

Your Guardian Angel

Story: Your Guardian Angel

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Summary:

NYC paramedic, Edward Masen, has it all. The job he loves, a partner that is always there for him, and a wife that loves him unconditionally. He has it all, until a madman decides to rip the world apart. On September 11th, 2001, Edward's world comes to a crashing halt. His wife is trapped inside one of the twin towers. He and his partner, Jasper Whitlock, race against time to find Bella before it's too late.



Banner by candykizzes24

In remembrance of all the men & women who lost their lives on that fateful day. They will never be forgotten.

Your Guardian Angel

Blinkie by: melmelee03

***Chapter 1*: Your Guardian Angel**

In a place like New York City, you pretty much get used to seeing violence on the news every day. It infiltrates our daily lives. Most New Yorkers think nothing of it. We go about our lives as if the violence doesn't exist around us because we see no reason not to.

I, on the other hand, think about it constantly. As an Emergency Medical Technician in New York City, I see all the violence first hand. Not a day goes by where I don't treat a victim of a gunshot wound, or maybe a victim of a drug overdose, or even mend the bones of an abused child. I see it all and infinitely more. You would think I would become desensitized by such things after awhile but the fact is I don't.

My beautiful wife, Bella, constantly tells me I wear the weight of the world on my shoulders, to which I will kindly reply, "No, my dear, just the weight of New York City." She laughs at me, kisses me in the way that only she can and quickly changes the subject. I'm actually very lucky that I have such an understanding wife. Many of the men on the force struggle with their wives not understanding their schedules and stress levels, but my Sunshine has never had an issue with it. She's always been very proud of the work I do and encourages me to keep doing it.

In my line of work, I rarely get the opportunity to see an early shift so when I do I take full advantage of them. I truly enjoy days like today, where I can wake up with her nestled safely in my arms and then make sweet love to her before we start our day. These moments are so rare that I cherish each one with complete and total reverence, and commit them to memory.

Today was such one of those mornings. After spending the early morning in the bed with my beautiful wife, I find myself watching her dress for the office. She always looks so beautiful in her business attire. I'm completely enamored by her light brown hair flowing down her back, shimmering in the light of the bedroom, as she slips into her form fitted black dress. It might sound odd but I find it fascinating to watch her. She's so meticulous about how much makeup she wears or finding the right pair of shoes to match her outfit perfectly.

Standing back from the mirror she takes in her full appearance with an unsatisfied grimace on her face. For me, simply looking at her takes my breath away.

"I look like a fucking librarian," Bella grumbles under her breath, straightening her dress.

I laugh which is apparently the wrong thing to do because she turns to face me, placing her tiny hands on her hips and her beautiful eyes turn from their usual gorgeous chocolate brown to a bright fire red.

"What's so funny, Masen? Hmmm?" she snarls.

I raise my hands in defense, trying my hardest not to laugh again. "Nothing, Sunshine. You're just so damn cute when you get all flustered." She rolls her eyes at me and proceeds to put on her mascara.

"So, have you thought anymore on what we talked about the other night," I pipe up anxiously.

Bella stops, places the mascara brush back in the bottle and sits down beside me. She takes my hand in hers and just like always I feel the fire explode inside me. Just her simple touch brings my soul to life. I stare down at her little hand in mine and smile.

"I have, Mace," she whispers.

"And?" I ask nervously, looking into her eyes as she tucks her hair behind her ear with her free hand.

"Yes, I say let's do it. Let's have a baby," she replies as the most beautiful smile explodes across her face.

"Really?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yes, really, you silly man." She laughs. Her laughter is like music to my ears. I cup her face in my hands and kiss her. Every fiber of my being is alive with excitement. My beautiful wife will soon be carrying my child, a symbol of our love and devotion to each other. I'm truly the happiest man on the planet.

I gently ease her down on the bed as I deepen our kiss.

"No time like the present to get started in the baby making business," I tease her as I snake my hand up her dress.

She chuckles and gently breaks away from our kiss, playfully smacking my hand away.

"I have to get ready for work, baby."

I groan as she gets up from the bed and returns to finishing her makeup. I sit and watch her a few more minutes before finally crawling out of the bed to get ready for my day. I catch Bella's eyes in the mirror as she watches me walk into the bathroom, wearing nothing more than my boxers. As I close the door behind me, I make sure to give her my best panty dropping smile. I laugh because immediately I can see it in her eyes that if she wasn't already dressed, I would have a partner with me in the shower.

I methodically complete my daily routine, a quick shower, shave and a fight with my hair that I always lose. By the time I finish getting dressed in my uniform and tie up my boots, Bella has breakfast ready and on the table waiting for me to dig in. It's amazing that I haven't gained six-hundred pounds since I married Bella. The woman cooks constantly and my God can she cook.

"I can't stay and eat this morning," she mumbles with a mouthful of toast. "I have an early meeting with a new author that I can't be late for. I have to leave now or I'll never make it on time."

Bella is an editor for a small publishing firm here in New York. I remember the day she got that job very vividly; because that was the day I met her. It's amazing how six years can pass before your eyes, but with Bella it seems more like six days instead. She's my ray of sunshine in a dark cruel world. Not a moment goes by where I don't wish to be near my wife. She's my world, my very existence.

I couldn't tell you a day where Bella didn't wake up without a smile on her beautiful face. She walks into a room and it lights up immediately. People are instantly drawn to her, like a moth to a flame. Her smile is so inviting and the moment she opens her mouth to speak, well, you're hooked.

She works in the south tower of The World Trade Center on the twenty-second floor. She always raves about the view from her office. It thrills her that she just has to look out the window and can practically see all of Manhattan. Personally, that would drive me crazy. I have a slight fear of heights and while I love to see my wife as often as I can, I tend to steer clear of those buildings at all cost.

"Come have lunch with me today," she whispers as she leans in to kiss me goodbye.

"But you're all the way downtown," I whine playfully, pulling her into my lap.

Bella laughs as she removes herself from my grip. "Then turn the sirens on, baby."

Releasing her from my hold, I smack her ass and chuckle as she jumps. "You'll one day be the death of me, Masen," she grumbles, kissing me again quickly.

"But not today," I mutter as I watch her grab her keys and briefcase, rushing out the door.

My heart nearly skips a beat when she suddenly turns to me just before closing the door and smiles. "I love you, Edward Masen, more than life itself."

I hop up from my chair and rush to her, kissing her as though my life depends on it. "I love you too, Isabella Masen, and don't you forget it."

I close the door behind her and then run across the apartment to the window where I watch as she hails a cab. She turns and looks up at me staring down at her and smiles. She blows me a kiss as the car pulls up to the curb. I feel my heart ache as I watch her climb into the vehicle and pull out into traffic. I stand at the window for what seems like a brief moment watching as her cab disappears down the street. Before I realize it, thirty minutes have passed by and I'm still standing at the window staring down at the empty street.

Glancing at the time, I quickly scarf down my breakfast, and rush out the door myself. Luckily the station is just up the street from our apartment and I can walk to work. I close the door and lock it before walking down the stairs heading to the street. As I open the front door a brisk wind rushes into the building. I pull my jacket around me, as the cool September wind brushes my cheek. Winter is slowly approaching and I can already feel it in the air around me.

"We're fucking going to skip fall altogether this year," I grumble as I make my way down the street towards the station.

Thankful for the short distance, I walk into the station and immediately make my way to the break room to grab me a cup of coffee to warm my blood up. As I pour my cup, my cell phone buzzes in my pocket. I gently set my cup down and pull out my phone to read a text from Bella.

Text from Bella Masen: 8:48am 9/11/01: Something just exploded over at the north tower. No worries. I'm okay. I love you.

"No worries she says," I mutter as I put my phone back in my shirt pocket, picking up my coffee and making my way to a seat at the break room table. "I can't help but worry about my clumsy wife."

My partner, Jasper Whitlock, our chief, Emmett McCarty, and several of the other guys are glued to the television in the corner as I sit down next to Jasper.

Jasper is what I like to call a rare breed, a true gentleman. He was born and raised in Texas and when they say everything is bigger in Texas they damn well mean it. Jasper may look scrawny, but he stands a mere six foot five and can carry a three hundred pound man on his back without breaking a sweat. I consider myself lucky to have him as a partner and even more lucky to have him as my friend.

Back before either of us was married, we would hit every bar in lower Manhattan after our shift each night. With his blue eyes and great smile and my ability to land pretty much any girl I wanted, there was no stopping us.

I consider myself to be a relatively normal guy, but according to my wife I'm drop-dead gorgeous. Sure, I've always known I'm handsome but I think she goes overboard with her evaluation. I'm about six foot one, reddish brown hair and green eyes. According to Bella, I'm not too muscular to be scary but just the right amount of tone to be defined. I have to admit I love the way she sees me.

"You're late, Masen," Emmett calls out to me without taking his eyes off the television.

"Yes, sir," I reply, looking over at Jasper who snickers.

"Don't let it happen again," he advises as a small smile creeps up the corner of his mouth.

"Won't happen again, sir," I reply with a chuckle as Jasper fights back his own laughter. We all know I'm never on time for anything. My father used to tell me I would be late to my own funeral, but with Emmett being the boss, he must set an example.

I take a sip of my coffee and notice what everyone is staring at on the television. Dark gray smoke and fire are escaping from the side of the north tower of the World Trade Center Twin Towers.

"What the fuck happened," I ask Jasper, now knowing where the explosion Bella heard came from.

"A plane lost control and crashed into the north tower. Man, I wouldn't want to be in Manhattan this morning. You know those poor guys are hustling."

I chuckle and nod my head in agreement. "Yeah, Sunny just sent me a text saying she heard an explosion. Did they say what caused the plane to lose control?"

"They're still trying to figure that..." Jasper stops in midsentence, entranced by the television.

I turn my head to see what he's looking at when everyone begins screaming and pointing at the television. The reporter is discussing the damage to the north tower and how rescuers are about to attempt to make their way into the tower. The broadcast station has a live feed of the wreckage showing behind the reporter as he gives all the details known at

this point as to how the plane crashed into the building. Then suddenly, right before our very eyes, another plane careens into the south tower.

"Holy shit!"

"No, fucking way!"

"Did you see that?"

My world stands still. The sight of that plane crashing into the south tower makes my heart stop. I watch the mayhem on the streets, the reporter frantically trying to figure out what has just happened, and the flames bursting from the building. I can't breathe, I can't move, because in this moment, there is only one thing on my mind. Bella.

I rip my phone from my shirt, fumbling to dial Bella's number. Every one of my mates turn to watch me as I wait for her to pick up the phone and tell me she's out of that building, safe, and alive. The phone goes straight to voicemail and my heart sinks. I leave her a message begging her to call me and tell me that she's safe. I hang up the phone and the world seems to start again but in complete slow motion.

"All right, gentlemen. We need to get ourselves together quickly and get downtown. They're going to need every available hand out there today," Emmett barks out.

Everyone jumps up from their chairs, rushing through the building. The whole station is in organized chaos as a jumble of orders are being yelled out simultaneously. People are frantically calling any off duty techs, as well as trying to obtain any and all knowledge they can about the wreckage.

I'm frozen, unable to move as I watch the guys pull every piece of equipment and all of our supplies from storage and shove them in the back of several buses.

"Masen!" I hear a familiar voice yell at me.

"Masen, can you hear me?" Jasper's voice rings in my ears.

I realize I'm standing completely still, in the middle of the break room, lost in my own little world. I struggle to pull myself together. My wife, my very existence is in that building. I can feel it. She's trapped and I may be her only hope for survival. I made a promise to her years ago that I would never let anything bad happen to her. I promised I would always protect her from harm and right now when she needs me the most, I'm standing here like an idiot, frozen in my own thoughts.

My body immediately jumps to action. Without thinking, I grab my gear and rush toward mine and Jasper's ambulance, ramming the key into the ignition. That's when my heart starts beating again. Bella. My sunshine. She's waiting on me. She needs me and I have to get to her.

"Get in this bus now, Jazz, before I leave your sorry ass behind," I yell out at him.

Jasper grabs his gear and runs towards the ambulance and jumps in, buckling his seatbelt. "What ya waitin' for? Let's get this show on the road."

I nod once and throw the bus in gear, pulling out into traffic as Jasper turns on the siren. My heart sinks as I look off into the distance and see the pillars of black smoke rising in the sky. I have never felt so much fear before in my entire life. Everything that I am is in that building and I can't survive without her.

Jasper turns on the radio and calls in our location as I speed down the boulevard heading toward the freeway. I weave in and out of traffic trying to pay close attention to the road, praying that no stupid idiot pulls out in front of me.

I listen closely to the radio for any news of the wreckage. There is so much activity going on that it's hard to make heads or tails of what is happening with the buildings. I listen as the rescuers on site are working diligently to evacuate the victims as quickly as possible. I pray that one of them will be Bella, and that I will find her alive and safe upon my arrival.

I exit the highway and barrel through the streets of Manhattan, aching to get to the towers to find my sunshine. Nearly an hour has passed since the first plane hit the north tower and not a word from Bella. I keep checking my cell phone hoping that it will buzz with her telling me that she's out and everything is okay.

A phone rings and I jump, ripping my phone from my pocket only to have the ache of loss hit me immediately when I realize it's not my phone ringing. Jasper looks over at me with a sad expression on his face, knowing I'm dying inside as he answers his phone.

I listen as he tells his wife, Alice, that we are on our way to the site and that he will be careful. I can't help but feel jealous of him as he talks to her. He tells her everything we know about the crash sites and comforts her fears. I long to do the same for Bella and yet all I can do is pray my loving wife is safe. Deep down I know she's alive. I know my heart will stop beating the moment hers does, so there's no doubt in my mind that my sunshine is thriving.

Jasper met Alice about the same time I met Bella. Somehow it was like fate knew exactly what he and I needed at that time in our lives. Looking back, he and I really were in a state of darkness, and these two women helped us see the light. Now, Alice is seven months pregnant with their first child and while I know they say a mother glows during her pregnancy, I must say Jasper has damn near been beaming ever since he discovered he was going to be a father.

I hear Jasper whisper to Alice how much he loves her and their son and tears well in my eyes. Jasper hangs up the phone and grips my shoulder.

"She'll be okay. That girl of yours is spunky. Nothing can keep her down," Jasper encourages me with a smile. I nod somehow feeling at peace by his words.

As we pull up to the wreckage I slow the bus down and every nightmare I've ever had in my life officially becomes a reality. The air is full of smoke and debris causing my lungs to ache for fresh air.

"Put your respirator on," Jasper demands as he attaches his to his face.

I reach back in my bag and grab for mine. I quickly put it on and immediately feel relief as I inhale clean air into my lungs. We jump out of the bus and hear nothing but the screams and crying of those who are being pulled from the buildings. My heart races in my chest as I search the faces of those who are being cared for, praying that one of them is my wife.

"There you two are," Emmett bellows running towards us. "We need you two over near the north tower."

Normally, I wouldn't argue with Emmett, because let's face it he's a scary looking mother fucker. He's a tall burly man that looks more like a grizzly bear than a man with his curly brown hair and deep blue eyes. I have nothing but the utmost respect for him, and usually I would take his orders and follow them to the letter but today I'm determined that no matter what I will be at the south tower to find my wife.

"I can't, Chief," I reply.

"What's that, Masen?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but my wife is in the south tower. I have to be there," I practically whimper.

Everything seems to go silent around us as he looks me in the eye. I can feel him sizing me up and know that as long as I stand my ground he will back down. Suddenly, I see compassion cross his rugged features. "Okay, Masen. You and Whitlock are at the south tower. If you happen to see Newton and Yorkie, send their asses over to me."

I nod, sighing in relief. Emmett grabs my shoulder and gives a weak smile. "Good luck, Masen. I pray to God you find her."

"I will, sir. No doubt about it."

Emmett releases me from his grasp with a nod. Jasper and I grab our gear and run several meters towards the medical sites that now surround the towers. Hundreds of people are gathering around the tents, in desperate need of medical attention. Some horribly wounded, others, barely having a scratch on them. I search each face, hoping that the next

person I see is Bella. Everything is in total chaos around us. No one knows who's coming or going. All we know is that we have to get to the people in those buildings and fast.

As we make our way to our designated location, we watch as a vast perimeter is set up miles away from the towers. Police tape is being used to block off the entire area to ensure safety. While it seems inconvenient for us to run the distance between the buildings and safe zone on foot, we know there is no way for us to use motor vehicles safely with the debris falling from the structures.

We find the tent with the sign that reads 'Personnel' and make our way inside.

"Gentlemen," the team captain is speaking to a group of Firefighters, Police Officers, and Medics, as we enter the tent. "We are each breaking up into teams of two or three. You are to stay with your team at all times. Under no circumstances are you to separate from your team members. There are too many wounded and not enough personnel to tend to the full situation. We just received a report that the structures aren't sound and either if not both buildings could collapse at any moment. Our jobs right now are to get as many people out of those buildings as possible. Is that understood?"

We acknowledge our orders and take off toward the south tower. I check my phone again to see if Bella has tried to reach me with no luck.

Jasper looks at me staring at my phone. "Quit worrying, Masen. She'll find a way to let you know she's okay. This is Sunny we're talking about after all."

I smile at him knowing without a doubt that he's right and for that minute moment I'm at peace.

Jasper and I work diligently with the rest of the crew to get every man, woman and child we can reach out of that building knowing that at any moment it could cave in.

"Your wife is Bella Masen?" the kindly older gentleman asks me as I escort him to the tent for treatment. The gash on his forehead has me very concerned and I know he needs medical attention immediately.

"Yes, sir. She's my sunshine," I reply, happy to find someone who knows my wife.

"She's so sweet. She comes into the cafeteria every morning and buys a cup of coffee. Her smile always puts me in the best of moods."

"Me too," I whisper.

"She's not still in there is she?" he inquires, his features inundated with concern.

"I don't know, but I assure you I won't stop until she's found," I promise.

I turn to see Jasper watching us, giving me a nod that we need to head back. I reassure the gentleman once more that I will find Sunny and leave him in the nurse's care. I follow Jasper out of the tent feeling some relief in finally speaking with someone that knows my beautiful Sunshine.

I pull out my cell phone and re-read the text Sunny left me that morning. No worries she said. I wish she knew just how worried I am. I slip my phone back in my pocket and I hear Jasper snicker. He has this know-it-all smirk on his face and I have the urge to slap it right off him.

"What?" I exclaim.

"Nothing, man. You didn't even realize that Grandpa back there was crushin' on your wife," Jasper replies with a chuckle.

I laugh. "I certainly did and I can't blame him one bit."

We are walking back towards the building when the sound of thunder roars around us. I have never heard anything like it before in my life. The rumble is more than just the sound of thunder. It sounds as if the earth is breaking open. The

explosion sends a wave of heated smoke through the streets making it nearly impossible to breathe even with our respirators on.

I look in the sky and can't see anything. The sky is nearly black. All sunlight has been taken from the world. My heart stops as the earth begins to shake under our feet. The rumble of concrete breaking, mortar crumbling and steel bending sends a jolt of panic to my soul. My eyes lift up and I watch as the south tower begins to crumble.

"OH MY GOD! NO!" I scream. "SUNSHINE! FUCK NO!"

As the tower collapses in on itself, billows of smoke and debris flood the streets of the city. My body moves without me thinking. I race toward the building while everyone else seems to be running to get away from the destruction.

"EDWARD! NO!" Jasper shouts.

Thousands of voices are screaming in anguish around me, yet I see no face but hers. Images of her beautiful face flood my mind while I run as hard and fast as my legs can carry me. My heart is pounding out of my chest and shattering into a million pieces all in the same moment. I watch as story by story the tower topples in on itself. A cloud of dust fills the streets making it nearly impossible to see anything as I rush toward the destruction.

Suddenly, a pair of arms reaches around me, pulling me back.

"Masen, you'll be killed," Jasper roars in my ear.

"Get the fuck off me, Jasper! I have to get to Bella!"

"Are you out of your fucking mind? You'll die, you stupid son of a bitch!"

"I swear to God, if you don't let me go I'll kill you! I have to get to my wife!" I scream as I ram my elbow deep into his gut trying desperately to escape his grasp.

I don't care about my life. I only care about my wife's and I have to reach her before that building takes the only thing from this world that has ever meant anything to me.

I hear Jasper groan in pain but feel no remorse for my actions. He's in my way and I will do whatever is humanly possible to save my wife.

"Edward, think of Bella. How would she feel about you risking your life to save hers?" Jasper argues as he attempts to readjust his grip.

"Please, Jazz," I beg. "What if it were Alice in there? You would do everything in your power to save her. Can you honestly ask less of me? Please, Jazz, if you're my friend, you have to let me go."

"I can't do that and you know it," Jasper screams.

I take advantage of his loosened grasp and rip myself from his arms. I dart toward the building again not sure how I will find her but know I have to get to her somehow. Jasper's arms swiftly vice grip around me again, preventing me from escaping. Tears stream down my face as I try to run with my best friend on my back. I attempt to wipe them from my eyes only to create mud from the dust that has accumulated on my face.

"I can't live without her," I scream through my tears, shaking hard to get Jasper off me. "Don't you see I'm nothing without her?"

Jasper uses every ounce of strength he has and knocks me to the ground. My head slams hard against the pavement and the wind is knocked out of me. I lie flat on my back and watch as the building crashes to the ground into a pile of rubble.

"BELLA!" I cry, ramming my fists against Jasper's chest. My eyes burn with the tears and dirt and my head aches from where it slammed into the concrete. But none of that matters. Only she matters.

"Please, God," I pray, "Please..."

I cover my face with my hands trying to block out the image of the tower crumbling around my wife. Jasper lies flat on top of me, tears streaking his face as he watches me fall apart, unable to console me.

"Edward, please understand," he begs.

My heart feels like it's being ripped from my chest. "I promised her. I fucking promised her that I would never let anything happen to her. I fucking swore to her and I failed her."

I grip his shirt and bury my face in his shoulder unable to stop the flood of tears.

The sound of the destruction is so deafening I almost don't hear Jasper say, "This is one fall you can't rescue her from, Edward."

I scream out my wife's name as my mind is transported back in time to when my beautiful ray of sunshine dropped into my life.

June 20th, 1995 ~ 3:12 pm EST

The summer heat was sweltering for this time of year in New York. It really wasn't so much the heat as it was for the humidity. Even at three in the afternoon, simply walking from my apartment to the station zapped nearly all the energy out of me. Of course it didn't help that I had a hangover from hell.

Earlier that morning, Jasper and I had gone out perusing the bars after our shift as usual. Since it was past midnight we decided to call it my birthday celebration. All I remember is that I got totally trashed and may have fucked a blonde in the bathroom of one of the bars. Not a bad way for a guy to spend the early morning hours of his twenty-fifth birthday if you ask me.

Normally, I would have called in sick on a day like this. With my head splitting and my body aching, I really would be no good to anyone, but something in me made me get up and go to work. I knew it wouldn't have been that big of a deal if I skipped since I rarely take time off anyway. Most of my mates tell me I'm a workaholic but I really don't think so. I just enjoy what I do for a living.

As always, I was running late for work and dragging my ass thanks to the heat and hangover. I reluctantly made my way out of my apartment and started towards the station. With the sun blazing in my eyes and my head pounding, I put on my sunglasses trying to alleviate some of the pain. I slowly made my way down the block, letting my mind wander as I walked. I desperately tried to remember the details of my night.

"Was she really a blonde? And what was her fucking name? Jenny? Penny? Fuck!" I grumbled under my breath.

I slightly shook my head trying to remember what the girl even looked like. I decided it really didn't matter. At least I didn't end up like Jasper and go home with a girl. God, I hate that awkward moment the next morning when you wake up next to a girl and can't remember her name. You'd be surprised at how pissed off a girl can get because you forgot her fucking name. I shrugged it off thankful that I didn't have to really worry about it since I'd never see the girl again anyway.

As struggled to remember the events of my evening, I mindlessly followed my usual path to work, which led me right passed by an old brownstone. I love the architecture of that building. It was built back in the early nineteen hundred's and they just don't make structures like that anymore.

I looked up to see the silhouette of a young woman walking out of the building. "Thanks again, Mrs. Johnson for letting me look at the room on such short..."

I heard the girl scream and without thinking I lunged for her as she toppled down the stairs, falling directly into my arms.

She peered over her glasses and looked up into my eyes. Her gorgeous brown eyes seemed to peer deep into my soul and every hair on my body seemed to stand on end as electricity coursed through my veins.

"You okay there, Sunshine?" I asked.

"My hero," she whispered, wincing slightly.

My heart raced and my body felt like it was a live wire while I held this woman in my arms. She was the most perfect creature I had ever laid eyes on. Her soft brown hair wisped over her shoulders, her flawless skin was smooth to the touch and the light pink flush on her cheeks was nearly my undoing.

"Are you hurt?" I asked again.

I was enamored by the shape of her mouth. The way her plump rose colored lips parted as she began to speak mesmerized me.

"Just my ankle," she muttered. "I'm such a fucking klutz."

I couldn't help but laugh at the sound of that beautiful mouth cursing.

"You think my being hurt is funny?" she whimpered.

My heart broke. Never in my life had I felt such a pull by a woman.

"Not at all, Sunshine. I just thought...you know what never mind. Look, there's a firehouse just around the corner. Let me get you over there and we'll have a look at that ankle."

"How do I know you're not serial killer or something?" she asked jokingly.

"You'll just have to trust me, Sunshine," I smugly replied.

She wrapped her arms around my neck and I proceeded to carry her to the station. The heat of the day suddenly disappeared and I felt nothing but complete comfort with her in my arms. She laid her head on my shoulder and her whole body relaxed against me.

"My name's Bella," she whispered against my neck, causing my skin to tingle.

"Hmm?"

"You keep calling me Sunshine. I just thought you might like to know my name's Bella," she replied with a chuckle.

"Oh, sorry. You just seemed like a sunshine to me."

"How so?"

"Because your smile is like a ray of sunshine in a dark world," I blurted out before my brain could catch up with my mouth. I mentally kicked myself for such a cheesy line, even though in my mind it was absolutely true. I waited for her to laugh but the laughter never came.

"I like that," she whispered. "Sunshine it is." She nuzzled her nose against my neck and I could swear she was sniffing me. "Maybe Sunny for short."

"Whatever you want, Sunny." I smiled and tightened my grip around her. "I guess I should've introduced myself. My name's Edward but everyone calls me Masen."

"That's an odd nickname," she replied.

"It's my last name." I pointed to the nametag on my shirt.

"Oh, so, you're a firefighter?"

"EMT."

"Wow! I guess if I was going to fall into a man's arms, I couldn't have chosen a better pair," she joked.

"Well, I'm more than happy to be your rescuer today."

"Edward Masen, my hero," she whispered as her fingers played with the hair at the nape of my neck.

We walked in silence until we reached the station. As we entered the firehouse, I noticed that it was empty and a couple of busses were gone.

"Damn, I really was late," I muttered as I took her into the dorm room. I gently laid her down on the bed and pulled up a chair. I took off my sunglasses and sat down in the chair.

"Do you mind?" I asked as I motioned toward her leg asking her permission to touch her.

She nodded her head with a smile and I proceeded to remove her shoe from her foot. I could feel her gaze wash over me as I felt her ankle for any kind of breaks. My heart broke when she winced as I slightly twisted her ankle.

"Sorry," she whimpered.

"Don't be sorry. It looks like nothing more than a sprain. I can fix you up quickly."

"Thank you," she whispered.

"Anything for you, Sunshine," I replied with a wink. She smiled softly and I couldn't help but smile back. I patted her tiny hand and got up from my seat. I reluctantly left her lying on the bed and went to the supply room to ascertain the supplies I would need to mend her sprained ankle.

When I returned she was gone. I panicked. I dropped the supplies on the bed and ran through the halls of the station, searching each room for my missing patient. Something inside me needed to find her and protect her at all cost. I was relieved when I found her hobbling along in the garage looking at one of the busses. I leaned against the door silently watching her examine the vehicle.

"I've never been this close to one before," she said to me without turning around.

I was startled by the sound of her voice. I didn't realize she knew I was watching her. She turned her head, looking over her shoulder and my heart skipped a beat. I walked up behind her, resting my hands on her shoulders. A little whimper escaped her lips as she leaned back, her head falling against my chest.

"You know you really shouldn't be on that ankle," I whispered softly to her as my hands slowly made their way down her smooth arms.

She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. "You feel it to? Don't you?" she murmured.

She was right. I did feel it. I had never felt anything like it before in my life. It was as if my body had been asleep all my life and was now awake for the first time.

I pulled her hair away from her shoulder, my hand lingering on her neck. Electricity shot through my body as her hands pressed firmly against my thighs. She looked up at me and it was like two magnets being drawn together. My lips connected to hers and every coherent thought seemed to flee my mind. I quickly but gently turned her to face me, pressing her back up against the bus as my tongue frantically invaded her mouth.

She whimpered which at first concerned me. I feared hurting her since I hadn't had the chance to mend her ankle. I pulled back looking into those beautiful brown eyes that were now darkened by lust and desire.

"Bella, we need to get you off..."

She cupped my face in her hands and pulled me to her, kissing me with so much passion that every ounce of my being felt as if it had been ignited on fire. I picked her up, wrapping her legs around my hips, and carried her to one of the work stations, never letting my lips leave hers.

I gently sat her down on the counter unable to control the urges within me. My lips tenderly trailed down her neck soliciting a sweet moan from her. Her hands clawed at the back of my shirt pulling me closer to her as my lips made their way down to her collarbone, nipping gently at her exposed skin.

"You're so beautiful, Sunny," I whispered against the hollow of her throat as my tongue dipped against it gently.

My fingers wrapped around her hips pulling her flush against me. I knew there was no way she couldn't feel the effects she was having on my body and I definitely could feel the heat permeating from hers. I brushed my hand up her shirt, feeling her heated skin against mine.

"Mace," she whispered against my lips, "I want..."

Just then the garage door opened and the trucks began to pull in. I pulled back and watched her blush a million shades of red at the fact that we had just been caught making out in the middle of a fire station garage. She had the most adorable deer in the headlight look on her face and I struggled not to laugh.

I gently picked her up off the counter and walked her over to my usual rig. Jasper hopped out looking like death warmed over and that's when I realized that my hangover was completely gone. I felt like I had been given a miracle drug.

"Late again, Masen?" Jasper hollered jokingly at me over the driver's side door.

I laughed. "Jazz, I want you to meet someone. Sunny, this is Jasper Whitlock, my partner. Jasper, this is my sunshine."

The look on Jasper's face was priceless. I just referred to this woman as mine. Never, since he had known me, had I ever called any girl mine. Not even jokingly. Jasper closed the door and walked around to us.

Bella looked up at me with a smile on her face then turned to Jasper. "Nice to meet you, Jasper," she said as she reached out to shake Jasper's hand.

"Likewise, ma'am," Jasper replied taking her hand, bringing it to his lips. "It's nice to meet the woman that could steal Edward Masen's heart."

"No, we just met," she argued looking up at me. I looked down at her and smiled. "He rescued me from my fall," she simply stated.

"I do believe you rescued him, m'dear," Jasper replied causing Bella to blush again.

"Sunshine, why don't we mend that ankle up and get you a cab?"

She nodded and allowed me to carry her back to the dorm where I mended her ankle, stole a few more kisses and graciously asked for her phone number.

September 12th, 2001 ~ 4:26 am EST

Nearly twenty-four hours has passed since my Sunshine went missing. I'm gritty and grimy but I keep pushing because I know deep in my heart that the next person I pull from the rubble just might be Sunny. Emmett has yelled at me so many times now that I've lost count. He wants me to take a break, to get some rest but I simply can't. I won't rest until my wife is safe and in my arms.

"Masen, I fucking swear to God that if you don't sleep for a couple of hours I will personally drag your ass away from here," he demands.

"Just one more run," I plead. "I might be able to find her. Please, sir, just one more."

"The answer is no, Masen. You are no good to me if you pass out in there from exhaustion. Now get your ass to a safe zone and I'm ordering you to sleep. If I find out you don't, I will have you removed from the premises. Do you understand me?"

I begrudgingly reply, "Clearly, sir."

I stomp off towards the safe zone with Jasper right behind me.

"He's right you know. You really do need sleep. "

"Fuck you," I snarl.

"Masen, just listen to me. Bella would have agreed with what I did. She wouldn't have wanted you to die in that building. You know I'm fucking right!" he yells, grabbing my shoulder turning me to face him.

I stare into his deep blue eyes and know that he's right. Bella would have been beyond pissed at me had I entered the building while it was collapsing. I've known that from the beginning but it's just easier to blame Jasper for the pain I'm feeling.

"I've been ordered to sleep and so I'm going to try and sleep. You coming?" I grumble.

I knew Jasper had already taken a break. He went home to see Alice and let her know he was okay. I envied him and knowing he had the chance to see his wife only made me angrier with him.

"I'm joining up with Newton while Yorkie takes his break. I'll see you in a couple of hours."

Jasper gives me a quick hug and runs back toward ground zero, as we are now calling it.

I shove my hands in my pockets and head to the closest safe zone. I walk in and to my surprise there is my father standing near one of the beds. He looks at me and suddenly every wall I've put up, every front I've created to make people believe I'm okay, crumbles. I rush into his arms and begin to cry uncontrollably.

"There, there, son," he softly comforts me.

Like a dam that has broken every ounce of agony in my soul pours forth onto my father's shirt. Carlisle Cullen might be my adopted father but he's really the only father I've even known. He's slightly shorter than me but built the same way as I. His golden blonde hair is disheveled and his blue-green eyes glisten with tears.

"What are you doing here?" I gasp between sobs.

"I'm here because I'm needed. You didn't think I wouldn't join in this now did you?"

I nod. He's right I should have known better. My father being a well renowned surgeon meant his services would most definitely be needed for a situation like this.

"I take it you haven't found Bella yet?" he inquires, pulling me down to the bed.

"No, sir. We're close though. I can feel it."

"Son, I hate to say it but have you considered..."

"No!" I scream. "Sunny isn't dead. I would know. My heart would know." I pound hard on my chest. "She's very much alive, Dad. She's just waiting for me to find her."

Carlisle gives me a slight nod. I know deep down he believes she's gone and he's just placating me but I refuse to share in his beliefs. My wife is alive. I know it. Don't ask me how I know I just do.

"When was the last time you slept, son?"

I shrug, knowing where he is going with this.

"Here, I was just leaving for my next shift. Take my bed. You need to sleep."

Knowing my orders and now that my father has seen me too, I reluctantly lay down on the bed as my father pulls the sheet over me. I pull my cell phone from my shirt and look at Bella's last text me again. I now have it memorized but I can't help myself. It's my last connection to my beautiful wife so I read it over and over again.

My father takes the cell phone from my hand and lays it on the table beside me. "Sleep now, Edward. For in your dreams, your Bella awaits you," he murmurs as he brushes my matted hair from my face.

I close my eyes, letting my mind drift through memories of my beloved wife as I slowly fall asleep.

August 30th, 1995 ~ 12:08 am EST

"Sunshine, I'm home." I hollered as a bouncing brunette came bounding down in the halls into my arms.

"Finally," she murmured as her lips crushed to mine.

My hands snaked up the back of her shirt as my tongue teased hers. "You know a man could get used to this kind of welcome home every day," I mumble as I nuzzled my nose in her neck.

"Good. You better get very used to it," she moaned softly.

Sunny and I had only been living together a few weeks. I couldn't stand the idea of another day without her constantly being near me. She was everything to me and I had to be close to her every possible moment I could. I'll never forget the sound of her squeal when I asked her to move in.

"You must be exhausted, hero," she whispered as her hands trailed down my arms.

"I am but it's nothing I can't manage. What I really need is a shower."

A playful smirk crossed her beautiful lips and I immediately knew what she was thinking. She silently took my hand and led me to the bathroom.

"How about a nice hot bath instead?" she asked as we entered the bathroom.

I snaked my arms around her waist and leaned into her whispering, "Only if you're planning on getting in there with me."

She kissed me sweetly and then shrugged her shoulders. "You talked me into it," she said as she started the water.

Once she seemed satisfied with the water temperature, she turned to face me, where she proceeded to undress me. With a hunger in her eyes, I watched as she quickly unbuttoned my shirt, pulling it away from my shoulders. Her nails gently raked down my chest over my nipples causing them to harden at her touch. I released a feral groan as she teased and played with each nipple, rolling them between her fingers.

All air escaped my lungs the moment her sweet mouth made contact with my bare skin. My cock grew painfully hard as her tongue slid down my chest leaving a trail of heat in its wake. I placed my hands in her hair, curling my fingers in her silky locks as she sucked my nipple into her mouth. I closed my eyes as her teeth grinded gently over my pebbled skin while her tongue expertly swirled around my nipple. My moans were drowned out by the sound of running water behind us as her gorgeous mouth tantalized my body.

Slowly her hands made their way down my chest. My heartbeat was racing as her palms flattened over my stomach and her fingertips ran gently down my sides. I crushed my lips to hers needing to feel her every possible way I could. My tongue invaded her delectable mouth as my hand slipped up the back of her shirt feeling her heated skin under my fingertips.

A small whimper escaped her lips as my hands moved down her back and grasped firmly around her backside. I squeezed her ass as her fingertips brushed over the waistband of my pants. She fumbled with the button on my pants, fighting back a moment of laughter at her inability to get the damn things unbuttoned.

"This is the only thing I hate about your uniform. It's so fucking hard to get it off of you," she complained.

I reached between us and expertly popped the button on my pants before guiding her hand down my zipper. A sweet smirk appeared on her lips as her fingers traced the outline of my engorged erection through my pants.

"Off. Now," I growled impatiently, my cock throbbing.

She pulled my pants and boxers down with one quick push then stood back staring at me.

"See something you like, Sunshine?"

She licked her lips and smiled. "I certainly do."

I stepped out of my pants, stalking towards her.

"You have too much clothing on, baby. I think a bath requires you to be naked."

"Well, what do you know? You're right. I'm still very much dressed," she sarcastically replied.

She gave me a cocky smirk then turned away from me and leaned down, dipping her hand in the tub to check the water temperature. I wrapped my fingers around her hips and aggressively tugged her body towards mine. I slipped my fingers into the hem of her silky yoga pants and dragged them down her legs, exposing her soft wet sex.

I took my dick in my hand and I rubbed the head of my cock along her slit. A low moan rumbled from my chest as I felt her body's reaction to mine. Her sweet wet pussy slightly opened for me, practically begging me to take her.

She looked over her shoulder at me, her fingers gripping the bathtub, her eyes darkened with lust and her lips parted with need. "What do you think you're doing?" she asked coyly.

I gave her a little crooked grin as I placed one hand on her hip and pushed the head of my cock into her hot center. Her eyes closed and just as I was about to thrust my cock deep inside her tight heat, she stood up, effectively cockblocking me.

She turned to me and within an instant, her sweet innocent demeanor melted away. Left before me was a gorgeous ferocious tigress who had taken complete ownership of my body.

"Bathtub, now, Mister," she demanded.

She lifted her arms, swiftly pulling her tank top over her head and unlatched her bra. I watched as the sheer fabric fell from her body leaving her completely naked before me.

"So beautiful," I murmured as I kissed her hungrily.

Walking backwards, she led me to the bathtub. I was momentarily shocked as she stepped into the tub without breaking our kiss. My sweet klutz would normally have taken a nose dive but when she was like this, there was a certain grace about her that was indescribable. I followed her in and sat down never letting my eyes leave her sexy figure. She turned off the water and sat down in the tub facing me.

"Now, where was I?" I asked as I leaned forward and wrapped my arms around her pulling her flush to me. I smirked at the sound of the water sloshing over the tub.

She wrapped her knees around my hips as she ground her sweet heat over my aching member.

"I think right about here," she growled as she thrust her body down.

A loud groan escaped my lips as my head fell back against the bathtub wall. She purred and smiled as she slowly worked her tight sheath around my erection. The silky feeling of her heated center engulfing my cock nearly sent me over the edge.

My fingers gripped her hips guiding her rhythmically along my length. She leaned forward and pressed her lips to my throat causing more water to spill over the bathtub.

"I missed you," she whimpered.

"I can tell," I replied teasingly.

I watched her closely with each move of her body memorizing every moan and expression she made. I pulled her back gently and smiled.

"What?" she whispered.

"You're just so fucking sexy," I replied.

I drew her gently toward me running my tongue along her neck, tasting the water that was covering her skin. I placed a tender kiss on each of her breasts before I thrust her down hard on my cock. She screamed in delight as she dug her nails into my shoulders. I took my chance to gain control of her body.

I bucked my hips towards her determined to have her feel me deeper with each thrust. My mind was telling me to slow down because I wanted this to last but my body was screaming for the release it needed. I fought the urge to cum as I felt her tightening around me.

"So close," she whimpered.

I kissed her feverishly as I thrust my hips harder towards her. I closed my eyes feeling every inch of her hot center wrapped around me.

She gripped my hair tight in her hands, forcing me to look her in the eyes. "I want to watch your eyes as you cum, baby."

That was all I could handle. I thrust my hips up bouncing her hard against my cock. I could feel as her body began to shake and her walls clamped down around me. Her eyes grew wider and her mouth fell open as my name dripped from her lips.

"Oh, God! Fuck, Mace! Edward!" she screamed.

I pushed her damp hair from her face kissing her with every ounce of passion in me. "That's right, Sunshine. Cum for me, baby."

Her breathing became erratic as her body thrust harder and faster, spiraling us both into ecstasy. I buried my face in her neck and screamed her name as my hot seed flowed out of me, filling her body.

"I love you, Mace," she whimpered as her movements slowed.

There I was in the bathtub, having just had the best orgasm of my life, my cock still twitching inside my beautiful girlfriend and I had only one thought on my mind. I wanted her forever. I pulled back, looked her in the eyes, and the words were out of my mouth before I even realized what I was saying.

"Marry me, sunshine?" I asked.

At first she looked startled. She almost seemed unsure if I was being serious or facetious but a smile formed on her lips and there was a sparkle in her eyes I will never forget. I knew then what her answer was before she even uttered the words.

"Yes. I'll marry you," she whispered as her lips met mine.

My arms snaked around her body pulling her close as I kissed her, overwhelmed with happiness.

"You'll marry me?" I reiterated.

"I'll marry you, Edward Masen," she said with a grin.

I held her close to me, gently rocking us, not caring that the water was getting cold or that it was splashing over the sides of the tub. All I knew is I wanted her in every way I could have her and making her my wife was the one way that would ensure she was mine for all eternity.

So, three days later, she and I drove to Atlantic City where I did exactly that.

September 13th, 2001 ~ 1:26 pm EST

I have been working nearly nonstop again for twenty hours. Emmett has stopped hounding me as much since we have had so many injured during this rescue that our numbers are dwindling. Medical professionals are coming in from other cities and even other states now to help with the search and rescue but no matter how many hands we have on sight, there just never seems to be enough.

One by one, Jasper and I work to pull people from the rubble. Every time we come across a lifeless body, I seize at the thought that it could be Bella.

Little by little, I'm realizing that there is just no more hope for my beautiful vibrant wife. I've lost her to the bastards that decided to make a statement to America and the world, by bringing down the World Trade Center. I'm angry and broken and I want to make every one of those fuckers pay for taking my world away from me.

Robotically, I turn over concrete and mortar searching for that one face, my sweet angel to appear to me. I flip over a piece of sheetrock and I see a tiny brunette curled up in a small ball.

I quickly pull the brunette from the rubble. My heart starts pounding in my ears and my stomach churns with fear. I gaze upon her praying that this isn't who I think it is. Her hair is matted with dried blood and dirt and her skin is stained with dust. I pick up her lifeless body and it just slumps in my arms. I gasp for air as I wipe the dust and dirt from her face.

"Oh, God, please, no," I beg as I look her over.

She seems so tiny and fragile and yet it's almost as if she's asleep. Her eyes are closed and her lips are covered in dust and muck.

"No, no, no!" I scream. I collapse to the ground with her in my arms. I'm beyond exhausted and I'm falling apart.

Jasper sees me with the woman in my arms and rushes to my side.

"Jasper," I grunt. "I can't breathe." I feel my chest collapsing in on me. "Jasper, she's gone. My sweet girl is gone." I look up at him and I feel the tears stinging my eyes but they refuse to fall. Panic takes over my body as I stare at this lifeless woman. After all this time, I find her like this and while I thought I was prepared to face her death, I'm not.

Jasper stares at me blankly, shaking his head.

I can't understand his reaction. My wife is fucking dead and all he can do is stare at me. I've forgiven him for not letting me go into the building while it was collapsing but his reaction now is unforgivable.

"She's gone!" I scream. "My wife is gone!"

Jasper leans down in front of me and looks me in the eyes, shaking his head. He tries to pull the corpse from my arms.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I demand. Anger has replaced my panic and I have the sudden urge to throw up.

Jasper wraps his arms under the corpse and tugs gently. I yank back, preventing him from taking her from me. "You can't take her away from me. Not now! I can't lose her, Jasper. I just can't."

I push him away as hard as I can, clinging to my wife's lifeless body. Lying in my arms is my last connection to the world that has now collapsed around me. I want nothing more than to die because I know I can't live without her. My stomach churns and I gulp back the saliva that is filling my mouth. I haven't eaten much in days but I know that at any moment, what is in my stomach will be coming back up.

Jasper grabs my arm and says, "That's not Bella."

I look at him confused. How could he say such a thing? Is he trying to drive me crazier than I already am?

"Look closely, man. That's not Bella," he whispers.

I do as I'm told and take a closer look at the woman in my arms. To my amazement, I realize my partner is right. While this woman is shaped very similar to my wife and her hair color is nearly the same, from what I can tell, her features

are nothing like Sunshine's. My grief and exhaustion are playing horrible tricks on my mind.

I hand over the body to Jasper willingly and sit in the rubble a few moments collecting my thoughts. I watch as Jasper places the woman in a body bag, tags her and sends her off with the other's we have collected.

Jasper comes and sits down beside me handing me a bottle of water. I take a sip and hand it back to him.

"Today is Sunny's birthday, you know." I tell him.

Jasper nods as he takes a drink from the bottle.

"I was planning on taking her to the Met tonight. She loves that place so much. I had the whole evening planned out. Dinner at Crema, a carriage ride through Central Park, the Met and I even had a suite reserved at the Waldorf."

"Sounds like Sunny was in for the night of her life," Jasper says.

I nod as a small smile appears on my lips. I can see it all in my head. I know exactly how Sunny would react to the evening I had planned for us. She thrives on romance and I would have made this the most romantic night of her life.

And like a ton of bricks it hits me. I've lost my wife forever. I won't ever be able to romance her the way she deserves. I won't have the chance to kiss her beautiful lips or simply hold her in my arms. The sounds of her laughter are lost to me for the rest of my life and I will never know her love again.

Tears fill my eyes as I turn to Jasper who is staring at a nearly empty bottle of water.

"I'm not going to find her alive, am I?" I finally ask.

"We'll find her," Jasper replies as he takes the last drink from the bottle.

We sit in silence several minutes and I finally come to grips with the fact that only one out of every three people we find are lucky enough to be alive. I'm defeated, nauseated and I need sleep desperately. My wife is gone and I'm left here in this world all alone.

I run my hands over my face wiping away the unshed tears when the sound of my cell phone vibrating rips me from my thoughts. I pull my phone from my shirt to see an alert for a new text message. I almost ignore the message thinking it's probably Emmett telling me it's time to get take another break but out of sheer habit I open it.

Text from Bella Masen: 1:53pm 9/13/01: I'm still here. No worries. We'll do it all. I love you.

My mouth drops open. I'm completely stunned

"Sunshine?" I whisper. "Is it possible?"

I read the text again to make sure my mind isn't playing tricks on me again. I can't believe what I'm reading. There it is, clear as day. My Bella, my Sunshine is alive and she must be nearby.

"What?" Jasper asks noticing my reaction.

"It's Sunny. She's here," I exclaim as I toss him my phone, hopping up from my spot.

I immediately begin to holler her name. Jasper reads the message and jumps up from his seat, tossing the phone back to me and begins to help me search.

"Sunny, baby, if you can hear me, try to make some noise so I can find you," I cry as I chuck sheetrock aside.

"Bella, we're here. Tell us where you are," Jasper instructs.

We tread lightly around the area. It's unstable and we don't want to take any chances of causing a cave in.

"Sunshine, please, if you can move or speak, anything, just let me know where you are," I plead.

"Masen!" Jasper shouts. I look over in his direction and he's pulling back rebar from a huge pile of rubble.

I scramble to his side and realize that there is huge gaping hole and someone is inside. I can barely make out the figure but I can see they are buried under a pile of debris. I'm frozen. What if this is her and her injuries are beyond my repair? What if I can't save my sunshine even after finding her?

I look up at Jasper in terror as he is pulling back metal from the hole.

"Help me, man. We have to get her out of there," he commands.

I fight the urge to scream and shake my head.

"Edward! Now!" Jasper screams.

I snap into action. I begin pulling back concrete trying to see down into the hole we are pulling the debris away from. I hear a rumbling around us and know that this area is not very sound. We have to be extremely careful or we will face a potential disaster.

Little by little we begin seeing more of the woman buried in the rubble. I shine a dull flashlight down and call out to her.

"Sunny, is that you?"

A hoarse whisper floats to my ears and it's the most beautiful sound I've ever heard.

"My hero."

Without thinking, I jump down into the hole and begin to push away the remains of the building from her body. Her smile brightens the room as I finally free her from her capture and pull her into my arms. Tears stream down my face as I see my beautiful ray of sunshine staring at me. As always she's the light that brightens this dark cruel world for me.

I smoothers her face in kisses, not caring that she is covered in blood, sweat, tears and dirt. All I know is I've found her and nothing in this world can take her away from me again.

"My beautiful angel," I cry.

Her little hand touches my face and that spark of electricity fills my soul. "No worries, baby. I'm here."

I press my lips to hers, thanking God for the life of my wife. I do a quick once over of her injuries. I know she is badly beaten up and I need to have her into the doctor stat.

The building around us makes a loud groan and pulls me from my moment of happiness.

"Masen, we have to hurry," Jasper's panicked voice floats down to me. I realize that the area is about to cave in and we have to get Bella out.

"Can you move, my love?" I ask her.

She nods. "I think so."

"Okay, I'm going to lift you up to Jasper. Ready?"

She kisses me sweetly and I know my girl is prepared. I stand up and pull her into my arms. I cringe as her whole body jerks and she winces in pain.

"You okay, Sunshine?"

She nods as tears stream down her face. I know she's lying to me but I have to get her out of here.

"Jasper, take Sunny."

Jasper reaches down and pulls Sunny from my arms. She cries out in pain and it takes everything inside of me to not

scream.

Once I'm sure Sunny is secure I jump as hard as I can and pull myself from the hole. I watch as Jasper examines Sunny's injuries.

"Looks like a couple of broken ribs and her left arm is broken. We need to get her back to a tent fast to make sure there are no internal injuries."

I agree and help Jasper place Bella on a gurney.

"There's someone else down there," Bella croaks. "I think they are still alive. I could hear them breathing."

I look at Jasper and can see exactly what he's thinking. I know he won't leave if there is a possibility of finding another survivor and I also know that I have to get Sunny topside quickly. Heaven only knows what kind of injuries she might have.

I plead with Jasper to just let us go and send another crew back but he shakes his head at me.

"Take Sunny to the station. Get her treated. I'm going to stay here and see if I can find the other person."

"I can't do that, Jazz. You know the orders. We stick with our partners."

"Yes, but you have a severely injured patient and I need to find this other person. If they are still alive, I might be able to save them. Send one of the Volturi brothers to help me. There are three of them anyway. One can split away for a moment to help me out. Problem solved."

"No, if one goes, the other must go too. I won't leave you like this."

"Masen, don't make me pull rank on you. I will, so help me God," Jasper growls.

"You wouldn't let me run into a falling building to save my wife. Why should I do any less for you right now? I'll stay and help."

"No! You will get Bella topside. You understand me. You will get her out of this fucking building right now. She has been here long enough."

I see the rage in Jasper's eyes and mine well with tears. Every emotion I thought he didn't feel was finally displayed on his face. He was being strong for me this whole time and I was just the selfish fool who couldn't see past my own worries to see his.

"Jasper, if anything were to happen, I would never be able to forgive myself. Please, come with me. We can send someone back. Think of Alice and the baby. Please," I beg.

"I can't leave anyone alive in this hell. Alice would understand that."

I nod in defeat. I know there is no way to change his mind once it's set.

"Be careful. I'll send Marcus down as soon as I get topside."

Jasper nods with a smile. He quickly kisses Bella on the forehead. "You take care of this idiot while I'm gone. He obviously can't do it himself," Jasper teases.

"Thank you," she whispers to him.

He turns to me and gives me a huge hug. I have a nagging feeling deep in my gut but I shrug it off as just all of the emotions I've been feeling for days finally surfacing.

"Be safe," I whisper.

Jasper nods and turns away from us, jumping down the hole I just came from. I push Bella from the wreckage to a

nearby tent where she is treated for three broken ribs, a broken arm and a concussion.

"I love you, Sunshine," I whisper as the nurse gives her drugs to help her relax so we can transport her to a nearby hospital.

"I love you too, Mace." She smiles, looking up at me. "Don't think you're getting out of celebrating my birthday either, mister," she mutters.

I laugh loud and hard. Even drug induced, she somehow brings a smile to my face.

I lean down and kiss her softly. "I wouldn't dream of it. Besides, if I recall we have a baby to make."

"Practice makes perfect." She chuckles and winces from the pain.

"Rest, baby. We have all the time in the world now."

She purrs sweetly and closes her eyes, letting the effects of the drugs take over.

"I love you," her soft voice mulls.

"I love you more," I reply back and watch her drift off to sleep.

April 23rd, 2011 ~ 2:00 pm EST

Ten years have passed since the events of that horrible day in American history. The war on terrorism still rages on. Our men and women continue to fight bravely to defend our freedom from the terrorists that were determined to strike fear into the hearts of all Americans on that day. As for the rest of us, life has returned to a semblance of normal.

I walk quietly along the streets of Manhattan, a cool breeze on my back as I pass by ground zero. I stop and look at the memorial of all the men and woman who passed on that dreadful day.

My eyes stop at one name and tears sting my eyes. Jasper Whitlock, NYC, EMT, is engraved in the stone memorial.

I brush my fingers over the lettering and remember the look of determination in Jasper's eyes that day. The building was so fragile and we knew that area could collapse at any moment, but Jasper couldn't leave if there was the possibility of getting someone out alive.

He jumped down that hole and found three people still alive. Miraculously, he got them out of there but at the price of his own life. The building began to collapse and he physically held the structure up so the survivors could escape. Unfortunately, the walls caved in on him before anyone could get to him, taking his own life. Guilt still inundates me to this day. If only I had been there, I could have saved his life, but I remind myself that Jasper wouldn't have let me give my life for his. He was the most selfless person I've ever known.

"Hey, look, Daddy, that's Jazzy's name," my little girl says.

I smile as I think back to the day Alice gave birth to Jasper Whitlock, Jr. Jasper would have been so proud of his boy. He looks just like his father.

"It's sure is, Princess," I reply. "It's also Jazzy's dad's name."

"Really?"

"Yes, Sari. He was named after his father."

"Cool," she whispers. "I can't wait to go home and tell him."

I laugh. "I'm sure he knows, Princess."

Sari looks up at me, her brow wrinkled deep in thought. "Daddy?"

"Hmm?"

"Where's Jazzy's dad now?"

I sigh as the tears slowly stream down my cheeks. "Jasper was a great man. He helped me rescue your mother and many other people from the towers. His name is etched here for all to remember that he gave his life so others could live," I reply sadly.

"A hero," she whispers in awe. She looks up at me with her big green eyes and smiles. "Just like you," she states proudly, as she brushes her hair from her face.

I look down at her and reply, "Jasper is a hero amongst heroes."

She smiles brightly and I can't help but return her smile. She reminds me so much of her mother with her flowing brown hair and her bright smile. She lights up the world just like Bella. She's another ray of sunshine.

My phone buzzes in my pocket and I pull it from my shirt and laugh as I read the text message.

Text from Bella Masen: 2:12pm 4/23/11: Your pregnant wife is starving. Hurry home. I love you.

Sari stands beside me swinging my hand impatiently as I put the phone back in my pocket.

"Okay, Sari, let's go home. Looks like your mom and brother are hungry."

Sari's face brightens at the mention of her unborn baby brother. She tugs at my hand and begins to skip away from the memorial. I chuckle softly and whisper goodbye to my old friend and partner as I leave the sight of my living nightmare.

I walk home, hand in hand with my little girl, a reminder of the love between me and my wife, and feel happy for all the joys in my life. So many things have changed since September eleventh but one thing has remained constant, my love for Bella.

I am reminded on a daily basis that this world is full of cruelty and malice but I have seen firsthand what real love is and relish in it. I may have faced terrible atrocities and seen things that no man should ever see but by the grace of God I have a guardian angel that is always there to guide and protect me.