

16. MAGIC

Bella fell asleep on the couch and we left her there. Moving her had become so difficult. I could tell by her facial expressions that the pain was intense.

Jacob fell asleep shortly after Bella did, but not before telling me that he was concerned about her phone conversations with Charlie. Bella had told her father that she was “on the mend,” a falsehood that could only end in grief for him. I was concerned too, but I wasn’t going to deny Bella something that she wanted. Not now.

She was fantasizing that she could see Charlie after she was changed too (if she survived to *be* changed). She probably imagined that we would attend family reunions and go to the kid’s school functions, throw birthday parties with “Grandpa Charlie,” and visit Florida too. That was fine with me. Let her have her dreams now. There wasn’t much time left, given the turn things had taken.

Drinking human blood had pulled Bella back from the brink of starvation, which is what she must have been referring to when she’d described herself as “on the mend” to Charlie. The problem was that the thing grew stronger even faster than Bella did now that it was getting what it wanted. It was literally tearing her apart from the inside. How much longer could this go on?

Rosalie kept watch while Jacob leaned against the couch, asleep, his arm against Bella to warm her. It reminded me of our night in the tent when Jacob snuggled with Bella in a sleeping bag to save her from freezing, while I sat helplessly nearby. I saw Bella shiver in her sleep and moved my chilly body further away from her. Jacob dropped his head onto the cushion beside Bella’s without waking up. Yes, they would have been good together. It was a tragedy that I hadn’t stayed away. Because of me, now she would die trying to bear my offspring. Was there anything more I could do? I went in search of Carlisle to run my latest idea by him. I found him, as usual, studying in his office.

“Carlisle?” He looked up.

“Yes, Edward?”

“In the research you’ve done, have you found anything about why the mothers died?” I spoke softly, so as not to share the conversation with anyone else in the house.

Not explicitly, no. My first guess would be hemorrhaging and blood loss, followed by heart failure.

“We know that if any of these children have actually been born, as the Ticunas seem to believe, that the mothers had to have survived until the birth, assuming the babies need blood circulation and oxygen in the womb, right?”

Yes. We don't know that they necessarily breathe air, but we do know that they are dependent upon the mother's body for survival because the fetus stopped growing as fast, and didn't move around as much, when Bella herself was starving.

"Right, my thought exactly. So we know that if such a child was ever born, that the mother survived up until the birth. I mean, the child had time to chew its way out before the mother was dead for very long.

Yes... Carlisle responded hesitantly, not sure where I was going with all this.

"So, if we have blood available for transfusions, and we deliver the baby, rather than let it deliver itself, then it's likely that we could keep Bella alive long enough to get the thing out and change her."

As long as her heart keeps beating. That's the critical point.

"That's what I'm getting at. If Bella's heart were to fail during the surgery, could venom repair it, do you think? If the venom were injected directly into her heart?"

That's an interesting question, Edward. In every case I have witnessed, the heart was still beating, even if only faintly, such as Esme's.

"But Esme's heart was beating just enough to push the venom through her system, right? And as more venom circulated, her heartbeat got stronger?"

Yes, that's true. Are you thinking of injecting Bella's heart directly with venom?

"That was my thought. If Bella's heart should fail, we could start her change by injecting her heart muscle immediately. If the venom repaired it then the entire transformation could continue."

I don't know if venom can restart a still heart, but it's a very interesting idea to change the heart first, Edward. Injecting venom directly into the organ shouldn't hurt anything, except for the pain, of course, but Bella will either be unconscious from the anesthesia or on morphine to prepare for her change.

"Yes.

It would be best to deliver the child first, before using morphine, of course. We know the baby has a heartbeat, and an adult dosage of morphine might stop its heart.

"Of course." Truly, I wasn't thinking about whether the *thing* survived or not.

It sounds like a good idea. If you're forced to change her to save her life, then it might speed up the process even.

I nodded. "That's what I was hoping. If I were to store up venom for that purpose, how long do you think it would stay viable?"

That I couldn't tell you. Human sperm has a refrigerated shelf-life of two day, but I wouldn't trust five-year-old venom not to harm a human. Fresh is probably best in any case. To be certain, you could store it fresh every day or every other day and it would be there to use. We are getting close.

"And you're going to get blood while you're out?"

Yes.

"We've got to get Jasper out of here to hunt. I'm afraid Bella could be in danger

soon. Rosalie should go too if she's going to help with the surgery."

We'll leave as soon as Jacob gives the go-ahead. I don't think I can convince Rosalie to go unless you do, though. Are you sure you shouldn't hunt before the birth?

I shook my head no. I just couldn't take the chance that she might be gone when I returned. I wouldn't leave her now.

Jacob departed before dawn. I awakened him when I saw that Bella's face had turned red. She was overheating next to his body. I sat down where he had been and held my arm around the top of her head to cool her down. He said silently that he was going to gather the pack and then the wolves would "run some spokes" to see if the way was clear for the family to go hunting.

"Thank you," I said after seeing his plans. "If the route is clear, they'll go today."

"I'll let you know."

I nodded. When he had gone, I peeled the blanket off Bella and gently rolled her sweatshirt up her belly. Rosalie gave me the evil eye, but I didn't acknowledge her.

The damage inside Bella was horrendous. I remembered how torn up I was on our honeymoon when I accidentally bruised Bella's body while making love. That was nothing to this. There was literally no ivory-colored skin on the front of her body between her breasts and pubis colored. When we taped her ribs, I'd seen that the bruising was the same on her back.

The bruise had the depth and quality of a life form. You could see slight variations in its color where some part of the creature's body had whacked her. The point of impact was purple, close to charcoal-colored. It faded by color...violet, red, green, yellow...as you looked outward from the point of impact. Most of what had been yellow was overlaid at least once with a newer contusion. As I watched, I saw a shark fin bulge appear and move a few inches across her lower belly before disappearing, an elbow, maybe. It might be kicking Bella to death, but it was certainly alive and well—whatever it was.

I jerked my head up. Rosalie must have said something, but it was garbled in my head.

"What did you say?" I asked, looking in her direction.

"I didn't say anything."

"What were you thinking about, then?"

"None of your beeswax. If you didn't hear, then I'm not telling you!"

I turned away, confused. By asking her the question, I caused Rosalie to reconsider her last thought, which was about holding the baby and feeding it with a bottle. A bottle of blood, no doubt! That's not what I heard, though. It must have been coming from somewhere else in the house. Or maybe Jacob was right that I was going crazy—now I was hearing voices and nonexistent thoughts. It didn't matter since—despite my optimism after talking with Carlisle—I didn't honestly expect to be around much longer. Let Rosalie have the creature! I couldn't love it if it killed my Bella.

How dramatic it all was. Shakespearean, almost.

The red heat was gone from Bella's face and I felt a little shiver run through her. Cold, again. I gently rolled the cotton fleece down over her abused body, trembling with anger and pain. I wrapped the blanket around her and went upstairs to our room. I should start stockpiling venom. It was something positive I could do, though I feared it wouldn't make any difference to the outcome.

How to proceed? *Hmm. Coming upon a delicious-smelling Bella in a dark alley would stimulate the venom flow!*

That thought bred the next—venom clinics, where vampires could donate for cash. Humans would peruse vampire biographies and choose the venom they wanted to purchase for that special occasion when they just *had* to make a vampire. Or they could inject themselves with venom, thus creating the rare phenomenon of a vampire changing himself! I imagined what the magazines would look like in the donation cubicles. That did make me smile—grimly—but it was still an upward movement of the lips. I think it counted.

Ah, well. Contemplating “a delicious-smelling Bella” did actually make my mouth water. Crazy, that after all this time and everything we'd been through together I *still* craved her blood. I darted down to Carlisle's office and rummaged through his medical equipment cart, since he'd stepped out somewhere. Then I heard his and Esme's thoughts...they were sharing a “private walk” together somewhere outside. Not so private now, though....

I found what I was looking for—a sterile specimen jar. I unscrewed the lid and spit into it. That reminded me of a time some decades ago when Carlisle and I had examined his venom under a microscope. You could see activity in the cells. It was like they were all jammed in together, but still buzzing around at full speed, bumping into each other continuously. Venom was alive. We looked at mine for a comparison and it was the same, though with slightly more color. Maybe venom was like vampire skin, losing its tint as its owner grew older.

I worked up a few more drops, and then popped the jar into Carlisle's mini-fridge. Refrigerating it seemed like the right thing to do. Perhaps freezing it with nitrogen would be better. Although Carlisle had collected a good stash of equipment for Bella, he hadn't gone quite that far. He was like me, though—thorough.

Carlisle and I had had a very interesting conversation the previous evening about genetics. He was hoping, I think, that since this baby was coming, that I might develop a more positive attitude toward it. Or maybe he was a little excited about being a grandfather. If it turned out to be a two-headed monster, Dr. and Mrs. Cullen would be the perfect parents for it. And if it outlived Bella, I knew he and Esme (and maybe even Rosalie) would love it like I never could. But he'd been thinking about science.

Bella had made a comment after the creature nearly broke her back stretching that it reminded her of Jacob. Naturally, Jacob got bent-out-of-shape being compared to *it*, but Bella was referring to Jacob's growth spurt a couple of years previously and how she'd watched him shoot up right before her eyes. I'd been away during that time, and when

Bella and I came back to Forks from Italy, I hadn't recognized Jacob right away. He'd grown a good seven or eight inches and resembled a bodybuilder, though when I first met him, he'd looked like a regular teenager.

Carlisle had been considering other similarities between Jacob and the fetus. Not only did they both grow at accelerated rates, Alice couldn't see the futures of either of them. Being inside of Bella, the fetus even blocked Alice's view of Bella's future.

Then there was the chromosomal issue. Humans have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes and we have twenty-five. What if the combination of Bella and myself produced offspring with twenty-four chromosomes? Was that possible? Carlisle seemed to think so. He cited an example from his most recent spate of research.

	Chromosomes
Donkey	62
Horse	64
Hybrid	63

Vampires and humans have an analogous relationship with regard to their number of chromosomes.

	Chromosomes
Human (Bella)	23
Vampire (Me)	25
Shape shifter (Jacob)	24

Was it possible that our offspring would have the same number of chromosomes as the wolves? If so, would it be a werewolf? A shape shifter? Another type of creature with 24 chromosomes? A male donkey and a female horse produce a *mule*. A female donkey and a male horse produce a *hinny*, which has the same number of chromosomes as the mule and looks similar, but is a different animal with different traits. That means that Bella and I could produce something that looks like a "Jacob," but isn't the same.

Could a child of ours grow up to be a shape shifter of some kind? *My gawd, wouldn't that be amazing?* If so, I hoped that it wouldn't be a wolf—way too much drama involved in the whole pack phenomenon. And frankly, imprinting was a little frightening, though I could easily see how imprinting would be a blessing for Jacob. There was no point in both of us going down with the mother ship. (That might have been an amusing metaphor under different circumstances.) If he could just meet the right "someone," he would heal.

It no longer seemed coincidental that, other than vampire teeth, wolf teeth were the only known means of tearing vampire skin. That meant Jacob or any other wolf would be physically able to extract the offspring of a vampire and human, which might be a genetic match to itself. Some mules were fertile. Likewise, the “mutant spawn” could be reproductively compatible with the wolf.

Well before dawn, I was seated at Bella’s feet when she woke with a shriek, which she instantly throttled by clenching her jaw. I started—a rare occurrence since only my wife is truly able to surprise me. Bella sat rigid, gripping her muscles to avoid movement. I hollered for Carlisle, but he was there already.

“I heard a bone break, Carlisle! My darling, where are you hurt?”

She couldn’t breathe yet for fear of moving a muscle and repeating the horrible, stabbing pain. Her eyes stared at me, wide and frightened.

“Bella, I’m going to pick you up and carry you upstairs, okay?”

She nodded in a tiny motion. I could tell as I lifted and carried her that she was struggling not to scream.

Rosalie followed us up the stairs. “I didn’t hear any bones break. Where are you hurting, Bella?”

Bella moved one index finger and pointed in the general area of her lower groin.

“Pelvis, Carlisle?”

“Yes, that’s my guess.”

I bent over with the greatest care to lay her down on the examining table without jostling any of her previously broken bones. Her face turned white and her jaw was clenched tightly closed.

“Bella, are you still feeling a stabbing pain or a more generalized pain?”

“First stab...then...” she moved her finger in a circle, indicating “general.”

“If it’s broken, we’ll make sure it’s not perforating anything.”

“Ba...by?” she panted.

“I don’t think one of your bones could hurt the baby inside its protective membrane.”

She nodded and closed her eyes while I positioned her and Carlisle positioned the X-ray scanner. When we examined the films, we couldn’t find the break.

“See, I *told* you I didn’t hear a crack. You need your ears checked, Edward.”

I did not look at Rosalie. What she thought meant nothing to me. Bella was all that I cared about. But I did hear the conversation downstairs between Alice and Jacob, who had just returned. Rosalie either didn’t hear or chose to ignore it.

“Edward’s going to end up ripping Rose into small pieces, I think. I’m surprised she doesn’t see that. Or maybe she thinks Emmett will be able to stop him,” Alice said.

“I’ll take Emmett. You can help Edward with the ripping part,” Jacob replied.

I appreciated the support. But nobody, with the possible exception of Emmett, could alter Rosalie’s direction or behavior.

I took Bella back to the couch and laid her down as gently as I possibly could.

“Jake,” Bella whispered, when she saw him.

Jacob was wondering why we didn’t leave her upstairs near the medical equipment. He guessed correctly that Bella didn’t want that. She was absolutely determined to pretend she was “fine.” Whatever she wanted at this point she would get—whatever made her happy. I would deal with any fallout later.

Doc’s looking bad.

I glanced at my father. Jacob was right. Carlisle was showing the strain. Though battling a serious thirst, his primary concern was for Bella. The blood supply had dwindled and the wolves were preventing him from acquiring more. Bella gulped it down even now. If the kicker survived, who knew how much it would require?

“Carlisle,” Jacob said, “we went halfway to Seattle. There’s no sign of the pack. You’re good to go.” My father’s shoulders dropped in relief.

“If you think so. Alice, Esme, Jasper, and I will go. Then Alice can take Emmett and Rosa—”

“Not a chance,” Rosalie snarled. “Emmett can go with you now.”

“You should hunt,” Carlisle advised.

“I’ll hunt when *he* does,” she snarled, referring to me.

I wasn’t sure what she thought I would do in her absence. It’s not like I could flush the little killer down the toilet.

She’s going as insane as me. At least she was invested in Bella’s welfare—for now. If she weren’t, I might have already killed her.

“Thank you,” Carlisle said to Jacob. He summoned the family and they all rushed out to hunt, except for myself and Rosalie. Everyone was hurting.

Jacob probably would have left too except that the perfect opportunity for harassing Rosalie had presented itself and he couldn’t resist. He sat in the lounge chair next to her and dangled his smelly human feet in the area where she was sitting.

“Ew. Someone put the dog out,” Rosalie complained, wrinkling her nose.

“Have you heard this one, Psycho? How do a blonde’s brain cells die?”

Rosalie ignored him.

“Has she heard it?” he asked me and I shook my head.

“Awesome. So you’ll enjoy this, bloodsucker—a blonde’s brain cells die *alone*.”

I was too absorbed in worrying about Bella’s breaking bones to get caught up in Jacob and Rosalie’s ongoing feud. I was sure that I’d heard something snap inside of her even though the X-rays didn’t confirm it. I watched her face for signs of the pain that she was trying to conceal and listened carefully for a repeat of whatever it was I’d heard before.

Rosalie spoke without looking at Jacob. “I have killed a hundred times more often than you have, you disgusting beast. Don’t forget that.”

“Someday, Beauty Queen, you’re going to get tired of just threatening me. I’m really looking forward to that.”

“Enough, Jacob,” Bella reproved him, scowling.

“You want me to take off?” Jacob offered.

Bella blinked in surprise. “No! Of course not.” Her expression was filled with so much shock and dismay that both Jacob and I felt stabs of pain.

Rosalie went upstairs to get Bella more blood and the room became quiet. In that silence, measured only by our breaths, I heard something—an expression of contentment, or even bliss—with no words associated with it.

“Did you say something?” I asked Bella, though I knew she hadn’t.

Bella looked at me oddly. “Me? I didn’t say anything.”

There was something there, for certain. Was I finally—at long last—hearing my wife’s thoughts?? Was I beginning to penetrate the mental barrier that existed between us? I rose to my knees and looked directly into her face.

“What are you thinking about right now?” She looked at me like she didn’t recognize me.

“Nothing. What’s going on?”

“What were you thinking about a minute ago?” I asked, excited.

“Just...Esme’s Island. And feathers.” Bella blushed the beautiful pink of our courtship days.

Ah, yes, something blissful indeed. And there it was again, following right *behind* Bella’s words. If it were her thoughts I was hearing, wouldn’t they be identifiable at precisely the *moment* she spoke, not afterwards? Something else was happening, something...magnificent?

“Say something else,” I whispered to my wife. I listened, anticipating...

“Like what? Edward, what’s going on?”

There it was...bliss...joy! I placed my hands on Bella’s huge belly and then... I knew. Jacob and the returning Rosalie gasped as I leaned in close and listened intently to the silent air. It was still there.

“The fe—...it...the *baby* likes the sound of your voice,” I said to Bella, grinning in sudden understanding. There was *humanity* in there, inside the destruction of my beloved wife’s body. Carlisle had been right. This was something special, something *magical*. Shocked silence reigned for a second, then...

“*Holy crow, you can hear him!*” Bella yelled.

The thi—...baby jumped in surprise, kicking his mother and Bella winced. I massaged the area to calm both him and her.

“Shh,” I warned Bella quietly. “You startled it...him.” I was stunned, fascinated, and enthralled all at once. The baby’s “voice” was unique, undeveloped, but clear in its intense...what? Love. That was it. Love and adoration.

“Sorry, baby,” Bella crooned, patting the side of her bulge.

“What’s he thinking now?” she asked excitedly.

“It...he or she, is...” I looked into Bella’s eyes, marveling at this stunning,

precious moment we were sharing.

“He’s *happy*,” I said in disbelief. I could see the joy and relief in Bella’s eyes as tears spilled down her cheeks and over her lips. My amazing wife who had faith, who always had had faith, in what I did not.

“Of course you’re happy, pretty baby, of course you are,” Bella soothed as she massaged the child through her skin. “How could you not be, all safe and warm and loved? I love you so much, little EJ, of course you’re happy.”

“What did you call him?”

Bella blushed again.

“I sort of named him. I didn’t think you would want...well, you know,” she said shyly.

“EJ?” I asked.

“Your father’s name was Edward, too.”

“Yes, it was. What—?” The baby had reacted when I spoke, responding with bursts of emotion. A little like Charlie, actually, though the emotion was joyful.

“Hmm...”

“What?”

“He likes my voice, too.”

“Of course he does. You have the most beautiful voice in the universe. Who wouldn’t love it?”

This was *my child* inside Bella. Part of me. Part of her. He already knew both of us and Bella knew him, but I did not. I was mesmerized. I wanted to learn more.

While I was listening to EJ—“Edward Jacob,” a true family name—Rosalie and Bella talked about girls’ names. Bella had thought all of this through, of course. I had not been there for her to talk to about it. I had not shared her anticipation, her joy, over carrying this living testament to our love. It was beating her up, draining her of life, but not in a malicious way. Bella was right—he was just too strong for her human body and he could not stay in there much longer. It was cramped and tight...suffocating almost. I sensed that strongly.

Every time Bella spoke, the baby’s mind hummed. I listened more carefully, trying to translate the feelings into words.

“What?” Bella asked eagerly. “What’s he thinking now?” Emotion glowed from him at the question.

I laid my ear close and felt him respond happily to my touch through Bella’s skin. Finally, I found the words.

“He loves you,” I murmured, surprised by the intensity of it. “He absolutely *adores* you.”

I was lost in this new world, the world where I could be the father of Bella’s child, a child who could communicate with me from inside her womb. It was a miracle, not something I had dreamed in my wildest imaginings. I remembered a day—it seemed

like forever ago—when I was wishing to Bella that Charlie’s assumption about our abrupt marriage announcement had been true. I’d wished that she had been pregnant, that we had that kind of potential, that I wouldn’t be taking the chance of motherhood away from Bella by marrying her. My wish, which had been just a fantasy to me, was granted, and I hadn’t understood the miracle. I hadn’t seen it for what it was: my most implausible dreams come true. I was filled with wonder and thanksgiving at this gift my wife was giving me...suffering so very much...to give me. And I had treated it like a curse. Suddenly, I wanted them *both* to live. I wanted us all to be together.

Just then, Jacob, whom I’d forgotten was there, leaped to his feet and my attention was drawn to his silent voice.

“Ahh...,” I moaned, when the force of his pain hit me—the overwhelming, irredeemable love of my wife. It struck like a lash, whipping and tearing through my joy.

Jacob had to get away, to run, to escape this rending of his soul. And I owed him. Inspired by Carlisle, who’d once rescued me from similar pain, I seized the keys to my Aston Martin from a drawer and tossed them to Jacob. He snatched them out of the air.

“Go, Jacob. Get away from here.” He needed a distraction, some kind of release, or better yet, a miracle.

He went looking for magic.