

## Swan Song

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/25740553) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/25740553>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">F/F</a> , <a href="#">F/M</a> , <a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Twilight Series - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">The Vampire Diaries (TV)</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Klaus Mikaelson/Bella Swan</a> , <a href="#">Edward Cullen/Bella Swan</a> , <a href="#">Emmett Cullen/Rosalie Hale</a> , <a href="#">Carlisle Cullen/Esme Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Alice Cullen/Jasper Hale</a> , <a href="#">eventual pairings - Relationship</a> , <a href="#">Leah Clearwater/Katherine Pierce</a> , <a href="#">Elijah Mikaelson/Angela Weber</a> , <a href="#">Matt Donovan/Rebekah Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Hayley Marshall/Jacob Black</a> , <a href="#">Bonnie Bennett/Edward Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Elena Gilbert/Damon Salvatore</a> , <a href="#">Caroline Forbes/Stefan Salvatore</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Klaus Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Bella Swan</a> , <a href="#">Edward Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Emmett Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Rosalie Hale</a> , <a href="#">Carlisle Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Esme Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Renée Dwyer</a> , <a href="#">Phil Dwyer</a> , <a href="#">Charlie Swan</a> , <a href="#">Alice Cullen</a> , <a href="#">Jasper Hale</a> , <a href="#">Angela Weber</a> , <a href="#">Mike Newton</a> , <a href="#">Eric Yorkie</a> , <a href="#">Jessica Stanley</a> , <a href="#">Leah Clearwater</a> , <a href="#">Sam Uley</a> , <a href="#">Jacob Black</a> , <a href="#">Katherine Pierce</a> , <a href="#">Elijah Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Matt Donovan</a> , <a href="#">Rebekah Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Hayley Marshall</a> , <a href="#">Bonnie Bennett</a> , <a href="#">Elena Gilbert</a> , <a href="#">Damon Salvatore</a> , <a href="#">Stefan Salvatore</a> , <a href="#">Caroline Forbes</a> , <a href="#">James (Twilight)</a> , <a href="#">Laurent (Twilight)</a> , <a href="#">Victoria (Twilight)</a> , <a href="#">Freya Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Kol Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Mikael (Vampire Diaries)</a> , <a href="#">Esther Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Finn Mikaelson</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence</a> , <a href="#">Original Character(s)</a> , <a href="#">Magic</a> , <a href="#">Mikael is going down</a> , <a href="#">So are the Volturi</a> , <a href="#">Klaus Mikaelson Has A Heart</a> , <a href="#">Possessive Klaus Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">Protective Edward Cullen</a> , <a href="#">happily ever after (eventually)</a> , <a href="#">Useless Vampires</a> , <a href="#">Sisterhood of BAMF Ladies</a> , <a href="#">Hybrid Klaus Mikaelson</a> , <a href="#">protective cullens</a> , <a href="#">Awesome Charlie Swan</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Fluff</a> , <a href="#">Romance</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-08-06 Words: 9,040 Chapters: 5/?

# Swan Song

by [ClaraKeanen](#)

## Summary

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, there is no going back. - Genesis 2:17 (mostly)

Due to the machinations of some blonde witch, twenty-three year-old Isabel Martin finds herself swapping places with none other than Isabella Swan - but this isn't your mother's Twilight, because no matter what everyone else believes, she isn't really Bella Swan. Meeting Elena Gilbert and the Salvatores before she moved to Forks wasn't part of the plan.

And neither was meeting Klaus Mikaelson.

(At least, it wasn't part of HER plan.)

# The Girl Who Was Bella Swan

*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, there is no going back. - Genesis 2:17 (mostly)*

Isabel Martin shut the door to her one-bedroom apartment behind her and sighed. Work had felt horrifically long today. It's not that her job was overly difficult, per se; being an administrative assistant was pretty straightforward most of the time. It was just that today was their annual summer barbecue, and so she'd had to mingle with all of her coworkers and the company's board members and see them with their families and their children and pretend that it didn't bother her that, for all intents and purposes, she was alone.

Kicking off her wedge heels, the twenty-three-year-old made her way into the kitchen and checked her answering machine. No messages. Not that she'd expected any. Her father – only in name, of course – was off with wife number four, and she hadn't spoken to dear old dad in six years. That certainly wasn't going to change now.

Thoroughly depressed, Isabel wrenched open the fridge door and began poking through its contents, looking for something to eat that wasn't a kale salad. *God, I need to grocery shop.*

“ Hmm. Not bad.”

A warm, slightly-lilted feminine voice had sounded from directly behind her. Isabel whirled around, ready to toss her ranch dressing at whomever had broken into her apartment.

The voice belonged to a tall- ish , slender blonde woman who was currently studying the (few) pictures decorating her mantle. “Who are you?” Isabel brandished the ranch bottle above her head, just in case the stranger got any closer.

The woman completely ignored her. Instead, she continued to hum, gazing at the photographs of Isabel and her grandmother. “Who is the woman in these portraits?”

Isabel frowned, her hand lowering slightly. “My mom .”

“How long has she been dead?”

“Twenty years, but that doesn't answer my question. Who are you, and, also, what the hell are you doing in my apartment?”

Huffing, the woman turned to face Isabel. She cocked her head to the side, her blue eyes running over Isabel's stationary form. “Your future sister-in-law, should everything work out,” the woman replied calmly, a small smile appearing on her face.

Shutting her eyes, Isabel shook her head back and forth, tossing the salad dressing behind her onto the kitchen counter. “ This is some sort of mistake -”

“I make no mistakes,” the woman replied firmly. Isabel opened her eyes in time to see the woman walk towards her. “There is only one match, and you’re it. Yes,” she murmured, coming to a stop in front of Isabel, “you’re it.”

“That’s it, I’m calling the police.” Isabel reached for her cell-phone, but the woman grasped hold of her wrist, abruptly stopping the movement. And just as their skin touched, a warm glow seemed to emanate from the woman. Gasping, Isabel tried to break-out of the woman’s hold, but to no avail.

The woman began to chant, and the world exploded in a flash of light.

--

Isabel came to with a start.

Blinking rapidly, she quickly discerned a few things. She was currently lying down in a queen-sized bed that was covered with a mound of multicolored blankets. The room around her was a pale mint green, and faint sunlight was shining through the thin white drapes covering the only window in the room.

Groaning, Isabel ran her hands across the topmost blanket, and felt a small piece of paper touch her fingers. Frowning, Isabel rolled onto her side. A small letter was sitting on the pillow next to her, the name *Isabella* artfully drawn on the envelope. Grasping hold of the paper with shaking fingers, she quickly tore open the envelope and pulled out a rather long looking handwritten letter.

*To be honest, I’m not entirely sure where to begin, the letter started. If you’re reading this, it’s because – well, it’s because you’ve taken my place. No, Bella, that sounds horrifying. Ugh, why is this so difficult? Okay, let’s start over. My name is Isabella Marie Swan, and you are living my life.*

“Isabella Marie Swan,” Isabel murmured slowly. “Isabella Marie Swa -” The realization thudded into her. “No, what? No. That’s not possible, no, no -”

A ringing sound tore through her panic attack. Isabel looked over her shoulder to find a glowing iPhone buzzing on the nightstand. Reaching over, Isabel accepted the call and raised it to her ear.

"You're finally awake!" A cheery voice sang through the phone. "Phil and I have been calling for hours!"

Isabel froze. *Phil and I? Who's – Phil. RENEE.* She clapped her hand over her mouth, muffling a scream.

“Bella? Bella, sweetheart, are you there?”

She shut her eyes, focusing on breathing. *Answer. You have to answer.* "Sorry," she muttered out, clearing her throat. "I just woke up."

"No worries, Bella. I just wanted to let you know that we'll be home around lunchtime. The meeting with the Nationals went amazing this morning, so we have all kinds of news! Speaking of, have you made up your mind yet about this summer?"

"Uh no, not yet," Isabel replied slowly.

"Oh." Renee's voice became more somber. "Well, we need to know by tonight, okay?"

"Yeah, definitely."

"Okay then. See you soon, sweetheart!"

The call disconnected before Isabel could respond, which was probably for the best.

Moaning, Isabel dropped her head into her hands and began to massage her temples. "This can't be happening." Her eyes caught sight of the letter in her lap. Sighing, she reached down, took it in her hands once again, and began to read.

*My name is Isabella Marie Swan, and you are living my life.*

*And before you freak out, no, this isn't an invasion of the body snatchers sort of thing. This is – well, it's hard to explain, but I'll give it my best shot.*

*So, a few months ago, Renee took me to this Wiccan store in New Orleans. She's been going through a bit of a spiritualism kick, and, well, I had nothing better to do. And she was really, really trying to make more of an effort – but I'll explain that part later.*

*Anyways, I went to this Wiccan store with Renee, and before I knew it, she ran off to get her tarot cards read or something. She left me alone in the store, which, I'm pretty used to, to be honest, but I met someone. Her name is Freya, and she's the reason you're here.*

*We talked for a while and agreed to get coffee the next day. Long story short, she'd found a way to grant people their best shot at happiness. It's not a wish-fulfillment spell or anything like that; it's more like an adjustment in the Fates' design. The downside is this: that in order to do this magic, the person who the spell is casted on has to have a sympathetic match in a different dimension. You can't rewrite Fate in your own dimension. The only way to do so is to have an outsider rewrite it for you. She said that she was looking to cast the spell, and wanted someone to try it out on. I practically begged her to use me.*

*Here's the part of the letter where I tell you why. God, how to do this without sounding awful? I guess – I've never really felt like I belong here. Charlie and Renee – my your parents – they were really young when I was born. Practically kids. They had no clue how to raise a daughter, let alone take care of themselves. So, I spent most of my childhood being bounced around, being the unwanted child. And I think I'd continue being that child, to Renee at least, if it wasn't for Phil. He walked into our lives about six months ago, and ever since he showed up, Renee's – well, she's different. More settled. And Phil sat me down after a few weeks and said that he knows what I've been through – he had a difficult childhood too – but to turn over another leaf and give Renee a chance.*

*The thing is, I can't. I've spent almost seventeen years on this planet just wanting to be on my own, to be as far away from this family that's never really felt like a family as possible. Freya said I was an independent soul. Who'd have thought that the first person to really, truly know me would be a witch?*

*In any case, I explained my situation to her, and she agreed to use me as her guinea pig of sorts, with the understanding that once the spell has been cast, I can never come back. I thought about it for a few weeks, but it wasn't that hard of a decision to make. I want a different life.*

*And that's where you come in. The final step of the process was to cast a location spell, which would take Freya to the person who would best fit in my place. To the person who wanted a different life, different circumstances, just as much as I did.*

*That spell took her straight to you.*

*This is why you're here. And, before you protest, she wouldn't have actually taken you if you truly wanted to stay in your world. She would have tried again, hoping to find a different dimension. But, being the witch she is, she would have known the moment she saw you whether or not this was your best shot too. Your best shot at a long, happy life.*

*Now, if you're wondering what Charlie and Phil and Renee will think, they won't suspect a thing. To them, you **are** Isabella Marie Swan, born on October 13, 2000. You're almost seventeen, still undecided about whether or not you want to travel with Phil's baseball team or go to Forks for the summer, and – hopefully – you're as enthusiastic about your new life as I am about mine.*

*We'll never meet. By the time you read this I'll be waking up in your world, wherever that is. But I just wanted to say thank you. It's because of you that I'll have my best shot at a happy life. And somehow, this is yours. So, please, be happy, and don't waste this. I know I won't.*

*Good luck, girl. We'll both need it.*

*Sincerely, The-Girl-Formerly-Known-As-Bella-Swan*

# The Girl Who is Now Bella Swan

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tears were streaming down Isabel's face as she finished the letter. She threw the letter back onto her lap as forcefully as she could, dropping her head back into her hands, praying, forcing, trying to will this out of her life – this wasn't be real, it couldn't be real -

*“ Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down - ”*

The cell phone on her bed started buzzing again. Isabel glanced over at it with watery eyes. *Time to wake up!*, the message on the screen declared.

Growling, Isabel launched the phone at the wall. It hit the wall with a loud *crack!* before sliding silently onto the floor.

Silence.

Isabel gasped, dropping her head back onto her knees as she tried to stop herself from hyperventilating.

*“ Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down - ”*

“ Augh, fine!” Isabel pushed herself off of the bed, grabbed the phone off the ground, and disabled the alarm. Rubbing a hand down her face, she eyed a pair of fluffy yellow towels hanging behind the door. Yanking the towels off the door, she made her way into the bathroom and flicked on the shower.

Isabel couldn't say how long she'd stood there, letting the raging hot water beat down across her skin. Emotions cycled through her as she absent-mindedly washed her hair; fear about this new situation she found herself in, rage at the utter *gall* of this witch – and Bella frickin' Swan – to do this to her, panic at the whole *Cullen thing*, desperate prayers for something, someone to send her back, sadness at the idea that she'd never gotten a chance to say goodbye to anyone, not that there was anyone to say goodbye to, and a feeling of – well, complete and utter shock.

Deciding that she'd finally used enough of the hot water, Isabel stepped out of the shower into the bright yellow bathroom. The Arizona sun was streaming in through an open window, and Isabel shut her eyes, breathing in warm, summer air.

The sound of the phone chirping broke her reverie. She glanced down in time to see a message from Renee flash across the screen. *Home in thirty minutes! Hope you're hungry for some Chinese 😊.*

Sighing, Isabel turned towards the sink. After digging through the drawers – and inwardly cringing at the amount of cheap hair products that Bella Swan had been using – she located a

relatively clean comb and began running in through her chocolate brown hair. "This is insane."

"It could be worse," a familiar voice spoke up from behind her. Jumping forward, Isabel turned and found herself face to face with the blonde woman from before. "This could be Westeros."

"You!" Isabel exclaimed accusatorially, brandishing her comb at her. "Why did you do this to me?"

"Didn't you read the letter?" The witch – Freya – smirked at her. "I gave you a new life. A better life."

"My life was fine the way it was!"

"Oh, really? So you were completely happy being alone with no one to care for? You felt fulfilled in your depressing nine to five routine?" When Isabel didn't reply, Freya snorted. "That's what I thought. Besides, think of this as a fresh start! You'll have to relive high school and college, of course, but the spell won't age you until Bella Swan turns twenty-three, and besides, won't it be nice to have a family that cares when you graduate? Maybe now you'll actually be happy -"

"Stop!" Isabel huffed, tossing her comb into the sink. "Look, whether or not I was happy wasn't the point. You did this without my permission! You didn't even ask!"

"I know," Freya's voice became serious, "but I have my own reasons. I wasn't about to risk this on the chance that you might say no." Freya sighed, and she leaned in towards Isabel, placing a hand on Isabel's shoulder. Well, she would have placed a hand on her shoulder, but her hand passed immaterially through it.

"What the -"

"Hate me, if it helps. But do try to accept this. For everyone's sake." Freya's face seemed to flicker all of a sudden. "It looks like our time is up."

"Wait, what? Where are you -"

Freya was already gone, her final words disappearing in the air just like her apparition. "Until next time, Ms. Swan."

Isabel stood, gaping in the silence, for several minutes. When she was convinced that Freya wasn't going to suddenly appear again, she leaned over the bathroom vanity and groaned. "Fuck," Isabel rubbed her eyes with her free hand. "This is just great."

The phone – her phone – buzzed again. Isabel glanced down; only twenty minutes until Phil and Renee were home.

*By the time you read this I'll be waking up in your world, wherever that is. But I just wanted to say thank you. It's because of you that I'll have my best shot at a happy life. And I hope that you find your happiness too.*



“ A happy life, huh?” She murmured to herself. She glanced up at her reflection in the mirror and examined herself. Longish brown hair, still tangled from her shower. Pale, freckled skin, pinkish from her day in the sun. And her mother’s hazel-brown eyes that suddenly looked too sad to fit in with the rest of her face.

“A happy life.” She snorted at her reflection. “We’ll see about that.”

--

"Bella! We're home!"

Closing her eyes, Isabel breathed deeply, trying to calm her nerves. She’d just finished selecting her clothing for the day – which was quite the chore, because the previous Bella had an absolutely *awful* taste in clothing – and thrown it on as a woman’s voice – Renee’s – rang up the staircase. Nodding quickly, Isabel pushed the sleeves of her Henley further up her arms and exited the bedroom, rushing down the stairs.

There was no one there.

Isabel frowned, stopping at the bottom of the staircase. "Renee?"

"In the kitchen!" The voice hollered back from her right. Taking an immediate right, Isabel strode down the sunny hallway towards Renee’s voice. Rounding the corner, Isabel came to a stop, taking in the scene.

Renee was *gorgeous*. Her dark brown hair was cut into a stylish lob, curling just past her shoulders. She had sparkling blue eyes, sun-kissed skin, and a smile so white it looked straight out of a toothpaste commercial. She was currently fluttering around a small kitchen table, laughing as the man following her around the table – Phil – kept slightly readjusting the boxes of Chinese food she was setting up. Like Renee, the man was incredibly tan, but his messy-tapered-styled hair was so dark, it was almost black. He had a fully-formed mustache and beard, and was in the process of nuzzling his face into a squealing Renee’s shoulder when they finally noticed Isabel’s presence.

"Good morning, Bella!" Renee sang, pushing Phil off her with a laugh.

“More like good afternoon. C ome on, let’s eat, ” Phil waved, motioning for Isabel to join them at the table. It was such a simple scene, and yet Isabel’s heart clenched up in her chest at the sight of them – and at the way they were gazing hopefully at her.

*How could anyone want to give this up?*

Renee turned around, unaware of Isabel’s interior dilemma, making her way towards the kitchen sink. “You want anything to drink, sweetheart?”

"Just water, thanks," Isabel nodded towards Renee. Smiling – albeit hesitantly – at Phil, Isabel made her way towards the small kitchen table. The four-side table was covered with a multi-colored tablecloth and was unlike anything Isabel had ever had on her own tables back home.

“So,” Isabel began, settling herself onto the chair next to Phil . *Relax, Isabel, you can do this. You’re great at small talk. Just act natural.* “How did the meeting go with the Nationals today?”

Squealing, Renee set Isabel’s water glass on the table before grinning wildly at Phil. “Well -”

“We got everything we asked for, and then some,” Phil cut in with a large smile.

“Really? What does that mean?”

“It means,” Renee replied, “that as of this morning, Phil’s in the Major Leagues!”

“That’s amazing!” *That actually is amazing. Okay, good, keep this up.* “Good contract?”

“Five years and twenty-million dollars by the time I’m 35, so yeah, I’d say so.”

“Phil, that’s - that’s amazing ! I can’t wait to see you play.”

Renee and Phil stilled almost instantly, turning to look at Isabel. Phil looked slightly shocked, whereas Renee – Isabel could hardly look at her, the expression on Renee’s face was so open and hopeful. *Shit, Bella, what kind of daughter are you?*

“What are you saying, sweetheart?” Renee asked quietly, sitting down next to Isabel.

“That -” Isabel’s voice cut out.

*Won’t it be nice to have a family that cares?* Freya’s voice echoed in her head.

“I want to travel with you this summer. Follow the team ,” Isabel rushed out, before she could change her mind.

Renee’s eyes filled up with tears as if on cue. “Really?” She gasped out.

“Yeah, if that’s all right,” she nodded in reply, trying – and failing – to suppress the lump that was forming in her throat.

“It’ll be a lot of moving around,” Phil replied quickly as he began to beam back at her. “Are you sure you want to do this? We won’t be hurt if -”

“Yeah. I’m sure ,” Isabel replied, her mind racing back to Bella’s letter. “Phil, we talked once? About second chances, and trying to do things better?”

Renee inhaled sharply, and she grabbed hold of Phil’s hand. Phil set his on top of Renee’s and encouragingly nodded at Isabel . “Yeah, I remember.”

Isabel exhaled slowly. *Please, be happy,* she almost heard Bella speak in her head, *and don’t waste this. I know I won’t.*

“Well, I want a second chance too. To do things better. And I want -” Tears finally sprung to Isabel’s eyes, and she hurriedly wiped at them as best as she could, still trapped within Renee’s embrace. “I want this for us. I want us to be happy.” She glanced up at Renee and Phil to find Renee nodding enthusiastically through her own tears.

“Sweetheart,” Renee almost laughed, the smile on her face was so wide. She made a move to hug Isabel. “Can we -”

Nodding, Isabel moved almost instinctively, and within the blink of an eye she found herself in Renee’s arms, holding the older woman – holding her *mother* – as she cried. Renee began to babble into Isabel’s shoulder, many of which she didn’t understand, only catching *so happy* and *love you*, and in that moment, Isabel swore to herself that she’d do better by Renee. *I might not be her biological daughter*, she thought fiercely, *but I’m Bella Swan now, and I’m not going to take a minute of this for granted.*

“I’m proud of you, kid,” Phil grinned at her approvingly. “Things are gonna be great, isn’t that right, honey?”

“Yes, yes, of course they are,” Renee replied brightly, wiping at her face as she pulled away from Isabel. “Oh, God, I’m a mess, and your shirt -”

“Seriously, don’t worry about the shirt,” Isabel waved her hand, rubbing Renee’s back as Renee settled back down by Phil. “I want to go shopping anyways, get some new stuff for school in the fall.”

“Sweetie, that’s a great idea!”

“Speaking of great ideas, let’s get going on this Chinese food before it gets cold and discuss our plan,” Phil chimed in. Smiling, albeit a bit stiffly – she was feeling a bit overwhelmed, to say the least – Isabel reached for the nearest box of food (thankfully containing some Chicken Lo Mein) and started heaping it into her bowl.

"Right, right. Okay, Bella, Phil will be heading out on Saturday to join the rest of the team, and we still need to box up your stuff to send to your dad, so we probably won't get to join him for a week or two," Renee began with a relieved sigh, scooping some fried rice onto her plate. "The movers will be here on Monday to put our furniture and stuff in storage, so we'll have to pack our summer stuff lightly; whatever we can fit in the jeep is what comes with us."

“Are you two going out to celebrate this, by the way? Because you should,” Isabel shoveled a bite of food into her mouth. *Besides, I’d much rather have you not be here when I trash most of her stuff.*

“Well, I was thinking we could go to that sushi place downtown and stay overnight at the Hilton,” Phil said gratefully, shooting a wink at Renee. “What do you think?”

Renee’s eyes were glued on Isabel. “I’d hate to leave you here by yourself -”

“Oh, no, don’t worry about it,” Isabel waved her hand. “I’ll get going on sorting through my clothes, maybe run a donation out to Goodwill . New start, new me, you know? Well, not new me, but maybe more ‘me’, me ,” *Christ, Isabel, quit while you’re ahead.* Isabel wrinkled her nose, shooting Phil and Renee an apologetic grimace. “ I’m babbling, sorry.”

“ Oh my God, Bella, don’t apologize ,” Renee reached across the table and squeezed her hand reassuringly. “That sounds wonderful to me And, speaking of wonderful,” she said, glancing over at Phil, “I hope you made reservations.”

Laughing, Phil pressed a quick kiss to Renee’s forehead. “I’ll confirm them now.” Phil stood and pushed himself away from the table, heading towards the relative privacy of the kitchen.

“Sweetie, I just, I can’t believe -” Renee turned back to Isabel with a grin . “Your aura is so much brighter, I can’t - how?”

Isabel set down her fork on her plate, and inhaled deeply. “I don’t know *how* to explain it, really.” *No shit.* “ I think I just sort of realized that I’m honestly so lucky, to get to live this life. I just – I don’t want to waste another moment, you know? I want to be happy, I want you and Phil to be happy, and – I just really want to be a part of this family.” She glanced over at Renee, who had tears again in her eyes. “Does that make any sense?”

“Yeah,” Renee chuckled a watery laugh. “Yeah, it does , because I want that too.” With a bright smile, Renee lifted up her water glass. “To a new start.”

"To a new start," Isabel lifted her glass and knocked it against Renee’s. They shared a bright smile, and something writhing in Isabel’s chest finally settled down. *Yes*, she thought to herself as she watched Phil return and press a loving kiss on Renee’s forehead, *I’m not going to waste this. I promise.*

--

It took surprisingly minimal effort to get Renee and Phil back out the door. After reassuring them that yes, she was perfectly fine on her own, yes, she had her phone on hand, and yes, it was totally normal for her to want to donate most of her old clothes, they headed out for their date night, and Isabel got to work.

Bella had an *abhorrent* taste in fashion. Most of her closet was filled with ill-fitting flannels and unflattering light blue jeans. Isabel grabbed a handful of large black trash bags and systematically went through the entire closet. By the end of the purge, it was mid-afternoon, and she had maybe six shirts and three pairs of shorts to her name, and that was about it. The worn henleys looked too comfortable to get rid of and, well, the oversized white tee and actually-fitted shorts would have to function until she went shopping.

After throwing the four bags of donatable clothes into the old jeep, Isabel took stock of her shoe situation. Somehow, it was even worse than her clothing, and she threw out most every pair, keeping only a pair of slightly-worn running shoes and a pair of brand-new-looking Toms.

The old Bella had few decorations in her room; most of them were kitschy little trinkets, and since Isabel didn't have any idea which ones, if any, were important to Renee or Charlie, she boxed them all up. Bella had a laptop *and* a smartphone, thankfully, and she'd helpfully left a list of passwords to all of her accounts. Isabel logged onto Bella's bank and, quickly taking stock of her savings – Bella had around \$3,000 in savings (which was disappointing, compared to the decent money Isabel had made back in her world) - grabbed Bella's old leather wallet filled with bank cards and headed out the door.

Driving through Goodwill took next to no time, and by the time she'd finished dropping off everything that she meant to donate, it was around 6:00 in the evening. Making the executive decision to run to the mall before it closed and forego dinner for the time being, Isabel made her way to the Paradise Valley Mall.

The two-hours-to-mall-close were spent in an absolute flurry. Isabel all but sprinted into Sephora, emerging forty minutes later (and \$400 poorer) with a complete set of her tried-and-true beauty routine products. The rest of the time was spent rushing through Macy's and Victoria Secret, grabbing just enough of the basics that she didn't feel like the state of her closet was a complete disaster. By the time Isabel made it back to the house, seven shopping bags in tow, she could only gulp down a protein smoothie before passing out on Bella's bed.

When Phil and Renee turned late the next morning, it was to find Isabel taping the last of the "bedroom" boxes shut, her new essentials already packed into the large suitcase she'd dragged out of the basement.

"Sweetie, I'm - well, I'm shocked! Look at you!" Renee said, her brow in a cute furrow, as she examined Isabel in her new tank top and make-up. Isabel had gone relatively easy on it; given Bella's total *lack* of beauty products, she didn't want Renee to think her daughter had had a psychotic break.

"Good shocked or bad shocked?"

"It's just different, that's all," Phil chimed in supportively. "You look lovely, Bella."

"Of course, she does! I just – you're not doing these things to please anyone else, are you, Bella? I just want you to be happy."

"Mom, I swear," Isabel said, ignoring Renee's gasp when she called her "mom", "I'm doing this for me, I promise. It's like I told you yesterday; new day, new me, and all that jazz. Did you two have a nice time?"

"We had a great time," Phil replied, eyes crinkling in happiness at he looked at his now-beaming Renee. "And now we're here to get this house all packed up. Do you need any help with your things?"

"Nope," Isabel grunted, shoving the last box onto the pile. "That's everything. How I can help you two?"

“Give your mom a hand with her clothes. I’ll get the living room electronics put away. How does that sound?”

“That sounds perfect,” Renee finally replied with a smile. “Come on, sweetheart . The sooner we get everything boxed up, the sooner we can join Phil on the road.”

“That sounds good to me.”

“Excellent! All right team,” Phil crowd, rubbing his hands together, “let’s get to work!”

## Chapter End Notes

So is our heroine accepting all of this relatively quickly? Mayhaps. But I also just want her to come across as a genuinely loving and empathetic person who's been looking for a place that she belongs. Also, if it's one of my stories, it's gonna have a massive amount of plot, and I don't want to drag things out more than I have to -

Which leads me to my second note, or rather, piece of advice: always take everything Freya Mikaelson says with a grain of salt. Or, like, a mountain of salt. A Mount Everest of salt. (At least, for now.)

Enjoy!

# On the Road with Renee

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil left the day after his date with Renee, and due to Isabel's efficient packing, it only took about six days for them to finish getting the rest of Renee's affairs in order. The house was quickly purchased by a family with young children, and all of the boxes from Bella's room were professionally shipped to Charlie's house in Forks. Everything else was put into storage until Phil and Renee found a new place, and so exactly eight days after Isabel arrived in this reality, she and Renee piled into Renee's brand-new white Mercedes-Benz G-Class SUV and hit the road.

////

"Okay, so we need to take the next right exit, and once we're on the I40, we stay on that until Oklahoma," Isabel navigated from the passenger's seat. "How are you doing so far, do you want to trade off?"

"Maybe after lunch," Renee replied, signaling as she maneuvered into the right lane.

*- top of the seventh and the Cardinals are up to bat, the sports announcer buzzed through the state-of-the-art stereo. The new pitcher for the Nationals, Phil Dwyer, pitched a shut-out for the first part of this double-hitter, and so far, it's looking like this game is following that trend. Lopez is up to bat -*

Renee and Isabel both whooped loudly at the sound of Phil's name. "A shut-out, can you believe it?"

"That's amazing," Isabel replied, picking up her discarded copy of *The Beginner's Guide to Baseball*. "And for his first two games?"

"It's exactly what he needed. He was so worried last night, but I told him he'd be great, and what did I say?"

*- and he's OUT, and that'll be the seventh inning stretch -*

"When can we buy some Dwyer jerseys?"

"Soon, hopefully. Speaking of, we'll have to get you outfitted in some Nationals gear. If we order it tonight, it'll be at our hotel by the time we get to Pittsburgh."

"Sounds good to me," Isabel replied, opening her book back up. She felt Renee turn to glance at her.

"You're really taking this seriously, huh? You never used to be interested in baseball."

“Yeah, well, it’s sort of the family business now, so I for sure want to know what I’m talking about.”

“Good, I’m glad to hear that.” Isabel heard the smile in Renee’s voice, and with a smile of her own, she returned to her book, content to listen to the radio and let the miles drift on by.

////

“ - come a little bit closer, you’re my kind of man, so big and so strong -”

“ - come a little bit closer, I’m all alone -”

“ - AND THE NIGHT IS SO YOUNG!”

Renee and Isabel’s loud duetting was cut off by the sound of Renee’s phone ringing. They were about forty-five minutes away from their first hotel of the trip, and Isabel was currently at the wheel, more than happy to finish up the final leg of their first day in the driver’s seat. Renee pressed the “accept” button on her dashboard with an excited bounce.

“CONGRATULATIONS BABY!” She squealed as soon as the call connected. Phil’s warm, booming laugh echoed out of the SUV’s speakers, and Isabel didn’t even try to bite back her grin.

“Yeah, congrats Phil!”

“Aw, thank you both! I take it you were listening then?”

“Of course! We wouldn’t miss a minute.”

“Good, I’m glad to hear that! We’re just about to board our plane, but I wanted to see how my girls were doing.”

“We’re doing great! Bella’s driving right now, and we’re about twenty-five miles away from our hotel.”

“Really? Good, good! Okay, listen, Martinez is signaling for us to board, so I’ve gotta go, but I’ll see you in two days, okay?”

“We can’t wait!”

“Awesome. Love you, Rey, you too, Bella!”

“Love you too!” Renee called back, Isabel chiming in with her own “fly safe!”

“Will do. Talk to you later.”

////

“God, if I never have to drive through Ohio again, it’ll be too soon,” Isabel exhaled as they crossed into Philadelphia two days later.



“Amen to that. And I thought Indiana was going to be bad,” Renee shivered exaggeratedly. “At least we’re almost there.”

“Ugh, thank God. Are our orders at the hotel?”

“Let me check – yes, Phil got them this morning.”

“Good! I’m really excited for the game today.”

“Oh, me too! I can’t wait for you to meet Martinez, and Phil says the rest of the team is great. They might go out for drinks after, since they’ve got a few days off -”

“And if they do, you should go with,” Isabel stated.

“And leave you at the hotel by yourself?”

“Please, mom, I’m sixteen.” *Sort of.* “As long as I have WiFi, I’ll be fine.”

“Well, if you’re sure -”

“I’m sure, I promise,” Isabel shot Renee a quick smile before glancing back at the road.

“Well, good, I’ll let Phil know.” Renee began humming as she tapped at her phone, and Isabel’s grin grew just a bit wider.

////

“What do you think?” Isabel asked, pivoting away from the hotel mirror and towards her mother. Upon reaching the hotel, the pair had split apart into their adjoining rooms and gotten hurriedly changed into the Nationals gear they’d previously ordered. Isabel had donned a plain white Nationals player jersey and thrown her hair into a wavy ponytail, covering the dirtier I’ve-been-travelling part of her hair with a red Nationals cap.

“You look great!” Renee replied with a smile. She was dressed in a red Nationals tank top, and her hair looked perfect as always. This might be a dimension with vampires, but Renee seemed to have the supernatural ability to never have a hair out of place. “Are you ready?”

Nodding, Isabel grabbed her simple shoulder-bag off the ground. “Let’s do this.”

////

It was a gorgeous day for baseball at Citizens Bank Park. It was a sweet 74 degrees, and a continuous breeze seemed to float around the VIP section. When Isabel and Renee arrived, they’d been quickly greeted by Shannon Martinez, the Manager’s wife, who then took Renee around and introduced her to the rest of the player’s families and significant others. Isabel was happy to remain behind and watch as Renee charmed her way around the section. She’d finished her tour by the start of the game, and Isabel and Renee took their spots on the left side of the front row.

Unlike their games with the Cardinals, the Nationals didn't have an easy time of it, and at the end of the game four and a half hours later, the Nationals had only managed to win by one extra hit with a score of 5-4. Phil had been called up to pitch at the end of the game, stopping the Phillies from getting any additional hits, so it was with a sense of victorious excitement that Renee and Isabel found Phil after the game as he emerged from the locker room.

The moment Phil saw Renee, he ran towards her and swept her up into his arms. "Renee, hon, I'm so glad to see you," he murmured, dipping Renee into an enthusiastic kiss.

*Okay, not really Bella Swan, but still*, Isabel tensed uncomfortably, looking anywhere but at Phil and Renee as they embraced.

"I've missed you -"

"Missed you too. Bella, get over here!"

Snorting, Isabel made her way over to Renee and Phil, who released Renee from his embrace and pulled her in for a tight hug. "It's good to see you too, Bella."

"You must be Renee!" A blonde man emerged from the locker room behind Phil and shot Renee a wink. "We've heard so much about you!"

"Seriously, does Dwyer talk about anything else?" His companion, a handsome dark-skinned man appeared beside him.

"Ease up, guys," Phil replied with a laugh. "Renee, Bella, meet Carter Zimmerman and Vic Taylor. Carter, Vic, this is my Renee and her daughter Bella."

"How do you do?"

"Daughter, huh?"

"Yes, and too young for you, Zimm," Phil replied, shoving Carter aside.

Vic rolled his eyes before shooting his most disarming smile at Renee. "Will you two lovely ladies be joining us for dinner?"

"What Vic's trying to say is that the team is headed to the steakhouse. You want in?"

"Why not?!" Renee exclaimed happily. "Bella, what do you think?"

"I could go for a steak."

Carter groaned, mock clutching his chest. "A woman after my own heart."

Phil mock-growled at Carter in reply, allowing Vic to walk over and offer Bella his arm. "Shall we?"

"We shall," Isabel replied with a grin.

////

“Thinking about getting a Taylor jersey?” Renee teased the next day as they left the hotel.

“Mom, he’s like, eight years older than me,” Isabel replied. *Again, sort of. Damn it Bella!*  
“I don’t think that’s going to happen.”

“Hmm, well, Carter’s only five years older than you -”

“Carter? Seriously? He has the attention span of a gnat.”

“Yeah, but he’s a cute gnat.”

Isabel snorted, tossing her large suitcase into the back. “Okay, so, where are we meeting up with the team?”

“The next games in Milwaukee, two days from now.”

“Wait, Milwaukee?”

“Yeah,” Renee frowned, looking at Isabel’s frustrated expression. “Why?”

“Ugh, we have to drive through Ohio again.”

“Shit.”

////

“Look at it this way,” Renee said five days later as they crossed back into Pittsburgh, “at least we won’t have to drive through Ohio again.”

“Yeah, not until they play the Reds,” Isabel replied with a groan.

“Okay, yeah, but Chicago was pretty nice, wasn’t it?”

“Chicago was great until Carter and Trevor threw up in the limo.”

“Yeah, I can’t rebut that.”

////

“Bella, do you have a minute?” Renee poked her head into Isabel’s hotel room. They’d finally arrived in Virginia, the home of the Nationals, and were settling into their three-week-long stay, which Isabel was grateful for. She was currently surfing the web on her phone, looking at clothing options for the middle-of-nowhere-Forks-Washington.

“Sure. What’s up?”

“Okay, well,” Renee crossed into the room, motioning for a tanner Phil to follow after her, “we didn’t want to tell you until it was for sure, but, well, we have some exciting news.”

Isabel sat up so fast she almost got whiplash. “Oh my God, what is it?”

“Well -”

“We found a place!”

Isabel blinked at their beaming faces a few times before shaking her head back and forth. “I’m sorry, I don’t understand.”

“We just closed on a house!”

“Wait, where? Here?”

“It’s a suburb nearby,” Phil chimed in. “It’s a pretty well-off area, and it’ll be nice to have some place to come home to when we’re not on the road.”

“Already though? We just got here!”

“Phil sent me pictures, and I just knew. Trust me, okay? We’ll be heading there tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Isabel nodded slowly, “that sounds good.”

“Wonderful!” Renee clapped her hands together before pulling Phil back out the door with her. “Sleep well, sweetheart!” The door shut with a quiet thud behind the couple, and Isabel fell back onto her bed with a sigh.

////

“You never told me where we were going,” Isabel yawned the next morning over her venti iced coffee. The trio – Phil was driving for once, thank God – had packed their things into the SUV and were headed out of the city and towards what Renee had called her “dream home” six times in the last two and a half hours.

“That’s because I wanted it to be a surprise!” Renee chirped, turning around in the front seat. “Seriously, Bella, it’s absolutely perfect for us.”

“You really think so?” Isabel replied, her eyebrows wrinkled in a frown.

“See for yourself,” Phil chimed in cheerfully. “We’re pulling into town right now.”

Blinking, Isabel turned her head towards the town’s welcome sign, and felt her heart stop in her chest.

Renee cheered happily, reading the sign as they passed by. “Welcome to Mystic Falls!”

\*laughs maniacally\*

# Welcome to Mystic Falls

*You've got to be fucking kidding me.*

“Mystic Falls?” Isabel repeated back in shock. It wasn't because she misunderstood; it was because she just didn't believe it.

“Isn't it perfect? It feels like a quaint town, but the population is booming, *and*, it's only half-an-hour away from the city!”

“Close enough to get to the action, but far enough to feel like home,” Phil grinned at Renee's enthusiasm.

“You didn't want an apartment in the city or anything?”

“A bunch of the guys live this way. Besides, property is a good investment. You'll understand it when you get older.”

“Uh huh,” Isabel replied, slumping in her seat. Renee continued to give a running commentary as they drove through the town, but all Isabel could focus on was the sense of sheer panic inside her chest.

////

“We're here!” Renee announced happily as the car came to a stop in front of a two-story, light brown house. Isabel could see why Renee liked it; it had fresh white trim around the windows and doors, and the white-trimmed porch would be perfect for sitting outside in the summer. New brass numbers reading *2106* hung over the three-car garage, which also looked like it had been repainted. The front-yard was covered with several interesting looking plants which, if Renee's Phoenix garden was any indication, would be very well tended to. “Isn't it perfect?!”

*This is fine*, Isabel said to herself as she stepped out into the morning sun. *There's no guarantee that it's even the same universe, er, dimension, whatever. This is fine.*

“The U-Haul will be here tomorrow,” Phil called from the front of the SUV, “so that should give us enough time to clean this place, top to bottom.”

Renee squealed and, grabbing hold of Phil's hand, raced towards the front door. “Come on, Bella, let's get going!”

“This is fine,” Isabel murmured to herself again. “This is totally fine.”

////

Isabel stumbled into the Mystic Grill just as the sun was starting to set. Renee had insisted on doing a “full-house cleanse” before the furniture was set to arrive, complete with actual cleaning surprise and a surprise amount of sage, and had finally sent Isabel to pick up dinner.

The restaurant was warmly lit, filled with interspersed tables and couches, and the soft sounds of “If You Leave” were playing over some hidden speakers.

“Hi, welcome to Mystic Grill.” Isabel turned from surveying the restaurant and found herself facing a handsome blonde man standing behind the bar, the name “Matt” emblazoned on a blue nametag. If she had to guess, he was probably in high school. “How can I help you?”

“Hi, I’m here to pick up an order,” she said, walking over to the bar. “Renee Swan?”

“Oh, right,” he said, glancing down at his notepad. “It should be ready in a few minutes. Have a seat.”

“Thanks,” Isabel said, swinging herself onto one of the barstools. She dropped her small purse on top of the bar and ran her fingers through her hair, tying it up into a loose bun. Matt, she noted, had turned to speak to someone in the kitchen and then had turned back.

“So, are you new in town, or are you just visiting?”

“New,” Isabel spoke slowly. “How’d you know?”

“Ah, well, Mystic Falls isn’t that big. I know pretty much everyone in town.” He walked over towards her and held out his hand. “Matt Donovan.”

“Uh, Bella. Bella Swan. My mom just moved here.”

“Nice. Will you be starting at Mystic Falls High in the fall then?”

“No, I’m going to my dad’s for the school year. My mom’s dating a player for the Nationals, so they’ll be on the road a bunch.”

“Seriously? That’s awesome,” Matt grinned. “What player?”

“Phil Dwyer.”

“Phil Dwyer? Wow. He’s been great for the team so far.”

“Yeah, we definitely think so,” Isabel smiled back.

The door to the diner opened with a creak. Matt’s eyes drifted away from Isabel and towards the source of the noise, and his brow grew furrowed. “What are you doing here?”

“Pick-up for Salvatore, Damon Salvatore.” Heavy footsteps travelled around Isabel and settled into the seat next to her. At the name *Damon Salvatore*, she’d all but frozen in her seat.

*Shit.*

“ You didn’t place an order.”

“Two of my usuals, then. You know the drill.” She could feel the owner of the caramel-smooth voice turn to look at her. “Who’s this, Matty? New girlfriend?”

*Isabel, you have to look up. LOOK UP.*

Exhaling slowly, Isabel looked up and turned to face the owner of the caramel voice. He had perfectly coiffed black hair, and between the twinkle in his eye and the smirk on his face, his expression was not at all innocent.

“Bella Swan, meet Damon Salvatore, our resident disappointment,” Matt’s voice nearly dripped with disdain.

“Charmed, I’m sure,” Damon shot her a wink. He held out his hand, and Isabel slowly placed hers in it, her brain screaming at her not to the entire time. “Going to be in town long?”

“Just for the summer,” Isabel forced out, shooting Damon what she hoped was her most convincing smile.

“Pity. We could use some new blood around here.”

Isabel wrenched her hand out of Damon’s grasp almost reflexively. “That’s a *strange* way of putting it.”

Damon’s eyes fluttered between Isabel’s expression and his now empty hand. “Actually, it’s a pretty normal one.”

“Bella, your order’s ready,” Matt dropped a paper bag filled with food containers in front of her. “Your mom paid over the phone, so you’re good to go.”

“Great.” Isabel slid off the bar stool, to the side away from Damon, and shot both Matt and Damon a quick nod. “Nice to meet you, thanks!” Pivoting on her heel, she snatched up both her purse and the food, all but racing out of the Mystic Grill. She tried to purposely slow down her breathing as she did, but the feeling of Damon Salvatore’s eyes burning into her back buffeted against any attempt to relax. All Isabel could think, the rest of her walk home, was one single, solitary thought:

*I’m fucked.*



# There Goes the Neighborhood

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Bella, do you mind getting the door? Phil and I have our hands full!”

Isabel groaned, dropping her head against the large cardboard box marked *Dining Room*. The movers had finally finished bringing all the boxes into 2106 Floyd Street only an hour previously, and it was only in the rhythm of meticulously unwrapping all of Renee’s home goods that she had started to finally relax from the night before. “Sure!”

“Thanks sweetie!” Renee called back from the kitchen.

Sighing, Isabel pushed herself away from her box and stood, wincing as her joints protested the sudden movement. The doorbell rang again, and Isabel picked up her walking speed.

“Just a minute!” She hollered, taking a sharp left out of the dining room. “Sorry about that,” she said, yanking open the door. “We’ve got a lot of boxes.”

“Don’t mention it.”

*You’ve got to be kidding me.*

Stiffening, Isabel glanced up and found herself looking at a smirking Damon Salvatore, standing with a small group of people on their front porch.

“Damon? What are you doing here?”

“I was just passing through, so I figured, hey, two birds, one stone. Guys, this is Bella. Bella, your neighbors.”

“Seriously, Damon? That’s your introduction?”

Damon ignored the dark-haired young woman shooting him a look. “That delightful young lady is Elena Gilbert.”

*OH MY GOD.*

Elena rolled her eyes and stepped in front of Damon. “I’m Elena,” she said, sticking out her hand and smiling warmly. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too,” Bella replied, trying not to scream at the sight of *Elena Gilbert* standing in front of her.

“Tall and awkward behind her is our dear Jeremy. Jeremy, say hi.”

“Hi,” Jeremy muttered, glaring at Damon.

“And I’m Alaric Saltzmann ,” the handsome blonde standing next to Elena stepped forward, taking Isabel’s hand from Elena. “I’m their guardian. We live next door, in 2104,” he said, pointing to the house to the right.

“ - who was at the door – oh! Hello!” Renee squeezed her way into the doorway. “Renee Swan , we just moved in here .”

“Alaric Saltzmann,” Alaric smiled, shaking Renee’s hand. “These two are Elena and Jeremy.” They greeted Renee in succession. “We live to your right.”

“Oh, wonderful! I was hoping we’d meet some neighbors today,” Renee beamed. Isabel watched as her eyes drifted over to Damon. “Do you live in the neighborhood too?”

“No, I’m just a friend,” he said, smirking at Elena, who was rolling her eyes again . “Bella and I met last night at Mystic Grill.”

“Really?” Renee said, turning to look at Isabel. “You didn’t mention meeting anyone.”

“I was hungry,” Isabel replied defensively, inwardly squirming at the doubtful look on Renee’s face.

“I get the same way ,” Elena chimed in. “I can’t think about anything besides food when I’m hungry.”

“Thank you, someone understands,” Isabel turned and shot her a grateful smile. Well, she hoped it was a grateful smile. It could very well be a maniacal one as well, her nerves felt that frayed.

“Well, we don’t want to hold you up,” Alaric said, nodding towards the boxes behind them. “I’m sure you have plenty of work to do.”

“The best part of moving,” Renee replied with a laugh. “Thanks for stopping over, though! Once we’ve got everything up and running, we’ll have you over for a meal .”

“I’ll bring the wine,” Alaric smiled. “Come on you three ,” he said, turning to shoot a particular *look* at Damon. “Let’s head back.”

“It was great to meet you, Bella,” Elena smiled, allowing Alaric to lead her down the stairs. Jeremy just waved and followed.

“You too,” Isabel forced herself to smile back. Her eyes drifted over to Damon, who was still watching her. “Nice to see you again, Damon.”

Damon grinned. “Right back at you, Bellarina . And, hey, before I forget,” he said, pivoting towards the stairs, “there’s a party Friday night at the Lockwood Mansion on the other side of town. You should come, meet the rest of the gang.”

“I -”

“She’ll be there!” Renee chirped.

*SERIOUSLY?!*

“Yeah, sounds great,” Isabel replied faintly.

“Good,” Damon turned around and sauntered down the stairs. “Catch you later, Bella.”

Isabel waited until Renee had shut the front door to say anything else. “MOM,” she hissed, glaring at Renee’s back, “why did you say that?”

“Because it’ll be good for you,” Renee replied breezily, turning around and walking towards the kitchen.

“I’m not even going to be here that much this summer! And I’m not going to school with them!” Isabel followed after her.

“Hey, you’re the one who said you wanted to turn over a new leaf,” Renee looked back at Isabel. “Right?”

Sighing, Isabel slumped against the hallway wall. “Right. It’s just – it’s not easy,” she lied.

Renee pouted and turned back around, pulling Isabel into a hug. “I know, sweetheart,” she said, pressing a kiss against Isabel’s hairline. “But going to the party will be good for you. You’ll see.”

*Yeah,* Isabel thought to herself as Renee squeezed her. *I’ll see, all right.*

////

“Did you see that?”

“Yeah, Damon, she’s totally normal,” Elena rolled her eyes, walking her way into the Gilbert kitchen.

“Clearly, your eyes aren’t working, because *she* -” Damon pointed next door for emphasis, “was acting suspicious.”

“Yes, any female that doesn’t fall apart at the sight of Damon Salvatore *must* be up to something,” Jeremy groused. He snatched a Gatorade off the kitchen counter and stomped his way back through the house.

“I’m glad you see things my way!” Damon called after him.

“Damon, I’m not seeing whatever this is either,” Alaric said, drinking from his coffee.

“Maybe she just has really bad social anxiety. You can kind of be a lot, sometimes.”

“First of all,” he said, waggling his finger in Elena’s face until she slapped it away, “I’m always the perfect amount for everyone, ever. Secondly, I’ve been alive a bit longer than you, so I’ve seen my fair share of weird shit. If I say that something’s up with her, then something’s up with her, and I’m *going* to figure it out.”

“Can you figure it out somewhere else?” Alaric walked over to the dining room table. “I have some reading to do.”

Damon groaned. “Those books won't tell you anything I don't already know.”

Sighing, Elena set her glass of water down on the counter and reached for Damon's arm. “Come on. Let's go see if Tyler and Caroline have had any luck.”

“Fine,” he grumbled. “But when I'm right about your neighbor, I'm going to say ‘I told you so.’”

## Chapter End Notes

And this marks the end of my first upload! Let me know what you think, and if you need me, I'll be stewing over folklore by T. Swift and thinking about all the ways in which this album fits the mood of this story. I hope you like (or learn to like) Isabel as much as I do!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!