointed out.

Jake rolled his eyes. "Just how I pictured this weekend Bells. Scrubbing floors."

"Better get on with it then," I stuck my tongue out at him.

At times like this, Jacob's werewolf abilities came in very handy. It took a little over an hour to clean up the floors and the bathroom. I found myself dreaming as I worked, picturing what colour curtains I would hang here, what colour I would paint that wall, what photo I would frame and place there. More than once, Jake caught me looking around and smiling to myself and every time he did, he would grab me and kiss me senseless.

By the time we agreed the cabin was habitable, we were both feeling keyed up from all the stolen, passionate kisses. Jacob finally threw his cloth across the kitchen, of course aiming it perfectly for the sink, and swept me up in his arms.

"Enough!" he said severely. "I don't need to be able to eat off the floor, just ravish my girl on it."

I snorted as he raced through to the bedroom and tossed me onto the mattress before throwing himself down next to me. No clouds of dust were displaced by the mattress and I figured our job was well enough done.

Jake looked into my eyes, suddenly serious. "I love you Bells."

"I know you do." I pushed his hair back from his eyes. "And I love you just as much."

"I know you do too." Smiling down at me, he lowered his face to mine and began to kiss me softly. I deepened the kiss and shifted so that I was lying flush against him. I hooked my leg over his waist and ran my hands over his broad back and shoulders, loving the feel of his taut muscles under my touch.

Jake's hands were under my shirt, freeing my breasts from the confines of my bra. He lifted my shirt over my head and pulled down my bra, throwing it behind him onto the floor. I felt his massive erection through his shorts and tightened my leg around his waist, rubbing against him. I was quickly becoming completely turned on and I knew he could smell me.

With a groan, Jacob pushed me onto my back and began an assault on my neck, which he knew was highly sensitive to

his hot kisses. He took his time, kissing and nipping every part of my skin there. My hands roamed his shoulders, down his arms and across his abs. I knew his sensitive areas just as intimately as he knew mine, and when I brushed my hands over his hard stomach I felt the trail of goose bumps forming and heard his breathing deepen.

Satisfied that my neck had been properly ravished, Jacob moved down to my breasts. As he licked and sucked, his hands skilfully unfastened my jeans allowing me to wriggle out of them. He kicked off his own shorts and my hands automatically went to his cock. Groaning under my touch, Jake kept up his attention to my breasts while his hand sought my mound through my panties, which were wet through.

"Fuck Bells you're soaking," he murmured. I felt him harden even more in my hand and the anticipation of feeling him inside me made me moan loudly. He cursed again in response and pulled my panties so hard I heard fabric rip.

I was more than ready for him and when I felt his blazing hot fingers rub my folds before pushing inside me, I knew I was close to my orgasm already. His thumb found my clitoris and rubbed circles around it while he thrust two fingers inside me. I moaned and writhed against his hand and when he stopped kissing me, I opened my eyes. He was watching my pleasure, looking at me with such a lust filled gaze that it drove me even wilder.

I reached for his cock again when I was on the brink of my climax. Jacob unexpectedly thrust a third finger inside me, crooking his fingers as he pushed them in as deeply as he could. My entire body was rocked by powerful waves of pleasure and I yelled out, cursing and calling his name.

As soon as I had begun to come down from my high, with supernatural speed Jacob rolled on a condom. He turned me over onto my stomach and pulled me up onto all fours. Thrusting into me from behind, I felt him bury himself deeply inside me. His accompanying groan was husky and dripping with want. He steadied my hips with his large hands and began pounding into me. My knees were about ready to give way when he reached around with one hand and began pinching my clit.

"Fuck Jake!" The combined sensations of his deep penetration and his merciless tugging at my already swollen and sensitive clit were driving me out of my mind. A steady stream of cursing left my mouth which Jacob matched ably with colourful language of his own.

I exploded into another release, my whole body trembling. Jacob didn't stop his hard pounding and my knees would have given way if he hadn't been holding me up. With a loud grunt and a further string of swearing, he found his own release and collapsed onto the mattress, pulling me down with him so that he was spooning me.

"Fucking hell that was amazing," he panted. Trembling and breathless, I wholeheartedly agreed.

We left the mattress only to eat. Jacob strutted around the kitchen naked, protesting when I pulled on the one T-shirt he had brought in his bag.

"Who d'you think is gonna see us honey?" he asked, tugging at the T-shirt.

"If you could see Hotah from here, he can see us through that window," I pointed at the offending window, pulling the T-shirt away from Jake's coaxing fingers.

He rolled his eyes. "There's no way anyone can see anything in **detail** through that window. At most they might see that there's something here. I'm Alpha remember, I have the best eyesight."

"Sometimes I think you make some of your enhanced Alpha powers up," I grumbled. Jake just laughed.

As I opened some cans of food and organised something easy for us to eat, he stood at the huge window surveying the scene before him.

"This really is amazing Bells. You don't even need to go onto the porch; you can see everything from here. I wonder who built this cabin in the first place. It's just perfect for an Alpha watching over his pack and his tribe."

"That would be one of your ancestors, Chief," I told him, handing him his plate.

"Huh. I knew there must be a reason my dad's so proud of our family history. Cos this place is cool."

Smiling at his enthusiasm, I felt my heart twinge again with the hope that he would fulfil all of his potential. With me by his side. Swallowing back the fear that threatened to consume me yet again, I tried to keep our conversation light over dinner.

After we had eaten, I excused myself to the bathroom. Jake paid me no heed as he gathered the dishes, so he missed the glint in my eye as I rushed to the bedroom and grabbed my new lingerie sets from my bag. Once in the bathroom, I debated. Red or black? Deciding that it literally could be now or never, and squeezing my eyes shut to stop the tears that once again threatened to fall at that thought, I went for the daring red bra and thong set.

I fluffed my hair around my shoulders and headed back to the kitchen. Jacob had his back to the door, once more surveying the land from the window. Pausing in the doorway, I needed to double check.

"So none of the wolves can see through that window, right?"

"Seriously Bells, there's no way" Jacob had begun to turn towards me and stopped mid-sentence, his jaw hanging open as he slowly and blatantly looked me over.

He literally growled as he crossed the room, swept me into his arms, whirled around and laid me across the kitchen table.

For the rest of the evening, conversation was limited to moans and cursing as Jake took me again and again throughout the cabin. Finally, exhausted and sore, we fell asleep on the mattress on the floor, perfectly content in one another's arms.

He actually preferred the black.

"Where do you see us one year from now?" It was Sunday morning and we hadn't yet made it off the mattress. Jake asked the question almost absently, twirling strands of my hair around his finger. My first impulse was to shrug my shoulders. I knew my future was with Jacob, but hadn't thought about it in terms of time scales. I caught myself just in time, and pulled my face away slightly so that I could see him. I suspected this was more than just a casual question, and something that I couldn't identify in his eyes confirmed that.

He met my gaze. "Let me take some dreams onto the battlefield, Bella," he murmured.

I swallowed. It was the first time he had alluded to our conversation on Friday night. Taking a deep breath, I tried to think.

"Tell me." The command was uttered in a low, husky voice and I saw the pleading in his eyes.

"Well," I sat up slightly so that I was leaning on my forearms on his chest looking down at him. "I'll be living here with you at weekends..."

"Only at weekends?" Jake frowned his disapproval and I shushed him.

"And during the weeks, I'll be at college. Close enough to come home all the time, every weekend and special occasion."

"Hmm, and what will you be studying?"

"Probably English Lit or something like that. Although as I haven't actually applied for anything yet, it could be a problem," I acknowledged. The events of the last few weeks had overshadowed every other priority.

"And what will I be doing the five days a week you're not with me?" he demanded.

I grinned down at him. "You'll be working your ass off to catch up at school, where you will be returning just as soon as all this is over."

Jake pulled a face. "I don't like one year from now," he complained. "Okay, five years. What are we doing?"

"Five years from now, I'll be here full time." I laughed softly at the satisfied expression on his face. "You'll run a car repair shop and I'll be teaching or something. We'll be married...."

"Really? Five years from now we're gonna be married?"

I laughed. I had never been an advocate for getting married young, but five years away seemed reasonable. "Mmhmm. You'll need to make an honest woman out of me sometime you know."

"Not a problem," he assured me fervently. "Do we have kids?"

"Uh...."

"Okay, you're pregnant. Ten years?"

"We have a couple of kids."

"Just a couple?"

"How many do we need?"

"Tons."

"In this cabin?" I looked around us and he laughed.

"Hell no, this is just a start honey. Ten years from now, I'll own the most successful car shop in the area and we'll have a house big enough for I dunno, eight kids."

"Eight?" I giggled at the thought of us chasing after eight kids. "Well if you want eight kids in ten years, we need a few sets of twins in there."

"Or we get started straight away," he corrected me mock seriously.

"Sure sure, Jake." I snuggled into his chest, smiling at the picture we had painted between us.

"Bells?"

"Mmhmm."

"I'm gonna make it all come true," he whispered, kissing my forehead.

I squeezed my eyes shut, willing away the tears. "If anyone can Jacob, it will be you," I admitted quietly. "You fixed me when I should have been irreparable. You can fix this."

He pulled me on top of him and kissed me with all the love he had in him. I tried to pour everything of my own into the kiss I gave him back. After a minute he pushed me gently onto my back, smiling down at me.

"And sixty years from now?"

I burst out laughing. "I'll be grey and wrinkled and saggy. You'll be grumpy. And we'll argue like, all the time."

Jake grinned at me. "With a lifetime full of memories to argue over."

Too soon, it was time to leave. Before we said goodbye to the cabin that I longed to call our home, Jacob brought me out onto the back porch again.

He seemed nervous as he brought something out of his pocket. "Bella," he said hesitantly, "there's something I want to give you. I made it for you when we first got together and I was planning on giving it to you for your graduation."

I knew instantly where he was going with this. "Then give it to me for graduation Jacob," I pleaded with him.

He shook his head. "Bella I want you to have it. I want you to have... the memory of me giving it to you. I thought about leaving it with Charlie to give you at graduation, just in case. But Bella, I want to know that it was me who gave it to you. It isn't much but... Well, if you wear it, knowing it was from me and that I made it for you..." He trailed off and opened his hand.

Nestled in his palm was a silver bracelet with a beautiful, tiny, russet coloured wooden wolf attached.

"Jake," I breathed, completely overwhelmed. "You made this?"

He nodded, a smile playing on his lips as he fastened it around my wrist. "The wolf part," he clarified. "It's exactly the right colour."

"I love it. Thank you." I looked at the bracelet on my wrist, fingering the little charm, my eyes glistening with tears. "When did you have the time?"

"You know I don't need much sleep these days," he shrugged. "I just did it here and there."

I met his eyes. "Here's the deal," I told him. "I'll wear it to bring you luck until after the battle. Then you are going to take it back and give it to me for graduation."

There was a mischievous glint in Jacob's eyes as he pulled me into his arms. "Maybe I'll give you a ring for graduation instead. Cos you know, I only have five years to marry you and get you pregnant. Better get engaged sooner rather than later."

I choked back the protest that I knew he would expect. Instead, I wrapped my arms around his neck and smiled sweetly at him. "Just let me know when you plan on asking Charlie's permission. I'll make myself scarce for that week."

"I figure I can do it right after I scare off the bogey man Bells. He'll agree to anything then, I reckon."

I had to acknowledge that he was probably right.

A/N: Just one more chapter before the battle. It will be up tomorrow or Monday at the latest.

Thank you to everyone who offered to read my oneshot. I'm still none the wiser what to do with it lol. I'll sleep on it for a few more nights first!

Chapter 34: Chapter 32 The Day Before

Chapter Thirty Two – The Day Before

Matt rolled over in bed, wincing as he felt his ribs complaining. Something wasn't right there. His arm and leg were pretty much healed, but he could feel something not right around his ribcage. It hurt but that wasn't the problem. It just felt... different somehow, kind of still busted.

Swinging his feet over the side of the bed, he cursed his own stupidity. Stupid to ever believe Nina would grow to love him, stupid to have come here to La Push in the first place. Akando would probably have let him stay behind. Matt would have come up with a half assed excuse about protecting their own people. Akando would have seen the truth, that Matt simply didn't want to witness the sickening effects of an early imprint on Nina and Embry. And Akando would probably have agreed to let Matt stay behind.

The desire to be around Nina had overcome his hatred of Embry and so he had come. Stupid.

And unbelievably stupid to have gotten himself into this particular mess. Matt stood up and tried stretching. A painful pop in his chest confirmed that something hadn't been set properly in his ribcage. *Terrific.*

It was Monday morning, and tomorrow was likely to be the day of the big fight. Matt wanted a fight. More than that, he **needed** it. All the rage and heartbreak had to be channelled somehow and as he would be Alpha ordered to stay the fuck away from Embry the moment he phased, he couldn't let it out the way he wanted to. Besides, it would upset Nina and that was something Matt tried not to do.

Sighing, he wondered where she was and automatically shut out that train of thought. She had come to see him yesterday and he had been pretty damn sure she had come straight from Embry's bed. These days, she reeked of him. Yesterday, she had carefully showered before coming to see him. He could smell the soap. There was only one reason he could think of for her doing that at three o'clock in the afternoon. He probably wouldn't usually have jumped to such a conclusion, but he had spent entirely too much time lying in this bed with nothing to do but dwell on thoughts he'd rather not have.

He badly wanted to phase. He wanted to check in with the pack mind and see what was going on. He wanted to stretch his legs and run. He wanted to growl and snarl, actually. But some damn leech doctor was being met at the treaty line right about now and Akando had ordered him not to phase until he had been checked over.

Here was the hilarious part. Because of the leech who was obsessed with Bella, Matt had to pretend to the leech doc that he was Embry. Oh it was all cloak and dagger around these parts. Edward could read the doc's mind, and Edward believed that the La Push pack consisted of five wolves. The fifth being, of course, the one wolf Matt wished had never been born, had never phased, and had certainly never set eyes on Nina.

And he had to pretend to fucking be him so that the doc wouldn't go and think something incriminating around the mind reader.

Matt had really wanted to ask if that gave him rights to Embry's imprint, but again, he knew that would upset Nina and so he refrained. He also had to act like his Alpha was some wolf called Sam he'd never met. Not that he cared about that. But no mention of Oregon or any of his own pack. He could manage that.

The window to his room was open and the smell hit him before he heard the voices. The tiny hairs on the back of his neck stood up and his body began to vibrate hard in response to that stench. The doc was here.

Clenching his fists and breathing hard to try and calm down, Matt waited for the door to open. The smell grew stronger and stronger and he tried breathing through his mouth to reduce the overpowering effects of it. Agitated and uncomfortable, it seemed to take forever before Jacob finally opened the door.

Jake gave Matt a warning look when he stepped inside. Matt nodded briefly, indicating that he knew the score. He was called Embry; he came from La Push, end of story. Get checked out by doc, hopefully get the all clear to phase, run outside for fresh air; got it.

Carlisle stepped through the door slowly. Paul had accompanied Jacob to the treaty line and Carlisle was well aware that he was on enemy territory with three volatile wolves, in a very confined space. With practice born of centuries, he moved slowly and deliberately. No sudden movements, no loud noises.

The gigantic man who was now standing in front of the bed was watching him warily.

"Hello Embry," Carlisle said in the gentle voice he reserved for his patients. He saw the wolf flinch and assumed his voice was unappealing to the wolf's ears. "I understand you have sustained some broken bones. I will need to touch you to feel how they've set. Is that alright?"

Matt shifted uneasily but nodded. Best get it over with. Carlisle stepped forward, apologising for the cold of his hands before touching Matt. It was unpleasant for both parties. The heat from Matt's skin seared Carlisle's cold flesh like a branding iron. The vampire's cold touch felt like antifreeze against Matt's arm.

"Arm's fine," Carlisle declared after a minute of prodding and manoeuvring. He gave the same verdict for the thigh bone. When he moved to Matt's ribcage however, he frowned immediately and noticed Matt's wince when he pressed two of his ribs.

"There's something not right here," he stated. "You can feel that can't you?" Matt gave him no response and he sighed. "Look Embry I think two of your ribs are still fractured. I can bring you straight to the hospital and get some X-rays run. That way we'll know exactly what we're looking at."

"No." Matt's voice was flat and brooked no argument. "They don't hurt that much and I'm needed tomorrow."

Carlisle shook his head. "Embry I am well aware that you face an ugly fight." He glanced at Jacob. "I have already attempted to persuade Jacob to reconsider your options. But either way, you are in no condition to engage in battle. One wrong move and these ribs could break again. I don't know enough about your shifting process to know whether they would survive you even becoming a wolf."

"One way to find out," Matt said gruffly. He headed towards the door. The revolting stench in the room was reaching unbearable levels and his skin felt violated everywhere the doctor had touched.

"Wait!" It was Jacob. "You can't phase until your Alpha says so."

"Fuck!" Matt's expletive was too loud in the small room with the charged atmosphere, and made everyone jump. Matt registered the smug smile on Jacob's face and realised he had been taking the opportunity to make the point to Carlisle that he wasn't Alpha.

This was getting way too complicated. Matt thought they should just kill the fucking leech and be done with all the secrecy.

Carlisle was looking worried. "I really think you should have the X-ray done Embry."

"No. I'm phasin' and I'm fightin'." Matt attempted to stare down Jacob and when that didn't work, turned his glare on the doctor.

"My advice is for you to do nothing until we can find out exactly what the problem is. But I suppose that decision lies with your Alpha." Carlisle looked uncertainly at Jacob Black. He knew he was the great-grandson of Ephraim Black and should be Alpha. Of course by the time the Cullens had left Forks, Jacob still hadn't become his wolf and Sam Uley was standing in.

None of the wolves answered him and eventually, Carlisle sighed and made for the door. "Call me if you change your mind," he told Matt, who simply nodded curtly.

Jacob and Paul escorted the vampire back to the treaty line. He was genuinely concerned about the state of affairs and couldn't understand the headstrong wolves' attitudes to the coming battle. He felt immensely guilty for the part he and his family had played in bringing such destruction on a tribe which had always been good to his family.

"Jacob there's something I would like to tell you," he began. "Alice issued me with a warning to give to Edward. He was not to trust the information he had received about a field at dawn. Alice didn't know what it meant or who had given Edward this information, but it was important. Edward saw this advice in my thoughts. His response was... odd."

If he was waiting for a reaction from Jacob, he was disappointed. Finally, Carlisle continued. "Edward said that the information was correct and either I was attempting to trick him into leaving you alone or there was ancient magic afoot. He absolutely refused to believe he may be misguided. I don't know what this means but I'm assuming it's significant."

They had reached the treaty line and Jacob simply thanked the doctor for his time and confirmed that Carlisle would be at the treaty line on Tuesday morning to be escorted to Sam's cabin. Sam's place had been chosen to be the hub of battle related activity. The wounded and if necessary, deceased, would be brought there. Abey, Kim and Nina would be there to look after the wolves as they came in.

Meantime, Bella would be at the Alpha cabin with Brady, Anna, Billy and Charlie. She had agreed to try and shield Jake from there, remembering how effortlessly her shield had extended almost of its own volition when Kate had hidden from them that morning at the Cullen house. Nick had let all the wolves know that Anna was most likely pregnant and the packs had unanimously declared that she should be at the cabin furthest away from the action.

Hotah would guard Sam's cabin and Collin would be running between the two cabins as necessary. Everyone else would be fighting. Apparently, that included Matt.

Matt had phased as soon as the leech doctor had left and Akando had reappeared and lifted the order not to phase. He felt the painful crunch in his ribs and yelped from the initial pain. It faded quickly to a dull ache and he found that he could run just fine. Akando ran with him for a while, shadowing him and watching him closely. He examined his pain through their linked minds and conceded that it was manageable.

The bottom line was that every wolf was needed to participate. Matt was eager to fight and had enough bitterness and anger within him to make him vicious. With the battle literally imminent, Akando was getting jittery. He was not as personally invested in the outcome of the battle as Jacob was, and he was very much afraid that if the battle went the

wrong way, his whole tribe would be left without any shape shifters. Anna's pregnancy had given him some small hope, but he did not want to send a young woman home, alone and shouldering the entire responsibility for the future of the Oregon wolves.

Akando readily agreed that Matt could join in the battle the next day.

By Monday evening, everyone was prepared. The wolves were ready and willing to protect their people. The imprints were focussed on their jobs. Even Billy and Charlie had turned up at Sam's cabin with a large supply of fish to be cooked for the evening's meal.

Jacob found a quiet moment with Bella to tell her how proud of her he was. She had spent the day calmly directing the girls who were all teetering on the brink of hysteria. Sue Clearwater had gone into Port Angeles to get medical supplies and groceries. Bella had taken charge of arranging the supplies and giving each of the girls a specific job to do. She oversaw all the arrangements and made sure that the cabin was efficiently organised as both a first aid shelter and a place to eat.

When Nina dropped a glass and cried over the broken pieces, Bella calmly swept it up and comforted Nina briefly before putting her straight back to work. When Anna's fears grew too much and she ran to the bathroom retching, Bella simply handed her a cold washcloth and hugged her. The wolves could smell the fear under her calm exterior, but the other girls and the older men detected nothing other than a level-headed efficiency which soothed everyone around her.

One detail about the next day had been bothering Jacob. He knew Carlisle seemed to be on their side, but he still didn't like the idea of him alone in Sam's cabin with three of the wolves' imprints and a young pup. He couldn't see any way around it. There was no way they could move injured wolves off the reservation and that left Carlisle coming to La Push. Nonetheless, he spent a considerable amount of time trying to find another solution. He wished for at least one person he could trust to diffuse any difficult situations that may arise.

Jacob was sitting outside Sam's cabin thinking about this problem when the sound of an engine he knew drew his attention. It was an engine he had worked on recently, Quil's car. Jacob knew that that particular car had been left on the Makah reservation for Sam, who wanted to stay longer when Quil returned to La Push. Quil had agreed to run home as a wolf and give Sam a loan of his car.

Realising what this must mean, Jake stood up with a grin. Sure enough, the car pulled up outside the cabin and Sam climbed out. If Jake was surprised by this show of solidarity from his former Alpha, he was even more surprised when Emily emerged from the passenger side.

Sam walked straight up to Jacob and pulled him into a brief hug before clapping his back and smiling at him. "Might not be a wolf anymore but I figured there must be something I can do."

Jake looked at him earnestly. "You might just have answered one of my biggest concerns. Hey Emily." He gave the young woman a hug which she returned with feeling.

"And I figured with so many mouths to feed, you could probably use an extra pair of hands," she told him.

Several of the La Push wolves were at the cabin and quickly picked up on Sam and Emily's presence. The next half hour was spent amongst much back slapping, hugging and a few tears from Emily as she heard over and over how sorely she had been missed.

That evening, the two packs with their imprints, Billy, Charlie, and Sue Clearwater ate together. Far from being morose, the conversations flowed and the laughter rang through the evening air. They knew the Volturi were close by. They knew the next day would seal their fates. Tonight was for enjoying the company of those they loved the most.

Later that evening, Jacob sat next to Bella as she called Alice one more time. Alice's visions had not changed. Everyone's futures disappeared in less than twelve short hours.

After the call, Jake and Bella walked hand in hand down to First Beach, to the tree where they both considered it had all began. Jake sat down with his back resting against the huge log, Bella between his legs as she had been just a few short weeks ago the night of the bonfire. They smiled together now, remembering how she had freaked out about it afterwards. Mostly though, they simply sat in silence, listening to the sound of the waves lapping onto the shore.

Jacob shut his eyes, committing this moment to memory. The girl he loved... no, that word didn't even cover it. The girl he adored and worshipped was right here in his arms. She had grown to love him, just as he had always dreamed she would. He was secure and confident in her love for him now, and the promises she had made him for their future together meant everything to him.

This, right here, his dreams, his future, his love for this one girl and the fierce pride he felt as the future leader of the Quileute people. This was why he would fight and win tomorrow. He breathed deeply and evenly, feeding his soul with these thoughts.

Bella's eyes were also shut tightly. She too, was committing this moment to memory. Today had cost her a great deal of effort, and she longed now to turn to Jacob for the comfort he had always provided her. But for now, she knew, their roles were reversed. She must be his comfort and his strength until he returned to her tomorrow. She tried to push away the

demons that wanted to infect her mind, whispering that this could be the last time he held her in his arms. If she allowed herself to listen to that voice, she would come undone.

Finally, Jacob took Bella's hand and pulled her to her feet. Looking deeply into her eyes, he told her one more time of his love for her and all the dreams he had for their future. He saw the effort it cost her to keep her tears at bay as she whispered back her love for him, and he loved her all the more for the strength she didn't even know she had.

They walked silently back to Sam's cabin, where Brady was waiting with Anna to bring Bella to the Alpha cabin. Charlie and Billy were already there. With one final soft, lingering kiss, Jacob and Bella parted ways.

Jacob's POV

At some point in the night, I awoke with a start. I was only scheduled to have a few hours' sleep and at first I assumed that it was habit that had wakened me. Unless I was with Bella, I would awaken automatically when it was time to patrol.

Within a fraction of a second, I had changed my mind. What had wakened me was a definite stench of acrid, rotting flesh. Gagging, I leapt to my feet and allowed my wolf to explode through me. The smell was so strong I was sure there must be a leech nearby. Puzzled as to how it could have got through the wolves' tight patrols, I searched for other minds. I quickly found Leah and Seth, both of whom were confused by what their Alpha smelled.

Seth – *Nothing crossed the perimeter Jake, I swear it.*

Leah – *No way Jake, definitely not.*

I knew what I could smell. It was a scent I tried to block out whenever I was near it, but now I forced myself to deliberately breathe it in.

Leah – *Fucking hell Jake, do you have to do that?*

They're here. Do you smell it through me? There's more than one. It's the guard, they're close. I can smell them already because there are so fucking many of 'em.

I phased back to human and quietly woke Akando, Embry, Paul and Jared. Akando was filling in for Sam to make up the fifth wolf in the field. Their appearances were similar enough that I was sure Edward wouldn't notice until it was too late and the leeches were trapped in the field.

Before shifting back to my wolf, I called Bella. She answered on the first ring and I hoped she had managed to get some sleep.

"It's time, honey."

All my instincts as a wolf, an Alpha, and the future Chief of the tribe were alert. I was ready to lead my pack to victory and I was anxious for the battle to commence. I was proud of my pack, proud of Akando's pack, and absolutely determined to win.

My movements were continuous. I paced and ran around the field. I couldn't keep still. My senses were on overdrive. Adrenaline was pounding with the blood through my veins.

I could feel somehow that Bella was protecting me. I had never noticed it before but now, with every nerve ending in my body sizzling with pent up energy, I sensed that her shield was covering me with very little effort being expended on her part. *That's my girl.*

The smell of rotten flesh was marching ever closer, feeding my agitation. The other four wolves in the field with me could all smell it now too, and Leah, who was phased further out to keep open our channel of communication with Akando, was also becoming antsy with the stench.

Dawn was about to break over the horizon. I had time only to hope that the Kootenai pack were going to keep their end of the bargain when slowly, with a synchrony and fluidity that almost matched the wolves', a wall of bloodsuckers broke through the tree line.

It had begun.

***Chapter 35*: Chapter 33 They Came At Dawn**

A/N: OK – here's part one of three of the battle. I had to split it otherwise it would have been insanely long and confusing..... Part Two will be posted up probably on Thursday, with the last part Fri or Sat. I promise you will know the outcome by the weekend! All those worried about tissues ... you won't need them for this chapter I don't think. Maybe have them handy for the next one though;-)

Chapter Thirty Three – They Came At Dawn

The Volturi guard advanced steadily into the field. They made an imposing sight, as numbered as they were. There were thirty two in all and they were focussed on their goal. Within the hour, the Quileute wolf pack would be no more. Every man, woman and child in La Push would likely be dead. And Bella Swan would be in the throes of agony as she left her mortal life behind her.

Their plan was clear. Edward had shown Aro the strong allegiance the three original wolves had felt to one another. Chelsea would go first, severing that bond. Then Jane would attack the Alpha, crippling him while Alec masked the remaining wolves' senses. The remainder of the guard would finish the pack off. Then they would find the girl that Aro and Edward coveted so much. All who stood in their way would be drained instantly.

The vampires could feel the anger rolling off the five wolves in the field. Thirty-two against five, it hardly seemed worthwhile to have mobilised the entire army but Aro did not want to leave any room for mistakes. Their attack would be over in mere minutes, La Push decimated a short time later, and they would be on their way home to Volterra as soon as night fell once more.

It was almost too easy.

Edward was the first to falter in his confidence. The minds of the thirty-two members of the guard created a dreadful commotion in his head, but he had expected the wolves' minds to be distinctive above all the din. He heard nothing that could come from any of the animals in the field. Furthermore, the large shifter who should be Sam Uley... was not.

Edward swiftly made his way to Aro and laid his hand in the ancient vampire's own. Aro was not unduly concerned. Even if the wolves had planned some trickery, the discrepancy in numbers alone made the outcome of this day clear. He signalled to Chelsea to proceed. There was no need for discussions or negotiations. Their purpose here was clear.

Chelsea was unable to see the wolves' bindings; that was Marcus' ability. But she should be able to feel them. She sent out probes to feel the lines of pressure that ought to be connecting the wolves to one another. With the strength of the bonds between the pack members, it should be an easy enough task. A frown masked her beautiful features as she realised her efforts were futile. She looked to Marcus for help but he could only confirm that the bonds were there.

The first doubts began to cloud Aro's mind and he signalled to Chelsea to stop while he took stock of the situation. A seemingly endless silence ensued.

The wolves were restless. Their hackles were standing straight up as they stood in a line facing the intruding leeches. They were waiting only for the Quileute Alpha's signal.

Jacob was squashing every instinct he had, allowing the shrewdness of the leader in him to temporarily quell the wolf's desires. He wanted to give the other six wolves time to creep as close as possible before he gave the signal to attack. The success of their entire strategy lay with their ability to take out four key members of the Volturi effortlessly and immediately. The closer the wolves were when he summoned them, the greater the surprise and the more effective their offensive.

And so, he ignored the feverish need to sink his teeth into the wall of corpses in front of him. He drove down the desire to rip them violently apart and watch them burn. He swallowed back the bile that their stench caused to rise in his throat, and he waited. Bella would cover them all from the mind attacks, of that he was certain. The time would soon come when the wolves could do what they were built for.

Finally, Aro issued a silent signal to Jane. The small vampire stepped forward slightly with the most malicious smile Jacob had ever seen on her lips. She looked at the large black and brown wolf who she believed to be the leader, and directed the full force of her power at him. At the same time, Alec attempted to block Jacob's senses, incapacitating the wolf they believed to be their second greatest threat.

Nothing happened.

Never in Jane's existence had her powers failed her. Narrowing her eyes in concentration, she attempted to unleash the most horrifying pain on the wolf which should by rights be writhing in agony on the ground.

Still, nothing happened.

Too late, Aro realised that the mind reader in whom he had placed all his trust, had been duped. At precisely that moment, the enormous russet wolf sat back on his haunches and howled at the sky.

It happened so fast that mere human eyes would never have known what had hit. The five wolves in the field sprang simultaneously in the direction of the guard. Edward had time only to register in disbelief that the small pack were going to take on the entire might of the Volturi, when a further half dozen massive animals launched out of the trees.

They moved in synchrony. They moved in twos and threes. Jacob dove straight for Jane. By his side were Paul and Matt, two of the most vicious fighters.

Her small stature belied the strength that was fuelled by human blood. But even then, she was no match for the three enormous, enraged wolves. Jacob and Matt dragged her out of formation while Paul ensured no other leech attempted to stop them. The truth was that the leeches were too stunned to react immediately. In an instant, Jane's arms which had been flailing around trying to find purchase had been ripped out. Matt tore off a large chunk of her torso for no other reason than because his instincts told him to bite and shred. Her screams of rage ended abruptly when Jacob snapped his massive jaws once and severed her head from her body.

Seth, under Jared's protection, had raced to an already prepared corner of the field. Phasing swiftly to human, he found the stashed lighter and lit the pyre. Before any vampire could think to take advantage of him being in human form, he was his wolf once more. Jane's parts were dragged to the fire by Seth and Jared as the three wolves who had ended her launched back into the crowd of vampires. Aro watched in horrified disbelief as one of his most prized possessions ignited and incinerated less than a minute after she had been dragged from his side.

The stench of the burning, rotting flesh added to the wolves' already incandescent anger. Akando, flanked by Nick and Quil, had already dealt with Alec. His attempt to take a few backwards steps had been futile as the large animals dragged him to the same fate as his sister. Mere seconds after she had been unceremoniously dumped on the flaming stake, he joined her there.

Chelsea was taken out by Embry and Elan. Leah joined with Jacob, Paul and Matt when they threw themselves back into the guard and grabbed the woman who shielded Aro.

Less than two minutes had passed since the wolves attacked. As the remaining vampires began to react, the wolves that had already dispatched of their targets snapped and worried at them until random pieces of leech lay scattered around the ground between the stunned Volturi and the wolves.

Jacob registered the look of utter horror on Aro's face and knew he had been right. The guard relied on numbers and their mental attacks. The eleven wolves pulled slightly back and circled menacingly around the twenty eight remaining vampires. They were outnumbered by almost three to one and Jacob felt the beginning of doubts seep into the pack mind.

*Enough! They are on **our** land! They intend to harm **our** people! Every one of us has been brought into existence for this moment. We will attack and destroy each and every one of them. By tonight, we will be celebrating on the beach.*

Jacob felt even the visiting pack respond to him with a renewed determination.

The vampires were looking to Aro for guidance. Aro wanted to retreat but surrounded as they were, he knew it was not an option. His calculating mind raced through alternative plans. Hand Edward over for giving him false information. He registered Edward looking at him in horror. Negotiate with the wolves; unlikely.

Sitting back on his haunches once more, Jacob hoped against hope that the Kootenai Alpha had kept his word, and he let rip the howl that announced it was time to attack. Those vampires from which Bella could not protect the outside pack had been eliminated. It was time now for the real fight to commence.

A sudden thundering sound caused all the vampires to look around them nervously. Howls and barks from the wolves around them were answered by similar calls from within the forest. The thundering grew closer. It was the sound of massive, running paws.

More than four wolves! Jacob's heart leapt as he realised that there were at least double the number of extra wolves from what he had been expecting. Focussing briefly on Akando, he saw in the other Alpha's mind the understanding that the Kootenai Alpha must have drummed up more support.

Pride and determination swept through Jacob Black. He was the Alpha of the endangered pack and it was his honour as well as his destiny to defend his people and their land. He roared at the wolves to attack. As one, they launched themselves into the line of leeches just as nine enormous wolves crashed out of the forest and joined them.

The fight was on.

Bella's POV

I had discovered a place in my soul that I had never before known existed. It was a serene place, a peaceful haven to which I clung tenuously. It had enabled me to remain calm and focussed for two days, while around me the other girls were falling apart.

My grip on this tranquil place was slippery. At any moment, the torrent of mind numbing fear and horror could burst through and I would descend into hysteria. All it would take was one errant idea that I allowed to form in my mind. Demons tried to whisper suggestions in my ear, thoughts of young boys fruitlessly laying down their lives, and of a lifetime spent alone or

an eternity as a vampire.

I silently pushed them all back. Since arriving at the Alpha cabin the night before the battle, I had focussed on mundane tasks and kept my mind busy. I soothed Anna and fed Brady, Charlie and Billy.

Charlie watched me curiously sometimes, probably wondering why I was so calm when everyone else, even Brady, was obviously jittery. Billy seemed to understand. He patted my hand each time I passed him as I flitted around the tiny cabin, keeping myself busy. I heard him tell Anna stories of his time living here with Sarah as newlyweds, and I hoped that one day he would visit Jake and I here and share those same stories.

I couldn't listen to them that night. Hearing of newly married bliss would cause the demons to whisper in my ear that I may never know that state.

Finally, everyone had turned in. Camping mattresses and blankets were laid out in the living room for Charlie and Billy, while Anna and I were to share the mattress in the bedroom. The memories of Jacob overpowered me there and I relocated to the kitchen before the dam could break and hysteria could claim me.

I sat at the small table in the kitchen, wandering outside occasionally to check with Brady whether there was any news. He was phased and dozing under the porch fence at the back of the cabin. I practised flexing my shield and concentrated on breathing.

Shortly after midnight, Charlie came in and tried to persuade me to get some sleep. I told him the truth; that the mattress in the bedroom held precious memories of Jacob and I couldn't possibly be there tonight. I didn't add that almost the entire cabin held the same memories. He spared me the fatherly reactions, and merely offered his makeshift bed in the living room, saying he would sit in the kitchen. But I couldn't succumb to sleep tonight. The nightmares would suck me under. In the end, Charlie just sat in the kitchen with me for the next few hours.

When Jacob called, I shut my eyes and listened to his husky voice tell me simply that it was time. I realised I was ready and stood up to go outside, still holding onto that calm oasis in the innermost reaches of my soul. My shield expanded almost of its own volition and easily covered the distance to the field that I couldn't even properly make out in the low pre-dawn light. Then, I stood there and waited.

Brady was whining and pacing below me. Charlie came out a few minutes later and wrapped a blanket around my shoulders. Billy followed soon after and wordlessly handed me a pair of field glasses. I almost laughed at that; such a simple idea and one that both Jake and I had completely overlooked. It was still too dark to see anything much but I knew they would be valuable before long.

I could feel my heart beating steadily and blood thrumming through my veins. I had never been so focussed on anything and thought that I must be in some kind of meditative state. A short time passed and I suddenly realised that I could actually **feel** Jacob under my shield. He was moving fast in the direction of the field. It was the strangest sensation, as though a beloved light was making its way across my soul. I found myself smiling and in my peripheral vision I registered Billy and Charlie exchanging a look, no doubt wondering what I had to be smiling about.

It may have felt strange but it was also wonderful. Oddly, I was somehow convinced that he could feel that I was covering him. He had wanted us to share a mind link. Apparently, we did.

Anna appeared outside with steaming mugs of coffee for us all. She too stayed out on the porch and waited.

I knew the vampires had arrived in the field when Brady began growling below us. I tried to focus on the light that was Jacob and not extend my shield any further than him. I didn't know what would happen if any of the vampires fell under the protective confines of the shield. It was remarkably easy to do. In fact, it felt almost as though it only **wanted** to cover Jacob, and moulded itself around him. I relaxed again. It seemed as though my shield was designed to protect my imprint.

A few minutes later, I felt fluttering against the membrane of my shield and knew that one of the attacks had begun. Lifting the field glasses to my eyes, I tried to see what had just happened. I could clearly make out the individual vampires now but I had no way of knowing who any of them were, other than Edward who was standing by an ancient looking vampire that I took to be Aro. I trained my vision on Jake, who was standing very still facing the crowd of vampires.

Some time passed and then a more insistent jabbing pressed against the membrane. It was uncomfortable and I guessed it must be Jane. The jabbing intensified and at the same time I had the uneasy sensation of smoke climbing over my shield.

I set my jaw, concentrating even harder although strictly speaking it probably wasn't necessary. It felt as though the invasive jabs and smoke went on for a long time although it was probably only a minute or two. Finally, Jake sat back on his haunches and let a howl rip which we could clearly hear. Brady's growls intensified in response and he stood very still as though watching intently as a scene played out in his head.

I watched it play out through my field glasses. The attempted invasion of my shield stopped the instant the packs leaped into action. I told Anna that Nick had safely taken care of Alec and heard her sigh in relief. It was over quickly and the eleven huge wolves circled the guard menacingly.

I handed Anna the glasses and she eagerly sought to reassure herself that the father of her child was so far unhurt. I still

had my shield extended, knowing that Edward remained a threat. I would not withdraw it until Brady received a direct order from Jacob telling me to.

A few minutes passed and I suddenly felt a powerful surge of emotion from the light under my shield. Something had ignited within Jacob. It was a fierce pride in his people and a sense of honour that he was the one to lead this battle. My own fists clenched involuntarily in response to the feelings he invoked and I heard Brady yelp.

Moments later, the packs launched into an attack. At almost the same instant, a large number of unfamiliar wolves raced out from the tree line and I heard Billy gasp audibly.

"Twenty!" he calculated. He slowly lowered his field glasses. "Twenty wolves in that field fighting and another three at the cabins; how many wolves exist, Bella?"

"I honestly don't know, Billy. I don't think Jake was expecting this many."

"They have answered the battle cry against their ancient enemies," Billy murmured. He shook his head and chuckled lightly. Charlie grabbed the glasses from his old friend and looked for himself, emitting a low whistle when he took in the sight unfolding below him.

We were too far away to hear much other than the occasional angry howl or scream but we silently passed the two pairs of field glasses between us as the fight got under way.

It was too close to call. The wolves were still outnumbered and the initial shock had worn off. The vampires were fighting back and it was clear that several of them were skilled. I watched as the wolves ducked and weaved, snapped and bit, lunged and dived. I panicked a little every time I saw a cold one throw off a wolf, or try to get their arms around them.

Brady's sudden yelp alerted me to the fact that one of the wolves was injured. I scanned the field trying to identify who was hurt but none were obviously handicapped. Finally I saw Quil land awkwardly from a leap and take a moment to steady himself. I realised it must be him. It didn't hold him back from viciously ripping the leg off the vampire he had landed next to and I exhaled sharply in relief.

Looking for Jacob, I saw that his head was clearly in the fight. He seemed almost able to see in every direction at once as he snapped his massive jaws and raked his lethal claws against marble skin. I handed the glasses back to Anna.

From the distance, without the glasses to train in on individuals, the scene looked like utter chaos. Human-like forms mingled randomly with the enormous wolves. Some looked like they were dancing as they darted and wove around each other, shifter and vampire each trying to find a weakness to attack. In other small clusters, several wolves at once descended on a lone leech and ripped them to shreds.

The pyre burnt brightly and the acrid smoke rose high into the air. I tried to count, hoping that the numbers were already more evenly matched, but the leeches moved too quickly. Frustrated, I gave up.

All I could do now was continue to shield, and wait.

A/N: I promise the next part will be up Thursday at the latest. That's the first Tissue Chapter. You have been warned.

***Chapter 36*: Chapter 34 What I Will Sacrifice For You**

A/N: Here it is ... Part Two of the battle. Ummmmm ... some of you won't like the way this plays out. But okay, you can always yell at me.

An extra special thank you to feebes for her beta reading on this chapter. She picked up on some mistakes that I had completely missed. Edward would have strolled through La Push examining his fingernails if this chapter hadn't been properly beta read. Seriously.

Chapter Thirty Four – What I Will Sacrifice For You (Matt)

Jacob

Another fucker down! It was now twenty wolves against twenty-two leeches. The odds were improving all the time and so far only Quil had sustained an injury. His left leg had been partially broken but he was pushing through the pain and still fighting strong. Matt's ribs were causing him trouble too, but again he was sucking it up and lethal.

Jacob saw through the pack mind that Seth was in trouble. It was distracting Leah who was supposed to be helping Paul. The Alpha wolf ripped the head off the bloodsucker he was fighting, twenty against twenty-one, and raced to Seth.

I've got it Leah. Focus!

The fucker Seth was fighting was big, and strong. His skin was weird. It was kind of olive coloured despite the standard leech chalky complexion. As Jacob leapt at him he heard another leech chuckle "Take 'im, Felix!"

He remembered Nina's description of Felix as being the brawn of the guard. Yeah, he could see why. He crashed into the leech's side just as he was about to deliver a blow to Seth's head that looked like it could have been fatal.

I've got him Seth. Go.

Seth raced off and attacked the leech that had been egging Felix on. Jacob zeroed his whole focus in on the deadly vampire. He was going to be a tough bastard to take down.

Matt

Fucking ribs were hurting like a bitch. Despite it, Matt was at his most dangerous as he shredded parts off every leech he got within reach of. He had already finished off two which put him on a par with Jacob. Akando had taken one, Paul and Leah another between them, and Embry and Elan the last. Of course Matt had sneered that his count was higher than Embry's.

Edward

This day was definitely not going as planned and Edward was upset. He was beyond shocked at the wolves' strategies. It had been nasty surprise after nasty surprise since he had arrived in the field with the Volturi.

Edward was actually quite skilled in combat; living with Jasper for as long as he had, he had learned a lot. He was more than capable of taking on a wolf, but he had the uneasy feeling that they were avoiding him. The nine wolves which had arrived later, whose minds he could read, certainly didn't seem to be staying away from him, but the original eleven seemed to be actively giving him a wide berth. No, make that ten of the original eleven. He had a sneaking suspicion that the enormous russet wolf was Jacob Black, and that he really was the Alpha of the pack. Moreover, he thought that Jacob had ordered his pack to leave Edward for him.

It was, Edward thought, fitting.

It still hadn't occurred to him that the reason he couldn't read the wolves' minds and that the Volturi's weapons had been so ineffective was because of Bella. He was still assuming some ancient Indian magic was at work.

Quil

Despite the crippling pain in his left leg, Quil kept on worrying at the vampire he and Nick were focussing on. He was a tricky bastard but last time Quil had managed to catch him off balance, he had almost kept him down long enough for Nick to rip his head off. The problem was that his damn leg was weaker than usual and the leech had managed to throw him off. He and Nick had swapped roles after that one, Nick would take it down, Quil would snap its neck.

In true Tamastlikt style, Nick threw his entire bulk at the vampire, head on. The leech wobbled but didn't go down. It wrapped its arms around Nick. Quil knew that would be game over. He lunged high and hard, lethal jaws wide open. He just missed the neck when the leech saw him coming and moved a little out of Quil's way, but he got a chunk out of its shoulder, causing it to loosen its grip on Nick just enough for him to break free.

Whirling around, Nick again threw his bulk at the leech, this time bringing it to its knees. It faltered and that was all Quil needed to get his jaws around its neck. With a crumbling crunch, its head was severed.

Twenty!

Akando

It was just as well the extra wolves had arrived. Without them, this would probably have been a lost cause.

As it was, though... Akando launched at a leech, ripping its leg from the knee down. It fell forward and Akando leapt on its back, snapping at its neck, an easy kill.

Nineteen!

Visiting Kootenai Wolf

Fuck this was fun! A whole fucking massive coven to destroy. The wolves were making quick work of the leeches. There goes another one.

Eighteen!

Leah – in Beta mode

Collin! How close are you?

Collin – Half a mile out. I was scouting the perimeter of Jake's cabin.

Leah - Get the fuck down here. Drag the leech parts to the pyre before they start fucking crawling back together!

Collin

Yes!

Jacob

Felix was every bit as tough as Jacob had anticipated. It was taking all of the Alpha's focus and skill to stay clear of the thug's vicious swings, and he was struggling to find any weakness in Felix to attack.

Jacob ducked away from another lethal kick, whirling around and diving aside as a fist smashed in his direction. The blows and kicks were raining down hard and fast and Jacob couldn't yet find a way past them. He knew that one lapse in his own concentration, or one false move and he would be seriously injured at best.

He was so focussed on Felix that he missed Edward's exit from the field.

Edward

The wolves had swung the numbers in their favour and looking around, Edward could see that the newest wolves to arrive were about to make quick work of another two of the Volturi.

The vampires were being annihilated and so far, none of the wolves were down.

Edward hadn't come here to be destroyed. He had come for Bella. Looking around him swiftly, he noticed two things. Firstly, there was a direct line clear into the trees. He could be there in the blink of an eye.

Secondly, something was glinting in the sunshine high up on the hill.

His thoughts clicked into place. Bella would be somewhere safe, but knowing Bella, she would want to watch over the wolves. Someone was on the hill with field glasses. *Bella.*

Embry

The leech parts had started to crawl and slither around the field, trying to knit themselves back together. It was fucking eerie. Leah had Beta ordered Collin to come and put them on the pyre but there were too many pieces. Akando told Elan and Embry to help him.

Dragging a leg in his mouth to the fire, Embry saw Edward's back disappear into the forest. That wasn't good, Jake wanted to take him down, not let the coward escape. Embry saw Leah race after Edward with Jared behind her. Leah was fast enough to catch him and they would keep him distracted till Jake could take him down.

Searching through the pack mind for his old friend, Embry saw Jake leap onto the back of the biggest fucking leech on the field. He couldn't bring it down, but he clung on and snapped at its neck. Its head severed partially but it needed a death blow.

Embry leaped into the fray.

Jake get the fuck after Edward. I've got this one!

He showed Jacob where Edward had disappeared into the trees.

Fucker's strong Embry but he just needs one good bite. Be careful.

Jacob jumped off the leech, launching himself in such a way that he pushed Felix forward with all his might. The leech fell partially to the ground and Embry leaped at it.

Jacob was already at the tree line when he realised he had made an error in judgement. Embry, like Seth, was no match for this vampire. Wheeling back around, Jake knew he wouldn't make it in time.

Felix had rolled as he fell and had delivered a blow with his arm to Embry. Embry's shoulder bone had shattered and he had gone down, yelping as his front leg gave way under him. Scrambling to get back on his feet, he was handicapped by the broken shoulder. Felix raised his massive frame over the wolf and lifted his foot to stamp it down on Embry's head.

It would be a fatal blow.

Matt

He knew it was pitiful but Matt was keeping a small amount of focus on Embry, determined to out kill and out skill his rival.

He saw the whole thing. The fucking massive leech that Jake was struggling with; Embry taking over to let Jacob go and avenge his girl; and the imminent death of Embry Call.

What followed was over in a split second.

Only one thought flashed through Matt's mind. *Nina*.

Nina would be devastated without her imprint. Nina needed not Matt, but Embry. Nina would never recover from the death of the wolf that was a mere moment away from his demise.

Shutting his eyes briefly with Nina's name a prayer on his lips, Matt launched himself at Felix.

He knew he was at the wrong angle. He knew he would never be able to move out of the way in time. His goal was only to distract the leech long enough for Embry to get out of the way. There were two more wolves charging this way to lend themselves to the attack of this particular leech. Matt just needed to buy enough time for them to get there.

Matt caught Felix's foot in his jaws and ripped it off as he sailed narrowly over Embry's prostrate frame. Caught off guard, Felix stumbled and Embry was on his feet and ready to defend himself, smashed shoulder and all.

Matt's claws raked into the ground as he landed and he knew he had no time to turn around to see what he was facing. He guessed Felix would deliver a blow in one direction or the other. Matt had a fifty-fifty chance of getting it right.

He leaped to his right and saw through Embry's eyes that that was the way Felix was swinging his massive fist. Matt had just enough time to sidestep to avoid a blow to his head when the fist hit his ribs with the force of a mallet flying at one hundred miles per hour.

In full health, Matt would have been left with a shattered rib cage. As it was, his ribs were already weakened. He clearly felt his two damaged ribs splinter and pierce deep into his lungs.

As he dragged himself off the field, wheezing and coughing up blood, Matt knew he wasn't going to make it. He watched in the pack mind as no fewer than seven enraged wolves leaped at Felix and tore him to shreds.

Pity they didn't think of that two minutes ago.

That was his second last thought.

His very last thought was *Nina*.

Blackness claimed him.

Neither the Quileute nor the Tamastlikt pack had experienced the death of a wolf before. Every one of the remaining thirteen wolves registered the snuff of life going out and every one of them froze in horror. A collective gasp of denial raced through the pack mind. Brady, on the hill with Bella, yelped and cowered to the ground. Hotah, with Nina at Sam's cabin, began whining and couldn't stop. Collin, on the field, gave a low bark that sounded like a plea and lay down with his muzzle between his paws.

The older wolves managed to collect themselves after the initial moment of shock.

Collin get the fuck up!

It was Jacob, enraged and deeply shaken, Alpha ordering the puppy that lay grieving on the ground, a sitting duck.

Jacob felt a surge of strength within him that he somehow knew came from Bella, and he was suddenly all over everyone's asses.

Get that fucking leech on the fucking pyre!

He was talking about Felix who now lay on the ground in over a dozen pieces.

Embry get to Carlisle, you can't fight like that.

Seth, pair up with Nick and don't even fucking think about taking one on alone.

Paul, Quil, take that fucker down NOW! Elan, help them!

He was talking about Aro who had been momentarily separated from his bodyguards in the melee.

The Kootenai pack had already taken out Marcus. With Felix destroyed and Edward on the run, that made fifteen leeches against eighteen wolves. Jacob wanted to swing the numbers more in the wolves' favour before leaving the battlefield now, but at the same time he desperately wanted to go after Edward. He was certain that Bella was safe at the Alpha cabin. The wolves had crossed over her scent several times to mask it so Edward couldn't track her. But Jacob was impatient to eliminate all threats to his and Bella's future happiness. And he wanted to seek revenge on the bloodsucker who had seduced an innocent girl into his unnatural world.

Leah – *We've got him here Jake, he's going nowhere. Do what you have to do then come get him.*

Jacob launched in fury at the closest vampire to him and he quickly made the odds fourteen to eighteen. Paul, Quil and Elan made quick work of Aro. The visiting wolves took out two more.

When it was eleven to eighteen, Jacob ordered Quil to get to Carlisle. Then, he spun around and raced after Edward.

Edward

The little grey wolf was faster than Edward had anticipated. It had caught up with him and leapt on his back, forcing him to stop and defend himself. Then the larger brown wolf had arrived and there was no way he could get past them.

Edward cursed inwardly. He had to act fast or else his opportunity to get to Bella would be gone. He had absolutely no doubt in his mind that the reason these two infernal wolves were dancing around him without attacking was because Jacob Black was on his way.

Edward relied entirely too heavily on his ability to read minds. Under normal circumstances, he would have been able to listen in to the two wolves' thoughts and find a way past them. Now, he simply had to rely on all he had learned of human nature while spending a century eavesdropping on people's minds.

Guessing that the shifters would protect one another, he bared his teeth and feigned a lunge at the little grey wolf. As he had hoped, the brown wolf instantly leapt at him. Bracing himself, Edward spun around and lashed out at the brown wolf with all his might. His arm connected with bone in the wolf's chest which cracked and splintered. The wolf gave an agonised yelp before falling heavily to the forest floor.

Edward had darted past before Jared's body even hit the ground.

Jacob

Intently focussed on Edward through Leah and Jared's minds, Jacob saw it all happen. He felt that Jared was only barely alive. He heard Leah's internal scream of anguish and rage and he saw Edward race away.

He knew within moments that Edward was headed in the direction of the Alpha cabin.

Brady!

Brady responded instantly.

Edward's on his way, can you see him?

Brady responded in the negative.

Get Bella the fuck out of there. I'm on my way.

Through the pack mind, Jacob saw that the wolves, with a combination of fury over losing one of their own, and the sheer fact that there were now more wolves to leeches, were quickly finishing off the vampires. It was seven to fourteen on the battlefield. Embry and Quil were at Sam's cabin; Leah was whining and pacing around Jared; and Jacob himself was racing to the cabin.

Seth! Collin! Get Jared to Carlisle and do it right the fuck now! Leah! Snap out of it and back me up! Paul, you too!

His fastest wolf and his most vicious fighter sprang to his aid. Leah caught up with him and began speeding ahead. Jacob was focussed on Brady's mind.

Typical Bella, she was arguing that she needed to shield him.

NO!

He roared it at Brady who suddenly phased to human, presumably to try and reason with her. Jacob no longer had a link to the Alpha cabin and it made him very uneasy.

Leah - I'm on it Jake, another minute and I'm there.

Another minute and it might be too fucking late, Leah. You've just seen howfast he is.

A woman's shrill scream rang through the air. Jacob didn't need the pack mind to hear it. He was close enough to hear it with his own ears. He pushed his limbs harder and felt the burn as he ran faster than he ever had before.

All of a sudden, Brady exploded back into the pack mind and Jacob snarled in fury as he saw Edward Cullen standing in front of the Alpha cabin.

Bella was less than two metres away from him. And all that stood between her and the vampire who was utterly obsessed with claiming her, was a puppy.

A/N: Oh-kay. Please review and let me know what you think, even if you don't like the way this worked out. If you don't review, I might not post up the last part of the battle. If you do review, I might post it early.

OK, I'm just kidding about not posting the next chapter. It'll be up tomorrow or Saturday and just so as you know, I cried writing it. A lot.

***Chapter 37*: Chapter 35 The Wolf, The Imprint and The**

A/N: Here you are. The end of the battle. My ffn account is being silly again, otherwise this would have been up hours ago. Not to worry, better late than never!

Chapter Thirty Five – The Wolf, The Imprint and The Vampire

Even with Bella shielding his thoughts, the russet wolf knew he didn't have a prayer of sneaking up on the bloodsucker that was currently surveying the scene before him. The sound of his paws would be thunderous to supernatural ears.

Jacob knew what Edward would be seeing. One young wolf, two older men, and two young women. Absolutely no obstacle to him grabbing Bella and making a run with her; or worse, biting her on the spot.

Jacob pushed himself faster still. He was under thirty seconds away but he knew that gave Edward more than enough time. Dread and rage fought for dominance within him. He couldn't allow himself to regret not accepting Paul's offer of guarding Bella himself. There would be time for regrets later.

Leah – I'm there Jake!

Jacob saw her launch herself at Edward with a fury that almost rivalled his own. The leech had taken Jared down and she hadn't been able to stop it. Leah was pissed as hell.

Edward side stepped Leah neatly, as both she and Jacob had known he would, but it distracted him long enough for Jacob to get there. Paul was close behind. Jacob called Brady and Hotah to attention.

The two of you get Bella and Anna out of here. I don't care where you take them, just go!

Hotah – I'm on my way Jake.

Jacob saw Edward turn in his direction. He knew Jacob was approaching. His face twisted into what may have been a cruel smile and he called out.

"Alright Jacob." He spread his arms wide. "I suppose in this situation we should say, may the best man win."

Jacob quickly took stock. Bella was, naturally, stubbornly refusing to go with Brady. Jacob growled.

Dammit! Brady, take Anna. Hotah get your fucking ass here and if you have to drag Bella out, do it!

He saw there were only three leeches left on the battlefield and the wolves were still enraged over Matt's death and Jared's serious injury. It would be over down there within a minute or two. All that mattered now was getting Edward away from Bella.

Sam

Embry had arrived first at the cabin. His shoulder was in a bad way and Carlisle had immediately got to work. Nina had been wonderful with him and Sam had felt a pang as he remembered the days of being imprinted with Emily.

He and Emily had spent a lot of time talking over the past couple of days. They still loved one another but they had both been badly shaken by the loss of their imprint. They had agreed to try and re-establish a relationship, moving slowly. Their decision to return to La Push to aid the wolves hadn't even required a discussion. They both simply assumed they would go.

Quil arrived at the cabin shortly after Embry. Carlisle was re-setting his leg when Seth and Collin carried Jared in. Sam had seen from Carlisle's face that this was no mere broken bone. This was serious. Kim had been on the brink of hysteria until Emily stepped in and calmed her down.

Sam felt a rage begin to burn within him. Edward fucking Cullen had been responsible for too much. He had drawn Bella Swan into his unnatural world. He belonged to the coven that had caused the shifting gene to trigger. Sam himself had nurtured and taught the entire pack of Quileute wolves. And now, those same wolves were arriving in his cabin injured and maimed.

Sam burst through the door to get some air, trying to contain his fury. Hotah was pacing outside the cabin in wolf form. Sam saw his ears prick as though listening, and recognised the pup's eager stance. He had just been given a job to do.

"Hotah!" Sam called before the puppy had time to run. "Is it Jake?" Hotah looked at him and nodded quickly. "Does he have Edward yet?" Hotah shook his head abruptly and took off at full pelt.

Sam thought for a moment. He absolutely hated sitting around uselessly. His time as Alpha was over, but every day he regretted more and more that he had given up his wolf. He wanted to help.

Striding back indoors, he asked Seth to join him outside. The younger man did so and Sam asked him to phase and let him know what was happening.

When Sam heard what was going on at the Alpha cabin, he headed straight to Quil's car.

Bella

It had been a terrifying half hour, but through it all Bella held onto the serenity and calm she had found. Charlie, Billy and Anna broke the long silences with gasps and exclamations. Bella simply watched, and shielded. As long as Jacob was safely under her protection, all was right with her soul.

She felt his shock and anguish when Matt died and it rocked her to the core. She tried to pour comfort back to him and felt him take strength from it. She felt his power as he issued Alpha command after Alpha command to get his wolves back on track.

Bella also felt Jacob's jolt of shock and dread when he realised Edward was heading for the cabin. When Brady began whining at her and nuzzling at her leg through the porch fence, she knew he was telling her to go with him.

She steadfastly refused.

Brady phased to human, disregarding his nudity under the circumstances, to plead with her. Moments later Edward darted out suddenly from among the trees, causing Anna to scream. Brady exploded back into his wolf.

Bella watched the events unfold while shaking her head stubbornly at Brady who was again trying to coax her onto his back. Edward surveyed the scene before him and she knew he was assessing how to get to her. Leah threw herself at Edward, futilely it seemed. And then Edward challenged Jacob.

Brady turned to Anna who climbed off the porch. Charlie helped her onto Brady's back and they took off.

"You should have gone Bella," Charlie whispered to her. Again, she stubbornly shook her head. She would stay with Jacob.

Jacob emerged slowly from the trees. His eyes were trained on Edward but she could feel under her shield that he was thinking mainly of her. She willed him to focus on Edward and saw him glance at her briefly as though he had heard her.

You can do this, Jacob, she thought as hard as she could at him. She heard his low bark in response.

Edward

Edward would have much preferred to simply take Bella and run but that irritating little grey wolf had held him up again. He hoped to have a chance at taking it out once he was finished with Jacob.

Edward looked at Bella and was enraged to see her gazing at the russet wolf as though it was the only thing in her world. Not only that, but incredibly, she seemed to be communicating with it somehow. Once more, he wished he could read the wolf's mind.

Edward searched the minds of Billy and Charlie for anything useful. He found only fear and anger. Billy in particular was hoping for his son to find the strength to be victorious here so that he could live out his life with Bella.

Well, Bella would change her mind soon enough. Edward decided he would dispose of the wolves and then bite her here, without any further ado. There would be no more obstacles in his way.

Isabella Swan would be his today.

Jacob wanted to position himself between Edward and Bella. Edward may be focussed on him, but he was fast and Jacob wasn't convinced he could cover the distance if Edward suddenly decided to take a shot at getting Bella.

Paul – *I'm on it Jake, you keep Edward facing you and I'll get between them.*

Paul darted round the side of the cabin. Jacob bared his teeth in a snarl and took a step to the side and slightly forward. Edward watched him carefully. Jacob took another step and snapped his jaws. It was, at the moment, all for effect. He wanted to keep Edward trained on him for long enough that Paul could position himself between the bloodsucker and Bella.

Leah joined in, approaching Edward slowly from the side opposite to where Paul was. She came at Edward from slightly behind, angling him forward and away from the porch. Edward turned his body so that he could see both Jacob and Leah. Paul slipped along the side of the cabin keeping close to the porch. He rounded the corner and in a few paces was positioned in front of Bella.

Jacob let out a breath in relief.

Paul – *Want me to take her Jake?*

Knowing Hotah was still a couple of minutes away, Jacob readily agreed. He knew Paul would drag her bodily if need be, and at this moment Jacob didn't care how mad Bella would be or which wolf she took it out on, so long as she was safe.

He watched in his mind's eye as Paul turned to growl at Bella. She understood him and shook her head. Jacob felt exasperated and empathised with Paul's flare of anger.

His girl was so damn stubborn.

Edward lunged at Jacob suddenly, taking him by surprise. The enormous wolf darted to the side just in time. He shuddered as he realised that he had very nearly been bitten by vampire teeth. Their venom was fatal if it reached the bloodstream.

Jacob knew he needed to get his head completely in the game, but with his imprint mere feet away from the danger, it wasn't going to happen.

Paul leapt up onto the porch and began stalking towards Bella. She scowled at him defiantly.

"Paul I am staying here to shield Jacob!"

Edward's head whipped round as everything fell into place. He had never been able to read Bella's mind. *Of course!* She was a shield. She could project. Even as a human, she could project. Edward took a moment to marvel at the potential she would have as a vampire before a new emotion surged through him.

She had betrayed him! His singer, his love, had deliberately blocked out not only him, but Jane, and Alec, and Chelsea. The Volturi had been destroyed ... because of Bella.

Edward reeled from the realisation. He looked again at the russet wolf which was barking and growling in Bella's direction. It seemed from the set of her jaw that she understood him. They shut him out, and they communicated between themselves in a way he could not interpret.

Rage boiled within Edward and he lunged once more at the Alpha wolf, destruction on his mind. He again took Jacob by surprise.

"Bella you're distracting him!"

The thundering voice came from none other than Billy Black, who had been watching his only son closely for several minutes now. He could clearly see that Jacob was focussing more on his imprint than on the leech who was intent on taking her.

Billy also knew that if Jacob lost this fight, they would all die here at the hands – or teeth – of Edward Cullen.

Bella jumped as she realised the truth of what Billy was saying. Turning desperately to Jacob with tears in her eyes, she promised to shield him for as long as she could.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Jacob gave a bark that sounded remarkably like "Go!" Bella jumped on Paul's back and he fled with her. Edward tried to give chase but both Leah and Jacob were ready for him.

What followed in the next sixty seconds was a mere blur to the eyes of Billy and Charlie. Vampire and wolves whirled and dove, neither side making any obvious gains.

Jacob quickly realised that Edward was skilled in combat. Even without reading his mind, Edward could outmanoeuvre Jacob. He was fast and deadly.

Jacob calculated quickly. He knew Hotah had arrived. This was best to be conducted one on one. Edward versus Jacob.

Leah, Hotah, take my dad and Charlie away from here. Leave us alone until it's over.

Keeping Edward at bay, Jacob defended only, until he saw that the wolves had carried the men to safety. Then, the fight began in earnest.

Changing tactics swiftly, the russet wolf counter attacked and took a small bite out of Edward's leg. It was only a small chunk of flesh but the taste of it drove Jacob into a greater fury. Edward lunged at him yet again; he side stepped, whirled and leapt on Edward's back trying to get his muzzle to the leech's neck.

Edward twisted his body, throwing Jacob off. The wolf landed heavily with the breath knocked out of his lungs. Leaping instantly to his feet and gasping air in, he charged towards the vampire. Feinting to the right, he then jumped to his left. Edward had begun to swing his arm out to knock the wolf away. He was caught off guard when Jacob changed direction and lost his right hand and forearm.

Screaming in frustration, Edward saw Jacob toss his head and throw the hand as far away as he could manage. Knowing that if he got to it, he could allow it to knit back to his body, Edward tried to lunge past Jacob. He expected the wolf to leap straight for his neck and was ready for that. Instead, Jacob jumped low, ripping off part of his foot this time as he passed.

Missing one hand and half of one foot, Edward hobbled a few paces backwards to take stock. Of course, Jacob had thrown the foot in the opposite direction to the hand so the chances of getting both were slim.

Jacob was not going to allow Edward time to think. He charged at him once more, again feigning a low jump to his right before springing high in an attempt to knock Edward over. Unbalanced by the loss of a foot, Edward stumbled and fell backwards under the wolf's weight; but then he rolled, trying to pin the wolf underneath him.

Jaws snapping, snarls ripping from his throat, the wolf took a bite out of Edward's cheek before throwing him off. Edward countered with a vicious swipe of his good arm which knocked Jacob flying across the grass.

Suddenly, everything changed.

Paul must have crossed some invisible line over which Bella was unable to extend her shield. Perhaps the distance was too great, or without line of sight she could no longer protect her wolf. But as though a veil was lifted, Edward could clearly read Jacob Black's mind.

Jacob felt it too. His heart sank a little. He had been gaining small advantages so far by using the element of surprise, but his strategies had been thought out by the man. He could no longer think his moves through. He must give himself over completely to the animal's instincts in the hope that Edward would not be able to read his reflexive responses quickly enough.

Edward saw Jacob understanding all this and couldn't help his twinge of alarm when the wolf that had already cost him a hand and a foot suddenly went primal. Its hackles raised higher and its head lowered. Its snarls became even more menacing as it began to circle him. Edward could clearly see that the man had been buried within the beast.

Focussing as intently as he could, Edward searched the wolf's mind for any clue as to what attack was coming next. As a sort of test, he feigned a lunge in the animal's direction and saw that the wolf's counter lunge was instinctive with only a fraction of a second's warning.

It now came down to whether a fraction of a second's warning was enough for Edward to react.

Wolf and vampire circled one another, each poised to both attack and defend. One would lunge, the other duck. Edward lost another chunk from his already maimed leg. Jacob felt a rib crack. Edward intercepted a potentially lethal leap at his throat just in time to save himself from destruction, but lost an ear in the process. Jacob felt the burning sting as Edward's teeth grazed his paw, not deeply enough to cut through the flesh but the graze burned instead of healing.

Both heard the approaching engine. Both registered the car stopping and the door open and shut. Both recognised the scent of Sam Uley. Neither knew why he was there.

Sam didn't really know why he was there either. Some part of him perhaps couldn't accept that he was no longer Jacob's Alpha. He knew the man who had been his protégée not so long ago was the better Alpha, the stronger wolf. But he also knew that Jacob was emotionally invested in this fight, and that he was headstrong with a terrifying temper. Sam had always tried to teach Jacob to even out his temper and think through consequences, and he maintained some vague notion that that was his responsibility.

Or maybe, the ex leader of the Quileute wolf pack simply wanted to know how this fight played out.

Either way, when Sam looked out the kitchen window at the vicious fight that was going on in the back yard, he could see that it was evenly matched. Although Edward seemed to have sustained the most physical damage, none of it was enough to handicap him completely. Even having lost part of one of his feet, he was still fast. And Jacob had clearly sustained considerable damage to his ribs.

As Sam watched, Edward landed another blow to the wolf's chest. Sam heard the yelp and saw that Jacob struggled to get up. His falter was enough for Edward to leap on him, intent on wrapping his vice like grip around the wolf's body.

Sam moved with a speed that may not have been that of a wolf, but was also not quite human. Having stayed at the cabin, he knew exactly where to find what he needed. By the time he had the object in his hand and was out on the porch, Jacob had somehow managed to shake Edward off but was clearly in considerable pain. He needed help, and Sam could provide it.

Leaping off the porch, Sam raised the kitchen knife in his right hand and plunged it into his left arm. Human blood poured forth from the deep wound and the scent assaulted Edward Cullen's senses, causing his throat to burn and the bloodlust to take over.

In under a second, Edward's teeth were sunk into Sam Uley's neck as he began to drink his fill. He never heard the incandescent snarl of the enormous wolf which expended the last of its energy to leap at its adversary.

Jacob knew Sam was gone. He knew his old Alpha had sacrificed his own life so that the tribe he had protected could survive. With a breaking heart, Jacob lunged at Edward, severing his head from his body. The force of his impact against the marble monster jarred against Sam's human frame and Jacob clearly heard bones snapping and cracking in Sam's body. Jacob had known it would happen. It didn't make it any less sickening.

Phasing painfully to human, his stomach heaving as he tried to absorb the enormity of what had just occurred, Jacob dragged his damaged body into the cabin to find a source of flames. He located matches by the stove and lit a fire outside. He systematically dragged pieces of leech to the fire and watched them burn.

When he was satisfied that Edward Cullen was no more, Jacob turned to the broken body of his old friend and mentor. Dropping to his knees beside him, he allowed his tears to fall. Sobs heaved through his body, causing agony in his ribs. The skin on his hand burned as though it was in the fire that still raged across the yard. But neither pain compared to the pain in his heart.

How long he stayed there, Jacob didn't know. Somewhere in the depth of his soul, he knew Bella was on her way back to him. She would come for him here and she would bring him solace. They would return together to Sam's cabin to break the news to the waiting wolves and imprints, and Jacob would be strong for the pack and for Emily.

But for now, it was his time to grieve.

He knew she was there before he could hear her or smell her. His soul felt her soul. She reached his side and gently touched his shoulder. Without raising his head, Jacob laid his hand on top of hers. She knelt beside him and he heard her intake of breath, presumably realising how bruised and battered his body was.

"Jacob you need to come with me to Carlisle now," she told him gently.

Nodding, the Alpha wolf and future Quileute Chief rose unsteadily to his feet. Although he couldn't lean on her physically without crushing her, somehow he gained some strength from her presence. With her arm around his waist, she walked him to the car that Sam had brought.

Without words, Bella settled Jacob in the car and went around to the driver's door. Before climbing in, her eyes met those of the dark silver wolf that had carried her to safety and brought her back again.

Paul dipped his head at her. Bella smiled faintly back at him.

The battle was over. Injuries had been sustained. Death had claimed two of their own and Jared's life hung in the balance. But it was over.

And they had won.

A/N: And so after all that build up, the battle's over. I really want to know what you all thought. Writing the last three chapters was amazing - hard work, loads of getting it wrong and having to revise and re-write, then posting it up before I could change my mind on anything.

So the next chapter is called The Aftermath, for obvious reasons lol. And then there will be a few chapters tying up loose ends and revisiting some characters who haven't been done any justice whatsoever in this story. And, of course, an epilogue.

***Chapter 38*: Chapter 36 The Aftermath**

A/N: First of all can I say a MASSIVE thank you to everybody who has been reviewing this story:-) The last few chapters had record numbers of reviews and I'm still stunned by how many people are enjoying my writing. I've had a really busy few days in RL so haven't managed to reply to all the reviews from last chapter individually but you are all wonderful.

Thank you as always to feebees for beta reading.

Chapter Thirty Six – The Aftermath

Carlisle was still working on Jared when Bella pulled up outside Sam's cabin with Jake. The threat to Jared's life had passed but he had almost suffered the same fate as Matt. Parts of his ribs had splintered and lodged in several of his organs. With only morphine available, which was burned off too quickly, Carlisle had no other option than to operate. It had been brutal.

The remains of thirty one vampires were burning in the field a few miles away. Thick clouds of acrid smoke billowed into the sky and Jacob realised a cover story would need to be concocted.

He couldn't think about that just now.

A smaller pyre, high on the hill, was burning itself out. All that was left of Edward Cullen was ash and dust.

The wolves had gradually come in. Jake was the last to arrive. Twenty-two enormous men stood, sat or lay strewn around both outside and in. Few had escaped completely unscathed. Most had relatively minor grazes and scratches, or a fracture that could quickly be set to heal. A few had sustained more serious injuries, but only Jared's was life threatening.

Carlisle was awe struck when he realised the sheer scale of the defence the wolves had organised. Listening with vampire hearing to snippets of conversation as he worked, he gathered that Bella Swan had been the key to the pack's success at taking out the most dangerous of the Volturi. He was proud of her.

He knew his son was unlikely to have survived.

When Sam's cabin had begun to overload with the walking wounded, he had begged to be allowed to bring Esme over the treaty line. She had learned a vast deal about nursing and general medicine in her time with Carlisle and she was more than capable of dealing with minor injuries.

Carlisle could guarantee the wolf's blood would not be appealing to her.

In the absence of Jake and Leah, the Quileute pack had turned to Akando for guidance. The Tamastslikt Alpha however was deeply shaken by the loss of one of his own wolves and steadfastly refused to become involved in such a decision. In the end, Elan took matters into his own hands and personally escorted Esme from the treaty line to the cabin.

And so when Jacob and Bella arrived, the cabin and its grounds were crowded with both familiar and unfamiliar faces. Nina, Abey and Emily were supplying food and drink to the wolves. Kim was with Jared and Carlisle. Sue Clearwater had arrived and was helping Esme tend to the wounded shifters. Brady had arrived only a few minutes earlier with Anna. She was having an emotional reunion with Nick, who had sustained only a dislocated shoulder.

All eyes turned to Jacob. The two visiting packs were curious to meet the Alpha of the pack responsible for the day's events. Everyone else just wanted to know what had happened.

Disregarding everybody else, even the Alphas of the two visiting packs, Jacob went straight to Emily. Wordlessly, he took her hand and led her out to the back of the cabin, begging Bella with his eyes to come with them. The wolves who wanted to would be able to hear their conversation but he wanted to give her the news away from watchful eyes.

Sitting on the back porch, Jacob broke the news of Sam's death to Emily. He told the horrified young woman of Sam's courage and of the sacrifice he had made to give Jacob an opportunity to put an end to it. He let her know that the outcome of the fight would likely have been very different if Sam had not done what he had. Sam had saved not only Jacob, but his tribe. There was not a doubt in Jacob's mind that if Edward had been the victor, he would have sought his revenge against the pack and the people of La Push.

By the time Jacob had finished, every pair of supernatural ears in and around the cabin knew of Sam's courage and sacrifice. The wolves knew they had two heroes to remember from that day on. Matt, who had given his life to ensure the happiness of the girl he loved; and Sam, who had given his so that his pack and his tribe would be safe.

Esme's chest heaved with tears she could not shed for the demise of her son. Carlisle felt every ounce of the responsibility for having created Edward in the first place, on his own shoulders.

Emily's tears fell silently. Her heart had broken with her imprint. She had learned to hope again when Sam came to visit her. Now, their love was lost forever.

Jacob stood. He knew he had business to attend to with the two visiting Alphas, and he wanted to check on Jared. His eyes met Bella's, and she took his place beside Emily. Sitting quietly beside her, Bella wrapped her arms around the grieving woman and began to rock her gently. Her eyes never left Jacob's until he stepped inside the cabin and out of sight.

There was much to be discussed. Yuma was the Alpha of the four Kootenai wolves. The other five wolves came from a tribe further east. Their Alpha, Will, was descended from the same family as Yuma and his pack considered itself a branch of the Kootenai pack. None of the visiting wolves had sustained serious injuries, and all were eager to hear the full story behind the day's events.

Jacob thanked both Alphas with a full heart. His sincerity was evident and as he went around the other seven wolves, thanking them all in turn, he showed himself to be a gracious leader. All the visiting wolves had enjoyed the day's battle immensely and their excitement was infectious.

Jacob invited them to stay for as long as they wished and told them to take full advantage of the hospitality being offered in the cabin. He himself had injured wolves to check on; Akando must be spoken with and each member of the Tamastlikt pack thanked. He had injuries needing attended to, and an imprint to be kissed senseless.

In the end, as wolf after wolf begged him for details of how the battle had come about in the first place, Jacob announced a bonfire would be held on the beach that evening. All stories would be shared then.

When he finally got away from the visitors and went to find Akando, Jacob was stopped suddenly by Embry.

"What the fuck is that on your hand?"

Jake had been aware that the burning in his hand was worsening. It had begun as a burning only in the area that Edward had grazed with his teeth but was slowly spreading. With so much else to think of and do, he had paid it little heed, telling himself that he would have his injuries treated later. But now, he flinched in shock as he looked at his hand.

Having grown used to all injuries healing quickly, he couldn't quite believe what he saw. An angry red weal was spreading across the back of his hand. In the middle of the weal, marking the painful area was an ominous looking yellowish blister which looked like an alien type of infection.

"Fucking leech got me with its teeth," he told Embry.

"Jake go show it to Carlisle, I think he's done with Jared."

"Is Jared okay?" Jake felt guilty that he hadn't yet been in to see him.

"As far as I can gather he's gonna be fine. C'mon, I'll come in with you and we can find out." Embry was really ensuring that his old friend did go to the doctor instead of postponing it while he attended to other duties. Now, as he watched Jacob walk painfully into the cabin, he realised that his injuries were more extensive than just his hand. His Alpha didn't seem to be healing.

Carlisle was dressing the site of the emergency operation he had been forced to perform when the two men walked into the room. Kim's face was streaked with tears as she mopped Jared's brow with a cold cloth. The truth was that he had passed out in agony long before Jake and Bella had arrived, but he would be in significant pain when he awoke and Kim was not going to leave his side.

Carlisle brought Jake into the only other bedroom in the cabin, and looked with horrified eyes at the weal on Jacob's hand.

"Vampire venom is entirely incompatible with your kind, Jacob, and in all honesty I have no idea whether there is a way to treat this. My only option is to attempt to suck the venom out." He looked at Jacob apologetically. "I will need to cut an incision into the wound and use my mouth to suck it as clean as I can."

Jake set his teeth. If there was no other option, he would need to tolerate the leech sucking on his skin. He had come this far to ensure his future with Bella; he could endure this. He nodded curtly and heard Embry say that he would bring Bella in.

Carlisle set about preparing for the procedure. He needed boiled water to sterilise the scalpel. Bella came racing in and went straight back out to get it, returning as quickly as she could to be by Jacob's side. Carlisle also needed dressings, which Esme provided. As he worked, Carlisle spoke to Jacob of the fears that had been gathering in his mind.

"Jacob I know you feel the Volturi were evil. And in many respects, yes they were. However their role for our people was necessary. They ensured our laws were not broken. They prevented other, less salubrious of our kind rising to power. With their demise, we are left without leadership and without laws. I am very much afraid that today's events may have created more problems than they solved."

He used his scalpel to cut into the painful weal as he spoke. Jake flinched, scarcely able to believe the raging, burning pain that the wound generated, and Bella reached for his other hand. She was worried about him. She knew from the way he moved that he was in a lot of pain but from the moment they had arrived here he had been putting his duties as Alpha and future Chief before his own wellbeing. Bella was determined not to let him out of this room until Carlisle had sorted all

his injuries.

Carlisle told Jake it was time for him to suck out the venom. Jake clenched his fist and ground his teeth. The feel of the leech's mouth on his skin was making it very difficult not to phase. He began to tremble, the combination of the day's events and the doctor's current treatment of him bringing his wolf to the fore.

"Jake," Bella's soft voice soothed him. "I'm here. Look at me." Meeting her chocolate brown eyes, Jacob allowed himself to melt into them and found his trembling subsided. A small smile formed on her lips as she saw him relax and he reflexively leaned towards her slightly. The movement caused his ribs to ache painfully and he cursed.

His body still wasn't healing.

Jake felt the searing heat begin to lessen in his hand and although it pained him to admit it, the bloodsucker's cold mouth actually felt good against the wound. He felt himself relaxing further and kept his eyes on Bella's while the doctor worked.

After a short while, Carlisle could taste no more venom in the wound. He held Jacob's hand in his for a moment until he saw the wolf's accelerated healing finally begin to kick in. Relieved, he told Jacob that his wound ought to heal completely now.

Turning his attention to Jacob's ribs, he fingered the nasty purplish bruise that covered the right side of his torso. He was hoping none of Jacob's ribs were broken. If they were, it was likely that Carlisle would need to perform surgery similar to that he had done on Jared to reset them.

In the end, as he saw the edges of the bruise begin to fade while he examined Jacob, Carlisle declared in relief that the ribs were badly fractured and cracked, but with no breaks. He strapped them up and watched in fascination as the Alpha wolf's less severe lacerations finally began to heal before his eyes. The scientist in him wondered whether the venomous infection had slowed down the healing process and he wished he could have the opportunity to investigate the wolves' genetic make-up further. There seemed little doubt that the small amount of venom Jacob had been exposed to had been spreading and impeding his healing abilities. Carlisle was fascinated.

Shutting the door behind him when he had finished, Carlisle smiled to himself as he heard Bella sigh in relief. Her love was safe and would recover fully, probably within hours. At least, Carlisle thought with a heavy heart, the girl that his whole family had grown to love would get to live her life and grow old, the way it should be. The Cullens, one and all, would need to let her go. Carlisle vowed to himself that he would personally ensure they did.

Inside the room, Jake had pulled Bella close to him and was allowing some of the emotions that had been swirling within him to surface. Relief that it was over and they had made it through. Pride that his pack had ensured the safety of his tribe. Grief over the loss of life of two fine men. Concern for Emily.

Jacob inhaled deeply, allowing Bella's scent to wash over him and soothe his soul. He knew it would take time to properly deal with the aftermath of the day's events. He also knew he would need to give consideration to what Carlisle had said about the implications of the Volturi's defeat. For now, it was enough to have this moment of quiet with his girl.

Jacob put his almost-healed hand under Bella's chin and tilted it so that her lips met his. He felt her arms wind around his neck and she moved even closer against him. He felt warm moisture against his lips and tasted the salt of her tears. Pulling back to look at her, he saw tears cascading down Bella's cheeks and he cradled her face in his hands.

"It's okay baby," he soothed. "It's over. We're safe."

"I know," Bella nodded. "I just need a minute."

"Me too," he confessed with a wry smile. He leaned his forehead against hers, hating that he had to break this moment. "But I need to go see Jared and Akando, see what needs to be done."

Sniffing and wiping her eyes on her sleeves, Bella swallowed hard and smiled at him. "Let's go then."

Hand in hand, the Alpha couple went to provide comfort and praise, and give thanks and condolences.

The mood among the wolves was generally buoyant. Relief and pride mingled with an overall celebration that together, they had wiped out the royal family of their ancient enemies. Someone, nobody knew who, had supplied some liquor. Billy and Charlie turned a blind eye to the age of the boys and joined in the drinking. Jacob suspected they were responsible for supplying it in the first place.

A few people were not joining in the celebration.

Nina was devastated. Embry had told her everything, and as the Tamastsiht wolves came in from battle they had added their own perspectives to the tale. That Matt was a hero was undisputed. That he had given his life for Nina was equally undisputed. Nina spilled tears of sorrow at the loss of her childhood friend, and tears of guilt that he had died to secure her future happiness.

Matt's body had been carried back by Elan and Nick. It was laid in the forest at the back of Sam's cabin. Nina insisted he not be left alone and she and Embry sat with him first. As they sat there, Nina told Embry stories from their childhood and

Embry found himself laughing at some of Matt's more outrageous antics as he sought to bring a smile to Nina's face in the days following the death of her father.

After a time, Elan and Abey came to sit with Matt and so it went on throughout the rest of the day. He was left alone at no time.

Equally, a constant vigil was kept over Sam. Paul and Seth carried his mangled body back from the cabin and he was laid in the bedroom he had shared with Emily. Emily carefully cleaned the dried blood from Sam's arm and neck as she wept over his broken form. She was joined by a steady stream of the La Push wolves throughout the day.

The wolves dedicated considerable time to discussing what to do with both men. Sam's sacrifice could never be made known to the Quileute tribe at large, but he could at least be given a proper memorial. It could be made known that he had died in a moment of great courage.

Matt, however, had not died in human form. He had passed in his wolf form and could not therefore be returned to his family in Tamastslíkt. This caused considerable problems for Akando, and his pack looked to him for guidance.

Akando was, however, nowhere to be found.

At that precise moment, Akando was back on the battle field, sitting on the ground where Matt had given up his life. All the wolves had felt Matt's pain when Felix had hit him and they all knew it had been fatal because his ribs were already busted. Akando was riddled with guilt. It was he who had agreed to allow Matt to fight. He could have Alpha ordered him to stay away, or to guard Sam's cabin with Hotah.

Instead, he had put his fears over the safety of a gene before the wellbeing of one of his own wolves. Akando bent his head in shame, and cried tears of sadness and regret.

Leah found him there. She understood his pain. She knew there was nothing she could say. She simply sat beside him until he was ready to head back to the cabin.

Jared finally regained consciousness and his pain was unbearable. Carlisle used the last of the Morphine he had available to make him comfortable, hoping that by the time it wore off the worst of the injuries would have begun to heal. Failing that, he advised that Jared be given copious amounts of the liquor until his pain was manageable.

Throughout the day, Jacob and Bella flitted from wolf to imprint to father to vampire. They provided assistance where it was required, comfort where it was necessary, and practical help with hospitality as needed. They scarcely had a moment alone.

The visiting packs were eager to return home and to their imprints, but were loath to pass up the opportunity to hear the stories around the bonfire. They announced their intention to stay until the following morning, and plans were made for the evening on the beach.

Charlie and Sue headed into Forks for groceries. Billy asked Jacob to bring him home under the guise of fetching more fish from the freezer. Once they arrived in the red cabin however, the older man reached up and pulled his gigantic son into a hug. Jake dropped to his knees beside his father's wheelchair and returned the embrace with feeling.

His voice laced with emotion, Billy told Jacob how proud he was of him. He spoke of their ancestors and how they had charged the young man with protecting their tribe from this great evil. He told him how, though the majority of the tribe would never know of the great service Jacob and his pack had done for them today, they had nonetheless secured their places in tribal histories.

What made the tears finally well up in Jake's eyes however was when Billy placed his hands on his shoulders, looked into his eyes and murmured the words, "Your mother would be so proud of you son."

Jake pulled his father into another tight hug, once more giving himself a moment to allow emotions to surface before he needed to return to business.

A/N: Just a couple more chapters to come. Next one should be up in a couple of days.

***Chapter 39*: Chapter 37 Looking To The Future**

A/N: I promise that's most of the angst over! Well there's still Sam's memorial to come and *mumbles about maybe one more tissue being needed* ... but on the whole, it gets lighter and fluffier now. I promise.

Chapter Thirty Seven – Looking To The Future

As the afternoon wore on, the mood amongst the majority of the people gathered at Sam's cabin continued to be mostly buoyant. The four packs of wolves had fought and destroyed their ancient enemies. Rippling just below the surface, for the Quileute and Tamastlikt packs, was grief. But for today, they would celebrate their victory.

The girls kept up a steady flow of massive quantities of food and drink. The wolves had fought a hard battle and their appetites were even bigger than usual. Then there was the matter of showers and clothes. All the wolves were muddy and blood stained. The nine visitors had brought only the shorts they routinely tied around their ankles, most of which had been ripped or made filthy during the battle. A stream of enormous boys used the shower at Sam's cabin and, when it became clear that supply could not keep up with demand, Billy's, in an attempt to clean up before the evening's bonfire. The Quileute wolves donated spare clothes as best they could.

Jacob and Bella still hadn't managed more than the occasional moment alone and Jake in particular was beginning to feel agitated. He had planned for weeks for this day. He had led his wolves and he had fought hard. Two good men had been lost under his leadership. He had destroyed his arch rival. Now, he wanted his imprint.

His imprint, however, was flustered and exhausted. Bella hadn't slept the night before. She had been sustained by adrenaline during the battle and the immediate aftermath. Now, she wanted only to take a hot shower and crawl into bed, preferably with Jacob. Instead, she was cooking and serving food to a large group of apparently bottomless pits. Whenever there was a spare moment, Bella went to Emily to sit with her and Sam and make sure the grieving woman wanted for nothing. Sue had gone with Billy to see the Shaman and to break the news to Sam's mother.

All the girls were beginning to feel the strain and Bella had been through more than most already that day. Finally, when she literally began to sway on her feet, Charlie insisted she get some rest. He had left his cruiser outside the cabin the night before and suggested bringing her to Billy's where she could sleep in Jake's bed.

The food had more or less run out and the wolves had been told they would need to wait until the bonfire for further sustenance. The other imprints assured Bella they could manage without her help and she readily agreed to go.

Jake was with Akando and the other two Alphas round the back of the cabin when Bella found him. He watched her walk across the grass towards him and saw how drained she looked. She walked into his waiting arms and told him that she was going to head home for a couple of hours' rest. When Jake realised that by "home" she meant the red cabin, he couldn't hold back the smile that spread across his whole face.

"I'll meet you there," he told her, kissing her gently.

Yuma, the Kootenai Alpha, had watched the exchange. None of his wolves were imprinted and until very recently, they had believed the whole imprinting phenomenon was a myth. Then, two of the wolves in his cousin Will's pack had imprinted within days of one another. And, when Akando had initially contacted him asking for aid against the Volturi, he had confirmed that imprinting was not just a tribal myth. Now, it seemed that it was far more common than anyone from his tribe had ever realised. And watching the tender exchange between Jacob and his imprint, Yuma realised that an Alpha's job was probably made easier when his soul mate was by his side. He wondered when his own pack would start to imprint. They were a relatively young pack. Yuma had been the first to phase and that had been only a year ago. He was proud to have led his pack today.

The four Alphas were quickly realising that the vampire threat was on a very large scale. All four packs had developed as a direct result of local leech activity and Will had heard of two more packs. While the Quileute pack seemed to be the largest, it seemed that pockets of shifters were emerging across the country.

Jacob let the other three men know of the warning Carlisle had issued him earlier. If he was right that the world of vampires was now ungoverned, there was no question that a time of great threat to humans lay ahead. An immediate agreement was reached whereby each pack would come to the aid of any threatened tribe and Jacob again felt the surge of pride and honour that he had felt on the battlefield.

It was one emotional onslaught too many. Jacob needed Bella.

Carlisle had advised him not to phase until the pain in his ribs had subsided and so he ran home on foot, keeping within the trees so as not to be seen running at such high speed. Bursting in the cabin door, he quickly determined there were no other wolves in the cabin for showering or any other reason and headed to his bedroom.

Before he reached the door, he heard Bella's slow, steady breathing and realised she was asleep. Creeping in so as not to waken her, Jake took in her sleeping form. She was so achingly beautiful. Her face was relaxed and when he reached out his hand to gently brush some loose strands of hair back from her face, her lips curved into a small unconscious smile at his touch. Her lips formed one word on a breath and Jacob's supernatural hearing allowed him to make out his name. He realised that Bella's left hand was holding the wolf on her bracelet as though she had been fingering it when she fell

asleep. The realisation brought a smile to his lips and warmth to his heart.

Jacob was torn. He badly needed a physical and emotional release that only Bella could give him. *Too much*, his mind was screaming at him. The events of the day were weighing him down and only his imprint could calm him now.

Then again, Bella's beautiful porcelain skin was paler even than usual and the dark circles under her eyes told him how much she needed this rest. That evening would be long, hosting the bonfire on the beach and telling the visiting packs the stories that led up to today.

Sighing, Jacob kissed Bella's hair gently and stood up to leave. His own needs would have to wait. Reluctantly, he headed for the door.

"Where are you going?"

Smiling, Jacob turned back around. Bella's eyes were open and she was rubbing them sleepily.

"You were completely out. I didn't want to wake you."

Bella smiled. "When has that ever stopped you?"

Jake returned her smile. It was a fair point. "You looked exhausted."

"So do you. How are the ribs?"

"Bella?" Jake crossed the room to the bed. "I don't wanna talk right now."

His eyes blazed with lust, causing Bella's breath to hitch as he closed the distance between their faces and drew her into the deep oblivion of his kiss.

Reminiscent of the day he had taken over as Alpha, Jacob took his time with her. He worshiped every inch of her body, drowning himself in her scent and her juices until they began to soothe him. Her moans reached into his soul and assured him of her need for him. Her cries ignited his own passion as he took her again and then again.

An hour and a half later, Jacob's wolf was partially sated and he knew he couldn't stay any longer, as badly as he wanted to. He longed to shut out the rest of the world and just be with Bella, but his duties as Alpha and host were beckoning. Added to that, his girl was now thoroughly exhausted.

Sighing deeply, he climbed out of bed and pulled his shorts back on. Leaning over to kiss Bella, he told her to get some more sleep. He would come back to waken her to get ready for the bonfire.

Nodding sleepily, Bella was asleep once more by the time the front door of the cabin clicked shut.

Bella's POV

Three hours later, I groaned and rolled over to escape the light but hot kisses that were peppering my face, trying to drag me out of a very deep slumber. Wakening a little more, I realised what I had just done and rolled back again to accept more of Jake's attention. Smiling sleepily up at him, I put my arms around his neck and pulled him closer to me.

His hair was wet from the shower and his breath was minty fresh. Horrified, I pulled back, putting my hand over my mouth. "I need to brush my teeth!"

Jake grinned at me. "Not for me you don't. But I thought you'd want to have a little time to shower before we need to be at the beach."

I traced my fingertips along the dark circles under his eyes. "Did you get any rest at all?" I asked him, concerned.

"I'll rest tomorrow when Yuma and Will are away with their packs. They're leaving after breakfast and then I can get some downtime."

"Okay. What needs done for this evening?" I stood up and stretched.

Jacob pulled me into his body and buried his face in my neck. "Me," he said cheekily and inhaled my scent deeply. I felt his lips curve into his trademark grin when he kissed my neck and I laughed.

"Anything else?" Jake shook his head against my neck, continuing to kiss and nibble at the skin there. "Really?"

"It's all done Bells. You just need to get ready and come to the beach. That's it." He pushed my shirt aside and kissed down my shoulder.

"Or....." I rubbed against him suggestively.

Jake grinned once more, against my shoulder this time. "Or we give our dads an earful."

"They're here?" I squeaked. Damn if Jake wasn't turning me on again and I knew he could smell it.

He pulled away from me. "They're in the living room waiting for us."

"Why didn't you tell me?" I was flustered. I had been very close to getting carried away.

"Because teasing you is much more fun," Jake moved behind me, kissing the sweet spot on the back of my neck that he knew made me squirm.

"Jake?"

"Yeah."

"Can we move into the Alpha cabin today?"

Jake burst out laughing. "No. But we can move in tomorrow." He moved in front of me again, his eyes suddenly serious. "Bells we need to talk about that. Not tonight though."

"Why? I mean, what's to talk about and why not tonight?"

"Because I think you'll get mad at me. And I don't want to do that today."

I frowned. "But... you do still want to move in together, right?" It was the only thing I could think of that he might be worried about saying to me.

"Of course I do! Don't be silly." Jacob pulled me close again. "Look, just forget I said that okay? We'll worry about it tomorrow."

"Oh sure, I'll just forget it." I rolled my eyes and he smiled ruefully at me.

"It's nothing **bad** Bells. It's just... aw hell. Look... today at the cabin? Sam **died** there, okay? And Edward was destroyed there too. I just think... I mean, do you really wanna live there now?" He blurted it out in a rush.

I frowned and backed up so that I was sitting on the bed. "I haven't thought about it Jake. I mean, I suppose when you put it like that... I feel bad about Sam. But should that stop us moving there? I understand if you want to wait for a while, let those memories fade a little rather than moving straight in. But would it really stop you wanting to move there?"

Jacob knelt on the floor in front of me. "Bella I feel awful about Sam too. But it was actually more Edward that I was thinking about. I mean, do you want to live with me in the place that he died?" His eyes were searching mine.

"Jacob," I said very seriously. "You already told me. He died a hundred years ago." I waited for that to sink in.

"Soooo ... it doesn't bother you?"

"He was at that cabin for **me** Jacob. He was going to turn me. He was drinking human blood. And **he** brought all this on us. He brought the Volturi here to destroy you and the rest of the packs. So you tell me. Why should his... demise bother me?"

Jake was still searching my eyes. I gazed back at him calmly. Slowly, a smile spread across his face. "Okay, fine. We move in tomorrow."

"Really?" My voice was high and excited.

"Really," he grinned back at me. "But tonight, we have a bonfire to go to."

The overall mood at the bonfire was still celebratory. I noticed that Nina and Embry were absent, and of course Emily, Jared and Kim weren't there either. I asked Jake whether we should go to them tonight. It felt somehow wrong to be celebrating when there was death and injury among us.

"The guys have a kind of rotation in place," Jake told me. "We'll all take turns sitting with Sam and Matt tonight. And Sue's still with Sam's mom."

I nodded. It seemed that while I had slept, the entire bonfire had been organised by the wolves. Jake had been right. I just needed to be here.

The evening passed amidst a lot of tales. All the old stories, of Taha Aki and the wives, and of how the treaty with the Cullens came into existence, were told first. Billy did most of the story telling and I simply leaned into Jake, enjoying his warmth and his closeness as I listened.

As we sat there, Jacob's hands never left my body. He stroked his fingertips along my jaw and neck, leaving a trail of goose bumps behind as his heat mingled with the cool evening air. He ran his hands through strands of my hair. He held my hand, rubbing circles on my palm.

Looking around, I saw that all the imprints were being treated to the same attentions. The wolves had survived. The risk of death and separation was over. They all needed to be close to their imprints tonight.

Jacob finally left with Quil to take their turn sitting with their fallen brothers. I thought I should go too, but Jake told me I would be needed more in the coming days and should stay and enjoy the bonfire this evening.

Jake had no sooner left than Charlie took his place at my side. I could tell immediately that he had something on his mind and he didn't beat about the bush.

"What you did this morning was incredibly stupid, Bella," he told me gruffly.

I knew exactly what he was talking about; and I suspected Jacob would want to have this conversation, too.

"I couldn't go, dad."

Literally.

The reality was that my shield had almost taken a life of its own. When I had thought that it **wanted** to protect Jacob, I had been right. And it didn't want to leave him unprotected in the face of danger. It was only when I realised that my very presence was what was endangering Jacob the most that I had been able to leave.

I longed to discuss it with Billy, but knew it would need to wait until he had finished his story telling. I wanted to know more about Angel, the woman in the legends who had shielded the tribe repeatedly.

I had been there when Carlisle had told Jacob about the consequences of the vampire world losing their leaders. And I had overheard some of the conversation between Jake and the other Alphas about the amount of leech activity around the country.

I also remembered Billy telling me, weeks ago, that he thought Jacob's life had been pre-destined. I was beginning to wonder if mine was, too.

I tried to explain some of this to Charlie, but at the mere thought that today may not be the end of it, he began to bluster and shout. I wondered whether returning him to a need to know basis, at least for the time being, might be a better approach.

Finally, I assured him that there was no immediate danger to me or anybody else, that we really had been victorious today and that I understood his concerns over my actions this morning. When he went to get another beer from the cooler, Billy caught my eye from across the bonfire and grinned at me.

Sometimes I thought he had supernatural senses of his own. Or then again, maybe he had already had this conversation with Charlie and knew why I was getting a hard time.

Finally, Jake returned and an opportunity came up to speak with Billy. Pulling Jake behind me, I asked his dad for some of his time, and explained the resistance I had felt from my shield earlier that day when Jacob had been fighting Edward.

Billy listened carefully and I noticed Jacob's mouth was hanging open by the time I had finished.

"I think," Billy said eventually, "that your friend in the Oregon library may have more information than I do. But do you remember Bella that I told you my belief that Jacob has a role to fulfil in this life? I also told you that a white imprint is unheard of in our tribe. It seems to me that you both have important destinies ahead of you. Let me speak with Old Quil, and you should speak with the librarian too."

Jacob was deep in thought for a while after that conversation. "I don't think I like you being tied up in this," he said finally.

I rolled my eyes. "So it's fine for me to sit about waiting for you to fight but not for me to help?"

"Not like that," he protested.

"Exactly like that." I snuggled into him once more as the evening air turned cooler. "And I think it's perfect, you and me together, in everything."

"Now **that** I like the sound of," he admitted.

By the end of the evening, even the wolves were exhausted. When the visiting packs finally took to the forest to sleep, everyone else began to disperse too.

Jacob was worrying about patrols. None had been carried out all day, the threat considered to have been taken care of. Nobody else thought patrols were necessary tonight, but Jake was still anxious.

"The bottom line is that we destroyed Carlisle and Esme's son, Bells," he told me gravely. "And I know they've been helping us and they said that they knew he'd changed, but there are still leeches that we've pissed off a few miles away. I'm going to have to patrol tonight."

I frowned. As well as the fact that Jake looked half dead on his feet, I selfishly wanted him in bed with me tonight.

"Well, can't someone else do it Jake? Maybe one of the younger wolves who didn't fight as hard today? And are you even okay to phase?"

"I'm fine, everything's healed. Bella I promise that after tonight, everything will get better for us okay? We'll move into the Alpha cabin, we'll have tons of rest and time with each other, and we can start building our future together. But right now honey, I still need to look after my tribe." His eyes were pleading with me and I knew that he needed me to understand.

"Okay," I agreed finally. "But only if you promise not to patrol alone all night. Get Seth or someone to take over after a while."

"Fine," Jake kissed my forehead and pulled me into a hug. "C'mon, I'll take you home first."

"No it's okay; Charlie's bringing Billy to the cruiser just now. I'll go with them." I pulled him down for a kiss before jogging after our dads.

I was once again in a deep sleep when Jacob came quietly into the room and crawled into bed beside me. I woke up enough to turn into his side and put my arm around his waist.

"Night Bells," I heard him whisper. Within twenty seconds, he was fast asleep.

A/N: Me being me and entirely unable to condense, there are still three chapters to come. Meantime, I've started working on my next fic. If anyone would be interested in pre-/beta reading it for me, please drop me a PM and I'll give you some more details. I'm hoping to have all of WotW posted by the weekend, and launch straight in to the next one.

Chapter 40: Chapter 38 One Day Later

A/N: All the usual thanks to feebes for beta reading, and to everyone who reads and reviews:-)

Chapter Thirty Eight – One Day Later

I woke up the next morning sweating, with a leaden weight crushing my left arm. Jacob and I had untangled during the night, and he was lying on top of my arm which felt like it had little in the way of circulation left. Trying to retrieve it from under the mass of weight that was my werewolf boyfriend, I caused him to grunt and roll away from me but not quite far enough.

"Jake!" I hissed at him, futilely attempting to shove him off me. "My arm's going to turn blue if you don't get off it!"

Jake murmured sleepily and lifted his body slightly so that I could bring my arm out from under him.

"Ouch!" I started rubbing it in an attempt to reinstate some blood flow and Jake sat up a little.

"Is it bad?"

"It's dead!" I told him, a little crossly.

"Sorry Bells," he said contritely. I looked at him and couldn't help but smile. His hair was tousled from sleep and falling over his eyes. He was looking up at me drowsily from under it. His lips were looking particularly pouty as he tried to waken up a little more.

"Its fine," I found myself telling him. It was impossible to be irritated with Jake. And really, it wasn't his fault that he had laid on my arm in his sleep, or that the bed was way too small for a teenage werewolf and his imprint.

Oh!

"Hey Jake, are we really moving into the Alpha cabin today?"

"You bet," he was suddenly wide awake. "What time's it? We're supposed to be hosting breakfast for Yuma and Will's packs before they go home." Yawning widely, he searched for his watch, groaning when he found it. "We need to get going Bells."

"Right now?" I felt like a spoiled little girl again, pouting because I wasn't getting what I wanted, but it felt as though Jacob needed to be everywhere but with me at the moment.

"Is five minutes long enough for you?" he grinned; moving on top of me and letting me feel his morning wood.

"Probably," I told him seriously.

"Bella I never thought I'd say this, but you are seriously addicted to sex," he told me as he lifted my tank top and moved his mouth to my breasts.

"I'm addicted to you," I corrected him. "And watch my arm!" He had just bumped his own arm against it, hard.

"You have another one," he reminded me cheekily before taking my nipple in his mouth.

I had to stifle my moan. "I need both if you expect me to cook breakfast for everyone," I said breathlessly. "And this isn't going to get us out of bed," I gasped when he bit down on me, really quite hard.

"Do you want me to stop?"

"Want? No. But I thought we needed to go now."

"We can **come** first. Then we can go."

I burst out laughing. "You're in a good mood this morning!"

"I get the rest of my life with the girl of my dreams, remember?"

A sudden knock on the bedroom door made us both jump.

"If you two are awake we need to head over to Sam's. Feeding the packs, remember?" It was Charlie's voice.

"Shit!" I abruptly tried to sit up. Jake moved off me to allow me to move and I missed his heat instantly.

He looked a little annoyed. "I am so moving you out of here today," he grumbled.

Breakfast was another marathon for myself, Anna, Abey and Nina. Kim was still with Jared, Leah was nowhere to be found, Emily was in her bedroom and not expected to help, and Sue was still with Sam's mother.

I was immensely grateful to all the wolves for everything they had done. But despite that, I couldn't help thinking as I threw yet another empty packet of bacon in the trash, that I would give a lot never to have to cook such quantities of food again. Even with help from Anna, Abey and Nina, it was tiring.

It seemed that I was not to have my wish granted. The four Alphas were deep in conversation at the kitchen table, so the other girls and I could hear everything they discussed.

They were all in agreement that the threat to humanity was greater than they had individually realised. They also expected the situation to worsen now that the Volturi were gone.

Jacob was keen to establish links with every known pack in the country. Akando was certain Len would be able to research the tribal histories and work out which tribes had the shifting gene. He would also be able to access other libraries nationwide to do the same.

Yuma was anxious to share information with Jacob and Akando. As the leader of a young pack, which like the Quileute's was the first pack for two generations, he wanted to know which myths were real and which not. Jacob wryly told him to assume they were **all** true, but agreed to meet with Yuma and Akando in the near future specifically for that purpose.

Will expressed his concern over what would happen now in the vampire world.

"How will we know what's happening there? Are we supposed to just sit around and wait until they start attacking humans more openly?" He was obviously repelled by such a situation.

Jake met my eyes across the room and I plainly saw the question in them. I nodded. I would try and keep channels of communication open with Carlisle, and possibly Alice, to keep track of what was going on with their kind. Jake's lips curved in a small smile and I knew he was thanking me.

"Bella can help us with that," he told the other three men.

Yuma twisted in his chair to stare at me and I found myself flushing at the open incredulity on his face.

"Problem, Yuma?" Nobody missed the ice in Jacob's voice.

Yuma held up his hands. "I just can't get my head round it," he stated. "She dated a leech, now she's an Alpha wolf's imprint but still keeps in touch with the bloodsuckers. And you tolerate that?"

Jacob was out his chair with his fists flying before anyone could stop him.

"Jacob!" I yelled at him, "Stop!"

Akando had him and Yuma had backed up, looking a little alarmed. Ignoring Jacob, I walked over to Yuma.

"Rule number one about imprinting, since you're so eager to find out about wolf stuff. Don't **ever** insult another wolf's imprint. Rule number two about imprinting. The imprintee is completely, totally loyal to her wolf. I think that's especially true for the Alphas. And just so as you know if you ever come across it again, vampires can entice humans, draw us in. If we have prolonged exposure to it, it becomes an addiction. It's not real. For the record, I don't want to stay in touch with the Cullens anymore. But I'm prepared to do it to help you do your job."

Shaking slightly, I walked back to the cooker and began banging pans around. The silence behind me was deafening. I jumped when Jacob's arms snaked around my waist and he breathed in my ear, "You did great Bella." I knew he would hear my heart hammering after that confrontation. Hell, I knew they would all hear it, but I was glad I had defended myself rather than let Jacob do it for me.

My eyes met Anna's and she winked at me. I smiled back at her. The intensity of our shared experience at the cabin had forged a sort of bond between us and I found myself feeling quite sad that she would be leaving imminently.

"I'm fine," I assured Jake, handing him another platter of food to take to the table. "I'm just going to bring this into Jared and Kim." I picked up two plates of food; one piled high and the other containing a more modest amount and headed for the room they were using.

When I reached the room, I smiled to see Jared sitting up in bed. His ribs were strapped up and he looked wan, but he was definitely healing. Kim was sitting beside him, holding his hand. They were deep in conversation and looked up when I walked in.

"Food for the wolf," I told Jared and he grinned.

"About time, Bella!"

"Someone's feeling better then?" I asked Kim and she pulled a face.

"I'm afraid so Bella. His wit is flowing."

I grinned, knowing she wouldn't have it any other way.

"What have I missed?" Jared asked as he began inhaling his plate of food.

"The two other packs are getting ready to leave. Jake, Akando and the other Alphas are discussing keeping in touch, having the packs all together for training and sharing information. Yuma insulted me in front of Jake."

Jared guffawed as Kim looked shocked. "Was that the sound of two trucks colliding?"

"Yep, that would have been Jake's fist connecting with Yuma's face."

We chatted for a few more minutes. Jared was clearly mending well. Jacob had been concerned that we may need to call Carlisle out to look at Jared again but it didn't look like that would be necessary. All the other wolves had recovered well and only Embry's shattered shoulder still had some healing left to do.

I learned that when I had come in, I had interrupted Kim and Jared discussing a date for their wedding. Smiling, I left them to it and headed in to see Emily.

She was sitting alone in the bedroom she had shared with Sam. His body had been removed by the elders the previous day. She looked exhausted and frail.

"Emily," I whispered. "You need to eat."

She nodded. "I need some air too," she murmured. "And we need to organise his.... I mean, he needs a proper memorial."

"What do you need me to do?" I asked her. My heart was breaking for what Emily had been through over the last few weeks.

She shook her head. "I need to do it myself Bella," she told me. "I can't just keep sitting here. I need to move, I need to work." She stood up. "I think I'll go and visit Sam's mom's first. Has she even been told?"

"Billy went to see her yesterday," I assured Emily. "He told her there had been a terrible accident and Sam's body was being recovered. Sue's been with her since then. Billy was just buying time and trying to explain... well, how he looks." I had tried to avoid looking at Sam's broken form every time I had been in the room the day before. The image of Jake crying over Sam's mangled body was etched into my brain and I had wondered once or twice if Jake had been right about whether we could now live in the Alpha cabin.

"I'll go and see her now," Emily said. Her voice broke as she spoke but she began walking to the bedroom door. I stopped her.

"Emily, please eat first." I didn't think she had eaten since Jacob had broken the news to her 24 hours previously.

"I'm not hungry Bella."

"No but you need to keep your strength up. At least take something with you!" I begged her. "Let me make you some sandwiches to bring with you."

Emily sighed and nodded. I suspected she just didn't have the energy to argue. I raced down to the kitchen, promising Emily that I wouldn't be long.

The four Alphas were still deep in discussion around the table. I hastily threw some sandwiches together and grabbed a carton of juice. I gave Emily the food and was relieved to learn that Seth had insisted on accompanying her to Allison Uley's home.

It wasn't long before Yuma and Will began gathering their packs to leave. We all said goodbye to the nine wolves and thanked them again for their help. Yuma apologised to me, saying that he didn't fully understand either the concept of imprinting, or the pull of a vampire, and that he had meant no harm. I accepted the apology, part of me understanding how he felt, but mainly wanting to keep relationships between the Alpha wolves as smooth as they could be.

The packs finally left. Anna, Abey and I began to clear up the dishes and debris while Jacob and Akando continued to discuss issues that needed resolved.

In all the nerves and tension leading up to the battle, I had overlooked one glaringly obvious fact. Embry and Nina, and Leah and Akando, could not be separated. Akando obviously needed to return to Oregon; he was Alpha after all. Apparently, this meant that Leah needed to go with him.

"I take it Leah wants to go with you," Jacob guessed.

"Of course," Akando confirmed. "She wants to give up her wolf now, and come with me to Oregon. We have not, however, discussed this with her family."

Jacob thought for a while. "If Leah gives up her wolf, we'll no longer be able to share a mind link," he pointed out.

Akando half laughed. "That might be a good thing. There's only so much of Embry I can have in my head."

Jacob snorted, "Yeah, imprinted on your sister and in your head. That's nasty. Okay, let's say Leah leaves my pack and goes to Oregon with you. What about Embry and Nina?"

Akando sighed. "My sister wants to stay with Embry. She is very young, Jacob."

Jacob grinned. "She's older than him. Seems the Quileute wolves like older women." He winked at me and I rolled my eyes. Nina and I were the same age. "Seriously Akando, Embry will look after her. You know that, you're imprinted now. She'll be one of our family."

Akando grimaced. It seemed he didn't like the idea of his younger sister staying here with her imprint; but as an imprinted wolf, he was in no position to object to it. "Who will you appoint as your new Beta, when Leah leaves?" he asked Jacob suddenly.

"I need to think about that," Jacob confessed. "Jared was a good Beta to Sam but after this injury and getting engaged to Kim, I don't think he'll want it. That makes Embry the obvious choice. But I need to consider all the pack members equally."

Jake and Akando continued to discuss pack matters while Anna, Abey and I worked. We threw some sandwiches together for everyone's lunch. Shortly after they had been demolished, Jacob found me in the crowd and tugged on my hand for me to follow him.

"Where are we going?" I asked him.

"Home," he replied simply. He had a glint in his eye that made my stomach flip.

True to his word, we were moving into the Alpha cabin. It didn't take long for us to gather all our meagre belongings and toss them into the back of the Rabbit.

Billy and Charlie were in the red cabin when we were ready to leave.

"Hey dad. Bella and I are moving into the Alpha cabin now."

"Leaving your old man alone, son?"

Jacob rolled his eyes. "Yeah, like you won't find a council matter that you need to discuss with me twice every day. And you know Bella won't sleep unless she's fed you. 'Sides, Rach gets here tomorrow."

"Well as long as I'm getting fed, Jacob."

That was how Jake broke the news of us moving to the cabin.

My conversation with Charlie was a little different.

"So um, dad... you know the cabin we were at, the Alpha one?"

"I'm not likely to forget that place easily Bella."

"Yeah... So.... Jake and I are moving there. Like now."

Charlie cleared his throat. "Just remember what I told you, son," he told Jake severely.

"I will sir," Jake replied respectfully.

My eyes bugged out of my head as I realised that I had no idea what conversation they were referring to. As soon as we were in the Rabbit, I demanded that Jake tell me what had happened between them.

"I told you Bells," he said, grinning wickedly at me, "Right after killing the bogey man."

I spluttered. "You did **not** ask my dad if you could marry me!"

"Why not?" Jake asked, offended. "It's our five year plan, right?"

I sat back in my seat, completely speechless.

It didn't take us long to unpack. Our home was pitiful. We laughed as we danced around it. Jacob twirled me at werewolf speed just so that he could catch me when I fell over. We had one small seat in the living room, a worn mattress for a bed, and a roof covered in tarpaulin to stop it from leaking. We knew the water mostly ran cold because the water heating element was temperamental.

We couldn't have been happier.

Jacob confirmed that we really didn't need to be back at Sam's cabin until much later. We had several uninterrupted hours

to ourselves. I threw myself into his arms, kissing him passionately. He pressed his body against mine and in moments I felt him begin to stand to attention.

It felt like circumstances had kept us apart lately and the thought of having our own home and, more immediately, several hours alone, overtook us.

Jacob suddenly gripped the back of my thighs, lifting me up so that I could wrap my legs around his waist. He turned and began moving towards the bedroom door. I tightened my legs around him, pulling myself tighter against his erection and he growled under his breath. That sound made me feel so incredibly powerful. Using my arms around his neck for leverage, I began moving myself up and down against him.

The next thing I knew, my back was slammed into the wall and then my feet were back on the floor as Jacob tugged my pants down and somehow managed to simultaneously kick his own shorts off and roll the condom on. I was lifted back up again and the most delicious sensations washed over me as Jacob drove his shaft inside me. My eyes rolled back in my head, thinking that I could spend the rest of my life living in the little broken cabin without furniture, so long as I had **this**. Jacob's heat seared into my centre and I moaned loudly at the sensations he was creating within me.

It was over quickly. We both needed the release and we found it almost immediately. I exploded around Jacob and he exploded inside me.

Panting slightly, Jacob grinned at me as he continued to hold me against the wall.

"You were right this morning Bells. Five minutes would've been enough."

Round two lasted well over an hour and Jake again swaggered naked around the kitchen as we looked for something to feed him with afterwards. He pouted at my shirt and panties but said nothing.

As he ate, I sat at the table with my chin in my hands, dreaming. This was my new home. We had very little money to live on but I was certain that we could manage to decorate a little. I knew the pack would fix the roof and the fencing around the porch. They would probably clear the overgrown path that led to the cabin as well. I wanted to paint the walls, find some second hand furniture, and hang curtains.

My eyes met Jake's. He had stopped eating and was watching me, a small smile playing on his lips.

"What are you thinking about Bells?" he asked me curiously.

"Decorating," I told him. "I'm picturing how I want this place to look. I know we can't afford much just now, but we can still make it more of a home."

"I thought it was something like that," he murmured. "You looked so... content." He reached his hand out and I stood up, going round the table and sitting on his lap.

Jacob pushed my hair back from my face and looked intently into my eyes. "I told you I'd make it all come true," he informed me matter-of-factly.

I smiled back at him. "I knew you would."

As we melted into a kiss, Jacob whispered something against my lips that sounded a lot like "home".

A/N: OK so, a lot of you have asked about who is going to take over the vampire world now. Can I just say that I am not going to deal with that in this story. I could quite literally go on forever with this because I have soooo many ideas for it still; but I have another one that is begging me to write it and I want to do that next. If enough people want it, I will follow WotW up with a sequel about what happens next in the vamp world and how it affects the packs. All the ideas are there; but you'll need to ask me lol. I don't want to over-run with this story. Two more chapters to come.

Chapter 41: Chapter 39 The Passage of Time Part One

Chapter Thirty Nine – The Passage of Time Part 1

Four Days Later

A few days after the battle, there was so much to think about and organise that Jake and I were kept constantly busy. Despite the misery caused by Sam and Matt's deaths, we were living in a state of contentment. Grief and sorrow filtered into our bubble at times, but we were also a source of constant comfort to one another.

Waking up in Jacob's arms every single morning was my own personal heaven. He swore that having home cooked meals every evening made him feel more cared for than he ever remembered feeling in his life before. And, of course, with every night alone together, we were insatiable. I had started taking the birth control pills and Jacob was impatient for the month's end to arrive so he could stop using condoms.

Two days after the battle, the Oregon pack reached a decision about Matt's body. He would be buried in the forest around La Push, at a spot that Nina would tend to over the passing years. Akando performed the ceremony that same day, and there were no dry eyes when Matt's enormous wolf form was lowered into the ground.

Shortly after that, the Oregon pack left for home. Leah stayed behind to attend Sam's memorial service the following day. Nina went with Akando, needing to pack her belongings and tie up some loose ends at her former home. She would be moving in with Sue Clearwater, in Leah's old room, until Embry could persuade his mother to allow Nina to live with them.

It was that afternoon that Paul imprinted on Rachel Black. She had returned home at lunchtime. Billy and Jake were at Matt's burial and didn't make it back to the red cabin in time to welcome her. She wandered down to the beach, rather annoyed at the lack of reception. Paul also went to the beach after Matt's burial, and met her there.

Jacob was furious. Billy was also less than pleased that the one wolf who had imprinted on his daughter was Paul Lahote. Only I saw the funny side, after all the wise cracks Jake had been making about Akando being in Embry's head after he imprinted on his sister.

Of course, Rachel had to be told. We all sat down with her, Jacob, Billy, Paul and I, that same evening. It was a long night.

Sam's memorial was held the next day, three days after the battle. Sam's mother and Emily had taken care of all the traditional tribal requirements and prepared his body for his journey to the afterlife, overseen by the Shaman. The ceremony itself been presided over by the Shaman and Billy. Sam's service to the tribe could not be openly acknowledged, but the eulogies and respects paid to him by the elders rivalled that of a Chief's memorial. It was a highly emotional event for the pack.

The ceremony was attended by almost every member of the tribe. Of course, most could not understand the reasons for the extent of the elders' involvement. The rumours of cults and gangs continued to spread through La Push and every single wolf had been branded. Local gossip inevitably had Sam as the victim of gang activity and although the tribe mourned the passing of a young man, we could all see the distrust in their eyes.

My heart bled for the surviving pack members as they faced the accusations on the faces of those people they had endangered their lives to protect. I saw Seth's shoulders sag under the weight of their suspicions. I saw Paul begin to tremble and Jacob sharply reprimand him. The two youngest wolves refused to meet the eyes of anyone who was not a member of the pack, the council, or an imprint.

Tiffany Call looked at her own son as though he disgusted her.

The tears that ran down my own face were not only tears of sorrow over Sam. They were also tears for the sacrifices and sufferings that the young pack had to endure.

After the memorial, the pack's emotions were running high. None of the imprints were surprised when they ran as one to the trees at the first opportunity. Knowing they would need fed on their return, Kim, Rachel, Nina and I went to the Alpha cabin to begin to prepare food for them.

As we worked, we answered Rachel's questions. I liked Jacob's older sister. She reminded me a lot of him. She seemed less outgoing than Jacob, although that could have been a reaction to the shock she had just received. She was intelligent and thoughtful, and although she was angry that her family's secret had been hidden from her until now, she seemed to be accepting it remarkably quickly.

Two hours after the pack had run off, they arrived en masse at the tiny cabin. My initial concern that my new home would literally burst at its seams if they all came in were put to rest when I saw that they were carrying wood, tools and a variety of other equipment.

Jacob told me that they had spent the best part of an hour as wolves, fuelling each other's anger and misery. Finally, Paul of all people had suggested they channel their anger differently and proposed using the rest of the day to fix up their Alpha's new home. I was surprised by Paul's help until I realised that he would be hoping to either impress Rachel, or gain Jake's favour.

Leah was the only wolf who hadn't come. She was packing for her move to Oregon. Sue was throwing a leaving dinner for her that evening, and she would go first thing in the morning.

Between the remaining eight wolves, the cabin quickly took shape. The roof was mended, the fencing replaced, the sagging middle step leading up to the front door fixed. They had even brought the terracotta shade of paint that I had wanted to paint the cabin's exterior with.

By mid-afternoon it was finished. I was mercilessly teased for the sentimental tears I shed when I thanked each of them the best way I knew how, with food. Jacob watched my tears and his brothers' teasing with a smile on his lips.

That evening, we all congregated at the Clearwater's to bid farewell to Leah. She would wait for a while before giving up her wolf. Jake and Akando had asked her to keep the option of linking their minds open for a short time, until the dust had settled a little after recent events. Knowing that her future was secure and she had found her place in the world, Leah had agreed.

The next day was Saturday again. It was the first day since the battle that there was nothing pressing to be done. Jacob told me that he wanted to spend some time with Billy that day. There were issues he wanted to discuss with him, both as his father and as the tribal Chief.

Everybody had seen the way Tiffany looked at Embry during Sam's memorial. Jacob had always hated that the secret of the shifters had to be kept even from their own family members. He was not yet chief and couldn't change any laws, but he wanted to ask Billy to at least allow Embry to tell his mother the truth.

There was also the matter of the stories that were circulating La Push about the arrival of the enormous native men who had stayed at Sam's home and about the acrid smoke that had burned over the reservation on Tuesday. Jacob knew that different rumours needed to be circulated and he wanted Billy's advice on that.

The matter of Embry's mother was settled remarkably quickly. Billy phoned around the council members and they each agreed that Tiffany Call could be brought into the loop. Jacob wryly told me that the pack members could probably ask for anything they wanted that particular week, and it would be granted. He had already told me that the raw materials needed to fix up our cabin had been donated on the spot by the council members.

The pack was being rewarded any way the council could manage.

Billy himself went with Embry that afternoon to break the news to Tiffany. Jacob and I heard later that after sitting in stunned silence for several minutes, she had burst into tears, thrown her arms around her son's neck, and thanked every divine entity she could think of that her son was a shape shifter. Apparently, that was preferable to whatever other ideas she had had.

Billy left Embry alone with Tiffany. Embry wanted to discuss both imprinting and his father. Obviously, the gene pool of potential fathers had been narrowed considerably. Once that conversation was over, Embry was kind of glad that Leah had moved to Oregon. As it was, Seth found it difficult to look Embry in the eye for several weeks, unable to cope at first with the enormity of discovering he had a half-brother.

At the precise time that Billy and Embry were telling Tiffany about her son's ability to turn into a wolf, Jacob and I were tangled together on our living room floor. Once again, my wolf's needs had consumed him and we hadn't made it to the mattress. Not that I was complaining. We had no sooner finished than Jake picked me up and carried me through to the bedroom.

"Again?" I asked him with a laugh as he threw himself onto the bed beside me and rolled onto his back, pulling me on top of him.

"Mmmhmm," he smirked against my lips as he kissed me, his hands tangling in my already mussed up hair. He pushed me away slightly to look at me. "You look so fuckin' sexy when we've just made love. It makes me wanna do it all over again." He kissed me again, pushing his hips up against me so that I could feel just how much he wanted to do it again.

Grinning, I began kissing down his chest, running my hand over his abs. I followed my hand with my tongue and he groaned loudly. The sound shot to my core and I felt moisture pool between my legs.

"Again, Bells?" Jake echoed back at me with a laugh as soon as he smelled me. I rolled my eyes at him and kept up my adoration of his taut muscles. He was soon putty in my hands.

All of a sudden he sat up, pulling me onto his lap. I wrapped my legs around him and threw back my head as he kissed my neck roughly, his stubble scratching my skin and his teeth nibbling around my collar bone. I rubbed myself against his erection and he groaned again.

Pulling back suddenly he said, "Bells do we still need to use condoms?"

"Yes," I told him firmly. "The pills need time to work."

"Well we only have one left," he grumbled. "I'll need to buy a bigger pack later."

I laughed at the petulant look on his face. "We'll just have to make the most of the last one then." His face brightened a little and he rolled it on quickly before pulling me tightly against him again.

"You know I love you Bells," he told me seriously.

"You know I love you too," I agreed as he lowered his hand between my legs. Before he even touched me the anticipation caused another rush of moisture there and he smiled.

"I love the way you react to me."

I moved against his by now very obvious erection. "I love the way you react to me too," I grinned.

Jacob lifted me by the hips and lowered me onto his straining member. I moaned at the feel of him filling me.

"I love the way you feel around me," he murmured, his voice huskier than usual.

"I love the way you feel inside me," I whispered back. His eyes darkened and he licked his lips before pulling my face closer to kiss me. His other hand moved to my clit and I moved my legs into a kneeling position to give myself more leverage.

We never broke our kiss as I moved on his lap. Jake allowed me complete control. If I picked up pace, he rubbed me faster; if I slowed, so did he. Before long I was moaning and dripping around him, my body laced with sweat. Jacob broke our kiss and told me to open my eyes. My eyes were locked on his when I came, my walls clenching around him and making him curse.

He used his hands on my hips to slow me as I came down from my high. Then, lifting me completely off him, he turned me and laid me on my stomach, climbing on top of me. This was my favourite position and I knew he really was determined to make the most of that last condom. I felt him line himself up with my entrance and moaned in anticipation of the sensations this particular position elicited.

He pushed inside me and my walls, still sensitive, automatically clenched around him. My body quaked, knowing he would push in deeply and hit exquisite places.

He lay fully over my back and his breath tickled my ear as he whispered, "Again, Bells?" I moaned loudly. He was going to tease me. He moved slowly, never pushing into me as deeply as he knew I craved in this position. His fingers moved around my clitoris again, but languorously this time and he soon had me writhing in frustration.

"What do you want honey?" he asked me, his voice deep and heavy with lust. His face was hovering over my cheek and I could smell his unique scent. My senses were overloaded with him. I could still taste his mouth on my tongue. His body heat seared across my back and between my legs. He was inside me but not filling me.

That was what I wanted. "Deeper," I gasped. He withdrew almost fully before plunging as far as he could into me.

"Fuck!" It exploded from my lips and he growled. His fingers picked up speed around my clit and he pulled out before plunging deeply into me again. I knew this position was highly sensitive for him, too, and he quickly stopped his teasing. I convulsed again, the third time in under an hour, and gasped for air as he continued to pound hard into me until he too exploded.

Jake lay over me for a minute, leaning on his elbows and catching his breath. He rocked gently into me and even though his shaft was spent, I was so overly sensitive that it made me whimper.

"Sorry Bells," he said contritely as he pulled out.

I turned round to face him. "You are not," I scolded him when I saw the smug look on his face.

He wrapped his long arms around me and kissed me. "Course not," he grinned.

We lay there for a while, perfectly content in one another's arms. We talked about everything and nothing. We needed no more than what we had, and our happiness at simply being together was almost overwhelming.

The need for more food and a bumper pack of condoms, finally drove us off the mattress and out of the cabin.

We went to Forks for grocery shopping, so that we could drop in to see Charlie. Both Jake and I delighted in the mundane task of buying food just as long as we were doing it together. We teased one another about it and I thought that I could spend my life in a state of perfect bliss if I could just be by Jake's side all the time.

Charlie had other plans. We were hardly in the door when he told me that Forks High School had called him at work the day before.

"You need to go back to school on Monday Bella," he told me severely. "The threat's over and you're due to graduate in a couple of months. Don't blow it now."

Jake's mood was much more serious on the way back home and I knew he was mulling over what Charlie had said.

"I'll go, Jake," I told him before he could start. "But you need to go back to school too!" He rolled his eyes and agreed.

One Month Later

Life in La Push had finally settled into a new normality. Jake and I had both returned to school and were studying hard. All the pack, and Jake in particular, were having a rough time at school. The teaching staff had no idea that the overgrown teenagers in their classes were Protectors, looking after them as they slept in their beds at night.

All they knew was that several students, those widely known to belong to a gang, had skipped several weeks of school and fallen far behind in their course work. Not only that, but they were somehow exempt from any kind of punishment. On council orders, no detention or any other punitive exercises had to be meted out to the boys. Jake had missed the most school and fallen the furthest behind while preparing for the Volturi to arrive. Most of his teachers assumed he was receiving preferential treatment from the council because he was the son of the Chief, and several of them took it upon themselves to put him firmly in his place.

On one particular day, his Chemistry teacher had taunted him mercilessly over an answer he hadn't known.

"I nearly fucking phased in the classroom Bella!" he ranted as I prepared our dinner while listening to him. "Seriously, can't the council just tell them that I have massive anger issues and could actually hurt them, or something? It's fucking stupid!" He slammed our plates down on the table, breaking one in the process. "Sorry Bells," he said contritely.

I sighed as he put the pieces in the bin. It wasn't the first piece of crockery that had been destroyed in a school-related tantrum and our already meagre stock of dishes was dwindling fast. Part of me had wondered whether Jacob really should continue to go to school. Surprisingly, it was him who ultimately decided that he would stay on.

"I'll catch up and then see what they have to say about it," he had said fiercely.

And so, evening after evening, we studied together. The knowledge that my final exams were looming and Jake's determination to catch up drove us both to work hard.

Inevitably, we would become distracted part way through the evening. I had finally declared that we could rely on the birth control pills and we had discovered that all the wonderful sensations we had found so far, were intensified skin on skin. If Jake had been insatiable before, he was even more so now.

Around us, life for the other pack members was going on too. Embry had a new, open relationship with Tiffany. Nina moved in with them with Tiffany's blessing once she understood the nature of imprinting. Nina's sweet nature helped speed the healing of the bond between mother and son, and Embry had a new confidence about him.

Nina was still not allowed in Tiffany's kitchen.

Seth had recovered from the initial shock of learning he had a half-brother. He and Leah had decided against raising the subject with Sue, and nobody had any idea whether she knew of her late husband's infidelity or of the son he had fathered while married to her.

Quil had decided against giving up his wolf. He told Jacob that it was enough for him to know that he could. One day, when phased together, Jacob had seen in Quil's mind that his main reason for remaining a wolf was because he didn't want the pack to dwindle further until we knew more about the developments in the vampire world. Carlisle had assured us that it would take time for the rest of his kind to even become aware that the Volturi no longer existed. It would take more time for any unrest to reach us. Jacob argued with Quil that he should give up his wolf if he wanted but as yet, no decision had been reached.

Leah and Akando were settling in to their lives together in Oregon. Paul had all but moved into Billy's to be closer to Rachel. I was rapidly developing a friendship with her and Jacob didn't need to tell me how happy that made him. I saw it in his eyes every time he saw us laughing or idly gossiping together. From Rachel's point of view, I was someone who shared her secret and understood being an imprintee. I was also her brother's girl. From my point of view, she was so like Jake that I simply adored her.

Jared had healed fully and he and Kim were marrying in September. I had been shocked when Kim asked me to be a bridesmaid until I realised that she, too, had no other friends who knew and understood her secret.

The bond between the women was proving to be almost as strong as that between the wolves. We were tightly bound by the need for secrecy and the knowledge that our men protected the entire tribe.

Collin and Brady were still Collin and Brady. They attended school, turned up at the Alpha cabin to be fed, and generally made nuisances of themselves. Nobody would have had it any other way.

Emily had returned to the Makah reservation. Quil visited regularly, both to visit Claire and to check on Emily. She was grieving and broken, and we were all concerned about her. Jake and I had visited only once, but had promised her to visit regularly throughout the summer months.

Charlie chose to return to his need to know state, which meant that most of the time he pretended not to know. He was

becoming closer with Sue Clearwater and I was pleased when Jake pointed out to me what I had missed, that there seemed to be more than mere friendship developing between them.

I had sent off college applications to any establishments local enough that may still be taking them. I was completely torn about what to do in the event that I was accepted. Jake was very strong in his opinion that I should go. He insisted that he was strong enough to deal with the separation and that I hadn't to give up any opportunities because of what he had once referred to as "freaky supernatural shit".

The other side of the coin was that I didn't want to leave him.

A/N: Just one more chapter ... I am so going to miss this story!

Chapter 42: Chapter 40 The Passage of Time Part Two

A/N: Here it is The final chapter *sobs*. I will from time to time add unbeta-ed out-takes, but for the main story ... this is it.

You've brought this story to over 1000 reviews. I am so incredibly grateful to each and every one of you. I never, never dreamed that my first fanfic would be so well received.

And to feebees ... who has had chapters thrown at her left right and centre and never once complained ... who has taught me so much about how to improve my writing, and patiently corrected my rookie errors ... THANK YOU.

Chapter Forty – The Passage of Time Part Two

One Year Later

Jacob was suffering. His imprint had gone to college in the fall and his time with her was limited to visits at weekends. He was short tempered and the younger wolves in particular dreaded the occasions they were required to patrol with him. He could be ferocious.

He had kept his word and caught up on school work. His teachers were going easier on him and it was just as well. There would have been a very real danger of an unfortunate incident in class had anyone goaded him.

Bella was oblivious. She knew when she came home at weekends that Jacob was tense and nervy. But he relaxed quickly around her and she didn't appreciate the full extent of his pain.

In the end, it was Nina and Embry who intervened. Jacob had taken a vicious chunk out of Collin's flank for turning up late for patrol because he had been making out with a girl. There had been absolutely no leech activity since the battle almost a year previously, and it had been a massive over reaction. It was the final straw for Embry. The next weekend Nina had insisted she needed some time alone with Bella to discuss girl's issues. Jake and Embry had made themselves scarce.

When they returned, one look at Bella's face and Jake knew he was in trouble. They had argued long into the evening. He absolutely refused to agree to her dropping out of college. She absolutely refused to allow him to continue to be so miserable. Nina had told her that his pain manifested itself physically sometimes. One day, when Bella had been unable to make her usual weekend trip home due to essay deadlines, Embry had phased into his wolf and come across Jake's wolf curled on the forest floor as though using his body to try and keep his chest intact.

It was too painfully familiar to Bella and she had cried at the mere thought of it. She was also pissed as hell that Jake hadn't told her how bad it could be.

By the time they made up, they were no further forward. Making up inevitably meant making love, using condoms again much to Jake's chagrin.

The birth control pills had been short lived. One random day Jake had been phased alone and having a wonderful replay in his head of a particularly steamy session with his girl. He had been in his wolf form specifically to check in with Leah but had missed her phasing in.

She had exploded at him. *Fucking hell Jake! Haven't you heard of contraception? You're the fucking Alpha wolf, do you have any idea how potent you're supposed to be?*

Chill out Leah, Bella's on birth control.

Leah – *Yeah, dumbass, so was Anna.*

Later that evening, Jacob had sat Bella down for a talk he was dreading. He had thought it would be a good idea to start by asking her not to freak out. Of course, that achieved precisely the opposite result.

"Didn't you spend **days** inside Nick's head Jake? How the hell could you not have known this?" She was panicking and mad.

"We weren't exactly thinking about that Bella. We were too focussed on the attack that was coming." Jake stood and crossed the room to Bella. Her eyes were huge and her face was chalk white. "C'mon honey, it wouldn't be the end of the world would it? I mean, we've survived a leech invasion, we've both survived vampire venom, how hard can a baby be?"

It offered Bella little consolation and she insisted on returning to condoms with immediate effect. She spent the rest of the month on tenterhooks. Even when it seemed clear that she wasn't pregnant, she took several tests just to be sure.

Jacob couldn't help the pang of disappointment when she confirmed that she was absolutely, definitely, one hundred percent, not pregnant. His head knew they weren't ready. His heart wanted it.

And now, with Bella away at college five days a week, his longing for a family increased all the time. He didn't just miss

and need his imprint, he was lonely. He spent a few nights a week at his dad's place, and sometimes even stayed over at Charlie's, sleeping in Bella's old bed.

The weekend that Nina intervened, Bella made sure he told her everything. It all poured out: his pain without her; his loneliness; his desire to build a home and a family with her. But still, he insisted that she finish college.

Bella returned to college with a heavy heart. She had been studying hard, hoping to finish ahead of time so that she could return to Jacob and the cabin she missed so much when she was gone. Finally, she had a meeting with her counsellor, asking what options were available for home study. It turned out that by swapping a few classes, the majority of her course could be completed online.

Bella moved back home to La Push three weeks later. The idea of online study held a lot of appeal for the older pack members, who were unable to consider going to college with the vampire world so unstable. The council had readily agreed to invest in faster and more reliable internet access for the reservation. Anything to reduce the sacrifices the tribe's Protectors had to make.

Carlisle had confirmed that rumours were now spreading quickly that the Volturi had been somehow eradicated. A coven of vampires were allegedly planning on travelling to Volterra to check for themselves. It was only a matter of time before the vampire world realised they were ungoverned. How long it would take for leech activity to increase and affect the populated areas around the shifting tribes was anybody's guess.

The packs were ready. No fewer than seven packs, including the Quileute, had been identified so far by Len. He had also confirmed that Bella's shield appeared to be similar to Angel's. Billy and Old Quil surmised that during Angel's time, there had been a period of great unrest in the vampire world. They assumed now that Jake and Bella were to lead the packs in the war against the new vampire hierarchy.

All anyone could do was wait.

Two Years Later

Jacob graduated high school. The pride Bella felt rivalled even Billy's. Jake enrolled in an online business course and focussed on his car repair work. He used the shed outside Billy's house as a garage at first, and began charging reasonable rates for his work. Word spread and his business steadily grew. He was saving hard with a view to buying a suitable building to expand his garage properly.

Not a single nomadic leech had passed their way since the battle with the Volturi. Carlisle had confirmed to Bella that his kind were well aware of the Volturi having been overthrown. The circumstances surrounding their demise were shrouded in rumours and speculation. Most vampires were gripped with a terror of the unknown. An entity so powerful that it had wiped out the entire Volturi guard swiftly and silently was one to be feared. Other than the odd leech becoming careless, none of the shifting tribes had noticed any increase in vampire activity.

With nothing to do, most of the pack members were feeling redundant and a little bored. Shortly after graduating, Quil finally made the decision to give up his wolf and pursue his own life. His imprint broke and he met a girl at college. Their relationship wasn't serious but Quil was having the time of his life, dating and fooling around. He adored Claire and would always be in her life, but he was undeniably happier than he had ever been when imprinted.

All the Alphas stayed in regular contact. On one visit to La Push, Yuma brought his half-brother Dan with him. He wasn't a wolf; Yuma's mother had remarried after the death of her first husband, and her second husband wasn't a gene carrier. But during their visit, Dan met Emily who visited regularly. No imprint occurred. There was nothing magical or mysterious about their connection. They had simply fallen in love. It had strengthened the link with Yuma's pack and shortly afterwards, Seth had imprinted on a girl from the Kootenai tribe.

Jared and Kim had married as planned and had a daughter called Lily. All the Quileute pack and their imprints adored her. Leah, too, had a child. She had quickly given up her wolf and had almost immediately fallen pregnant. She had found perfect contentment in her role as wife and mother and whenever she visited to allow Sue time with her grandson, the rest of the old La Push pack enjoyed teasing her about her feisty days as a wolf.

The question of whether Sue knew about her late husband's infidelity had not been answered. It was just another secret the pack kept.

Three Years Later

Life should have been the best it had ever been. Bella had graduated from college and was teaching part-time at the community college. Jacob had bought an old house with a large workshop. He enlisted the pack's help to renovate both, and his garage now operated out of the old workshop. The house itself was almost habitable and Jacob wanted it completed for Bella's birthday in September. Their new home wouldn't be big enough for eight kids, but Jake figured it was big enough for a werewolf, his almost-fiancée, and a few babies.

Jacob had been looking forward with great excitement to Bella's birthday. He had plans to move her into their new home on the day, propose to her that evening, and spend the night christening all the rooms. He hoped to set the date for their wedding for the following summer. That kept them well on track for their five year plan, he thought.

Life with Bella since she had left college had been constant bliss. They encouraged each other with their studies. They looked after one another. Their life together really was as easy as breathing. They fought, they made up. They laughed, they made memories. They were best friends and lovers. Jacob had never for one moment doubted Bella's love for him, or his for her. Nor had he doubted that they would spend the rest of their lives together.

Shortly after Bella started teaching, however, something subtle changed in their relationship. It coincided with Nina giving birth to her first child, a boy. It didn't take Jacob long to realise that something was wrong. Bella still told him she loved him, she still made love with him as though her body craved him as much as his craved her, but he sensed a sadness that he couldn't understand. No matter how many times she assured him that she was fine, he knew something was bothering her and he was confused why she wouldn't tell him what it was. He began to think that spending more time off the reservation while she was working was showing her a life she had missed out on.

Jacob worried about it excessively. Embry listened and told Nina about it. Nina, with a female's intuition, guessed what it may be. Her suspicion was confirmed one day when she and Bella were grocery shopping and bumped into an old school mate of Bella's, Jessica. Jessica was newly engaged and flaunting her ring. Nina caught the expression on Bella's face and reported back to Embry.

Jacob was torn. He had planned his proposal for Bella's birthday. It would be very Bella, nothing overly indulgent, just a heartfelt declaration of his love and devotion. He had the ring and again, it was very Bella. It wasn't flashy, just a thin gold band with a small cluster of diamonds. If she didn't like it, they would return it. It didn't matter to Jacob, as long as she was happy.

Which, apparently, she wasn't. He realised she must have expected him to propose to her before now.

In the end, Jacob had chosen to simply reassure her. One evening, as they lay together in the bed he had bought them a year earlier, he had reminded her of their five year plan. He had felt Bella stiffen and had rubbed her arm, soothing her.

"I guess that means you'll need to agree to marry me soon, huh Bells?"

"You'll need to ask me first," she had replied slightly acidly. Smiling, he had tilted her face up so she could see his eyes.

"You'll need to trust me on that honey," he whispered before kissing her deeply.

It had worked. Bella relaxed and her birthday had gone as planned. They spent the day excitedly moving into their new home. Jacob insisted on cooking for her and had even lit candles. Bella assumed the romantic gesture was because of her birthday and their new home. She hadn't expected him to come round to her side of the table and drop to one knee.

Jacob had predicted her tears when she accepted. He hadn't predicted his own. The guys had given him hell for that one. Or those that remained in the pack, anyway.

Jared and Paul had both given up phasing to allow themselves to age with their imprints. Both their wolves lay dormant and could be called upon should the need ever arise. That left only Jacob, Embry, Seth, Collin and Brady. It was more than enough.

Carlisle reported that unrest was growing steadily amongst his kind as unsubstantiated rumours of a highly dangerous entity lost their initial impact. The Quileute wolves had come across only one lone vampire in the three years since defeating the Volturi. It had been destroyed within sixty seconds of crossing into their territory.

Sue and Charlie had finally married. One day when they were visiting Bella, Nina had arrived to visit with her new baby son. Sue had begged for a cuddle and had sat for quite some time cooing at the little one. Bella had been watching when a strange look crossed Sue's face. She had taken the boy to the window, as though to look at him better in the light, and had spent considerable time examining his features.

She later told Charlie that the child looked uncannily like Seth had as a baby.

Five Years Later

Jacob smiled to himself as he lay in bed, listening to the steady *thump-thump* of his wife's heart, and the faster thrumming of the baby that grew within her. Any day now, his first born child would make his or her appearance, and he couldn't wait.

They had married the June after Jake had proposed, and Bella had laughingly agreed to a thrilled Jacob that he could finally ditch the condoms. She had fallen pregnant more or less immediately, and now, their baby was due.

Bella went into labour two days later. Jacob cried again when he held Samuel Matthew for the first time. The child's name had been approved by both Nina and Emily. They both thought it fitting that the heir to the pack should bear the names of the men who fell to protect the Quileute tribe.

The call to arms came less than a year later. Jacob had been considering quitting phasing. Patrols were kept up as a matter of routine but there was rarely any need for the pack's services. Jake knew that Embry would quit, if he did. Seth could take over the pack; or even Collin, who was the closest blood relative to Jacob. He and Bella had spent considerable time discussing it. They both knew he had to quit eventually, but Carlisle had been reporting increasing unrest globally.

One afternoon, as they sat on the beach watching Sammy test out his new walking skills and laughingly arguing over whether the new life they had just learned was growing within Bella was a boy or a girl, they clearly heard an unfamiliar wolf howl in the forest. Jake jumped up, startled, and took off for the trees. Brady came to break the news to Bella half an hour later. A new wolf had phased.

Jacob stopped talking about quitting. Three more wolves phased within six months. Bella gave birth to their second child, a girl. She was named Charlotte Sarah and had her father wrapped around her little finger within moments of her birth. Bella watched her husband fall head over heels for their tiny daughter and smiled to herself. She had known that, as much as he would have loved another boy, part of him had hoped for a baby girl.

Charlotte, already called Charlie for short, was nursing at Bella's breast a month after her birth when the phone rang. It was Carlisle. Following a power struggle, his kind had new rulers who were determined to seek out and eliminate whatever threat had brought down the Volturi. They had information but Carlisle was not sure exactly how much they knew. The wolves were endangered once more.

Two hours later, Bella's living room was filled with the existing nine wolves, and Paul and Jared. Jacob had alerted the other Alphas and the packs would meet within days. Paul and Jared immediately agreed to bring forth their wolves again. Bella didn't miss the gleam in Paul's eyes at the thought of it. They all knew he had missed his wolf.

As they lay in bed that night, Bella asked her husband if they needed to be afraid. He had solemnly promised her that there would be no threat, none whatsoever. No leeches would be allowed within miles of La Push. Carlisle could be trusted, that much he had proven over the years. He had assured them that the new leech rulers had no way of knowing about the scale of the defence the wolves could put up. They knew nothing of Bella's shield.

The wolves would fight. They would bring down the new rulers. And the cycle would begin again.

FIN

Chapter 43: Leah's Imprint

A/N: So, since finishing *The Ties That Bind Us* and promising its sequel will start in July, a lot of readers have asked about *Worthy of the Wolf*. I haven't forgotten about it. It's just been on a back burner while I've been writing *Ties* and *32*. So here's a short outtake just to prove I do still think about this fic lol. This is Leah imprinting, and reads alongside Chapter 23, *The Incomers*. It's not been beta or pre read or edited in any way, so the inevitable mistakes are all my own. It's not intended to advance the storyline or add anything to the fic. It's just a peek behind the scenes into Leah's mind the day she imprinted.

Leah Clearwater gave her bedroom mirror only a cursory glance as she passed it. She knew what it would tell her if she looked at her reflection properly and she didn't like to dwell on it. Her hair which had once been long and thick was now in a short bob because its length dictated the length of her wolf's fur. Her expression, once full of the joy of a young woman in love, now knew too many secrets. Her physique, once feminine with soft curves, was now powerful and muscular.

Leah Clearwater was a genetic freak of nature. She had come to terms with it and accepted her fate. She was a wolf, the only female ever to phase. Unlikely to have children, it was presumably not her role to ensure the wolf line continued. What exactly her role was, she had no idea. Perhaps there wasn't a bigger picture for her at all.

Dwelling on these poisonous thoughts was never a good thing. Leah had learned that the hard way. She had finally started to move past it. The night Sam had come to her and begged for her forgiveness, she had found a new peace in her heart. The forgiveness, she had willingly granted. The peace had stayed.

Leah now bounded out of her bedroom and down the stairs, determined not to give in to self pity or self loathing again. That afternoon, she was taking on a more domestic role. Leah was going to Sam's cabin to help her mom and Bella prepare for the arrival of the Tamastlikt pack.

Leah had hardly slept the night before. Despite her peace, some new feeling had settled on her. It was almost like foreboding, although not so ominous. A strong sense of expectation, perhaps. Leah had been tempted to put it down to the fact that a new pack was arriving and they would be training for an impending war. Yet she couldn't shake the feeling that it was more personal, somehow. Either way, her slumber had been very disturbed and she certainly wasn't feeling refreshed that morning. Leah was used to that though, and it wouldn't affect her ability to work or patrol that day.

Sue was waiting downstairs, ready to go and prepare Sam's cabin for the use of the visiting pack. She smiled at her daughter, relieved to note that the new light in her eyes was still there this morning. After the months of anguish and heartbreak Leah had endured, Sue was not yet confident in her new found calm.

Throughout the afternoon, the two women worked. Beds were made and floors swept. Bella arrived, and Sue left with Seth to get the phenomenal amount of groceries that would be needed over the coming few days.

Leah saw that Bella was radiant. Clearly, the move to La Push to live with Jake was suiting her. The girls made small talk and Leah even confided in Bella about what had happened with Sam. She had been astonished to find that she liked Jake's girl. The leech lover had turned out to be strong, and as loyal as any wolf. Bella had made Leah's life easier by asking Jake to be more understanding towards her when she first phased. And she had been incredible with the leech that called itself Kate, learning to use her shield to protect the pack.

While cooking, something Leah preferred to leave to others whenever possible, Jake arrived. Leah saw his face fall and knew he had hoped to find his imprint alone. Deciding not to tease them, she busied herself in the living room. She almost choked on her laughter when she heard Jake whisper to Bella that he'd thought he would get her alone. As always, Bella handled him deftly. She knew how to soothe him and made him promises for later. He was appeased by the time Leah made her entrance back into the kitchen.

Later, on patrol, Leah waited until she was the only wolf phased and then allowed herself to indulge in the only fantasy that remained remotely realistic for her life. She had longed so many times to imprint on somebody, anybody. At first, it was to enable her to forget the pain of Sam and Emily's betrayal. Over the last few days, though, since Sam had come to see her, the pain had dissipated.

Now, she wanted to imprint for a different reason. She saw the pure love that shone from Jake and Jared's eyes when they looked at Bella and Kim. Leah wanted to know that kind of love, even if she was the bestower. There was no doubt that imprints loved their wolves with a depth that few humans would ever experience. Leah would happily be the adoring part of the relationship so long as her imprint loved her in return.

Leah allowed herself that afternoon to wonder about her imprint. She contemplated whether she would ever find him. As the only female wolf, nobody knew whether it would even happen for her. It had been just another thing for her to be bitter about until recently. Now, she understood that if she didn't imprint, she could still move on past Sam and form a relationship on her own terms.

Her patrol shift passed and Brady phased in. He showed Leah that the incoming pack had arrived and been fed. When she caught a glimpse of the tall, proud visiting Alpha in the pup's mind, Leah faltered mid stride. She couldn't know it was the same reaction Embry had had when he saw Nina in Jake's mind.

Brady - *You okay, Leah?*

Leah - Yeah, course I am. I'm phasing out.

Shifting back to human, Leah swiftly pulled on her shorts and tank top, and made her way barefoot through the forest towards Sam's cabin. She knew her hair would be wild from the wind blowing in her fur, and that her feet were growing increasingly muddy as she walked. She absently picked leaves and pieces of moss from her clothes. The image of Akando in Brady's mind seemed to have seared itself into her own mind and branded itself on her brain. Leah hoped she wouldn't turn into a tongue tied fool in front of him. She was used to muscular, attractive men, she told herself crossly. Being inside their minds had her firmly convinced that the muscle was all physical. Either brain power, emotional maturity or both were often lacking. Where they weren't, there was always some flaw that Leah couldn't live with.

Telling herself that the visiting Alpha was no different to any member of her own pack, with his own annoying habits and weaknesses, Leah reached her destination. Stepping out of the treeline, the pull she felt to raise her eyes was not something she could have denied, even if it had occurred to her to fight it.

Lifting her line of sight, Leah's eyes met the proud, shrewd gaze of the Tamastlikt leader, and time stood still. Just as Leah had seen happen in her brothers' minds, steel cable after steel cable snapped within her psyche and re-attached themselves to the man who had risen to his feet and was staring at her as though she were the most desirable and valuable thing in existence.

Energy sped along the steel cables that now connected Leah to Akando. Partway there, energy flowing from him to her collided with her own, and sparks ignited between them. The air between them hummed and crackled, a palpable force field which caused the younger wolves to stir restlessly.

Leah's eyes widened as she realised that the imprint was two way. Her life had just changed forever. She watched as Akando slowly began to make his way towards her. Their eye contact never faltered as he crossed the space which separated them. Taking her hand before any words had been exchanged between them, the pair walked silently into the cover of the trees, away from supernaturally sharp ears. As they walked, Leah stole occasional glances at the man she was destined to spend her life with. She was amused to find him frequently doing the same with her.

It was Akando who spoke first. "Leah, I presume."

She inclined her head. "Akando?"

"Yes." His smile looked as rusty as her own and Leah wanted suddenly to know everything about him. "I want to know everything about you and I don't know where to start," he confessed just as the same thought had crossed her own mind. Leah laughed, shocked to hear how light a sound it was.

"Let's just start at the beginning," she suggested. Finding a fallen log to lean against, Leah sank to the forest floor and prepared to share her life story with the man she had first set eyes on five minutes earlier, but with whom she was destined to spend the rest of her life.

Not knowing they shared a mind link when phased, Leah and Akando nonetheless held nothing back that evening. Akando learned of Leah's childhood growing up with her parents and younger brother. He heard of her first love and had to clench his fists and bite his tongue in an attempt to curb his jealousy of the man who took the gift of her virginity. When he then heard of her heartbreak and pain when Sam had imprinted on her own cousin, Akando had to exert all of his self control to stop from hurling the log they leaned against across the forest.

In return, he told Leah of his own childhood. His father was also deceased, leaving Akando feeling as though he had to be the man of the family at a very young age. Leah thought of Seth and felt her heart tear a little. Akando, like Sam, had been the first of his pack to phase. Unlike the Quileute wolves however, he had heard strong hints from his tribe's Elders that their legends held more truths than anyone would ever believe. And unlike Sam, Akando was the rightful Alpha. He had struggled little with the secret, and had been joined quickly by Elan.

It was Leah's turn to feel jealousy when he admitted to several past relationships. None, he protested, had felt 'right' and he had ended them all when it became clear that the girls were beginning to form expectations. Leah scowled at the thought of him with multiple other women, until he used the pad of his thumb to smooth the creases of her frown, and kissed her gently for the first time.

Leah returned the kiss and before long they were wrapped in one another's arms, breathless and wanting more. It was only the knowledge that Brady was somewhere in the vicinity that prevented Leah from carrying on. It never once crossed her mind that it was strange for her to want this man as much as she did, mere hours after meeting him. Those thoughts were for a world where monsters and magic did not exist. Leah knew she was very much enmeshed in something magical, and she was grateful for all of it.

Finally, Akando's need to return to the packs and strategise with Jacob for the upcoming battle, along with Leah's ravenous hunger, drove them back to Sam's cabin. The rest of the wolves were understandably curious and when Jacob grinned widely at his Beta, she actually blushed. For the most part, she simply avoided eye contact and ate in silence while she pondered with awe the events of the evening.

That night, lying awake in her bed, Leah couldn't wipe the smile from her face. She was an imprinted wolf. Her future was secure. She would know no more heartbreak, no more pain, no more rejection.

Doubts born of insecurity began to creep in as she thought of her potential inability to bear children. Would Akando be disappointed if they couldn't continue the wolf line? Would he be disgusted if his imprint was barren? These thoughts led to the obvious conclusion. There was no way the Alpha of a wolfpack would imprint on a woman who was unable to bear him children. Seeds of hope quickly began to sprout through Leah's fears. There was a bigger picture for her after all.

Chapter 44: When Jacob Asked Charlie

A/N: I'm going to come clean. I've had this short outtake in the recesses of my brain for months, sitting there and never being written while I've focussed on my other stories. Now, though, something really exciting has happened. *Worthy of the Wolf* has been nominated for two awards: best break out story from a new author, and best canon fic. Both nominations are for the JBNP Awards and voting is now open. I know several of you have been asking about this particular outtake so here it is, along with a gentle nudge in the direction of JBNP;) Seriously, a ton of very talented writers and fantastic stories have all been nominated in those awards and I can promise that when we feel the love, our muses flow! So even if you don't want to vote for *Worthy*, please do head over and vote for your favourites to support your best loved writers and stories.

For those readers who followed *The Ties That Bind Us*, after winning two Non-Canon Awards (one first, one second place), it now also has a couple of JBNP nominations—for most erotic fic (I love that nomination!) and most angst fic. And finally, for those of you reading *Bonds of our Souls* who are confused by me posting a chapter when I'm on vacation and internetless, I've been overcoming my techphobia over the past two weeks lol and have all but claimed hubby's phone for my own. Expect an early *Bonds* update as a result!

So here it is, When Jacob Asked Charlie. This outtake is set right at the end of the battle with the Volturi, just after Jake scared off the bogey man! I hope you enjoy it. As with all my outtakes, this hasn't been beta or pre-read, so all mistakes are my own.

Charlie Swan sat on a low wall outside Sam Uley's cabin, his hands hanging limply as his elbows rested on his knees. He was watching as streams of men, impossibly tall and muscled, came in from battle. Most of them walked on their own feet, heads held high and proud. Occasionally, one would be supported by another.

The mood was a curious mix of jubilation and grief. The battle had been won, but a brother had fallen. Charlie didn't know Matt well but that didn't lessen his sacrifice in the Police Chief's eyes. The man would forever be a hero.

Charlie watched anxiously until his daughter and her boyfriend arrived safely back. *Boyfriend*. Charlie shook his head at the inadequacy of that word. Who would have thought that the boy he had loved as a son, the same boy he had watched brokenly grieve after the untimely death of his mother, the same boy who had matured too fast when forced to care for his disabled father, the same boy who had comically stammered and stumbled around Bells with an outrageous crush on her when she returned to Forks...Who would have thought that boy would today have led a victorious war against monsters, right here in La Push?

As Chief Swan watched unnoticed by all, Jacob Black ignored the obvious pain he was in to check Bella was doing okay. He remembered the night he had learned of this supernatural world, and how the boy had come to his door to pour out his heart. He told Charlie of the love he had felt for Bella, even before he phased. He explained how the imprint strengthened his bond to her and intensified his love. He vowed he would take on the Volturi and win, to keep Bella safe. He promised to never do anything to hurt her, and to devote himself to her happiness for the rest of his life.

Charlie had no doubt he meant every word he uttered. That was the same night he had vowed to destroy Edward Cullen for the sole purpose of keeping Bella safe. Apparently, Jacob had achieved just that.

Charlie's mind wandered to his experiences early that morning at the Alpha Cabin. He had watched through field glasses as twenty enormous wolves launched themselves at men made of stone. The leader of the wolves had been a massive russet beast, deadly and vicious in his role as Alpha. *Jacob Black*.

His Bells had looked fierce in the reddish glow from the morning sun. The breeze had caught her long hair and whipped it back from her face as she focussed with an intensity he had never seen before. She had shielded Jacob—and therefore the other wolves—from mental attacks from the vampires. More than that, when the horror of Edward Cullen materialised before them and Jacob's wolf came to Protect, Charlie had witnessed with his own eyes the communication that flowed between human girl and beast. A deep spiritual bond existed between Bella and Jake that Charlie could only wonder at.

Word reached his ears that Sam Uley had made the ultimate sacrifice for his tribe. Shaking his head, Chief Swan rose to his feet and headed to his cruiser. Nobody noticed him leave, and nobody noticed his return less than an hour later. The mystery of the huge quantities of beer and hard liquor that materialised in Emily's kitchen that morning never was solved, although Billy Black had his suspicions.

Sometime later, Charlie was still in his spot on the low wall pondering the loss of a young man who should by rights have had a happy life stretching ahead of him, when a large figure sat next to him. Looking up, he saw Jacob extending a beer to him with one hand while popping his own can with the other. Charlie didn't even consider reprimanding him for underage drinking.

"It's really over?" He would feel happier if he heard the words directly from the young man he had grown to regard with respect and something like awe.

"It's over. She's safe."

"Thank you."

Jake gave a slight laugh. "No need to thank me. I can't see a life for myself without Bella in it. I fought for *us*, for our future."

"You deserve that future, for what you've done here." Charlie swept his arm around, taking in the whole scene before them. He wasn't sure what he'd said to make a wide grin spread across Jake's features. He knew nothing of the conversation that had taken place two nights earlier.

There was a mischievous glint in Jacob's eyes as he pulled Bella into his arms. "Maybe I'll give you a ring for graduation instead. Cos you know, I only have five years to marry you and get you pregnant. Better get engaged sooner rather than later."

Bella choked back the protest that she knew she would expect. Instead, she wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled sweetly at him. "Just let me know when you plan on asking Charlie's permission. I'll make myself scarce for that week."

"I figure I can do it right after I scare off the bogey man Bells. He'll agree to anything then, I reckon."

She had to acknowledge that he was probably right.

"So you're fine with having me for a son-in-law then?" Jake's grin was still wide as he looked Charlie straight in the eyes.

Not quite understanding that this was a serious question, Charlie snorted and raised his beer in Jake's direction. "Good luck getting the ring on her finger son." He chuckled and took a long pull of his drink, grateful for some levity.

"It's in our five year plan," Jacob informed him.

Charlie choked mid-pull. Jake helpfully pounded on his back a few times. "You have a five year plan?" he croaked when he could breathe again.

"Nah, we have a sixty year plan," the young man announced confidently.

"A sixty...?" Charlie's voice trailed off weakly.

"Yup. So what do you think, Charlie?" Jake's voice and demeanour were suddenly serious. "You know I love Bells; worship her actually. No other man could ever love her as much as I do. I'll devote my life to making her happy, I'll provide for her and keep her safe. And if she marries me, you know that means she'll never leave, *and* you'll have a ton of grandkids to babysit." Jake wasn't sure if he needed to use that trump card but figured it was worth throwing it in, just for good measure.

Charlie blinked. A few hours ago he had feared for everyone's life. Now he was being asked for his blessing to keep his daughter close by and married to the boy—no, the *man*—who had mobilised tribes of shifters to ensure her safety. The same man Charlie had watched grow from a baby to a toddler, from a small boy to pre-pubescence, from a young teen to the proud warrior that sat before him now, asking for his daughter's hand in marriage. The same man Charlie loved as the son he had always wanted and never had.

Charlie knew there wasn't a more honest, more loving heart in the whole of Washington State than that of Jacob Black. And he also knew that same heart was owned by one Bella Swan.

Choked with emotion suddenly, Charlie gave his response. "It would be my honour to call you my son-in-law." He waved his hand with an attempt to lighten the suddenly serious mood. "Of course you know all about my shotgun and knowledge about burying bodies so they'll never be found."

Jacob's eyes spoke more than words ever could. "Thank you." With a sudden sly grin, he added, "Wait till Bells hears. She said you'd freak out. I told her if I asked you right after I scared off the bogey man, you'd agree."

Charlie hid his smile. Jacob had achieved much to be proud of that day. There was no need to share the truth with him.

The truth was that without the bogey man, Chief Swan would still have given his daughter willingly to Jacob Black. Because without the beasts and the vampires, without the war that he had led that very morning, Jacob Black would still be a hero to Chief Swan.

Because when his daughter was in a dark, broken place and Chief Swan feared for her sanity every day, it was the sunny boy sitting before him who had brought her back to life.

***Chapter 45*: THANK YOU**

I had wanted to attach this message to a new outtake but time is slipping away and I haven't had a chance to sit down and write the outtake as yet. So for now, this is just an incredibly massive THANK YOU to everybody who voted for *Worthy of the Wolf* in the JBNP Awards.

YOUR votes won first place for both Best Breakout Story and the "No Matter What You Love" Award. I can't even begin to tell you how much that means to me.

Expect a new outtake soon as a thank you to each and every person who voted.