



Chapter Forty-three:

I was awake before I could open my eyes. Not that I didn't try, but I failed. I heard sounds around me, and I knew I wasn't in my bed at home. My eyelids seemed heavy, far too cumbersome to lift. It was uncomfortable. I was all over, even my hands were tender. I could do little more than wiggle my fingers. And it was as if an elephant was sitting on my lower stomach. The smell of cleaner and a lot of salt assaulted my nose violently. I didn't like it at all.

The sun was warming my cheeks, or I assumed it was. A beeping got louder in my ear. As it got faster, my heart sped up nervously, which made the noise increase.

It was a heart monitor. I was in the hospital.

That explained the smell, but what it didn't explain was why I was there. I couldn't remember anything after the ball. I realized we must have gone home, but after that- it was a total blank.

When I tried to wiggle the fingers of my left hand, they seemed caught in something or rather clutched by someone- somebody with very warm and soft skin. A thin layer of sweat collected between us. I knew it must have been Edward.

When I attempted to move again, the bed shifted a little. My boyfriend groaned softly, and then there was a second of quiet with nothing but the monitor going.

“Bella,” he mumbled, his voice scratchy and slurred. My heart sped up, giving away how it reacted every time he spoke my name. “Bella? Are you awake? Can you hear me?”

“Edward,” I sighed, the word slipping from my lips. “I can’t open my eyes.”

“Oh! They’re matted. Hold on. Let me get a warm washcloth. That should help,” he stated hurriedly, finally letting go of my hand. I wriggled my fingers carefully. They were sore from being in the same position for too long.

“What happened?” I asked as I listened to him go around the room. The water came on, and then it dripped as he rang out the cloth. “Car accident?”

“No,” he answered slowly. “I’m not sure if I’d be the best at explaining. Would you prefer for me to get the doctor? He’d know more.”

“That bad? What? Did I fall down the stairs and break my back?” I inquired sarcastically, thinking that was something I would do. A rough half-laugh, half-cough racked my body, and I groaned as pain rippled from my lower stomach.

“No, nothing like that. It wasn’t an accident,” he replied seriously as his moist hand touched mine. “This is a little hot,” he mumbled before it washed over my eyes. It instantly felt much better. It was as if glue held them shut, and with the warmth, it was gone. Slowly, they fluttered open.

Edward looked like hell.

“Oh, it must have been serious,” I replied as I peered at him. I had never seen him like it before, with his face gaunt and his locks wild. Deep purple circles stood out underneath his dark green eyes, an almost full beard across his jaw. It grew fast, and I knew in a good day or two it could happen.

“It wasn’t great,” he responded with a sad smile.

“How long have I been out?”

He sighed heavily and looked at the clock on the wall. “It’s four. So, sixteen hours?” He rubbed a rough hand over his face. His expression changed, and he quickly grabbed his phone. He scrolled through several things, different messages from people. “Your mom should be here after a while. Esme, too. Your dad says he’ll be back up here around five.”

"Wow, quite a crowd," I mumbled.

"You can't say you aren't loved. We filled up almost the entire waiting room last night."

"Who was here?"

"Me, Alice, Jasper, Seth, your father, and Sue," he said as he squeezed my hand. "Oh, Sue brought you some magazines."

"Edward, tell me what happened," I pressed again. All of my friends and family were coming to see me, so I knew it wasn't positive. And his expression was still so intense, no relief in them at all. I was awake, so I must have survived whatever it was. I mustn't have been dying. Or was I?

"What's the last thing you remember?" He asked, looking away.

"You're one of the dukes of the Krewe," I told him as I squinted my eyes. "We left before anyone else could talk to us." I shook my head. "After that, nothing."

"Uh," he sighed. "Um, well... we went home, and we... played."

Smiling, I stopped him. "Oh, yes. I remember that now. I said 'six months.'"

"Yeah, we'll have to talk about that later." He almost grinned before he continued. "Afterward, we were in bed together, and you started to scream abruptly. You were in a lot of pain. Your head hurt, and so did your stomach. You passed out from it. I called 9-1-1, and they took you to LSU Med and did some tests in the ER. They found a tumor on one of your ovaries that twisted and burst. It caused you to bleed internally. They took you up to surgery right away."

"Tumor. Do I have cancer?" I asked with a trembling bottom lip.

"I don't know." He glanced away once more as if he was ashamed. Like he had done this to me.

Clutching his hand, I squeezed it so he would look at me again. "How did the operation go?"

"They said it went smoothly. They had to remove one of your ovaries and the tube that was attached to it. They're running some tests on it now. But they claimed it was the size of a softball."

"Wow." I curled my hand up as I tried to imagine that. That was big. Well, if that was inside me, that would have explained my expanding stomach. I slowly moved my palm over the

blanket. Though the area was swollen, it seemed flatter than before, even with the padding that covered it. It was odd.

“How are you feeling? Are you in a lot of pain?”

I looked at the IV in my hand and understood at once why I was so heavy headed and foggy. They had me on a morphine drip. I wrinkled my nose slightly and laid my head back against the pillow. “I’m okay, I guess. I’m kind of sore. I’d like to sit up.”

“I’m not certain that’s a good idea. I think maybe we should call a nurse or a doctor before you move at all,” he declared with his hands out in front of him as if he was ready to stop me if I tried to hop out of bed. That certainly wasn’t going to happen. I wasn’t sure I could move without assistance.

“Okay, okay,” I assured him with a slight frown.

He went for the nurse button and pushed it with a loud beep. “Yes?” The static-filled voice inquired. I couldn’t even tell if it was a man or a woman.

“Ms. Swan is awake and wants to sit up. Is that okay?” He asked nervously.

“Yeah, that should be okay. Just go slowly. I’ll be in there in a minute,” it replied. Then the static was gone.

“Maybe we should wait for the nurse-” Edward began, but I was already pushing the up bottom on the head part of the bed. Gradually, it creaked upwards until I was at a forty-five-degree angle. I wiggled my rear a little to pop my back but didn’t move too much besides that because the pull in my stomach increased.

“God, that’s so much better,” I muttered as I took the washcloth Edward had used for my eyes to wash my face. I felt so sticky. When I pulled the rough white fabric away, it had day-old makeup all over it. “Ew. I need to get this stuff off before I get all kinds of pimples.”

“Sorry,” he chuckled quietly. “I’ll see what I can do about that in a little while.”

But then there was a knock at the door, the nurse poking her head inside. “Well, hello there! It’s good to see you awake,” she spoke almost too cheerfully. She rolled in the blood pressure machine, tending to that first. “Your BP is a bit high, but that’s not too surprising. Temp is perfect. How are you feeling?” She threw back my covers.

“Gross.”

“Any pain?”

“A bit, but nothing I can’t handle.”

As she lifted my hospital gown, Edward stood beside me and stroked my hair. I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the gauzy padding covering the neat row of stitches that went from just below my belly button to the small patch of fuzz between my legs. The area was only slightly pink, and she poked it carefully. “They made your cut pretty,” she commented with a smile. “You won’t have too much scarring. Not too much swelling. No pus. That’s good.”

“She coughed earlier,” he spoke up softly, “and it caused her some pain.”

“Oh! Yeah, that’s normal. You’ll cough a lot more once you move around some. It’s all that crap they pump into you to knock you out. What you want to do is hold a pillow over your stomach when you feel it coming. It helps,” she added with a reassuring smile, though it wasn’t that comforting.

“When will the doctor come by?”

“He’ll make his rounds right after dinner. You’ll be getting a liquid meal tonight, and normal food can start tomorrow.” She grinned as she readjusted the blankets over me. “Alright, sweetie. Call us at the desk if you need anything.”

“Thanks,” Edward whispered as she shut the door. He gave me a small smile as he brushed some hair out of my eyes.

My poor boyfriend. He looked so sad.

“Knock, knock!” A familiar voice called from the door. Alice came in, dressed down in jeans and a long sleeve shirt with Jasper trailing behind in the same. “Hey! Look who’s awake! How are you feeling?”

“Like death warmed over,” I smirked.

She giggled and patted my foot. “Better than the alternative,” she replied as she plopped down on the couch across from the bed.

“Amen to that,” I smiled, but my man wasn’t amused by the whole thing. He sat down in his chair and went back to holding my left hand.

Alice and I talked for a long while before turning the television on to the news. My father came only a few moments before my sad dinner tray arrived. I wasn’t really hungry, but between Sue and Edward’s prodding, I ate it all.

There were so many knocks that I hardly noticed them anymore. Between family, friends, nurses, and pain medication, my reality was a little shaky. But apparently, there was another because Edward called for someone to come in. It was Esme and Carmen with a huge flower bouquet.

He hugged his sister so tightly I was surprised he didn't break her ribs. "You didn't have to come."

"Of course I did! My sis is in the hospital! I had to!" She announced as she came over to me and gave a gentle hug.

"Who's got the kids?" I asked.

"Dad," she smiled. "He was going to come down too, but he said perhaps it wouldn't be a good idea for the girls to be here, so he offered to watch them for me."

"He's probably right. That's nice of him," I commented with a slight grin. Esme came to the edge of my bed and readjusted my rough white blanket. "Thank you," I breathed.

"Of course."

"Ms. Swan?" A male voice called from the door. He popped his head in and then mouthed the word 'whoa' before coming inside. "Wow, a full house."

"It's the way I like em," I remarked.

"Hi." He shook my hand. "I'm Dr. Smith. I'm one of the doctors who operated on you last night. How are you feeling?"

I was getting very sick of hearing that question, but I knew I had to answer it for him. "Sore, but that's to be expected."

"Yes, it is," he grinned stiffly. Everyone was forcing them to make me feel better. "So, has anyone explained what exactly happened?"

"Somewhat." I shrugged.

"Well, to give just the basic details, there was a malignant tumor on your right ovary. When it became too heavy, it twisted both your ovary and your fallopian tube that connects it to your uterus, which caused it to rupture and bleed," he began, but I shook my head to stop him.

"Malignant means cancer, doesn't it?"

“Yes,” Esme said softly, her voice just a soft breath floating in the nearly silent room.

“Yes, it does. But we have some good news about that. We believe we were able to remove all the cancerous tissue when we removed your ovary. Of course, we will keep doing tests to make sure, but we don’t suspect you’ll have to go through any chemo or radiation,” the physician explained with that same smile on his face. He must have worn it for all of his patients.

“Hi,” Edward’s stepmother finally piped up and walked over to the doctor. “I’m Dr. Cullen, a family friend and hopefully future mother-in-law. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

“No, ask me anything you want,” he replied as he shook her hand.

“Will this affect her chances of getting pregnant?”

That hadn’t even been something I had thought about. Suddenly a pain grew in my chest as I considered what the answer might have been. What if he said yes? That I wouldn’t be able to have children? Edward wanted them so badly. I wanted to give him those babies- little girls with green eyes and brown hair, or boys with red curls and brown eyes, freckles dashing across their skin.

“It may lower her chances marginally, but her other reproductive organs seem healthy enough to carry. Of course, she’d want to wait until she’s fully healed before she considers becoming pregnant. A couple of years, maybe.”

“Of course,” Esme nodded her head thoughtfully. “How long do you think it will take her to recover from this?”

“Well, we will keep her in the hospital for at least a week, more depending on how she’s healing. The surgery site itself may take a month or so to heal, most likely feeling back to normal within six months unless there are complications.”.

“Like cancer,” she replied.

“Yes.”

Everyone listened to the conversation with wide-eyed attention. “Thank you,” she finally stated with a nod of her head.

After he left, everybody in the room was really quiet. That didn’t surprise me. He stated I needed to relax and try to get some rest. Despite not moving at all, I was feeling exhausted.

Carmen turned off the muted television while Esme came over to her stepson. "Edward, when was the last time you ate?"

"I'm not hungry," was all he answered.

"That's not what I asked. I know you. Have you had lunch or dinner?"

I ratted him out. "He hasn't eaten since I've been awake. Honey, why don't you go home? Go get some sleep and eat. I'll be fine here."

"I'm not leaving your side until you're out of this hospital," he swore, clasping my hand like he was afraid they would tear me away.

"I'll be fine," I repeated softly, but he shook his head. I looked over at Esme for help, but I found none. She just nodded.

"Carmen and I will go get you something," she finally announced. "The cafeteria is already closed so we'll have to go to one of the places around here. Is there anything you'd like?"

Edward only shrugged.

"How about we go over to your place and get you some fresh clothes?" Alice offered as she stood, an abnormally quiet Jasper standing beside her. I could see him remembering going through something like this with his beloved when we were teenagers, and it got to him. At least my best friend would understand better than anyone what I was about to go through, and she could help me.

"That would be nice," he finally spoke, nodding. She took the key from my dad's grip. I wanted to ask about that, but I decided it could wait.

"Could you get me some of my facial cleansers? And my toothbrush and toothpaste?" I hopefully asked.

"Of course." She grinned as she planted a kiss on my forehead. "Text us if you can think of anything else you need."

Charlie looked at his watch and groaned. "I need to go pick up your mom from the airport."

"Sorry." I gave him a half sarcastic smile. He just shrugged his shoulders. "Do you think you can have her hold off on coming up here until tomorrow? I think I'm going to sleep in a little while. I'm really tired."

“Yeah, I can try,” he assured me with a heavy pat of his hand. “I love you, baby girl. Feel better.”

“Don’t worry. They’ve got me pretty drugged up. Morphine is amazing,” I teased. He only smirked and rolled his eyes.

“Hold on a second,” Edward called to them as they were walking out. His eyes lit up as if he had thought of something. “I’ll be right back.” He followed them out of the room. I couldn’t hear the conversation, but that may have been because my eyelids were getting heavy once more, an abnormal warmth spreading through my veins.

I had only been awake for four hours, and I was ready to go back to sleep again. But I couldn’t. Something was tugging at me, and I had to talk to him about it.

When he came back in, he closed the door behind him and switched the overhead lamp off so that the light over my bed was the only one on. It gave off an eerie soft glow in the dim room.

“How are you feeling?” He asked gently when he sat in his spot across from me. I was getting bored with answering that, and he must have seen it on my face. “I’m sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“I...” He trailed off, not exactly sure what to say. “I just am. I feel so helpless, Bella. I want to take your pain away, but I can’t.”

“I wouldn’t give it to you if I could.” I shook my head. “You should know that. I don’t want you to suffer either. And don’t feel powerless. I have no doubt if I were alone when this happened that I’d be dead. As you can tell, I don’t handle pain very well.”

He gave a small smile as he looked away. “Yeah, I don’t think I handled it very well, either.”

We were silent for a long time, even the surrounding hospital quiet. It was uncomfortable and heavy, which was the only reason I didn’t slip back into unconsciousness. Suddenly I blurted out the words in my mind, my filter removed from the considerable pain medications. “What if I can’t give you babies? What if I’m broken? What if I can’t give you children? I know that you want them! Oh, god,” I began to cry, the strain in my stomach making it worse. I held the pillow to my gut as I coughed, gasping for gulps of burning air.

“Bella! Bella, stop!” He frantically begged as he took my hand. “Why are you even thinking about this right now? That’s not relevant.”

“Yes, it is.”

“No, your health is. That’s what’s important right now. Besides, you heard the doctor. You can still get pregnant. You look healthy otherwise.”

“But- B-but,” I stuttered out before coughing again. He held my hand and rubbed my back until the fit was done. I rested against the mattress, exhausted, with tears still running down my cheeks.

“No. No buts,” he finally declared firmly. “I don’t care if we have kids.”

“Don’t lie.”

“I’m not lying. Bella, so what? So what if you can’t get pregnant? I would rather have you than a thousand children. So what if you can’t get pregnant?” He repeated himself as he shook his head. “That won’t stop us from having them. There are a dozen options when we decide we’re ready to have kids. I wouldn’t love them, or you, any less.”

His eyes were so full of passion that it caught me off guard. I began to cry again, harder this time, but I had no idea why.

“If you don’t calm down, I will call the nurse and have her sedate you. You need to rest,” he spoke resolutely, squeezing my palm. “Don’t think about this now. We’ll talk about it later all you want, and I’ll show you how much it doesn’t matter then, but not now.”

“I love you,” I whimpered, my bottom lip trembling with my heavy emotions.

“I love you, too- more than anything. I can’t live without you.” He brought my hand up to his mouth and kissed each knuckle delicately as if I was made from glass. As if he was afraid to hurt me. I suppose in my condition he could have. “You are my life now,” he finally declared, his eyes glistening with unshared tears.

“Lay in bed with me,” I asked, my voice near pleading.

Frowning, he shook his head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.” But I could already see him eyeing how it could be done without injuring me. There was one simple way to do it.

I pushed myself up with my arms and wiggled my bottom over, so I was on the far side of the bed against the railing. It pulled like a motherfucker, but I wouldn’t let him know that. I kept my face a mask as I readjusted my blankets, though all I wanted to do was cry again.

“There. There’s plenty of room.”

“What if I hurt you?”

“I’ll let you know. Please? Just until I fall asleep? It won’t take long,” I promised, a fresh warmth spreading through my body.

He gave in silently, adjusting the railing so it fell to the bottom of the bed. As carefully as he could, Edward laid beside me on his side. I moved my head onto his arm and brought his other to drape across my upper chest. He locked his hands together, holding me in his grip. It was the best I had felt since I had woken up.

He nuzzled my ear and kissed it lightly. “Tell me everything will be okay,” he implored as I drifted off.

“It already is,” I assured him as the morphine won, and the world went black around me.