



Epilogue: In My Imagination

“Tonight’s special guest is a multi-award winner best-selling author. Her latest work, ‘The Scarlet Garden,’ the long-awaited sequel to the young adult novel sensation, ‘The Emerald Sea,’ just hit shelves at number one earlier this week! And I’ve already finished reading it.” The audience got louder. “Let’s give it up for a friend of the show, Isabella Swan!” Laurent said cheerfully as he stood from his desk chair with his hands opened wide to the crowd. They were standing and clapping for me as I walked out onto the stage.

Smiling, I took his hand and gave it a quick shake before I sat down. There was no nervousness anymore. I knew exactly what I was doing, and I was damn good at it. And we were actually friends, so it was fun. “I always get the best welcomes when I come here! Thank you so much!”

He sat too, adjusting his tie as he did. "It's because we love you here," he chuckled. "So, we've got a lot to talk about today!"

"We do!" I agreed. "It's been a very busy year."

Leaning in, he spoke as if we were alone at dinner. "So, first, I am so excited about The Cop's Story coming out. I'm so glad it's on HBO, and that'll be a mini-series. Frankly, I think nothing other than a hard-R would do it justice. I've already got my DVR set."

Softly, I laughed. "I've got my popcorn ready. Um, it'll be gritty for sure. I'm thrilled. Angela, the director, has really done it beautifully, and I was delighted to work with such a talented person. It was amazing to be on the set like that. She doesn't hold back any of the punches. And I feel like I'm a much better screenwriter this time around, so I'm a bit more confident, and I can relax and enjoy the experience."

"Well, since you won an Oscar for the best-adapted screenplay, I think you should be at this point," he chuckled, and the crowd clapped for me. It made me blush for a second. It always caused me to a flush when praised like this, but I was good at playing this role. "I watched it again when I found out you were going to be on. It's one of my all-time favorite movies, and it deserved every award it won."

"Thank you!" I beamed. "I'm really proud of it. Honestly, it's a little piece of my soul since it was written during such a rough period in my life, as was the original novel. I poured so much into it, and I'm glad it showed in the final product. But it helped that I was able to work with a crew who was so passionate about the source material. They wanted to make it my vision, and they succeeded in every way."

"All of your stories are just incredible," he sincerely promised. He leaned in again as he got more serious. His tone changed, and his expression was solemn. "Speaking of that period, the seventh anniversary of the I-90 Tracker, Royce King, being captured is coming up in the next few months. How are you doing with that? You went through so much, as did your husband."

I forced a smile. I had been asked some sort of version of this question so many times. And I would be for the rest of my life. For the rest of my days, I would be bound to 'The King and the Killer DA,' as they had been dubbed in the press, but I would never give them any power. "I'm doing great. Luckily, I have an amazing support system. My partner and my family and friends are just incredible people. It was a traumatic experience, but we've been able to move past it with lots of therapy. I'm good at not letting the monsters into my head, which is helpful. I still think about it every day, but it's not emotional."

"Do you ever speak to Bree Tanner?"

This time my grin was more genuine. “Yes, often. We email back and forth.” She didn’t go by that name anymore, though. She was under special protection and had changed it years before. The girl who saved my life was now Becca and married to a lovely woman named Julie, who was a grief counselor. They adopted six dogs and lived in the middle of nowhere on a farm somewhere in Washington. She was vegan and grew most of her own food. “Once you share an event like that, it’s hard not to connect with someone. She’s doing well, but she’s very private. It’s something we have in common.”

“I think we can all understand that, but that’s fantastic to hear. I’m glad she’s doing okay.” Once again, his posture and tone changed, like switching on a light. “So, you’re not just here to promote *The Scarlet Garden*, which there needs to be a Harry Potter-style movie series of.” I giggled at his words. “Just my personal opinion,” he chuckled as he lifted his palms up innocently. It was already in the works after the final one in the trilogy came out, but I couldn’t talk about either of those things yet. “But you’re here for a children’s book that you’ve done with your husband, too!”

“I am!” I beamed as I clapped my hands together. This was why I was really there and what I was most excited about. “I wrote a story for our son Charlie’s fifth birthday earlier this year, and his extremely talented father, Jasper Hale, did all the pictures for it. It’s called ‘In my Imagination,’ and it’s a mix of everything he loves. Cars, dinosaurs, cowboys, animals, monsters, and candy. You know, things all kids do. It comes out just in time for Christmas, and all profits go to funding school library programs around the country.”

They showed a couple of pages on the screen beside us. It was my talented man’s work on full display for the world to see. It was so beautiful. He got better with every passing year, but he did it constantly. It was how he healed.

Our baby loved it so much, but Jasper made sure he was involved in the art on every page. Besides me, Charlie was his Daddy’s favorite subject to draw, and he adored being in a book. Since starting preschool, he told all of his friends and anyone who would listen to him. I had already arranged to give every child at his school a copy of their own and would read the entire thing for them before throwing the cutest release party ever. There would be people in costumes, games, music, dancing, and all the kinds of foods children love.

Laurent looked so impressed. The audience ‘Awed’ and ‘Oohed’ at each new page they saw. “That is just stunning. I adore the colors. You know, I don’t have any kids, but I’m going to buy copies for my nieces for sure. They’re three and five and are going to love it.”

“That’s fantastic! I hope they do!”

He shifted, moving on to the end of the interview. I knew this was one of the topics they were going to bring up. It was time to hustle. “So, do you have any fun plans for the new year? You’re one of the busiest ladies in the business.”

Boy, he wasn't kidding.

"Well, after I get done with the press tour up here, I'm taking a little vacation. But it's only a week. Then I've actually got two weddings coming up where I will be a maid in the next few weeks. My good friend and agent, Eric, is marrying the other screenwriter from *A Rabbit in the Snow*, Felix Von. And he also worked on *The Cop's Story*." They put up a picture of them at the premiere. The couple was in matching suits. The next was with me in the middle, looking tiny in comparison to the two gentlemen. They wanted me to talk about it, to help promote our work. Marriages were always marvelous news, and the awards season was coming up. "Oh, my God. They're so sweet together! He looks so happy."

Shaking his head, Laurent chuckled. "Two weddings, though? That's a lot of cake."

"Yes! I'm so excited!" I laughed. "For the cake. Not the effort that comes with it. I'm actually going to be the matron of honor at my best friend's. And I might be more nervous than her because I never had one with lots of people, but she's a vice principal, and she's used to being in front of crowds. It'll also be at her dad's church, and her future in-laws are planning something with a thousand people." I shuddered playfully. "Just a cold sweat thinking about it."

Honestly, it hadn't shocked me that much that Edward asked Alice out to rebound from Tanya. He was an idiot who thought with his penis and wanted to stop hurting. What surprised me was that he got her pregnant within six months, and they moved in together before the baby was born. And he was never happier. It was a remarkable difference. Instead of cocky and brash, he was a calm and caring father. He was still weird, but they were strange together. T was happy for them. I enjoyed being a godmother, and Vanessa, their daughter, and Charlie were best friends. It made it better.

Jasper tolerated him at best and was vaguely sassy and sarcastic, like the snide asshole he could be, at worst. It always amused me.

"So, if people want to buy '*In my Imagination*' or '*The Scarlet Garden*', or any of the other amazing stories you've written, where can they go?" He held up both books that sat on his desk. They also came up on the screen.

"As always, you can go to my website, [Isabella Swan dot com](http://IsabellaSwan.com). You can also follow me on pretty much all social media platforms at that name, and there are links everywhere. And, if you're old school, you can go to your neighborhood bookstore and help support a local business!"

Laurent stood up and held out his hand to me. "Isabella Swan, everybody!"

I got a standing ovation. Beaming, I bowed a little. Then they went to a commercial break to reset for the end of the show. A production assistant escorted me to the green room. Jasper was waiting for me, grinning as he sat on a couch and watched from a television screen on the wall.

“Very well done, Mrs. Hale,” he said in a charming voice. It was our last stop of the day, and he was alone. He stood and walked to me, putting his hands on my shoulders before he leaned in to kiss my lips tenderly. “They always love you, but I can see why,” he flirted.

Though he was still my personal bodyguard, the job was much different than it was before. Sometimes there were pushy fans, but I was never scared for my life. Often, he acted as a wrangler, forcing folks to wait their turn and get in line. But that generally only happened when we were in big cities like LA or NYC.

His real passion was being a stay at home father to our son. They spent almost every day together, making art, playing sports, or whatever fun things his father could come up with. He tried to pretend he enjoyed the quiet time now that he started school, but I could see he missed his little buddy.

His cell phone interrupted our moment. Sighing, he pulled it from his pocket. When he saw the number, he grinned. He put it on the speaker right away. “Hello?”

“Hi, Daddy!” Charlie shouted. “Mamaw said I could call you.”

“Hey, sweetie!” I cooed, leaning in.

Our son switched it to the camera. “HI, MOMMY!” He yelled. His two-year-old cousins, twin blond-haired, blue-eyed girls, were right beside him. We could see right up his nose. They all had McDonald’s cups and chocolate on their faces while in the back seat of Justin’s big SUV. “We went to the park with Mamaw and Gramma Caroline. It was fun! I miss you, though.”

“We miss you, too,” Jasper smiled at him. He was glowing with his happiness. “But we’ll be home in a few days. You should see how much stuff Momma has bought you. And you, ladies.” The girls grinned at their favorite uncle.

“Thank you!” They said in a chorus. They were the cutest. “Oh! We’re here! Okay. I love you! BYE!” And then he hung up on us without waiting for an answer.

We both laughed softly as he put his cell phone away. Jasper shook his head. “He’ll get the hang of it someday.” He brushed his fingers over my cheek. “So, what else do we need to do today?”

“I’m all done. We are free to start that vacation now.” I wrapped my arms around his neck, letting them drape down his back. His grin grew wicked as he pulled me closer, one of his hands running up my spine.

“And how would you like to spend this evening?”

Playing coy, I pecked his lips as I pushed my fingers into the back of his thick, now graying hair. “I don’t know. Do you have any ideas, sir?”

He buried his face in my neck, pushing our chests flush with his hand on my ass. “How would you like to go out and do a scene? We can have some champagne and cake after.” His tongue moved over his ear. “Or during. I can eat it off of you.”

I shuddered at his touch. He always knew how to work me to make me turn into putty in his hands. Another one of his skills that only improved with the years. “That sounds incredible, but I can’t have any champagne.”

Jasper instantly stopped, pulling away to look into my eyes. He was too smart to not put it together right away. He was already beginning to tear up, a hopeful smile tugging at his full lips. We had been trying again for years. We were worried my eventful pregnancy would stop us from having another. “How far along are you?”

“Nine weeks.”