



Find the Cost of Freedom

Aylah50

Copyright Page

This book was automatically created by [FLAG](#) on April 19th, 2012, based on content retrieved from <http://www.fanfiction.net/s/7790285/>.

The content in this book is copyrighted by Aylah50 or their authorised agent(s). All rights are reserved except where explicitly stated otherwise.

This story was first published on January 30th, 2012, and was last updated on January 30th, 2012.

Any and all feedback is greatly appreciated - please email any bugs, problems, feature requests etc. to flag@erayd.net.

Summary

Amidst the chaotic and turbulent times of 1970, Edward has learned to stay quiet. But meeting Bella, a free-thinking hippie at Kent State University, will force him to find the conviction to stand up for what he believes in, no matter what the cost.

Chapter 1

An Age of Edward Contest Entry

Pen name: Aylah50

Title: Find the Cost of Freedom

Type of Edward: Sixties-ward

Disclaimer: SM owns all things Twilight.

Thanks to Kyla713, Tarasueme and Beammeup_00

Banner by Heatherdawn

[www\(.\)aylahfanfiction\(.\)com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Ftcof\(.\)png](http://www(.)aylahfanfiction(.)com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Ftcof(.)png)

Tin soldiers and Nixon coming,

We're finally on our own.

This summer I hear the drumming,

Four dead in Ohio.

May 1, 1970. Friday.

"You can't *honestly* believe Nixon was right, can you?"

Alice's question comes out more like a demand. She's standing now, one hand grasping her hip while the other is bracing the table, fingers splayed out across the plexi-glass. Eyes blazing, my sister's demeanor reflects such a different personality than her long flowing clothes and flowered headscarf portray.

Sprawled in a chair behind her, Jasper chuckles. As he joins his hands together behind his head, blond tendrils dangling down past his cheeks, he mutters, "Here she goes." His features are a mix of amusement and pride as he glances at up at my sister, fierce in her resolve.

If Alice hears him, she doesn't show it, her heated gaze fixed on Emmett. "You really feel that the Cambodians *deserved* to be invaded?"

"I *believe* my commander-in-chief knows what he's doing," Emmett throws back at her. "And I. Don't. Question. It." Jaw tense, teeth gritted, he punctuates every word. Hair shorn short, so different from the cherubic curls he sported before he joined the Guard, my brother is all soldier, his muscles held taut under a black t-shirt and fatigues.

And as I watch my siblings face off, I know that the first Cullen family dinner we've had in months is about to turn ugly. Again.

"Let's just try to have a nice meal, all right?" my mother, Esme, asks. She nervously smooths her turquoise polyester dress before her hands flutter to the strand of pearls permanently ensconced along her collarbone. "It's been so long since we were all together."

"Almost a year, to be exact. Before Alice ran off to that convention and disappeared for another summer." My father, Carlisle, eyes Alice coldly from his chair, where he has remained undisturbed, hands folded over his stomach. He is the picture of calm, but I know underneath that practiced exterior, he's seething. "It's your mother's birthday. Can't we all at least *try* to get along? Topics like these don't need to be discussed at the dinner table."

I sigh and stare at my plate.

In our small town of Stow, nestled amongst Ohio's quiet hills and valleys, betwixt country clubs and golf courses, no one talks about the war over dinner.

Despite the fact that fewer and fewer young men line the streets, here, everyone has been going about their business, watching the newsreels with impassionate indifference. No one discusses the war raging halfway across the world in Vietnam, or the rising turmoil that has steadily begun erupting on campuses across America.

Especially not the Cullens.

Alice's occasional visits are the only things that break the pleasantries of our dinner table conversations, her long, bellbottomed pants and vehement opinions bringing the war home in a way no news broadcast ever could.

"Sure," Alice sarcastically huffs. "Let's just forget about the suffering of innocent people and eat our chicken and hot dogs."

She drops back into the chair she'd risen from so abruptly only moments ago. Jasper leans forward to press soothing touches to her shoulder. He's been by her side for years now, but we see them so seldom, it's still a sight for me to get used to.

So are the matching wedding bands they now wear.

"The food *is* delicious." Mom forces a smile, her desperation unsteady, like a live wire crackling in her voice. "Your father did such a lovely job cooking. Thank you, dear."

Dad doesn't respond but simply glares at his eldest and the too-intimate presence of her husband's fingers on her skin. My mother's eyes flash around the table, but I can't meet her gaze. It's too hard to bear her pain - She knows it's only a matter of time before Alice leaves again.

Emmett is the first to retrieve his food from his plate, and a deadly silence settles at the table. On the manicured lawns and cement sidewalks surrounding us, there are the sounds of children's laughter, the the low noise of a distant lawn mower, and a transistor radio playing Creedence Clearwater Revival.

"Yeah, some folks inherit star spangled eyes.

Ooh, they send you down to war.

And when you ask them, 'How much should we give?'

Oh, they only answer, more, more, more, Lord."

It is an odd accompaniment to our uneasy quiet.

"Edward," Mom begins, breaking the silence as her hopeful gaze thrusts expectantly upon me. "Why don't you tell your sister how school has been going?"

I wince, stabbing my plastic fork into a mound of coleslaw, torn between the desire to make my mother happy and a wish to not be forced into the spotlight. I suppose a topic so menial as my chemistry major at Kent State University is her last desperate attempt at pleasant conversation. With a half-shrug, I raise my eyes to Alice's.

"It's all right. One of my professors is pretty tough." I clear my throat, uncomfortable at being the center of attention. Amidst the turmoil of my family's opposing viewpoints, I have always tried to be the one to remain silent. "I'm kind of

worried about finals."

Alice's face softens, her head tilting to the side with a reassuring smile. "I'm sure you'll do fine. You always were the smartest out of all of us."

Emmett bristles but says nothing, taking a ferocious bite of his sandwich. My father raises his cocktail to his lips. Though it is barely five o'clock, he has already asked Mom to prepare his evening martini. Alice and Jasper's sudden appearance in our backyard that afternoon was apparently enough to warrant an early drink.

"You could have been the smart one, too," he says between sips. "If you'd actually put that education we paid for to good use."

Alice doesn't allow the barbed comment to affect her. "Just because I'm not a teacher yet, doesn't mean I won't be someday. Besides," she pauses to squeeze Jasper's thigh affectionately. "We're doing just fine."

"If you consider traipsing around the country 'fine'..." Dad trails off, his words absorbed by the alcohol in his glass. Mom, however, ignores the tension that refuses to abate and smiles broadly at Jasper.

"How is work going for you, dear?"

Jasper's polite response illustrates his genteel upbringing, a Texas drawl still hanging on his vowels. "It's good when I have it, but we get by when I don't."

Raised in the sprawling mansions of San Antonio, Jasper attended G.W. to study engineering. Upon graduation, however, he decided to forego the bourgeois careers that waited for him at places like Grumman and NASA, instead trading it in for a V.W. van and a mechanic's tool-belt. He and Alice have been crossing state lines since 1967, picking up odd jobs in between the protests and marches they help organize with Students for a Democratic Society.

Jasper's eyes flit to Emmett. "I hear you've been promoted since last we saw you."

My brother's shoulders square, but he doesn't reply, so my mother does for him. "Oh yes. He's a Sergeant now in the 145th Infantry."

Alice's lips purse into a thin line. "Congratulations, Em." Her sarcasm is more than I can bear, but Mom doesn't hear it, or rather, she chooses not to.

"Isn't this lovely? We can just enjoy the lovely spring weather and have a nice

dinner."

Alice grunts. "Nice dinners that the poor murdered families in Vietnam will never have again."

Emmett boils out of his chair, standing with such force that it knocks his flimsy lawn chair backwards as if it were no more than a child's toy.

"You care about those Commies more than you do your own *family!*" Emmett snarls. "Who are you to talk about what's right when you're never even here? You spend all your time with your protests, when *I'm* the only one doing something that really matters."

"Is that so, *Sergeant?*" Alice is on her feet once again, unafraid of Emmett despite his towering height and brawn. "Well, if you're so eager to *do* something, go join your brothers out there in combat. See if you don't get blown away like Grandpa Platt and Uncle Liam did!"

A sharp gasp pierces the air, my mother's sudden pain palpable. She stands, her knuckles pressed tightly to her lips as she tries to hold back the sob that begs to escape. Dad rises, pulling her to his side as his free hand points at Alice. "You watch your tongue, young lady."

I sigh heavily, raking a hand through my hair.

It's no secret that Mom never quite recovered from the death of her father when she was just twelve years old, watching her own mother crumple to the floor as an officer bearing a telegram arrived at their door. Twelve years later, the same message arrived after the death of her baby brother, Liam, was lost to the bloody trenches in Korea.

My father was the only person to return whole to her from war.

It's never been said, but I know their deaths are the real reason why Emmett never enlisted in the Army, instead becoming a National Guardsman straight out of high school. Mom just couldn't bear to lose someone else to a battle on another continent. Now she wears her wounds like so much armor, weighing heavily on even her brightest smile. It's a low blow for Alice to bring it up, and I watch my mother sway on her feet, unsteady with her grief forced so unwillingly upon her.

Emmett takes a step closer to Alice, fists at his side, anger rolling off him in waves. "I *would* be over there if I could and you know it. Not like some hippie

draft-dodger." His last comment is directed solely at Jasper, who rises calmly to Alice's side, taking her hand.

"We can't all be fortunate sons, man." Jasper smiles, quoting the Creedence song that has now faded into a Beatles hit on our neighbor's radio. His implication that Emmett is hiding in the Guard to escape the draft does not go unnoticed, and I see my brother's teeth begin to grind together. "Some of us have to find other ways of avoiding conflict."

"You son of a b—" Emmett's fist begins to fly, and I am up out of my chair in what I know will be a useless attempt to stop him. Alice flings her body in front of Jasper's, egging Emmett on, but it is the uncharacteristically loud cry from Mom that brings us all to heel.

"Please don't fight!" she begs in a high-pitched voice. We freeze, Emmett's arm dropping reluctantly to his side as he exhales loudly in frustration. Mom's fingers are once again fluttering to her pearls. "Please, let's just sit down and enjoy our time together?"

"I'm sorry, Mom," Alice sighs, pulling her crocheted bag off the floor and onto her shoulder. "But there are some things we just can't agree on. I think Jasper and I should go, anyway. We have work to do."

"*Work?*" The word barely rips its way free of my father's clenched jaw. "Don't tell me you had any part in that *business* at Kent State today."

Alice raises her chin defiantly and my eyes widen in shock.

I'd passed by the demonstration on the Commons that afternoon as I crossed campus to get to my next class. Hands shoved deeply in my pockets, I'd watched as one classmate burned a copy of the Constitution. Another shouted obscenities, his arm waving madly in the air like a beacon as his draft card went up in flames.

I'd observed the protest in awe, wondering if I'd ever have so much conviction in anything that I'd be willing to break laws for it. I'd always tried to avoid conflict, having spent so much of my teen years with more than my fair share of it at home. But today, I'd lingered at the edge of the crowd for another reason.

Bella had been there.

Her heart-shaped face soft and nearly hidden under the floppy brim of a woven hat, Bella had sat cross-legged under a nearby tree, lovingly stroking the strings of

her guitar. Even among the din of the protestors' angry shouting, I could hear her sweet voice asking us all to give peace a chance.

However, it wasn't long before her friends found her hiding spot and pulled her into the fray.

I can't believe that Alice had been one of the demonstrators. Maybe if I'd seen my sister there, I could have joined her, and maybe, just maybe, it could have turned into an opportunity to talk to the girl I've been dreaming about for the better part of my junior year.

However, as much as I would do anything to be closer to Bella, to find a way to finally talk to her, a protest was not where someone like me belonged. I was much better suited to the chemistry lab, or crouched around our television set, watching *Star Trek* on syndication.

"So, you didn't come home for your mother's birthday at all, did you, Alice?" Dad growls. "That's not why you're *really* here."

Alice meets his angry gaze, holding her ground. "The student governments on campuses need people with experience to help them organize. Just because S.D.S. has dissolved doesn't mean our work ended."

A shuddering sob silences Alice and I can nearly feel Mom crumpling in sadness. She mumbles through an excuse as she releases herself from my father's hold, stumbling blindly toward the house. Once she's safely inside, my father turns on his only daughter.

"I don't know why the hell you bother coming back," he spits viciously. "You couldn't give a *damn* about us. You're only here to cause trouble with your rebel friends."

Alice lurches forward, but Jasper stops her from saying something she might regret by putting an arm protectively around her. "It isn't the rebels who cause the troubles of the world, Dr. Cullen," he says. "It's the troubles that cause the rebels."

My father's fingers twitch at his side, and I think of the things he wishes he could do to Jasper, if he weren't a civilized man. Instead, he breathes quietly, his words coming out low. "Get. Out."

Alice's lips twist into a rare grimace, a sheen of tears covering her eyes. I think for a minute, if she would only give in, my family might find a way to repair itself. But

then, she simply nods and whispers, "Okay. Bye, Daddy."

Moments later, she and Jasper are rounding the corner of our house, treading up the walkway leading to where his van is parked, when the first sobs escape the window of my parents' bedroom. My father hurries inside as Emmett falls back into his chair, and, I, left to my own devices, can't help myself.

I run after my big sister.

"Alice! Wait!"

As I reach them, she and Jasper stop and turn. Hair flopping down over my eyelids, I brush the strands back and plead with my eyes, but I'm too cowardly to say what I really want to talk to her about, so I go with the obvious. "Don't go. You still haven't told me about Woodstock yet."

"Oh, Edward." She laughs a sound of relief. Reaching into her bag, she pulls out a pen and a scrap of paper. "We're crashing with James, the student government leader at Kent."

I recognize the name. He was the blond with the ponytail burning his draft card today.

"Here's his number." She presses the paper into my palm. "Call me there, okay?"

"Okay," I reply softly. It's enough, for now. Her smile is wistful as she flashes me the peace sign. Then, as quickly as she arrived in the middle of my mother's birthday barbeque, Alice disappears again.

May 2, 1970. Saturday.

I wake the next morning to a house that is shrouded in silence. Though it is barely seven a.m., I am alert, lying in bed with thoughts rolling through my mind like thunderclouds.

While I know I should be thinking about the events of the day before, and the very real possibility that Alice may never walk through our door again, all I can think about is Bella.

I'd first laid eyes on her at the beginning of the year. She'd shyly entered the registrar's office asking for directions to the English department. A blush had crept over her cheeks when she'd told the secretary she was a transfer student and didn't

know her way around.

I could have been bold enough to offer to show her the campus, but instead I stood in a corner, clutching my schedule, breath caught in my lungs. As she craned her head to study the map offered to her, strands of long, dark hair graced fluidly over creamy shoulders exposed by a sleeveless peasant blouse. The mahogany locks skirted just above the curves of a lush, round bottom sheathed perfectly within long panels of denim.

My mouth went dry as I felt myself instantly responding to the sight of her. But while her body was enough to send any red-blooded American male into a salivating trance, it was her voice that truly captivated me.

Her simple thank you as she took the printed map in hand was a sound like I'd never heard before - soft and husky, musical even though she hadn't sung a word - and as she crouched down to retrieve a guitar case off the ground before leaving, our eyes met. She flickered a smile in my direction, and I knew in that moment, my life had been irrevocably changed.

However, eight months later, I still haven't gained the courage to even speak to her.

It's not that I've never had the opportunity to talk to Bella, whose name I'd quickly learned from Ben, my lab partner. His girlfriend, Angela, was in Bella's poetry class. Though Literature and Chemistry majors rarely cross paths, I'd frequently seen her sitting on the green, thoughtfully strumming her guitar. Ben's been on my case to talk to her, saying "You never know what might happen," but I always find some reason to keep my distance.

The truth is Bella is rarely alone, and I don't fit in with the company she often keeps: James, Laurent - a rumored Black Panther, who looks like Hendrix - and a wild red-head I found out to be her cousin, Victoria.

Throwing off my comforter, I stand and stretch, catching my reflection in my mirror - green eyes under too-strong brows, floppy hair I've never been able to tame. Never having been one to defy authority, I don't have much in common with the hippie crowd, other than a shared love of music. As I gaze around at the extensive record collection filling my shelves, with albums ranging from Janis Joplin to The Who, Jefferson Airplane to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, I think of all the times I'd hoped to broach a conversation with Bella about music.

She seems to express herself through song, finding freedom in notes and lyrics,

and it's something we have in common. In these turbulent times, the only escape I have has been through the touch of needle to vinyl. However every time I passed her, I told myself there was no way someone like Bella would want to talk to a square like me.

But today, I am determined. I have spent too many days as an observer, both at school and at home, standing quietly when I would rather have spoken my mind. In the chaos of my family, I have learned to keep my head down and my mouth shut, but now, I want to talk.

If I see Bella on campus today, I *will* speak to her.

Dressing in comfortable slacks, a plaid, button down, short-sleeved shirt, and worn-out Converse sneakers, I pad out to the kitchen. I find Emmett bent over the table, devouring a bowl of cereal as he reads *Motor Trend Magazine*. Ready for his weekend training, he's in his olive-drab uniform. The name "Cullen" is stamped over his heart, just underneath the triple arrows on his collar denoting his new rank. An American flag patch flexes over his shoulder as he raises the spoon to his mouth.

"Where's Mom?"

Emmett barely addresses my question, simply nods in the direction of the living room, where I hear the quiet hum of our television. A pot of fresh coffee percolates on the counter, no doubt brewed for my father before he left for the golf course that morning. Pouring myself a cup, I cross to where my mother sits, perched daintily on the end of our sofa, a photo album balanced on her lap.

Not wanting to startle her, I clear my throat, but her head jerks up in surprise anyway. "Oh, Edward, good morning! I was just looking through some old photos."

She laughs as if it is a silly thing to be caught doing, but when I ask if I can join her, she smiles and pats the seat next to her. "I was just remembering when you all were little."

Mom turns to the first page, where held down by black tabs is a grayed photo of Dad meeting me for the first time. I was born while he was tending to the injured soldiers in Korea, returning home to a lofty position at Robinson Memorial. A few pages later, there a photo of Alice, Emmett and me as children, squinting in the sunlight at Silver Lake, clad in only bathing suits and our smiles. Alice has her arms around both of us.

"We spent so many lovely summer days there, remember?"

I nod, recalling one summer many years later at that same lake, when Emmett taught me the lines that would entice Maggie, the lifeguard I'd had a crush on. He was the first to slap me on the shoulder when I'd emerged from the boat house, my virginity a thing of the past.

My face flushes at the recollection, and I hide my blush behind my coffee mug. Still, it's nice to remember when my family felt whole.

Simpler times and happy memories continue up until '63. There's a photo of Alice waving from a car on her way to American University. What none of us knew was that she was skipping freshman orientation to join thousands of others at the Washington Monument to hear Dr. King speak.

That's when things got difficult.

Alice's presence in the album diminishes as the pages flip closer to the present, her visits home always thwarted by a rally or convention. The last one of all of us together is in '67 at her graduation, after which she disappeared for several months. We received a letter in the fall with a return address of San Francisco, containing a photo of Alice and Jasper just married, barefoot in the park.

She wasn't welcome home for some time after that.

On the television, the morning news broadcast begins and the album is forgotten across my mother's lap as the anchor starts his grim report. "Close to midnight last night in downtown Kent, a crowd lit a bonfire after breaking storefront windows with beer bottles and rocks. The police arrived shortly after."

The image of the newscaster switches to one of an angry throng, shouting obscenities at police. Among the revelers, it is easy to make out the silhouette of my sister, flanked by Jasper and James. Mom stares at the screen, pearls tightly wound in her grasp, dangerously close to snapping.

"Police were eventually forced to use tear gas to disperse the crowd, after which they retreated back to the Kent State campus," the anchor continues. "Mayor Leroy Satrom declared a state of emergency, and asked Ohio Governor James Rhodes for assistance."

The thought of that angry mob anywhere near Bella makes my chest constrict with worry. As the reporter moves to the next story, Mom hides her face and the silent tears that slip down her cheeks.

"I'm sure she's all right, Mom." My reassurance is rushed, because the truth is, I'm anxious to go. "I have to get to the library."

Wiping her eyes quickly, she turns my way, flashing a forced smile. "Ask Emmett to drive you, okay?" I nod and we both stand. Nervously, she reaches out to squeeze my hand and retreats to her bedroom, album in hand.

"If you want a ride, we've gotta move." Emmett's voice booms from the kitchen. "I've got to be on base by eight."

A short time later, I'm climbing out of the passenger seat of Emmett's red Dodge Charger, acknowledging his bark to be ready by five. I scan the quad for Alice, but it's relatively serene given the early hour, so I retreat to the library and study until noon.

Lunchtime brings life back to the campus, and there are easily a hundred more people milling about when I come up for air.

After grabbing a sandwich, I sit at one of the benches outside the dining hall. That's when I see Bella, curves hugged by a long printed dress, standing next to the ever-present accompaniment of Victoria and James. Bella's hair spills beautifully down her back as she turns to follow the frantic wave of her cousin's arm. It's then that Alice emerges out of the crowd, a stack of flyers in hand as she advances toward them. Jasper is by her side as always, the two of them matching in their tie-dye.

It's the opportunity I have been hoping for.

Trying to look casual, I stroll to the bulletin board where they begin tacking up flyers.

"We've got to get these up in as many places as possible," Alice instructs. "That way, we'll make sure we've got a huge crowd on Monday."

"I'm not waiting until Monday," James grumbles, arms bent across his chest. "That son of a bitch Rhodes needs to know we mean business."

"Don't be such a drag, baby. He'll hear us, I'm sure of it." Victoria snakes her hand into James' long hair, pulling him toward her for a kiss. Bella turns away, and I can't help but notice a sudden flash of sadness in her deep, brown eyes.

I clear my throat and Alice turns, smiling as she registers it's me. "The prodigal

son emerges from his studies!" She leans in to kiss my cheek, and then turns to the others. "You guys know Edward?"

Victoria and James nod in greeting, and when my eyes meet Bella's, it's as if every chemistry experiment gone wrong suddenly explodes in my stomach. Her teeth sink down onto a succulent, pink lower lip, and then her face blooms into a smile. "You're Ben's lab partner."

For a moment, all I can do is blink. "You...you knew that?"

"Yeah." She chuckles softly as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, and glances up at me under hooded lashes in a gaze that sets my spine tingling. "I'm Bella, by the way. We've never actually met."

"Edward." I clear my throat, my voice cracking in my nervousness. "Edward Cullen."

"I know." Bella smiles again, and I'm amazed to see her cheeks color in a rosy blush. Our introduction is interrupted, though, by James' guttural complaints.

"Fuck Rhodes and his bullshit. I'll show *him* a state of emergency. We're gonna light something up tonight."

"We got his attention *last night*," Alice assures him, pressing a pin into the corkboard. As the rest of them continue discussing tactics, I can't help noticing Bella's eyes dropping to her feet. She seems uncomfortable, and I want to say something to put her at ease.

Struggling for subject matter, I suddenly remember my earlier conviction to talk to her about music.

"No guitar today?"

Her chin lifts, the smile she directs at me leaving me momentarily breathless. "I left it in my room. I didn't want to carry it all over campus." Bella's head jerks back toward Victoria, who is on her toes, looking for another spot to hang leaflets announcing Monday's protest.

"I could walk you back to your dorm to get it," I offer with a shrug.

"Right on, you two! This day needs some tunes," Alice interrupts, throwing an arm around my shoulder. I pinch my eyes closed, knowing it's my turn to blush, but when

my eyes reopen, Bella's beautiful smile is not only still there, it's wider. "Why don't you go get Bella's guitar while we finish up here? We'll meet up with you later."

My eyes catch Bella's again. "If you want...?"

I let the question hang in the air, praying that I don't seem as eager as I feel. Bella's head inclines in a nod, and as Alice hurries off with the others, we slowly begin to trek through the grass toward the dorms.

Walking by my side, I'm painfully aware of how *close* Bella is: the scent of strawberries is wafting from her hair, and the tribal-print of her dress is caressing her flesh in a path my fingers itch to follow.

I shove my hands into my pockets. "So, you transferred here in September?"

"You knew that?" Her eyebrows raise, her smile playful as she repeats my earlier words. "Well, yeah. I had to get away from...stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

Bella pauses, chewing her lip again as she studies me. "I'm from this nowhere town in Washington state, and my Dad's the chief of police." Her nose scrunches up, like it's distasteful to say the word.

I've never harbored the kind of hatred my peers have toward law enforcement, and when she sees no sign of revulsion in my face, Bella continues. "He agreed to let me go to college in Seattle, but on the way there, my-" she swallows "-boyfriend, Jacob, and I took a little 'side trip' to San Francisco."

Bella seems hesitant, and then the weight of her statement sinks in. "You went to Haight-Ashbury?" I ask in astonishment. When she nods, I try to ignore the discomfort that takes hold of my limbs at the thought of her at the 'Summer of Love' with another man. "That must have been a real...trip."

My tongue rolls awkwardly over the slang I so rarely use, but Bella lets out something sounding like a snort.

"Yeah, it sure was. I just wanted to see some of the world, you know? No harm in it. But when we got back to Seattle, our dads were there waiting. The school called them because we were late to orientation, and, well...they were furious at us."

As we tread slowly toward the dorms, Bella tells me how her father made her

come home and switch to the local community college. "Jacob didn't even *get* that choice. His dad signed him up for the army." Her voice lowers to a whisper. "He died six months later in Vietnam."

We reach the entrance to her dorm, and I turn to face her, wanting so badly to comfort her. "I'm sorry, Bella."

She shrugs. "After two years of good behavior, Dad finally agreed to my transfer here because of Victoria. She's kept me out of trouble. Until she met James, that is." Bella lifts a brave face, reminding me so much of my mother as she smiles through her pain. "Hey, I'll be right back. Just gonna go in and grab my guitar."

She hurries inside, and I rub my sweaty palms against my pants as I wait. When she returns with her guitar strap strung over her shoulder, her smile is genuine. "You play at all?"

"No, but I do like a lot of music."

A bob of her head encourages me to continue, and much to my surprise, we spend the better part of the afternoon strolling around campus, talking about groups. She is as enraptured as I was to hear that Alice had gone to Woodstock.

"Oh, man, I wish I could have gone," she says wistfully, back pressed against a tree. The afternoon sun is beginning to wane, and the shadows from the leaves above us play on Bella's face as we sit cross-legged beneath them.

"Me, too." I'm amazed at how well our conversation is going, and trying to ignore the growing crowd of people merging at the R.O.T.C. building nearby.

Bella plays a few chords. "Edward, how old are you?"

"Eighteen. Nineteen in June."

She hums a few notes before turning an earnest gaze on me. "Are you worried about the draft?"

I look away for a moment, thinking back to my eighteenth birthday, when Emmett accompanied me to register with the draft board. I was terrified, the card I now carried burning a hole in my wallet. But in the days that followed, I managed to lose myself in the broadcasts of Apollo 11, the scientist in me sure that there was no way a war could continue when so many possibilities in space lay ahead of us.

"I try not to think about it very much. But they say the war is ending, you know?"

"They've been saying that for a while." Bella strums the beginning of Jefferson Airplane's *Volunteers*. "Would you go?"

"To Vietnam? I don't think I'd make a very good soldier," I chuckle. "But, I guess, if it's the right thing to do." Bella doesn't answer, looking out over a crowd that is steadily gaining volume. "Would you?"

"Me?" she laughs, but then is serious. "If women got drafted, well then...I hear Canada is a real nice place to live."

"You'd run away?" I can't hide my surprise. "You know you could probably never come back."

Bella shrugs. "I don't look at it as running away. It's doing what it takes to be free."

I'm about to tell her how amazing I think she is when Alice reappears, crouching down next to me. "I think you guys had better get out of here. James is going to set the ROTC headquarters on fire." Worry clutches my chest, not only out of concern for Bella's safety, but at the look on Alice's face. "He's not listening to me and Jasper at all."

"Is Victoria with him?" Bella stands, craning her neck for a glimpse of her cousin.

"Yes, but I promise to keep an eye on her. Will you two please get somewhere safe?" Alice reaches out to squeeze both our shoulders, and then rushes back to the unruly mob ahead of us.

Once again, I offer to walk Bella back to her dorm. "You have a way home?" she asks. I nod, and we hurry to the entrance where she suddenly turns to face me.

"Why did you never talk to me before today?" she demands, her tone accusing. My mouth falls open, but before I can answer, she says in a softer tone, "I always hoped you would."

"I've wanted to talk to you for months," I admit.

A loud crash startles both of us, and before I can think, I've pulled her into my arms, my body shielding her from the blaze of flame that shoots up in the distance. It takes a second before I realize I'm holding her, and she's looking up at me with

hope in her eyes.

"I'm glad you finally did," Bella whispers.

All around us people are running across the campus, but I refuse to let this moment go. Dipping my head, my kiss is a question as I let my lips gently brush across hers. She answers by opening her mouth to mine, wet and soft and perfect as her fingers come up to clutch at my collar.

"Edward!"

It is not Bella's voice, but Emmett's I hear calling my name. We break apart, turning to see him waiting on the corner. He's still in his uniform, his stare tired and angry from the driver's seat of his car.

"I have to go," I breathe. "Can I see you tomorrow?"

Bella nods and nervously eyes the fire behind us.

"Get inside," I entreat, kissing her once more. When she lets go of me and hurries away, I wait until I see her safely through the door, emotions turbulent within me. Emmett barks my name again, and I hurry to his car.

"I only left base to take you home," he grunts. "I need to be back at nineteen-hundred."

"Why?" I'm barely listening as we pull away from campus, but what Emmett says next grabs my full attention.

"Governor Rhodes has ordered the Infantry to handle the protest."

"To what? Tear gas them? Shoot?" He doesn't respond, but his silence is answer enough. "But Em, Alice is out there!"

His jaw is tight. "I know."

May 3, 1970. Sunday.

Emmett has already left by the time I'm up, having been called back to the base early in the morning. I never heard him come in the night before, or leave today for that matter. I'm groggy, having slept badly after spending Saturday night watching the evening's events unfold on the T.V. alongside my parents.

James and a few others had razed the ROTC building to the ground, somehow managing to evade arrest. A thousand protestors cheered the fire, throwing rocks at Kent firefighters attempting to extinguish the blaze. We didn't see Alice's face among them, but we knew she was there. My father left the room, slamming the bedroom door behind him. I finally had to excuse myself too when the screen filled with footage of National Guardsmen expelling tear gas on the crowd.

My stomach was in knots as I dialed the number to Bella's dorm, waiting as a girl named Rosalie went to find her. I'd never been so relieved to hear Bella's voice on the static-filled line. She promised me that there was a curfew on campus, and she was perfectly safe.

From Alice, however, I got no such assurance - there was no answer at James' house.

I call again as soon as I wake up, relieved to hear Jasper's voice on the other end. "We're all fine. Bella's here if you want me to come get you. Victoria didn't want her to stay on campus."

I'm quick to agree, and though I dress hastily, it's noon before I hear the van idling outside. Passing through the kitchen, I find my mother preparing a meatloaf, hiding a glass of wine behind the breadbox with shaking hands.

"Going back to study, dear?"

It's a Godsend she doesn't turn to look at me, because I'm about to do something I've never done before.

I lie.

"Yeah, uh, Ben's coming to pick me up. We're going to run through some practice tests in the lab." I tell her I'm not sure if I'll be home by dinner. She nods, keeping her eyes on the food she steadfastly prepares, telling me to be safe.

When I climb into the front seat of Jasper's van, there's a teenage girl bouncing in the back seat.

"Her name's Bree," Jasper says. "Bella's friend, Angela, found her wandering around campus. She was looking for James."

"I ran away," Bree announces proudly, rocking back and forth on the seat. I don't know what to say to her - she can't be more than fourteen. We ride in silence as the

suburbs melt into farmland, listening to Bob Dylan tell us that the times they are a-changing.

No kidding.

James' rented house is on the edge of town, and there's a collection of vehicles parked on the driveway, the grass and the dusty road's edge. Once inside, I find myself among a room full of people I barely know, the air heavy with the thick, sweet scent of marijuana.

"James!" Bree squeals, throwing herself into his arms, despite the fact that Victoria is curled into his side on the couch. "I knew I'd find you."

"Glad you got out of that shit hole town, little neighbor," he says before kissing her, sucking on her lower lip. Victoria hums in approval, and then groans as James turns and slips his tongue into her own mouth. I look away, the sight of 'free love' in action more discomfoting than arousing.

It's then that Bella emerges from the kitchen. She gives me a shy smile as she wraps her arms around my waist. Relief washes through me. "I'm glad you're okay," I whisper into her hair.

"You a Dove or a Hawk?" a low voice suddenly questions. I follow the sound to where Laurent sits, exhaling smoke and regarding me carefully. There are several other people seated around him, all their eyes squarely on me. When I blink, he explains, "*For* the war, or against it?"

I clear my throat. "Um, against?"

"He's my *brother*, Laurent," Alice admonishes from the floor, grinning up at me proudly. "He's straight, but he's okay."

Laurent shrugs. "I've gotta ask. Your other brother's practically a Pig."

"Emmett's not a Pig!" Alice shouts. "He's just confused about everything. He thinks the Guard is doing the right thing."

I barely have time to absorb her comment before James yells out, jostling both Bree and Victoria. "Fuck the Guard and fuck Rhodes! Did you hear what he said about us? That we're the 'worst type of people we harbor in America.' Fuck yeah!"

Half the group cheers him on, but Alice stands, garnering their attention with a

steady voice. "You proved your point last night. Now, the next step is gaining a meeting with the mayor. We should go into town tonight and hold a sit-in."

James ignores her. "Fucking establishment! We'll burn the whole fucking campus down if that's what it takes."

Victoria groans, reaching for her joint and taking a long drag. "Stop it, James. You're bringing me down."

Bella snickers, the sound a bright light amidst such dark topics. I press a gentle touch to her shoulder, and she sighs and leans into me.

Jasper takes Alice by the hand, saying they're heading into town to get supplies. Once they're out the door, someone sets an Iron Butterfly record playing and I watch as one by one, they each find a partner to grind against. James begins to peel off Victoria's top while Bree kneels in between his legs, her eyes hungry as she unbuttons his fly.

"You wanna go someplace else?" Bella prods. I'm quick to agree, following her out into the backyard.

The ground is dry, straw-like, and uncared for. A frayed rope dangles from a tree limb, and affixed to the bottom is a small wooden square. Bella steps up onto it, grasping the rope with one hand and gesturing toward me to join her with the other.

I climb on, and we swing in silence for a few minutes. With our hands and faces so close together, I soak in little details about her I'd never noticed: the mood ring she wears on her pointer finger, the tiny scar above her right eyebrow. As we sway together, her scent assaults my senses, and I can't help thinking how badly I want to do to her some of the things that are going on inside the house.

"Alice is really far out," Bella says with a smile. "You must really miss her when she's gone."

I furrow my brow, looking for the right words. "I miss *Alice*, but not what she brings with her. My father's all, 'America, love it or leave it.' So is my brother, or, at least, that's how he acts. And Alice, well..." I wave toward the house, as if to prove my point.

Bella leans backwards, causing the swing to lurch before she folds back in to me. "What do you think about Vietnam, Edward?"

"I don't know. I mean, some people say we need to keep our military strong, to stop the Communists from taking over the world, and others 'make love, not war'."

Bella halts my speech, placing a warm palm against my cheek. "What do you think?"

For a moment, I just breathe, feeling her skin on mine. "I think...there's got to be a better way than war to make everyone free."

She smiles, bringing her face to mine for a brief kiss. "That's what I like about you. You care so much about everyone else."

I raise an eyebrow. "How do you know that about me?"

That beautiful flush colors Bella's cheeks again. "I've kinda been asking Angela to tell me everything she knows about you, from Ben. I guess I've had a bit of a crush on you."

"All this time?" It's almost too hard to believe - like some kind of miracle that she's wanted me, too.

Bella nods, the tendrils of her hair floating joyfully around her face as we rock and sway. "I'd watch you, going to classes and studying. You always seemed so...calm, even in all this craziness."

"That's because in my house, I've spent years just trying to keep the peace." I look out at the barren farmland surrounding us. "I don't want my family to fall apart, but it's almost like I can't stop it."

"You can't help everyone, Edward. I mean, at least your family still *talks* to each other." Bella suddenly hops off the swing. "I haven't spoken to my Dad since I left."

"I didn't know that." My heart aches at the sadness in her voice, and I wonder how a girl who has been through so much pain can still radiate love and peace.

Bella shrugs and tumbles down into the dead grass under the tree, letting the blades crawl over her forearms and her jean-clad thighs. I follow her and lay back in the weeds, bracing my weight behind me on my hands.

"I mean, sometimes people aren't willing to change," she explains. "And you've just gotta let it be."

I chuckle. "Okay, Ringo."

Bella giggles. "You laugh, but their words are right on." And then my breath catches as she begins to sing softly.

"And when the brokenhearted people living in the world agree...there will be an answer, let it be."

Her eyes are burning with meaning as they search mine, her voice releasing the lyrics on a sweet breath of song.

"For though they may be parted, there is still a chance that they will see...there will be an answer, let it be."

I can't believe how beautiful she sounds, or how the words she chose fit the moment perfectly. I'd played the same song over and over by myself, but only felt my own sadness reflected in the words, and not the hope Bella presents to me.

She sighs as she sprawls out on her back, fingers searching through the stalks. I watch as she finds a tiny white flower, plucking it from where it had bloomed in the dry earth.

Leave it to her to find one small peace of beauty amidst so much desolation.

She holds it up to me and I bend my face closer, letting her tuck the flower behind my ear. Her fingers linger in my hair, stroking softly against the back of my neck.

"I want to give my heart to you, but I'm so afraid you're going to disappear." A tear slips down her cheek as I understand what she's implying, and I brush my thumb along her satin skin, wiping the salty liquid away.

"I'm not going anywhere," I promise her, even though I'm not certain it's one I can keep. "You don't know how long I've waited for you."

She pulls me down to her, and I can feel her warm skin through the white, gauzy blouse she wears. She whispers my name, and then we are kissing again. I would feel a need for modesty, to hide her from view, if not for what is going on inside the house and the fact that I've been waiting for ages to touch her.

Gentle passes become more eager, more desperate, her lips parting on a sigh. As our tongues slide together, her fingers dance down my shirt, searching under the hem. I groan, feeling myself harden at her touch, and then with a tug of her hand

against my hip, I am crawling above her, easing my legs into the space between her thighs.

"God, Bella," I pant, kissing along her jaw and down her throat. "You're so beautiful."

Her soft whimper spurs me on, and my lips begin to trace places I've only dreamed about - the sensitive spot just beneath her ear, the tender hollow of her throat. I know I'm grinding against her, denim growing hotter against denim, but I can't help myself, and it seems neither can she.

"Edward! I-" Bella freezes and I pause. Worrying I've pushed things too fast, I pull back to gauge her expression. "I'm not easy, I mean, I don't want you to think..."

Confusion hits me, and my words come out flustered. "But, you said you went to San Francisco with your...with Jacob."

I hate the sudden regret that flashes in her eyes, but it only lasts a moment and then she shakes her head. "It wasn't like this, with him. I didn't feel the same as I do...with you."

"You mean, you've never...?"

She averts her eyes, looking embarrassed, and mine widen. I'm filled with relief, possessiveness flooding through me at the thought of being her first. Gingerly, I ask, "Do you want to?"

Bella looks back up at me as her teeth sink into her lip, and the sight is almost too erotic to bear. "For now, can we just...touch?"

The thought of my fingers on her naked flesh is more than enough to bring me dangerously close to orgasm, without even feeling her touch yet. I nod, too enthusiastically at that, and her laugh relaxes both of us. Then she's twisting to pull her shirt over her head, exposing creamy breasts and pink nipples begging for my mouth.

I bring my lips to the rosy peaks, teasing her with nips and licks until her legs are scissoring in the straw, her keening moans turning into pleas for more. Popping loose the buttons on her jeans, I slide my hand down until I'm met with dewy curls, and then I'm biting my own lip as I watch her face in pleasure.

"Edward! Yes...oh, *God*."

Bella's head pushes back against the ground, moaning softly as I stroke faster, pressing and rubbing her delicate flesh until she shatters beneath me. She's quick to reciprocate, still panting as she pushes me back and unfastens my pants, freeing me from my boxers.

At the first delicious glide of her hand on my cock, I'm already inhaling sharply, hissing a curse through my teeth.

"Jesus, Bella..."

So close already after months of fantasy, I give in to the too-perfect feel of her fingers stroking my hardened flesh. My hands tangle in her hair, drowning in sensation as I pull her to me, and her kiss swallows my shudder as I arch and still and release.

Tucking me back into my clothes, she cuddles against me, and for a few more beautiful hours alone in that yard, there is no war, no protests, no families breaking apart - only Bella and me in the waning sunlight.

May 4, 1970. Monday.

I'm hesitant to set foot back on campus - the protest planned for today has an air of dread to it, and I'm dragging my feet to get ready.

Alice's sit-in the night before came on the heels of yet another rally, and more tear-gas had coated the ground. Bella and I had remained sequestered in her dorm's common room through all of it, having been dropped off there by Jasper before dark. He'd barely returned in time to take me home before the curfew forced all the students inside.

I have a few eerie moments alone with my mother in the kitchen before I leave for school this morning, taking the bus for want of other transportation. My father's Cadillac already absent on the driveway, I see Emmett's fatigues thundering down to his car.

He's obviously not dressed for his civilian job at the warehouse, and I don't need to ask where he's going.

"I agree with her, you know," Mom whispers as she stares out the window, following Emmett's disappearing form. "Alice...I just wish she could find a safer way to save the world."

I squeeze her shoulder, wishing I knew what to say.

This morning, hardly anyone goes to class, including me. Bella is frightened, and I don't want to leave her alone, so we spend the morning hidden in her dorm again, listening to records and shutting out the world.

We emerge around noon to discover professors passing out leaflets saying the protest is cancelled, but there's already some thousand students on the Commons, and my fingers tighten around Bella's as we hover on the side-lines.

James has climbed on top of a statue, shouting encouragement at the crowd, but he's drowned out by the rumbling sound of National Guard jeeps rolling onto campus.

"You are ordered to disperse, or face arrest!" a voice thunders through a bullhorn.

I see Alice raising a fist in the air, leading the others in shouting, "Hell no, we won't go!" People begin throwing rocks at the jeep, but then, I sigh in relief as it retreats.

"See?" I squeeze Bella close. "Nothing's going to happen. Just another protest."

Her eyes don't meet mine, though. They're trained toward the sound of boots hitting the ground, and I turn from her face to watch the 145th Infantry making its way down Blanket Hill, M-1 rifles in their hands.

At the front of the troop is Emmett.

"Oh, God," I gasp, and then the shrill sound of tear gas exploding fills the air.

Bella flinches, and I pull her closer, watching as the gas evaporates harmlessly in the opposing wind. James' frenzied shout of "Pigs off campus!" is followed by war cries as protestors begin launching the empty gas canisters back at the troops.

More students become spectators, and out of the corner of my eye, I see Angela and Ben. There's a moment of humor in the surrounding absurdity as they see me with Bella. They both smile, waving at us as they cross from Taylor Hall.

I'm watching them, but amidst all the shouting and noise I pause, hearing a sound I can't identify. It's some kind of crack, and then everything goes into slow motion.

I hear the unmistakable sound of my brother shouting, "Guard!" His face is grim,

his body rigid.

In unison, the soldiers turn, drop to a single knee, and aim their rifles at the crowd. My stomach lurches as I watch Emmett raise a pistol, and even from this distance, I can see his grip shaking.

"No!" Bella shouts, but her hoarse cry is eclipsed by the sudden sound of gunfire and the terrified screams of hundreds of students.

Rounds of ammunition begin exploding all around us, and I'm shouting for Bella to get down, crouching over her and shielding her body with my own. Over the long, thundering stream of gunshots crackling in the air, Bella is sobbing, pressing her hands to her ears, but her eyes are wide open, taking in the carnage before us.

While the shots last what could only be less than thirty seconds, it feels like a lifetime passes before they stop. And in the frantic hysteria that follows, I pull Bella to her feet, stumbling behind her as we hurry into the screaming crowd.

My eyes land on Alice, slumped against Jasper's shoulder. She is crying, but she doesn't seem hurt. He catches my eye and nods, pulling her tighter against him. An agonized bawl then rips through the crowd and I see Bree, kneeling above James' body. He is face-down on the concrete, a bloody trail pooling from his open mouth. Over his corpse, Bree is screaming, "Why?" over and over again.

Bella suddenly breaks ahead of me, releasing my hand. "Oh, my God! *Victoria!*"

She bolts towards where Laurent is holding Victoria up, but crimson streaks stain her shirt. Bella's cousin is gasping for air, and even I can tell she's got only minutes left.

A few feet away, I see a similar wound on a familiar face. Ben lies on the ground, fingers pressed against a bright red mark above his heart, while next to him lies Angela, eyes glassy, blood pouring from her neck.

They weren't even part of the protest - just got caught in the crossfire, coming to talk to Bella and me.

I turn slowly in the middle of it all, looking to my right where Alice is still sobbing, her eyes pleading, as if to say she never meant for this to happen. To my left, Emmett is alone, his troop having already retreated. His eyes lock on mine, and after nearly a decade of silently hoping to solder my broken family back together, I know today is the day I have to stand up for something.

For what I think is right.

Shaking my head, I turn my back on both of them.

Instead, I stoop to the ground, pulling a wailing Bella into my arms. "It's not right!" she screams. "It's just not fair!"

"Shhh," I whisper, rocking her gently and pulling her away from her dying cousin. She's resisting, tiny fists beating against my chest, but I know it's not me she's fighting.

My geology professor begins ushering students away from the Commons, begging us all to go before more violence happens. Claspng Bella to my chest, feeling her tears soak my shirt, I try to soothe her again, walking her away from the brutal scene before us.

Ambulances wind through the streets, their wailing sirens sharp as the screeching tires of news crews arriving on campus. The sudden pop of flashbulbs makes Bella start in renewed fear, and I realize that if *my* parents see this on T.V., I can only imagine that Bella's father will too.

Speaking or not, he has to be worried about his daughter.

I guide her to the nearest pay phone I can find. "Bella, this is going to be on the News. I really think you should call your dad and tell him you're okay."

She lifts her head on a sob and nods quickly, trembling hands searching her pockets for change. I'm rubbing her back as she lifts the receiver, and the way she croaks the word "*Daddy?*" nearly breaks me.

As I listen to Bella tell her father she's okay, that she's so sorry, that she loves him and misses him, I watch the paramedics attend to the injured. They kneel over Ben and Angela, but something inside me knows it's too late. Bella's back is still turned as Victoria is carried off in a stretcher, and James' body gets covered with a sheet. Laurent sags into the grass at their loss and Bree throws herself into his arms.

I don't understand how, with an enemy that is supposed to be thousands of miles away, we have become a country at war with ourselves.

It's then that I see Emmett seated on a bench a few yards away, head buried in his hands, helmet dropped haphazardly by his feet. He's shaking, shoulders curling inward, and I feel the need to go to him, when I see Alice has already beaten me to

it.

She approaches him slowly, and he starts as she touches his shoulder, head flying up in alarm. His face crumples at the sight of her, and I almost can't believe it as they embrace before my eyes. Bella's money runs out and she rejoins my side, our fingers entwining as her gaze follows mine.

Bella and I take cautious steps together across the green, now littered with rocks, metal canisters and ripped paper, to where Alice has her arms draped around Emmett. We pause where Jasper lingers at a safe distance away from them, but it's close enough to hear what they say.

"We were supposed to do what was honorable, what was right!" Emmett bawls as Alice gently rocks him back and forth. "But there's no honor in what we did here today. None at all."

She holds him tight, and as his fingers come up to desperately grasp her hand, I wonder how it's possible that such tragedy can bring people back together.

My family healing is a sight I've waited for ages to see, and yet, now that it's in front of me, I can't focus on it at all. The only thing that I can think about is caring for the girl shivering in my arms, and shielding her from any more pain.

So with an arm wrapped solidly around her, I turn from them and whisper softly in Bella's ear.

"When you're weary...feeling small. When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all."

Fresh tears splash down on her cheeks, and she forms a tight fist at my back, gathering the material in her hands, as if I were her lifeline. I keep singing, not caring how broken it sounds.

"If you need a friend, I'm sailing right behind. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will ease your mind."

"I love you, Edward," she murmurs.

At those words, I realize nothing but Bella matters. Nothing at all.

Not wanting to stop soothing her for even a second, I pour out my love for her in song, and when she looks up at me, her eyes say she understands exactly how I feel.

July 1, 1970. Wednesday.

Kent State remains closed for six weeks after the massacre, and in that time, I can't bring myself to care about my studies, the importance of books and papers seeming to wane in the shadow of death and regret.

Bella's father flies out for Victoria's funeral, and I watch her run to his arms at the baggage claim of Akron International. Charlie Swan is a man of few words, but as he catches Bella and holds her tightly, I can tell there's so much he wishes to say.

After introductions are made, his voice is gruff with emotion as he firmly shakes my hand. "Thank you for taking care of my daughter."

I simply nod and offer to give them a few days to spend alone together, but neither of them will hear of it.

After the burials of Victoria, James, Angela and Ben, Charlie sets Bella up in an apartment off-campus with her friend, Rosalie. My own grief is nothing compared to Bella's, but it's lessened somewhat by her father's company. I know he's asked Bella to return home to Washington, but her steadfast refusal to leave my side is all the answer he needs to hear. And when he leaves a week later, I'm certain it won't be long before we see him again.

In the days that follow, Alice is welcomed home with open arms, and there's a quiet acceptance between her and Emmett.

My brother still doesn't know why he was given the order to shoot that day, and the memories haunt him. But he and Rosalie begin to date, and her bubbly smile slowly brings Emmett's back to life.

Alice doesn't attend the protest in D.C. that comes in retribution for the shootings, a TV screen between her and the mobs smashing windows, slashing tires and causing bedlam in the streets. We all share a chuckle when we hear Nixon has been taken to Camp David for protection, including my father.

"If you can't stand the heat..." he begins, smiling at Jasper, and I can tell something has changed between them.

The change is felt even more so when Alice announces that she's pregnant.

The news comes just before my nineteenth birthday, and it helps usher in something like normalcy for us. Shortly after that, Alice and Jasper decide to move

in with us, and I spend a hot Saturday in June helping Emmett and my father turn the basement into an apartment for them. Jasper finds a steady job at a garage, and Mom starts helping Alice prepare for the baby.

It feels like a regular summer for a while.

Dad and Jasper take up chess, their nightly games covering the dining room table as soon as dinner is cleared. Mom is teaching Alice to knit, their temples pressed softly together as they relax on the couch, discussing baby names and making plans.

With my family's wounds beginning to mend, I feel my presence at home is not needed as much as before, so I get a job in a record store in town and spend all my free time with Bella.

No one seems to comment on the fact that I sleep many nights at her apartment. Too caught up in reuniting, for the most part, no one seems to notice.

Not that they could pull me away from her if they tried.

We spend hours simply listening to music, and she tries to teach me how to play guitar. It is in the cool shadows of her tiny bedroom that Bella and I finally make love, and I feel I could spend the rest of my life drowning in her shuddering breaths and slick skin.

But for all the lazy afternoons and passionate nights we spend together, I still wear a layer of uncertainty about the future. It's hard to plan for the inane choices of what classes to take in the fall when Vietnam still rages in the Far East. However, the trepidation that once haunted my every step has become a thing of the past. I now look at myself in the mirror and respect the man I see. Love is a word easily exchanged between Bella and me now, and I have every intention of asking her to bind herself to me forever.

It's on an ordinary Wednesday in July that we're all preparing for dinner, me hovering between where the women chatter in the kitchen to the living room, where Dad, Emmett and Jasper watch baseball. My mother is just carrying a salad to the table when a CBS News special report interrupts the broadcast.

The bowl in her hands clatters to the table as we're told the Selective Service is holding another Lottery.

"The birthdays of all young men born in the year 1951 are being mixed in that plastic capsule," the reporter tells us, pointing to small rotating jar. He says the

ceremony has been going on for hours, but I know there is nothing ceremonious about it.

A lump forms in my throat as I imagine the tiny piece of paper bearing my date of birth tumbling around the others. Bella's hand is cold as it comes to grasp mine.

"They are drawn one at a time along with a corresponding draft number," he continues, and under the drone of his voice, we can hear dates being yelled out. Standing next to an unfurled American flag clinging to its brass pole, an old man in a suit pulls papers from the jar, deciding the fate of thousands of young men.

We are all silent as we wait and listen. In my peripheral vision, I can see Alice settling onto Jasper's lap, Rosalie's hand on Emmett's shoulder, and my father rising to hold my mother, but I can't look at any of them.

My heart pounding, I can't tear my eyes from the screen.

Months and days are called out, and the screen flashes to a bulletin board with numbers: 003. 161. 202.

"Men whose draft number is below fifty should expect a letter within the coming days to report to the army for a physical," the reporter concludes.

And then, I hear it. "June twentieth."

Bella clings to me as the image of my birth date tacked to a corkboard fills the screen. My number is added shortly after.

Forty-three.

Bella gasps and falls into my side, head pressed to my chest. Mom dissolves into sobs, breaking free of my father and rushing to my side.

"Edward, it will be okay!" she pleads through flustered tears. "We'll work around it! We'll figure something out - we'll have Emmett make sure you get in the Guard."

But the idea horrifies me. After what happened at Kent State, after watching my brother turn on his sister, after watching innocent people die at the hands of others their own age on American soil, I can't bear to follow in those footsteps.

After finally figuring out what I believe in, the cost of that particular kind of freedom is a price too high for me to pay.

"No, Mom. I'm not going to do that."

Bella's groan vibrates against my heart, and I feel her begin to tremble, whispering, "Don't go, Edward, please. I can't lose you, too. *Please.*"

"Hey." I rub her back, asking her with my touch to look up at me. The decision I've already made is one that makes my heart ache, but I know it's what's best for my future.

For *our* future.

Bella reluctantly raises her chin, pressing it against my chest, and I flash her a grin. "You know, someone once told me that Canada is a real nice place to live."

Bella's fear turns to disbelief, and then relief floods her features, the smile I love so much returning swiftly on its heels. She nods rapidly. "I've always thought that it might be."

Holding Bella tightly, I turn to face my family, waiting for the fallout of my choice.

Dad's expression is grim, his jaw tightly locked when he steps toward me. He doesn't meet my eyes, but then raises his hand to me. In shock I pause, and then reach out to answer it, feeling the acceptance in his firm grip.

He doesn't need to say anything more.

Mom sighs, but retreats to my father's side. "If that's what you think is best, Edward...then I'd rather have you far away, but alive."

Emmett rises from the couch. "Tell me when you want me to help you pack." Jasper nods in agreement, and Alice smiles shyly at me, rubbing her belly.

And with their firm support, I know I'm ready to leave them all behind.

I lead Bella away from them, out into the yard for some air. "Are we really doing this?" Her question is breathless, her grip on me strong. "Running away?"

"We're not. We're doing what it takes to be free."

A tear streaks down her face, and I lift my hands to her cheeks, stroking her sadness away.

"I did promise you I wasn't going anywhere, right?"

She nods, burying her face against my chest, and I wrap my arms around her, kissing the top of her head.

As we stand there in the twilight, I think how, for so many years, I'd been hoping to see my family whole again - it was the *only* thing I wanted - and now that they have finally healed, I'm leaving them.

It is an irony I can't quite comprehend. But the contented sigh Bella releases is all I need to hear, the sound more musical than the Rolling Stones tune drifting over from my neighbor's radio.

"You can't always get what you want.

But if you try sometimes you just might find...

You get what you need."

I look down at my girl and smile.

I couldn't agree more.