

## Chapter Nineteen: Floating in the Blackness

It was hard to open my eyes. It was as if library paste was keeping them in place. Every time I tried, it felt half-dried and crumbly on my eyelashes. My head hurt, and I didn't know why. I couldn't remember anything, my mind floating somewhere off in space and time. My entire body seemed oddly heavy. A machine beeped, but I didn't know what kind it was. It was soft, somewhere in the distance. It did it again. I turned my face towards the noise. Finally, one eye peeled open and then the other. Looking didn't help answer my question. I blinked for several moments. My vision was blurry.

"Bella, darlin?" Jasper asked worriedly. He wasn't in front of me. It took an effort to make my head turn to the other side to find him. He was sitting beside me in a chair, close to my bedside. "Hey. Focus on me," he cooed. I tried to, my eyes still fluttering. Lightly, his fingertips combed my hair out of them. Finally, it became clear.

My poor husband was covered in scrapes and bruises. There was a small square bandage on his neck and some stitches on his forehead. Even so, he was smiling. I realized he was holding my hand and that it was in a brace. I wiggled my fingers in his grip to see what it felt like, but there was nothing.

"What happened?" I questioned softly.

"Someone purposefully ran into us. It made the car flip. We don't know who yet. They drove off. The vehicle was reported stolen this morning, and it's already been found abandoned in a parking lot," he explained in a calm voice. Jasper was trying to keep me from getting too upset. "You hit your head pretty good, and you sprained your wrist, but other than that and a lot of bruises, you're okay."

That was something. "How long was I unconscious?"

Grimacing, he bit his lip for a moment. "They had to sedate you at the scene because you were panicking and struggling with the EMTs. But you were in shock and scared. You didn't do anything wrong. You've been asleep for a few hours now." He combed his fingers through my hair again. "You needed the rest."

I opened my mouth a little, then shook my head. "I don't remember," I whispered.

"That's normal," he assured me as he scooted closer in his seat. He was right on the edge and leaning forward. Gently, he ran his hand over my stomach. "How are you feeling?"

“Confused. Numb. Sore.” I brought my other hand up to my skull, where it ached. It had an IV in it and pulled a bit, tugging at the tape. There was a huge goose egg at the top. “Ow.”

“Yeah, you’re going to be uncomfortable for a few days at least. I’m sorry,” he sighed.

“It’s not your fault, Dr. Hale,” I said in a soft, airy voice with a slight smile. Then I looked down at my line. “Oh, they’re giving me pain killers. That’s why. I don’t feel anything. It’s going to suck tomorrow.”

Jasper chuckled. “Probably.”

“They don’t know who? Did they find camera footage of them?” I questioned.

He shook his head. “No. Not yet. Hopefully, soon. You don’t need to worry about that right now. You just need to get better.” He rubbed his thumb over my knuckles of my injured fist. They barely peeked out of the brace. Clearing his throat, he gazed at my hand. “I don’t suppose there is anything you’ve needed to tell me?”

I stared at him in confusion. I literally spewed my every thought to him whenever I had them. It was a problem he found charming. “What?”

“Yeah, that’s what I figured,” he mumbled to himself before forcing a smile. Jasper finally glanced at me. His tongue darted out to moisten his lips. Scoffing, he peered at the ceiling for just a second. “So, guess what?”

“What?” I repeated. I wasn’t in the condition to figure out anything.

His hand rubbed over my belly again. “I’m going to be a father.”

“Who the fuck did you knock up?” I asked automatically, making him laugh loudly. The sound confused me. I shook my head. “No. I’m on birth control.”

“It’s not one hundred percent effective. When was the last time you got your shot?”

Blinking, I thought about it for several seconds. It was hard to find the information in my cluttered brain. I started from the beginning. The first time I got it in was November, then again in April when we were in Albany. And I was supposed to go six months later...

Supposed to.

“Oh no,” I gasped as I sat up quickly. It hurt, though. “Oh, fuck.” I put my hand on my gut. “No, no, no, no... Shit, I am so stupid. I am so sorry.”

Instantly, he moved to the edge of the bed. “Why are you apologizing?” Jasper questioned, taking my face in his hands. I was already beginning to cry. “I am so happy.” He rubbed his thumb over my cheek. “It’s okay,” he breathed before kissing me. “This is a good surprise- a fantastic one.”

“I’m not ready,” I whimpered as my bottom lip quivered. “We just got married and my career-” I leaned into him, gripping his shirt tightly. My nose was pushed into it. It smelled mildly of gasoline and burned rubber. I didn’t care.

“This won’t slow down your work. I promise. I will help every step of the way.” He brought his hand back to my stomach. He pressed it to the center. “We will make sure you have all the time and energy you need to continue being the kick-ass author that you are.”

“How far along am I?” I asked in a tiny voice.

“Eight weeks.”

I gasped. I was almost to the second trimester already. “But I’ve been drinking so much!”

He shook his head to keep me from freaking out and feeling guilty. “It’s okay. It’s still early. Just stop now, and it’ll be fine.” He curled his fingers over my tummy. “We’ll start eating healthier, and I’ll stop indulging, too.” Lightly, Jasper kissed my forehead. “My pretty little Mama.”

Loudly, I sobbed. Everything was too much. He rocked me until I ran out of steam and laid back. He held me in his arms until I fell into a drugged sleep. It’s what I needed. I had so many nightmares, but I couldn’t describe them beyond just terrifying and filled with screams. My own and an infant’s.

A nurse woke me up early in the morning to take out my IV and give me vitamins for the baby. When my breakfast tray came, it looked disgusting, so I pushed it away with a wrinkled nose. Jasper opened the milk and passed it to me with a straw. “At least drink this, so the pills don’t upset your stomach, and I’ll get you something from the cafeteria. Iron can be rough on your system.”

“Yes, sir,” I said a little sarcastically as I took it from him. It wasn’t cold enough for my tastes, but I finished it quickly. I made sure to slurp the end to make a point. He rolled his eyes but was still smiling.

There was a quick, sharp knock on the door before it opened. Caroline popped her head in. I looked at the clock, realizing visiting hours just started. She must have been waiting outside to come in. “Oh, baby!” She whimpered as she rushed into the room. She hurried to the bed, but Jasper stopped her from pouncing on me.

“Careful. She took the impact on her side,” he reminded her as he hugged her gently. He was sore too.

“Right, I’m sorry.” She gave him a pained grin and came to the other side. My mother-in-law grabbed my hand and gently squeezed it. “How are you feeling?”

Grimacing, I tried to sit up. I had slouched down on the mattress. “I’m in a lot of pain, but I’ll live. I’ve never been in an accident before.”

“That wasn’t accidental, though. It was a deliberate hit-and-run,” my husband reminded me. “They were coming for you.”

Caroline leaned in and brushed the hair out of my eyes. “Don’t you worry, honey. We’ll take care of you until you’re on your feet again. You can stay at our house. We have that gigantic wall, and we can get a bunch of big dogs with sharp teeth to bite ‘em if they try anything stupid,” she continued to rant in a thick southern accent.

It was hard not to grin at her. “I just need to rest.”

Nodding, she tried to smile for me. “I am so angry right now. When I find the person doing this, I’m going to give them exactly what they deserve.”

“Me too,” her son swore with every bit of anger in his heart. It was a frightening promise.

There was another knock on the door. I half expected it to be Rose and Emmett, but it was a nurse with a big machine. “Hi, everyone! Do we have the whole family?”

“Almost. His sister is on her way,” his mother informed us. She looked at her son. “She has just been beside herself, worried about y’all. It’s not a good idea for Mamaw to be at the hospital around all these sick people, or she’d be up here, too.”

“No, it’s okay,” Jasper said with an anxious laugh. “We understand. Everybody doesn’t need to run up here. We’re alright. Just bounced around.”

The woman continued to set up as we spoke. She rolled it over to me, plugging it into the wall. “So, Mom,” she began talking to me. She had a big smile on her face. “We want to do another ultrasound to check on the baby. Do we need to kick everyone out, or can they stay for the show?” She pointed at the machine. “I’m fine either way.”

“You’re pregnant?” Caroline asked in a loud, high-pitched voice. Her hands flew up to her mouth in surprise.

“Oops,” the poor nurse breathed, her cheeks turning red. I lost any hope of keeping the information to ourselves for a day. I hadn’t even got around to thinking about telling everyone yet. I was still processing it myself.

“She’s two months,” Jasper answered for us in a soft voice. “We found out last night.”

She didn’t scream as I expected her to. Her mouth was opened wide as her eyes went glossy. A sound like a cough came from her throat. Then she fainted, going face-first into the bed railing with a thump. She slid down the side slowly until her knees were on the floor.

Her son, her husband, and the nurse all ran to her. She was only out for a second. Jasper kneeled in front of her, making sure she wasn’t bleeding. There was a mark on her forehead.

“My baby is going to have a baby. He’s going to be a daddy. Oh,” she wept right as she came to, leaning into him. Her fingers curled into his shirt as she held on as tightly as she could. He embraced her closely, rocking her as she let her overwhelming excitement out.

“I am so sorry,” the nurse began to apologize. “I didn’t realize everybody didn’t know.”

I brought my hand up to stop her, shaking my head. “It’s okay. We can’t keep things quiet in this family anyway,” I laughed as I sniffled.

Justin wordlessly leaned over the bed to hug me. He was silently crying. It wasn’t hard like his wife, but the tears were still there. His warm, wet kiss pressed against my cheek. “You’re going to be amazing parents,” he whispered to me.

“Thank you,” I tried not to cry myself. I wasn’t sure I believed him. Fear overwhelmed me. I felt simultaneously too young and too old to be a mother. All my energy at that moment was gone.

He patted his hand on my belly. “Oh, there’s a tiny Hale in there. If he’s a hellion like his father and aunt, good luck.”

“I hope it’s a girl,” Caroline added as she sat back in her chair finally. “I want to spoil her.”

“How about we hope they’re just happy and healthy?” Jasper offered lightly. “It’s a little early to worry about their gender.”

She nodded in agreement eagerly. She wouldn’t care what she got, as long as she received the grandchild she always wanted.

There was another knock on the door. This time it was my brother- and sister-in-law. She looked as if she hadn't gotten any sleep the night before. They seemed confused by the scene they walked in on. I wasn't sure what they were expecting, but probably not that.

"What's going on?" Rosalie drawled, looking around at every teary-eyed face. "Is everything okay? What's with the big ass machine?"

Jasper stood from his mother's side. "Bella's about to have an ultrasound."

"On her wrist?" She questioned, pointing at my injury. "I didn't think it was that bad. Do they think you broke it now?"

"No. She's going to have a baby!" His mother said through her happy tears. "I'm finally going to be a grandmother."

Her mouth dropped open. "Really?" She asked in barely a breath. She was hurt and jarred.

Nodding, I instantly felt guilt fill me. They had been trying for so long, and we got that way by accident.

Emmett laughed with pure joy. His smile was huge. "That is CRAZY! Yes! Congratulations!" He brought Jasper into an enormous bear hug and slapped his back. "Good job, man."

I giggled because I couldn't help myself. He was pleased for us, no jealousy in his reaction at all. My emotions were getting the better of me again. "We weren't trying to get this way! I forgot to schedule my shot. So much has been going on."

The nurse stood beside the machine. "I hate to interrupt, but I still need to do that ultrasound. Everyone in or out?" She asked me because my opinion was the only one that mattered.

"In," I said because there was no way that I would deprive any of them of this experience.

They turned off the lights, and Jasper sat on the opposite side of me so he could watch the screen. His mother and father were standing by the head of the bed. Rose and Emmett were at my feet. Everyone was silent as they waited to see the newest member of the family for the first time.

I had to adjust the blanket, so I didn't show off my boring white underwear as I lifted the gown to my breasts. There was no bump or any telltale sign. The gel she squirted on me was

surprisingly warm. The wand helped spread it all around before she flicked on the screen. She had to press harder than I expected. It dug into my bladder uncomfortably.

“There we go. Right there,” she stated as she adjusted something. She pressed several buttons, then turned the scan so we could see it better. There was a tiny blob floating in the blackness. “There’s your baby.”

“If you say so,” Emmett chuckled as he leaned in and squinted. “What’s what?”

She clicked on things, taking a still picture. Then she marked places on the screen. Leg, arm, butt, head. They were just little nubs, but I could see what she was talking about once she pointed it out. It wasn’t human, for sure, but it was turning into something like that.

The images moved again. She slid the wand lower. Finally, she clicked a button several times in a row. It made a noise like static fill the room. Then a pattern emerged. Bomp, bomp, bomp...

“There is their heartbeat. Nice and strong. Looks like everything is normal.”

“What’s her due date?” Caroline questioned. It was a good one. I didn’t know that either, and I wasn’t sure if Jasper did.

She hummed, waffling her head from side to side. “I’m going to put it around September thirteen. Give or take. These things are never exact.”

“That’s my birthday,” I squeaked with a little laugh. Jasper squeezed my hand. When I looked at him, he grinned. He had tears in his eyes, too. Great things kept happening to me on that day.

Rose touched my foot to get my attention. She smiled at me, happy and sweet. “What a wonderful gift.”