

The Private Diary of Edward Anthony Cullen, Part 2

Fanfiction by **PA Lassiter**

from

Twilight: The Missing Pieces

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INTRODUCTION

[This file contains entries forty-one through seventy-four of Edward's diary. The first forty are contained in Part 1 in a separate file.]

Edward Cullen's gift for reading minds provides him with a glut of information about those around him, some of it wanted, but most of it not. His sense of integrity prevents him from sharing others' secrets, and so to relieve his mind, he took time in 2011 and 2012 to record them in this diary, along with many secrets of his own.

The material in this diary seeks to fill in missing pieces of information about any and all the characters from *The Twilight Saga*. The entries came about in response to hints and holes I found in Stephenie Meyer's four books that begged to be filled. Except for the first one in Part I of the diary, the stories are told in no particular date order.

Note that this version of the *Private Diary of EAC* is intended for reading on an e-reader and so has had some non-compatible material removed. Captions from missing photographs remain in some cases to indicate where a picture might have been placed in a diary entry. In many cases, these photos are illustrative and add to the experience of reading the diary. You can access the original stories, complete with photos and media links, on my website *Twilight: The Missing Pieces*, located here.

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PA Lassiter

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REUNION

Alice, Bella, and I received notice of our fifth-year class reunion last spring. Who does five-year reunions? We've barely escaped from Forks High School and already people want to return? How much can humans possibly have changed in five years?

We haven't changed and that's a fact. Bella will always be as beautiful as she was on our wedding day. Our classmates might be interested to know that Bella and I have a fifteen-year-old daughter, sort of. The details of how we managed that will remain forever a mystery. At our wedding, Jessica Stanley eagerly whispered to anyone who would listen that Bella was "expecting," though that's not precisely the wording she used. I can tell her this—we were expecting a lot and hoping for more, but we weren't expecting Renesmee.

I didn't understand why Bella wanted to go to the reunion, but she did. Carlisle wouldn't say no to his newest vampire daughter—he rarely does to any of us—but he was skeptical, more so than he let on. Even Alice, who is seasoned in the vampire life and normally more cautious, jumped on the bandwagon after realizing a reunion was just a big party. My sister went so far as to offer our house as the venue and proceeded to hijack the entire planning process. If she'd had her way, our class reunion would have been a 1950s sock-hop with poodle skirts and fuzzy sweaters for the women and rolled-up trouser cuffs and ducktail haircuts for the men. She argued that if she designed the lighting, she could make us all age by exactly five years. Carlisle remained unconvinced.

Our family has been in Forks for ten years in total, which is pushing the limits of credibility, and we still haven't found a way to leave. As she will tell you should you be foolish enough to ask, Rosalie is sick to death of wearing her beautiful golden hair in a granny bun to make her appear older in case she's spotted in the area. Esme considered spreading the rumor that Carlisle had a facelift, but he might not be able to pull that off working at a hospital as he does.

Bella and I stayed away from town for Renesmee's first four years and pretended to be at Dartmouth. Now that Nessie has nearly reached her adult size, we could introduce her to the townspeople as our adopted niece and that would give her seven or eight more years in Forks. But there's no getting around the fact that Bella and I look exactly as we did five years ago, except that Bella has paler skin and amber-colored eyes.

We could alter our style of dress to make us appear more mature and if absolutely necessary, use stage make-up and hair dye to give us the appearance of aging, but those techniques are not particularly convincing, in truth. Makeup sticks to our skin no better than dirt does and Rosalie, the only one of us who ever wears it, has to keep tissues always on hand to dab at the smears. Carlisle is thinking of moving his medical practice to Port Angeles or Olympia where no

one knows how old he is and where he could work under surgical lights without wearing aging makeup, which looks especially false when brightly lit.

I tend to think of Bella and myself as looking older than we do because of all that we've been through in the last five years, both good and bad—deadly standoffs with vampire covens and wolf packs, marriage, a life-threatening pregnancy, and raising our unusual daughter. However, if I examine Bella's photographs of me from our courtship days, I have to admit that any change is unlikely to be visible to anyone but me.

In spite of the difficulties of staying put, Bella isn't ready to leave her father and we are both reluctant to make Renesmee move. Being near La Push allows her to go to school on the reservation where she doesn't have to hide who or what she is. She'll get enough of that in adulthood. In actuality, she's outpaced the high school teachers and could be working at a college graduate level, but Bella wants to let her be a teenager for as long as possible.

Needless to say, Jacob Black is strongly resistant to our moving even as far as Port Angeles. He doesn't want to be separated from Renesmee and he feels a strong sense of duty as alpha of his wolf pack. It has occurred to me that Nessie might choose to stay in La Push when we leave western Washington. Bella can't even talk about that possibility without completely falling apart. My feeling is that Renesmee still has free will and who she chooses for her mate in twenty or thirty years is not a foregone conclusion. (I know, I know...a father's wishful thinking.)

But back to the reunion...Jessica Stanley sent Bella's "save-the-date" announcement to Charlie who passed it along and it included notices for Alice and me too. Not that Jessica necessarily wanted to invite Alice or me, but since we're Bella's family, she could hardly avoid it. Probably, she was curious about the status of Bella's and my marriage, assuming Jessica hasn't changed much in five years. She's the type who would pounce if she thought things weren't working out for us.

Apparently, Port Angeles isn't the dating mecca Jessica thought it would be when she moved there. I have heard that Eric Yorkie is back from college and still available, though.

From what Alice tells me, Jessica and Lauren went to southern California together after graduation. Lauren thought she had what it took to be a model or actress in L.A. and Jessica went along to escape Forks and look for a rich, handsome husband. Jessica didn't last long in the city. By all accounts, she disliked waiting tables and hated being considered a "plain Jane" among the multitudes of surgically enhanced, bleached blondes (including Lauren). She bailed out and returned to Forks six months later and Mike Newton proposed to her soon afterwards.

Of course, everybody knows what happened to the ill-fated couple. Jessica began working at the Newtons' sporting goods store (taking Bella's former position) and quickly discovered how

ordinary and dead-end a life in Forks could be. Mike had felt obligated to drop out of college a couple months into his first semester and take over as manager of the family store after his father died. Alice tells me he hates his life, especially the fact that he's still being bossed around both at home and at work by his domineering mother.

Mrs. Newton threw a fit when Mike and Jessica announced they were renting an apartment and moving in together. According to Bella, who found out through emails from Angela, Jessica couldn't stand Mrs. Newton's influence over Mike and was heard at least once referring to him as a "momma's boy." She broke off the engagement and moved out one day when Mike was at work, taking a job in Port Angeles as a barmaid. Now Mike has grown stout as a barrel from spending every night in Port Angeles taverns looking for Jessica and drowning his sorrows in micro-brew. It's sad, really—or so Bella tells me. It's not of much interest to me since I was never fond of either Jessica or Mike.

Bella secretly enjoyed hearing that Lauren—who was so mean to her in high school—hasn't exactly fulfilled her dreams of success in Hollywood. Jessica told Angela that Lauren is making extremely good money working for tips as an "exotic dancer" on the Sunset Strip. Who knows, maybe she'll be the next Anna Nicole Smith and find herself an old billionaire to love.

Ben Cheney and Angela Weber are engaged and living together in Seattle. Ben graduated a year early from the UW's computer engineering program and is making a success of himself as a graduate student doing research on the next generation of video gaming software. Angela got a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and is becoming known for her talent with watercolors. She paints Pacific Northwest scenes and sells her work at various street fairs and art shows in several states. We have two beautiful pictures hanging in our cottage—one of a tree-sized piece of driftwood on First Beach and one of a mossy seat on a downed tree in the Olympic National Forest.

Carlisle gently discouraged Alice and Bella from participating in our class reunion. When all was said and done, Alice dropped her involvement with planning it and none of us Cullens attended, citing the death of Carlisle's elderly father. Ha!

Bella gave up on going when the implications of seeing our classmates finally became clear to her. There is nothing to be gained by reestablishing contact with old friends only to have to break with them again. Bella is still new at the immortality business, but learning quickly.

Edward

Bobby Fischer

“Momma, Momma, Momma!” Renesmee dashed into the cottage hollering. It was the spring after her first birthday and she’d just come home from the reservation school accompanied by Jacob, who flicked his tail at us and then returned to the woods with Quil and Embry.

Nessie flew across the room and landed on her mother’s lap. *Can I have a kitty? Can I, Momma?* she asked with her palm on her mother’s throat. Bella glanced at me from where she was sitting by the fireplace reading Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth*. No, I hadn’t seen that coming.

Uncle Emmett said to name him “Pussy,” Nessie went on silently, *‘cuz he’s a pussycat.* Bella raised her eyebrows at me.

“Did he now?” she replied. “I’ll have to have a talk with Uncle Emmett about that. What brought all this on?”

Embry said Tabatha had babies and we could come to his house to see them after school. The white one climbed out of the box and sat on my lap. He likes me, Momma, and I like him too. He has a black star on top of his head. Can I have him, Momma?

“There’s a lot of responsibility that comes with having a pet, Renesmee. Are you sure that you’re ready to take care of it?”

Yes, yes, yes! I can play with him and give him water and hunt with him. I smiled at that from across the room. I could imagine Nessie snatching mice out from under ferns and forest salal to feed to her cat. Emmett had taught her how to catch flies in midair, shake them inside her fist, and release them to watch how they fly around erratically like they’re drunk.

“Do you remember when we went hunting and Daddy helped you catch a mountain lion?” Bella asked.

Yes, I do. That was funner than Roosevelt deer.

“We say ‘more fun,’ rather than ‘funner,’” Bella told her. “It’s an exception to the rule.” Renesmee nodded, filing the information away as she always did. Then Bella continued, “Well, house cats are related to mountain lions and their blood smells very similar.”

It does?

“Yes. A kitty might make you thirsty.”

You mean like Grandpa and Sue?

“Yes, except that you don’t drink human blood anymore and you do drink mountain lion sometimes.”

“That’s true,” Nessie said aloud, thoughtfully. “I don’t think I would drink it if it was *my* kitty, though.”

“Did your Momma ever tell you that she never had much luck with pets?” I asked her. Nessie looked at Bella.

You didn’t?

“No, darling. Grandpa Charlie and Grandma Renee let me have a goldfish, but he died because I gave him too much food.”

What did you do then?

“Grandpa Charlie flushed Goldie down the toilet and got me Goldie 2.”

What happened to him?

“He died too because I didn’t clean his bowl right.” Bella didn’t mention how she killed Goldie 3. “That’s something you have to consider if you get a pet. They don’t live very long and it’s sad when they die.”

How long?

“Hmm, well, a cat that lives for fifteen years is a very old cat. He might only live ten or twelve years, or if he gets hurt or has a disease, he could die after only three or four years. There’s no way to know.”

Could I ask Aunt Alice?

“Yes, you could do that. She might not know, though.”

Renesmee considered that for a second. *Would you flush my kitty down the toilet if he dies?*

I suppressed a smile. “No sweetheart,” Bella told her. “We only do that with little fish. Usually, people bury their pets when they die.”

In the ground?

“Yes, that way they decompose and feed plants that grow in the soil, and those plants feed animals and people. It’s the cycle of nature. Everything gets recycled.”

Oh. May I have him if I promise to bury him when he dies?

Bella punted. “Why don’t you ask your Daddy what he thinks?” Renesmee hopped off Bella’s lap. I held out my arms and she flew straight into them.

Daddy, can I have him?

“Is it a girl or a boy kitten?”

Embry says he’s a boy.

“A boy,” I repeated for Bella’s sake. “Well, I can’t think of any good reason why you shouldn’t have a kitten if you want one, but let’s think of a better name.”

Better than Pussy?

“Yes. Better than Pussy. Uncle Emmett was teasing you. Pussy is short for pussycat, which is fine, but it is also used as a naughty word sometimes, so when you call your kitty, people will laugh.”

Renesmee whispered into my ear, “Like jackass is a donkey?”

“Yes, exactly like that.”

“Uncle Jasper said I could call him Kaspar.”

“You mean like ‘Casper the Friendly Ghost?’ Because he’s a white kitty?”

“A ghost? No, like Garry Kasparov. He’s the best chess player in the world.”

I chuckled at the coincidence. Jasper probably had never heard of ‘Casper the Friendly Ghost.’ Or Caspar Weinberger—the buffoonish 1980s Secretary of Defense—for that matter. The cat’s black “toupee” would resemble the incongruously coal black hair on Weinberger’s overly dyed, seventy-year-old head.

“Uncle Emmett said if I didn’t like Pussy, I should call him Pat McGroin because it works for a boy or a girl, but I don’t know who that is.” Bella covered her mouth to keep from laughing.

“Uncle Emmett was teasing you again,” I told her. “Maybe you don’t want to listen to his suggestions anymore.”

“Aunt Rose said since he has a black star on his head, I could call him Target, but Aunt Alice didn’t like that. She said to call him Barneys or Saks, but I don’t really like any of those names. They’re weird.”

“What name do you like?” Bella asked.

“Well, Kaspar is nice, but I like Bobby Fischer,” Renesmee answered. “He was the youngest chess grandmaster ever. I’m going to name him Bobby Fischer, Bob for short.”

“Bob the Cat,” I commented, chuckling. “That’s a great name, Nessie. When did Embry say you could get Bob?”

“I can see him every day if I want, but I can’t bring him home until he’s big enough. Embry said his momma has to teach him how to bury his poops and other cat stuff.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Bella said, smiling. “Did you tell Nana and Poppop?”

“No. Come with me! Daddy too!”

We took Renesmee’s hands between us and jogged to the big house, jumping in tandem over the river. When we got close, Nessie broke free and sprinted toward the kitchen door.

“I’m getting a kitty! I’m getting a kitty!” Renesmee shouted as she ran to find her Nana.

“Are we going to regret this?” Bella wondered.

“I hope not,” I replied. “Jacob might, though. She’s just told Esme that she can’t wait to show Bob to Fred.” Bella laughed.

She wasn’t laughing ten months later when Renesmee came racing out of the garage shrieking, “Bobby Fischer had kitties!” “Bobby Fischer had kitties!”

Edward

A CULLEN CHRISTMAS

Daddy, can we invite Fred? Renesmee asked as I lifted her so she could hang a crystal angel near the top of the family Christmas tree.

Alice had purchased the designer decorations and was carefully observing our installation, making clucking noises with her tongue whenever we started to hang an ornament in a spot she didn't like. After ten minutes of such scrutiny, I quietly asked her to leave us alone so that Renesmee could have fun decorating the tree. I promised her that she could redo everything after Nessie went to bed if she felt it was necessary. She "humph'd" her way up the staircase to her room.

Nessie was one-and-a-half and this was her first real Christmas. The year before, the family had been living under a cloud of doom waiting for the Volturi to come and destroy us. So this year, we were going all out and had invited our friends and family—human, werewolf, and vampire—to a joint Christmas celebration. Sue—with help from Esme, Bella, and myself—would be cooking Christmas dinner for the humans.

"Yes, Fred is invited if we see him before Christmas Day."

Can we go look for him? I asked Jacob to take me, but he didn't want to, Nessie continued silently.

"He didn't? Why not?" I asked disingenuously, a smile tickling the corners of my mouth.

I don't know, Daddy. He never wants to.

It was clear to everyone else—and especially to the mind reader—that Jacob felt no affection for Fred and it was also clear why. Nessie had unexpectedly developed a crush on the vampire Fred.

At first, Bella and I found this exceedingly odd. Fred is somber and silent in company and is also extraordinarily literal. He doesn't respond to sarcasm, or grasp metaphor, and he seems incapable of recognizing when someone else is making a joke. (After Emmett figured that out, Fred became his new favorite target. Em doesn't enjoy teasing Bella as much as he used to since he still can't beat her in an arm wrestling match.)

Nessie seems to like Fred specifically *because* he is so literal and humorless—she interprets his lack of humor as humor. Much like a child in some ways, Fred takes everything Renesmee says seriously and he is willing to engage with her on any topic of conversation from the earthy (farting) to the sublime (whether computers have souls).

Since he found us, Fred has come around every few weeks for a visit. He has spent hours in Carlisle's office talking with my father and me, seemingly starved for intellectual stimulation. His favorite subjects of conversation are computers, electronics, and software, but he is happy to discuss any science or mathematics topic—the more obscure, the better. As the scientists in the family, he has singled out the two of us.

We hadn't seen Fred for over three weeks, so he could have appeared at any time, but we weren't thinking about him as we all bustled about on Christmas Day. Jasper was helping Alice freshen the bouquets of hothouse flowers she'd special-ordered by the dozens from Costa Rica. In the kitchen, Sue was making gravy and Esme was taking bread out of the oven, while Bella and I arranged platters and bowls of food on the dining room table (which never before had been used for that purpose).

Because most of us didn't eat food, we were serving dinner buffet-style and had set up cocktail tables and TV trays around the living room where the humans could set their plates to eat. Emmett had suggested that we purchase several cases of donated human blood as a treat for the non-humans, but nobody laughed because his comment set all of us on edge thinking about the taste of human blood just before nearly a dozen humans were set to arrive. *So clever*, Emmett.

As usual, I heard Fred before I saw him. It had become his habit to lurk outside until I noticed his thoughts and alerted someone to invite him in. On this occasion, he was particularly wary, having spied us through the window and noted the large, mixed gathering inside.

Look at 'em! thought Fred. *Kinda reminds me of Riley's mob except this bunch seems like they're having fun. One human woman in the kitchen, two in the living room, six human men, one in a wheelchair, a gangly boy. I dunno...*

It was a large crowd, especially for Fred. Charlie and Sue, and Billy and Lily had joined us, as well as Jacob's pack (with Leah patrolling outside), and Sam and Emily.

"Fred's here," I whispered in Bella's ear. "Let's go get him before he runs off. It'll make Nessie happy." Though I could hear his thoughts clearly, I would have a hard time physically locating Fred by myself unless he wanted me to find him.

With Bella's shield up, we exited together through the kitchen door and saw him right away. He was looking into the living room through the window wall at the corner farthest from us.

"Hey, Fred," I said.

He instantly shrunk into a defensive crouch, reacting to being seen. Though he knew that Bella could make him visible, he wasn't used to it yet.

“Oh...hi,” he said, returning to his full height and dropping his arms.

“We’re glad you came. Renesmee is asking about you,” I told him.

“She is?”

“Yes. She likes you.”

“She does?”

“Sure, Fred, we all do,” Bella reassured him. “Will you join us?”

“Umm...you have a lot of humans here,” Fred said hesitantly. “And a bunch of them stink.”

Bella and I chuckled. He was absolutely right, but we all put up with each other’s stench when we had to.

“Is it Fred? Is it Fred?” Renesmee came charging out the back door. “Momma, you’re talking to Fred, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Fred’s right here,” Bella replied, as Nessie rushed over into her mother’s shield where she could see him. She grabbed Fred’s hand and began pulling him toward the house.

“Come see my presents! I got a MacBook and a Kindle and my own pack!”

Fred didn’t reply, but neither did he resist Nessie’s coaxing as she pulled him across the yard and through the kitchen door. However, when she then tried to pull him into the living room where everyone was gathered, he stopped short in the doorway and froze. Nessie couldn’t budge him as he stood gaping at the crowd of humans and vampires.

“Come *on!*” Nessie urged, alerting everyone to his presence.

The whole family turned toward them and called “Hi Fred!” in unison. The greeting had begun spontaneously on Fred’s second or third visit and was now a tradition—or a habit.

The humans, who had much slower reflexes, turned to look a fraction of a second later by which time Fred had disappeared. Renesmee was left standing there holding the hand of her imaginary friend, as the humans in the room surmised. They were pleasantly indulgent with Nessie’s “little quirk” before turning away to continue their conversations.

Charlie was in a lounge chair with Billy’s wheelchair nearby and they were arguing about whether the Seattle Seahawks would make it to the 2007 Super Bowl. Sam and Emily sat on the far side of the room talking to Quil, who was lounging on a floor pillow. Embry stood near the kitchen door picking bits of food from the trays his mother, Lily, carried to the dining table, and

Seth and Jacob had just left to check on Leah. Emmett had his sixty-four-inch plasma television tuned in to ESPN to catch the day's late-season games and Rosalie sat on his lap painting her nails. Jasper was under the staircase planning his playoffs' betting pool and drawing a block chart for the Super Bowl.

Bella, who sympathized with Fred's discomfort at the center of a crowd, said, "Come over here by the Christmas tree to see Renesmee's presents."

Standing behind him within Bella's shield, I watched Fred unfreeze and side-step—his back against the window wall—until he was fully obscured by the decorated tree. Bella stood nearby to keep Fred visible to Nessie and as I moved out of her shield, I saw Fred disappear. He was more comfortable that way.

"Lookie...," Renesmee said, spinning the numbered dials on a briefcase lock. "See how it opens?" Then in a whisper, said, "My number is 1-1-2-3. That's the beginning of—"

"—the Fibonacci sequence," Fred finished for her.

"You know the Fibonacci sequence?" Renesmee asked in surprise. "Then what's the next—"

"Five," Fred interrupted again.

"Wow! What's the—"

"Eight."

"Next?"

"Thirteen!" Nessie shouted the number in unison with Fred, excited that he knew what she was talking about. I saw her raise her hand in a triumphant "high-five" and assumed that Fred slapped her hand, though knowing Fred, he might not have. The humans in the room didn't know what to make of this and so they ignored it politely.

"See, it's my new chess set from Uncle Jasper." Renesmee opened the case and pulled up a hard flap that hid the chess pieces, each of which was tucked in its own private slot. "Will you play with me?"

"Yes, but not today." Fred said under his breath. "What else did you say you got?"

"I got a Kindle from Nana and a MacBook from Momma and Daddy."

"Awesome. The Tiger operating system has cool widgets. Sometime I can show you how to use them."

“That would be awesome,” Nessie responded, borrowing Fred’s word. “Look what else, Fred. See my wolf pack?”

Renesmee pointed to an elaborate shadowbox constructed with six separate compartments and a plexiglass door. Each compartment held a two- to three-inch wolf figurine intricately carved from a piece of wood that matched the fur colors of Jacob’s pack—russet red for Jacob, gray for Leah, gray with dark patches for Embry, sandy brown representing Seth, and chocolate brown for Quil. The final compartment held a bronze-colored wolf with a child’s face just visible through its open jaws. It was Renesmee in her wolf costume.

Billy and Jacob had carved the pack of wolves and constructed the shadowbox to display them. Jacob had carved himself, of course, and the russet wolf matched the smaller figure that Bella wore on her charm bracelet. The detail was exquisite, with each wolf revealing something about his personality. Seth had big paws he was still growing into; Leah had an impatient tail; and Quil was looking away toward something, probably his Claire. When Renesmee held out Jacob’s stately Alpha figurine, Fred didn’t take it from her hand.

The front door slammed. “Ness-ieee,” Jacob called as he strode in with Seth trailing behind. “Oh, there you are.” Jacob began moving rapidly across the room toward the Christmas tree.

I waited with baited breath to see what Jacob would do when he realized Renesmee was playing with *Fred*. Bella expanded her shield so that Jacob would see Fred before he got too close and I could watch too.

“Renesmee’s showing Fred her Christmas presents,” Bella said, probably concerned that Jacob’s temper might flare up.

When Jacob reached Bella’s shield, he saw Fred. “Oh...him,” he grumbled, making no effort to hide his disdain.

“Fred knows the Fibonacci numbers!” Renesmee cried, oblivious to the look of irritation on Jacob’s face and his animosity toward the blonde vampire. “You know...,” she explained when Jacob didn’t reply, “like the primary numbers only different.”

Jacob wouldn’t recognize a Fibonacci number if it bit his big toe, but he faked it. “Sure, sure. Do you like your wolf pack?” he asked, trying to draw Nessie’s attention away from the visitor behind the Christmas tree. He already knew the answer to his question since he’d watched her open the present and scream in delight.

“Yes, I do!” she reiterated.

Fred remained frozen, not moving or responding in any way to Jacob's presence except to note that the huge guy smelled repulsive. Fred could respect that.

Suddenly, Jacob thought of something that would pull Nessie out of the room and away from Fred.

"Do you want to go outside and try out your new bike?"

"Yes!" Nessie answered excitedly.

"Renesmee, let's wait until after Grandpa Charlie has eaten his dinner so he can help too," Bella directed, making Jacob scowl. "He gave her the bike," she added. Bella didn't have my insight into Jacob's immediate motives.

"Umm...I gotta go," Fred mumbled.

"Come back tomorrow," Renesmee directed.

"Umm..."

I heard his unspoken question and answered it. "It'll just be the family tomorrow."

He nodded once, and without saying goodbye, dashed out the kitchen door into the darkening twilight. Nessie leaped up and started running after him, but I netted her in my arms.

He didn't say goodbye or when he was coming back, Nessie complained with her hand to my cheek.

"No, that was a bit rude," I told her, "but Fred can't help it sometimes. All the people here made him nervous."

He's going to help me with my MacBook and play chess, she added, smiling widely.

I nodded while I smoothed her beautiful ringlets. "Maybe he'll be a good friend for you."

"Nessie, let's play with your wolf pack," Jacob invited, trying to return Renesmee's attention to himself. I chuckled quietly.

"Food's on!" Sue called, bringing the last dish from the kitchen. Seth rushed to the dining table, prompting Sam to issue a soft growl. Though Sam was no longer Seth's Alpha wolf, he retained his authority over the younger wolves as their elder. Seth stepped away from the table to let Charlie push Billy's chair to the front of the line. Sam escorted Lily and Emily into the line behind them.

“You want to try some chow?” Jacob asked Nessie, encouraging her, as we all did, to eat human food as often as possible. It would make her life easier when she had to assimilate with humans.

“Desserts last,” Bella reminded her, knowing that Nessie would rocket toward the cookies and sweets, ignoring the healthful food groups. “I’ll make you a plate,” she added. Of the choices available, Nessie would eat a little turkey and some green beans if pushed.

I eased my way to the opposite end of the living room where my grand piano sat on its raised platform. Esme had requested Christmas music during the meal and I’d agreed. Alice joined me from upstairs and together we played highly personalized versions of “Deck the Halls,” “Have a Holly, Jolly Christmas,” and “Jingle Bells,” and then slowed things down with “Silent Night” and “Little Drummer Boy” (with Alice using her fingers as drumsticks on the bottom of the piano).

“He’s really good,” I heard Charlie comment to Bella as he dug into seconds of the meat and mashed potatoes. “You never told me.”

“You never asked, did you?” she reminded him, referring to our high school courting days when Charlie had slighted and ignored me assiduously.

Charlie grunted and then paused before remarking, “You did all right, Bells. You did all right.”

For the first time since 1918, my fingers stumbled over the keys for two full beats.

Edward

It was just one of those things, Carlisle had said. There's no predicting it, though premature delivery always increases the risk. Until about the eighth month, the fetus is still small enough to float around in the mother's womb and might be turned in any direction if he delivers early.

So why did Sam and Emily's baby come early? Bella blames the Volturi, however illogically, for stressing Emily early in her pregnancy. Carlisle thinks it was diabetes, a common condition among modern-day natives. For whatever reason, Emily's contractions began in July, almost six weeks before her due date.

Emily had planned to deliver her baby in the traditional way—at home with the help of a midwife. She had chosen Sue Clearwater—both a nurse and a midwife—for the honor. So when Emily's contractions began and didn't stop, Sam called his cousin Sue and was surprised to hear Charlie Swan's voice on the other end of the line. Charlie told Sam that Sue had the flu and she didn't dare expose Emily and the baby. Sue told Sam (through Charlie) to take Emily to the hospital.

Emily wouldn't go. She had a strong aversion to hospitals and, perhaps influenced by that, decided she wasn't in true labor. It was much too early and Braxton-Hicks (false) labor contractions are common in the latter weeks of pregnancy. It's like the body is practicing for the big event.

Sam was nervous, though, and when the contractions became sharp and long and didn't stop, he insisted she be examined. Emily told him to call Dr. Cullen. Though Emily well knows what we are, Carlisle had saved her life several years before and she trusted him.

My father asked whether I would come along in case he needed assistance. Rosalie was nearly as educated in human biology as me, but I had recently acquired some frighteningly relevant experience. Since this was just an exam, there would be no blood and so I agreed to go.

Carlisle loaded his medical bag and sonogram equipment into his car and we drove to Sam's house. Before we'd even gotten out of the car, the normally calm and controlled Sam threw open the front door and frantically beckoned us inside.

The situation we found there was much different than what we'd expected (or at least what I'd expected). Emily was in the bedroom lying on her back with her knees elevated, as Carlisle had suggested over the phone. She was having a contraction and was obviously in serious pain.

"Hello, Emily," my father began, pulling a chair up beside her. "How are you feeling?"

"My water broke, Dr. Cullen. Just before you came," Emily said in a strained voice.

“Okay. When did the contractions start?” Carlisle asked.

“About nine o’clock,” Sam replied. It was now four o’clock in the morning.

“You waited a long time to call for help,” my father observed calmly.

Sam, who was anxious enough for all of us, explained in a rush, “Emily thought they were false contractions, so we waited for them to stop. Then it got really late,” he finished lamely.

“I wouldn’t...go to...the hospital,” Emily admitted between gasps. “Sam wanted me to ...” She groaned and clasped her swollen belly.

“Well, never mind. I’m glad you called me, Sam. Your baby is coming today,” Carlisle declared. “We best get ready.”

“It’s too early, Dr. Cullen,” Emily groaned. “I’m only thirty weeks along!”

Carlisle put his hand on Emily’s shoulder and said gently, “The little one has already decided, I’m afraid, so we’ll just give him or her the best welcome possible, okay?”

Emily nodded, as tears welled up in her eyes. Sam stood helplessly nearby.

“Try not to panic,” Carlisle said, looking at both parents-to-be. “Let’s just find out where we are. How’s your blood sugar been?”

“A little high in the last couple of weeks. Sue said I had become borderline diabetic, but it probably would go back to normal after the birth.”

“That’s true. Gestational diabetes is not uncommon and it could explain the baby’s rush to be born. He or she might be telling us that his environment is no longer hospitable, in which case it’s just as well that he come early.”

As he reached the end of his sentence, Emily began to groan and her face screwed into a tight knot of pain.

“Eighty seconds,” I told Carlisle when she relaxed again. They were about one minute, fifteen seconds apart.

“I need to examine you to check how far along you are and make sure everything is okay. Is that all right?”

“Yes...” Emily panted and Carlisle touched his stethoscope to her belly. We could both hear the little one’s heartbeat which sounded robust, but Carlisle was exercising caution. He listened

carefully for any hissing that would signal blood leaking through a hole or an underdeveloped valve in the heart.

“The baby’s heartbeat is good and strong,” he assured the parents. Then, looking just at Emily, he said, “I asked Edward to come with me in case I needed assistance and since the baby is coming, it looks like I will. Edward is experienced and has some special skills, but we can call someone else if you prefer.”

Emily looked at me. “You delivered Renesmee, didn’t you?”

I nodded.

“Jacob told us about that. You saved Bella...”

“He did,” my father interjected. “Against all odds.”

“With Jacob’s help,” I added.

“I trust you,” she whispered and closed her eyes. “Sam will be useless when things get dicey. He can’t stand me to be hurting.” She smiled, remembering how Sam nearly had fainted when he tried to dress her wounds at home after the accident.

I smiled too. “I promise you that I won’t faint,” I said confidently, though I was anything but. Despite my many years in medical school, I’d never delivered a baby until Renesmee came and that was far from a normal delivery. Still, I had managed and Carlisle was here this time.

The other issue, of course, was the blood. Always before, I had avoided assisting Carlisle with any medical procedure where blood might be a factor. Having resisted the call of Bella’s blood for so long, though, I was pretty comfortable with my self-control. Emily’s scent didn’t have a fraction of the appeal to me that Bella’s had had—no one’s did.

Sam wasn’t comfortable. He was pacing nervously and his thoughts were frightened and frenetic. He was pretty sure he didn’t want either Carlisle *or* me there, but there was no other option. It was too late to move Emily and no other doctor would risk a home delivery under the circumstances.

“Do you want to know the baby’s gender?” Carlisle asked, looking at the child’s blurry form on the sonogram screen. He kept his voice calm despite the image displayed there of a tiny human with his butt planted securely downwards toward the birth canal. The situation was getting more dangerous by the minute.

“He’s a boy, isn’t he?” Emily whispered. “I’ve always thought so.”

Carlisle smiled and nodded. "He's a boy and he's got a mind of his own, I'd say. He's coming to us in the breech position. That's not uncommon for premature infants, and his small size makes that less of a problem, actually."

Emily began to cry. "Is he going to make it, Carlisle?" she stammered. Sam, who was now holding Emily's hand, blanched.

"I'll do everything I can. Try not to worry. I've been doing this for a long time," he told the parents in a reassuring voice without a hint of irony. "We don't have long to wait. You're already at ten centimeters." He rolled the office chair backwards and pulled off the latex gloves he'd donned.

Emily started to reply, but the words got squeezed into a gasp and a groan. Sam leaned heavily against the wall. He had gone as pale as a paleface.

Edward, go get Billy, please. I'll call and tell him you're on your way. Take the car, Carlisle directed silently.

That was an excellent idea. Somebody had to look after Sam. I nodded and left, driving as fast as I dared over the dirt roads.

Billy was awake when I arrived and invited me in. I found him sitting on the edge of his bed getting dressed. Jacob was out patrolling somewhere. Billy allowed me to lift him into his wheelchair, though he could do it himself.

"Do you need anything? Something to eat before we go?" I asked him.

"No, Emily'll have something there. So Sam is a mess, huh?"

"Emily doesn't think he'll hold up too well and Carlisle doesn't need a third patient on his hands," I said, smiling.

"He hasn't told his pack." It was more statement than question.

"I don't think so. He wouldn't leave Emily's side to transform. They won't be able to help anyway. He needs an experienced man for support. You're the closest thing he has to a father, I suppose."

"Yeah, that's about right."

I loaded Billy into the car, folded his chair into the back seat, and we took off.

"I'll call Lily in a while. Emily should have a woman with her. Her mother lives on the Makah reservation and Sam's mother is visiting relatives there now. Nobody thought the baby would come this soon."

At Sam's house, I lifted Billy, wheelchair and all, up the two porch steps and rolled him into the living room.

"Edward?" my father called. *Need some help, Son.*

I dashed back to the bedroom and found Sam in a chair with a blank look on his face. He appeared to be going into shock.

Get him to the couch, feet up, my father directed silently.

"Let's go, Sam. Billy's here," I said as I slung one of his arms over my shoulders and half-carried him to the living room. "Lie down here, Sam." I found an afghan and threw it over him and propped his feet on a pillow.

"Shock," I mouthed to Billy. "Keep him here. Call if he turns cold or passes out."

Billy nodded.

Carlisle and I busied ourselves setting up as sterile an environment as possible and creating a draft-free zone for the baby using sheets. While I was gone, Charlie had called to check on Emily at Sue's request. When Sue heard that the baby was coming, she sent Charlie over with loads of sterile linens and all the birthing and pediatric equipment she thought would be useful to us.

Charlie seemed surprised when I came outside to retrieve everything he had brought.

"You're helping Carlisle?" he inquired suspiciously.

I merely nodded. There was nothing I could say to Charlie to explain why that made sense and he was learning not to ask too many questions.

Edward! Carlisle called silently.

"Gotta go," I said to Charlie. "Thanks for the supplies." I turned and hurried back inside.

"Put your hand here," my father directed, indicating a spot on Emily's belly under a sheet.

I looked at her with my eyebrows raised, silently asking permission. She nodded with a grimace.

"Can you feel this arc?" my father asked.

I ran my fingers lightly over a roundish shape just above Emily's naval. "Yes."

“That’s his head.”

Once Carlisle had pointed it out, I shut my eyes and followed the shape around with my fingers until I felt another slight bulge beneath that. “The shoulder?” I asked.

“The left one,” Carlisle said, smiling. *Can you hear anything from him?* my father asked.

I shook my head. “Nothing I can make out,” I said softly, “possibly a slight hum. I’m not sure.”

If it changes, let me know. It could be a sign of distress. We’ll both monitor the baby’s heartbeat.

I nodded and then there was no more time to talk.

Delivering Emily’s baby turned out not to be that difficult. It was nothing compared to Bella’s delivery, that’s for sure. And there wasn’t much blood to speak of. The hard part was listening to Emily’s suffering during the middle stages. In the late stages, determination seemed to crowd out distress. Lily had arrived by that time and she held Emily’s hand and encouraged her while she struggled.

Breech delivery is considered risky, but it caused no particular problems in this case, probably because Carlisle knew exactly what he was doing. The baby was facing away from us—the preferred position—so the back of his behind emerged first and then the top of his thighs. Carlisle used a gloved finger and thumb to wiggle the first leg out and then gestured for me to do the same with the second. After that, I supported the baby while letting the weight of his legs pull his left shoulder down and out. Carlisle wiggled the left arm free. Then the right shoulder naturally rotated down and out and I freed the right arm while Carlisle made sure the umbilical cord wasn’t pinched off. After the nape of the baby’s neck appeared, Carlisle grasped his ankles between three fingers and raised his feet back and straight up, causing the baby’s tiny puckered face to appear.

What a tremendous thrill that was! Carlisle looked up at me and grinned. My face opened into a broad smile and I had to press my lips together to keep from cheering and laughing.

“I heard him, Carlisle,” I said in too soft a tone for the humans to hear. “He’s disgruntled.” I grinned again. “He’s not too sure about the big world.” It wasn’t a thought, of course, more of a feeling, a sort of tightening in the child’s mental hum.

The baby was unbelievably tiny except for his large scrotum, which seemed strangely outsized to the rest of his miniature body. I found myself hurriedly counting his fingers and toes as the back of his head slowly emerged and revealed a covering of thick black hair. The brand new

child was smaller than Renesmee had been when she was born. He also looked more wrinkled and less fully developed, which I suppose he was.

Carlisle laid the child face-down on his mother's belly and pinched off the cord, then let me do the honors of cutting it. After Carlisle drew the mucus from the infant's nose and mouth, the four of us watched, rapt, as he took his first breath. He didn't cry, but rather yawned and put his tiny thumb into his tiny mouth and we all chuckled.

I cleaned off the baby with some cloths and a basin of warm water that Lily had brought in, and then I laid him into his mother's arms just as I had done with Renesmee. And just like Renesmee, he turned to the breast, only he had no teeth with which to bite.

After Carlisle finished the delivery and called for Sam, I left the room, but not before taking a look back at the little family. Sam was kneeling beside the bed and both mother and father glowed with joy. I turned and went outside to phone Bella with the news. It was one of those moments when I wished I had Renesmee's gift and could show Bella the whole experience. It was remarkable...life-altering...a miracle.

On our way home, Carlisle admitted that that was one reason he'd asked me to come with him. After the trauma I'd been through with Renesmee's birth and Bella's death, he thought it might be a healing experience for me to witness the miracle of birth without the accompanying terror of loss. He was right.

The child's parents named him Fenix William Uley, his first name in recognition of the tribe's new beginning, the birth of the next generation of Quileute; his second name in honor of Billy, who has been more of a father to Sam throughout his difficult life than his own father was.

Fenix William Uley
b. July 21st, 2007
9:45 a.m.

The first thing I did when I got home was grab my wife and kiss her long and hard. The second thing I did was pick up our miraculous daughter and hold my precious family in my arms.

Edward

ALICE ALONE #2: Chicago

By 1930, life in the United States had changed dramatically from the heyday of the 1920s' Jazz Age. When the stock market crashed in 1929, the country (and indeed, the world) began sliding into the depths of the Great Depression. Southern agricultural states like Mississippi had already been hit hard by a 65% drop in cotton prices in the early 1920s. So when Wall Street collapsed and cotton dropped to only 15% of its previous value, countless small farmers were bankrupted and transformed swiftly from middle-class landowners, to starving sharecroppers, to homeless migrants.

The poor and destitute Mississippians weren't Alice's concern, but the dwindling social scene in Jackson was. As the economic crisis continued, formerly rich landowners could no longer sustain their lavish city lifestyles and fled the capital to salvage what they could of their rural plantations.

Those who remained in the city—mostly politicians and the invulnerably rich (like Alice)—quickly recognized that it was socially inappropriate to dance while the national ship was sinking. For her part, Alice saved many newly bankrupt acquaintances the humiliation of suddenly having to work for their keep. With so many citizens on the move, nobody would notice the odd one here or there who vanished.

In Jackson, Alice had learned to create a life for herself and how to hide in plain sight amongst her prey. More than that, she had been a great social success in Jackson—known for her fashion sense, her unrivaled skill on the dance floor, and her lively, if odd, conversation. But her time there was limited. Even without the economic meltdown to urge her on, she would have had to leave soon. She'd lived in Jackson for eight or nine years and those in her social circle had begun to comment on her never-changing youthfulness.

Alice left Jackson the same way she'd come—by rail. She joined the mass exodus of the homeless and unemployed to northern cities. Rather than walk the rails or hop a moving freight train as the poverty-stricken did, she purchased passage in a private sleeping car. And thus arrived my future sister to the great city of Chicago—my city—only twelve years after Carlisle and I had left.

Sadly, the unemployment rate in Chicago was hovering around forty percent, fifteen percent higher than the country as a whole. Not only was the city filled with the migrant poor, but also with workers laid off as the financial crisis shut down northern factories. But while the numbers of homeless and hungry people increased, Chicago retained a solid core of super-rich families who were little affected by the Great Depression. Among the wealthy descendants of Marshall Field, Potter Palmer, Phillip Armour, and Cyrus McCormick, Alice hoped to recreate the lifestyle she had perfected in Mississippi.

She moved into a luxury suite of rooms at the renowned Palmer Hotel where other wealthy Chicagoans lived as permanent residents. Twenty-five stories high, it was the most opulent hotel in the country with Italian marble walls, gilded frescoes on coved ceilings, French chandeliers, and monumental hand-carved staircases.

Alice slipped into Chicago society like she'd been born to it—normally a difficult feat. Living at the Palmer gave her an immediate acquaintance with its upper-class occupants, plus her endless funds and flair for mystery and drama drew humans to her like moths to flame. Her specialty was throwing parties. Within two years, her gold-embossed calling cards—delivered by a white-gloved chauffeur in a 1932 Nash Phaeton limousine were the most sought after among the city's socialites.

The masquerade balls Alice hosted in the hotel's ballroom were notorious for their decadence at a time when a large part of the city's population couldn't adequately feed its children. Alice drowned her guests in champagne, caviar, and showered them with all manner of luxury gifts before she feasted on them. Fair is fair.

But even in Chicago, such public displays of wealth were widely considered to be in poor taste. Increasingly, as the less fortunate created tent cities and stood in line at soup kitchens visible from the hotel, the wealthy who cared about their public image boycotted Alice's extravagant affairs. Unfortunately, the fewer guests who attended, the more difficult it was to take her meals from among them. One missing person in a hundred is much less noticeable than one in twenty or thirty.

Adaptable as always, Alice recognized that the truly fashionable people were joining the crowds of artists and intellectuals who began to question a society where the rich live in luxury while the poor die in the streets. Alice began dressing down at night and wandering around Towertown, a neighborhood just north of her hotel where hobos and bohemians ("hobohehians") gathered to debate the issues of the day. In addition to being more "hip," the area was a good hunting ground because it remained active at night.

Walking down State Avenue in Towertown one evening, Alice noticed several people step through a break in a brick wall and disappear. Curious, she followed them through the hole, turned right, then left, and found herself in a hidden alley. She walked a short distance until she came upon an odd doorway into what looked like an abandoned warehouse. It had the feel of a speakeasy, a secret club that illegally served alcohol—common during the era of Prohibition.

Alice had visited speakeasies in Mississippi and always found them convenient hunting grounds. Though the blood of drunks wasn't as tasty as clean blood, the victim's foggy state of mind was an aid to the hunt and drunkenness was an easily accepted explanation for why patrons might disappear.

If this door led to a speakeasy, it certainly wasn't well hidden, Alice thought. Above it hung an orange-colored light and on it was painted a strangely inviting message.

DANGER...
STEP HIGH
STOOP LOW
LEAVE
YOUR
DIGNITY
OUTSIDE

The mysterious door brought to mind Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. How could she not enter?

What Alice found in the dimly lit basement at the bottom of the stairs was an assortment of unusual citizens. They were anarchists, communists, suffragists, artists, free love advocates, hobos, prostitutes, and others whose beliefs or lifestyles ran counter to the mainstream. The place was known as the Dill Pickle Club. Alice was fascinated. This was a far cry from the kind of society she'd become accustomed to. But it was multi-faceted and far more interesting in its way.

On that particular night, a large group had gathered for a talk by a notorious German doctor named Magnus Hirschfeld. He had created the Institute for Sex Research in Berlin and spent much of his life advocating for the rights of sexual minorities. Surely a man ahead of his time.

Alice found herself rather ignorant of the issues presented, but she liked the unusual crowd. She liked it even more when it dawned on her that many of the elegant women and dashing men present were not what they seemed to be. Among these people, Alice's pale skin and eye-obscuring veil attracted no notice whatsoever. After that night, Alice visited frequently and found that when the Dill Pickle Club closed in the wee hours of the morning, one or two stragglers could usually be found walking home alone.

Back then, Alice wasn't sentimental about feeding on the creatures she lived amongst. The process of becoming a vampire naturally degrades any empathy a newborn might have for humans. It's a survival mechanism, I suppose. Carlisle is the only vampire in my acquaintance who never lost his empathy for humans and he spent many years trying to destroy himself.

I believe Alice knew then about her future as a Cullen, but she also knew that it was many years down the road. Thus, she had no immediate incentive to forego human blood. She might have

preferred to take a vampire companion during this time, but she hadn't found one. Though she'd smelled vampires from time to time in Jackson, the scents belonged to nomads who entered the city to hunt and then moved on.

I think it likely that Alice was then, as we are now, a very rare breed of vampire—those who live among humans full-time. Perhaps she naturally fell into that pattern because she had seen her future with us. I've never asked her, actually.

Edward

SCARY LITTLE MONSTER

Alice has told me that during her years in Chicago, she always felt like she was living in the happening place, the center of the universe. The city attracted radical social reformers who tested their ideas on the citizenry of Chicago before moving on to other cities. She watched as societal trends she first observed in Chicago took root in the 1930s and spread across the country in due course. Some people call Chicago the “New York of the Midwest” and I believe Alice would agree with that.

My sister found that living among humans while also feeding on them was easier in Chicago than it had been in Jackson. For one thing, there were so many more people in Chicago and the mix was itinerant and constantly changing. People were not missed as readily as they were in a smaller city. For another thing, in the big city she could be in company, but remain a stranger. Nobody questioned her too much about her origins.

It was a Saturday night at the Dill Pickle Club and Alice had found a large crowd gathered there. The featured speaker was Margaret Sanger, a woman whose mother bore eighteen children before dying at age fifty. Miss Sanger had made it her life’s mission to see birth control legal and available throughout the country.

The lecture proceeded for forty minutes after which the speaker took a five-minute break. During that time, she and her friend, anarchist Emma Goldman, carried a plain brown box around the room and began distributing rubber diaphragms and latex condoms to the attendees.

Suddenly, a gang of local police barged into the club and declared that the women were under arrest for the distribution of obscene materials.

The coffeehouse/tearoom was a regular hangout for anarchists, communists, suffragists, and queer rights activists—all of whom were frequently at odds with the police—and so, predictably, the crowd began to boo and hiss and throw whatever they could get their hands on at the officers.

It did no good, of course, merely caused ten more people to be hustled outside and loaded into the waiting paddy wagon. Clearly, an informant had tipped off the police to the illegal activity and they had come to break up the “Commie” meeting.

Alice was offended less by the political aspects of the intrusion than she was by the forced dispersal of the crowd several hours before she felt it was safe to hunt. She was plenty offended by that!

As the police wagon departed with its ample load, Alice casually followed it, keeping to the shadows. Waiting until it turned down a deserted side street, she leaped onto the floorboard, yanked the driver's side door from its hinges with one hand, and tossed it away. Then she grabbed the driver himself by the neck, pulled him from his seat, and flipped him over her head. He landed with a dull, wet thud against the front of a brick building and plopped to the sidewalk. She ignored the yelling and banging that she heard coming from the back of the truck.

"Good evening," she said politely to the second officer across the seat from her who was sitting there frozen in shock.

When the policeman belatedly reached for his sidearm, she plucked it from his hand and flipped it through the door opening, though he never saw her move. Terrified, he tried to scramble out of the vehicle, but she pulled him back and tucked his arm under hers, flashing him a pleasant smile as she calmly drove the truck into a blind alley.

Having found a good spot to abandon it, she cut the truck's engine, hauled the policeman out, and cheekily transferred his hat to her own head. With a tinkling bell of a giggle, she lifted him slightly off the ground with an arm around his waist and then walked to the back of the van and snapped off the padlock holding the doors shut.

"You're free to go," she called cheerfully to the detainees.

Taking a few quick steps as a run-up, Alice leaped onto the roof of the three-story brick building at the end of the alley, hauling her reluctant package with her. Once there, she looked around to make sure that no one could observe them and then said, "I'm so sorry, Mr. Policeman, but everybody's got to eat!" Then she sank her teeth into his neck hungrily and drank, struggling a little to keep up as his racing heart pumped out his life's blood extraordinarily fast.

The light left his eyes too soon and his heart stopped shortly after that. Alice dropped him with a thump and made her way home across the rooftops.

The dustup at the Dill Pickle Club was chronicled in the *Chicago Tribune* the following day. The police department had found the empty paddy wagon, but could not find the body someone had reported nearby—only a large stain on a storefront that appeared to have been scrubbed.

So two officers had gone missing, at least one was presumed dead, and no witnesses to the incident could be found, though the police van had been loaded with anarchists and Commies, who incidentally, were set free. You didn't have to be a genius to solve that riddle. No doubt the consequences to the socially undesirable citizens in the neighborhood were dire, but my sister didn't trouble herself with such human concerns.

Many years later, when Alice discovered how important Margaret Sanger had been to the rights of women in America, she was exceedingly glad that she'd not had the opportunity to drink her for dinner.

Edward

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALICE?

I couldn't let it go. It was too disturbing, too dark. And I loved her too much. The whole thing began before Bella and I were married. Believe me, I don't stand around pondering how or when or if the women around me have lost their virginity. It's just...this was a special case.

Before proposing to Bella, I'd had a rather personal conversation with my father concerning the nature of virginity for vampire women. He reassured me with regard to Bella, but I came away with a troubling conclusion about my sister.

I told Bella my concerns about Alice's history and she was, of course, sympathetic, but she didn't understand why I had to pursue it. After all, it didn't trouble Alice—I was pretty sure that she hadn't even thought about it. Rosalie had been assaulted and Bella very nearly had been herself. Why would I get obsessed about Alice's misfortune in particular?

What Bella didn't know was that it wasn't just Alice who concerned me. I had taken it upon myself to track down and punish Bella's tormenters and Esme's abusive former husband. Rosalie had exacted her own revenge on the men who had tortured her almost to death.

It wasn't exactly a desire for vengeance that would not allow me to leave Alice's history alone, but that was part of it. Even if she couldn't remember what had happened to her, shouldn't *someone* know and remember for her? Should there not be justice?

Bella loves Alice as much as I do, but she is good at forgetting unpleasant things, as she once told me. Perhaps being changed has changed that to a degree. She certainly didn't hold back her fury when Jacob imprinted on our daughter.

Bella agreed to go to Mississippi with me so I could visit the state hospital where Alice had been abandoned as a child. My sister had told me that she found her admission certificate among some ancient archives in the basement. I don't know what else I thought I might find there. It's not as if I would stumble on a diary or something that pointed the finger at a culprit, if there was one.

Still, I wanted to see for myself. We would take a four-day trip and call it a vacation. Bella was interested in visiting New Orleans, so that would be the main focus of our time in the South. Renesmee was four years old and more mature than a twelve-year-old human child. We asked her if she wanted to come along, but she preferred to stay home with Jacob and Aunt Rose. That was more convenient, since we didn't want to tell her about my obsessive mission. It wasn't like we could keep our plans secret from Alice, but we didn't talk about it and she didn't ask. Perhaps she was making a point of giving Bella and me some privacy and hadn't looked at our future activities.

It wasn't hard to find the old asylum. Alice had told me a little about her trip there after we came back from Italy. I simply retraced her steps, leaving Bella to entertain herself in New Orleans, since she did not want to visit the place where Alice had been incarcerated.

I went at night, of course, to hide from the Mississippi sunshine. I slipped through the employee's entrance behind some workers during the shift change, moving so fast that they did not notice me.

The hospital basement appeared to have been abandoned long ago. It was like a cellar, dark and damp with ceilings only seven feet high, giving the space an oppressive feel. It was a warren of dark corridors and tiny rooms with grimy cinder-block walls and dirt floors.

At the back side of the hospital, a long corridor ran the length of the southern wing. On each side of it were rows of doorways into closet-sized rooms spaced five or six feet apart—obviously cells where inmates had been kept. Being underground with no windows, the cells would have been absolutely black dark when their doors were closed, though the doors had been removed. Some of them—solid oak with ten-inch hooded slits, presumably for passing food—were propped against a wall inside the cells.

I stood there, stunned by the realization that Alice likely had spent years of her life in one of these tiny rooms. I don't know how she survived. Perhaps she could see her future and that helped...knowing her life would be different one day. I stood there for a short while and then said a silent prayer for those who had suffered in that place.

In the northern wing of the basement, the cinder-block rooms were larger and of varying sizes. In one room that still had a door, I found a dozen old filing cabinets lining two of the walls. The farther back I looked, the older and rustier the metal cabinets became. They appeared not to have been touched in decades.

After opening a few drawers in different cabinets, I found one that contained employment records from the period during which Alice would have been there. I quickly scanned the files, recording in my head the names and addresses of employees, particularly patient caretakers and guards, and particularly males.

To my surprise, I was able to narrow down the identity of Alice's vampire friend to three. Only three male employees working the night shift would have had frequent access to female patients during the period of Alice's incarceration. I thought the most likely one of the three was the janitor responsible for cleaning the

underground cells where disruptive patients were kept and where we believed Alice had spent much of her time.

I wondered whether the unknown vampire used the patients in the basement as a source of food. Any number of forgotten inmates like Alice—whose family abandoned her there and reported her dead—could have been killed without repercussions. Perhaps that is why he never freed Alice. He wouldn't have wanted to lose a job like that. Dead patients were one thing, lost or kidnapped patients quite another.

In a different cabinet, I found what appeared to be infirmary records for the 1910s. One file documented electroshock treatments (EST), and specified patient names, dates, and any injuries sustained during the treatment. Reading through these records—which as far as I know, Alice either never found or didn't read—I was taken aback by the number of injuries the treatments inflicted, typically sprained muscles, broken teeth, burns, and bruises, but there were more than a few cases of cut or partially amputated tongues, torn ligaments, and broken bones, mostly limbs, ribs, and vertebrae.

When I located records of Alice's shock treatments, I was stunned at the number of them—eighty-six during one four-month period and there were four years of records. To the best of my knowledge, no more than twelve sessions are ever given to modern-day patients and contemporary electroconvulsive therapy (ECT—new name, same game) operates at much lower voltages than were used in the 1910s. What possibly could have justified such excessive use of shock except as an instrument of torture? I also wondered how many times it might have been used and not recorded. Just considering it was horrifying.

The regular infirmary records were separate from the EST records and the number of files for the ten years between 1908 and 1918 was enormous. I took the time to scan through some of them quickly.

Alice's name appeared now and then, but the entries were not out of the ordinary for inmates of an institution—flu, lice, fevers, as well as occasional injuries from accidents or fights.

The only entries in the infirmary records that begged for an explanation were the cases of venereal disease, especially syphilis, among the female patients. As far as I know, there is only one way to acquire syphilis and since male and female patients lived in separate wings, it must have been introduced by male staff or visitors. (Or

the patient was admitted with the disease, one of whose long-term effects is dementia.)

There were also a surprising number of "D & C" procedures, which—back when I was in medical school—was a discrete term for "abortion." No patient had more than one, though, as sterilization surgery appeared to be the standard follow-up treatment. The pattern of records told me more than I needed to know about what was happening to female patients, but not who was responsible.

It was then that I noticed part of a small wooden door at the back of the room, partially hidden behind a heavy filing cabinet. Moving the cabinet aside, I saw that the door—which had been painted to match the wall, camouflaging it—was three feet high and two feet across. It had no handle, so I poked a finger through the wood to create a pull and eased it open on its rusty hinges.

Crouching down to look inside, I saw a lone filing cabinet standing in the closet-like space. It was there I discovered the true horror that had played out in this godforsaken place.

The old-fashioned filing cabinet had a flat steel rod with two slots that slipped over steel loops at the top and bottom edges of the cabinet. A rusty padlock was run through each loop to hold the steel bar in place, which held the doors closed. So much rust had built up in the padlock keyholes that I guessed the keys to these particular locks had been lost long ago. It was trivial to snap them off and remove the steel bar.

The four metal drawers were rusted shut due to the dampness in the unventilated cavern and so I forced them open one by one, starting at the bottom. The lowest drawer contained a stinking glop of shredded, mildew-covered papers with fur, mouse droppings, feathers, and various other things mixed into it—a long-abandoned mouse nest.

The next drawer up was much the same, while the third drawer was mostly empty except for some old architectural drawings of the building's original design. Areas on the blueprints were faded to gray shadows, but I saw a date along the bottom of the sheet:

E. Mississippi Lunatic Asylum
October 1882
Isaacs & Hodge, Architects

Interesting to an historian, perhaps, but not to me.

The last drawer I opened, the topmost, contained files stacked one on top of another...financial records, inventories, construction documents, and at the very bottom, a black ledger. I opened the cover and saw a name handwritten in an antique French script:

M.de la Rochefoucauld

Inside, I found that each page contained a column of letters and lists of numbers. A random page read thus:

| | |
|-----|-----------------|
| SD | 2,225,250,1.75 |
| DS | 1,1,150,1,1,150 |
| JE | 225,2,250 |
| MAB | 5,450,4,4,350 |
| PP | 1,115,1 |
| KCL | 2,150 |
| AW | 1,1,125 |
| PW | 0 |

Other pages looked similar and made no sense to me until I found one with a U.S. dollar sign in the second column. So, the numbers represented money. Another page had a date at the bottom: Febr 1916. Five pages later was the date, July 1916. Farther back, I found one with the year 1917 and toward the end of the ledger, 1920.

It would appear that each page represented a month and dollar amounts associated with different letters. Something bothered me about these pages, but I couldn't put my finger on it. The letters changed some from page to page, one set would disappear, another take its place, perhaps an old one would reappear. The ones with zeroes after them disappeared on subsequent pages.

I stared and stared. Were the letters acronyms? Abbreviations? French acronyms? Then it hit me. *They were INITIALS!*

My heart sank like a stone. MAB=Mary Alice Brandon. The book contained lists of inmates and monthly dollar amounts they earned. The amounts were too large for the

menial labor that might have been available to them, so these inmates must have been providing *extraordinary* services. That could mean only one thing—this “M. de la Rochefoucauld,” who was not in the employee lists I saw, was prostituting asylum inmates.

Red-hot rage burned in me. Was that even his real name? Was he the vampire? The name was of French nobility and went back many centuries. Perhaps he was centuries old and used an American pseudonym in the twentieth century. But James had told us that Alice’s creator was her friend and that he had saved her from James himself. Could a “friend” have committed such egregious offenses? Against a child?

But the evidence supported it—if not the vampire, then someone else. In the long history of sexual slavery on our planet, “unspoilt” females have always been the most valuable commodity. Customers pay high premiums to be a young girl’s first. In 1916, Alice was a teenager, somewhere between 13 and 17—i.e., young—which would explain why MAB’s dollar amounts were higher than the others. Her initials didn’t appear on every page, but they did reappear periodically until nearly the end of the book, the dollar amounts decreasing only slightly over time. Alice’s value would have remained high because she is so small that she could be taken for a girl much younger than she was.

Now that I had found evidence of what I’d halfway suspected, I had no idea what to do about it. I stood paralyzed, my fury collapsing into devastation, then blazing back, then collapsing again until I finally realized that there was little more I could do in that dark, gloomy hellhole. I hurriedly rifled through the remaining contents of the file cabinet, but found nothing else of interest.

As I pushed the drawers shut, the cabinet wobbled and I heard something slip against the wall behind it. I lifted the cabinet away from the wall and the item hit the dirt floor—it was another ledger book. This one had been subjected to the dampness of the concrete wall and on brief inspection, I saw that many pages were stained with mildew. I stacked it against the other, tucked them both under my arm, and left that horrid place, never to return. To this day, I have told no one about what I found, not even my beloved wife.

Edward

Her Other Life

(or, What Would Have Happened if I'd Found Her Happy)

It was one of those waking dream states that I've experienced only a few times in my vampire life during which my mind spins a tale with such minute detail and sensual clarity that I have to shake myself afterward to recognize that I am sitting at our cottage hearth or standing next to a fir tree in the forest.

"Come in to supper, Jaed! Bring your sister!" she called through the top half of the Dutch-style back door.

"Aw Mom. It's not even dark yet," replied the long-limbed, burnished brown boy. His shiny black hair hung loose to his shoulders in the exact manner of his little sister's, though hers showed red highlights in the sun.

"Yeah, Mom. Not even dark," the three-year-old, russet-skinned child echoed her brother as she often did. Little Saren, who was sitting on the ground with her legs stretched out in a "V" shape, stuck her index finger in her mouth and then poked it in a finger-sized hole in the sandy soil, and put it back in her mouth.

"It's spaghetti," her mother coaxed.

"Okay, it's dark now," six-year-old Jaed declared solemnly to his single devout follower.

"It's dark now, Momma," Saren repeated.

The two children walked hand-in-hand to the little white cottage with the red-shingled roof and red door that the village had helped the couple build in an Amish-style "barn-raising" just before they were married.

Tribal members who could afford it were encouraged to invest money in the community building fund and couples like the young Swan-Blacks took out low-interest loans from it for materials to build their homes. Villagers provided labor in whatever capacity they could and banked hours with the community for bartering with others. Everything from babysitting to carpentry could be traded in a system that allowed everyone in the tribe to get their needs met without requiring a lot of capital. A percentage of everyone's bankable hours went to assist the elderly and disabled citizens.

The cottage—which Jake and Charlie still worked on together when they had time and which probably never would be completely finished (missing trim around the windows, exterior painting incomplete, temporary back stairs, etc.)—was set in the forest a quarter mile from Billy Black's house. That gave the little family just enough distance for privacy, while still being within shouting distance

to Jacob's sensitive ears if Billy should need something and couldn't reach the phone. Granddad Billy provided babysitting services whenever they were required and Bella always cooked extra food for delivery to Billy's refrigerator.

The young father crashed noisily through the back door, having just returned from the auto-repair business he ran from his father's shed. Everyone on the rez and dozens of families off it hired Jacob Black to repair and maintain their older cars and trucks. He was said to be able to keep an old vehicle running for years after its natural lifespan was over. He'd begun a scrap business by gleaning parts from those vehicles that had died their final deaths, reconditioning them, and selling them locally or on the Internet. Since his only local competition was Dowling's Auto Shop, which everyone in the county thought was over-priced, Jacob had more business than he could handle most of the time.

He'd taken on his half-brother, Embry, as an apprentice of sorts. Embry didn't have the natural mechanical ability and inclination of his brother, but it was a good living and he was saving up to buy a newer-model Camaro. He'd finally found a special girlfriend and she had let him know that he needed to "up his game" if he wanted to keep her.

The brothers got along extraordinarily well. Though Jacob was clearly shop boss, Embry's easygoing personality made him an ideal worker. Jacob had been trying to convince Embry to go to technical college and learn auto-body repair. There was good insurance money to be made in fixing dented doors and fenders, replacing windshields and repainting cars. Together, they would corner the county market on car repair.

Bella got pregnant with Jaed when she was twenty-three and the couple decided to officially tie the knot before their baby was born, though they had been together informally for four years by that time. After graduating from high school, Bella left Forks for two years, moved to Olympia and attended Evergreen State College. Jacob went there himself after he graduated from the Quileute reservation school two years later, but not to attend college. He went to ask Bella to come back to Forks so they could be together. By that time, her heart had healed—or at least scarred over— enough to move forward with her personal life in a way she hadn't been able to do since, well...

She moved into her father's house and resumed her English literature studies by correspondence, keeping house for Charlie in exchange for room and board. She worked part-time clerking at World of Books, a used bookstore that had opened in Forks a year before. Bella had become good at repairing books when business was slow and had begun doing book repair jobs for the local library. She also had started recommending and collecting donated books to enhance the library's collection.

Jacob slammed the cottage door—a bad habit—and strode up behind Bella at the stove, lifting her off the floor in a bear hug.

“Jake! Put me down!” she ordered, the wooden spoon in her hand dripping spaghetti sauce.

“Smells good, honey. I’m hungry as a wolf!” He grinned and gave her a big lip-smacking kiss on the side of her neck. Bella stiffened. She didn’t like it when Jacob kissed her neck and had asked him many times not to. He knew it upset her and he knew why, but Jacob was Jacob and couldn’t always help himself. For her, it brought back memories of her first love, Edward Cullen, who happened to be a vampire and who had been gone from Forks for a long time.

“Hey, kids! Wanna go to the beach tomorrow?”

“Yes!”

“Yeth!”

“Can we Mom?”

“Can we Mom?”

“Jake, Jaed has school.”

“Ah, missing one day won’t hurt him. He’ll learn about rocks and shells and tidal pools. You always liked the tidal pools, remember?”

“Still do,” Bella replied, giving Jacob a stern look that the children couldn’t see.

It was just like him to speak before thinking. In some ways, Jacob was an overgrown kid with his children as playmates. They loved their time with him, which was always fun, always exciting. Jacob carried a lot of responsibility on his shoulders and had done so since his early teens when his sisters left home and he stayed behind to look after his wheelchair-bound father, Billy. Since then, he had become the Alpha wolf in one of the two Quileute werewolf packs and had acquired a wife and family. Somehow, through all of that—or perhaps because of that—he loved to let loose with his kids whenever possible.

“I’d like to go with you,” Bella said after thinking about it. “If you could wait until Saturday, we could all go together.”

Jacob looked at his wife, understanding what she was trying to do. It wasn’t good to give the children the idea that going to school wasn’t important and that rules were meant for everyone except them. Jacob applied one finger to the side of his mouth and rolled his eyes upward as if he were thinking hard about it.

"You know, it would be a lot funner with your Mom along," he said as the children watched him. "I'm not sure I remember the way to the tidal pools. I think she's gonna hafta show us on Saturday. Or...we could go tomorrow and sit on the boring old rocks. Hmm...I don't really want to wait, so let's go tomorrow and sit on the rocks."

"I wanna see the tidal pools," Jaed whined.

"Me too," Saren magpied.

"I don't know. I kind of had my heart set on sitting on the rocks all quiet and bored."

"Saturday! Let's go Saturday!"

"Saturday! We wanna go Saturday!"

"Oh...all right," their father agreed reluctantly.

Bella's mouth twitched as she put a small plate of spaghetti in front of each of the children and a platter of spaghetti in front of her husband.

"Thanks, Doll!" he said, grinning widely at her. "Jaed, do you want to learn how to tear down a carburetor? I'm gonna take one apart after school tomorrow."

"Yeah, Dad! That'd be great! Can I hand you the tools?"

"Yes, if you work hard at school alllllll day."

"I will, I will!"

"Me too!" piped up Saren.

"You don't even go to school yet," her brother pointed out.

When the children had finished their dinners and taken their plates to the kitchen sink, Bella said to their father, "Baths or dishes?"

"Baths," Jacob replied. "Come on, kids. Let's get cleaned up before bed and then I'll tell you a wolf story."

He gave Bella another bear hug from behind while she ran water into the kitchen sink, but this time kissed her on her cheek. She turned her head toward him and gave him a warm kiss on the lips, looking into his eyes.

Later, after the kids had gone to bed, husband and wife lay together on their extra, extra long, 96-inch, queen-size mattress that they special-ordered over the Internet from Tall Paul's Tall Mall. Jacob built the custom-sized frame himself.

“Renee and Phil are coming for a visit after school’s out in June.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jacob replied as he slipped a hand up his wife’s t-shirt and fiddled with the front clasp on her bra.

“Yes, I’m going to ask Charlie if they can stay at his house and have him stay at Sue’s for that week.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Jacob said as the clasp gave way. His hands were so large that he could hold both of Bella’s breasts in one of them if he stretched out his fingers and squeezed her breasts a little closer together. He did so as he slid her t-shirt up over them and kissed her enhanced center cleavage.

“Jake...,” Bella warned, taking a ragged breath. “I doubt the kids are asleep yet.”

“I locked the door,” he replied, kissing across the tops of her pooched-out breasts and then stretching his tongue down to lick her right nipple. It hardened immediately to his wet, overheated touch. He flicked his tongue across it, once, twice, while Bella pulled the leather tie from his long braid and ran her hands through his silky black hair whose smell reminded her of bay leaves, damp moss, and musk. Jacob pulled her nipple into his mouth and sucked until it turned bright red, full of blood, then he turned his attention to her left nipple, licking and then sucking it hard into his mouth. Bella moaned and Jacob slid sideways to lie between her legs. With one hand, he unsnapped and unzipped her jeans and she raised her butt slightly off the mattress to wiggle them down her hips. He yanked them below her knees and she kicked them off onto the floor.

“Cute pussy,” he said, grinning, and slipped a finger inside the damp crotch of her lace bikinis. He lay his finger crossways and stroked upward over her dark-red pubic hair, then down, then back to the top and back down. As Bella became increasingly aroused, her inner lips swelled up through the outer. He continued the motion down and up until she was panting.

“Jake...” she breathed. She was so excited that her clitoris had swelled and was poking out above her inner lips. On the next stroke, his finger rolled across that special spot and Bella gasped.

“Oh...,” she moaned, her voice dropping to a low note. He continued the rolling motion and Bella’s hips chased his finger up and down to maintain longer contact with her clitoris. He took her left nipple between his thumb and forefinger and rolled it gently back and forth. Bella’s moan had become continual. He pulled on her nipple and stroked down her vulva again.

“Pleeease, Jacob,” she begged him. Though he had tried many times to resist her begging and continue to tease, he never lasted long before giving in. He yanked at her panties, tearing a side-seam in the process, but laying bare her bright red,

swollen, inner lips. She raised her knees and spread them as far apart as she could, raising her hips from the bed. "Pleeeeeease," she whispered.

Jacob placed the tip of his hot, hot tongue against her delicate, swollen flesh and licked her slowly, starting from the bottom. When he reached the top, she muffled a cry. His heat and gentle touch sent her into a private place where she was utterly alone with her pleasure, trusting the slow build, trusting him not to disappoint.

Jacob had never disappointed her, not from that first kiss on Little Tahoma while her new fiancé stood not fifty yards away taking care of business to keep her safe...alive and safe. She remembered how she had craved his touch then, his cold, smooth fingers bringing goose bumps to her skin wherever he touched her. She had longed desperately for him to make love to her, to feel the shock of his ice-cold, marble-hard penis entering her—the combination of her hot with his cold stimulating her beyond what she believed possible with a human man.

But Jacob wasn't exactly human, either. With a body temperature over one hundred eight degrees, she preferred making love to him with all the windows open and a fan blowing across her sweaty skin. Once she had fainted from heat exhaustion while they were making love and since then, he'd learned to watch for the signs and make sure that the two clip-on fans attached to their headboard were on their highest settings. If he planned ahead, he tried to bring a glass of ice to the bedroom to cool her down in case of emergency. She liked it besides.

It hadn't occurred to Jacob that when she asked him to push an ice cube inside of her, then another, then another, and to rub another across her swollen clitoris that she was thinking of someone else. Sometimes he alternated his tongue with an ice cube...tongue...ice cube and she always came hard and long. He didn't give it any particular thought—he'd just discovered one day that it worked for her. She would never tell him about her ultimate fantasy...russet and alabaster...fire and ice...together.

Edward

S.O.S. (Save Our Son)

I actually found out about Bella's S.O.S. phone call to Rosalie the moment we returned to SeaTac airport from our honeymoon in Brazil. Of course, I was frantic...absolutely frantic...to get Bella home so Carlisle could terminate the abomination that I had seeded into my wife's womb.

For the love of God! Who would have imagined that a petrified creature like me would be fertile? Why didn't we know? We're a tribe, of sorts. Where is our oral history, our legacy handed down from our makers and theirs to teach us what we need to know when we enter this unholy immortal life?

We had just discovered that Bella was pregnant—with *something*. How could it have taken hold? It was a mystery. Perhaps if it hadn't been growing like a malignant cancer, the situation wouldn't have been so frightening. But at two weeks, the thing was already big enough to distort the lovely body of my wife, to give her an unnatural bulge in her formerly flat stomach. And it was moving around! At the rate it was growing, it would be as big as Emmett in nine months! How long would it take to tear her apart? Of *course* it had to go! Or so I thought at the time. The trouble was, I hadn't asked my wife.

After our eighteen-hour flight, Bella and I had exited the jetway and found Carlisle, Esme, Emmett, and Rosalie waiting for us just past the security checkpoint. As soon as we got close to the family, Rosalie held out her arms and Bella rushed into them. Rosalie!

And then I saw it all in a flash, every word of the conversation Bella had had with my sister before we left Brazil. I don't know when or how Bella managed to make that phone call—we were together the entire time after discovering the truth, I thought. But somehow, Bella had contacted my sister without my knowledge. Rosalie's head was full of it.

R: Hello?

B: Rosalie? It's Bella. You have to help me. I'm pregnant. I felt him today. He nudges me. He dreams. But Edward and Carlisle want to take him out of me when we get home. They think he's a monster, but he's not! He's our child. I love him! Please will you help me? Please don't let them hurt my baby. I want him! Do you understand?

R: Yes, I understand. I'll meet you at the airport.

B: He's coming back. I have to go. Thank you Rosalie! Thank you, thank you...

<click>

I was stunned. Not by the fact of the phone call—of course, Bella was free to call whomever she liked—but by her choice of recipient and the content of the call. Bella had become frightened of me without my realizing it!

As the four of us stood watching, our eyes wide, Bella began to cry on Rosalie's shoulder, ruining her silk blouse with salty tears. Contrary to character, my sister just held Bella and let her cry.

The journey home from the airport was more than a little awkward. I had been anxious to discuss the abortion procedure with my father and to reassure Bella that she would be fine. But to my surprise, Bella didn't want to ride home with Carlisle, and Rosalie wouldn't let me get in her car with my wife. So I reluctantly climbed into my father's car with my parents, while my sick, frightened wife clung to my sister in the back seat of Rosalie's car with Emmett as chauffeur.

Esme asked me on the way home if I'd talked to Bella about terminating her pregnancy and I had to admit that "No, I just assumed." She and Carlisle exchanged looks. "Uh oh" was the gist of their thoughts. As newlywed squabbles go, this one was a doozy!

It took me the entire journey to comprehend the truth of what I would have to face next. But I never could have imagined how bad things would get before they got better. Sometimes it's good not to know what the future holds.

Edward

TANYA & ME

I would never tell Bella about this, not because it's a secret, particularly, but because it would either drive her crazy or make her angry without cause, since it's all in the past. When Rosalie first told Bella about the Denali clan and "all those women"—implying that they were throwing themselves at me—she was exaggerating, of course. I don't think Irina or Kate showed any particular interest, but Rose also says that I am naïve. Perhaps I am.

Tanya *was* throwing herself at me, though. I could hardly misconstrue her intentions, even if I hadn't been able to read her mind. I suppose Tanya had had her eye on me from the beginning, but I didn't realize that. To me, she merely seemed welcoming and friendly. And even when Emmett began to tease me about being the only bachelor vampire in the State of Alaska, I didn't think much about it. Tanya considered me attractive, I suppose, but we lived among humans and I was used to hearing such thoughts. It was the norm.

The first time I realized that there was something more to it, Tanya and I were on a hunting excursion. I had missed the women's hunting trip the day before, Carlisle had gone to Fairbanks to check out the regional medical center, and neither Jasper nor Emmett wanted to join me because they were busy creating the vampire version of "dodge ball." (One of them somersaulted down a snowy mountain slope while the other stood on an opposing slope and heaved large boulders at him.)

Tanya volunteered to come along and show me some polar bear hunting grounds. We did hunt after many more hours of travel than I had expected, Alaska being so much larger than the word "State" implies. It is practically its own continent. After we found bears and both of us had drunk our fill of blood, we started running homeward across the crusty snow. As twilight settled in, Tanya slowed to a jog and then a walk and I followed her lead, curious what she may have seen or heard.

"Let's sit for a while," she suggested, indicating a large granite outcropping.

We sat and Tanya spoke to me about this and that...the family's lifestyle in Denali, other places she had lived, how she and Carlisle had met. Then without warning, she turned and put her hand on my cheek and whispered, "Edward." I stared, frozen in surprise as she leaned toward me with her lips pursed. At the last moment, I came to my senses, pulled my head away sharply, and stood up.

"I'm sorry...I thought..." she began.

"I'm flattered, but...no...thank you...I'm not..."

“I like you very much, Edward.”

“I like you too Tanya, as I do Irina and Kate.”

She peered upward at me and scrutinized my expression. I did not flinch or blink, not wanting to appear irresolute.

It's not as if I hadn't had females show an interest in me before. I had—often—and perhaps that's why it was so easy to ignore Tanya's thoughts and miss her signals until that very moment.

My previous admirers had always been human and were easily discouraged with a flash of my teeth or a cold stare. I had a feeling, though, that Tanya would not be so easily deterred. She said nothing more on that occasion, but merely stood and resumed running toward home, her thoughts a jumble of uncertainty and indecision...and frustration. She had been expecting our day and night together to end very differently.

I grew wary of being alone with Tanya after that, but she had a way of approaching me when I was unprepared for it or otherwise engaged. She would sit down on the bench next to me when I played Irina's baby grand piano, for instance, often closer than I would have preferred. The first time, she wrapped her arm around my waist and smiled when I looked at her. I smiled back and then—letting my left hand take over both left- and right-hand parts—I removed her arm, brought the back of her hand to my lips briefly, settled it firmly in her own lap, and then resumed playing with two hands. She looked at me searchingly and I gave her a friendly smile which she returned without enthusiasm.

The next time she joined me on the piano bench, I was ready for her, catching her hand just before she settled it on my right knee. This time when I returned it to her lap, she did not smile, but merely stood up and walked away.

After that, such encounters became like a game to Tanya, a challenge to see what she could get away with before I stopped her. With my ability to hear her thoughts, it was a game she couldn't win, though she did gain skill at hiding her intentions until the last possible second.

I learned, in turn, to read with my back to the wall so she couldn't come up behind me and wrap her arms around my waist if I was standing or lace her fingers through my hair if I was seated. I learned to lock the dressing room door when I changed clothes so that she didn't “accidentally” walk in when I was half naked. I altered my habit of tub bathing every week and merely wiped down my skin with a cloth and brushed the dust out of my hair when necessary.

A persistent woman, Tanya did not give up making advances despite my consistent rebuffs. Clearly, she was unused to rejection and seemed unable to accept it at face value, changing tactics instead. When we were in the same room together, she began flashing “thought invitations” at me in the form of images of she and I snuggling, kissing, or lying together. I ignored these incursions as best I could and pretended that I saw nothing.

Believing my deception, Tanya began to escalate the mental assaults on the theory that if they were more outrageous or explicit, I would be less likely to “miss” them. She casually faked going about her business while she sent me thoughts and images of her many and varied sexual escapades. I had no way to escape from these assaults. I found them difficult to block, especially in those days, and I had to run a long distance to get beyond them (which I frequently did, thus establishing my long-held habit of running when stressed). The best I could do was leave her presence so she couldn’t observe my discomfort and amuse herself at my expense.

I have wondered whether the prospect of bedding a reluctant man is something of a draw for experienced females. The film, *The Graduate*, lends credence to the idea with its iconic tale of Mrs. Robinson seducing her daughter’s boyfriend—a youth a generation younger than herself. Perhaps a desire to defile the innocent is simply a human trait. Or maybe it was less my “innocence” than it was my unavailability that was attractive. Possibly, I was the least willing man Tanya had ever encountered, though perhaps she thought I was simply playing hard to get and could eventually be moved.

Perhaps if she had thought about it, she’d have remembered that we are all stuck in the state at which we were created. Since I was a seventeen-year-old sexual innocent when I was changed, she was unlikely to succeed in seducing me at all. Finding Bella was the miracle that changed me.

Eventually, my father began to discern that something was going on between Tanya and me. When he asked if I was romantically interested in Tanya, I told him “Not at all, but ‘no’ doesn’t seem to be part of her vocabulary.” I gave him a rueful smile.

It wasn’t long afterwards that Carlisle decided it was time for the Cullens to move on. He made it clear to the Denalis that he was concerned we were becoming too conspicuous living altogether. He never told me anything different, but I knew the real reason and I must say that I was both grateful and relieved.

Edward

FRED GOES NORTH

"I'm going north," Fred told us in Carlisle's office. He had returned to visit the day after Christmas because we'd had too many guests in the house that day for him to feel comfortable. "I want to find out more about these Volturi."

"That's a wise decision, Fred," my father told him. "You should become acquainted with Eleazar especially. He can tell you everything you need to know."

Fred was optimizing Carlisle's computer for him, cleaning the registry, installing new accelerators, updating his device drivers, and other esoteric maintenance tasks. Carlisle hadn't asked him to do it, Fred just was drawn to the screen and keyboard like an ant to a picnic and couldn't stand it when he noticed that Carlisle wasn't doing daily updates.

"Yeah, I don't want to accidentally become a Volturi slave if they come back to town," Fred said, then reflected, *I wonder if I should reinstitute my stink shield.*

"I don't think it will repel them," I responded to his thought, "but it couldn't hurt, of course. It's likely that Demetri could find you even with your shield up." *And he's likely to like you a lot,* I thought.

"So how many are in the northern coven?" Fred asked, concerned about crowds as always.

"Tanya is the leader of the Denali coven and she has a sister named Katerina who goes by Kate. Their third sister recently died," Carlisle told him.

Fred turned away from the computer to look at us, his eyes wide.

"Yes, destroyed by the Volturi," I confirmed. "For making a false accusation."

"It was a simple mistake," Carlisle added. "Irina thought she was telling the truth. It's a sad story. Perhaps they will tell it to you if you get to know them." Carlisle and I both sighed. It had been another terrible blow to the Denalis after losing their mother, not to mention a little brother they hadn't known about.

"And Eleazar, right?" Fred queried.

"And his mate, Carmen," I added.

"I understand from Tanya that Garrett is still there as well. He and Kate have taken to one another," Carlisle noted.

I wasn't too surprised. The nomad, Garrett, had clearly become attracted to Kate when they met at our last showdown with the Volturi. He cared enough for her that he had endured massive electrical shocks throughout his body in order to restrain her and prevent her from attacking the Volturi. And I knew personally how much voltage Kate could shoot at you when she *wasn't* mad, let alone when she was.

"That must have changed the family dynamic quite a bit," I commented to Carlisle. "It used to be all women in the Denali clan," I explained to Fred.

"It sure has," Carlisle gave me a private wink. "When were you thinking of going, Fred?"

"Tomorrow, I guess. I don't have anything I have to do here right now."

"Would you like me to phone Tanya and tell her that you're coming? That way, you will be welcomed as a friend. I wouldn't want Kate to shock you, thinking that you are an intruder."

"You definitely don't want Kate to shock you," I agreed with a smile. "She packs a punch."

"Uh, yeah, that would be good, I guess."

"Tanya's coven is also vegetarian, if you recall," Carlisle reminded Fred.

He nodded. "I can do that. I've been practicing. Sometimes I really don't want to be that close to humans anyway and I can bite game in the neck, which is easier than under the arm," he said solemnly, seeing nothing at all unusual in his idiosyncratic feeding habits.

I wondered what Tanya would make of him. Physically, I thought she would like him a great deal. Fred is tall, blonde, and quite beautiful, though most of our family has never gotten a good look at him. He was no longer guarded with Carlisle and me, so I was familiar with his appearance. Once she saw him, I didn't think Tanya would miss out on a chance to "make friends" with Fred.

Like me before I met Bella, Fred is a virgin. Obviously, Tanya is not. *Should I warn him?* I wondered. I decided not to. If I was wrong and Tanya didn't make a play for him, then he would either think I was cracked or that she didn't like him. And if she did make a play for him, with any luck he would like her too.

I smiled to myself. I had my suspicions about Tanya and virginal men. Her feelings for me, while still intact at Bella's and my wedding, evaporated shortly thereafter, according to Alice. I attribute it to the loss of my sexual innocence. I do believe the woman enjoys the

conquest of the unlikely and inexperienced. (I am far from innocent now. Bella and I love our sex life. We don't rival Emmett and Rosalie for house and furniture destruction, but we definitely rival them in other ways.)

"I hope you'll stay to see Renesmee before you go. She'll want to say goodbye, I'm sure," I told Fred.

"Yeah. We're going to play chess and fool around with some widgets today."

That would have sounded very strange, except that I knew he was talking about helping her with her MacBook. It didn't matter what Fred did with Renesmee. She just liked his company, so I was glad that he planned to keep his promises to her. I should have known he would. Being very literal, Fred always did what he said he was going to do.

I'd talked with Carlisle recently about my theory that Fred was autistic as a human. Carlisle had decided the same thing, though he identified the disorder as Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism that doesn't affect cognitive functioning. Some humans with Asperger's have exceptional intellectual gifts, but struggle with emotional and social skills. Fred certainly fit that category. He was a talented mathematician and computer scientist, but an odd duck. Since odd was normal in our family, he fit right in.

"FRED! Momma, is Fred here?" Renesmee called, having returned from hunting with Jacob. Though Fred no longer used his "stink shield," Renesmee recognized his scent.

"Yes, darling, he's upstairs in Popop's office with Daddy," Bella replied from the living room where she was helping Alice with some AliceRoi children's-wear designs.

What's that freak of nature doing here? I heard Jacob's annoyance before he "about-faced" at our front door and left.

I felt a little sorry for Jacob. Renesmee was always excited to see Fred, partly because she didn't see him very often, so each time was a treat. She no longer expressed such excitement when Jacob showed up, because she was used to him being part of our family and she saw him every day. I wasn't sure whether Jacob realized that there was no competition in Fred's mind. Renesmee was like a playmate to him. They got along and were interested in some of the same things. Plus, Fred's social skills were at about the same level of development as Renesmee's. In spite of that, I was sure that Jacob would be pleased to hear that Fred was leaving.

"Fred!" Renesmee hollered when she found us upstairs.

“Hey.”

“Will you play chess with me today?”

“Yeah, if you want.”

“Good, let’s go!”

“Hold on a second, Nessie. Fred has some news that you’ll want to hear,” I said and then waited for Fred to tell her. Fred remained silent, however, and I realized that my comment was a social cue of the sort that Fred usually didn’t recognize. So I told her myself. “Fred’s going to visit Cousins Tanya and Kate, and Aunt Carmen.”

“I love Aunt Carmen,” Renesmee reminded me. “Can I go too?”

“Not this time, but we will visit sometime soon.”

“How long will you be gone?” she asked Fred.

“Uh, don’t know.”

“Oh.” Renesmee was clearly disappointed, but Fred didn’t notice. “Are you going to show me some widgets?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“Go on then,” Carlisle said. “I’ll give Tanya a call and let her know you’ll be visiting,” he added to Fred.

Renesmee took Fred’s hand and led him out of the room. Bella or I probably would have to break up their games when it was time for Renesmee to go to bed. The passage of time had no meaning to Fred when he was working on a computer.

“When are you going to teach me derivatives?” Renesmee asked Fred as they left the office. “You promised.”

I looked at Carlisle and we both chuckled. I remembered how Bella had struggled with Calculus in high school and now her five-year-old-equivalent daughter was begging a mathematician to teach it to her. She had her Popop’s love of learning, certainly.

Fred did go north. Eleazar called Carlisle a month or two later and I listened in.

“Your Fred is an interesting character. Quite a talent he has.”

“Yes, we were concerned that the Volturi would want to recruit him if and when they discover his existence,” Carlisle told him.

“I can assure you that they will. He is learning to stretch his shield to selectively hide others along with himself. Think what Aro could do with that! Plus, with his ‘stink shield,’ as he calls it, he makes Renata redundant. He can do everything she does and more besides. Of course, they’ll have a hard time finding him if he doesn’t want to be found.” Eleazar chuckled.

“We thought he would benefit from your knowledge. He wasn’t taught anything as a newborn and knows very little of our history—only what I’ve given him in bits and pieces. As far as his survival goes, and his talent, he’s completely self-taught.”

“Quite remarkable. He’s an unusual individual, isn’t he? Reminds me very much of Alistair.”

“Yes, in some ways, I suppose. He’s not particularly comfortable around others, but one-on-one, he’s more personable than Alistair. He sought us out and he’s been a wonderful friend to our Renesmee. He’s not living with you, is he?”

Eleazar laughed. “No, I wouldn’t say so. He comes around nearly every day, though. Tanya has developed quite an interest in him.”

“Oh?” Carlisle prompted. My ears perked up.

“Yes, I think she finds him to be rather mysterious. She seems to enjoy the challenge.” Eleazar laughed again. “If you understand my meaning.”

Carlisle chuckled. “Yes, I certainly do.” He glanced at me and I smiled. “Has he made any mention of when he might return south?”

“No, but I wouldn’t leave a light on for him. I can see a bond developing here, fledgling as of yet, but it has all the signs....” Eleazar abandoned the sentence. With his expertise in reading the connections between individuals, it wasn’t difficult to take his meaning.

He went on, “As far as I can tell, Fred is utterly bewildered by Tanya and her intentions, but he remains drawn to her. Perhaps your Alice could tell you more.” He chuckled. “Our household certainly has changed in the past year. Having two new friends has helped the sisters cope a little better with the loss of Irina. The men are distracting them, to say the least.”

“I’m glad to hear things are working out. Keep us informed if and when any of you choose to visit and we’ll do the same.” Carlisle closed his cell phone and smiled at me.

Quite the unexpected development, he thought.

“Yes. It would certainly make my family reunions more comfortable!”

Carlisle laughed.

I was anxious to share the news with Bella. Jacob too. I was sure they would both breathe easier, each for their own reasons.

Edward

ALICE'S VISION

It wasn't only *her* future love whom Alice saw coming. She saw mine too, though not so clearly and never without mystery and ambiguity. But if it weren't for my sister's vision, I never would have found her.

Before coming to the far north, we'd been living in northern Minnesota. After seven years there, it was time to move on. Carlisle had visited Fairbanks many years before when we lived in Denali and it seemed like a suitable option. We all like Alaska and Fairbanks is dark for half the year and cloudy for the other half. That's an exaggeration, of course, but even in the longest days of summer, clouds hide the sun fifty or sixty percent of the time, which made it a suitable location for such as ourselves.

"Is Fairbanks too close to Denali for comfort?" Carlisle asked me privately one day near the end of the semester at the University of Minnesota.

"I don't think I want to avoid Alaska forever just to keep my distance from Tanya," I replied. "If it becomes a problem again, I suppose we can address it then. Perhaps it won't."

So we moved to Fairbanks in the 1990s and attended high school while Carlisle worked at the medical center there. We saw our cousins often during those years since they lived less than two hundred miles away. One or more of them would drop in for a visit when they were hunting in the area and we did the same. We didn't attempt living together again except for short visits, Carlisle making the excuse that he wanted to be near a large hospital.

Tanya's feelings for me had not changed over the decades. I was still unavailable and unattached and she was still drawn to me. Whenever the opportunity occurred, which wasn't often, she pursued me, though with less offensive flamboyance than in earlier years. It was tolerable.

And then, Alice envisioned us living somewhere else...in Forks, Washington. She had "seen the eyes" which in her mind—she explained to me much later—came to represent my future as well as her own. Even she didn't understand what they meant except that, like the billboard from *The Great Gatsby*, the eyes were a signpost guiding us to a life-altering destination.

When Alice told Carlisle that she saw us on the Olympic Peninsula, he questioned the wisdom of returning to that part of the country. We had been so shocked by the presence of the Quileute wolves there in the 1930s and their having taken such an immediate dislike to us. Alice hadn't been with us then and so she couldn't fully appreciate that experience.

“That’s all past now, though, don’t you think?” she asked my father. “That was several generations ago. Nobody will remember you from before, if those people...the Killeus?...are even there anymore. It seems like Indians have practically been wiped out in the last century.”

“Not true,” Emmett cut in. “They’ve been building casinos and getting repaid by the white man for all the land we stole from them.”

Jasper and I chuckled at that. Though neither of us ever lost money at casinos, Emmett was notorious for it. He always thought he could predict the outcome and points’ spreads of football games, but there were just too many unknowns to consistently win at sports betting and it was too hard to cheat.

“I suppose you’re right,” Carlisle agreed with Alice, “but what is it about the town of Forks in particular that’s drawing you?”

Alice never gave him a straight answer as far as I knew. When we had choices to make, we generally trusted Alice’s insight unless we had good reasons to go another way, in which case her vision changed to match the likely decision.

In this case, we had no good arguments for not moving back to western Washington and we all had liked the freedom that came with living in the cloudiest part of the continental United States. We moved to Forks and made the necessary adjustments.

Piecing things together later, I recognized the actual reason for Alice’s vision, one that would not have made sense to any of my family except in retrospect. Alice hadn’t even known the details at the time, but the chocolate eyes led us to Forks because of an obscure decision being made in the Arizona desert at precisely that time—Renee Swan decided to give Phil Dwyer a go, in spite of the fact that he was fifteen years her junior.

I don’t know why I never saw the recurring “billboards” in Alice’s mind, except perhaps that the melted chocolate eyes were as much tied to Alice’s future as they were to mine. And as she told me later, they flickered in and out. Renee waffled so much over whether to travel with Phil during the baseball season or stay at home with Bella that it took a while for Bella to decide to take herself out of the equation and move to Forks.

On the day Bella arrived at Forks High School, the eyes were exceptionally bright. I saw them in Alice’s head that day, but I saw them in everyone’s heads—the transfer of a new girl to that tiny school being the most interesting event of the year. There was no reason for me to regard that image as a portent of my future.

Did Alice become more certain of Bella's role in our lives on that day? She tells me that she knew the girl would be significant in some way, because finally, here was the face that went with the eyes she'd been seeing for two years. It was an important moment for my sister, but she didn't yet know why.

And then, of course, the eyes vanished less than an hour later in Alice's head when I caught the scent of the delicious-smelling girl in my Biology class. They didn't come back until I high-tailed it to Alaska to escape my murderous inclinations. Alice recognized that the girl's future was safe as long as I stayed away.

I couldn't stay away, of course. A combination of defiance and a curious attraction brought me back. When I returned six days later, the eyes dimmed, but they did not vanish. Alice was beginning to understand the significance of the chocolate eyes as she watched me become more and more intrigued by the wan girl with the mahogany hair. I was the biggest threat to the girl's life, though inexplicably, I'd already begun to feel like her protector.

On the day after the snow fall, Tyler Crowley wiped out the eyes when, due to the icy conditions, his parents decided to let him borrow their four-wheel-drive van. I restored them in Alice's head when I threw myself in front of the van to prevent the girl from being crushed.

Alice didn't have to tell me that later the same day the chocolate eyes disappeared from her vision when Rosalie and Jasper decided to destroy the girl in response to my heroics. When Carlisle convinced Rosalie to back down from her jealous vendetta, the eyes reappeared dimly, enough that Alice *finally* could see the significance to herself of the chocolate-eyed girl. The two of them would become great friends.

When inevitably I gave in to love, I had my own visions—Alice and Bella, arm in arm, the one alabaster, the other ivory. It boggled my mind. How could it be? A human girl become best friends with a vampire? And then the other vision came—the two of them arm in arm, but *both* alabaster. Could I be so selfish that I would ask my father to change her so that I could keep her forever?

As it turned out—against my wishes—Bella would do that herself.

My love, my life, my joy...*my wife*.

Edward

GROWING UP NESSIE

“It wasn’t like that, Nessie. I swear,” Jacob said to my daughter.

“But Jake, it’s *icky*! And very disturbing to me. How can I ever forget that you were in love with my mother?” Nessie demanded.

“You know, I was a lot younger then and I wanted her to be my first sweetheart. But she never saw me that way. She was in love with your dad from when she first met him.”

“But she loved you too.”

“She still does. You know that.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Fortunately for all of us, your mom picked your dad and now we have each other.”

“I don’t know. Did you, like, kiss and stuff?” Nessie asked, not really wanting to know. Through my daughter’s eyes, I saw Jacob look down at his feet, then take a deep breath and look up again.

“Just once, right before she rejected me forever. Well, I kissed her once before that but she called it ‘assault’ and punched me in the face.”

“So I guess you weren’t that good at it, huh?” Nessie looked at him through her lashes, holding back a grin.

“Your mom probably doesn’t even remember it, it was *that* insignificant. You’re not gonna hold something like that against me that happened before you were born, are you? Come on, you know you’re everything to me.”

“Yes, but you imprinted on me, didn’t you? You couldn’t help it.”

“Well...that’s true, but that is the deepest, most powerful kind of love there is and that’s what I feel for you. I will never stop loving you—you and only you...forever. You’re gonna get over this, right?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Come *on*, Nessie. Don’t leave me hangin’ here!”

She grinned and began running toward the river, making a great leap across. Jacob leaped after her and phased in the air, coming down on all four paws on the other side as I watched through the living room window. His shredded clothes floated down behind him into the river.

I suppose she had seen him and most of the other wolves naked. She spent much of her time with the packs and they didn't always make it into the woods to phase if they were in a hurry or if they perceived a threat. She'd surely seen plenty of bare behinds at least. I never noticed her thinking about it, though. When she was younger, she enjoyed running around naked with them, in fact. Like a naturist child, she seemed to accept nudity for what it was without fanfare.

As far as I could tell, Nessie hadn't fallen for Jacob at that age. She'd just turned three, which made her about fifteen in human years. We had no idea how the transition would happen, if it did, from Jacob as her buddy to Jacob as a potential mate, since she was the first imprintee of the Quileute wolves to grow up. Claire was the only other child to have been imprinted upon so far and she would be a child for years to come.

Right around her third birthday, Renesmee reached puberty and started to become interested in boys as boys. Embry was still unattached and his name came up more than a little when Jacob wasn't around. She was also intrigued by several boys from Forks whom she'd met at First Beach.

It had been impossible to know what to do. As Nessie's parents, should we encourage her to date other boys besides Jake? Should we move away for a time to give her a chance to do that? If we did and Nessie found a boy she liked, what could ever become of that? A human would grow old and die. Would we be setting ourselves up to change another individual? Nessie's mother had adapted to our otherworldly existence and chosen to become a vampire, but I imagined her to be a rare human.

If we stayed in Forks and she wanted to date Quileute boys—Embry, say—would that even be possible? Being part of Jacob's pack and his brother, Embry would turn her down, probably. Wouldn't he have to? So the only other options would be Brady or Collin from Sam's pack or a boy who hadn't inherited the werewolf gene. But the wolves would abandon her if they ever imprinted on someone and the non-werewolf Quileute would grow old and die. Would the Quileute allow one of their own to be changed to a vampire? Doubtful, especially since Jake already had imprinted on her.

Then there was Nahuel, the only male vampire-human hybrid we knew to exist. We thought it would be good for Nessie to meet him now that she was a little older, if only to remember that she wasn't the only one of her kind in existence. We hoped to meet Nahuel's sisters too. We were planning a trip to the Amazon the following summer when she would have a chance to do that, but we assumed Jacob would insist on going with us when we told him about it.

Bella and I had had so many questions—it had been a confusing time. Only Nessie seemed completely unperturbed by all the issues we saw on the near horizon. We finally decided just to let her tell us how she felt and what she wanted as time went along.

As far as the Quileute were concerned, we discovered that there was no issue for them either, no gray area at all. Everyone in the tribe considered Jacob and Nessie to be betrothed from the time Nessie was a baby. No Quileute boy ever would try to go around Jacob to get to our daughter. Even among the tribal members who didn't know about their wolf heritage, it was simply understood.

Visitors from the Makah tribe were another matter. The boys from Neah Bay had no qualms about horning in on a Quileute's girl. They even considered it an entertaining challenge, as did the boys from the Quinault and Hoh reservations. And Nessie was beautiful. Even if I weren't her father, I couldn't not know how appealing she was to everyone who met her. But the boys who wanted to date Nessie quickly backed off when Jacob Black made it clear that she was spoken for. His physical presence was too intimidating for any suitor to challenge him.

I worried sometimes whether that was fair to Renesmee and whether she shouldn't have a chance to date other people and choose for herself what she wanted. But the bond between vampire mates is quite similar to werewolf imprinting. Once we find our mates, the bond is strong and permanent. Perhaps that was true for Nessie too and Jacob was already her bonded mate even as she moved through the stages of growing up. When Bella was pregnant, she became particularly attached to Jacob, drawing him to her side more and more as she got closer to term. Both she and Jacob came to believe that the pull wasn't from Bella at all, but from Nessie inside Bella's womb. If so, then perhaps she already had chosen Jacob before he imprinted on her.

In spite of our concerns for Renesmee's freedom to choose, we never doubted that Jacob would be a wonderful mate. We knew that she would be happy with him. We even speculated that together they might be fertile. Part of the wolves' imprinting phenomenon was the instinctive attraction to partners with whom they could perpetuate the wolf gene. Jacob's imprinting on Nessie, therefore, implied that the two of them might be compatible for procreation.

The idea of being a grandfather someday pleased me tremendously. The possibility of descendants was something we gave up when we became vampires. But Nessie had retained the reproductive biology of a human female as far as Carlisle could determine. She began having menstrual periods at the appropriate equivalent age for a human, though her cycle was longer than a human's—every three months.

Looking back, I realize that it was about that time that Renesmee became shy around Jacob in the manner of teenage girls everywhere, establishing boundaries of privacy with him that they'd never had when she was a child. It all seemed perfectly natural and right on track.

Edward

SKYPING RENEE

Bella's mother had become something of a problem. After Charlie became privy to Bella's new condition and had learned not to ask too many questions, Bella was able to reestablish her relationship with him and to let him get to know Renesmee as well. Charlie was 99% sure that Renesmee was Bella's and my biological child, though he also knew it was a physical impossibility. But Charlie had seen Jacob transform into a wolf right in front of his eyes and so he was at least cognizant that the world was something different than what we all understood it to be.

In spite of Charlie's ability to accept the supernatural without understanding it, none of us believed that would be possible for Renee. We were sure that she would (as Bella put it) *freak out*, a generic term for any number of reactions ranging from having a mental breakdown, to going to the police, to merely being scarred for the rest of her life.

But Renee didn't give up on seeing Bella as easily as we thought she might. During Bella's pregnancy, she hounded Charlie for information until he gave her the same wrong phone number for the Center for Disease Control that Carlisle had given him. When Renee called, she unknowingly spoke to Esme in her guise of CDC receptionist. She also called Esme directly, wanting to ask questions—one mother to another—about what was happening with their beloved children. Esme handled both kinds of calls effortlessly.

It was shortly after that that Jacob initiated Charlie into the world of the supernatural and invited him to visit our home in Forks. Though he was stunned, confused, and a little frightened by Bella's altered appearance, Charlie agreed not to ask too many questions. Ignorance was the only way to keep him safe from the Volturi. Fortunately, he didn't have to feel alone in our strange world. Both his friend, Billy Black, and his new romantic interest, Sue Clearwater, had been initiated to it long before.

Frustrated by the obfuscation she encountered when she called the fake CDC, Renee announced that she was going to Atlanta to see her daughter, regardless of the doctors' advice against it. It suddenly became necessary for Bella's health to have her transferred to a private sanatorium in Switzerland for long-term treatment of the unusual "disease" she had acquired in Brazil. But even that fiction did not put off Bella's mother. Though she wasn't prepared to fly to Switzerland, she insisted that she *must* speak with her daughter over the phone.

We knew that Bella's new voice would shock Renee, despite Bella's attempts to make it sound lower and rougher. So after conferring with Charlie, Carlisle and I came up with a solution that we thought would satisfy Renee while obscuring Bella's transformation.

Renee was not a technologically savvy person. Though she used a cell phone, the internet still baffled her. She had learned how to send email only after Bella moved away and she frequently followed up her email messages with a phone call to verify that the message had arrived. Someone like her would not expect much from a free phone call over the internet, much less a free phone call with video. The technology would be so new to Renee that she was likely to accept whatever quality of sound and picture she received, allowing us to blame any discrepancies in what she expected and what she observed on the internet connection.

Skype is a widely available program for making video phone calls over the internet. The computer's built-in camera captures the user's image while the microphone captures his voice and both are sent to the recipient's computer. When I explained how it worked to Renee, I sold it to her as a much better and cheaper way to communicate with Bella than by telephone. She became excited about the prospect of seeing Bella as well as talking to her, so I guided her in setting up *Skype* on her home computer.

On our end, we set up a corner of Carlisle's office with an empty oxygen tank and a lounge chair where Bella supposedly sat for her respiratory therapy. We put my MacBook in front of the chair, turned down the ambient lighting, and used a video effect to blur Bella's image.

Bella still would look odd to Renee and even using her rough voice, she'd also sound distinctly different than she had before. We would explain away those incongruities by our "bad internet connection" overseas—we doubted that Renee would know the difference. And since her transmission speed was slow, we expected Bella's image to appear jerky and the sound to become de-synchronized with the picture. I advised Bella to move around and fidget even more than a human normally does to enhance the obscuring effects. Despite all of that, Renee was ecstatic to see Bella's blurry, jerky image on her screen. Of course, Renee's image was perfectly clear on our end.

"Hi Mom," Bella said in an absurdly beautiful, absurdly fake-sounding voice.

"Bella! I can't believe I can see you in my computer! But you sound weird."

"Well, the virus attacked my vocal chords and my voice does sound a little different now, but the computer connection probably affects it too."

"Yeah, that makes sense. You look pretty weird too. Your picture isn't very clear and you look really white. You're not still *that* sick, are you?"

“You know I’ve always been pale, Mom. That’s nothing new. How’s Phil?” Bella asked to change the subject.

“Great, great! His leg has completely healed and he’s playing better than ever. So we’re going to start traveling a lot more again. When are you coming back to this country?”

“I don’t know. I’m kind of a rare specimen and you know how doctors are...they like to collect data on bizarre diseases.”

“How’s Edward doing with all of this? It must be hard on him to have his new bride be so sick.”

“It hasn’t been easy, I know, but Edward’s just...so great. He’s really the only thing that’s gotten me through all this.”

I smiled at my wife from behind the webcam.

I left the two of them alone then and they chatted for another ten minutes or so. I knew it would be hard for Bella to lie about every aspect of her life with her mother, so I’d reminded her beforehand that if it got too difficult she simply had to say she was tired and hang up.

Afterward, we were all pleased that our internet ruse had worked. Though we were deceiving Renee, we also were giving her a chance to see her daughter again and perhaps for a while into the future too—something we’d all believed to be impossible.

Edward

THE STRENGTH OF TEN

During the first couple years of our marriage, Bella's newborn strength was simply overwhelming. This was a constant source of irritation and temptation for Emmett, of course. Bella soon grew tired of Emmett's goading and his daily demands for "just one more" arm-wrestling rematch.

Except for that first slipup when she figured out that Jacob had imprinted on Renesmee, Bella had been extraordinarily even-tempered for a newborn, which, I suppose, allowed Emmett to forget that she was still a newborn. One afternoon, he was reminded of that after he pushed my wife just a little too far. Reckless Emmett!

"Come on, Bella! Just one match. It's been over a year and you're losing your strength. Give me a chance!"

Bella already had declined Emmett's challenge for an arm-wrestling match, but our brother wouldn't be denied. Bella left the house to get away from him, but he followed her, goading, prodding, insisting that he could beat her now, never mind that she'd humbled him in less than a second the day before.

"Emmett, I don't want to wrestle again. It's getting old. Give me a break!"

"Speaking of break," Emmett commented dangerously, "I heard that tree crash out by your place last night. What were you two up to, anyway? Hanging by your—"

He didn't get to complete his sentence. Bella charged him with her forearms raised like an offensive lineman. Her irritation must have been building for a while, because the impact produced a deafening crash, the sound of two boulders colliding at high speed. As Rosalie and I looked on, Emmett folded over at his midsection and flew butt-first through the air toward the river. His arms and legs flailed, trying to gain purchase on empty air. Thrashing and cursing, Emmett landed in the current of the Sol Duc River, creating a concussion of sound in two deep notes, the first one when he hit and the second when the displaced water rushed in to fill the gully he'd created in the water's surface.

Renesmee, asleep in my arms, started to lift her head from my shoulder to see what was going on, but couldn't overcome her grogginess and fell back to sleep.

Bella was instantly mortified. "Emmett, Emmett, are you okay?" she called anxiously. "I didn't mean to...I meant...oh, Rose, I'm sorry, it was an accident... Is he okay? Are you okay? I'm so sorry, Emmett, I'm so sorry..." She ran to the riverbank and reached out to help Emmett as he splashed his way out of the water, an angry expression on his face.

Emmett jerked his arm away and growled when Bella touched him. Our brother was known for his good nature, but being bested in a physical altercation was an altogether new experience for him and his shock and humiliation erupted in a rare fury.

“Leave him alone,” I said to her softly. “Here, take Nessie and go on to the cottage. I’ll join you in a minute.” Bella took our daughter from my arms.

“I’m sorry, Rose. I’m sorry, Emmett. I’m really sorry...” she continued muttering as she hopped easily over the river and took off running through the woods.

I knew Bella was embarrassed and ashamed, but Rosalie had her hand in front of her mouth, trying not to let Emmett see her amusement. I was holding back laughter myself.

One step over the line, big brother..., I thought. He’d had it coming. Though he’d been relatively faithful in holding up his end of the “no sexual innuendo” bargain he’d made much earlier with Bella, he’d slipped up while trying to provoke her into wrestling with him. I moved toward Emmett to talk to him, but his brows were pushed together and he was holding his elbows away from his body as weightlifters do when they’re trying to look meaner and bulkier than they are. I could practically see the steam coming out of his ears.

“Em...,” I began.

He snarled at me and then bent over and shook his head like one of the wolves after a swim in the river. Water flew from his hair, covering both Rosalie and me, but we held our tongues. He stuck a finger in his right ear and rattled it around to encourage the river water to flow out. He repeated the maneuver in his left ear and then stalked off, looking straight ahead.

“You had it coming,” Rosalie pronounced as he brushed by.

Emmett knew that and he wasn’t mad at Bella so much as embarrassed by her obvious physical superiority. He was kidding himself if he thought something had changed. She was as strong as ever. I should know.

When I reached the cottage, Bella was exiting Renesmee’s room after tucking her into her bed for the night.

“Oh, Edward, is Emmett okay?”

“His dignity is a little scuffed, that’s all,” I told her, chuckling.

“He knows I didn’t mean to do that, doesn’t he?” Bella was wringing her hands, so I took one in each of mine.

“Yes, of course, he does,” I assured her. “Don’t worry about it, love. It was his fault. He knows better than to poke a bear with stick.”

“I’m horrible!” Bella dropped her head on my shoulder and I wrapped my arms around her.

“You should just enjoy it. It won’t last forever and then I’m sure Emmett will do his best to pay you back.”

She raised her head. “You know, you’re right. He will!”

“Yes, so don’t waste any tears on him now.” I chuckled. “Besides, he’s given me an idea.”

I took Bella’s hand and pulled her out the front door of the cottage. Pointing to a big-leaf maple, I said. “Let’s climb.” I scaled the huge tree about twenty feet up and balanced on a sturdy branch where Bella joined me. We had not knocked over the tree Emmett had referred to. A rotted fir had blown over in a high gust of wind the previous night and crashed in the forest.

“What are we doing up here?” Bella asked.

“I rather liked the image Emmett had in his head. I wanted to try it.” I smiled at her salaciously.

“What was it?”

“I’ll show you,” I said as my fingers moved to unbutton her blouse. She turned around nervously and sniffed the air to check that we were alone.

“No one’s here and Nessie’s window faces the other side of the house. If she wakes up, we’ll hear her before she sees us,” I assured her.

I pushed the cotton fabric off Bella’s shoulders and flicked her blouse into the air. We watched it float to the ground and then I yanked my sweater over my head and flicked it away too. Cupping my palms around Bella’s smooth, round breasts, I rubbed my thumbs back and forth across her nipples as I leaned forward and kissed her throat. She inhaled sharply and let her head fall back to create more room for my lips to move...up her throat to her taut jawline, over to her earlobe, taking it between my lips, down the side of her neck onto her shoulder. Grasping my head in her hands, she pulled my lips up to hers then and we kissed deeply as I caressed and squeezed her breasts.

“Mmm...I’ll never get over how your hands feel on me,” Bella murmured. “I couldn’t wait for you to touch me there. I wanted you for so long.”

“And I, you, my love,” I whispered against her lips.

“I don’t think it possibly could have been the same, Edward. You’d lie with me in my bed every night and I’d be soaking through the crotch of my underwear and my sweatpants. That’s one reason I wore sweatpants to bed, you know, even in the summer.”

“Why?” I inquired, moving my lips to the side of her neck.

“So I wouldn’t make a puddle in the middle of the mattress. Sweats are very absorbent.”

“You poor thing, sleeping in wet underwear every night,” I teased, though I knew it was true. I could smell her arousal a mile away back then, that musky lavender scent that made me ache in all the right places. It was different now. She still emitted a musky lavender scent when she was aroused, but amidst the ever-present undertone of freesia, there was a stronger sweetness to it, like hyacinth, and overtones of pungent peonies, and the smell of clean air after a rainfall. It was as intoxicating as ever, perhaps even more so than when she was human.

“You know, I had to stop myself from tearing off those sweats many a time,” I admitted. “It was a continual challenge not to.” Speaking of which, I unfastened the placket of her blue jeans and combed the deeply colored red hair behind it with my fingers. I let one finger wander lower.

“You seem rather wet now, actually,” I said, dipping into her. Bella gasped and unzipped my trousers, pulling my penis free of the fabric with her hand. She wrapped her fingers around me and began stroking me up and down. “Bella...,” I groaned.

Quicker than lightening, she ripped the front of my trousers down and forward like a Chippendale dancer’s tear-aways, except that these weren’t and I heard the fabric rip all the way through, leaving the two detached legs to fall to my ankles. *That was a good trick*, I thought, as I kicked them off one at a time, clutching a branch for balance. I watched as Bella removed her blue jeans and tossed them away. Then she took my nakedness in both of her hands and stroked me, up, down, up, down and I groaned, pushing two fingers inside of her and then three, two in front, one in back. She began to flex her knees slightly to feel my fingers moving inside of her. I was doing the same, sliding against her palms and finding her clitoris with my thumb.

“Mmm, mmm, mmm...” she panted, her excitement increasing mine. With one hand she continued stroking the length of my penis, her fingers not quite circumscribing its girth. Just then, I felt her other palm move lower and grasp my scrotum, cupping and stroking. I stopped breathing as I watched her move that hand to her mouth wetting down her third finger. The movement was fast, but not so fast that I didn’t notice it. Then her hand returned to my private parts below and I felt that same finger press against my back side. I pulled away reflexively, discovering to my surprise and mild consternation that I could not move. Her grip was too strong. I could not prevent her from doing as she liked.

I gasped as her finger entered my body, partly in pain, partly in shock, both of which dissipated immediately as I felt the tension building between my legs. I barely cared what else she did while her palm was stroking my fully aroused, stone-hard appendage. The fuse had been lit and I breathlessly anticipated the explosion. She stopped stroking then and wiggled her finger inside of me. I drew in a sharp breath.

“Bella...,” I exhaled heavily, trying to press myself against her hand, but still, I couldn’t move. She moved her finger nearly out of me and then back in and I felt the urgency build in my scrotum. I wanted to orgasm...needed to...badly. Waiting on the precipice of release with her touching me in such a way was excruciating, if that word can be applied to pleasure.

“You want to come?” she whispered with her lips against my ear.

“Pleeease,” I begged. She moved her finger nearly out of me and then all the way in, rubbing against an internal pleasure point I’d only recently learned existed. With her firm grip, she slid her fingers all the way to the head of my penis and then all the way back to the bottom, once...twice...then stroked me inside and I felt hot lava rise to the brink.

One...more...stroke, I begged silently, as my jaws clamped around a mouthful of my lover’s hair. I was beyond cognizance, beyond any perception of anything at all but the movements of her fingers when suddenly, the dam burst and I growled with the ferocity of a lion setting on a wounded deer. Semen shot from me and splashed onto Bella’s stomach and then ran slowly downward toward the hand I’d forgotten I owned. I was completely captive to her, utterly paralyzed, and left waiting for her next stroke, her next movement against my skin. I held my breath and tried to focus the efforts of my own hand, but was stunned again by the pleasure of release. I gasped and she stroked me again. I gasped again. I lost track of time, of our surroundings, of everything but the enormity of sensation Bella had provoked.

“This wasn’t...exactly what...I had in...mind,” I stammered when I could speak again.

“But you’re not sorry, are you?” Bella asked as she kissed my throat.

“Surprised, but I couldn’t say that I was sorry, no.” I removed my hand from between Bella’s legs and pulled her to me, my lips searching hungrily for hers. She released me from her grip and pulled my hips forward so she could rub herself against me.

“Here,” I said, whispering against her lips. “Leap up.” I grabbed the back of her thigh to help her. She looked at me curiously, but then hopped up and wrapped her legs around my waist. Holding onto a branch with one hand and cupping Bella’s bottom with the other, I lifted her slightly and then lowered her slowly down onto my carved-marble penis.

“Ahhh...,” she sang, echoing my sentiment.

“Hang on,” I said, then bent my knees and leaped to grab a heavy horizontal branch above our heads. I initiated a gentle swinging motion back and forth and as Bella rode atop me, she suddenly understood the point.

“Oh, oh, oh...” she cried as the swinging caused our bodies to move together in new and different ways. “Is this what Emmett was thinking?” she gasped between panting breaths.

“More or less,” I chuckled. Actually, he and Rosalie had acquired a specialized two-person swing and tied it in a tree high above the ground. I was merely translating the effect without the extra equipment.

I pumped my legs like a child on a schoolyard swing while Bella panted and moaned in response to the motion inside of her. It was highly gratifying for me too. Each time we reached a certain angle of the arc, her internal muscles squeezed in the most delightful way.

So absorbed was I by my love’s response and by my own pleasure that I failed to notice the increased creaking of the maple branch as we swung back and forth.

C..C..C..R..R...A...C...K!! The thunderous noise cut through the forest as our branch splintered near the trunk and snapped off, dropping us into a short free-fall. Bella clung to me as we went down and when my feet hit the ground, I heaved the huge tree limb behind me so that it didn’t whack either of us in the head.

Recovering, I wrapped my arms around Bella’s back and began to laugh. “Do you think Emmett heard that?” I asked loudly, knowing that if he was still at the house then he had heard both the crash and my question.

Bella began to giggle uncontrollably, causing very interesting things to happen to certain of her interior muscles. When she finally regained control of herself, she squeaked, “So now what?” and began to giggle again.

I smiled and dropped to my knees, still hungry for her, though I was pretty sure that she’d already drained my interior reserves. I laid her on her back and began to move inside her until Bella’s giggling transformed to panting. Then without warning, I found myself flat on my back beneath her. She had grabbed my wrists in one hand and was holding them above my head as she kissed me and rode me like a pony.

Just for fun, I made an effort to escape, twisting my wrists to break her grip and pushing my feet into the ground to roll her onto her back. I watched her face to see what she’d do, but she did...nothing. Her eyes remained closed, her lips slightly parted near my own. Neither of my wrists was free and my efforts hadn’t disturbed her at all. She hadn’t even noticed my

squirming. She was utterly absorbed in her own pleasure, her free hand reaching down between her legs.

“Mmm, mmm, mmm,” she moaned, sliding forward and back. I tried my escape move again to no effect. How the tables had turned! I remembered a similar situation before she was changed when I was enjoying myself and she had tried to push me away. She’d had to repeat the effort several times before I noticed, as absorbed as I’d been in her body at the time.

I grinned. It was rather amusing how my tiny wife could utterly incapacitate me without even trying. She held me down with the strength of ten and helped herself to my body there under the maple tree. I sighed with pleasure, happily helpless beneath her.

Edward

FADING AWAY RENEE

It's been a tough thing for Bella, trying to maintain some kind of connection to her mother since our wedding and her transformation. She'd never expected to and when we left on our honeymoon, Bella said her final goodbyes to her mother—or so she thought.

But after Bella became “ill” on our honeymoon, Renee reestablished contact with Charlie by calling him frequently, trying to find out what was happening with Bella. One thing led to another and we established a video link to Bella's mother, but we used it as infrequently as possible. We'd been trying to disappear quietly out of Renee's life. Bella's feeling was that she had Phil to look after her now and didn't need Bella the way she used to. But the fact remained that, though Renee might not have been the most maternal of mothers, she still loved her daughter and her daughter still loved her.

After a year with the sanatorium in Switzerland story, we couldn't believably string it out any longer without tempting Renee to get on a plane to Europe. If her daughter was still that sick after a year, then Renee would feel duty-bound to personally check out the situation. We needed to let Bella be healed and come up with a new story.

“Since we're here anyway, Edward is going to study at the Institute of Technology in Zurich,” Bella told her mother. “It's one of the top ten engineering universities in the world. I want to pursue my education too. I've decided to study teaching English as a second language. ESL teachers are needed everywhere and you know I always wanted to follow in your footsteps. By staying here for school, I can check in with the doctors every six months too. Yes Mom, I'm perfectly fine, but I'm still an interesting research subject, I guess.”

If we *had* been in Zurich, I would have loved to study at the Institute of Technology, so it wasn't too far of a reach as stories go. With this new excuse in place, we managed to stretch out our stay in Switzerland for four more years. But the time came to revisit things with Renee.

“Is it worse letting her go from your life altogether or trying to create and maintain some new fiction?” I asked Bella.

“I don't know, Edward,” she sighed. “Both are so hard.”

“We can figure out a new story. Cullens are expert at it.”

“But this is my *mother*. I hate lying to her.”

“We always knew that was part of the deal.”

“You're right, I know. This is what I wanted. And she's doing fine without me, but...oh, I don't know. I guess I like having the option of letting her know I'm okay. And I feel like I have to in a

way. Before the wedding, Renee hadn't called Charlie five times in ten years. I arranged my own pickup and deliveries between my parents. But now, it's almost like they're friends. If we disappear, then I'll be leaving Charlie to deal with all her questions and he'll have the same problem we have now."

"Bella, I think we can postpone this decision if you want to. We can say we're moving somewhere else in Europe or that we're going to South America because we loved it so much on our honeymoon. We could avoid being on the same continent as your mother for three or four more years maybe. We'll have to give up the video-phoning soon, though. She's bound to meet some five-year-old who will show her that *Skype* works fine overseas."

"That's true," Bella agreed with a chuckle.

"Do you think she's heard your rough voice enough over the internet that she could handle your phone voice now?"

"Yes, I think I can make that work."

"We could pretend to live somewhere in the wilderness in South America or Africa. You'll teach English and I'll help build wells or bridges or something."

"Right. And then we never come back to the U.S. Will I have to die of another tropical disease, do you think?"

"Only if it becomes necessary. We wouldn't have to stage a funeral."

So that's what we did a few months ago. We told Renee that we had joined the Peace Corps and been assigned to Uruguay. I would work on engineering projects and Bella would teach English as a Second Language.

"We were lucky to be accepted, actually," Bella told her mother. "The Peace Corps only takes married couples if they have a need for both of them in the same location. It will be a great experience."

Renee was sad but proud that her daughter and son-in-law would do something so "noble." She teared up on the video screen, which tugged at Bella's heart. But it got a little easier for her when her mother's next comment was "That's South America, right? Maybe you'll get a little more sun down there. You sure could use it."

Peace Corps appointments are for two years and we'll tell Renee that we've re-upped for two more years after that. So we have four years before we'll have to think of another excuse for

not seeing her. I'm guessing that Renee will know so little about Uruguay that she will easily accept that phone calls—with bad reception and a tendency to cut off in the middle of conversations—will be few and far between.

In order not to put responsibility for Renee on either Charlie or my parents, we've given Renee a phone number that she can call in case of emergency. If she does, she will get a message to leave a message for the volunteers she's trying to reach and they will call if they are able. From a country as remote as Uruguay, she won't expect more.

Because Bella and I can't actually do the service—sparkling creatures that we are—our family has made a large monetary contribution instead. Carlisle gets the credit for that last part—it was his suggestion.

Edward

SEX & THE NEWBORN

My father and I have been through four human-to-vampire transformations in the last eighty-five years (in addition to my own), but it is only now that I realize how very different it is to be the mate of a new vampire than it is to be a brother or even a parent.

When Carlisle found Esme in a hospital in Wisconsin and decided to change her, I don't think he did so with the intent to marry her. Their affection for one another grew gradually into love after Esme's transformation.

I wasn't far past newborn status myself at that time, so I didn't think of Esme as extraordinarily strong. To me, she seemed more or less normal given my limited experience of being a vampire. But my father knew more about such things than I did. Now I realize that as my parents' relationship developed into a courtship and then matrimonial love, Carlisle must have taken measures to protect himself from Esme physically. Otherwise, I would have seen a lot more injuries than I did.

That became clearer to me with Bella's transformation. Shortly after she awoke, my wife hugged me and nearly broke my back. Making love under such circumstances was risky business, because it took time for Bella to recognize and manage her new strength.

Prior to that time, of course, our relative strength was reversed—me with vampire strength and Bella as a human—so I was able to share with her some of the tricks I had learned on our honeymoon to avoid injuring her. For instance, my strength was less of an issue when I took the bottom position and the more passive role in lovemaking. Keeping track of my hands was important as well as finding something safe to do with both my hands and my teeth when my excitement level rose. I clutched the bedclothes, sunk my teeth into pillows, and grasped the wooden frame of the bed to channel my excess strength. Better to destroy the furniture and linens than your loved one, certainly.

My advice was only marginally helpful to Bella, though. It was still difficult for her to adjust and there were times when the pleasure of making love with my newborn wife crossed the threshold into pain. Once or twice, I suffered cracked bones, though I made every effort to keep that information to myself. We heal very quickly, so I only had to remain still and quiet until the damage mended. I did tell Bella when something began to hurt, so that she could take measure of her strength and back off, but in the heat of passion that wasn't always easy for her to do.

Carlisle must have struggled through the same problems with Esme during their first year together, though I never heard any thoughts to that effect. After they were married, my parents were considerate enough to disappear at night and I never saw any signs of injury or distress in the morning. Quite the opposite, actually. They were always blissfully happy. No

doubt Carlisle was perfectly stoic when he sustained injuries at Esme's hand. She probably never even knew it when she broke a bone. Carlisle must have kept his hair out of her hands too when they made love because he has no bald patches on his head. Once pulled out, of course, our hair does not regrow. I've never asked my father whether he acquired any teeth marks during his honeymoon days. Fortunately, I didn't get either bite scars or bald spots. I couldn't have let Bella do that—she would have been mortified.

Though I consulted my father about the dangers of making love with Bella while she was human, I never thought to ask him for his advice about how to protect myself from my newborn wife when our conditions were reversed. It also never occurred to me to ask Rosalie how she survived making love with Emmett after his change.

Bella was a powerful newborn, but Emmett had twice Bella's newborn strength during his first year. He was a trained wrestler, a powerful fighter, and for his entire human life, he'd worked to enhance his power and learn how to use it to overcome an opponent. Rosalie had to have sustained injuries in their early days together.

I went out of my way not to read my sister's mind during those years, for she was not a friend to me. It took the addition of Emmett to the family and the passage of time to turn our contentious beginning into something tolerable. So I wasn't aware of how badly or how often she might have been injured when she and Emmett made love. I do know that Emmett was thrilled with his new amour and, unlike Carlisle and Esme, who married before making love with each other, he and Rose did not wait. Rosalie was so attracted to him and so thrilled to have him that she didn't hesitate to make advances, which he didn't resist, apparently. I'm sure he would have made the first move himself if he hadn't been rather focused on blood at that time. With the nature of their relationship obvious from the start, Carlisle suggested that they marry as soon as possible, which they did.

Long after Rosalie and Emmett were married, it was not unusual to walk into one of the public rooms of our house and find them half naked in a lounge chair (or on the couch or the floor). Carlisle, Esme, and I got used to the quick scramble for clothing and the mumbled "Sorry" or "Oops!" as we turned our heads and hurried from the room. They would start giggling, then wander to their bedroom or outside, neither of which ever protected us from their noisy amorousness. Ultimately, Esme built them their own house to encourage them to conduct their activities out of our hearing range.

So I had to laugh when Emmett expressed his discomfort at the passionate kiss Bella and I shared just after she awoke from her transformation. Caught up in a flash fire of heat, light, and love, Bella interlaced her thighs with mine and I pulled her tightly against my body as our lips

locked together. After a few moments, Emmett's irritable "Ahem" interrupted our bliss to remind us that we were not alone.

In truth, our public display of affection was so miniscule compared to what he and Rose put Carlisle, Esme, and me through when they were newlyweds that I felt precisely zero pity for him. Still, he couldn't leave the room as we always had since he and the others were there to protect Bella as she adjusted to her new status and sensory experience. We couldn't predict how she would react. It wasn't unheard of for a newborn to plunder everything in his path as he sought a human to suck dry. Since both Jacob and Renesmee were in our house at the time, we couldn't risk it. Much to everyone's surprise, though, Bella was neither threatening nor out-of-control.

In contrast, we'd had our hands full after Carlisle changed Emmett. It had taken all four of us—Rosalie, Carlisle, Esme, and me—to keep him contained when he smelled blood. He was similarly exuberant in his physical reaction to Rose and my parents were deeply concerned that he would hurt her during that first year of their marriage. Personally, I didn't care if he did. As far as I was concerned, Emmett could knock down as many trees and walls and buildings as he wanted to and Rosalie could just fend for herself.

Unfortunately, though, Rosalie was a "screamer" (as Emmett would say) and we never knew exactly what the sounds meant. Worried about her welfare, Carlisle and Esme raced to find Rose the first time they heard her scream, only to discover her and Emmett rolling around nude in the mud, enjoying themselves exceedingly. My parents sneaked away quietly without inquiring as to the nature of the emergency.

I tried my hardest not to learn Rosalie's vocabulary of screams, but depending on how loudly one or the other of them was thinking about or visualizing their activities, I couldn't always help it, much to my dismay.

Edward

THE SECRET GARDEN

Together, Carlisle and I have witnessed the human-to-vampire transformations of everyone in our family except for Alice and Jasper. They came to us fully formed with their unique histories and personal routes to vampirehood. We all have one thing in common, though, as Rosalie aptly explained to Bella during one of her more cogent moments: None of our human stories have happy endings. We all bear psychic scars from the time of our transformations. In the case of Alice and Jasper, the effects of their individual tragedies have combined to make them uniquely compatible, particularly in one area of their relationship.

This is information to which I have been privy for a number of years, but of course, I've never spoken of it to anyone. Doing so would be a supreme invasion of Alice and Jasper's privacy for one thing, but also, I've only begun to make sense of it since I journeyed to east Mississippi in search of Alice's human history. That revelatory research combined with the five-and-a-half years of conjugal experience I now have under my belt (so to speak) has given me some insight where bafflement prevailed before.

Alice and Jasper have always been special as a couple. They have a way of falling into one another's eyes that is remarkable to witness. They separate only rarely, but when they do, such as when Alice took Bella to Italy to rescue me from the Volturi, their reunions are powerful in some inexplicable way. Instead of rushing into each other's arms and expressing their joy and relief like the rest of us might do, they find each other's eyes from a distance and maintain their gaze as they move toward one another slowly, completely oblivious to everything and everyone around them. When they come together, they might go so far as to clasp hands, but they never kiss or even fully embrace. Instead, the two of them take readings on each other. Jasper pictures what he has planned for their private reunion; Alice sees that in his future with her; then Jasper reads how it makes her feel. Such moments, though in public, are utterly private and intensely passionate, only discernible (except to me) in the electrical charge in the air between them. It's quite something.

Unlike Rosalie and Emmett, or even Bella and myself, Alice and Jasper never visibly display their love in public. The only physical contact they demonstrate in the presence of others occurs when Jasper's protective instincts are triggered. At such times, he curves his body over and around Alice's tiny form, growling and radiating menace. We have learned to keep our distance from both of them when he gets into that state.

Once on a hunting trip shortly after Alice and Jasper joined the family, we were startled by the sound of automatic gunfire. Deer season had just opened and some redneck yahoos were using that as an excuse to shoot off illegal weapons. As a former redneck yahoo himself, Emmett read the situation immediately and reached out to reassure Jasper who had gone into Alice-

protection mode. Before any of us knew what was happening, Jasper had whirled around and torn Emmett's arm from its socket and sent it flying through the trees. One-armed and still screaming in pain, Emmett heroically leaped in front of Rosalie to prevent her from attacking Jasper in retribution. Since that incident, none of us intervenes when Jasper gets protective. Alice is the only one who can handle him and we leave it to her.

Alice and Jasper's relationship has a distinctly different "flavor" than the other marriages in our family, though the exact nature of the differences is hard to pin down. It mystified me for years. They are introverted and private together, even secretive, and they are remarkably undemonstrative though it is obvious to anyone who observes them for any length of time that their love is deep and profound.

Alice has always been skilled at shielding her thoughts about her marital relationship from me, as is Jasper—so good, in fact, that I never even realized they were shielding anything until I found Bella and finally reached sexual maturity myself at the ripe old age of one hundred four. It's taken that experience for me to make sense of the rare glimpses I've gotten of the nature of their intimacy.

Ack! This is a personal diary, not a signboard, so why am I beating around the bush? It's a newly recognized and somewhat disorienting (to me) truth that in their sex life, Alice and Jasper represent the yin and yang in a tajitsu of Domination and Submission. They are a matched pair, actors in a tableau of opposites, each of whose existence necessitates and defines the other. Or so I've come to understand.

Alice is sexually submissive. She likes to be tied up and tied down, blind-folded, gagged, used...abused. I try not to see the extent or the exact nature of her needs or of her and Jasper's activities. I only know that because Alice is who she is, Jasper is essential. He completes her. They role-play, but it is not a game. It is more a necessity...an inevitability, in a way. Like me, Alice would choose not to exist if she ever lost her mate.

What outsiders see when they look at Alice and Jasper is the ten percent of the iceberg that exists above the water line. The ninety percent hidden below is so intimate, intense, and intensely personal that they create a world unto themselves. The way they look at one another! If I had had any awareness or knowledge of the sexual universe they inhabit, I might have guessed what those looks meant, but I've been innocent most of my life. As I've said before, I no longer am.

Alice and Jasper know that I know. Out of inexcusable curiosity, I visited a special location marked as theirs and later, of course, they knew that I had been there by the presence of my scent. In my family, married partners have places to retreat to when we wish to gain distance from the ears of the others. It's understood that if one finds a trail traveled regularly *a deux* he

avoids it lest he intrude upon scenes of a private nature. My parents frequent a spot near the Devil's Punch Bowl, a beautiful clear lake high in the Olympic Mountains. Emmett and Rosalie have several favorite locations they visit that are well marked by their scents. Bella and I have a place or two of our own in the forest, though with our cottage available to us, we retreat outside less often than the others do.

Alice and Jasper have chosen a spot created by a phenomenon of ancient Northwest forests. It is a circle of bare ground completely surrounded and hidden by large trees. These places are created when an ancient cedar, fir, or spruce tree dies in a forest fire whose heat stimulates sprouting from the cones that fell at the edges of the tree's canopy. Seedlings begin to grow in a ring around the rotting remains of the mother, the "nurse tree," that feeds them. Eventually, the nurse tree rots completely leaving a circle of trees with a bare space in the center. These are magical places, which no doubt is why Jasper and Alice chose it. This particular circle of trees is so closely planted that one has to climb a tree and drop down into the private "playground," which is what it is.

Inside the natural coppice, Jasper and Alice have dropped in several boulders which are too heavy for a single vampire to move. Steel rings trapped under them serve as anchor points for chains and steel cables. Beneath one, they have created a chamber where they stow the accoutrements of bondage and sexual domination rituals customized for use by vampires, meaning mostly constructed of steel or carved from granite....steel shackles, whips and floggers made from steel cable, paddles carved from stone, handmade blindfolds and gags, gloves fashioned from otter fur and eagle feathers, plus a variety of specialty outfits made of leather and steel with carefully placed straps, buckles, rings, spikes, and voids. None of these items could be ever be used except by mutual consent because, of course, Alice could not be caught, restrained, or mistreated unless she was willing. And I don't worry about her because as I've come to understand, it is the submissive half of a D/s partnership who wields all the power, including singular authority over the words "yes," "no," and "stop." This is a fact I found counterintuitive at first, but it becomes obvious when you consider who holds the reins in Alice and Jasper's relationship. Alice, of course.

It was a disturbing moment for them and for me when they returned home one morning with images of the hidden articles and how they are used in their thoughts, planted there by their knowledge of my intrusion into their private space. I left their presence immediately, kicking myself and very much wishing that they didn't know what I was seeing in their minds. But as she is wont to do, Alice surprised me by not caring at all what I had discovered or how much I knew. In fact, even now when she wants to get under my skin, she'll purposely think a salacious thought and visualize her "toys" in action while giving me a private wink. It always rattles me, usually at the most inopportune moments. She just laughs at me.

Jasper was not so easygoing about my trespassing. Except for Alice's intervention, he would have attacked after following me out of the house and into the forest. I didn't blame him. If I hadn't been afraid of his tearing my head from my neck, an injury from which I would heal though it would hurt like the devil, I might have let him catch me. I deserved whatever I got for my indefensible intrusion. (On the other hand, as a Dominant, Jasper probably would enjoy thrashing me more than I might prefer.) I can't explain my behavior even to myself, really, except to blame impulsiveness and curiosity.

I was a bit shocked by my new knowledge at first, though not as much as I was ashamed of myself, but as I've pondered Alice and Jasper's thoughts and done some research, many pieces of an intriguing puzzle have fallen into place. When I think of my sister's human history—which incidentally, she doesn't remember—Alice's proclivities make sense from a developmental point of view. In the asylum, Alice was introduced to sex by force and compulsion which no doubt was accompanied by both physical and psychic pain. That became her "normal" and in a bent sort of way, I suppose, defined her unique version of what is sexually arousing.

On the other side of the Dominance/submission equation is Jasper, a natural leader who from the beginning of his vampire life was forced by a more dominant vampire into the role of a pimp of sorts. He collected, trained, and destroyed newborn vampires who were considered nothing more than fighting machines to be abused and disposed of at Maria's whim. Jasper only survived that fate himself by being extremely skilled at what he was told to do. Maria was the Dominant in their unequal relationship and it only stands to reason that a strong-willed someone who was abused like that for many years—without love, mind you—would aspire to become the possessor rather than the possessed. I am no psychiatrist, of course, and any analysis of why Alice and Jasper are as they are together is irrelevant, because in truth, they are exceedingly happy with one another in every way—yin and yang.

People who live in the BDSM (bondage and discipline, sado-masochism) world often wear tattoos, jewelry, or clothing that signifies their erotic preferences and the nature of their relationship with their partners. Jasper often thinks lovingly of the marks on Alice's body that identify her as his and his alone. I have seen them in his thoughts but didn't understand their significance until recently.

Our venom is toxic to us, burning and leaving scars wherever it breaks through our skin. Using his own venom, therefore, Jasper was able to tattoo a triskelion at the base of Alice's spine. This ancient Celtic symbol (with many variations) would be instantly recognizable to those in the BDSM community, but Alice explains it away as merely decorative to anyone who happens to see it. It is her private joy.

Alice has other marks which cannot be interpreted as anything other than what they are. In honor of Jasper's scars—the brocade design of vampire bites covering his arms and neck, a legacy of his tenure as Maria's "slave"—Alice waxed off her pubic hair (a permanent alteration for a vampire) and Jasper replaced it with teeth marks, a symbol that he owns her, body and soul. That tattoo matches two other sets of bite marks, one each at the top of Alice's inner thighs. It is one of their personal secrets, which I am contrite to admit, is no longer secret from me.

This is more or less what the marks look like, though venom scars appear silver on our alabaster skin. When Jasper slipped up and let me see Alice's bite marks in his thoughts, I was not surprised, particularly, or scandalized, or even embarrassed as one might expect. I understand utterly the desire to bite one's woman at the point where her legs meet her torso. It is the location of her femoral arteries, which still hold their power for us, even when blood no longer pulses through them. It is very much akin to one's desire to taste his woman's sex. Both are oral urges of a keenly gratifying sort. I would never hurt Bella by biting through her skin, and so I abstain, but Alice and Jasper clearly operate under a different set of rules.

Now that some time has passed, even Jasper no longer cares that I know his and Alice's secrets, as they also know I would never disclose them to anyone. It's just one of the inconveniences that my entire family has to tolerate if they want to keep me around.

Edward

MY YEAR AS A SEX SLAVE

I simply cannot describe how beautiful Bella was when she awoke from her transformation. Of course, she's always been beautiful to me, at least once I allowed myself to notice and appreciate her, which is something I resisted when she first arrived at Forks High School. How glad I am that I overcame my arrogant self-absorption long enough for her to capture my attention before her scent did! Though I didn't realize it then, my indifferent attitude toward Bella—and really, all women during that period of my life—stemmed from a place of unconscious, muted despair.

I had lived one hundred four years without the kind of love in my life that I witnessed every day in my family. I couldn't feel the lack of something I'd never known, but I'm not blind or stupid. I was more than aware of the way my parents and siblings looked into their mates' eyes, the way every one of them lit up automatically when their other half appeared, the way they disappeared together at night, and yes, even the way that Emmett and Rosalie simply could not keep their hands off each other. All of it was foreign to me—that kind of attraction to anyone—but that doesn't mean I didn't wonder what I was missing or perhaps even what was wrong with me.

Carlisle says that statistically speaking, I likely had had some experience of sexual desire and gratification as a human. After all, I was a seventeen-year-old boy and even in those days when teenagers were not as sophisticated as they are now, our bodies awakened at the usual time for humans. And human boys are known to have a remarkable affinity for their own sex organs. Of course, I don't remember my body changing, but the fact that I have hair on my chest and the voice of a man rather than a child proves that I had physically entered manhood.

So from somewhere in my past experience, my body remembered the cravings that Bella so eloquently (and frequently) expressed to me while she was human. Though I can't remember my human experience, based on my observation of humans, I have concluded that sexuality is different for vampires. We don't have hormonal spikes that drive us suddenly forward in a search for a sexual outlet. Instead, when the subject of our sexual focus is present, at least one thought thread of our many-threaded minds continually runs along a sexual seam, creating a constant craving. At any moment when Bella is near, I can direct my attention to that thread of thought and instantly be prepared to indulge it.

The first time I visited Bella's bedroom, I began to experience what I later recognized as sexual desire for her. The feelings were new to me and powerful, and while she remained human, I had to exercise an enormous amount of self-control to prevent myself from acting upon them—especially when combined with my natural thirst and Bella's constant pressure for more physical contact.

What a revelation it was after Bella was changed, therefore, to find that my sexual attraction for her had amplified by several times! Altering her already potent draw into a form wholly compatible with my own makeup changed the equation and suddenly, all of my carefully cultivated control and restraint flew out the window. I was once again in over my head, drowning in desire for her. The moment she threw her arms around my neck, a gravitational force more powerful than any before it secured me to her forever—a moon in her orbit.

On the day Bella awoke, despite the fact that my family stood observing us, my mother silently shrieking *Too close! Too close! She'll attack!* and Jasper poised to leap between us, I could have taken my wife right there on the floor. I wanted to. Such was the power of my enhanced attraction to her. Fortunately for our spectators, my overarching feelings of relief and adoration kept me in check as well as the knowledge that if I felt so unrestrained, then Bella must feel even more so and it was my responsibility to help her manage her new cravings...of every type.

When we lay outside together after Bella's first hunt, I was again overcome by physical desire for my vampire wife. I was desperate to strip her naked and feel the smoothness of her new skin against my own. How I longed to press my lips to every inch of her body and explore her with my fingers and tongue! It had been less than two weeks since we'd last made love, but it felt like half a lifetime.

Admittedly, the fact that Renesmee was waiting for her mother to return would not have been sufficient inducement to drag me off of my wife's new body, but fortunately, it distracted Bella enough to get us home. If we had made love in the woods then, I don't know how many days it would have been before we resurfaced to face our obligations. Finally, I understood the indecent behavior that Emmett and Rosalie so often displayed in their first ten years together.

The density and texture of Bella's new form signaled that I was no longer a physical danger to her, though so thoroughly had I trained myself to avoid expressing my desire for her directly that it took my mind a while to catch up to the knowledge that it was perfectly safe for me to engage with her however I wished. In fact, Bella was much more of a danger to me than I was to her. She was so easily overwhelmed by lust that she often forgot to account for her new strength.

Our first night together was an eye-opening experience. Within a minute of tearing off our clothes, Bella had knocked me to the hardwood floor of our bedroom with an overly exuberant kiss. Overcome by passion and desire, I had slid on top of my wife and was making love to her in a gloriously carnal reunion. Then suddenly, I wasn't. In her excitement, Bella had rolled me beneath her and assumed control. I found myself trapped under a highly aroused, boisterous newborn with no hope of dislodging her if I'd wanted to.

Reflecting on that later, I realized what a profound change had occurred in our relationship. Suddenly, Bella was able to exercise complete physical control over me. Because I couldn't read her mind, I was utterly helpless to defend myself against any assault she might launch. It was little consolation that her assaults were always amorous and that she never would hurt me intentionally.

My psyche was stunned by the strangeness of my new position and the awareness of my new vulnerability. I was instantly enlightened as to how Bella must have felt being with me while she was human. At any moment, she could be moved from one physical location to another, hauled through the forest at lightning speed, or knocked senseless in an unguarded moment. Even being kissed by me must have felt a little risky. Just as I crushed an iron rose from our bed in my hand, so I could crush her hand when I reached to hold it, or crush her skull when I leaned down to kiss her. How did Bella ever tolerate such vulnerability??

I found it extraordinarily difficult, not only because I was so unaccustomed to it, but also because I was aware that Bella did not know how to manage her newborn strength. In the midst of my intense cravings for her, a continuous warning cycled through my mind...*she can hurt you...she can hurt you...*

My new defensiveness didn't hamper my desire for my wife or my enthusiasm for making love with her. Neither was I consciously concerned about being injured. I knew that I would heal from any damage she might do and I was so happy to have her back—healthy, strong, and durable—that I was more than willing to tolerate some physical pain.

In that regard, Bella's first year as a newborn taught me some things about the nature of Alice and Jasper's relationship. First, that *anticipation* of pain is often more distressing than the pain itself and likewise, anticipation of pleasure heightens subsequent pleasure. Second, once one has reached a certain level of arousal, pain no longer feels like pain, but acts as a stimulus to an even higher level of arousal. I have heard it said that there is a fine line between pleasure and pain and during that year with Bella, my personal line moved dramatically.

Sometimes when Bella was close to orgasm, she would clench her fingers so tightly that her fingernails penetrated my skin, leaving bloodless gouges or long, deep scratches in my back. Under ordinary circumstances, such injuries would hurt, but when my wife reached that level of sexual excitement, she always carried me along with her so that I was too aroused to interrupt everything and call her attention to it. Often, in fact, the intense stimulation of the pain threw me over the edge into orgasm unexpectedly. Orgasms under those circumstances were extraordinarily forceful...even thrilling. It was as if my body had interpreted the pain as pleasure.

While on our honeymoon, I had found Bella to be highly responsive to sexual stimulus of every kind, but after her transformation, “responsive” no longer characterized her behavior. Instead, she became dominant and dominating in our sex life. In her excitement, Bella would move me about this way and that, shove me around the room, or roll me onto my back, immobilizing or incapacitating me with her strength. During sex, I frequently felt like a Raggedy Andy doll being handled too roughly by a child. I protested and reminded her regularly, but it took Bella a long time to recognize and contain her power. It never felt to her like she was restraining or controlling me.

Probably seventy-five percent of the times we made love in Bella’s first vampire year, though, I ended up being subjugated in some way to my wife’s desire. It became *de rigueur* for Bella to end up ravishing me from above, no matter what position we started in. With her new, heightened capacity for sensation, she would lose herself completely in the buildup to her sexual climax. She would flip me onto my back and crouch over me with her arms pressing into my biceps or chest, pinning me into submission. She would hold me helplessly beneath her as she flexed her thighs and thrust herself upon me, pleasuring herself with the most intimate part of my body. I adapted to this new state of affairs and enjoyed my increased arousal as I watched her use me as she desired. Indeed, I was her willing slave.

As our first year progressed, Bella became gradually more aware of her sexual dominance. Whenever she realized that she was on top of me and preventing me from moving, she would roll us over so that I was on top of her. Then she would forget herself again, let her body take over, and roll onto me once more, repeating the cycle, sometimes rapidly. To a human eye, we would have looked like a spinning wheel flyer whirling away across the ground.

While Bella was human, I had learned to sublimate and reign in my desire for her, to practice self-control. But I had always enforced Bella’s self-control as well as my own and nothing about that changed when we got married. She had not learned how to keep her sexual desires in check and neither did she know how—or perhaps even want—to constrain her power.

I don’t mean to imply that Bella abused her strength, but she never hesitated to use it. As time went on, she even embraced her power over me. I suppose it was a reaction to all the sexual frustration our situation (or from her perspective, I myself) had forced on her from the beginning of our relationship. When she was nearly a year old, she discovered that by inserting her finger in my backside, she could turn me into the sexual equivalent of a bug on a pin writhing helplessly at her mercy. She would hold me down, take my penis in her mouth and stroke me front and back into total submission or she would roll me onto my stomach and make me come just by touching me inside. I allowed her, of course, as I certainly was not suffering, but she enjoyed reducing me to a mound of jelly at her whim.

In spite of wishing to indulge my wife in every possible way, I was still Edward, though...the one used to making the decisions, initiating our physical relationship to the degree that it had ever been possible, and being physically in control of everything. Suddenly finding myself in control of nothing, including my own body at times, was disturbing. Bella was stronger than me, probably more stubborn, at least as opinionated, and she enjoyed turning the tables on me, which was easier after her change than before. Plus once freed, pent-up desire whooshed out of her so hard and fast that even my highly frustrated and intense new cravings were always a step or two behind hers.

I never particularly minded being physically subordinate to Bella (a “Bottom” to her “Top”) during our first year together, but there are times, at least for a man, when being in control feels very necessary. It’s the essence of manhood as I learned it and though that standard has changed over the past century to some degree, I still believe that testosterone during the human years alters our brains in certain ways. So psychologically, it wasn’t always easy to be sexually submissive to my wife.

When my feelings of being controlled became too much for me to handle, I would insist on making love “doggy style” (Emmett’s lingo). It’s the one sexual position in which I always could subdue Bella—from behind, with her on her knees and elbows. She’s never found another position that gives her the same sensations as that one does. While still a powerful newborn, she certainly could have shaken me off, but she never wanted to, which allowed me some measure of control in the bedroom. Still does, as a matter of fact, though it feels less necessary these days.

Looking back, I’m sure that I overcompensated during our second year of marriage. As Bella’s extraordinary strength waned, she—unconsciously, I think—began to cede control to me more readily and I grew more assertive as well. I prefer being a Top, as it turns out; I like “doing to” more than “being done to.” If Bella and I were a sexually Dominant/submissive sort of couple like Alice and Jasper, I would be the Dominant. Unfortunately, so would Bella, so it’s best that we’re not into that, I suppose. Still, our lives are long and one learns never to say never.

Edward

BELLA CRIED

Bella cried the day we told her. I had gone back and forth so many times as to whether we even *should* tell her, since it was no longer relevant to her life. Would it cause her pain to know or would having an explanation give her a chance to reinterpret her life experience in a better way? I just didn't know. When I asked Carlisle for his opinion, he said that it was entirely up to me, either way. If I decided to tell her, he was willing to be present to explain his own actions and to answer questions if I wished.

Really, there was no reason for me to bring it up at all. It wouldn't change anything about anything except for perhaps the way Bella thought about herself or her past, but in the end, I decided to tell her. Secrets like that have a way of revealing themselves and causing problems that you can't predict. I had learned a few things in my time with Bella and one was that trying to protect her from upsetting information was something she didn't appreciate.

The issue came to the fore the day that Renesmee tumbled headfirst down the staircase when she was nearly two years old. It was so unexpected an incident that those in the living room at the time and those who raced in in response to the loud clattering noise froze in place and watched as she fell. Everyone thought she was doing a "stair somersault" as some kind of gymnastic fun. Only I could hear the panic in her mind when her foot, damp from the bath, slipped over the lip of the top step plunging her forward. Her head smacked into the fourth stair tread in the first revolution of her headfirst cartwheel.

When it happened, I was at Alice's computer nearby trying to figure out why her touchscreen was behaving erratically. As everyone turned to watch Renesmee's "trick," I read her panic and dashed toward the stairs, scooping her out of the air before her head could hit a second time. I pulled her against my chest and rubbed her back as she burst into tears, more out of surprise and fright than pain. Fortunately, Renesmee's head is much harder than the oak staircase—the fourth tread splintered upon impact with her skull.

"It's all right, muffin. Daddy's here. Shh...shh..." I soothed quietly, turning my body so that Nessie couldn't see the shocked expressions on the faces below us and become more frightened. "You took a little tumble, didn't you?"

Bella, who had just returned home from running an errand in town, heard the banging and raced in to find me comforting our sobbing daughter. She ran up the stairs toward us in consternation.

"Nessie, what happened? Are you all right?" Bella held out her arms and Renesmee leaned into them, though she was no longer a small child. Nessie began to hiccup as she explained to her

mother what had happened, how scared she was that she couldn't get her feet under her, and how Daddy had saved her. It was all a bit melodramatic.

"Bella, let's take Renesmee to the cottage," I suggested after looking around the room. All the concerned adults at the house were bound to overreact and make more of the event than it warranted.

Renesmee was exhausted. She'd had an upsetting nightmare the previous night and not slept as many hours as she needed, an amount that varied depending on how fast she was growing at any particular time. After laying her down in her bed for a nap, Bella and I sat by our fireplace to talk.

"She actually fell?" Bella asked in disbelief.

Physical awkwardness was something we'd never witnessed in our daughter and so we assumed that Renesmee's physical capabilities were on par with those of a vampire. Naturally, she possessed slightly less strength and speed than the rest of her family, but we'd never seen her human side reveal itself in a lack of balance or coordination.

"Yes," I responded to Bella's question. "She might have caught herself before reaching the bottom of the stairs, but her thoughts were frightened and helpless so I intervened. She didn't tumble on purpose."

"Well, that's a first. But kids do fall, I guess. Maybe she inherited her mother's clumsiness gene," Bella commented wryly.

A silent alarm went off in my head. *Was it possible? Surely not! Was it?* I shuddered at the thought. If it was hereditary, we would have no recourse. After meeting Nahuel, the half-vampire, half-human man from the Amazon who was approximately one hundred fifty years old, we had assumed that Renesmee was not subject to the physical debilities of human disease. But what if she was? Quileute legends indicate that vampire bites are deadly to the shapeshifting wolves who have the same number of chromosomes as our daughter. Based on that, we have theorized that Renesmee could die if we tried to change her. My mind raced through the worst-case scenario in the flash of a second before I was able to compose my face. I needed to talk to Carlisle.

"What, Edward? What is it?"

I looked at my wife. Obviously, I'd failed to hide my unease. "It's nothing, darling," I said mildly. "I was just worried about the shock Nessie took."

"You don't think she's hurt, do you?"

“She says not, but we’ll have Carlisle look her over anyway when she wakes up.”

Bella nodded in agreement. I took her hand and pulled her to our bedroom, laying her gently on the bed before lying down beside her. I wanted to exorcise my fears by making love with my wife, as Bella’s body never failed to soothe me. Sensing my stress, though, my wife kissed me gently, lovingly, and then made her way slowly down my body, unbuttoning my shirt and unfastening my trousers, kissing and caressing along the way. Normally, I was uncomfortable allowing Bella to love me unilaterally, but on this day, I did not object. The overwhelming sensations of her lips, fingers, and tongue touching my most sensitive places gave me much-needed relief. I reciprocated the favor with pleasure.

Later that afternoon, Jacob took Nessie hunting and I went in search of my father. He’d examined Nessie thoroughly and declared her to be healthy and whole, no harm done from the fall. Bella and I had assumed she was fine, but hearing it from Carlisle set Bella’s mind at ease.

“Are you going to tell her?” Carlisle asked when I found him alone and expressed my concerns.

“Yes, I have to. What if there’s a problem in Nessie’s genetics? What if it progresses and leaves her immobilized for eternity? We don’t know!” My voice broke on the last word and I covered my face with my hands.

“I think it highly unlikely, Edward,” Carlisle said gently. “We’re not even sure it’s hereditary. It’s just as likely to be environmentally triggered. We know that it is more prevalent in colder climates...northern U.S., southern Canada, Russia, northern Europe—”

“I hope you’re right,” I interrupted, regaining my composure. I knew that I was overreacting, but was unable to help myself. “Still, it raises an issue and I would rather Bella heard it from me now than discover it herself later. I’ve learned a few lessons since our courting days.” I smiled grimly at my father. “I’ll just go and get her. Okay?”

Carlisle nodded and I went to find my wife. Now was as good a time as any and Bella already had figured out that something was troubling me. After two years of marriage, she could read me better than I could read her. It was uniquely frustrating.

My wife became concerned when I asked her to join me in Carlisle’s office. “What is it, Edward? Is it Nessie? Is something wrong with Nessie?” I could hear the panic beneath her words.

“No, not at all,” I hastened to reassure her. My father had declared it unlikely in spite of my own panic. “But I’d like Carlisle to explain.”

She looked at me with a wide, distrusting stare, but allowed me to tug her up the stairs to my father’s office.

“Bella, thanks for coming up. Please sit down.” Carlisle motioned to the sofa near his desk, immediately adopting his doctor’s bedside manner for breaking bad news. It was such a habit for him after three hundred years of treating humans.

“What’s going on, Carlisle? You two are starting to scare me!” I took my wife’s hand while my father explained. I had no idea how she might react.

“Well, we’re all a little on edge about Nessie’s fall down the stairs. It’s unexpected and a little unsettling given her gifts, but let me reassure you that as far as I can determine, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with Renesmee. Edward shared with me your remark about how Nessie might have inherited her mother’s clumsiness and it reminded us both that...well...” Carlisle’s voice faded out and his eyes wandered to the forest view from his window. Uncharacteristically, he seemed at a loss to explain himself.

I took over for him. “Bella, what Carlisle is trying to say is that while you were pregnant, when he was drawing blood anyway, he did some testing that we never told you about.”

Bella’s mouth dropped open in surprise and her gaze switched from me to my father and back as she peppered us with questions. “Why would you do that? What were you looking for? What did you find?”

“Carlisle was looking to confirm a suspicion of his about why you had so much trouble with balance... falling, you know...and with insensitivity to temperature and pain. Why you had so many old contusions and healed fractures on your x-rays.”

Bella glared at me silently. I couldn’t tell what was going through her mind. Surprise? Anger? Fear?

Carlisle had regained his composure. “I believe, Bella,” he said quietly, “that you were suffering from undiagnosed multiple sclerosis...MS...possibly for a long time.” He paused to let her absorb the information.

“Wha...a...t?” Bella stuttered, her eyes wide and her mouth gaping.

“Darling,” I said, stroking the back of her hand with my thumb, “you weren’t a clumsy child. You weren’t an uncoordinated teenager...well, you were, but Carlisle believes it was due to a serious and progressive disease. It wasn’t your fault that you weren’t good at sports or that you constantly fell or that you injured yourself so often. You had a serious dysfunction of the nervous system...well, he’s pretty sure.”

“I...I don’t understand. You’re saying I was sick?”

“Yes, darling. It’s a degenerative condition that would have crippled you eventually. It even could have killed you, probably at a young age because it took hold so early.”

“You knew this and you never told me?” Bella’s voice rose aggressively.

I tried to explain. “We found out when you were so close to starvation...during those horrific days when I thought you were going to die. Then after Nessie was born and you were changed it no longer seemed important.”

I don’t know exactly what I was expecting Bella to do when she got this information. I rather thought she would be angry at me for keeping it from her and maybe at Carlisle for testing her blood without her knowledge, but I didn’t expect what happened. Bella stood up and paced across the office, then stopped and muttered, “That explains so much...,” her voice a whisper. Time stood still as she wrapped her arms tightly around her chest and stared blankly into space. Then suddenly, her face collapsed and she slumped over at the waist, gasping uncontrollably. A high keening sound broke from her chest and she began rocking back and forth, toes to heels, heels to toes. The noise turned into a piercing wail.

I glanced at my father in alarm before rushing to my wife and scooping her up in my arms. I dropped to the floor and pulled her into my lap, enveloping her with my body. I had never seen a vampire react this way under any circumstances, especially not my strong, stoic wife. Bella was not an hysterical person in any way, but she was clearly falling apart, vampire tears wracking her body with dry sobs. Stunned and a little frightened, I was hit with an onslaught of concerned thoughts swirling through the house. Esme was on her way up the stairs. Carlisle looked chagrined.

Perhaps I shouldn’t have told her...he thought.

“Bella, Bella, it’s okay, love, that’s all in the past. You’re fine now...fine...darling, it’s okay...”

Esme knocked quietly and opened the door enough to peer in. When Carlisle shook his head at her silent query, she closed the door quietly and retreated. Bella was showing no signs of regaining control over herself and I had no clue whatsoever what was going on inside her head. After a time, I decided to do as I would with our child and carried her home. I laid with her on our bed, wrapping my arms and legs around her and rocking slowly. It took Bella a long time to calm down, but eventually, the hysteria eased and her cries quieted.

“What’s wrong, love?” I whispered when she seemed to be past the crisis. “You aren’t worried about this now, surely?”

“Oh Edward...” she moaned softly, regaining her voice, “if you only knew...” Another sob broke from her chest.

“Tell me, darling, what is it?” I could hear the anxiety in my tone.

Rather than try to find words to express her intense emotion, Bella paused for a few moments. She closed her eyes and brought her fingers to her temples, and then without warning, I was inside her mind. It seemed unreal to me, miraculous, as she’d allowed me to read her thoughts only a few times since discovering that she could raise her inner shield and let me in. It was still a difficult and demanding endeavor for her.

I was quickly overwhelmed as Bella reviewed memory after memory of emergency room trauma...x-rays, stitches, casts...and the even more numerous injuries she’d suffered in silence and hidden from everyone, including her parents. The scenes were pale and indistinct with fuzzy edges and little detail, but all had a common dark thread of pain and humiliation running through them. She revealed incidents of relentless taunting and bullying by other children, perpetual exclusion from parties, outings, games, and lunchroom groupings, and a pervasive sense of being different—less than—her peers.

When Bella finished recalling the dim memories she could bring to mind, her shield dropped over her inner world of hurt, anger, embarrassment, and shame, stowing it away, hidden from me and from the rest of the world. I lay beside her, flooded with all the human pain and sadness that had survived her transformation and traveled with her into her new life. The fact that she remembered any of it revealed how emotionally shattering it had been. It explained a lot about my wife...her loneliness, her shyness, why she’d never had a boyfriend, her low self-esteem, her regard for others over herself, her emotional maturity...*so much*. I never knew.

I exhaled heavily to release this borrowed mountain of misery and held my wife tightly to my chest, rocking her gently back and forth. We didn’t speak, but after a time, I began to sing *You are the Sunshine of My Life* by Stevie Wonder, a cheerful song of love and adoration as I cradled her in my arms and stroked her hair. At some point, singing turned to kissing and kissing turned to lovemaking and for the first time since Nessie was born, we stayed in bed together all afternoon.

Edward

*You are the sunshine of my life
That's why I'll always stay around
You are the apple of my eye
Forever you'll stay in my heart*

*I feel like this is the beginning
Though I've loved you for a million years
And if I thought our love was ending
I'd find myself drowning in my own tears*

*You are the sunshine of my life
That's why I'll always stay around
You are the apple of my eye
Forever you'll stay in my heart*

*You must have known that I was lonely
Because you came to my rescue
And I know that this must be heaven
How could so much love be inside of you*

*You are the sunshine of my life
That's why I'll always stay around
You are the apple of my eye
Forever you'll stay in my heart*

THE DAY WOULD COME

The day was bound to come when Jacob Black pressed his suit for my daughter's hand. He had been giving her "promise" jewelry of various types since she was a toddler, but I, if not Bella, maintained that Renesmee should be free to choose her mate notwithstanding Jacob's devotion. I felt that at least she should be exposed to other possibilities. Though I wasn't advocating for it necessarily, I thought it conceivable that her eyes might stray from her childhood companion, caretaker, and friend.

We visited the Amazon when Nessie was about twelve in human-equivalent years. She missed Zafrina after they became friends when she was four months old. She and the Amazonian vampire share a similar gift—the ability to produce images in the minds of others. Renesmee had come out of the womb with her extraordinary talent, but since meeting Zafrina she'd wanted to learn how to extend it beyond her own body, to put pictures in others' minds without needing to touch them. She also wanted to learn how to mesmerize groups of people with a common illusion as Zafrina could do.

In addition to seeing our Amazonian friends Zafrina, Kachiri, and Senna, Bella and I wanted to give Nessie another chance to spend time with Nahuel, the only male vampire/human hybrid we know of in the world. I thought she might be drawn to one of her own species, even if the two of them had profoundly different cultural backgrounds.

Renesmee and Nahuel did hit it off insofar as they were allowed to get acquainted. When Jacob learned of our plans to visit South America, he insisted on escorting Renesmee, though I tried to convince him to stay home. He seemed genetically wired never to stray more than a few miles from Nessie at any time. He couldn't imagine letting her travel anywhere without him, even less to somewhere so distant where she would meet a potential rival.

So Jacob came with us to the Amazon and prevented Renesmee from spending a minute alone with Nahuel. Jacob was so antagonistic, in fact, that Nessie could barely converse with the Amazonian in Jacob's presence. At her insistence, he finally agreed to change to his wolf form and follow behind her and Nahuel when they set off together because she had so many questions to ask her genetic counterpart about his life. They also shared details of their experiences as half-breeds—eating human food, being a few steps behind their vampire relatives in every physical pursuit, being unique in the world—and Nahuel explained how he handled all of his family's non-hunting interactions with humans because he could pass for human much more easily than the vampire women.

Much to our surprise, Nahuel remained as he had been the last time we met him—more interested in Renesmee's mother than in Renesmee herself. He had siblings to fill in the gap that existed in Nessie's life, but he had never known his own or any of his sisters' mothers,

since none had survived the birth of their children. To him, *Bella* was the miracle rather than himself and Renesmee. His father Johan, whom the Volturi had not yet confronted and destroyed, had sired half a dozen children, though Nahuel was the only son.

Additionally, though Nahuel enjoyed spending time with Renesmee, the two of them talking and testing their physical abilities against one another, he seemed to feel no particular romantic attraction for her, nor she for him. When we asked her about it, she said that he felt very much like Jacob to her...a brother or cousin or just a friend.

We returned to the Amazon a year ago when Renesmee was seventeen or eighteen, human-equivalent, and though she and Nahuel enjoyed reconnecting and spending time together (with Jacob tagging along as “minder”), their interactions remained on a friendship level. We found out from Zafrina that Nahuel had begun following in his father’s footsteps, cultivating a sexual predilection for human women. The Amazonian coven is not vegetarian and it was clear to me that Nahuel—though not bedding humans necessarily as a prelude to killing them—did not suffer overmuch when he drained his female lovers. I also read from his thoughts, but didn’t share it with Bella, that he killed them immediately if they conceived because he did not want to create more motherless children like himself. Kachiri told Bella that Nahuel had shown no preference for any of his conquests and never had considered transforming one to be his mate. Perhaps when he met the right woman, as I had, that would change. Until that time, Nahuel was not interested in being celibate.

That last point was one reason why Bella and I didn’t intervene when Jacob insisted on chaperoning Renesmee and Nahuel. We thought that Nahuel might find our beautiful teenage daughter a fitting conquest, possibly an exotic attraction. We knew that out of respect for Carlisle, the blood-drinking Amazonian women would never harm Renesmee—that, in fact, they loved her—but as the son of Johan, we were never altogether sure about trusting Nahuel with Nessie. We weren’t willing to take any chances with either her blood or her maidenhood. And Jacob certainly wasn’t! He made himself Renesmee’s protector during our journey and when she slept, he slept in wolf form by her side.

As Nessie grew up, Bella and I had given her other opportunities to meet boys besides Jacob. She attended the reservation school, though by three years old she was already teaching math and science to the younger students. We also enrolled her in advanced placement classes at Evergreen State College in Olympia. Though they found her attractive, the college boys regarded Renesmee as a child prodigy too young to court, particularly since she was accompanied everywhere she went by a gigantic Indian bodyguard. Though we assumed that Jacob would keep any boys who might be romantically interested in our daughter at bay, we also believed that meeting them was good for Nessie because ultimately the choice of a mate would be hers.

Jacob had approached me when Renesmee was almost four—approximately sixteen in human years—and asked my permission to become engaged to her. He had promised himself to her without my permission from the time of her birth, but this was different. He knew that with Nessie being so young he would need her parents' consent for a formal engagement.

After consulting Bella, I refused his request. Bella was less opposed than I was because she considered their engagement to be inevitable, but we both felt that Jacob was panicking because he had witnessed the attentions given to Renesmee by other males and feared that she might find someone else to love. We didn't feel that Jacob's anxiety was a good reason to force such an important decision on Renesmee before she had shown any inclination to address it herself. We insisted that he wait one more year and we would reconsider at that time.

We knew that at some point, it would no longer be up to us to approve or disapprove of Nessie's choice of a mate because she would be old enough to decide for herself. But we hoped to postpone that time as long as possible because, though we had a sense of Renesmee's emotional age, we wanted to be conservative and protect her from any pressure to make such a permanent decision before she was ready. In fact, we preferred that it be *her* idea to become engaged to Jacob if that was her choice. Of course, *he* was ready to secure Renesmee to him—he'd been waiting for her for years. I think I convinced him that hurrying her along on a preset course wouldn't be fair to her.

Renesmee's menstrual cycle began just before she turned four years old. It was a bittersweet event for her father. How little time we'd had with our child as a child! But lamenting it didn't change anything. Renesmee was physically a woman and if she continued to mature as humans did, though on her much accelerated scale, she would undoubtedly begin to experience the physical cravings of a mature woman. I can attest to the fact that Bella was ready to start a physical relationship with me almost from the moment of our first kiss. It had taken every ounce of strength and willpower I could muster to put her off until we were married.

We didn't assume that Nessie would be just like her mother, especially since she had known her primary suitor for her entire life. But in fact, we couldn't assume anything. Nessie was truly one of a kind. As she grew, we presented her with the usual parental information about her body (insofar as we understood her anatomy), about physical desire, love, and personal responsibility. Her usual reaction was to roll her eyes—like her father had always done, Bella claims—implying “oh, not *this* again.” The talks didn't interest her much.

But everything changed when Renesmee reached four-and-a-half years old, somewhere between seventeen and nineteen in human years, and Bella and I saw the writing on the wall. We knew that soon it would be our daughter asking for our permission to become engaged—we hoped—or telling us that she had already become engaged. We weren't wrong.

Edward

SEX & THE SCHOOLGIRL

“Jacob won’t have sex with me unless we get engaged,” Renesmee announced one evening as we were running home to our cottage. It was one of those rare times when Jacob wasn’t hanging around because he had gone home to spend an evening with his father.

Bella and I both froze in mid-air and hit the ground like two marble statues dropped from a window. We landed hard and stuck, our hands clasped together and our eyes glued to each other’s as we stood immobile and mute. My immediate reaction was fury—Jacob Black was discussing sexual intercourse with MY DAUGHTER?! I’d KILL him! Bella’s hand clamped down tightly around mine, holding me steady for the few beats it took me to process what Nessie actually had said—that SHE had approached the subject with HIM and he had refused her. My fury morphed into shock. The two of them hadn’t given us any indication that they were moving in that direction. How could I POSSIBLY have missed it? I’m a MINDREADER for crissakes!

Catatonic, I searched my daughter’s mind, trying to make sense of her astonishing pronouncement. I saw no evidence there of illicit trysts in the forest, secret exploration, or frantic passion of the type that Bella and I engaged in during our courtship. Many a night, Jacob had slept outside Renesmee’s window in wolf form, but he had never been in her bed...as far as I could see.

Nessie, knowing me as she does, began to laugh. She knew that I would be scanning her mind for just the information I was scanning her mind for. Neither Bella nor I joined her in her amusement, though. Eventually, she contained her glee and showed me the scene with Jacob. I suppose she thought that would interrupt the reaction she knew I would have at her declaration. It did stop my mind from running away with me, but no, it didn’t immediately douse my anger.

Jacob and Nessie had been spending time in the woods together, as they often did, when she asked him completely out of the blue if he would have sex with her. Apparently, his reaction was very much like her parents’. He froze and stared at her like she was a creature from outer space. In the manner of her other developmental stages, Renesmee apparently had reached some milestone, possibly even while she slept. Yesterday she had been a carefree girl—today she was a ripe young woman prime for the picking.

Jesus H. Christ! Surely a vampire can’t suffer a heart attack, but if anything could provoke one, it was Nessie on that day. Dropping this bombshell was how she chose to inform her suitor and her parents that she was moving into the next phase of her life.

Through all of Renesmee's changes, Jacob had been her ideal companion. When Nessie was a baby, Jacob was the perfect nursemaid; when she was an active child, he was the perfect playmate; when she was a girl, he was the perfect confidante. My next thought was *Now he will be the perfect lover!* and a complex mixture of anger, jealousy, and sadness gripped me. At least our child's mother had the presence of mind to adapt to the moment. Her father had become completely incapacitated.

Amazingly, Bella found a way to address the rat's nest of a dilemma Renesmee had presented and asked the right questions to untangle it. She regained her mobility quickly and reached for Nessie's hand. Then she towed father and daughter along in a walk toward home as she encouraged Nessie to elaborate.

"So, you're interested in sex?" Bella asked cautiously.

"Yes, I want to know what it's like," Nessie responded simply.

"You asked Jacob and he said 'no?'"

"More or less."

How odd it was that my temper should flare again at that moment as I realized my daughter had been refused! *Oh! This was a confusing situation!*

"What was his objection?" Bella inquired matter-of-factly.

Renesmee answered, "Well, he got real quiet and then he said, 'Ness, I don't think that would be right.' I asked him why not and he said that it wasn't like cliff-diving or riding a motorcycle or something you would do one day for an adventure. At least it could never be that way for him. That's what he said."

I marveled at such a response from someone I'd known to be very different in earlier years—back when it was my wife rather than my daughter under discussion.

"Did you understand what he meant?" Bella pressed.

I was amazed that she could conduct this conversation so calmly. I, on the other hand, felt completely at sea and was suffering whiplash from the onslaught of the waves. I wanted to stick my fingers in my ears and sing "la la la la" as loudly as I could. Instead, I concentrated on keeping my mouth shut and letting Bella lead us through this alligator-infested lagoon.

"Yes, I suppose," Renesmee replied. "Jacob thinks that sex should be part of a commitment, not just for recreation or to get rid of your virginity."

“You don’t agree?”

“Well, I am curious about sex, of course, and I think I’m old enough to try it.”

“Did Jacob ask you to become engaged?”

“No, he just said it would be a prerequisite for sex.”

Unbelievably, Jacob, who had been so anxious to enter a physical relationship with Bella earlier in his life, was refusing a blatant sexual invitation from Renesmee. I understood then that what Jacob might want for himself always would be overridden by Nessie’s best interests. He knew, as only an imprinted male could know, that Renesmee wasn’t truly ready for mature lovemaking and I saw that he wouldn’t— probably even *couldn’t*—take advantage of her before she reached that point, whether *she* believed she was ready or not. Jacob wouldn’t make love to her until her feelings for him also matured into adult love.

That was the moment when I knew with a certainty I’d never had before that Jacob Black was, and always would be, Renesmee Carlie Cullen’s perfect choice for a lifetime partner.

Edward

ALL GROWN UP

With Renesmee's abrupt vault into the world of adulthood, my mind hearkens back to the days before Renesmee's coming of age when she was still an innocent child discovering the mysteries of the universe, including the miracle of procreation.

"Bobby Fischer had kitties!" Renesmee had hollered as she raced into the house one spring day when she was one-and-a-half years old. Her "Uncle" Embry, as she called him then, had told her that Bobby Fischer was a male cat and none of the adults had bothered to double-check that assumption.

Bobby Fischer bore four kittens—two males, two females—by some unknown tomcat and Renesmee named them after her favorite pioneers in the fields of mathematics and computing: Charles Babbage, Alan Turing, Ada Lovelace, and Admiral Grace Hopper.

Bella and I took the opportunity to teach Renesmee about mammalian reproduction and we took a Wikipedia lesson ourselves on sexing a kitten to prevent another such surprise in the future. Bobby Fischer was rechristened Bobbi Fischer. Renesmee herself farmed the kittens out to her friends at the reservation school, very carefully explaining the differences between the boys and the girls to her gift recipients and how boy kitties inject sperm into girl kitties to make more kitties.

So we had come a long way from those days. Renesmee had grown into a lovely, apparently fertile woman with the healthy sex drive of her mother. After her announcement that she wanted to try out sex, I took her on a private hunt to share with her my personal values surrounding sex, commitment, love, and marriage. Carlisle, Esme, and I are the last Cullen holdouts for a value system that advocates celibacy before marriage. It isn't a popular idea and even Renesmee's mother has deep reservations about its viability in the twenty-first century, but I still thought Renesmee should hear her father's archaic point-of-view.

"When your mother and I were courting," I told her, "I insisted on abstaining from sex until after we were married."

"I know," she replied with a smirk. "Mom told me."

"Well, perhaps she also told you that she didn't share my viewpoint. Her parents were married barely long enough for them to have her before they got divorced, so she never developed much respect for the institution of marriage. I was raised to believe that having sex outside of marriage is wrong—a sin in God's eyes—and maybe that's true, but that's not why I recommend against it. Experience has proven to me that the union of two bodies finds its greatest expression as an extension of the union of two souls."

Renesmee remained silent, but I knew she was listening carefully. I went on. "In retrospect, I think your mother found that to be more true than she anticipated. Sex as an expression of love and commitment is a profound experience and elevates the act to something more than a bodily function. I'm glad that we waited. Making love with your mother on our wedding night was worth all the arguments I had with her about it beforehand."

Renesmee did not poke her fingers in her ears and say Ooh, gross, Dad! Don't talk about you and Mom having sex! She's a more thoughtful person than that and she was considering my position.

"You're trying to not tell me what to do, aren't you, Dad?" she confirmed.

"That's right, daughter." I smiled at her. "I respect your ability to make your own decision, but at least I wanted to share my perspective with you. Your grandparents and I are the holdouts on the old-fashioned viewpoint, though it sounds like Jacob is setting some constraints—which I agree with, by the way, as far as they go."

Nessie giggled. "Yes, it's really funny." She switched into her silent communication mode in case any wolves were in the vicinity. Zafrina had indeed taught her to communicate without the need to touch her recipient as long as he or she was close by. Her mother and I were the best receivers, though I couldn't always tell if I was receiving or just mindreading. She had only partial success with the rest of the family and continued to work on the skill.

Silently, she went on, Embry told me that Jacob was really hot-to-trot when he was dating mom! She giggled again.

"You find that amusing, do you?" I responded, feeling the corner of my mouth twitch up slightly. I had never found it amusing, but I did find my daughter's amusement amusing. I was glad she could take it so lightly.

Nessie went on. *Oh...it's hilarious! Mom didn't want to have sex with Jake but I do and he tells ME no!*

I chuckled. "To be clear, your mother says they never officially dated, that they were just friends."

Well, I heard he gave you a pretty good run for your money! she relayed silently, smirking.

A stab of pain cut through me as I remembered the horrific night when Bella finally recognized that she loved Jacob and then had let him go.

"Who told you that?" I asked, perhaps a bit more sharply than I intended. I reigned my emotion in.

Uncle Billy, Renesmee replied.

“Hmm...well...he’s probably right. Does that bother you?”

No, I wasn’t around to be bothered by it then and now it’s in the past. Jake reminds me all the time that the past is the past. He really loves me, Dad.

I stopped running and Renesmee followed suit. It seemed like an important moment. I regarded her carefully.

“I know he does, Nessie. How do you feel about that?”

Oh, I love him too. He could hardly be more perfect.

I chuckled at her comment. She hadn’t known Jacob as long as I had. But he *was* different now. He was devoted to Nessie—and only Nessie. “Do you know what you’re going to do?” I asked.

Nessie sighed and rolled her eyes. *I suppose I’ll have to **marry** him if I ever want to get laid.* She sighed again heavily as if suffering a great ordeal. Then she glanced up at me through her eyelashes and started laughing. “Ha, ha, ha! You should see the look on your face, Dad!”

I was glad at that moment that I could not blush. She was trying to wind me up and was succeeding as only Nessie could.

You know, all the girls on the rez think you’re really hot. My daughter was on a roll now, trying to get my goat as she often did when she thought I was being too serious.

“Well, Renesmee,” I replied with a straight face, “that’s just one of the great burdens of being me.”

She stared at me, trying to determine whether I was joking. I waited a beat and then grinned at her and she laughed.

“In all seriousness, though, Jacob asked me six months ago if he could officially become engaged to you,” I told her.

He did?

“He did and I said no. I told him to wait another year, but that I preferred it was your idea rather than his. He was still a lot older than you last year.”

But now he’s not.

“No. You must be very nearly the same age and it’s no longer up to me and your mom to tell Jacob yes or no. That’s between you two now.”

I'm not that crazy about the idea of marriage, to be honest, Nessie confided. It seems like such an outdated notion. It's not like I'm ever going to want anybody else.

I suppressed my surprise at her last statement. I hadn't known she felt that way. Then I said, "Marriage isn't outdated to me. Besides the day you were born, your Mom's and my wedding day was the single most important day of my life. Making a vow to love, cherish, and support someone for as long as you live is a profound act. There is great value in formalizing and stating your intentions toward one another."

I know, Dad. I just don't feel in any hurry to get there. I know there will never be anyone else for me except Jake, but I hate to be a foregone conclusion. It's so predictable.

"Believe me, child. Jacob has never regarded you as a foregone conclusion. From the time he helped bring you into this world, he's fought for you every day of your life, against me as much as anything else."

You haven't made it easy for him, have you?

"No. I wanted you to have the chance to choose for yourself—to have options."

I don't need any other options. It was always going to be Jacob.

"How long have you known?" I asked, astonished.

Oh...forever, really. Jacob's mine. I've always known that. It's only recently that I've started seeing him in a different way, though. I don't think he's caught up with me on that yet.

Much to my surprise, Renesmee blushed slightly. She didn't have to explain to me what she meant.

"I see."

So I'm going to propose to him, Dad. Do I have your blessing?

I stared at my daughter in amazement. Her unpredictability reminded me so much of her mother. I never knew which way her thoughts were heading, but I could see that she was absolutely serious about this.

She continued. I wanted to do things the traditional way and ask for the bride's father's permission before I proposed.

Nessie grinned and I began to laugh. Love surged through me in a great wave. I reached for her and pulled her into my arms, kissing the top of her head—my beautiful, brilliant, singular daughter whom I love more than life itself.

“Of course you have my permission, darling child, and my blessing. Jacob Black will make you a fine husband.” I kissed her head again and added solemnly, “But you might want to ask his father for the gentleman’s hand.”

She leaned back to search my face, then burst into giggles. I chuckled with her as we resumed our jaunt through the forest, intermittently nudging each other off balance as we ran.

Edward

BOBBI FISCHER'S LEGACY

I have never told Renesmee that one of her first crushes, the vampire Fred, was responsible for the demise of two of Bobbi Fischer's kittens, which had grown to adulthood on the Quileute reservation. Bella and I had introduced Fred to a vegetarian lifestyle and as he experimented with that, unbeknownst to us, he developed a taste for domestic feline blood. Though cats have a palatable scent, none of the Cullens has ever considered drinking them because dealing with the carcass is more trouble than the one swallow they contain is worth. Fred likes the flavor, though, and cats are much more abundant than mountain lions.

After one of Fred's regular visits, Renesmee told me that two of Bobbi Fischer's offspring had not been visiting her at school as they usually did. I put two and two together and was glad that Renesmee had not.

The next time Fred showed up I asked him about his recent hunting habits and saw in his mind that he had encountered Ada Lovelace and Alan Turing in the woods near the reservation and had made short work of them. I said nothing to Renesmee, but I warned Fred about the existence of Bobbi Fischer and described her and her remaining progeny so that he could avoid destroying any more of Renesmee's prized litter. He felt badly, of course, but after all, we had encouraged him to try a vegetarian lifestyle and we always knew that he had unusual feeding habits.

That same year, Admiral Grace became pregnant and delivered her kittens somewhere out in the forest. Renesmee looked for them, but she never found the litter. We assumed that they hadn't survived the owls that hunt the Olympic forest at night. A couple years later, though, we discovered that a growing number of feral cats had taken up residence in the area. I've advised Renesmee to leave them alone and when Fred returns from Denali, we'll encourage him to winnow down the population to acceptable levels—if he returns, that is. Alice said he has no current plans to do so. She winked at me then and I have yet to quiz her about Fred's fate in Alaska.

Oh hell! I don't have to ask Alice. I know Tanya all too well. With any luck, Fred is happily ensnared in her web.

Edward

ADJUSTMENTS

Renesmee followed through on her plan, though she waited for several weeks after our talk to pop the question. She knew that changes in Jacob's mode of responding to her had always been triggered by her own changes. As an imprinted soul, Jacob could only love Renesmee in a way that was appropriate to her needs at any given time. He couldn't see her as an object of adult love and sexual desire until she was grown up enough to want that from him.

After realizing that she was ready to commit herself to Jacob and join her life to his, Renesmee's feelings for him swiftly evolved into romantic love. She began to behave differently around him—with a new shyness and a perceptible physical reaction to his presence—and soon after she declared her intentions to me, she initiated their first kiss. The change in Jacob was almost immediate and their romantic courtship began.

When you have a child who grows and matures at a rate four to five times faster than the human norm, it can be difficult—even painful—to keep pace. One minute you know your child as your own; the next minute she belongs to someone else. Renesmee's transformation left both Bella and myself reeling. Change for vampires is difficult under the best of circumstances, but when you must alter something so fundamental as your relationship to your child, adjustment seems impossible. I spent many an hour conferring with Carlisle to try to gain some perspective on the situation and to process intellectually what was required of me as the father of a child who had entered adulthood in less than five years—something that had taken me over one hundred years to accomplish. It was mind-boggling and so very difficult to accept.

Bella and I did our best to release Nessie to her future, but the required shift was unnatural and Bella could enumerate many instances in which I behaved less than graciously toward Jacob Black. Accepting that Renesmee is his has been the most difficult change I've ever had to undergo, including when I returned to drinking animal blood after feeding on humans for several years.

Carlisle offered his advice, his comfort, and his reassurance that every ending is also a beginning and, hard as it is to let go of Renesmee, I would reap rewards from that sacrifice in time. She and Jacob would bring new joys into our lives including, perhaps, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This is the natural order of things, even for us, the most unnatural of creatures.

Billy Black was thrilled when Nessie asked him if he would honor her by becoming her father-in-law. Billy graciously accepted and offered his son to her along with his blessing. Nessie told us that she kissed his cheek and then grabbed his wheelchair and spun him around in circles as he used to do with her on his lap as a child. She said that in his chair he'd always made her feel like she could fly.

Renesmee proposed to Jacob soon afterwards and he accepted with no hesitation, though he wanted to postpone the wedding until the tribe could fulfill its duty of constructing a house for them on the reservation. It was his fervent desire to present his new wife with a home of her own as a wedding gift.

If, as we suspect, Jacob and Renesmee are genetically compatible and choose to have children, then they will raise their offspring as human on the reservation, sons and daughters of a Quileute chief. Nobody knows whether the presence of a half-vampire in the tribe will stimulate the magical change from Quileute to wolf among the tribe's teenagers or whether the combining of vampire and Quileute blood will suppress it. Time will tell.

Bella is exceedingly happy that with Renesmee married to Jacob, Charlie will have access to his granddaughter and potential great-grandchildren for the remainder of his life, even if his daughter eventually has to move on. He also gets the son-in-law he always wanted, if one generation farther down the line. We expect him and Sue Clearwater to marry one day, which will make both Renesmee and Charlie tribe members intimately involved with the tribal council. Who besides Alice ever would have guessed?

The months following Renesmee and Jacob's engagement were awkward for Bella and myself, as the two of them began displaying all the behavior patterns of young lovers...the whispered secrets and private laughter, the disappearances, the inseparability, and the inevitable lovers' quarrels, which are always rather one-sided, since Jacob lives to make Renesmee happy. Nessie has her mother's stubbornness and temper, and occasionally sets herself against her fiancé over this or that, which makes Jacob miserable. I can utterly sympathize, though he tolerates Renesmee's moods and whims better than I ever tolerated Bella's. My son-in-law-to-be is his own man, but absolutely devoted to my daughter and I love him for that.

I am still struggling with the issue of sex...that most delicate and disturbing of subjects when it concerns one's daughter. After conferring with Carlisle, Bella sat down with Renesmee and discussed her options for birth control. Though her menstrual cycle is three times longer than a human's, we presume that she is fertile. Bella and I have advised her against having children right away. As Bella put it, she and Jacob (literally) have all the time in the world to raise a family.

I never asked Bella what type of birth control Renesmee settled on or when exactly she started using it—I *really* don't want to know.

Edward

THE DAY I LOST IT

“Ah, Bella...” I moaned through her hair as I pushed into her farthest reaches, “I shall never get enough of you.”

“Good,” she murmured, rolling me onto my back and crouching over me. She contracted her interior muscles sharply and I groaned. “I could make you come without moving, just by squeezing.”

“Is that so?” She demonstrated with a staccato succession of grip-and-release actions and I was reduced to monosyllabic utterances. “Ah...um...”

She pressed a fingertip to my lips and I sucked it into my mouth. Then she leaned over me and whispered in my ear, “I want to put this finger where the sun doesn’t shine.”

I felt an involuntary clenching of the muscles in my backside. “I don’t know about that,” I mumbled hesitantly. I had told her before that it didn’t sound particularly appealing, though *she* had clearly enjoyed such penetration on our honeymoon (and since).

She squeezed me again. “I’m going to sit here completely still until you say yes.”

“No...,” I groaned, bucking my hips upward for some much-needed friction. She grabbed my hipbones and pushed me into the mattress, immobilizing me with her newborn strength. I could have tried wrestling her for control, but I knew it would be futile.

“Let me,” she coaxed, moving her lips against my ear.

She was driving me crazy. I began to toy with her nipples to see if I could persuade her to move or squeeze...*something*. Being held in her silky embrace was as intensely pleasurable after two months of marriage as it had been the very first time and she was making me ache. I focused my attention on her nipples, rolling them tightly between my thumbs and forefingers and pulling gently. I felt a twinge inside her. She’d forgotten that I could persuade her to contract her vaginal muscles against her will.

“Hey, no fair!” she protested.

I pulled harder and she squeezed me again. “All’s fair in love and titillation,” I purred. “You know I can make you come this way.” I angled up at the waist and took her left nipple in my mouth, sucking hard while my fingers stroked and stimulated the other one. I felt a powerful, satisfying contraction inside her. “And that will make me come too. I win,” I crowed triumphantly.

She reached behind herself and pressed her moistened finger where the sun indeed never shines. "Behave," she commanded, "or I'll do it."

"I have a feeling that you're going to do it anyway so I might as well enjoy myself," I said, pulling at her nipples to coerce another squeeze from her vagina.

She lifted her hips and dragged the threatening finger forward to my penis, curling it around and stroking me...up...down. *Mmm...such a tease!* My breathing accelerated and then she went still again. The suspense was getting to me. *What is she thinking? What is she going to do?* I desperately wanted her to do *something*, to give me *something*.

I re-employed my only weapon. I curled forward and took her right nipple in my mouth, sucked hard, and felt the instantaneous reward. I felt something *else* too—her now well-lubricated finger pressing into me a short ways.

"Bella...," I warned, but she didn't withdraw it. Instead, she squeezed me tightly and then lifted herself up almost to the point of separating from me. *No!* I pressed my hips forward to prevent her from breaking our intimate contact, then I reached for her waist to pull her down onto me again. She resisted easily. *Friction...I needed friction.*

"Hands off," she commanded and I felt her wiggle the finger that remained poised just inside my sensitive opening. It was not an unpleasant sensation, but my entire backside clenched in defense. I immediately removed my hands from her torso, though in retribution for her threat, leaned forward and sucked hard on her nipple. She couldn't resist that and her back arched, pressing her breast forward against my mouth. She issued a deep groan before suddenly jerking away.

"Mouth off, too," she ordered. Her finger moved a little farther into me. My muscles clenched again and I flattened myself against the mattress and pressed my hands under my waist.

"No hands...," I whispered in submission.

I was more highly aroused than I wanted to admit. I felt the familiar tightening at the base of my penis, which elongated me toward her. She responded by slowly pressing herself down over me and I moaned in pleasure. When the base of her met the base of me, she stopped breathing and closed her eyes, then clenched me in a series of quick squeezes, which made me elongate further inside her.

"Ahhh...more friction, pleasee." It sounded like the begging that it was. She responded to my plea and began moving slowly up and down. *Ah...finally...* I started to lose myself in the long-delayed escalation of sensation that I'd been craving for half an hour. My breathing changed to a pant, but she was still torturing me with her unhurried movements. Every time I started to

move with her, she put her hand on my hip and pressed me back to the mattress, shaking her head slowly.

“No moving, no hands,” she breathed. She wanted me at her mercy. I obliged by tucking my arms further under my waist and she rewarded me with another long stroke, up and down. I felt her wiggle her finger again, reminding me where she had left it. I felt my muscles clench again, but this time it also made me shiver. She raised herself for another stroke and then paused.

“More, Bella, pleeease...” I pleaded softly. Her ruby eyes blazed at me, lighting a sexual nova in my body.

“Yes...but this too...,” she replied in a whisper, wiggling the finger that at first had seemed like a threat, but now felt more like a trigger for pleasure.

“Okay...,” I conceded with a sigh.

She smiled, her eyes gleaming salaciously, and lowered herself over me, squeezing firmly.

“Ahh...,” I cried as her finger eased further into me too. I could barely breath. Another long stroke with her body and her intrepid finger sank further inside me. I felt my penis stretch to its full length as the muscles at its base contracted sharply. I...was...*losing*...it. “Bella,” I whispered, “do whatever you want.”

Perhaps that was what she’d been waiting for. She raised herself one more time and when she pressed herself down around me, I felt her finger plunge to the hilt. I no longer cared because she began moving faster, finally giving me what I wanted...what I *needed*. I struggled to remain still, afraid she would stop if I helped myself to some friction. Three more strokes and I was approaching the height of my pleasure, anticipating the peak. She pressed once more onto my body and then stopped moving.

“Nooo, don’t stop now...” I begged. She began to withdraw her finger and I gasped as my muscles contracted around it. She set a rhythm then, caressing my penis with her slick interior and repeatedly plunging her finger deeply into me, her hand and vagina working on me in sync. Bella was *fucking* me—there was no other word for it—and I was utterly helpless, frozen by this strange pleasure that felt alien, but oh...so...good. Anticipation taunted me each time she pulled back as I waited for the next forward thrust.

“Bella...I want to come. I *need* to...,” I gasped as the pressure inside me built to an almost intolerable level. She was moving so slowly that I couldn’t quite get there. I needed more...*something* more. Just then, I felt her buried finger begin to rub against an interior wall, a spot that...*ohmigod*...made me press my head into the mattress and gasp. My penis remained

wrapped in her, rigid and extended as far as it has ever been, but she held her body still. The only motion she allowed was in one finger as it rubbed the hidden spot to which all of my senses were newly attuned. I groaned in response to the unfamiliar sensations, not knowing exactly where they would lead. Though it felt so strange, I didn't want it to stop.

"More?" she whispered.

My mouth had gone slack, but every muscle below my waist was tightly wound. I could only nod my head. She continued the rubbing and pressing against that singular point inside me and I felt myself building, tightening, straining toward.... Suddenly, my body began to shudder. Bella's finger continued stroking mercilessly.

"Bella...," I moaned as the tension began to peak.

"That's right," she whispered. "For me."

With one last wiggle of her finger, I felt a compression, a rushing convergence, and a climactic whoosh of pleasure as semen shot through the length of my penis into my wife. My hips rose from the mattress as I reached into her depths.

"Yes," she murmured, yanking her finger out of me, initiating one more hard spasm before I collapsed heavily beneath her. Bella's spare hand had moved to the front of her body, her fingers rolling round and round over her clitoris. I felt her interior muscles begin to ripple and squeeze, trying to extract something more from me, it seemed. I thrust my penis to the back of her in a few short, quick strokes and felt her entire body quake violently. I wrapped my hands around her waist to hold her upright as the shuddering went on and on until finally, she collapsed forward with her eyes closed, an angelic expression on her face.

When both of us had calmed and Bella lay flat against my chest, her face nestled at the base of my neck, I said softly, "So, Mrs. Cullen, I've lost my virginity to you again. Are you happy now?"

Keeping her eyes closed, Bella grinned and nodded her affirmation against my throat.

I inhaled her heavenly scent, kissed the top of her head, and whispered, "I am yours. All yours."

Edward

THE ANGEL CULLEN

My father has had a long career as an angel. Over the centuries, he often has been mistaken for a messenger from God when he's been unable to prevent a human from observing him do extraordinary things—usually to save lives. He was known as the Angel Sawbones during the American Revolutionary War, when he was famous for being the fastest amputating surgeon ever seen in the battlefields. An angel, indeed, in a time when no anesthetics for surgery were available.

Even in the last ninety years since I have known him, Carlisle's been called an angel by those who worked with him during the Spanish flu epidemic in Chicago and the yellow fever outbreak in New Orleans, and even in modern-day hospitals where he continually performs surgical procedures thought to be beyond the capability of human hands. Perhaps the most dramatic of Carlisle's life-saving feats, though, occurred early in his vampire life when he became an angel of deliverance for a village in Great Britain.

My father was born in England at a time when one's choice of religion could mean the difference between life and death. Religious beliefs have always been a source of human antagonisms, of course, but the history of conflicts between adherents of one or another form of Christianity in Great Britain has been especially long and bloody.

During the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the kingdoms of England and Scotland each broke with the Roman Catholics to establish their own churches. While England formed an Anglo-Catholic church administered by bishops beholden to the English king, Scotland formed a Protestant Presbyterian church controlled by elected elders independent of their monarchy.

When Carlisle became a vampire in the early 1660s, Charles II, King of England and Scotland (and Ireland, which doesn't figure into this particular story), outlawed Presbyterianism and tried to force the Scots to accept the religious hierarchy and liturgy of the Anglo-Catholic Church of England (or Anglican Church). It was a time of great persecution of the Scottish Protestants, known as "Covenanters," adherents to two 16th century covenants declaring Scotland to be a Protestant kingdom. The King sent soldiers northward to force their religious compliance.

During this period, Carlisle was wandering around Great Britain, struggling with the dramatic turn his life had taken. From the son of a religious man dedicated to destroying vampires (whom he regarded as Satan's creatures), Carlisle had been transformed into such a creature himself. Determined not to be evil, a slave to his new nature, my father left London and kept to the countryside for many years in order to avoid humans while he learned how to survive by drinking animal blood.

Though we've only known Carlisle as he is now, invulnerable to the lure of human blood, he was no different than any other newborn vampire. It took a great deal of agonizing effort to learn the self-control which has kept him from attacking a human when he is thirsty. After he was changed, he spent forty years avoiding human settlements to help himself resist the temptation.

In 1679 when Carlisle was sixteen years into his new life, he found himself roaming the northeastern coast of Scotland, drawn there by the beauty of the sea and the sparseness of the human population.

Following the coastline, he became aware of a black haze of smoke in the distance and as he grew closer, saw that it rose from the smoldering remains of one large fire after another at the centers of which were decimated dwellings and animal shelters. Moving along, Carlisle saw the occasional haggard cluster of humans—mostly women, children, and the elderly—with a few possessions slung on their backs. Not wishing to be tempted by their blood, he remained at a distance, but as he came upon more and more of them, refugees from some human tragedy, and heard their muttered conversations, he began to piece together what was happening.

The King had issued a decree that the Presbyterians in Scotland must give up their practices of worship and adopt those of the Church of England. They must turn over their churches to the Anglicans and pledge their loyalty to the King. Charles II had sent mounted soldiers to enforce the decree and they were traveling from village to village and farm to farm, turning out all Presbyterian ministers and punishing dissenters. Scots who resisted were killed outright, their homes burned and their goods confiscated. Some were taken as prisoners to be tortured in Edinburgh before being hanged.

Covenanters' Prison, Edinburgh

Late in the evening, Carlisle observed a great fire in the village of Inverglas (*Inbhar Glas* in Gaelic, "the mouth of the river Glas"), a place considered to be a hub of religious dissidence. As he approached, he saw desperate people running in every direction trying to escape mounted soldiers who chased them down and ran them through with swords, one by one. On the far side of the village, armed only with pitchforks, clubs, and the odd ax, local men and boys had formed a defensive line in front of the ancient stone church (formerly Catholic, now Presbyterian), putting up a fierce resistance against the horsemen's muskets and swords.

The people who could not fight had abandoned their homes and taken refuge in the church in the fervent hope that no one, not even the King's soldiers, would attack a house of God. After a bravely fought battle, the Scots defenders lay in bloody heaps in the village streets.

Carlisle remembers the scent of the massacre, a mixture of acrid smoke and the enticing smell of human blood. Through the burning torment of it, he racked his brain for some way to save the noncombatants huddling in the church, for he did not believe the soldiers would halt their aggression until the Presbyterian village was empty of souls. He knew he was right when the soldiers surrounded the church and began barricading the exits. Carlisle quickly realized that they intended to burn the church with the helpless citizens of Inverglas inside.

Through smashed windows, the soldiers thrust torches to set alight the church's flammable contents. As the wooden furnishings and cloth dressings burned, they would ignite the interior wall and roof beams, which would cause the structure to collapse on those who had not already burned to death.

As Carlisle watched, smoke began to pour out of the broken windows amidst the sounds of terrified screams and wails. Soldiers guarded all possible exits, running through or setting on fire anyone who tried to escape. My empathic father could not stand by and do nothing, though he himself was greatly endangered by fire.

Rather than attack the soldiers directly, for he would no more prefer to kill a soldier than a civilian, he raced unseen around the building searching for any part of the structure that had been neglected by the guards, a jut-out or hidden area where he might break through a wall and lead the humans to safety. Unfortunately, no such place was to be found.

Retreating to a nearby copse of trees, Carlisle remembered that long before the persecution of these northern Presbyterians, King Henry VIII had decried Roman Catholicism, expelling and killing priests, and confiscating or destroying churches and abbeys. As a result of that oppression, many old (formerly Catholic) churches, including his father's church in London, had underground tunnels through which priests could escape if their church was attacked. Perhaps such tunnels existed in the north as well.

Carlisle dashed around in search of an escape hatch hidden amidst the trees, but found nothing. He suspected that any old tunnels which might have existed a hundred years before had not been maintained or had even been destroyed after they were no longer needed. Perhaps modern parishioners didn't even know about them.

As he hurriedly scoured the area, Carlisle noticed a strange vibration in the ground beneath his feet. He stilled and detected the muffled sound of human voices and the scent of human blood, both subtle, but nevertheless present. He knew immediately what it meant—the trapped humans *had* found a tunnel where escaping priests would have shed their religious garments and then emerged hidden amongst the trees.

Carlisle tracked the underground sounds and scent to their most perceptible location. Why was no one emerging? They would suffocate if they remained underground. He searched again for an exit in the area, but found nothing. It was likely that time had destroyed it or filled the tunnel with debris.

Carlisle became aware that the underground noise was becoming louder and more urgent. Muffled screams and the cries of children could be heard. With no other option, he simply began to dig a short ways beyond the frantic voices. His swift and powerful hands scooped and tossed duff and dirt, tore and yanked roots, and broke and scattered rock until he saw a wisp of smoke rise from the hole. There was no time to waste. Redoubling his efforts, he soon uncovered a horizontal wooden beam and saw a cavity beneath it. It was part of the roof structure of the tunnel—flat beams laid across stone supports. He tore off the first plank and then another and another and before long, unearthed a low corridor leading in the direction of the church. He jumped to its floor and raced forward until he found the blockage, a compacted pile of stones, dirt, and rotted wood.

At vampire speed, Carlisle began clearing dirt and debris from the tunnel, creating a hole large enough to crawl through, without breaking all the way through. Knowing fire, he realized that supplying oxygen at this end of the tunnel likely would pull the fire through it. He would have only a short time to get the humans out before they were burned alive. He began to speak to the people on the other side of the barrier, who he soon realized could hear his voice, yet not decipher his words.

Knowing he was there, no one panicked when he finally thrust his pale, cold hand through the last bit of dirt into the larger cavity. A shout of joy went up and chased backwards through the tunnel. Looking into the opening, Carlisle saw three old men who'd been trying heroically to clear the blockage with their inadequate human fingers.

"This way to safety," Carlisle called softly, quickly widening the opening.

"Mothers with children first," one of the men called as people began shuffling forward to crawl through the hole...mothers pushing their babies into Carlisle's waiting arms before crawling after them, old women assisting disabled husbands, children urging each other on. One after another reached for, and were lifted to, freedom until the three elder rescuers were the only

people left. Carlisle helped them through and urged them to lead the others to safety while he ran back into the tunnel in search of survivors.

He found a few...mothers whose children had succumbed to the smoke and wouldn't leave them, others who were injured or unconscious. He scooped them into his arms and raced to the end of the tunnel where one of the men had remained to pull them through. Carlisle ran back again and again until none but the dead remained.

Exiting the tunnel, Carlisle quickly filled in the hole with wood, rocks, and dirt to hide the exit point as best he could. Then he helped carry the remaining injured to a hidden refuge in the trees. He breathed life into some, but others could not be saved.

As dawn approached, he knew that he must leave the people to fend for themselves. He had pushed himself to the limits of his tolerance and began to be afraid he would lose control of his thirst and drink. He also could not risk being seen in the rising daylight, even though his otherworldly capabilities already had been noted by the rescued. Some whispered "saving angel" and were giving thanks to God, but others whispered "demon" or "witch" and were conspiring to attack him. He did not try to explain himself. As he turned to leave, one of the heroic old men held out his hand and asked his name and Carlisle responded truthfully—Cullen.

The King's soldiers had departed after the town lay in ashes and the screaming from inside the church had ceased. They didn't have to examine the gutted stone structure to know that their job was done. They moved east to their next destination, having accomplished their deadly mission in Inverglas.

Out of curiosity, Carlisle returned to the village twenty years later and discovered that people who had survived the massacre, especially as children, had told lingering tales of a pale white angel sent from Heaven to rescue them. He discovered a shrine had been built in the churchyard to the *Aingel Culaine*, Gaelic for "Angel Cullen."

Within a few decades, the village of Inverglas was rebuilt, though the homes were moved to higher ground to reduce flooding problems. The old stone church was reconstructed and then expanded as the Presbyterian community grew, the Scots having outlasted the English authorities in their long, bitter battle to worship as they chose. Colloquially, the old church became known as *Aingel Culaine Kirk* (Angel Cullen Church) after the shrine where people often came to pray. Over time, the town adopted the name of the famous church, dropping the *Aingel* prefix. Memories of the heroic Scots of Cullen and their "Heaven-sent" angel remain.

On maps today, you can find the town of Cullen in northeast Scotland and if you visit—which I intend to do one day—you can see the Cullen Auld Kirk and the shrine to the Angel Cullen where visitors light candles and whisper prayers for God's deliverance and mercy. If you wander

among the ancient gravestones in the churchyard, I've been told that you can find one or two dated 1679 and engraved with the words *An Teine Mor* (A Great Fire).

Edward

ALICE IN CHAINS

Jasper has recently taken up a new hobby: photography. He bought a fancy Nikon digital camera, best for portraits, he tells me, with both wide-angle and zoom lenses, a tripod, reflectors, and professional lighting equipment. I couldn't figure out his motives, exactly, since I can't see him starting a new career as a wedding photographer.

However, his intentions became clearer after a recent weekend when the rest of us went hunting and Jasper and Alice stayed home. There was nothing unusual about that, as all of us enjoy private time with our mates whenever we can get it. A few days after we returned, though, Emmett came to find me at the cottage, bouncing with excitement over his latest gossip.

"Dude!" he greeted me when I stepped outside. (Apparently, he is updating his slang.) "You will *never believe* what I found in Jasper's office!"

"What were you doing in Jasper's office?" I inquired, though I didn't need to ask. Emmett never hesitates to snoop in his brothers' lives, especially if he thinks he might discover something personal or salacious. It seems he never will outgrow the adolescent phase of drooling over girlie magazines and lacing every conversation with sexual innuendo. We all have our faults, I suppose, and his is at least amusing—when his target is someone other than yourself, that is.

"Ah, the usual..." he equivocated before directing my attention away from his misdemeanor. "I found pictures! *Perverved* pictures!"

I couldn't be moved to exclaim at his amazement and disbelief. After all, I had discovered the nature of Alice and Jasper's marital relationship some time before. And I'd done my best *not* to see images in my brother and sister's minds on that particular subject, though it amuses Alice to surprise me with a scandalous thought or picture from time to time.

It is rare that anyone in our family can keep a secret from me, but I had hoped that this particular one might stop there because it's so intensely personal. But no...not with Emmett around.

"Em, I really don't want to know," I said, trying to interrupt his train of thought, but he would not be deterred.

"You won't *believe* it, Bro. These pictures are *hot!* *Super hot!*"

I suddenly wanted—not for the first time—to stick my fingers in my ears like a child and holler "la, la, la, la..." to drown out Emmett's thoughts. Alas, it never works.

“Now I know what Jasper’s been doing with that fancy camera of his. He and Alice are into some *kinky* stuff!”

“You don’t have to tell me about it...please don’t. I already know anyway.”

“Dude! And you didn’t tell me?”

“Why would I do that? It’s their private business. You shouldn’t be poking around in their rooms anyway, Emmett,” I chastised, recognizing that I sounded like an old schoolmarm. “Jasper will go berserk when he finds out and, seriously, he might not get over this. If I were you, I’d keep it to myself.”

“How can I? It’s so *juicy!* I mean, look at these!”

Of course, I couldn’t help *but* look since he was showing the images to me in his thoughts. Fortunately, they weren’t as intimate as I had feared. Actually, the images were quite beautiful in a bent sort of way. Alice is my sister and though I *really* don’t want to think of her like that, I can still appreciate Jasper’s eye.

<picture>

Alice in Chains, I thought. The image would make a striking album cover for the Seattle grunge band of that name, a moniker that had never made much sense to me. Now I get it...perhaps.

“That’s the least of the batch. Check this out!” Emmett’s eyebrows folded together like he was concentrating hard to make me see the image. He should know by now that that is entirely unnecessary.

“Please don’t, Emmett...,” I responded to no avail. The second image popped into his mind.

<picture>

“I don’t care who you are, that is hot! I wonder where they took them.”

“In the attic,” I replied with resignation. “When we were on our hunting trip.”

“You didn’t tell me!”

“Like I said, Em, it’s private.”

“Not anymore!” Emmett laughed raucously.

I was glad that the photographs were all Emmett had unearthed. At least he hadn’t discovered Alice and Jasper’s forest hideaway and their stockpile of specialized equipment. These pictures

weren't explicitly sexual, after all—more artistic. One can take sexy photographs that aren't necessarily documenting a sex life. Knowing Emmett, though, he would take them literally, assuming the most lascivious interpretation possible. Still, he can't *know* the truth unless one of us tells him.

Ack!! Why am I making this my problem?

I suppose I feel protective of Alice, though why I should, I'm not sure, since she's never been concerned about my knowledge of her sex life.

Emmett broke into my thoughts. "Check this out!"

Could I help it?

<picture>

A former Texas horseman, Jasper certainly knows his knots!

"I'm gonna try some of this kinky stuff with Rose!" Emmett exclaimed before adding, "if she'll let me."

I laughed. "Good luck with that."

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"So what did you think?" Alice wanted to know when I saw her later.

"About what?"

"You know...the photos..."

"So you saw that, did you?"

"Of course. I think Jasper left them on his desk on purpose. He's really proud of the skill he's developing."

"Ah, that explains why Emmett didn't find anything explicit."

"Exactly. But you still haven't said."

"What?"

"Edward! You know very well *what!* The photographs!"

“They’re very nice, Alice.” Fortunately, she let me off the hook with that bland acknowledgement.

“This one’s my favorite of the non-X-rated ones.” She showed me a photo that Emmett hadn’t.

<picture>

“Do you like it?” she asked impatiently.

“Alice,” I complained, “do you *really* want me to comment on Jasper’s sado-masochistic creations?”

“Of course. You’re the only one I can show them to without carrying the evidence around in my pocket. And anyway, it’s not S & M. It’s Bondage & Domination.”

I didn’t bother to inquire what the difference is. It’s all *too much information*.

“Why don’t you show them to Bella?” I suggested, hoping Alice would go away and leave me alone. “See what she says.”

“What do *you* say?” she insisted.

“They’re beautiful. Satisfied?”

“Yes,” she replied smugly. “Jasper’s thinking about publishing them or selling them on the internet.”

“Do you really want your naked behind flying all over the world?”

“What do I care? Nobody will know it’s me.”

“True. Jasper doesn’t need the money, does he?”

“No, of course not! He’s just proud and wants people to see them.”

“Okay, I’ve seen them and they’re very nice. Now go bug somebody else, please.”

“Oh...you’re impossible! BELLA!”

*Edward*

## A SHOCKING SITUATION

“Damn it, Katie! How hard is this going to be?”

“I don’t know, Garrett. This has never happened before.”

“Might I hope it is because you’ve had no other lovers but me?”

“Of course you can *hope*,” Kate replies, dripping sarcasm. “I’ve remained a virgin for the last thousand years (give or take a hundred) just waiting for the wonder that is you. You are my everything.”

“Well, that’s a relief.” Garrett grins. “You know, my love, I’ve heard of the rare lady whose delicacies come with teeth, but this is something else entirely. You’ve got a real bite!”

Garrett remembers the incident fondly, though I don’t know why. It couldn’t have been pleasant.

After a short courtship, Kate and Garrett knew they were meant for one another, so Garrett gathered the Denali coven together and, in their presence, vowed to love, cherish, and protect Kate for the remainder of their days while Kate stood and listened indulgently. Garrett then presented her with matching silver bands engraved with an ancient Celtic design and the two were formally joined.

In celebration, they ran through the barren expanse of Alaska until they had reached a sufficient distance from home to provide some measure of privacy and then settled in the soft snow to consummate their bond. Though Garrett long had been without the comforts of a woman, having never met a suitable vampire in his wanderings and having never attempted to mate with a human, he was delighted to find that his love for Kate inspired him to moments of brilliance (as he puts it) in according her physical pleasure. Through his clever ministrations, he led her to that thrilling moment of imminent sexual release and then joyfully pushed her over the brink. It was at that instant that Cousin Kate lost control of her electrical current and gave her loving husband one hell of a surprise.

He tells the story as if it were terribly funny, but I can only imagine what Kate’s shocking talent must have felt like when applied directly to the most sensitive part of a man’s body. He related the content of their subsequent conversation.

“You mean to tell me that of all the humans who’ve had the pleasure of knowing you in the Biblical sense, you have never electrocuted a one of them?” Garrett asks.

“That is correct. Not to my knowledge, anyway.”

"I must assume, then, that it is my superior ability to satisfy you that caused you to lose control in such a shocking way. I should be proud."

Kate laughs, though she is trying to conceal her distress and mortification.

"You can think that if you like, but it could be that human bodies aren't conductors for my electrical frequency. Or maybe the last time I copulated with a human male, my gift was less developed."

"That is probably true, as I assume your last lover was far, far in the past."

Kate smirks.

"What are we going to do? I would not enjoy a repeat of that experience. Perhaps I shall have to wear rubber rubbers." Garrett chuckles.

"I am sorry, Garrett. Truly. The only way I know to learn to control this talent, whether to exert force or to prevent it, is to practice."

Garrett knew that Kate was right. Though being shocked during orgasm was not something he ever wished to repeat, he couldn't see any way around it and so they forged ahead.

"Aye, my scepter has grown shy in these last months," he lamented when we visited our cousins a year after the Volturi standoff. "The wee fellow never knows when he will be rewarded or punished." He laughed.

"How can you stand it?" Alice asked him.

"I will admit that I've adjusted to the sensation somewhat over time, perhaps even become a mite fond of it. It is my Katie, after all." He winked at Alice, not knowing that Alice could fully understand how such a change could transpire.

"You're a better man than me," Emmett marveled. "If Rosalie's poony turns electric, that's a deal breaker right there!"

Garrett remained unfazed by my brother's complete lack of conversational decorum. He said, "I am glad to know that my Katie is safe from your undoubted talent."

"My *talent*...yeah!" Emmett hooted. "That's what I'll call it! Rose'll like that!"

Alice laughed. "I think you'll have Cousin Kate all to yourself forever, Garrett!"

"Hallelujah!" he exclaimed. Cousin Garrett does love a challenge.

*Edward*

## APPROPRIATING FRED

When Fred arrived in Denali, he crept around the coven house without announcing himself, much as he had done when he first visited our house. Carlisle had called Tanya to inform her that Fred would be visiting, but he gave her no particular time frame, so Fred was not discovered immediately.

Eleazar was the first to notice Fred's presence. With his ability to recognize the talents other vampires possess, he began to sense that a powerful shield was operating nearby. At first, he attributed the force field to Kate, who had been working continually to extend the range and strength of her shield since the Volturi's attack on her sister had left her feeling aggrieved and vulnerable.

Once Eleazar determined that it was not Kate's shield he was sensing, but a second one, he recalled Carlisle's comment that the vampire Fred had an "interesting" talent, which he had declined to identify, leaving Eleazar to discover it for himself. Eleazar had never met a vampire with an invisibility shield and was impressed by its effectiveness. He called out to the visitor.

"Hello! Might you be a friend of Carlisle Cullen? Is your name Fred?"

Knowing he had been found out, Fred lowered his shield and allowed Eleazar to approach him. As Eleazar tells it, he then had to play twenty questions to verify who Fred was and what his intentions were in visiting. Carmen, always warmly welcoming, coaxed him to come inside where Eleazar introduced him to the rest of coven.

Eleazar said that Fred was wary, but the women couldn't keep their eyes off his blonde hair, chiseled face, and broad shoulders. He stood, awkwardly silent, as they scrutinized him and tried to make conversation. When he got too uncomfortable, Fred raised his shield and became invisible, though he continued to respond to direct questions. Everyone was in awe.

Fred began to hang around the Denali's house during the day, though often hiding behind his shield so that Eleazar was the only one who knew for sure when he was there and when he wasn't. He was intrigued enough to remain nearby, but living with the group was too difficult, not only because of his character quirk, but also because his first experience with coven life had been so nightmarish.

Once Fred became tolerably comfortable with the Denalis, Eleazar began telling him of our history, of the Volturi, and of other vampires who have talents both similar to, and different from, his. Eleazar tested the limits of Fred's shield and encouraged him to practice extending it as Bella learned to do.

Eleazar was greatly amused when Fred demonstrated the first manifestation of his talent—the stink shield. Eleazar also marveled at Fred’s ability to make others forget that they had seen him or that he had ever been present. The latter was a subtle effect but, as Eleazar told him, would be extremely powerful in helping him to avoid capture by the Volturi. Eleazar told Carlisle later that Fred was one of the most gifted vampires he had ever met, a savant. Right up there in Alice’s league.

True to her nature of chasing those who can’t be caught, Tanya grew enamored of Fred. She began following him when he left the coven house, inviting herself to tag along wherever he was going. Fred froze into immobility every time she approached, but she was so attracted to him that his reticence and lack of positive response didn’t deter her. (In fact, that was probably part of the attraction.)

When Tanya sets her sights on something she wants, she can be relentless. In Fred’s case, she believed that persistence would bring him around. After a time, she escalated her attentions from chatting and shadowing him, to touching his shoulder flirtatiously, giving him pecks on the cheek, and frequently crowding his personal space.

Tanya’s attentions could not have been completely unwelcome, because Fred didn’t purposefully hide from her or cause her to forget he was around, which he could have done at any time. Tanya never would have found him if he hadn’t wanted to be found. Though he might have appeared unenthusiastic, his behavior was actually receptive—for Fred.

Fred was three years older than me when Victoria changed him, a crucial developmental difference between us given the social conservatism of my time. Even if he had never gained experience with the opposite sex, Fred was old enough to have developed sexual desires and he was capable of being attracted to Tanya as a beautiful and available female. Her pursuit may have resonated with him in a way that it never did with me.

Tanya’s breakthrough with Fred occurred on a hunting trip. As she had done with me, Tanya offered Fred the intriguing possibility of locating polar bears. She assured him that it was the best-tasting blood a vegetarian could drink.

“I like pussycats,” was Fred’s reply.

Tanya looked at him curiously. As Eleazar had hinted to Carlisle in a phone conversation, Tanya construed Fred’s natural taciturnity as depth. In truth, Fred is as straightforward and literal as a punch to the nose. When he says, “I like pussycats,” that’s exactly what he means—no more, no less.

After a long journey and a successful polar bear hunt, Fred and Tanya began the trek back to the coven house. Along the way, Tanya paused at the same granite outcropping where she and I had stopped and asked Fred to sit with her. I don't doubt that Fred wondered why since he's no conversationalist and neither of them had a need to rest.

"I've grown quite fond of you, Fred," Tanya said as they sat together on a boulder.

How does a mildly autistic vampire respond to a comment like that? He raises his shield. (Not his stink shield because he doesn't want to drive Tanya away. He merely wants to hide.)

"Stop that, Fred," Tanya scolded. "You're gorgeous and I want to look at you."

Fred reappears, but fades in and out as his discomfort waxes and wanes. Tanya scoots close to him and wraps her arm around his waist. He freezes into a column of ice. A human with Asperger's Syndrome normally doesn't respond well to direct physical contact and our experience with Fred tells us that, as a vampire, that trait is solidified.

I can guess his thoughts...*Why is she touching me? I hate this. Should I pull away? Repel her?*

"Fred," Tanya coaxed, "look at me."

Fred turns his head stiffly and Tanya leans in to kiss him on the lips, an invitation rather than an exploration. Fred does not kiss back, but neither does he turn away. He stares at her face, trying to understand her motivation, which is a complete mystery to him. Fred has not kissed a woman since he became a vampire and doesn't remember ever being kissed as a human.

"Don't you want to kiss me?" she asks.

"Why?" Fred asks in turn. It's not a coy response. He is actually curious.

"Because I like you. Do you like me, Fred?"

"You're very pretty. I like your hair." Not exactly a rousing statement of overwhelming passion, but that's about the extent of Fred's capacity for such things.

Not one to be put off easily when pursuing a man, Tanya runs her fingers through Fred's blonde hair. "I like yours too. Kiss me, Fred."

Fred doesn't move, but he doesn't turn away either and so Tanya takes the lead. She presses her lips to his and this time he isn't quite as unresponsive, but he's clearly uncertain about his role and whether he even likes this sort of touching.

"Fred, you've never had a woman, have you?"

Fred stares at her.

“A girlfriend,” Tanya clarifies.

“Oh.” Now he gets it. “No. I had a friend named Bree.”

“Did you ever kiss Bree?”

“No. She liked Diego.”

“Do you want to kiss me?”

Fred’s not sure, but he does want to touch her hair and so he does.

“Such an unusual color.”

“It’s called strawberry blonde.”

“It’s pretty.”

“I’m going to teach you how to kiss a woman, Fred. Follow along and do what I do. I promise you will enjoy yourself.”

Fred doesn’t agree or disagree, but when Tanya touches her lips to his for the third time, he hesitantly responds.

“Open your lips to me, Fred,” she tells him and though he wants to ask “Why?” she doesn’t give him a chance. She merely demonstrates the pleasant sensation of passing breath between them.

Fred is not stupid, nor is he ignorant about the mechanics of physical intimacy...up to a point. He grew up watching television and going to movies like any other kid, and though he preferred animation and action movies over “relationship” films, he’s seen couples kiss, fall into bed together, and even simulate sex. More than likely, Fred became curious enough about such things to look up the details in a book. Or perhaps the mechanics of sex were taught in high school. However he was exposed, he was not ignorant in theory, only in practice. As a vampire, he was locked into a state of vague physical longing without any comprehension of an outlet for it.

As a human, even an autistic human if he could tolerate touch at all, Fred naturally would have figured out that the rush of blood between his legs in response to certain stimuli was a sensation to be encouraged. Eventually, he would have pursued it to its natural conclusion. He would have made the neural connection between love, sexual arousal, and consummation.

If a vampire doesn't already have that connection at the time he is created, though, it is not a straightforward process to gain it afterwards. That's one reason why so many vampires live out their existence alone, as nomads.

Sensing that touching Fred was not the most effective way to get into his trousers, Tanya took the opposite route. She disrobed and encouraged him to touch each beautiful part of her until the pleasure of doing so began to sear itself into Fred's consciousness. It was a step-by-step process and one step did not lead naturally to the next. I don't know at what point Fred's knowledge of human intimacy and the physical reality of his vampire body finally collided to create that "Ah ha!" experience which changed him irrevocably, but by the time Tanya had coerced his clothing off and given him the visceral experience of intimate touch, the connection was made.

Over the centuries, Tanya and her sisters had many sexual partners, but their experience, like Johan's, is an aberration among vampires. Because they remained isolated from our kind for so long, they had loved only humans and never experienced the eternal bonding that occurs between vampire lovers. So while Tanya took Fred's virginity, he also took hers in a way. Having lead Fred from innocence to the searing, boundless sexuality of a vampire, Tanya was changed.

I couldn't be happier for her. Perhaps her affinity for virgins had a purpose. Maybe finding one of her own to lead and teach is what she required to attain an eternal bond. Likewise, only someone as pushy and persistent as Tanya ever could have broken through Fred's wall of social isolation.

*Edward*

## ROSALIE'S NEW DREAM

“Rosalie, you must stop this immediately!” I shouted at her one day when I’d finally had enough of her secret, scheming thoughts.

“What?” She gave me the innocent act.

“My daughter was not put on this earth to be your incubator!”

That’s what her thoughts amounted to. She’d concocted a new plan to get herself a baby. Not only is it a disturbing idea, but it is far too premature even if it weren’t so very wrong.

Sure, Renesmee is engaged to Jacob and her mother and I hope they might have children someday. Carlisle doesn’t see why not. Their gene count and structure is the same, though that isn’t necessarily required for reproductive compatibility. Regardless, the two of them have years to worry about such things. They are both young, especially Nessie, and as her father, I believe that she should be allowed just to live her life for a while.

Renesmee has spent the five-and-a-half years of her existence growing and changing so rapidly that none of us—especially her—has had time to take a breath. We watched her evolve every day into a new person. Even with our advanced brain structure, absorbing the constant flux has been difficult. Renesmee’s mind continues to grow, of course, but we believe that her body has reached maturity. With that change comes the chance for her to start experiencing the outside world as the rest of us do, something we had to be extraordinarily careful about when she was changing so fast...supernaturally fast.

Now Rosalie wants to turn my daughter into a baby-making machine. She hasn’t brought up the subject with Emmett yet, so it’s up to me to nip this notion in the bud before it has a chance to blossom. At the very least, I must convince her to keep the idea to herself for another decade...or two, or three, or ten. By then, Jacob and Renesmee perhaps will have tried for a child and we’ll know a lot more about whether Renesmee’s body is capable. For all we know, the fertilization of a half-vampire’s ovum with a werewolf’s sperm could produce an abomination, or something that can’t survive, or nothing at all. Though Nessie is not a full vampire, the Quileute have always believed that vampire venom is poisonous to their clan. What if Renesmee’s body poisons a werewolf fetus? What if she miscarries? If Renesmee suffers any trauma at all from trying to have children, then Rosalie’s crazy idea must never reach my daughter’s ears.

Rose wants Carlisle to, at a minimum, inject Emmett’s semen into my half-vampire, half-human child and if that doesn’t create a pregnancy, then to combine his sperm with Renesmee’s eggs in a petri dish and re-implant a fertilized egg into Nessie’s womb. Talk about the cutting edge of

science! Considering it from that point of view, Carlisle is likely to be excited about the idea, though of course he would never do anything that might harm Renesmee in any way.

When it comes right down to it, only Renesmee herself could ever decide to grant Rosalie's request and she is way too young to be forced even to think about such a thing! Still, I don't know how I can keep Rose from approaching her and thus putting the burden of her happiness on my daughter's shoulders. It would be utterly unfair to Nessie. Rosalie has never been known for her patience or her selflessness, though.

I might have to enlist Emmett's help to keep Rosalie quiet. As of now, my brother doesn't know what's going on in that pretty little head of hers and though I hate to spread the word any further, Emmett is the only person who can control his wife to any degree at all.

To be fair, other than the "ick" factor of having my brother impregnate my daughter (and all the complications that implies, such as my grandchild also being my niece or nephew), surrogate birthing is not an evil thing. I can see how it could be the ultimate gift from one woman to another. However, pregnancy is a life-endangering process, as I well know, and any such gift should be given completely free of coercion. For all I know, Renesmee might not even *want* to have children. Though the family assumes she does, I doubt if anyone has asked her directly. We've always spent so much effort trying to keep up with Renesmee's latest developmental milestone that asking her about her future in any serious way...well, we don't get around to that too often. My mind can barely grasp the fact that she's old enough to get married.

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So...I decided I had to talk to Emmett before Rosalie went off half-cocked and put her wishes—coming from her, they're likely to seem more like demands—on the table. I spoke with Bella first, of course, and initially she was appalled by Rosalie's latest scheme to acquire a child. After she got past that immediate reaction, though, she felt a certain empathy for Rosalie who, after all, was Bella's primary ally in maintaining her deadly pregnancy.

Before Renesmee was born, none of us would have guessed that Rosalie could be a wonderful mother, but she proved it then. Mothering my daughter insofar as she did made Rose a much more tolerable person. It softened her somehow. Now that I think about it, what child wouldn't want Emmett for a father? He could hardly be more suited to the role.

The trouble is...who's to say that carrying a three-quarter-vampire fetus wouldn't kill its half-vampire mother? In size, Renesmee looks no bigger than Bella did when she conceived and Renesmee's growth tore her body apart. We have the advantage now of knowing how to nourish a part-vampire child in the womb, though this child still would be unique and therefore,

unpredictable. For all we know, it might devour its mother from the inside as it gestates! The possibility of my daughter being harmed in any way puts me firmly in the camp of “No! Never! I won’t allow it!” Bella, though, has carried a child in her womb and she sees things differently than me.

But back to Emmett...he and I went for a run together and I let him in on Rosalie’s scheme. Perhaps I should have let Rose tell him herself, but I figured that once she told him, she’d have fewer qualms about telling everyone.

At first, my brother was nonplussed. He’s never considered fatherhood a possibility, so hasn’t examined how he might feel about it. But as the idea sank in, I saw a light come into his eyes when he realized he potentially could have a son or daughter, flesh of his flesh. Emmett tried to conceal his growing enthusiasm after I pointed out that we were talking about his impregnating my daughter, his niece, but he’s an utter failure at hiding his thoughts from me. Except for the “ick” factor, the idea *thrilled* him.

“Emmett,” I said, “you’ve got to see how bringing this up with Renesmee is unfair to her, right? Putting pressure on her to bear a child for someone else. Not to mention that doing so could kill her!”

Emmett sobered at the realization. We’d all been traumatized by Bella’s pregnancy and none of us, except for maybe Rosalie, would want Renesmee to risk going through the same thing.

“You’ll talk to Rose, won’t you? And explain that it’s unfair to ask Renesmee for this before she’s even tried having her own kids?”

Emmett remained silent while he sorted through all the implications.

I went on. “It’s possible that Renesmee would feel obliged to say ‘yes’ simply because Rose is her godmother and she loves her and feels grateful to her. Maybe in fifty or a hundred years she could consider giving Rose such a gift, but not now, not at her young age. All I’m asking is that you talk to Rose and tell her to keep it to herself for now. Let my daughter live this part of her life unencumbered by that constant pressure. And by the way, I can’t see Jacob *ever* agreeing to such a thing, so why even put the idea in Nessie’s head?”

In Emmett’s mind, I saw persistent images of throwing a football to his son, teaching him how to wrestle and hunt, having someone to play with every day. It appealed to him a great deal.

“I see your point, Bro,” he managed to say. “It’s an awful lot to ask of anyone and she’s still a kid, really.” He went quiet again and to my dismay I heard his mind start down the “me have sex with Renesmee?” trail and how weird that would be and could he even handle it?

“No, no, no, Emmett! Don’t even *think* of my daughter that way or I’ll knock you into the next county and then let Jacob and Rosalie take their turns! You wouldn’t have sex with her! We’re talking about artificial insemination. You’d have to collect semen.”

Emmett couldn’t hide his profound relief and, for maybe the first time in his life, he could find no humor whatsoever in a conversation about sex and reproduction. He had no jokes, offered no sexual innuendo, and didn’t even crack a suggestive smile. He just walked away, flummoxed, his mind reeling with the possibilities, the risk, the potential changes to his and Rose’s future.

Emmett never answered my question about whether he’d tell Rose to keep it between them for a couple hundred years. I think he’ll come around and do the right thing, but that remains to be seen.

*Edward*

## THE WHEEL TURNS

Leah Clearwater suffered a great deal almost from the moment my family arrived in Forks, though we had no idea the kind of ripples our presence was creating in the fabric of the Quileute community. Responding to an ancient call of survival, the tribe's dormant shapeshifting gene awakened, prompting young people to morph without warning from human beings into wolves, with all of the inherent consequences of such a mind-bending transformation.

Sam Uley was the first to suffer from the effects of this alteration and, though no one ever acknowledged it directly, Leah Clearwater was the second. Forbidden to know what was happening to her love, who simply disappeared with no notice and no explanation, she was left to agonize and to doubt both him and herself. Then she lost him altogether to the magic of imprinting when his devotion transferred instantly and irrevocably to another woman—her cousin and close friend, Emily Young.

As time went on and the tribe's teenage boys one by one began to change and form an exclusive clan, Leah found herself living the nightmare of the transformation herself, becoming the first female werewolf in the known history of the Quileute tribe. No one knew that, as such, she would be forced to choose between her blood-born duty to protect her tribe from its mortal enemies and her hopes of one day becoming a mother.

Losing Sam was the first of many losses for Leah. She lost her father, who died as a result of the invasion of vampires my family unwittingly drew to Forks. She lost her friend, Jacob, to his pining for a girl whom Leah felt was unworthy of him, and she saw her brother, Seth, form a friendship with the filthy bloodsucker who had stolen Jacob's girl.

To escape the misery of her membership in Sam's pack and being privy to his innermost thoughts, which centered on Emily, Leah defected with her brother to Jacob's pack, a move which forced her to protect the vampires she despised from members of her own tribe. When Jacob subsequently imprinted on my half-vampire daughter, Leah was compelled to defend a child she believed to be an abomination.

Leah's world had become untenable to her in so many ways that she wanted nothing more than to escape the devastation of her existence on the Quileute reservation. As a dutiful tribe member, however, she stood as Jacob's second when the Quileute wolves defended my daughter and my family from a foreign vampire threat.

After the dust of the averted battle had settled with only one life lost, Leah was dealt a final blow when Sam and Emily found they were expecting a baby. The news spread quickly

through Sam's pack, then Jacob's pack, and then through the tribe at large. It was simply too much for Leah to bear and so she took a page from Jacob's book of heartbreak and ran away.

Just as Jacob did when Bella and I became engaged, Leah submerged her human soul inside her wolf's body to blunt the pain of knowing another woman carried her true love's child. Emily's happy condition brought home to Leah with distressing clarity the fact that she would not experience such an event herself, having become sterile for all intents and purposes since transforming into a werewolf. Unlike the other wolves, all of whom were male and fertile, Leah was a genetic dead-end, yet one more sorrow for her to bear.

Leah disappeared shortly after our great standoff against the Volturi. Not wanting to cope with her mother's supplications to stay, Leah phased and took off without telling anyone, taking comfort in living as a lone wolf, and losing track of place and time. Images I saw in her mind later were of snow-covered mountains and glaciers along a great cold sea, from which I inferred that she went to the northernmost reaches of Canada near the Arctic Circle.

Despite the turmoil Leah had brought to both Quileute wolf packs in the past, she was missed. Jacob had become reliant upon her as his second, especially after he imprinted on Renesmee and his attention was focused so much on her. Seth was lonely for his bossy, nagging sister, though he didn't like to admit it. Sue missed her daughter terribly, which caused Charlie to miss her by proxy. Sam and Emily regretted Leah's departure as well, for they had hoped to enlist Leah and Jacob as their baby's godparents.

Month after month passed with no word from Leah, much to Sue's dismay. Many of us wondered whether she would ever return. Then, after almost a year of silence, Leah's thoughts broke into the pack mind and news of her impending arrival flashed through Jacob's pack like wildfire.

*Leah's back!*

I heard the silent cry that Seth, Embry, and Quil issued simultaneously from our yard. As it happened, Jacob had come inside the house to collect Renesmee for a forest outing.

"You'd better go talk to Embry, Jacob," I told him as Seth's yelp of delight floated through the air. "The pack has news." I couldn't help but smile at the wolves' unexpected enthusiasm.

"I'll be right back, sweetheart," Jacob said to my daughter, as he raced out our front door.

My family looked to me for an explanation. "Leah's coming home," I told them.

“How wonderful,” Esme exclaimed, clapping her palms together, though no one else expressed much excitement over the news. Renesmee padded to the sidelight window by the front door to see what she could see.

We all heard the rumbling and yipping as Jacob’s pack conferred before Jacob sent Seth and Quil to meet Leah and run her in. Ten minutes later, I saw through Seth’s eyes as Leah skidded to a stop in a forest clearing where they waited for her.

Leah had never been anyone’s favorite wolf, but she was still Jacob’s second-in-command and the pack was glad to have her back. The two halves of Jake’s pack, though separated, simultaneously raised their noses toward the sky and sent happy howls singing through the trees. Renesmee raised her nose along with them and attempted her own wolf howl, whose high, tinny pitch made all of us laugh.

Sam dispatched Colin and Evan (one of the younger wolf additions) to locate Jacob’s pack and find out what the fuss was all about. When the two met Jake in our yard, the news of Leah’s return raced through the second pack mind and Sam sent Paul to inform Sue Clearwater and Billy Black.

The rest of the story I saw later through Seth’s eyes and by all indications, it was powerful. After catching up on the pack news and tolerating the pack’s solicitous attention as well as my own family’s welcome back greetings, Leah went home with Seth to see her mother. So unused to living as a human among humans, Leah was incredibly awkward at first, speaking in single syllables and using strange physical gestures to communicate.

The morning after Leah’s return, Sam and Emily ventured to Sue’s house to welcome her back and to introduce her to their son, not something Leah was anticipating with any pleasure and would have preferred to put off. Though her feelings had mellowed some during her time away, she remained painfully envious of Emily’s good fortune.

Seth answered the visitors’ knock on the Clearwaters’ front door and Leah wandered into the living room to see who was there.

“Leah!” Emily greeted her quietly, but with great enthusiasm. “It’s wonderful to see you.” Emily rushed toward her and threw one arm around Leah’s reluctant shoulder, a sideways hug necessitated by the large bundle strapped to the front of Emily’s body. Leah avoided looking at the offensive, blanketed bulge.

“Yes, Leah, we’re glad to have you back,” Sam added, though he did not move to hug his former girlfriend. “I hope you’re planning to stay?”

Leah, as yet undecided, merely shrugged.

“You must meet Fenix!” Emily said as she pulled aside the cloth that sheltered the baby from the winter’s chill. He was sleeping, which at four months old and born six weeks prematurely, was his primary occupation.

No doubt with pain and dread in her heart, Leah prepared herself to feign happiness for Emily. This child would have been hers and Sam’s if her life had proceeded according to her dreams. She stood, waiting, as Emily pulled aside the cloth covering Fenix’s head and Sue and Seth gathered close by. The swaddled, copper-skinned infant yawned and opened his large black eyes, fixing them clearly on Leah’s face. One short moment later, everyone in the room knew that Leah would never be the same.

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It’s almost funny now to remember the old Leah before she imprinted on Fenix William Uley. As much as she had mocked and derided Jacob for his overzealous attachment to our Renesmee, Leah is at least as fanatical about Fenix. She is protective of him, cleaves to him, and is as annoying to Sam in her presumed ownership of his son as Jacob ever was to Bella and me.

How the wheel of life comes around! Where once Emily felt badly knowing that she had caused Leah’s deep unhappiness, she now finds herself constantly aggravated by Leah’s perpetual presence and interference in the raising of her child. Bella felt the same way when she awoke from her vampire transformation to find that she was sharing “ownership” of Renesmee with Jacob. How hard it was for her in the beginning, knowing that from her daughter’s first day in the world, she belonged to Jacob as much as to her parents! The same is now true for Emily—Fenix is as much Leah’s concern as he is his mother’s.

It is an ironic and amusing twist of fate to see the much more pleasant version of Leah enthralled with the object of her imprinting. She remains as fierce as ever, as loyal and as devoted, but the subject of her dedication has changed forever. More importantly, she is no longer bitter and no more brokenhearted.

*Edward*

## WOMANLY WILES

Given the purpose of my diary—a release valve, of sorts, for all the personal information I glean every day from the minds around me—I've not had much reason to write about Bella's father, because I have never been very successful at reading Charlie's mind. He is the source of the mental silence which initially spurred my interest in his daughter (a fact that might distress him, given the way everything has turned out). In truth, his quiet mind has prevented me from knowing much more about Charlie than any observant human could discover.

One thing I do know about him is that he loves fiercely and, perhaps because a human heart can contain only so much, he loves parsimoniously, having had only two major attachments for most of his life. Charlie's love for his daughter is the paternal equivalent of my overarching ardor for her and he once loved his wife, Renee, in much the same way. After Renee left him, those who knew Charlie well thought he might never love again. It wasn't until nearly twenty years had passed that they were proven wrong when his feelings for a dear friend evolved into something more.

The romance between Charlie and Sue Clearwater began slowly. Charlie stood by her after Harry's death and, based on what Bella has told me, grieved nearly as intensely as she did at the loss of her husband, his best friend. The mutual comfort they derived from one another also supported them through the trials of single parenting. Sue had some unspecified difficulty with her children after their father died and Charlie was facing the return of his daughter's wholly unsuitable beau. The two of them, drawn together by trial and kept close by shared concerns, eventually could not ignore the feelings that began developing between them.

Perhaps because Sue and Charlie's first foray across the gulf separating friendship and love was such an emotional event for Charlie, I saw his memory of their first awkward kiss. Though I never shared the news with Bella, I was aware that their relationship progressed rather quickly after that. By then, Sue had become a regular visitor at the Cullen home and, unlike Charlie's, her mind was as transparent as glass.

In a show of solidarity and with a misguided notion of protecting Charlie, Sue began accompanying him when he came to our house to visit Bella and Renesmee. Though her aversion to vampires has never changed, Sue's wariness of my family faded somewhat upon repeated exposure. As her extreme vigilance lessened, her mind would wander from the danger we represented to more personal matters, which, much to my surprise, included schemes for getting Charlie Swan into her bed.

Even after she had won his heart and they had shared more than a few kisses, Charlie was not ready to allow Sue access to his body. He was cautious and shy, but she was barely forty

years old, in her sexual prime, and she was eager to make love with the man she had grown to love.

During that time, I often had to disguise a chortle as a cough when I caught glimpses of Sue's inventive household "emergencies"—locking herself out of the house, hearing strange sounds in the attic, getting stranded by a dead battery or flat tire—and Charlie's obliviousness to their true meaning. After many fruitless attempts, Sue finally found success by conjuring up a prowler late on a Saturday night.

"Make sure all your doors and windows are locked. I'm on my way!" Charlie bellowed into the phone at 1:00 a.m., only two short hours after he had left her frustrated, unfulfilled, and fully clothed at her door.

It's curious that Charlie—a veteran police officer—didn't question why his Quileute lady alerted him rather than the tribal police who were closer at hand, or why she didn't call Billy Black, who could have summoned local assistance at a moment's notice. Perhaps his subconscious mind knew the true nature of Sue's distress, for he didn't alert them either. Instead, he assumed responsibility for the call and, in a testosterone-fueled charge, made the fifteen-minute drive to the reservation in seven minutes flat, disturbing citizens along the way with his police siren and flashing lights.

Charlie pulled up to Sue's house quietly, lights off, possibly hoping to surprise the sorry so-and-so who had frightened the woman he'd vowed to protect. He opened door of the cruiser, using it as a shield against danger, as he scanned the area, gun drawn. Sue watched him through a crack in the window curtain, his display of masculinity fuel to her flame. Charlie crouched slightly, both arms extended in a sweep of the property before he made his way to her front door and knocked.

"Sue, it's me. Are you okay?" he called.

The door opened partway and Charlie found Sue Clearwater—an utterly competent woman, a tribal elder, a skilled deer and rabbit hunter, comfortable with a rifle or shotgun—dressed in (desperately?) skimpy nightclothes, wearing a frightened expression.

Charlie's eyes widened at the short, silky robe she'd tied carefully around her waist, just loose enough to gap across the top of her breasts and reveal the provocative valley between them. The thin fabric clung to her peaked brown nipples, gone erect from the night's chill breeze and this man's gaze. Charlie had to tear his eyes away from her to concentrate on the task at hand.

“I’m going to walk the property. You stay inside with the door locked until I come back,” he ordered in a husky voice.

Charlie pulled a long-handled flashlight from his belt and left the porch to creep around the corner of the house, aiming the light beam into the darkness and balancing his service weapon over his wrist.

Sue waited behind the door, breathing much too fast, but not out of fear. She hadn’t missed Charlie’s appreciation for the feminine assets she was so shamelessly displaying. She was frustrated beyond shame after months of closeness, growing desire, and abortive attempts at intimacy, with only a few fleeting kisses to show for it.

If Charlie had any idea that the emergency call was a ruse, he gave no indication of it. Having failed to notify the tribal authorities, he was acting less like a police chief and more like a man, but a man in his element who was determined to protect the woman he was growing to love in the best way he knew how.

After Charlie swept the property and found no suspicious footprints beneath Sue’s windows and no evidence of a prowler, he returned to her front door and tapped his knuckles against it.

“All clear, Sue.”

She opened the door and stepped to the side in an unspoken invitation.

“Thank you for coming, Charlie,” Sue said. “I was scared being alone. Leah and Seth are off this weekend with their friends.” Sue didn’t say “on patrol with the pack” and Charlie didn’t ask. He’d seen Jacob morph into a wolf and through observation and a few carefully worded questions had guessed that Sue’s kids harbored the same magic, though he avoided thinking about what it might mean.

“Sure thing, Sue. I would have been upset if you hadn’t called me.”

“Can you stay for a little while until I calm down? I’ll get you some coffee.”

“I wouldn’t think of leaving you alone with a possible prowler around,” Charlie answered, laying his service weapon on an end table and dropping heavily onto the couch.

Sue brought him a piece of lemon pound cake she’d made especially for him and the promised coffee, and sat down beside him. If he wondered why she hadn’t covered herself

more thoroughly, he didn't ask. Instead, he tried to direct his gaze away from her full breasts and long, slim legs as she folded them next to her body.

She saw his flushed face and restless eyes and knew he wasn't immune, but Charlie, self-conscious and out of practice as he was, didn't make his move. I can see him sipping at his drink and nibbling at the cake, stretching the moments while his stomach churned with indecision.

"I'll sleep on your couch tonight, so you won't be alone," he offered, his face flushing red.

After a pause filled with the cacophony of unspoken words, Sue responded softly, "I wish you wouldn't, Charlie."

Her response startled him and he looked at her, not comprehending. Then unable to help himself, he lowered his eyes to her cinnamon-colored cleavage.

Herself a woman of few words, Sue took his hand from where it gripped his thigh and pressed it against one barely covered breast, holding it to her while she gazed into his eye. It was a blatant signal not even Charlie could misread and he yielded to her direction with the one hand and then the other, allowing himself to cradle both her breasts in his hands.

When Sue leaned in to kiss him, he yielded to that too and his high walls began to crumble. The lover in him, unleashed at last, pulled Sue against the sheltering strength of his chest and kissed her in a whole new way, the pent up passion of years sparking and catching fire. Sue deftly loosened the tie that held her robe together and it fell away, revealing her full breasts, her slim, flat stomach, and the lacy underpants she'd recently purchased from the Victoria's Secret catalog. With a huge intake of breath, Charlie raked his eyes over her body, laid bare for him alone, and pushed her down on the couch. He stretched over her, fully clothed, boots, gun belt, and all

Sue relives that night over and over as she sits quietly at Charlie's side in the Cullen living room. Everyone assumes that she's scrutinizing the vampires, preparing to leap into action should we suddenly threaten her Charlie. She's doing that too, but sooner or later her mind starts to wander and images of the first time she and Charlie made love begin rolling through her mind where only I can see.

At these times, I'm often surprised that my family doesn't notice the light twinkling in her black eyes or react to the warm flush of blood that steals across her cheeks. We are more restrained than humans ever know.

*Edward*



## WHITER SHADE OF PALE

Alice came back suddenly, dropping me into the present in a state of shock. She'd gone into one of her trances while sitting at her computer. Nobody else had noticed for a time, though I recognized it immediately from where I stood by the dining room window watching Renesmee try to teach Jacob to waltz while his pack dozed nearby.

The vision that had fogged Alice's eyes and transformed her into a marble statue caught me unawares and I froze in rapt attention, unable to tear myself away. The image gelled in my mind... Renesmee in a white peasant-style gown reminiscent of the 1960s with an elaborate halo of yellow daisies and baby's breath in her hair. The Cullens and our extended family, including Tanya's expanded coven with the additions of Fred and Garrett, were gathered somewhere in the Olympic Forest along with the entire Quileute nation and Charlie Swan. I gazed in wonderment at my beautiful daughter whose hand I held as we paced down a path of evergreen needles between colossal trees painted with lime-colored moss.

Rosalie, Jacob, and Billy stood facing us with Emmett and Sam behind them. Rose wore a pale yellow gown that matched the vests Emmett and I wore beneath our charcoal-gray suits. Sam and Billy wore traditional Quileute attire—black leggings, tunics, and red and black capes decorated with white buttons arranged in the shapes of primitive whales, eagles, and salmon.

Jacob wore black leggings and an appliqued vest with a deep "V" neckline and no sides, which exposed more of his smooth cinnamon-colored skin than it covered. A blood-red sash wrapped around his waist and a woven headdress fashioned from cedar bark and raven feathers sat low on his forehead like a crown.

As my daughter and I approached the group, Emmett and Sam spread a double-width cape behind Jacob's back, and I directed Renesmee to the empty space beside the groom. Sam and Emmett then laid the garment ceremoniously over the couple's shoulders and tied it together in the front. When Jacob and Renesmee turned to approach an altar made from woven tree branches and covered in flowers, the back of the cape flowed behind them, revealing an intricately embroidered wolf and doe flanking one another—a marriage blanket.

Tribe members formed a circle around the gathering and soft drumbeats I hadn't noticed before increased in volume, the primal rhythm elaborated by voices singing in a native tongue. I saw myself turn and join my wife where she sat in a gold-colored gown atop a bench intricately carved from a cedar log.

When the singing and drumming stopped, Sam delivered a Quileute prayer and emotion swept through me as I realized I had just relinquished my daughter to her chosen husband. Bella and I had had her for such a brief time and never to ourselves, for Jacob had been there from the day

of her birth laying his own claim to her. I saw myself wrap my arm around Bella when her shoulders began to shake, imagining how it must feel to give her daughter to a man she herself had once loved. Then it occurred to me that if it weren't for me, Bella likely would be standing where our daughter stood and the surrounding guests would look very different.

Alice's vision abruptly shifted and I recoiled instantly from the sound of piercing screams. It was my daughter's voice, distorted into an impossibly high register by what could only be excruciating pain. My legs flexed to thrust me forward and my arms stretched to annihilate whoever was hurting her. The horrific noise seared my consciousness and urged me to action inside this whisper of a dream that wasn't even mine.

Did I really want to know? Could I survive even a moment of the catastrophe in Alice's mind? But like a moth to flame, I couldn't even look away, much less flee from this disturbing, riveting prophecy. Drawn against my will, I followed Alice's eyes to a little white house with a wide front porch that sat nestled amongst ancient evergreen trees. Behind it was a long metal shed which, if instinct served, would house an engine repair shop.

Suddenly, Jacob slammed through the front door and raced into the trees where he bent and emptied the contents of his stomach into the forest duff. With a sense of dread, I followed the vision into a darkened room where my father stood at the foot of a hand-carved bed. I saw my daughter's copper curls spread across white cotton sheets, her naturally pale face now faded to the color of the bleached cloth upon which she lay. I knew what this was.

My body, which still stood at my parents' dining room window, fists tightly clenched, detected a touch.

"Edward, darling son, what's wrong?"

My eyes cleared and I found my mother standing beside me with her hand against my back. Across the room, Alice remained inert, though Jasper now stood behind her, his body curved protectively around hers. Rosalie was there, her eyes darting nervously between Alice and me, worried how the vision would affect her.

Bella was not home. She needed to hunt more often than the rest of us, so often joined whomever was going, in this case, Carlisle and Emmett. Renesmee might have gone too, but had elected to spend the day with Jacob.

"What's happening, dear heart? Can you tell me?"

I heard the ring of concern in my mother's voice, but I could not respond to her, drawn as I was...relentlessly, inexorably...to the room where my daughter lay suffering, possibly dying. With a groan that sounded like a scream, I broke from my mother's half embrace.

“Not now...” I managed to reply before dashing out the back door and into the woods as Jacob had done in Alice’s mind. How I wished I could bury what I was seeing and all its concomitant pain deep within the earth!

In the diffuse green light of the forest, I wedged my body between three closely spaced trees, hiding in the womb-like space as Alice’s wretched vision continued to unfold, she as helpless to escape it as me. Peering over my father’s shoulder, I saw Renesmee lying with her legs spread wide around a dripping pool of blood, a scene so reminiscent of Bella’s ghastly parturition. Carlisle had cut deeply into my daughter’s flesh behind where a toddler-sized head was trying to emerge. It was much too big! It was tearing her apart!

Nessie’s screams rose against the crisp “snap snap” of her breaking bones and I felt all the more hopeless knowing that my father would have done everything in his power to prevent this kind of suffering.

*Why didn’t you take it out?* I wanted to scream. *Why is she delivering this monster at all?* But inside the vision, there were no words, only agonized shrieks. I knew the answer, anyway—my daughter would make the same choice her mother had made, despite any advice to the contrary.

Huddling in my makeshift shelter, I experienced an overwhelming desire to rip Jacob Black’s head from his body. My daughter’s blood was draining from her in amounts signifying death and I sat idly by, helpless to divert any event leading to this conclusion. My daughter would die merely because she’d been born in proximity to genetic freaks who would extend their bloodlines at any cost! I didn’t pause to consider the irony of my feelings or the inconvenient revelation of how Jacob must have suffered during Bella’s pregnancy. The desire to murder him and all his kind outweighed everything else.

Caught in the torture of knowledge, I slowly became aware of drumbeats in the near distance and knew instinctively it was the cadence of a death watch. The natives were ushering the soul of my daughter to the place from whence it came. More important to them, however, was the soul that lay in the balance, a future tribal chief. Song rose into the air, a mournful sound that took the rhythm of a heartbeat. I could hear the living hearts around me align themselves to the slow beat designed to create calm in a circumstance laden with stress.

It was a horrendous repetition of my wife’s demise, this wrenching of my daughter’s body in that little white house. I was held in torturous thrall, cowering in the dirt with my arms wrapped around my torso, utterly incapable of movement.

*Will she die? Can she die?* We didn't really know. Nahuel had lived for one hundred fifty years, but that was no proof he was immortal. There might be a reason why Joham's children were the only half vampire/half-humans we'd encountered. Perhaps the hybrids were not immortal.

*Can we change her?* I wondered desperately in my distress. *We have to change her!* But I also knew that changing Renesmee might kill her. Even worse than watching this disaster play out in front of me was not knowing how we had gotten to this place or what Carlisle was thinking in that humble delivery room.

Abruptly, the vision changed again. It was nighttime and members of the tribe had gathered around a large bonfire—Jacob and Billy Black, Sam Uley, and Sue Clearwater taking center stage, along with old Quil Ateara. It occurred to me that the scene couldn't be too far in the future if old Quil was still alive.

This was a tribal council meeting. I recognized that much. As before, I heard no voices and could not discern the topic of discussion, but excitement filled the air and Jacob was arguing fiercely with Sam Uley. Drums beat furiously somewhere out of sight and I saw Paul and the rest of Sam's pack seated as humans on the opposite side of the fire. The drumming grew louder and I considered covering my ears, though it would do no good.

*Where is my daughter?* I wanted to shout. Why was she not there? As the wife of the tribal chief, she should be privy to council meetings. Fear gripped my gut and I badly wished to know the truth I was beginning to suspect.

Then I heard a rustling sound and watched as Jacob's pack began to emerge from the forest, Leah at point, with Seth and a slim gray wolf with dark spots—Embry Call—spread slightly outward behind her. A chocolate-colored wolf with a lighter-colored face followed Seth—young Quil—and several others unknown to me filled out the triangular formation. I watched anxiously as the triangle of wolves, eight in all, moved across the clearing and stopped, leaving a gap at the front when Leah alone approached the council.

That's when I saw it...her...a lone wolf pup one-quarter the size of the full-grown wolves surrounding her. She was solidly white, ghostly in color, but for a pair of expressive brown eyes that sat too large over her muzzle. Her paws were far too big for her spindly legs and she wore an expression of mischief that was impossible to miss. The rest of the pack stood at strict attention in respect of the council, but not the little one. She caught a glimpse of tail moving behind her and turned to snap at it, missing. She snapped at it again, missing again, and then began spinning in a tight circle, lightning-fast, chasing her own appendage, though it continued to elude her. I might have laughed when she finally caught her furry tail between her teeth and wrestled it to the ground, except at that moment, the rising moon cast a soft beam of light across the clearing and I was stunned into silence.

Still at play, surrounded by her wolf-pack guard, the pup began to glow as the ray of moonlight touched her fur, turning it into a cloud of light. I stared in fascination as the glow moved with her, washing first one then another of her caretakers with light. When she finally released her tail and held still for a moment, my keen eyes detected the cause. Each of the snowy white hairs covering her body carried a microscopically tiny, gem-like tip which reflected light like a vampire's skin. My granddaughter—the white wolf—sparkled.

*Edward*