



Chapter Forty-two:

Death had always been on my mind. My own. My mother's. I knew how much I was like her. And I knew, I just knew, I would die like her. Suddenly and at a very young age. I was convinced as a child I would perish without her, and I almost did. I lost the will to move. To eat. It became so bad I spent a lot of time in the hospital. First, in the children's section and then in the psychiatric ward.

They said I got better, but I always debated whether or not that was true.

I ate, yes. And I began moving around. I slowly spoke again. But I wasn't sure I ever really felt like I was living. I was going through the motions.

When Carmen was born, it helped. I felt like my mother had a hand in it all, giving me someone to love and care about. I adored my half-sister from the moment I saw her, beautiful with her dark eyes and olive skin. So, I decided to live as much as I could until I died. But I was just waiting for the end.

I never allowed myself to get emotionally close to anyone. I did physically, but after college, after I almost ruined my family's reputation with my stupidity, that nearly stopped. I was human, only a man, so I had the occasional fling, but it never lasted more than a few weeks at a time.

I offered to move to Shreveport, away from my family in Chicago, because I felt like my time was running short. I wanted them to get used to the separation. My thirty-fourth birthday felt

like the beginning of the countdown to my end. My mother didn't make it to thirty-five, and I knew I wouldn't either. And I was at peace with that. I tried not to let anyone see it, especially my loved ones, but I quietly wrapped up my affairs and prepared myself.

Then I saw Bella, and everything changed.

I wanted her. I needed her from the very second that I beheld her strength and beauty for the first time. As lovely, wet, and angry as she was. I had never been with a woman as stunning as her before, with her snow-white skin and enchanting dark mahogany hair. She was so fierce, so passionate. Short in stature and big in attitude. Spunky, as my stepmother had called it. It was a good word for it.

But then I did something stupid. I hired her. I figured I could deal with it, and it would be easier for her if- when- I died if there was no emotional attachment. I should have known better. I should have known from the first instant she would own me, but I had no idea she would love me in return.

And it made it all that much worse. I had never had a desire to live before. But I wanted to. I wished for a life with Bella. I needed to marry her. And I wanted to have children with her. And she, I think, wanted that with me too. My fear of death, something new, ate me alive. I hadn't been frightened before. I longed for it. But I didn't know how to fight something off I had invited in so warmly before.

I ate better, mostly through Bella's help, and I exercised more. I even went to the doctor to have my heart checked, though I didn't tell her about it. I didn't want her to worry about it. He said I was as healthy as a horse, but I really didn't believe him.

But, I knew as I sat there on my knees at the end of the bed as she screamed in agony, this would be the death of me.

I never, ever, imagined that this would be what killed me. But if anything happened to my Bella, I would curl up and die. Suicide was not even a question. I would make sure she was buried in a beautiful dress safely in the ground, and then I would swallow the gun I kept in the library safe.

And I would be happy to do so. I knew I couldn't live without her, and I wouldn't even attempt to.

I attempted to soothe her as I tried to find out what was wrong, but she just kept wailing as she jerked back and forth, her legs kicking wildly. I dashed off of it to look for the pants containing my cell phone and immediately dialed 911. They asked me a few questions and promised the ambulance would be there in a few minutes.

When I hung up, I realized I was still nude. I grabbed the first thing I could find in the closet, a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie, throwing them on as quickly as possible. I put on flip-flops as I slipped my phone and keys into my pocket.

Bella's screams hushed, but she was still jerking around. I sat down beside her, taking her hand and squeezed it tightly. It wasn't a seizure. I had seen one of those before, back in college, when someone overdosed in class. No, she was trembling in pain.

Faint purple bruises were spreading across her lower stomach where she had dug at her skin, the sheet pulled away from her in all her moving. I tried to cover her back up before running downstairs to open the door for the EMTs. They told me not to move her. Otherwise, I would have taken her down there to wait. It would have been nice to have her cradled in my arms.

It felt as if they took forever to get there. In all honesty, it was probably only a couple of minutes. But every second, it was as if she was being pulled away from me.

Was fate so cruel that it would let me taste happiness just to rip it away? I already knew the answer to that.

Bella passed out from the pain, which may have been a good thing. The EMTs were talking amongst themselves, but I couldn't make out any of the words. When they finally put her on a stretcher with an IV in her arm, a police officer had to shake me to get my attention. I hadn't even realized he was there.

"You can't go with them, but I'll give you an escort. They're taking her to LSU Med since it's the closest. Sir? Do you think you can drive?"

"Yeah," I finally answered, trying to shake myself awake from the stupor I was falling into. My chest ached fiercely as if my heart had been cut out of it. I rubbed the gaping hole with my palm, wishing it away.

I flew downstairs and snagged a set of keys to the first car I came across. I thanked God the hospital we were going to be literally less than two minutes away. Especially at the speeds they were going.

I tried to follow her into the room, but someone, a nurse, grabbed my shoulder and told me I couldn't go in with her. They had to examine her and figure out what was going on. They needed space to work, and I had to go to the waiting room. And that they would tell me what was going on as soon as they knew.

The last thing I wanted to do was wait. I cursed loudly, though I wasn't even sure what word fell from my lips. I made my way to the crowded waiting area. The chairs were filled with

people. Most of them had the flu. Instead of taking up a seat, I made my way to an empty corner and sank down into it.

I rubbed my fingers through my hair as I tried to figure out what I needed to do. My head was foggy and aching. Tugging at it, I willed myself to think, but all I could imagine was death-Bella's and my own.

I was so terrified.

Finally, I swallowed it back, realizing I needed to tell Bella's parents that something was wrong, but I didn't have their numbers. All I had was Alice and Jasper's. I hoped they had them because I would not leave the hospital until Bella did.

I dialed and waited for an answer, but there was none, so I tried again. I knew it was late, but I didn't care. It didn't matter. Finally, a very sleepy sounding woman responded. "Hello?" She asked in confusion.

"Alice," I started out in a shaky tone.

I heard rustling in the background as she sat up in her bed. "Edward, what's wrong?" She instantly seemed more alert.

"I don't know," I breathed. "We're at the hospital, and I don't know. She just began screaming and shaking. She said it was her stomach. But I don't- they haven't told me anything yet. We just got here."

"Okay, which one? Jasper, get up. It's Bella," she spoke desperately.

"LSU Medical. I need your help. Do you have Charlie and Renee's number? I need to call them. I have to tell them. Charlie's Bella's next of kin, and he's the one that can make-" I stopped myself, not wanting to finish the sentence. He was the one that could make life and death decisions for her.

"Yeah, I've got them."

"Tell Renee if she can't afford to pay for the flight, I will. She'll probably have to wait until morning to come. Tell Jasper to get her in contact with Angela, my secretary, okay?"

"Of course," she breathed. "I'll call Charlie first. Where are you at right now?"

"Emergency room waiting area. Give them my phone number, please," I said, trying to think of what else I needed to do. My fingers were trembling, and my breath was coming out in shaky huffs. The ache only got worse and worse.

“I will. I’ll call them, and we’ll be right over. Call my cell or Jasper’s if you hear anything before then. We’ll be there in a few minutes, Edward. It’ll be okay.”

“Okay,” was all I could say. I wasn’t sure if it was an answer or if I was just repeating her. The word tasted awful in my mouth, heavy and metallic.

I slid my phone into my hoodie pocket as I drew my knees in closer to me and buried my fingers in my hair again. Tugging it so sharply that it hurt, I had to keep myself from vibrating apart. It was the only thing that kept me focused.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, I heard a petite nurse call my name. She couldn’t have been older than twenty. I was positive if it was horrible news, they wouldn’t send the new girl. If Bella had died... they would...

I couldn’t even bring myself to think about that.

“Mr. Masen,” she called again. I got up from my corner and walked towards her. “Mr. Masen?” She asked once more, just to make sure, and I nodded. “If you’ll follow me, the doctor wants to talk to you.”

“Okay,” I repeated the awful word. Following her down the hall, the light was harsh and overbearingly white.

“Hello.” An older physician shook my hand. He said his name and what he specialized in, but I didn’t really catch it. All I saw was Bella laying out in bed, her eyes closed, and her body covered in a hospital blanket. There was a set of tubes in her arms and a mask on her face for oxygen. What finally caught my attention was when the man mentioned surgery.

“I’m sorry, could you say that again?” I breathed.

“I know this is difficult.” He smiled kindly as if he knew I wasn’t there. “We did an ultrasound of Ms. Swan’s abdomen, and we’ve discovered a very large tumor on her right ovary. It’s twisted and has ruptured. Do you know if she’s on any medication?”

“She’s on birth control. That’s it.”

“Do you know what kind?” He asked, writing it down.

“Uh, I’m not sure. It’s something really common. Low dose, but she said it was causing her some issues. She was considering trying something else,” I explained. “She’s been having so many problems with her period lately. Cramping and such. She thought it was just the birth control.”

“How long has she been having issues?”

“A couple of months. Not that long, really. Can tumors grow that fast?” I inquired softly, feeling stupid for not making her go to the doctor. Could she have been in that much pain and not said anything?

“It depends on the type.”

“What’s going to happen now?”

He continued to write. “We’re preparing her for surgery in just a few minutes. We’ll have to remove the entire ovary. There is a possibility that we’ll have to take out all of her reproductive organs. Mr. Masen, there’s also a chance that the tumor is cancerous.”

“Will she be okay?” I whispered, looking into the room at my silent and beautiful love. Even in a drug-induced sleep, she looked pained, her fingers curled tightly at her side.

The doctor sighed heavily. “We believe she will survive the surgery, yes.”

“What about afterward?” I demanded.

“We’ll have to wait and see. I can’t tell you anything else until we get more information. She’ll be leaving for surgery in just a few minutes. We hope it won’t last more than a couple of hours, but it may be more. There is always a chance of death when there is an operation, so all I can say is that we believe it will go well, and we’ll have to deal with whatever is next as it comes.”

All I could do was nod. “Can I see her?”

“Only for a moment. The nurses will come for her soon.”

He said something else, but I didn’t hear him. I just walked into her room and sat on the stool beside her bed. There was a monitor that beeped every few moments, keeping time with her heartbeat. Her skin was hot, nearly on fire. That meant there was an infection. I smoothed her matted bangs away from her forehead and kissed it lightly.

“I love you, Bella. Please be alright. Be okay for me? I beg you. I’m begging you now, if you live, I will do anything you want. I’ll be your slave. I can’t- I can’t live without you. I need you. I need you more than anything else in this world,” I pleaded, the oxygen burning my lungs. I straightened her fingers, trying to uncurl the white digits. Kissing each knuckle, I breathed in her scent, but it was masked by the smell of the hospital.

“Sir, it’s time,” an orderly declared, several nurses coming into the room to detach her from the wall. I nodded and stood, making my way out. I waited until she rolled past to go towards the waiting room.

Someone caught me, the petite nurse again. “Her surgery will be on the fourth floor, in maternity. If you and her family would like, you can go to the waiting area up there. It’s the one in the left hall.”

“Thanks.” I nodded. “Her friends and family should be here in a minute. I’ll wait for them here, and then we’ll head up.”

I went out to stand by the emergency room door and slid down the wall slowly as I brought my hands to my face. I tugged at my hair as my entire being shook with fear. I wouldn’t know if she was going to be okay for hours. Maybe longer if the tumor was cancerous. I wasn’t sure what would happen next. I hated that. I wanted to know. I needed to.

I took a deep, shuddering breath before I pulled out my phone. My stepmother was the only doctor I knew, and though she wasn’t that kind, any information would make me feel better.

My father answered the home phone on the second ring, his voice ragged and confused. “Hello?”

“Dad,” I breathed out quietly.

“What’s the matter? Is everything okay?” I heard Esme in the background, asking what was going on.

“Um, no. It’s not. Can- Can I talk to Mom? I need to ask her something.”

“Tell me what’s going on,” he demanded firmly. “Are you hurt?”

“Bella, s- sh- she,” I began to cry, the dam finally breaking. “She just started screaming. She’s in so much pain. And there was nothing I could do. They s-said something about a tumor. I j- I just want to talk to Esme and ask her some questions. I know she’ll be straight with me.”

“Okay, hold on,” he responded quietly, and the phone passed hands. She was near frantic. “Something happened to Bella,” he mumbled.

“Edward, honey, what’s going on? What’s wrong?”

It was hard to get the words out. “They said she had a tumor or something on one of her ovaries. It twisted and ruptured. It’s bleeding out. We’re at the hospital, and they’re taking her up to surgery now. What’s going to happen? Is she going to be alright?”

“How long before you got her there?”

“A few minutes after she started screaming.” Though the time felt like an eternity.

“That’s good. Well, they’ll cut out the tumor first and most likely take the ovary too. Depending on certain factors, they may have to remove the rest of her reproductive organs. If they look healthy, they won’t. Hopefully, that’s the case. Bella is young. They’ll test the cyst itself to see what they need to do next.”

All this information was stuff the doctor had told me, but it was comforting in a way.

“What if she has cancer?”

“If they didn’t remove the organs in the first place, they may go back and do so. They’ll start either chemo or radiation. There is medication to help, too. It just depends, Edward. There are so many things they can do. But she’s young. She’s strong, and she’s pretty healthy. I think she’ll be alright,” Esme spoke in a soothing tone. “Honey, we’ll be there in the morning.”

“Mom,” I whispered, my voice choked up in my throat.

“We will be there in the morning,” she said more firmly, stopping any argument I may have had. I didn’t really have one. Having someone there I knew, that I was close to, seemed like a blessing. I needed somebody to lean on.

“Thanks.”

“Of course. We adore Bella, too,” she promised, and I could hear the emotion in her voice. “Alright, we’ll text when we figure out the details of our flight.”

“Esme,” I called to her before she hung up. “I love you.”

“I love you too, honey.”

I slipped my phone into my pocket and went back to pulling my hair. I wasn’t sure how long I stayed there, kind of just rocking myself back and forth before I heard someone clear their throat. It was Charlie in his sleep pants and a white t-shirt. He looked like hell, the worst condition I had ever seen him.

“Where is she?”

“They took her to the fourth floor for surgery.” I pushed myself off of the ground. “I was waiting to go until you and Alice got here.”

“Thanks,” he mumbled as he rubbed the back of his neck. “Do we know anything?”

So, I told the story to him and then to her best friend and Jasper when they arrived. She hugged me in a way she had never done before, her eyes red from crying. She whispered in my ear that everything would be alright. I just nodded because I couldn't be sure of that. It was as if my universe was shattering like a mirror, each piece jagged and tearing at my being.

I knew I was weak without Bella, but I was realizing that I was nothing without her. I could feel my mind shrinking back into itself.

The waiting room chairs felt too big, and the surrounding chatter was a dull hum. I knew some of it was directed at me, but no one expected me to answer. I couldn't have held up a discussion if I wanted to.

I did catch the fact that Renee would be flying in by mid-afternoon the next day. Charlie's bristling conversation with her was quick. He was annoyed she couldn't come in any quicker. I think he was just frustrated and wanted to take it out on someone.

My parents texted me about an hour later, saying they would be in by around dinnertime. Esme even apologized about it not being sooner, but the fact they were coming at all was wonderful.

Sometime after that, Ms. Clearwater arrived, carrying a picnic basket full of items. Seth was right behind her. It was the first time I had ever seen his young face look so grim. He shook my hand and plopped down heavily beside me. Sue was talking brightly, trying to cheer people up. She brought snacks, drinks, things to read, and puzzles for everyone. She even bought a couple of magazines just for Bella because she knew she would like them. I could hardly bring myself to look at them. I only half-heartedly smiled at her in thanks.

Time inched, crawled, dragged forward at a snail's pace. It was so painful. I hated it. My brain ached, and I was tired but too wired to even think about closing my eyes.

Finally, a doctor came out, asking if there was someone for Ms. Swan. Charlie hopped out of his chair with me by his side, the rest of the group standing up and following. He was a little overwhelmed by us, taking a minute to gather himself. “She's out of surgery and going into recovery now. We had to remove her right ovary and fallopian tube. We sent the tumor down to the lab for some further testing. We should have the results in the afternoon. She did very well, and she'll probably be waking up very soon.”

“Oh, thank God,” Sue declared from somewhere behind us.

“Can we go see her?” I asked.

“Immediate family can, but only one at a time for right now, please,” he replied with a nod of his head. Charlie frowned at me and patted my shoulder. “Once she goes to her room in a couple of hours, you can visit her.”

“I’m her father,” he told the surgeon, “I’ll go in and let you know how she looks.” He felt sorry for me. I could see it in his eyes.

“Alright, if you’ll follow me,” the young doctor said, turning back towards the double doors.

He didn’t come back out, though. I understood, in a way, but it didn’t upset me any less. I want to know everything. I needed to be in there and holding her hand.

I wanted to be her family.

I yanked at my hair so roughly I was surprised it didn’t come out in clumps. There should have been a pile on the floor. Finally, he returned with a grim expression on his face.

“Sorry,” he mumbled. “She asked me not to go. I just couldn’t leave her.”

“How is she?” I demanded desperately.

“She’s... she’s not there right now. She’s really drugged up, but that’s not surprising. They gave her quite a bit of pain medication. She kept calling for you, Edward. She would have gotten out of bed to look for you if she could move.”

“What are they doing now?”

“They’re taking her to a room. It’s 1195. Um, I believe that’s what they said.” He shook his head, exhausted. “They said to give them a few minutes to get her arranged, and all hooked up.”

Sue was by his side by then, stroking his shoulder. “Once she gets settled, we should get home so you can get some rest. You didn’t bring your medication with you, did you?”

“No,” he frowned. I wasn’t sure what he was saying no to.

“You can sleep at my home for a while if you want. It’s only two minutes away. I can call you if anything happens,” I assured him. His face was somber, but I was positive mine was too. I took my house key out of my pocket and offered it to him. “We can order more of whatever the medication you need is, and I can have my assistant pick it up.”

“I’ll get his medicine,” Sue smiled, taking the key from my palm. “Charlie, it’s a great idea. You need your rest. You have to think about your heart. You won’t do Bella any good if you’re sick yourself.”

“Fine. Once she gets settled,” he finally gave in. Alice walked over to me and squeezed my hand gently.

“Once she gets settled, Jasper and I will head out to get a quick nap too. You can call us if you need anything, and we can bring it up to you.”

No one said it, but everybody knew without question I wouldn’t be leaving her side. I couldn’t.

“Thanks, I’ll be fine,” I answered softly.

It took them longer than I liked to get her to her room. Everyone came in to check on her, talking to her. They whispered their love and their goodbyes, leaving me alone with her.

I pulled a chair to her bedside and took her left hand into my own. Kissing it lightly, I brushed my nose against her skin. But she didn’t smell like herself, like my Bella. Instead, she smelled of hospitals and the drugs in her system.

“Edward,” she called softly. Her voice was garbled and thick.

“I’m here, my love,” I breathed, my own cracking.

“Edward,” she cried again, but louder this time.

I clutched her hand and cleared my throat. “I’m here,” I spoke louder. “Don’t worry, I’m here. I’m so sorry. Everything will be okay.”

“I don’t feel good,” she mumbled.

“I know,” I acknowledged as I kissed her silky soft skin. “That’s why you need to rest now.”

“Don’t go. Please don’t go.”

“Don’t worry,” I responded. “Bella, I will never leave your side. I promise.”

“I love you,” she whispered before she fell into a deep sleep.

"I love you, too," I said, though I knew she couldn't hear me. That was probably a good thing.

I took a deep breath as I looked her over. The sun was just starting to come up, and the sky was glowing with the light blues and purples of early morning haze. It was over. We survived the night. A flood of emotions hit me, my heart beating hard in my chest. So hard that it felt like it would rip itself out, breaking through with each sharp pounding. I allowed it to wash over me as I laid my head down on the edge of her mattress, tears running down my cheeks. I felt so helpless and useless. I hated it.

I had been so accepting of death before, the thought not frightening me in the least. It was a natural part of life that I craved and welcomed with open arms. But now that she was in my life, I had never wanted to live more. Bella was my purpose, my reason for being.

Without her, I was just a shell.