

9. There

It was twilight when I pulled into the Citgo station. Carlisle flashed his lights once and I followed him back onto the road so that neither of us would have to get out of our cars. I could use a refill on gas, but it wasn't critical yet. Carlisle led me in his Mercedes to a wooded area northeast of the city called Cayuga Heights. I followed him down an isolated private road at the end of which was a large Tudor-style home with extensive gardens backing onto a small forest. He pulled up to a three-car garage and one of the doors opened automatically. It hadn't taken the family long to get settled, it appeared.

I drove up behind him and another garage door rose, obviously for me. I pulled in and parked before getting out and looking around. This was a truly cavernous garage with room to park six cars, two in tandem for each of the three garage doors.

Esme darted out of the house through a door off to the side, which I guessed led to the kitchen.

"Edward! We're so glad you're here."

"Thanks, Mom."

"Come in and see our new temporary housing."

"It looks huge."

"Yes, a doctor at the local medical center is on an overseas sabbatical, so it was offered to Emmett and Rosalie for our family after the hospital administration saw Carlisle's CV. He's got an interview tomorrow, but they badly need a surgeon, especially one willing to work night shift. Of course, if we like it here, we'll find our own home. What do you think?"

It was obvious that Esme was excited about the house, so I tried to sound enthused. "It looks very nice. Do I get my own room?"

"Yes, of course, your choice, if you like. How was your trip?"

"Probably very much like yours, but less enjoyable. I almost stopped in Chicago, but Alice distracted me and I didn't."

"Did you go by your house?" Carlisle asked.

"I got very close."

"You look like you could use a hunting trip," he noted.

"Probably so. It's hard to concentrate on anything, even being thirsty."

"Shall we go then? Esme?"

"I'll stay behind. I want to study the real estate listings."

"Okay, then. Edward?"

"Sure. I might as well see the options. Where are Emmett and Rosalie?"

“Hunting also. I waited for you.”

New York State is a hospitable place for vegetarian vampires, as we discovered when we lived in Rochester in the early 1930s. The eastern part of the state boasts 3.5 million acres of federally protected forests in the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains, as well as half a dozen smaller state forests within running distance of Ithaca. Farther south are the forested Allegheny Mountains in Pennsylvania, and several large forests still exist in Vermont and New Hampshire. All of them are classified as “broadleaf deciduous,” which are quite different than the coniferous forests of the Olympic Peninsula. Here, the deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall, so the forests are rather bare even as early as September, which makes us more visible as we race through the trees.

New York is also more populous than the Olympic Peninsula, with hunters and trappers scattered all over during hunting season. We had to remain alert not to come into contact with them and accidentally get shot or be discovered feeding. The primary large game in New York, both for human hunters and us, is white-tailed deer and black bear. In the 1930s, one could also find the occasional caribou and moose, but they are long gone now. Sometimes, I wonder whether vegetarian vampires might eventually become extinct, as humans gradually take over more and more of the planet and destroy animal habitat. Maybe we would be reduced to drinking rats one day. Or armadillos. It is said that armadillos and rats will survive even a nuclear holocaust.

On this occasion, we ran to Hammond Hill State Forest about ten miles away, and since it was dark, we didn’t worry about hunters or hikers, but we kept our noses alert for campers, which fortunately we did not encounter. We also did not find any bear, but we scared up a family of white-tailed deer, which still seem rather abundant.

After Carlisle and I had both fed, he spoke. “Bella is in no danger, Edward.”

“You checked?”

“Yes, I called the hospital under the auspices of locating records I might have misfiled. It seems that Bella got lost in the woods the night you left, but some local boys found her and took her home. Dr. Gerandy checked her for injuries and exposure and says she was suffering only from exhaustion.”

I assumed that Carlisle was putting a positive slant on the news, because I heard the word *melancholia* in his mind, but he did not elaborate. Bella must be suffering some depression since I left. I was sorry for that—terribly sorry, and guilty too—but it was to be expected. She just needed some time to recover.

“She’ll be fine, right?”

“Dr. Gerandy sees no reason why she shouldn’t be. She had a shock, but she’s strong.”

The word *breakdown* also slipped through, but I didn’t stop to analyze what that might mean. I just nodded and said “thank you.” I didn’t want to know any more details, afraid that I would find reasons why I must return to Forks immediately. It was imperative that I not do so. Bella deserved a life.

When we got back to the house, Emmett and Rosalie had returned.

“Hey, brother!” Emmett greeted me jovially. I couldn’t summon much enthusiasm, though I was glad to see him.

“Em. Rosalie.”

“It’s great here, Edward. There are forests everywhere and lots of black bears. I got one today, in fact,” Emmett enthused.

I grunted in reply. It was not possible for me to share anyone’s joy at the moment.

“Edward, do you want to go to the Cayuga Medical Center with me tomorrow for my interview? You could look around, see what you think. You too, Rosalie, if you’d like. It’s quite advanced for a semi-rural area.”

“I’d rather go look around Cornell. Do they have a medical library?” Rosalie asked. Rose has a graduate degree in medicine, as do I. Over the decades, she has taken on the job of helping Carlisle stay up-to-date with medical research, something he has to work at continually.

I didn’t bother to reply. I couldn’t imagine feeling any more enthusiastic about looking around town tomorrow than I did today. Carlisle was just trying to engage me in something, which was kind of him.

“Esme, which room is mine?”

“Come with me. I’ll show you the rooms you can pick from,” she replied, holding out her hand. I wanted to go somewhere and shut the door and try to block the thoughts all around me.

Why doesn’t he pull himself together? It’s just a human. (Rosalie)

Poor Edward. He finally finds someone to love and... (Esme)

Did we do the right thing coming here? Perhaps I should have intervened in his decision. His sense of right and wrong puts him in such a bind. (Carlisle)

He looks bad. I wish Alice were here. She could cheer him up. (Emmett)

I wanted to put on a less grim face for my family and pretend I was okay, but I simply didn’t have the energy to try. I took my mother’s hand and let her lead me around the large, complicated house and show me the three bedrooms that weren’t in use. I chose the smallest room on the third floor—servants’ quarters, probably—because it was furthest from the others.

What would Bella think of the area? I wondered. She probably wouldn’t like it in winter. The temperature regularly dropped to twenty degrees Fahrenheit and below, and winters were long. That was fine for us. We didn’t feel the cold, and the longer the nights, the more hours we had to move about freely.

I retrieved my duffle bag from my car, along with the pictures I’d stashed in the glove box, and returned to my new bedroom to unpack. The room was minimally furnished with a bed, a desk, and a dresser, but it had an attractive gabled window set into a box-like space under the eaves. I walked over and looked out. It faced the back of the house and the forest beyond, whose trees already had lost most of their leaves. The bare trees seemed a

little sad, but their starkness mirrored my mood. The leaves on the oak trees had turned brown and wrinkled—dead—but they still clung to their branches, as they would continue to do all winter.

Like me, I suppose.

I began to count them, each crumpled brown pendant on every branch, starting at the bottom and working my way up. When I finished the first tree, I started on the one adjacent to it. The oaks were hardest. Most of the other trees had few leaves left.

“Edward.” My father’s voice broke into my reverie. When I turned, I saw the look of concern on his face.

“Carlisle?”

“Do you want to go to the hospital with me?”

It was still dark outside the window and I was confused for a moment. “I thought that was tomorrow.”

He looked at me oddly. “Son...”—he paused—“...it *is* tomorrow.”

“Oh.” Twenty-four hours had passed. It was dark *again*, not *still*. That was mildly alarming.

“I’m running late, actually.”

“You’d better go on then. Good luck with the interview,” I said, trying to sound cheerful, but the words came out tight and forced.

“Thank you,” Carlisle replied aloud. His thoughts continued silently. *I’ll have Esme check on him while I’m gone. Maybe leaving him alone isn’t the best policy after all.*

I turned to the window and continued counting the leaves that clung to the bare branches. The garage door opened and closed, and Carlisle’s car pulled away. Some time passed and then my mother knocked softly on the door and stuck her head in.

“Edward?”

“Yes?” I answered without turning around.

“Won’t you come downstairs with us? I would love for you to try out the piano in the living room. It’s a beautiful Yamaha.”

“Yes, okay. Down in a minute.”

I continued my counting. Something about the number of leaves still hanging on seemed vitally important to me. I didn’t want to lose my place.

“How did it go?” I heard Esme say.

“Well. They’d like me to start immediately as the nighttime attending physician, including emergency service, working with interns and residents.”

“So you’ll be teaching?” She sounded pleased.

“Yes. Cornell has an affiliated medical college in New York and the students often return here, as well as others. I can keep my hand in.”

My mind registered the conversation, but in a detached manner, as if I were listening to a television program I never watched. If someone were to ask me later whether Carlisle got the job, I might have to think about it for a second before being certain.

Then in lower, barely audible tones...

“How is he?”

“No change. Shouldn’t we do something?”

“Perhaps.”

“I’ll get him.”

Emmett’s heavy footsteps moved through the house, up a flight of stairs, around a landing, up another flight of stairs, down the hallway, stopping at my door.

“Hey, Edward, let’s throw some tree javelin. Or boulder shot put. Your choice. You need to get out of the house, bro. Come on, best out of seven. Hundred bucks?”

I didn’t turn around. I had no energy for sports.

“Not right now, Em. Maybe later.”

“Ah, come on. I’m bored. Let’s go out in the woods. We could have a fox hunt with us as the hounds. Owooooh!” My brother howled like a hound dog and then howled with laughter.

I ignored him.

“We can goof off if you want. Just do *something*.”

He said more things. He might have yelled at me, but I’d tuned him out. Eventually, it grew quiet again. I’d finished with the leaves and decided to inventory the trees in the big back yard...ten pines, three oaks, three flowering cherry, five dogwood, three crabapple, five holly, four unknown. It was quite challenging to identify deciduous trees in the winter, in the dark, from a distance, through dirty window glass. I wasn’t sure I had classified them all correctly. I was starting on the shrubs and hedge plants when I heard footsteps coming down the hall.

“Edward!” Rosalie’s voice was harsh. “Stop being a jerk and come talk to us. You’re upsetting everyone acting like this. Why don’t you think about somebody besides yourself once in a while?”

“Okay. Down in a minute.” My voice sounded hollow and remote. I just wanted the gnats to stop buzzing in my ears. I needed peace. That was all.

It was easier to count things when the sun was up. Ants were good. There were lots of them and they usually traveled in single file. It got tricky when they went into a hole and came back out, though, because they look remarkably alike.

Occasionally, small animals or birds exited the forest and ventured into the cultivated part of the yard, which was at least an acre. They didn’t seem afraid of the noise we made, but drew a certain line between the forest and the house beyond which they would not venture. As far as I know, nobody has done studies of what alerts animals to our threat. I assume it’s our smell, but how do they know to equate that scent to danger? It was instinctive, that was clear.

What? Who? Oh. “Carlisle?”

“Son, what are you up to?”

“Oh, the usual.”

“Your mother and I are concerned about you.”

“You are?”

“Yes. Do you realize you’ve been standing by that window for four days?”

“It’s dark out.”

“Yes, it has been dark out three separate times since you came up here to watch.

What are you watching?”

“Life, you know, trees, ants, shrubs. I’ll make a list for Esme.”

“Okay, she’ll appreciate that.” *Why...I’m not sure exactly.* He didn’t say that last part aloud. I noticed the thought, but didn’t process or quite understand it.

“Edward, can you turn around and look at me?”

“I don’t want to lose my count.”

“Can you finish your current count and then turn around?”

I realized that I could. Black beetles were more of a challenge than ants in the dark. They required a lot of time. I liked that. I would count just to that rock and hope that none of them crossed the imaginary line beside it while I wasn’t looking. When I was sure there were no beetles within five inches of the line on either side, I whipped around.

“What?” It sounded a little more aggressive than I had intended.

Carlisle did not respond in kind, but remained calm, soft-spoken, and gentle. Something was wrong with that, I thought, but I wasn’t sure what it was. There was something wrong with his face too, maybe. I couldn’t be certain.

“Edward, son, where are you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You aren’t here with me.”

That was confusing. Of course I was.

“You are suffering.”

Was I? The way he said it made it sound true. *Was it true?* I could feel someone or something inside me preparing to fight.

“No...”

Carlisle stepped toward me. He is two inches taller than me and I found my eyes rolling upward to meet his, he was standing so close. His arms moved upward, one to the level of my shoulders and one to the level of my waist.

I should know what this means. He was moving in slow motion, strange for a vampire. I wasn’t frightened, but I thought maybe I should do something. I just didn’t know what it was.

Then I felt my body being squeezed tightly, my chest compressed slightly with my arms hanging loosely by my sides. It almost hurt, in a way, the hug was so tight, but in another way, I suddenly felt safe, though I didn’t realize I’d felt unsafe before. I knew intuitively that if I went completely limp, I would not fall down. If I breathed in a regular rhythm, exhaling even, neither myself nor my world would collapse. Nor would it explode and destroy everyone and everything around me. Safe.

A wave of emotion hit me so hard I should have toppled. It took my breath away. I felt the sword in my chest pierce my body, the point jamming through and sticking into the wall behind me. I was stuck there like a butterfly on a pin.

The pain was tremendous, cataclysmic, beyond what any creature should feel and survive. And yet, I was still here, the powerful trusses of Carlisle's arms holding the pieces of me together. Someone nearby was screaming, the sound rising by degrees, a penetrating wail that filled all the space in my head and in the room too. I wished it would stop—it hurt my ears. My body began to shake uncontrollably, as if lightning had struck from the sky and was grounding through me. I was convulsing, maybe. Do vampires convulse?

My eyes burned. *Somebody stop the screaming!* I opened my mouth to tell Carlisle, but it was already open and so I shut it. The screaming stopped.

It had been me the whole time.

I don't know how long I stood there with Carlisle's arms encasing me like armor. It might have been days. Eventually, though, I became aware that I was still and quiet and that the sword pinning me to the wall was gone. In its place, an empty well gaped, deep, cavernous, and hollow. I could easily fall into it and never be heard from again.

"What's happening to me?" I rasped when I could accumulate enough air to speak.

You are in a great deal of pain, son.

"Yes," I acknowledged quietly.

Does your body hurt anywhere? he asked, loosening his arms from around me. He moved back a step and gripped my upper arms.

"My chest was hurting terribly, but it's...changing." I didn't know how to describe it exactly. I wasn't sure that "hollow" was better than piercing pain. "Am I going crazy?"

Some doctors believe that most of what is called "crazy" is an indirect expression of pain...of being hurt. Strong emotions tend to make themselves known in one way or another. Even in our kind.

"I think I have to leave, Carlisle."

Leave?

"I don't think I can stay here with everyone."

What do you want to do?

"Run."

Carlisle took my response literally. He opened the window I had been staring out of, grasped my hand, and pulled me through after him.

A week passed. And then two. I never got back to counting black beetles. After the incident with Carlisle, I couldn't remember why it had been important. He made me realize that I couldn't just stay in my room and look out the window, though. It worried Esme.

I tried harder to cope. I came out of my room and went outside. I trimmed trees, cut

hedges, raked leaves, and mowed the grass. I didn't count the leaves that I threw onto the compost pile.

Through the Ithaca Historical Preservation Society, Esme had located a rare, old, Federal-style mansion that had been left to crumble in the forest after the family who built it died out. It needed too much work and too much money for the society to take it on, so Esme decided to buy the house and rebuild it. It was more than a renovation. She wanted to do everything with historical accuracy, which made her very popular. She insisted on maintaining a low profile, however, and politely declined the invitation to be the featured guest at an upcoming dinner.

"Let's see what I can do with it first," she told the eager members, many of whom had close connections to Cornell University. Once those folks found out about Carlisle, word spread, and he was asked to teach evening courses for pre-med students at the university. The administration would give him as many courses as he could handle, so we began seeing less of him at home.

I dutifully accompanied my mother on trips to "The Ruins," as I dubbed her new project, and I helped my father move into his office at the medical center. I hunted with Rosalie and Emmett and even threw "tree javelin" with my brother. He beat me in both the javelin and the shot-put contests because the two sports rely on sheer power and momentum. My speed and mind reading ability couldn't help me there. When I got bored (quickly), he marked out a course for running tree hurdles, at which I beat him handily.

None of these activities was fun for me or even slightly diverting. The hollow well in my chest sucked away my *joie de vivre*. Everything I did was mechanical, every conversation a struggle, every movement an effort. For my family, I forced myself to behave as normally as I could manage, though.

I took to running and swimming, the only activities that eased my distress in the slightest. Often, I ran to Cayuga Lake and swam long distances up and down its length. Beyond four or five miles out, I rarely saw anyone. When boats approached, I dove under. No human in his right mind would be swimming in a northern lake in the fall, alone, miles from shore with no boat. Thoughts around me dimmed when I was under water. I liked the isolation and declined Emmett and Rosalie's offers of company.

After several weeks of concerted effort on my part, my family seemed to relax a little where I was concerned. I still heard their thoughts about me, though.

Finally! He's getting over this stupid breakup! (Rosalie)

He seems better. I don't dare ask any questions, though. I might set him off. (Esme)

I wish Alice and Jasper would come cheer him up. (Emmett)

He's acting like he's better, but I don't think he is, much. Can he recover? An image of the Italian vampire, Marcus Volturi, depressed for centuries, passed through Carlisle's mind.

My thoughts were never far from Bella. I often found myself talking to her in my head. What would she think of this? Of that? Had she forgotten me? Time and time again, I

wrestled against the urge to return to Forks. How the desire consumed me! I wanted her to be happy, of course, but if she'd found someone else...well...perhaps it was better I didn't know. And I had promised her. She deserved to live her life without my interference.

I avoided closing my eyes, for each time I did, her face appeared behind my eyelids like a three-dimensional tattoo, reproaching me, the pain in her chocolate eyes as palpable as the day I left her. *Agony!*

As time passed—so very slowly—it began to be clear that I could not exist forever in such misery. As long as Bella lived somewhere in the world, hope for her happiness would be enough to keep me there too, but when she was gone, I'd have no incentive to continue. I shared this truth with no one, though sometimes I considered how I would end myself when the time came. I hadn't come up with any ideas except what I'd already considered—the Volturi. I had some time to think more about it and make a decision.

Then I got a phone call that changed everything.