

Epilogue: Treaty

The first time I saw Jacob Black after returning to Forks, I learned more about him than I ever wanted to know. Now I wish I could erase it all from my head. No, that's not true—what I really want to erase is what I did to drive Bella into Jacob's arms. Whether or not she's actually been in his arms, I'm not sure. Jacob seems to have a rich fantasy life and I can't tell how much of what I saw was truth and how much fiction. One thing I know, though, is that he wishes it were all true. He wishes that he'd moved faster with Bella, pushed his romantic interest a little harder. He thinks that if I'd stayed away just a little longer, he would have won her.

I can't say I'm glad how Bella and I were reunited, but I *am* glad that we were *when* we were. Bella claims that Jacob is her best friend and I believe that is what she believes. I don't know how much deeper than that her feelings go. I'm not sure she does either.

The more pressing problem, though, is that Bella's "best friend" is a werewolf—an extremely dangerous, volatile, and violent creature by nature. Carlisle has told me about the "bear attack" on Emily Young. We thought that the werewolves had died out long ago, or we never would have come back to the region. So when a tribal elder brought Emily to the hospital with life-threatening wounds, Carlisle had no reason to believe they weren't from a bear attack. He said he smelled the familiar werewolf scent on her, but he'd assumed that it was simply in the blood of the tribe and was noticeable only because Emily was bleeding so profusely.

Now we know that when Sam hit puberty, the tribal gene kicked in after generations of lying dormant. Before Sam had learned to control his new nature, he'd critically injured the love of his life. Nobody from the tribe would have come anywhere near my father except that Emily needed the immediate attention of a skilled surgeon to avoid bleeding to death. Carlisle not only saved her life, but also the vision in her damaged right eye.

Bella doesn't believe this could happen to her. I can't *believe* she has hung around with the werewolves for weeks and remains unscathed—as far as I can tell, that is. If she *had* been endangered by the wolves, I get the feeling she wouldn't tell me—a possibility that makes me all the more vigilant. She doesn't take my concerns seriously.

I admit that I would prefer Bella didn't spend time with Jacob Black even if he *weren't* a werewolf. However, my determination to prevent her from doing so has nothing to do with that personal preference. It is all about the my love's safety.

Bella did not agree to marry me the night of the vote. I'm still hoping that my offer of changing her myself will undermine her resistance, though, and that she will accept my proposal. If I have to change her afterward, then at least she will be *my wife forever!* Just

the thought of it sets my feet dancing.

The family did remain in Forks. As soon as Esme found out I was staying, she wanted the whole family to be there together. Carlisle was eagerly accepted back at the local hospital after explaining that his wife hadn't liked the big city life of "Los Angeles." Esme planned to continue working on the house restoration project she had started in Ithaca, New York, coordinating the work by telephone and periodic visits.

Jasper would have stayed regardless, because Alice wanted to be with Bella and me and he wouldn't be without her. He was considering transferring his credits to the Philosophy program at the University of Washington.

We'd told school friends that Rosalie and Emmett had gone to Dartmouth, but they'd actually been traveling a lot, to northern Europe, to somewhere in Africa—Kenya, I think, to New York, and to Denali. Now they would remain in Forks with us, keeping a low profile until they could claim they were out of college for the summer.

We hadn't seen any sign of Victoria since our return, but we weren't letting Bella out of our sight. When I had to go hunting, Alice stayed with her. Charlie liked having Alice around ever since she played nursemaid to Bella when her leg was in a cast the previous spring. Bella had been grounded upon our return from Italy and I was only allowed to visit her between the hours of 6:00 and 10:00 p.m., but Alice could come and go at will and even stay overnight.

We had another problem besides Victoria and, though it was only marginally related to Bella, it seemed to be getting worse. The *Seattle Times* was reporting a series of gruesome murders in the city, accompanied by unprecedented mayhem and destruction... overturned cars, large fires, corpses left in plain sight with disturbing marks on their bodies. We recognized the pattern and were convinced that one or more newborn vampires were on the rampage in Seattle. They were drawing undue attention to themselves, but for what reason, we didn't know. It was risky behavior—exactly the kind of activity that the Volturi guard is sent to quell.

We didn't want the Volturi anywhere near Forks and had discussed the possibility of going to Seattle to destroy the renegades ourselves. Emmett and Jasper were all for going immediately, but Carlisle wanted to wait and see whether they would leave the area on their own first.

Though Charlie compromised with Bella by letting me into his house during the designated visiting hours, he was not speaking to me. The effect of that was that his thoughts were often directed at me, which made them easier to read—not a great benefit because they were mostly angry opinions and insults.

The one significant thing I learned, though, was how terribly worried Charlie had been about Bella after I left. I caught words like "depressed," "nightmares," and "zombie," all of which were extremely distressing to me. In this one case, I was rather glad to be getting only the gist of his thoughts because the pain of just that much was difficult to handle. The truth was that I could never forgive myself for what I had done to Bella, nor

could I ever make it up to her. All I could do was try to prevent anything or anyone from hurting her again—myself included.

Sadly, I was already failing at that because Jacob Black had not been speaking to Bella since I'd returned. Being grounded, she couldn't go see him and he wouldn't answer her phone calls. Though I personally preferred him to keep his distance, it upset me to see her feelings hurt.

One Saturday, I picked up Bella at Newton's Olympic Outfitters to drive her home after her shift. She was distraught about Jacob Black, whom she had tried to phone again.

"It's just plain rude!" Bella said angrily. "Downright insulting! Billy said he didn't *want* to talk to me. That he was there, and wouldn't walk three steps to get to the phone! Usually Billy just says he's out or busy or sleeping or something. I mean, it's not like I didn't know he was lying to me, but at least it was a polite way to handle it. I guess Billy hates me now, too. It's not fair!"

"It's not you, Bella," I told her quietly. "Nobody hates you."

"Feels that way," she complained.

"Jacob knows we're back, and I'm sure he's ascertained that I'm with you," I explained. "He won't come anywhere near me. The enmity is rooted too deeply."

"That's stupid. He knows you're not...like other vampires."

"There's still good reason to keep a safe distance," I said. Bella turned away to look out the window, which was dripping with spring rain.

I wished I could convince her that werewolves and vampires live in circles that do not—cannot—intersect. And I wished that that truth didn't bother her so much. Jacob was right to stay away from her—and me.

"Bella, we are what we are. I can control myself, but I doubt he can. He's very young. It would most likely turn into a fight, and I don't know if I could stop it before I k—" I caught myself just in time. "...before I hurt him. You would be unhappy. I don't want that to happen."

Bella didn't miss my slip.

"Edward Cullen," she chided. "Were you about to say *'killed'* him? Were you?"

I looked out my window, not because I was avoiding her question, but because I could hear Charlie swearing, though we were still around the corner from his house.

"After everything I've told her about motorcycles, she does this! I could kill her myself!"

"Yeah, I thought you should know, Charlie."

"I appreciate that, Jake."

Jacob Black.

Bella was still waiting for my answer. "I would try...very hard...not to do that," I promised. Because it would hurt her.

"Well, nothing like that is ever going to happen, so there's no reason to worry about it. And you know Charlie's staring at the clock right now. You'd better get me home before

I get in more trouble for being late.”

She started to smile, but her expression changed when she looked at my face and realized something was wrong. I had pulled to the stop sign at the corner and waited there until I saw Jacob Black leave her house. I wasn't going to take Bella home while he was there. Bella's heart began to accelerate as she watched me nervously.

“You're already in more trouble, Bella,” I murmured, still listening for Charlie and Jacob's thoughts.

“What? What is it?”

“Charlie...”

“My dad?” Bella's voice rose into the stratosphere.

“Charlie...is probably *not* going to kill you, but he's thinking about it,” I told her.

Jacob Black had left Charlie's and walked into the woods just beyond the house where he now waited. I turned down Charlie's street, but drove past his house and parked the car next to the woods. The car was still visible from his front porch, but not as immediately obvious as it would be sitting in front of his house.

“What did I do?” Bella was starting to panic.

I had understood as soon as I saw the shiny red motorcycle in the driveway and heard Jacob's angry thoughts. So *this* was the infamous motorcycle with which Bella had tried to kill herself so she could summon my voice in her head. I felt the virtual whip across my shoulders. There wasn't a punishment harsh enough to make up for the harm I'd caused Bella by leaving.

Bella's eyes followed my gaze until she saw it too.

“No!” she gasped. “*Why?* Why would Jacob do this to me? Is he still here?”

“Yes. He's waiting for us there.” I pointed toward the path into the trees.

Bella jumped out of the car and took off at a run, her face compressed in fury and her hands clenched into fists.

I caught up with her before she reached the path and wrapped my arm around her waist to slow her down. Tears had started to pool in her eyes, which she would say were the result of anger, but I believed they contained sadness too. She felt betrayed.

“Let me go! I'm going to murder him! *Traitor!*” Bella yelled toward the woods.

“Charlie will hear you,” I cautioned. “And once he gets you inside, he may brick over the doorway.” Charlie was still fuming in the house, his anger increasing every minute that his daughter was late getting home.

Bella glanced at the house. “Just give me one round with Jacob, and then I'll deal with Charlie,” she declared, straining to break my hold around her.

“Jacob Black wants to see me. That's why he's still here,” I explained. She stopped struggling in surprise.

That's right, bloodsucker! Hurry up! I don't have all day!

Jacob had been told that I could read minds—by Bella, I assume—and he was testing that out by insulting me. *Bloodsucker*. It's what I was. I couldn't deny that.

“Talk?” Bella checked.

“More or less.”

Why did I volunteer for this? I knew he was seeing her and I sure as hell don't need to see them together. Damn it! Well, he can't bite her or he's fair game.

“How much more?” Bella worried. Her voice was shaky.

I tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear. “Don't worry, he's not here to fight me. He's acting as...spokesperson for the pack.”

“Oh.”

Where the hell is she? What has that SOB done to her THIS time?

I pulled Bella toward the path. “We should hurry. Charlie's getting impatient.”

We walked a short distance into the woods and found Jacob Black leaning against a mossy stump. He straightened and walked toward us wearing an unfriendly expression meant for me. His stature was impressive. I guessed he was in Magic Johnson territory, height-wise.

With a protective arm I cut off Bella's progress toward him. I didn't want her any closer to the werewolf than absolutely necessary. His murderous eyes locked onto mine.

Ha! He's keeping her away from me; now he won't get to see her either.

Being this close to a vampire was difficult for Jacob Black. He was shaking and shuddering, ready to transform into a wolf right there on the spot. Because of Carlisle, who long ago brokered a peace treaty with the Quileute, we never battled the wolves from the earlier generation, so I had no experience with their fighting style.

The Quileute are not werewolves, per se. They are more properly called “shape-shifters” and just happen to take the shape of wolves. Their ability to change is unrelated to the lunar cycle and, as far as I know, they don't attack humans at all. They seem to exist for the sole purpose of destroying vampires.

We don't know if they are the only wolves of their kind in the world. Caius was a werewolf hunter and Carlisle has never heard him speak of any others like the Quileute wolves. But indigenous peoples the world over harbor mysteries I associate with living so close to nature and to the land. Their genetic traits developed over millennia, often in isolation. Who knows how many such secrets have been lost through genocide or how many still exist and are known only to the tribes themselves?

“Bella,” Jacob acknowledged, keeping his eyes locked on me. I had pushed her behind my body in case the boy lost control. She had to duck around me to get a look at his face.

“Why?” Bella protested. “How could you do this to me, Jacob?”

“It's for the best,” he replied coolly.

“What is *that* supposed to mean? Do you want Charlie to *strangle* me? Or did you want him to have a heart attack, like Harry? No matter how mad you are at me, how could you do this to *him*?”

Hmm... “Like Harry” ... “He's at the funeral” ...the boy on the telephone... All

pieces of the puzzle.

I explained to Bella, “He didn’t want to hurt anyone—he just wanted to get you grounded, so that you wouldn’t be allowed to spend time with me.”

The mind-reading infuriated Jacob. The tendons in his arms bulged as he flexed his fists.

“Aw, Jake!” Bella complained “I’m *already* grounded! Why do you think I haven’t been down to La Push to kick your butt for avoiding my phone calls?”

“That’s why?” He glanced at me, greatly surprised. *Not the vampire leech’s fault?*

“He thought *I* wouldn’t let you, not Charlie,” I told Bella.

“Stop that,” the dog snapped and I braced myself. His body was trembling again.

“Bella wasn’t exaggerating about your...abilities,” he hissed, gritting his teeth. “So you must already know why I’m here.”

“Yes. But, before you begin, I need to say something.” I kept my voice soft and low in order not to excite him around Bella. His body was calm now but his arms still shook. “Thank you,” I said with the utmost sincerity. “I will never be able to tell you how grateful I am. I will owe you for the rest of my...existence.”

Jacob had expected something aggressive from me and was caught off guard. His face looked puzzled rather than angry for a moment.

“For keeping Bella alive,” I clarified, “when I...didn’t.”

Though Jacob was a danger to Bella, that didn’t negate the fact that he had done me the greatest possible service by protecting her. The pain of its necessity due to *my* misguided actions made my voice go coarse and deep.

“Edward—,” Bella started to contradict, but I held up a hand to signal “not now.” I knew very well the measure of my culpability.

“I didn’t do it for your benefit,” the wolf snarled, regaining his aggressive edge.

“I know. But that doesn’t erase the gratitude I feel. I thought you should know. If there’s ever anything in my power to do for you...”

You could leave Bella alone, he thought.

“That’s not in my power,” I admitted.

“Whose, then?”

“Hers,” I said, looking at Bella. “I’m a quick learner, Jacob Black, and I don’t make the same mistake twice. I’m here until she orders me away.”

I looked into Bella’s eyes when I said that last bit. She needed to hear it, a reminder of my promise to her.

“Never,” Bella murmured, looking into my eyes.

Jacob Black made an offensive noise, which annoyed Bella.

“Was there something else you needed, Jacob?” Bella shot out. “You wanted me in trouble—mission accomplished. Charlie might just send me to military school. But that won’t keep me away from Edward. There’s nothing that can do that. What more do you want?”

“I just needed to remind your bloodsucking friends of a few key points in the treaty they agreed to,” Jacob Black said. I’d already seen the words in his head.

You can’t bite her to turn her into one of you. That means war.

Out loud he said, “The treaty that is the only thing stopping me from ripping his throat out right this minute.”

I hardly thought that was true, but never mind.

“We haven’t forgotten,” I told him and I wasn’t worried about it. I had no plans to let anyone bite Bella.

“What key points?” she wanted to know.

“The treaty is quite specific. If any of them bite a human, the truce is over. *Bite*, not kill,” he said to Bella, while looking at me.

Is that what you’re planning, bloodsucker?

If he could read minds, he’d see that it was Bella who wanted that, not me.

Bella’s temper flared. “That’s none of your business,” she snapped, inadvertently revealing her intention to him.

“The hell it—”

The wolf interrupted himself as he started shaking violently. He pressed his fists into his head, clamped his eyes shut, and hunched inward, trying not to lose control of himself. He was *furious* and utterly stunned by Bella’s words, but he didn’t want to hurt her. Now me...that was another thing.

“Jake? You okay?” Bella took a step toward the shuddering boy. I grabbed her and relocated her behind my body.

“Careful! He’s not under control,” I warned. Not only that—the wolf wasn’t just furious; *hate* radiated from him.

“Ugh. *I would never hurt her,*” he snarled at me.

As if I would!

I felt my temper rising. I knew *exactly* what he was referring to—not just changing her, but leaving her. The wolf wanted to fight and except for Bella’s presence, I would have been happy to oblige him.

Just then, Charlie stomped out of his house and saw my parked car.

“BELLA!” he thundered. “YOU GET IN THIS HOUSE THIS INSTANT!”

“Crap.”

“I *am* sorry about that,” Jacob Black admitted regretfully. “I had to do what I could—I had to try...” *To get you away from him. To get you back.* But he didn’t say those last words out loud.

“Thanks,” Bella retorted, her voice wavering. Charlie’s anger was unsettling to her.

“Just one more thing,” I said to Bella as she turned to leave, then I looked at Jacob. “We’ve found no trace of Victoria on our side of the line—have you?”

“The last time was while Bella was...away. We let her think she was slipping through—we were tightening the circle, getting ready to ambush her but then she took off

like a bat out of hell. Near as we can tell, she caught your little female's scent and bailed. She hasn't come near our lands since."

I nodded to acknowledge the report. It was good news for the moment.

"When she comes back, she's not your problem anymore," I informed him. "We'll—"

"She killed on our turf. She's ours!" the wolf raged.

"No—," Bella cried out to both of us.

"BELLA! I SEE HIS CAR AND I KNOW YOU'RE OUT THERE! IF YOU AREN'T INSIDE THIS HOUSE IN ONE MINUTE...!" Charlie couldn't think of a black enough threat to end that sentence.

He'd punished Bella about as far as he could without committing a crime, I figured, or provoking Bella to move to my house. He'd *really* hate that, so I guessed he wouldn't come down too hard on her, despite his temper.

"Let's go," I urged. I wanted Bella out of the werewolf's vicinity anyway, the sooner, the better.

Bella turned back toward her friend.

"Sorry," he whispered. "'Bye, Bells."

"You promised," Bella said.

Promised what?

"Still friends, right?" she asked. I hoped that was all he'd promised her. I would be keeping my eye on Jacob Black.

"You know how hard I've tried to keep that promise," he responded, "But...I can't see how to keep trying. Not now..." The wolf stretched a hand toward Bella. "Miss you."

"Me, too," Bella croaked. "Jake..." Bella stepped toward the wolf and I pulled her back.

No closer.

"It's okay," Bella said to me confidently.

"No, it's not," I replied with steel in my voice. She had to understand the danger.

"Let her go. She wants to!" The wolf snarled at me and began striding forward, ready to fight. Swiftly, I grabbed Bella and moved her behind me and then turned to face the aggressor, arms raised in readiness.

"No! Edward—!" Bella cried out.

"ISABELLA SWAN!" The irate voice rang through the neighborhood.

"Come on! Charlie's mad! Hurry!" Bella urged, pulling at my shirt. He was indeed. He had just squelched an impulse to retrieve his service revolver.

I backed Bella out of the woods, keeping my eyes on the wolf. I'd gotten my irritation under control, though I couldn't say the same for Jacob Black. When we'd cleared the trees, I spun forward and wrapped my arms around Bella's waist. She was very upset, her body shaking as we strode toward her father's house. Charlie was standing just inside the front door.

“I’m here,” I said, holding her close.

It wasn’t as bad as I’d expected. My recent temper tantrum was worse than Charlie’s. At least *he* didn’t stoop to destruction. He was quite a yeller, though, and anger made his rich, red blood churn and eddy beneath his skin in the most tantalizing way.

If Charlie had been speaking to me, he surely would have ordered me out of his house as soon as I stepped inside with Bella. He wasn’t, though, so I took advantage, placidly ignoring his mental expulsions and non-verbal cues to leave (such as turning his back on me and blocking me in the entry). Bella did not argue with her father or protest his excoriations because she was too worried about his blood pressure, she told me later.

The upshot of the motorcycle fiasco was that my visiting hours were shortened by an hour and a half; we would be allowed no privacy in Charlie’s house; and Bella still wasn’t allowed out except for school and work (and to buy groceries when that became necessary). She also had to promise not to ride the motorcycle. Bella thought the punishment was fair. I wasn’t particularly bothered by it either, because as long as Bella remained grounded, she couldn’t spend time with the werewolf as she’d been wanting to do. Charlie wouldn’t allow it and so I didn’t have to be the bad guy for the time being.

I’ve already set in motion the long process of replacing Emmett’s television. To tide him over until it arrives from overseas, I had an electronics store in Port Angeles deliver a fifty-inch Panasonic flat screen to the house. Esme repaired the wall herself, with nary an admonishment in my direction. My behavior had been deplorable, but she knew how seriously I viewed taking Bella’s human life. Everyone seemed to think I’d gotten over it and mostly they were relieved.

Emmett forgave me right away for destroying his prized possession. He claims he had plenty of rages himself “back in the day,” though personally, I couldn’t remember any.

“Besides,” he informed me. “They’re making sixty-four-inch plasma screens in Korea since I bought the old one.”

I couldn’t remember anybody ever accusing Emmett of being subtle either, but I didn’t mind. It was the least I could do.