

My mother drove me to the airport with the windows rolled down. It was seventy-five degrees in Phoenix, the sky a perfect, cloudless blue. I was wearing my favorite shirt – sleeveless, white eyelet lace; I was wearing it as a farewell gesture. My carry-on item was a parka.

In the Olympic Peninsula of northwest Washington State, a small town named Forks exists under a near-constant cover of clouds. It rains on this inconsequential town more than any other place in the United States of America. It was from this town and its gloomy, omnipresent shade that my mother escaped with me when I was only a few months old. It was in this town that I'd been compelled to spend a month every summer until I was fourteen. That was the year I finally put my foot down; these past three summers, my dad, Charlie, vacationed with me in California for two weeks instead.

It was to Forks that I now exiled myself – an action that I took with great horror. I detested Forks.

I loved Phoenix. I loved the sun and the blistering heat. I loved the vigorous, sprawling city.

“Bella,” my mom said to me – the last of a thousand times – before I got on the plane. “You don’t have to do this.”

My mom looks like me, except with short hair and laugh lines. I felt a spasm of panic as I stared at her wide, childlike eyes. How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself? Of course she had Phil now, so the bills would probably get paid, there would be food in the refrigerator, gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost, but still...

“I want to go,” I lied. I’d always been a bad liar, but I’d been saying this lie so frequently lately that it sounded almost convincing now.

“Tell Charlie I said hi.”

“I will.”

“I’ll see you soon,” she insisted. “You can come home whenever you want – I’ll come right back as soon as you need me.”

But I could see the sacrifice in her eyes behind the promise.

“Don’t worry about me,” I urged. “It’ll be great. I love you, Mom.”

She hugged me tightly for a minute, and then I got on the plane, and she was gone.

It’s a four-hour flight from Phoenix to Seattle, another hour in a small plane up to Port Angeles, and then an hour drive back down to Forks. Flying doesn’t bother me; the hour in the car with Charlie, though, I was a little worried about.

Charlie had really been fairly nice about the whole thing. He seemed genuinely pleased that I was coming to live with him for the first time with any degree of permanence. He’d already gotten me registered for high school and was going to help me get a car.

But it was sure to be awkward with Charlie. Neither of us was what anyone would call verbose, and I didn't know what there was to say regardless. I knew he was more than a little confused by my decision – like my mother before me, I hadn't made a secret of my distaste for Forks.

When I landed in Port Angeles, it was raining. I didn't see it as an omen – just unavoidable. I'd already said my goodbyes to the sun.

Charlie was waiting for me with the cruiser. This I was expecting, too. Charlie is Police Chief Swan to the good people of Forks. My primary motivation behind buying a car, despite the scarcity of my funds, was that I refused to be driven around town in a car with red and blue lights on top. Nothing slows down traffic like a cop.

Charlie gave me an awkward, one-armed hug when I stumbled my way off the plane.

"It's good to see you, Bells," he said, smiling as he automatically caught and steadied me. "You haven't changed much. How's Renée?"

"Mom's fine. It's good to see you, too, Dad." I wasn't allowed to call him Charlie to his face.

I had only a few bags. Most of my Arizona clothes were too permeable for Washington. My mom and I had pooled our resources to supplement my winter wardrobe, but it was still scanty. It all fit easily into the trunk of the cruiser.

"I found a good car for you, really cheap," he announced when we were strapped in.

"What kind of car?" I was suspicious of the way he said "good car for you" as opposed to just "good car."

"Well, it's a truck actually, a Chevy."

"Where did you find it?"

"Do you remember Billy Black down at La Push?" La Push is the tiny Indian reservation on the coast.

"No."

"He used to go fishing with us during the summer," Charlie prompted.

That would explain why I didn't remember him. I do a good job of blocking painful, unnecessary things from my memory.

"He's in a wheelchair now," Charlie continued when I didn't respond, "so he can't drive anymore, and he offered to sell me his truck cheap."

"What year is it?" I could see from his change of expression that this was the question he was hoping I wouldn't ask.

“Well, Billy’s done a lot of work on the engine – it’s only a few years old, really.”

I hoped he didn’t think so little of me as to believe I would give up that easily. “When did he buy it?”

“He bought it in 1984, I think.”

“Did he buy it new?”

“Well, no. I think it was new in the early sixties – or late fifties at the earliest,” he admitted sheepishly.

“Ch – Dad, I don’t really know anything about cars. I wouldn’t be able to fix it if anything went wrong, and I couldn’t afford a mechanic...”

“Really, Bella, the thing runs great. They don’t build them like that anymore.”

The thing, I thought to myself... it had possibilities – as a nickname, at the very least.

“How cheap is cheap?” After all, that was the part I couldn’t compromise on.

“Well, honey, I kind of already bought it for you. As a home-coming gift.” Charlie peeked sideways at me with a hopeful expression.

Wow. Free.

“You didn’t need to do that, Dad. I was going to buy myself a car.”

“I don’t mind. I want you to be happy here.” He was looking ahead at the road when he said this. Charlie wasn’t comfortable with expressing his emotions out loud. I inherited that from him. So I was looking straight ahead as I responded.

“That’s really nice, Dad. Thanks. I really appreciate it.” No need to add that my being happy in Forks is an impossibility. He didn’t need to suffer along with me. And I never looked a free truck in the mouth – or engine.

“Well, now, you’re welcome,” he mumbled, embarrassed by my thanks.

We exchanged a few more comments on the weather, which was wet, and that was pretty much it for conversation. We stared out the windows in silence.

It was beautiful, of course; I couldn’t deny that. Everything was green: the trees, their trunks covered with moss, their branches hanging with a canopy of it, the ground covered with ferns. Even the air filtered down greenly through the leaves.

It was too green – an alien planet.

Eventually we made it to Charlie's. He still lived in the small, two-bedroom house that he'd bought with my mother in the early days of their marriage. Those were the only kind of days their marriage had – the early ones. There, parked on the street in front of the house that never changed, was my new – well, new to me – truck. It was a faded red color, with big, rounded fenders and a bulbous cab. To my intense surprise, I loved it. I didn't know if it would run, but I could see myself in it. Plus, it was one of those solid iron affairs that never gets damaged – the kind you see at the scene of an accident, paint unscratched, surrounded by the pieces of the foreign car it had destroyed.

"Wow, Dad, I love it! Thanks!" Now my horrific day tomorrow would be just that much less dreadful. I wouldn't be faced with the choice of either walking two miles in the rain to school or accepting a ride in the Chief's cruiser.

"I'm glad you like it," Charlie said gruffly, embarrassed again.

It took only one trip to get all my stuff upstairs. I got the west bedroom that faced out over the front yard. The room was familiar; it had belonged to me since I was born. The wooden floor, the light blue walls, the peaked ceiling, the yellowed lace curtains around the window – these were all a part of my childhood. The only changes Charlie had ever made were switching the crib for a bed and adding a desk as I grew. The desk now held a second-hand computer, with the phone line for the modem stapled along the floor to the nearest phone jack. This was a stipulation from my mother, so that we could stay in

touch easily. The rocking chair from my baby days was still in the corner.

There was only one small bathroom at the top of the stairs, which I would have to share with Charlie. I was trying not to dwell too much on that fact.

One of the best things about Charlie is he doesn't hover. He left me alone to unpack and get settled, a feat that would have been altogether impossible for my mother. It was nice to be alone, not to have to smile and look pleased; a relief to stare dejectedly out the window at the sheeting rain and let just a few tears escape. I wasn't in the mood to go on a real crying jag. I would save that for bedtime, when I would have to think about the coming morning.

Forks High School had a frightening total of only three hundred and fifty-seven – now fifty-eight – students; there were more than seven hundred people in my junior class alone back home. All of the kids here had grown up together – their grandparents had been toddlers together. I would be the new girl from the big city, a curiosity, a freak.

Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps – all the things that go with living in the valley of the sun.

Instead, I was ivory-skinned, without even the excuse of blue eyes or red hair, despite the constant sunshine. I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating



myself – and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close.

When I finished putting my clothes in the old pine dresser, I took my bag of bathroom necessities and went to the communal bathroom to clean myself up after the day of travel. I looked at my face in the mirror as I brushed through my tangled, damp hair. Maybe it was the light, but already I looked sallow, unhealthy. My skin could be pretty – it was very clear, almost translucent-looking – but it all depended on color. I had no color here.

Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that I was lying to myself. It wasn't just physically that I'd never fit in. And if I couldn't find a niche in a school with three thousand people, what were my chances here?

I didn't relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I didn't relate well to people, period. Even my mother, who I was closer to than anyone else on the planet, was never in harmony with me, never on exactly the same page. Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch in my brain.

But the cause didn't matter. All that mattered was the effect. And tomorrow would be just the beginning.

I didn't sleep well that night, even after I was done crying. The constant whooshing of the rain and wind across the roof wouldn't fade into the background. I pulled the faded old quilt over my head, and later added the pillow, too. But I couldn't fall asleep until after midnight, when the rain finally settled into a quieter drizzle.

Thick fog was all I could see out my window in the morning, and I could feel the claustrophobia creeping up on me. You could never see the sky here; it was like a cage.

Breakfast with Charlie was a quiet event. He wished me good luck at school. I thanked him, knowing his hope was wasted. Good luck tended to avoid me. Charlie left first, off to the police station that was his wife and family. After he left, I sat at the old square oak table in one of the three unmatching chairs and examined his small kitchen, with its dark paneled walls, bright yellow cabinets, and white linoleum floor. Nothing was changed. My mother had painted the cabinets eighteen years ago in an attempt to bring some sunshine into the house. Over the small fireplace in the adjoining handkerchief-sized family room was a row of pictures. First a wedding picture of Charlie and my mom in Las Vegas, then one of the three of us in the hospital after I was born, taken by a helpful nurse, followed by the procession of my school pictures up to last year's. Those were embarrassing to look at – I would have to see what I could do to get Charlie to put them somewhere else, at least while I was living here.

It was impossible, being in this house, not to realize that Charlie had never gotten over my mom. It made me uncomfortable.

I didn't want to be too early to school, but I couldn't stay in the house anymore. I donned my jacket – which had the feel of a biohazard suit – and headed out into the rain.

It was just drizzling still, not enough to soak me through immediately as I reached for the house key that was always hidden under the

eaves by the door, and locked up. The sloshing of my new waterproof boots was unnerving. I missed the normal crunch of gravel as I walked. I couldn't pause and admire my truck again as I wanted; I was in a hurry to get out of the misty wet that swirled around my head and clung to my hair under my hood.

Inside the truck, it was nice and dry. Either Billy or Charlie had obviously cleaned it up, but the tan upholstered seats still smelled faintly of tobacco, gasoline, and peppermint. The engine started quickly, to my relief, but loudly, roaring to life and then idling at top volume. Well, a truck this old was bound to have a flaw. The antique radio worked, a plus that I hadn't expected.

Finding the school wasn't difficult, though I'd never been there before. The school was, like most other things, just off the highway. It was not obvious that it was a school; only the sign, which declared it to be the Forks High School, made me stop. It looked like a collection of matching houses, built with maroon-colored bricks. There were so many trees and shrubs I couldn't see its size at first. Where was the feel of the institution? I wondered nostalgically. Where were the chain-link fences, the metal detectors?

I parked in front of the first building, which had a small sign over the door reading FRONT OFFICE. No one else was parked there, so I was sure it was off limits, but I decided I would get directions inside instead of circling around in the rain like an idiot. I stepped unwillingly out of the toasty truck cab and walked down a little stone path lined with dark hedges. I took a deep breath before opening the door.

Inside, it was brightly lit, and warmer than I'd hoped. The office was small; a little waiting area with padded folding chairs, orange-flecked commercial carpet, notices and awards cluttering the walls, a big clock

ticking loudly. Plants grew everywhere in large plastic pots, as if there wasn't enough greenery outside. The room was cut in half by a long counter, cluttered with wire baskets full of papers and brightly colored flyers taped to its front. There were three desks behind the counter, one of which was manned by a large, red-haired woman wearing glasses. She was wearing a purple t-shirt, which immediately made me feel overdressed.

The red-haired woman looked up. "Can I help you?"

"I'm Isabella Swan," I informed her, and saw the immediate awareness light her eyes. I was expected, a topic of gossip no doubt. Daughter of the Chief's flighty ex-wife, come home at last.

"Of course," she said. She dug through a precariously stacked pile of documents on her desk till she found the ones she was looking for. "I have your schedule right here, and a map of the school." She brought several sheets to the counter to show me.

She went through my classes for me, highlighting the best route to each on the map, and gave me a slip to have each teacher sign, which I was to bring back at the end of the day. She smiled at me and hoped, like Charlie, that I would like it here in Forks. I smiled back as convincingly as I could.

When I went back out to my truck, other students were starting to arrive. I drove around the school, following the line of traffic. I was glad to see that most of the cars were older like mine, nothing flashy. At home I'd lived in one of the few lower-income neighborhoods that

were included in the Paradise Valley District. It was a common thing to see a new Mercedes or Porsche in the student lot. The nicest car here was a shiny Volvo, and it stood out. Still, I cut the engine as soon as I was in a spot, so that the thunderous volume wouldn't draw attention to me.

I looked at the map in the truck, trying to memorize it now; hopefully I wouldn't have to walk around with it stuck in front of my nose all day. I stuffed everything in my bag, slung the strap over my shoulder, and sucked in a huge breath. I can do this, I lied to myself feebly. No one was going to bite me. I finally exhaled and stepped out of the truck.

I kept my face pulled back into my hood as I walked to the sidewalk, crowded with teenagers. My plain black jacket didn't stand out, I noticed with relief.

Once I got around the cafeteria, building three was easy to spot. A large black "3" was painted on a white square on the east corner. I felt my breathing gradually creeping toward hyperventilation as I approached the door. I tried holding my breath as I followed two unisex raincoats through the door.

The classroom was small. The people in front of me stopped just inside the door to hang up their coats on a long row of hooks. I copied them. They were two girls, one a porcelain-colored blonde, the other also pale, with light brown hair. At least my skin wouldn't be a standout here.

I took the slip up to the teacher, a tall, balding man whose desk had a nameplate identifying him as Mr. Mason. He gawked at me when he saw my name – not an encouraging response – and of course I

flushed tomato red. But at least he sent me to an empty desk at the back without introducing me to the class. It was harder for my new classmates to stare at me in the back, but somehow, they managed. I kept my eyes down on the reading list the teacher had given me. It was fairly basic: Brontë, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Faulkner. I'd already read everything. That was comforting... and boring. I wondered if my mom would send me my folder of old essays, or if she would think that was cheating. I went through different arguments with her in my head while the teacher droned on.

When the bell rang, a nasal buzzing sound, a gangly boy with skin problems and hair black as an oil slick leaned across the aisle to talk to me.

"You're Isabella Swan, aren't you?" He looked like the overly helpful, chess club type.

"Bella," I corrected. Everyone within a three-seat radius turned to look at me.

"Where's your next class?" he asked.

I had to check in my bag. "Um, Government, with Jefferson, in building six."

There was nowhere to look without meeting curious eyes.

"I'm headed toward building four, I could show you the way..."

Definitely over-helpful. "I'm Eric," he added.

I smiled tentatively. "Thanks."

We got our jackets and headed out into the rain, which had picked up. I could have sworn several people behind us were walking close enough to eavesdrop. I hoped I wasn't getting paranoid.

"So, this is a lot different than Phoenix, huh?" he asked.

"Very."

"It doesn't rain much there, does it?"

"Three or four times a year."

"Wow, what must that be like?" he wondered.

"Sunny," I told him.

"You don't look very tan."

"My mother is part albino."

He studied my face apprehensively, and I sighed. It looked like clouds and a sense of humor didn't mix. A few months of this and I'd forget how to use sarcasm.

We walked back around the cafeteria, to the south buildings by the gym. Eric walked me right to the door, though it was clearly marked.

"Well, good luck," he said as I touched the handle. "Maybe we'll have some other classes together." He sounded hopeful.

I smiled at him vaguely and went inside.

The rest of the morning passed in about the same fashion. My Trigonometry teacher, Mr. Varner, who I would have hated anyway just because of the subject he taught, was the only one who made me stand in front of the class and introduce myself. I stammered, blushed, and tripped over my own boots on the way to my seat.

After two classes, I started to recognize several of the faces in each class. There was always someone braver than the others who would introduce themselves and ask me questions about how I was liking Forks. I tried to be diplomatic, but mostly I just lied a lot. At least I never needed the map.

One girl sat next to me in both Trig and Spanish, and she walked with me to the cafeteria for lunch. She was tiny, several inches shorter than my five feet four inches, but her wildly curly dark hair made up a lot of the difference between our heights. I couldn't remember her name, so I smiled and nodded as she prattled about teachers and classes. I didn't try to keep up.



We sat at the end of a full table with several of her friends, who she introduced to me. I forgot all their names as soon as she spoke them. They seemed impressed by her bravery in speaking to me. The boy from English, Eric, waved at me from across the room.

It was there, sitting in the lunchroom, trying to make conversation with seven curious strangers, that I first saw them.

They were sitting in the corner of the cafeteria, as far away from where I sat as possible in the long room. There were five of them. They weren't talking, and they weren't eating, though they each had a tray of untouched food in front of them. They weren't gawking at me, unlike most of the other students, so it was safe to stare at them without fear of meeting an excessively interested pair of eyes. But it was none of these things that caught, and held, my attention.

They didn't look anything alike. Of the three boys, one was big – muscled like a serious weight lifter, with dark, curly hair. Another was taller, leaner, but still muscular, and honey blond. The last was lanky, less bulky, with untidy, bronze-colored hair. He was more boyish than the others, who looked like they could be in college, or even teachers here rather than students.

The girls were opposites. The tall one was statuesque. She had a beautiful figure, the kind you saw on the cover of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue, the kind that made every girl around her take a hit on her self-esteem just by being in the same room. Her hair was golden, gently waving to the middle of her back. The short girl was pixielike, thin in the extreme, with small features. Her hair was a deep black, cropped short and pointing in every direction.

And yet, they were all exactly alike. Every one of them was chalky pale, the palest of all the students living in this sunless town. Paler than me, the albino. They all had very dark eyes despite the range in hair tones. They also had dark shadows under those eyes – purplish, bruiselike shadows. As if they were all suffering from a sleepless night, or almost done recovering from a broken nose. Though their noses, all their features, were straight, perfect, angular.

But all this is not why I couldn't look away.

I stared because their faces, so different, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful. They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine. Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel. It was hard to decide who was the most beautiful – maybe the perfect blond girl, or the bronze-haired boy.

They were all looking away – away from each other, away from the other students, away from anything in particular as far as I could tell. As I watched, the small girl rose with her tray – unopened soda, unbitten apple – and walked away with a quick, graceful lope that belonged on a runway. I watched, amazed at her lithe dancer's step, till she dumped her tray and glided through the back door, faster than I would have thought possible. My eyes darted back to the others, who sat unchanging.

"Who are they?" I asked the girl from my Spanish class, whose name I'd forgotten.

As she looked up to see who I meant – though already knowing, probably, from my tone – suddenly he looked at her, the thinner one, the boyish one, the youngest, perhaps. He looked at my neighbor for just a fraction of a second, and then his dark eyes flickered to mine.

He looked away quickly, more quickly than I could, though in a flush of embarrassment I dropped my eyes at once. In that brief flash of a glance, his face held nothing of interest – it was as if she had called his name, and he'd looked up in involuntary response, already having decided not to answer.

My neighbor giggled in embarrassment, looking at the table like I did.

“That’s Edward and Emmett Cullen, and Rosalie and Jasper Hale. The one who left was Alice Cullen; they all live together with Dr. Cullen and his wife.” She said this under her breath.

I glanced sideways at the beautiful boy, who was looking at his tray now, picking a bagel to pieces with long, pale fingers.

His mouth was moving very quickly, his perfect lips barely opening. The other three still looked away, and yet I felt he was speaking quietly to them.

Strange, unpopular names, I thought. The kinds of names grandparents had. But maybe that was in vogue here – small town names? I finally remembered that my neighbor was called Jessica, a perfectly common name. There were two girls named Jessica in my History class back home.

“They are... very nice-looking.” I struggled with the conspicuous understatement.

“Yes!” Jessica agreed with another giggle. “They’re all together though – Emmett and Rosalie, and Jasper and Alice, I mean. And they live together.” Her voice held all the shock and condemnation of the small town, I thought critically. But, if I was being honest, I had to admit that even in Phoenix, it would cause gossip.

“Which ones are the Cullens?” I asked. “They don’t look related....”

“Oh, they’re not. Dr. Cullen is really young, in his twenties or early thirties. They’re all adopted. The Hales are brother and sister, twins – the blondes – and they’re foster children.”

“They look a little old for foster children.”

“They are now, Jasper and Rosalie are both eighteen, but they’ve been with Mrs. Cullen since they were eight. She’s their aunt or something like that.”

“That’s really kind of nice – for them to take care of all those kids like that, when they’re so young and everything.”

“I guess so,” Jessica admitted reluctantly, and I got the impression that she didn’t like the doctor and his wife for some reason. With the glances she was throwing at their adopted children, I would presume

the reason was jealousy. “I think that Mrs. Cullen can’t have any kids, though,” she added, as if that lessened their kindness.

Throughout all this conversation, my eyes flickered again and again to the table where the strange family sat. They continued to look at the walls and not eat.

“Have they always lived in Forks?” I asked. Surely I would have noticed them on one of my summers here.

“No,” she said in a voice that implied it should be obvious, even to a new arrival like me. “They just moved down two years ago from somewhere in Alaska.”

I felt a surge of pity, and relief. Pity because, as beautiful as they were, they were outsiders, clearly not accepted. Relief that I wasn’t the only newcomer here, and certainly not the most interesting by any standard.

As I examined them, the youngest, one of the Cullens, looked up and met my gaze, this time with evident curiosity in his expression. As I looked swiftly away, it seemed to me that his glance held some kind of unmet expectation.

“Which one is the boy with the reddish brown hair?” I asked. I peeked at him from the corner of my eye, and he was still staring at me, but not gawking like the other students had today – he had a slightly frustrated expression. I looked down again.

“That’s Edward. He’s gorgeous, of course, but don’t waste your time. He doesn’t date. Apparently none of the girls here are good-looking enough for him.” She sniffed, a clear case of sour grapes. I wondered when he’d turned her down. I bit my lip to hide my smile. Then I glanced at him again. His face was turned away, but I thought his cheek appeared lifted, as if he were smiling, too.

After a few more minutes, the four of them left the table together. They all were noticeably graceful – even the big, brawny one. It was unsettling to watch. The one named Edward didn’t look at me again.

I sat at the table with Jessica and her friends longer than I would have if I’d been sitting alone. I was anxious not to be late for class on my first day. One of my new acquaintances, who considerately reminded me that her name was Angela, had Biology II with me the next hour. We walked to class together in silence. She was shy, too.

When we entered the classroom, Angela went to sit at a blacktopped lab table exactly like the ones I was used to. She already had a neighbor. In fact, all the tables were filled but one. Next to the center aisle, I recognized Edward Cullen by his unusual hair, sitting next to that single open seat.

As I walked down the aisle to introduce myself to the teacher and get my slip signed, I was watching him surreptitiously. Just as I passed, he suddenly went rigid in his seat. He stared at me again, meeting my eyes with the strangest expression on his face – it was hostile, furious. I looked away quickly, shocked, going red again. I stumbled over a book in the walkway and had to catch myself on the edge of a table. The girl sitting there giggled.

I'd noticed that his eyes were black – coal black.

Mr. Banner signed my slip and handed me a book with no nonsense about introductions. I could tell we were going to get along. Of course, he had no choice but to send me to the one open seat in the middle of the room. I kept my eyes down as I went to sit by him, bewildered by the antagonistic stare he'd given me.

I didn't look up as I set my book on the table and took my seat, but I saw his posture change from the corner of my eye. He was leaning away from me, sitting on the extreme edge of his chair and averting his face like he smelled something bad. Inconspicuously, I sniffed my hair. It smelled like strawberries, the scent of my favorite shampoo. It seemed an innocent enough odor. I let my hair fall over my right shoulder, making a dark curtain between us, and tried to pay attention to the teacher.

Unfortunately the lecture was on cellular anatomy, something I'd already studied. I took notes carefully anyway, always looking down.

I couldn't stop myself from peeking occasionally through the screen of my hair at the strange boy next to me. During the whole class, he never relaxed his stiff position on the edge of his chair, sitting as far from me as possible. I could see his hand on his left leg was clenched into a fist, tendons standing out under his pale skin. This, too, he never relaxed. He had the long sleeves of his white shirt pushed up to his elbows, and his forearm was surprisingly hard and muscular beneath his light skin. He wasn't nearly as slight as he'd looked next to his burly brother.

The class seemed to drag on longer than the others. Was it because the day was finally coming to a close, or because I was waiting for his tight fist to loosen? It never did; he continued to sit so still it looked like he wasn't breathing. What was wrong with him? Was this his normal behavior? I questioned my judgment on Jessica's bitterness at lunch today. Maybe she was not as resentful as I'd thought. It couldn't have anything to do with me. He didn't know me from Eve.

I peeked up at him one more time, and regretted it. He was glaring down at me again, his black eyes full of revulsion. As I flinched away from him, shrinking against my chair, the phrase if looks could kill suddenly ran through my mind.

At that moment, the bell rang loudly, making me jump, and Edward Cullen was out of his seat. Fluidly he rose – he was much taller than I'd thought – his back to me, and he was out the door before anyone else was out of their seat.

I sat frozen in my seat, staring blankly after him. He was so mean. It wasn't fair. I began gathering up my things slowly, trying to block the anger that filled me, for fear my eyes would tear up. For some reason, my temper was hardwired to my tear ducts. I usually cried when I was angry, a humiliating tendency.

"Aren't you Isabella Swan?" a male voice asked.

I looked up to see a cute, baby-faced boy, his pale blond hair carefully gelled into orderly spikes, smiling at me in a friendly way. He obviously didn't think I smelled bad.



“Bella,” I corrected him, with a smile.

“I’m Mike.”

“Hi, Mike.”

“Do you need any help finding your next class?”

“I’m headed to the gym, actually. I think I can find it.”

“That’s my next class, too.” He seemed thrilled, though it wasn’t that big of a coincidence in a school this small.

We walked to class together; he was a chatterer – he supplied most of the conversation, which made it easy for me. He’d lived in California till he was ten, so he knew how I felt about the sun. It turned out he was in my English class also. He was the nicest person I’d met today.

But as we were entering the gym, he asked, “So, did you stab Edward Cullen with a pencil or what? I’ve never seen him act like that.”

I cringed. So I wasn’t the only one who had noticed. And, apparently, that wasn’t Edward Cullen’s usual behavior. I decided to play dumb.

“Was that the boy I sat next to in Biology?” I asked artlessly. “Yes,” he said. “He looked like he was in pain or something.”

“I don’t know,” I responded. “I never spoke to him.”

“He’s a weird guy.” Mike lingered by me instead of heading to the dressing room. “If I were lucky enough to sit by you, I would have talked to you.”

I smiled at him before walking through the girls’ locker room door. He was friendly and clearly admiring. But it wasn’t enough to ease my irritation.

The Gym teacher, Coach Clapp, found me a uniform but didn’t make me dress down for today’s class. At home, only two years of P.E. were required. Here, P.E. was mandatory all four years. Forks was literally my personal hell on Earth.

I watched four volleyball games running simultaneously. Remembering how many injuries I had sustained – and inflicted – playing volleyball, I felt faintly nauseated.

The final bell rang at last. I walked slowly to the office to return my paperwork. The rain had drifted away, but the wind was strong, and colder. I wrapped my arms around myself.

When I walked into the warm office, I almost turned around and walked back out.

Edward Cullen stood at the desk in front of me. I recognized again that tousled bronze hair. He didn't appear to notice the sound of my entrance. I stood pressed against the back wall, waiting for the receptionist to be free.

He was arguing with her in a low, attractive voice. I quickly picked up the gist of the argument. He was trying to trade from sixth-hour Biology to another time – any other time.

I just couldn't believe that this was about me. It had to be something else, something that happened before I entered the Biology room. The look on his face must have been about another aggravation entirely. It was impossible that this stranger could take such a sudden, intense dislike to me.

The door opened again, and the cold wind suddenly gusted through the room, rustling the papers on the desk, swirling my hair around my face. The girl who came in merely stepped to the desk, placed a note in the wire basket, and walked out again. But Edward Cullen's back stiffened, and he turned slowly to glare at me – his face was absurdly handsome – with piercing, hate-filled eyes. For an instant, I felt a thrill of genuine fear, raising the hair on my arms. The look only lasted a second, but it chilled me more than the freezing wind. He turned back to the receptionist.

"Never mind, then," he said hastily in a voice like velvet. "I can see that it's impossible. Thank you so much for your help."

And he turned on his heel without another look at me, and disappeared out the door.

I went meekly to the desk, my face white for once instead of red, and handed her the signed slip.

“How did your first day go, dear?” the receptionist asked maternally.

“Fine,” I lied, my voice weak. She didn’t look convinced.

When I got to the truck, it was almost the last car in the lot. It seemed like a haven, already the closest thing to home I had in this damp green hole. I sat inside for a while, just staring out the windshield blankly. But soon I was cold enough to need the heater, so I turned the key and the engine roared to life. I headed back to Charlie’s house, fighting tears the whole way there.