STEPHENIE MEYER

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

Chapter 1

I'd never given much thought to how I would die —

though I'd had reason enough in the last few months

— but even if I had, I would not have imagined it like

this.

I stared without breathing across the long room, into

the dark eyes of the hunter, and he looked pleasantly

back at me.

Surely it was a good way to die, in the place of

someone else, someone I loved. Noble, even. That

ought to count for something.

I knew that if I'd never gone to Forks, I wouldn't be

facing death now. But, terrified as I was, I couldn't

bring myself to regret the decision. When life offers

you a dream so far beyond any of your expectations,

it's not reasonable to grieve when it comes to an end.

The hunter smiled in a friendly way as he sauntered

forward to kill me.

Chapter 2

FIRST SIGHT

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 Renee?"

"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

homecoming 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 Chiefs 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

been 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 secondhand 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 sallower,

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 Chiefs

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 roe.

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:

Bronte, 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."

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"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

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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

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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

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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.

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"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 black-topped 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,

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

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

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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

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

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."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"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 RE. 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

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

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

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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.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Chapter 3

The next day was better... and worse.

It was better because it wasn't raining yet, though the

clouds were dense and opaque. It was easier because

I knew what to expect of my day. Mike came to sit by

me in English, and walked me to my next class, with

Chess Club Eric glaring at him all the while; that was

nattering. People didn't look at me quite as much as

they had yesterday. I sat with a big group at lunch

that included Mike, Eric, Jessica, and several other

people whose names and faces I now remembered. I

began to feel like I was treading water, instead of

drowning in it.

It was worse because I was tired; I still couldn't sleep

with the wind echoing around the house. It was worse

because Mr. Varner called on me in Trig when my

hand wasn't raised and I had the wrong answer. It

was miserable because I had to play volleyball, and

the one time I didn't cringe out of the way of the ball,

I hit my teammate in the head with it. And it was

worse because Edward Cullen wasn't in school at all.

All morning I was dreading lunch, fearing his bizarre

glares. Part of me wanted to confront him and

demand to know what his problem was. While I was

lying sleepless in my bed, I even imagined what I

would say. But I knew myself too well to think I would

really have the guts to do it. I made the Cowardly Lion

look like the terminator.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

But when I walked into the cafeteria with Jessica —

trying to keep my eyes from sweeping the place for

him, and failing entirely — I saw that his four siblings

of sorts were sitting together at the same table, and

he was not with them.

Mike intercepted us and steered us to his table.

Jessica seemed elated by the attention, and her

friends quickly joined us. But as I tried to listen to

their easy chatter, I was terribly uncomfortable,

waiting nervously for the moment he would arrive. I

hoped that he would simply ignore me when he came,

and prove my suspicions false.

He didn't come, and as time passed I grew more and

more tense. I walked to Biology with more confidence

when, by the end of lunch, he still hadn't showed.

Mike, who was taking on the qualities of a golden

retriever, walked faithfully by my side to class. I held

my breath at the door, but Edward Cullen wasn't

there, either. I exhaled and went to my seat. Mike

followed, talking about an upcoming trip to the beach.

He lingered by my desk till the bell rang. Then he

smiled at me wistfully and went to sit by a girl with

braces and a bad perm. It looked like I was going to

have to do something about Mike, and it wouldn't be

easy. In a town like this, where everyone lived on top

of everyone else, diplomacy was essential. I had never

been enormously tactful; I had no practice dealing

with overly friendly boys.

I was relieved that I had the desk to myself, that

Edward was absent. I told myself that repeatedly. But

I couldn't get rid of the nagging suspicion that I was

the reason he wasn't there. It was ridiculous, and

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egotistical, to think that I could affect anyone that

strongly. It was impossible. And yet I couldn't stop

worrying that it was true. When the school day was

finally done, and the blush was fading out of my

cheeks from the volleyball incident, I changed quickly

back into my jeans and navy blue sweater. I hurried

from the girls' locker room, pleased to find that I had

successfully evaded my retriever friend for the

moment. I walked swiftly out to the parking lot. It was

crowded now with fleeing students. I got in my truck

and dug through my bag to make sure I had what I

needed.

Last night I'd discovered that Charlie couldn't cook

much besides fried eggs and bacon. So I requested

that I be assigned kitchen detail for the duration of

my stay. He was willing enough to hand over the keys

to the banquet hall. I also found out that he had no

food in the house. So I had my shopping list and the

cash from the jar in the cupboard labeled FOOD

MONEY, and I was on my way to the Thriftway.

I gunned my deafening engine to life, ignoring the

heads that turned in my direction, and backed

carefully into a place in the line of cars that were

waiting to exit the parking lot. As I waited, trying to

pretend that the earsplitting rumble was coming from

someone else's car, I saw the two Cullens and the

Hale twins getting into their car. It was the shiny new

Volvo. Of course. I hadn't noticed their clothes before

— I'd been too mesmerized by their faces. Now that I

looked, it was obvious that they were all dressed

exceptionally well; simply, but in clothes that subtly

hinted at designer origins. With their remarkable good

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looks, the style with which they carried themselves,

they could have worn dishrags and pulled it off. It

seemed excessive for them to have both looks and

money. But as far as I could tell, life worked that way

most of the time. It didn't look as if it bought them

any acceptance here.

No, I didn't fully believe that. The isolation must be

their desire; I couldn't imagine any door that wouldn't

be opened by that degree of beauty.

They looked at my noisy truck as I passed them, just

like everyone else. I kept my eyes straight forward and

was relieved when I finally was free of the school

grounds.

The Thriftway was not far from the school, just a few

streets south, off the highway. It was nice to be inside

the supermarket; it felt normal. I did the shopping at

home, and I fell into the pattern of the familiar task

gladly. The store was big enough inside that I couldn't

hear the tapping of the rain on the roof to remind me

where I was. When I got home, I unloaded all the

groceries, stuffing them in wherever I could find an

open space. I hoped Charlie wouldn't mind. I wrapped

potatoes in foil and stuck them in the oven to bake,

covered a steak in marinade and balanced it on top of

a carton of eggs in the fridge. When I was finished

with that, I took my book bag upstairs. Before

starting my homework, I changed into a pair of dry

sweats, pulled my damp hair up into a pony-tail, and

checked my e-mail for the first time. I had three

messages.

"Bella," my mom wrote...

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Write me as soon as you get in. Tell me how your

flight was. Is it raining? I miss you already. I'm almost

finished packing for Florida, but I can't find my pink

blouse. Do you know where I put it? Phil says hi.

Mom.

I sighed and went to the next. It was sent eight hours

after the first.

"Bella," she wrote...

Why haven't you e-mailed me yet? What are you

waiting for? Mom. The last was from this morning.

Isabella,

If I haven't heard from you by 5:30 p.m. today I'm

calling Charlie. I checked the clock. I still had an

hour, but my mom was well known for jumping the

gun.

Mom,

Calm down. I'm writing right now. Don't do anything

rash. Bella.

I sent that, and began again.

Mom,

Everything is great. Of course it's raining. I was

waiting for something to write about. School isn't bad,

just a little repetitive. I met some nice kids who sit by

me at lunch.

Your blouse is at the dry cleaners - you were

supposed to pick it up Friday.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Charlie bought me a truck, can you believe it? I love

it. It's old, but really sturdy, which is good, you know,

for me.

I miss you, too. I'll write again soon, but I'm not going

to check my e-mail every five minutes. Relax, breathe.

I love you.

Bella.

I had decided to read Wuthering Heights — the novel

we were currently studying in English — yet again for

the fun of it, and that's what I was doing when

Charlie came home. I'd lost track of the time, and I

hurried downstairs to take the potatoes out and put

the steak in to broil.

"Bella?" my father called out when he heard me on

the stairs. Who else? I thought to myself.

"Hey, Dad, welcome home."

"Thanks." He hung up his gun belt and stepped out of

his boots as I bustled about the kitchen. As far as I

was aware, he'd never shot the gun on the job. But he

kept it ready. When I came here as a child, he would

always remove the bullets as soon as he walked in the

door. I guess he considered me old enough now not to

shoot myself by accident, and not depressed enough

to shoot myself on purpose.

"What's for dinner?" he asked warily. My mother was

an imaginative cook, and her experiments weren't

always edible. I was surprised, and sad, that he

seemed to remember that far back.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Steak and potatoes," I answered, and he looked

relieved. He seemed to feel awkward standing in the

kitchen doing nothing; he lumbered into the living

room to watch TV while I worked. We were both more

comfortable that way. I made a salad while the steaks

cooked, and set the table.

I called him in when dinner was ready, and he sniffed

appreciatively as he walked into the room.

"Smells good, Bell."

"Thanks."

We ate in silence for a few minutes. It wasn't

uncomfortable. Neither of us was bothered by the

quiet. In some ways, we were well suited for living

together.

"So, how did you like school? Have you made any

friends?" he asked as he was taking seconds.

"Well, I have a few classes with a girl named Jessica. I

sit with her friends at lunch. And there's this boy,

Mike, who's very friendly. Everybody seems pretty

nice." With one outstanding exception.

"That must be Mike Newton. Nice kid — nice family.

His dad owns the sporting goods store just outside of

town. He makes a good living off all the backpackers

who come through here."

"Do you know the Cullen family?" I asked hesitantly.

"Dr. Cullen's family? Sure. Dr. Cullen's a great man."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"They... the kids... are a little different. They don't

seem to fit in very well at school."

Charlie surprised me by looking angry.

"People in this town," he muttered. "Dr. Cullen is a

brilliant surgeon who could probably work in any

hospital in the world, make ten times the salary he

gets here," he continued, getting louder. "We're lucky

to have him — lucky that his wife wanted to live in a

small town. He's an asset to the community, and all

of those kids are well behaved and polite. I had my

doubts, when they first moved in, with all those

adopted teenagers. I thought we might have some

problems with them. But they're all very mature — I

haven't had one speck of trouble from any of them.

That's more than I can say for the children of some

folks who have lived in this town for generations. And

they stick together the way a family should —

camping trips every other weekend... Just because

they're newcomers, people have to talk."

It was the longest speech I'd ever heard Charlie make.

He must feel strongly about whatever people were

saying.

I backpedaled. "They seemed nice enough to me. I

just noticed they kept to themselves. They're all very

attractive," I added, trying to be more complimentary.

"You should see the doctor," Charlie said, laughing.

"It's a good thing he's happily married. A lot of the

nurses at the hospital have a hard time concentrating

on their work with him around."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

We lapsed back into silence as we finished eating. He

cleared the table while I started on the dishes. He

went back to the TV, and after I finished washing the

dishes by hand — no dishwasher — I went upstairs

unwillingly to work on my math homework. I could

feel a tradition in the making.

That night it was finally quiet. I fell asleep quickly,

exhausted. The rest of the week was uneventful. I got

used to the routine of my classes. By Friday I was

able to recognize, if not name, almost all the students

at school. In Gym, the kids on my team learned not to

pass me the ball and to step quickly in front of me if

the other team tried to take advantage of my

weakness. I happily stayed out of their way. Edward

Cullen didn't come back to school.

Every day, I watched anxiously until the rest of the

Cullens entered the cafeteria without him. Then I

could relax and join in the lunchtime conversation.

Mostly it centered around a trip to the La Push Ocean

Park in two weeks that Mike was putting together. I

was invited, and I had agreed to go, more out of

politeness than desire. Beaches should be hot and

dry.

By Friday I was perfectly comfortable entering my

Biology class, no longer worried that Edward would

be there. For all I knew, he had dropped out of school.

I tried not to think about him, but I couldn't totally

suppress the worry that I was responsible for his

continued absence, ridiculous as it seemed.

My first weekend in Forks passed without incident.

Charlie, unused to spending time in the usually

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empty house, worked most of the weekend. I cleaned

the house, got ahead on my homework, and wrote my

mom more bogusly cheerful e-mail. I did drive to the

library Saturday, but it was so poorly stocked that I

didn't bother to get a card; I would have to make a

date to visit Olympia or Seattle soon and find a good

bookstore. I wondered idly what kind of gas mileage

the truck got... and shuddered at the thought.

The rain stayed soft over the weekend, quiet, so I was

able to sleep well. People greeted me in the parking lot

Monday morning. I didn't know all their names, but I

waved back and smiled at everyone. It was colder this

morning, but happily not raining. In English, Mike

took his accustomed seat by my side. We had a pop

quiz on Wuthering Heights. It was straightforward,

very easy.

All in all, I was feeling a lot more comfortable than I

had thought I would feel by this point. More

comfortable than I had ever expected to feel here.

When we walked out of class, the air was full of

swirling bits of white. I could hear people shouting

excitedly to each other. The wind bit at my cheeks,

my nose.

"Wow," Mike said. "It's snowing."

I looked at the little cotton fluffs that were building up

along the sidewalk and swirling erratically past my

face.

"Ew." Snow. There went my good day.

He looked surprised. "Don't you like snow?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No. That means it's too cold for rain." Obviously.

"Besides, I thought it was supposed to come down in

flakes — you know, each one unique and all that.

These just look like the ends of Q-tips."

"Haven't you ever seen snow fall before?" he asked

incredulously.

"Sure I have." I paused. "On TV."

Mike laughed. And then a big, squishy ball of

dripping snow smacked into the back of his head. We

both turned to see where it came from. I had my

suspicions about Eric, who was walking away, his

back toward us — in the wrong direction for his next

class. Mike appatently had the same notion. He bent

over and began scraping together a pile of the white

mush.

"I'll see you at lunch, okay?" I kept walking as I

spoke. "Once people start throwing wet stuff, I go

inside."

He just nodded, his eyes on Eric's retreating figure.

Throughout the morning, everyone chattered excitedly

about the snow; apparently it was the first snowfall of

the new year. I kept my mouth shut. Sure, it was

drier than rain — until it melted in your socks. I

walked alertly to the cafeteria with Jessica after

Spanish. Mush balls were flying everywhere. I kept a

binder in my hands, ready to use it as a shield if

necessary. Jessica thought I was hilarious, but

something in my expression kept her from lobbing a

snowball at me herself. Mike caught up to us as we

walked in the doors, laughing, with ice melting the

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

spikes in his hair. He and Jessica were talking

animatedly about the snow fight as we got in line to

buy food. I glanced toward that table in the corner out

of habit. And then I froze where I stood. There were

five people at the table.

Jessica pulled on my arm.

"Hello? Bella? What do you want?"

I looked down; my ears were hot. I had no reason to

feel self-conscious, I reminded myself. I hadn't done

anything wrong.

"What's with Bella?" Mike asked Jessica.

"Nothing," I answered. "I'll just get a soda today." I

caught up to the end of the line.

"Aren't you hungry?" Jessica asked.

"Actually, I feel a little sick," I said, my eyes still on

the floor. I waited for them to get their food, and then

followed them to a table, my eyes on my feet.

I sipped my soda slowly, my stomach churning. Twice

Mike asked, with unnecessary concern, how I was

feeling.

I told him it was nothing, but I was wondering if I

should play it up and escape to the nurse's office for

the next hour.

Ridiculous. I shouldn't have to run away.

I decided to permit myself one glance at the Cullen

family's table. If he was glaring at me, I would skip

Biology, like the coward I was. I kept my head down

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and glanced up under my lashes. None of them were

looking this way. I lifted my head a little.

They were laughing. Edward, Jasper, and Emmett all

had their hair entirely saturated with melting snow.

Alice and Rosalie were leaning away as Emmett shook

his dripping hair toward them. They were enjoying the

snowy day, just like everyone else — only they looked

more like a scene from a movie than the rest of us.

But, aside from the laughter and playfulness, there

was something different, and I couldn't quite pinpoint

what that difference was. I examined Edward the

most carefully. His skin was less pale, I decided —

flushed from the snow fight maybe — the circles

under his eyes much less noticeable. But there was

something more. I pondered, staring, trying to isolate

the change.

"Bella, what are you staring at?" Jessica intruded, her

eyes following my stare.

At that precise moment, his eyes flashed over to meet

mine. I dropped my head, letting my hair fall to

conceal my face. I was sure, though, in the instant

our eyes met, that he didn't look harsh or unfriendly

as he had the last time I'd seen him. He looked merely

curious again, unsatisfied in some way.

"Edward Cullen is staring at you," Jessica giggled in

my ear.

"He doesn't look angry, does he?" I couldn't help

asking.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No," she said, sounding confused by my question.

"Should he be?"

"I don't think he likes me," I confided. I still felt

queasy. I put my head down on my arm.

"The Cullens don't like anybody... well, they don't

notice anybody enough to like them. But he's still

staring at you."

"Stop looking at him," I hissed.

She snickered, but she looked away. I raised my head

enough to make sure that she did, contemplating

violence if she resisted.

Mike interrupted us then — he was planning an epic

battle of the blizzard in the parking lot after school

and wanted us to join. Jessica agreed

enthusiastically. The way she looked at Mike left little

doubt that she would be up for anything he

suggested. I kept silent. I would have to hide in the

gym until the parking lot cleared.

For the rest of the lunch hour I very carefully kept my

eyes at my own table. I decided to honor the bargain

I'd made with myself. Since he didn't look angry, I

would go to Biology. My stomach did frightened little

flips at the thought of sitting next to him again. I

didn't really want to walk to class with Mike as usual

— he seemed to be a popular target for the snowball

snipers — but when we went to the door, everyone

besides me groaned in unison. It was raining,

washing all traces of the snow away in clear, icy

ribbons down the side of the walkway. I pulled my

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hood up, secretly pleased. I would be free to go

straight home after Gym.

Mike kept up a string of complaints on the way to

building four. Once inside the classroom, I saw with

relief that my table was still empty. Mr. Banner was

walking around the room, distributing one

microscope and box of slides to each table. Class

didn't start for a few minutes, and the room buzzed

with conversation. I kept my eyes away from the door,

doodling idly on the cover of my notebook.

I heard very clearly when the chair next to me moved,

but my eyes stayed carefully focused on the pattern I

was drawing.

"Hello," said a quiet, musical voice.

I looked up, stunned that he was speaking to me. He

was sitting as far away from me as the desk allowed,

but his chair was angled toward me. His hair was

dripping wet, disheveled — even so, he looked like

he'd just finished shooting a commercial for hair gel.

His dazzling face was friendly, open, a slight smile on

his flawless lips. But his eyes were careful.

"My name is Edward Cullen," he continued. "I didn't

have a chance to introduce myself last week. You

must be Bella Swan." My mind was spinning with

confusion. Had I made up the whole thing? He was

perfectly polite now. I had to speak; he was waiting.

But I couldn't think of anything conventional to say.

"H-how do you know my name?" I stammered.

He laughed a soft, enchanting laugh.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Oh, I think everyone knows your name. The whole

town's been waiting for you to arrive."

I grimaced. I knew it was something like that.

"No," I persisted stupidly. "I meant, why did you call

me Bella?" He seemed confused. "Do you prefer

Isabella?"

"No, I like Bella," I said. "But I think Charlie — I mean

my dad — must call me Isabella behind my back —

that's what everyone here seems to know me as," I

tried to explain, feeling like an utter moron.

"Oh." He let it drop. I looked away awkwardly.

Thankfully, Mr. Banner started class at that moment.

I tried to concentrate as he explained the lab we

would be doing today. The slides in the box were out

of order. Working as lab partners, we had to separate

the slides of onion root tip cells into the phases of

mitosis they represented and label them accordingly.

We weren't supposed to use our books. In twenty

minutes, he would be coming around to see who had

it right.

"Get started," he commanded.

"Ladies first, partner?" Edward asked. I looked up to

see him smiling a crooked smile so beautiful that I

could only stare at him like an idiot.

"Or I could start, if you wish." The smile faded; he was

obviously wondering if I was mentally competent.

"No," I said, flushing. "I'll go ahead." I was showing

off, just a little. I'd already done this lab, and I knew

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

what I was looking for. It should be easy. I snapped

the first slide into place under the microscope and

adjusted it quickly to the 40X objective. I studied the

slide briefly.

My assessment was confident. "Prophase."

"Do you mind if I look?" he asked as I began to

remove the slide. His hand caught mine, to stop me,

as he asked. His fingers were ice-cold, like he'd been

holding them in a snowdrift before class. But that

wasn't why I jerked my hand away so quickly. When

he touched me, it stung my hand as if an electric

current had passed through us.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, pulling his hand back

immediately. However, he continued to reach for the

microscope. I watched him, still staggered, as he

examined the slide for an even shorter time than I

had.

"Prophase," he agreed, writing it neatly in the first

space on our worksheet. He swiftly switched out the

first slide for the second, and then glanced at it

cursorily.

"Anaphase," he murmured, writing it down as he

spoke. I kept my voice indifferent. "May I?"

He smirked and pushed the microscope to me.

I looked through the eyepiece eagerly, only to be

disappointed. Dang it, he was right.

"Slide three?" I held out my hand without looking at

him. He handed it to me; it seemed like he was being

careful not to touch my skin again.

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I took the most fleeting look I could manage.

"Interphase." I passed him the microscope before he

could ask for it. He took a swift peek, and then wrote

it down. I would have written it while he looked, but

his clear, elegant script intimidated me. I didn't want

to spoil the page with my clumsy scrawl.

We were finished before anyone else was close. I could

see Mike and his partner comparing two slides again

and again, and another group had their book open

under the table.

Which left me with nothing to do but try to not look at

him...

unsuccessfully. I glanced up, and he was staring at

me, that same inexplicable look of frustration in his

eyes. Suddenly I identified that subtle difference in

his face.

"Did you get contacts?" I blurted out unthinkingly. He

seemed puzzled by my unexpected question. "No."

"Oh," I mumbled. "I thought there was something

different about your eyes."

He shrugged, and looked away.

In fact, I was sure there was something different. I

vividly remembered the flat black color of his eyes the

last time he'd glared at me — the color was striking

against the background of his pale skin and his

auburn hair. Today, his eyes were a completely

different color: a strange ocher, darker than

butterscotch, but with the same golden tone. I didn't

understand how that could be, unless he was lying

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for some reason about the contacts. Or maybe Forks

was making me crazy in the literal sense of the word.

I looked down. His hands were clenched into hard

fists again. Mr. Banner came to our table then, to see

why we weren't working. He looked over our

shoulders to glance at the completed lab, and then

stared more intently to check the answers.

"So, Edward, didn't you think Isabella should get a

chance with the microscope?" Mr. Banner asked.

"Bella," Edward corrected automatically. "Actually,

she identified three of the five."

Mr. Banner looked at me now; his expression was

skeptical.

"Have you done this lab before?" he asked.

I smiled sheepishly. "Not with onion root."

"Whitefish blastula?"

"Yeah."

Mr. Banner nodded. "Were you in an advanced

placement program in Phoenix?"

"Yes."

"Well," he said after a moment, "I guess it's good you

two are lab partners." He mumbled something else as

he walked away. After he left, I began doodling on my

notebook again.

"It's too bad about the snow, isn't it?" Edward asked. I

had the feeling that he was forcing himself to make

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small talk with me. Paranoia swept over me again. It

was like he had heard my conversation with Jessica

at lunch and was trying to prove me wrong.

"Not really," I answered honestly, instead of

pretending to be normal like everyone else. I was still

trying to dislodge the stupid feeling of suspicion, and

I couldn't concentrate.

"You don't like the cold." It wasn't a question.

"Or the wet."

"Forks must be a difficult place for you to live," he

mused.

"You have no idea," I muttered darkly.

He looked fascinated by what I said, for some reason I

couldn't imagine. His face was such a distraction that

I tried not to look at it any more than courtesy

absolutely demanded.

"Why did you come here, then?"

No one had asked me that — not straight out like he

did, demanding.

"It's... complicated."

"I think I can keep up," he pressed.

I paused for a long moment, and then made the

mistake of meeting his gaze. His dark gold eyes

confused me, and I answered without thinking.

"My mother got remarried," I said.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"That doesn't sound so complex," he disagreed, but he

was suddenly sympathetic. "When did that happen?"

"Last September." My voice sounded sad, even to me.

"And you don't like him," Edward surmised, his tone

still kind.

"No, Phil is fine. Too young, maybe, but nice enough."

"Why didn't you stay with them?"

I couldn't fathom his interest, but he continued to

stare at me with penetrating eyes, as if my dull life's

story was somehow vitally important.

"Phil travels a lot. He plays ball for a living." I half-

smiled.

"Have I heard of him?" he asked, smiling in response.

"Probably not. He doesn't play well. Strictly minor

league. He moves around a lot."

"And your mother sent you here so that she could

travel with him." He said it as an assumption again,

not a question.

My chin raised a fraction. "No, she did not send me

here. I sent myself." His eyebrows knit together. "I

don't understand," he admitted, and he seemed

unnecessarily frustrated by that fact.

I sighed. Why was I explaining this to him? He

continued to stare at me with obvious curiosity.

"She stayed with me at first, but she missed him. It

made her unhappy. . . so I decided it was time to spend

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

some quality time with Charlie." My voice was glum

by the time I finished.

"But now you're unhappy," he pointed out.

"And?" I challenged.

"That doesn't seem fair." He shrugged, but his eyes

were still intense. I laughed without humor. "Hasn't

anyone ever told you? Life isn't fair."

"I believe I have heard that somewhere before," he

agreed dryly.

"So that's all," I insisted, wondering why he was still

staring at me that way.

His gaze became appraising. "You put on a good

show," he said slowly.

"But I'd be willing to bet that you're suffering more

than you let anyone see."

I grimaced at him, resisting the impulse to stick out

my tongue like a five-year-old, and looked away.

"Am I wrong?"

I tried to ignore him.

"I didn't think so," he murmured smugly.

"Why does it matter to you?" I asked, irritated. I kept

my eyes away, watching the teacher make his rounds.

"That's a very good question," he muttered, so quietly

that I wondered if he was talking to himself. However,

after a few seconds of silence, I decided that was the

only answer I was going to get.

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I sighed, scowling at the blackboard.

"Am I annoying you?" he asked. He sounded amused.

I glanced at him without thinking... and told the truth

again. "Not exactly. I'm more annoyed at myself. My

face is so easy to read — my mother always calls me

her open book." I frowned.

"On the contrary, I find you very difficult to read."

Despite everything that I'd said and he'd guessed, he

sounded like he meant it.

"You must be a good reader then," I replied.

"Usually." He smiled widely, flashing a set of perfect,

ultrawhite teeth. Mr. Banner called the class to order

then, and I turned with relief to listen. I was in

disbelief that I'd just explained my dreary life to this

bizarre, beautiful boy who may or may not despise

me. He'd seemed engrossed in our conversation, but

now I could see, from the corner of my eye, that he

was leaning away from me again, his hands gripping

the edge of the table with unmistakable tension.

I tried to appear attentive as Mr. Banner illustrated,

with transparencies on the overhead projector, what I

had seen without difficulty through the microscope.

But my thoughts were unmanageable. When the bell

finally rang, Edward rushed as swiftly and as

gracefully from the room as he had last Monday. And,

like last Monday, I stared after him in amazement.

Mike skipped quickly to my side and picked up my

books for me. I imagined him with a wagging tail.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"That was awful," he groaned. "They all looked exactly

the same. You're lucky you had Cullen for a partner."

"I didn't have any trouble with it," I said, stung by his

assumption. I regretted the snub instantly. "I've done

the lab before, though," I added before he could get

his feelings hurt.

"Cullen seemed friendly enough today," he

commented as we shrugged into our raincoats. He

didn't seem pleased about it.

I tried to sound indifferent. "I wonder what was with

him last Monday." I couldn't concentrate on Mike's

chatter as we walked to Gym, and RE. didn't do much

to hold my attention, either. Mike was on my team

today. He chivalrously covered my position as well as

his own, so my woolgathering was only interrupted

when it was my turn to serve; my team ducked warily

out of the way every time I was up.

The rain was just a mist as I walked to the parking

lot, but I was happier when I was in the dry cab. I got

the heater running, for once not caring about the

mind-numbing roar of the engine. I unzipped my

jacket, put the hood down, and fluffed my damp hair

out so the heater could dry it on the way home.

I looked around me to make sure it was clear. That's

when I noticed the still, white figure. Edward Cullen

was leaning against the front door of the Volvo, three

cars down from me, and staring intently in my

direction. I swiftly looked away and threw the truck

into reverse, almost hitting a rusty Toyota Corolla in

my haste. Lucky for the Toyota, I stomped on the

brake in time. It was just the sort of car that my truck

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would make scrap metal of. I took a deep breath, still

looking out the other side of my car, and cautiously

pulled out again, with greater success. I stared

straight ahead as I passed the Volvo, but from a

peripheral peek, I would swear I saw him laughing.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Chapter 4

When I opened my eyes in the morning, something

was different. It was the light. It was still the gray-

green light of a cloudy day in the forest, but it was

clearer somehow. I realized there was no fog veiling

my window.

I jumped up to look outside, and then groaned in

horror.

A fine layer of snow covered the yard, dusted the top

of my truck, and whitened the road. But that wasn't

the worst part. All the rain from yesterday had frozen

solid — coating the needles on the trees in fantastic,

gorgeous patterns, and making the driveway a deadly

ice slick. I had enough trouble not falling down when

the ground was dry; it might be safer for me to go

back to bed now.

Charlie had left for work before I got downstairs. In a

lot of ways, living with Charlie was like having my

own place, and I found myself reveling in the

aloneness instead of being lonely.

I threw down a quick bowl of cereal and some orange

juice from the carton. I felt excited to go to school,

and that scared me. I knew it wasn't the stimulating

learning environment I was anticipating, or seeing my

new set of friends. If I was being honest with myself, I

knew I was eager to get to school because I would see

Edward Cullen. And that was very, very stupid.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I should be avoiding him entirely after my brainless

and embarrassing babbling yesterday. And I was

suspicious of him; why should he lie about his eyes? I

was still frightened of the hostility I sometimes felt

emanating from him, and I was still tongue-tied

whenever I pictured his perfect face. I was well aware

that my league and his league were spheres that did

not touch. So I shouldn't be at all anxious to see him

today. It took every ounce of my concentration to

make it down the icy brick driveway alive. I almost

lost my balance when I finally got to the truck, but I

managed to cling to the side mirror and save myself.

Clearly, today was going to be nightmarish.

Driving to school, I distracted myself from my fear of

falling and my unwanted speculations about Edward

Cullen by thinking about Mike and Eric, and the

obvious difference in how teenage boys responded to

me here. I was sure I looked exactly the same as I had

in Phoenix. Maybe it was just that the boys back

home had watched me pass slowly through all the

awkward phases of adolescence and still thought of

me that way. Perhaps it was because I was a novelty

here, where novelties were few and far between.

Possibly my crippling clumsiness was seen as

endearing rather than pathetic, casting me as a

damsel in distress. Whatever the reason, Mike's

puppy dog behavior and Eric's apparent rivalry with

him were disconcerting. I wasn't sure if I didn't prefer

being ignored. My truck seemed to have no problem

with the black ice that covered the roads. I drove very

slowly, though, not wanting to carve a path of

destruction through Main Street.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

When I got out of my truck at school, I saw why I'd

had so little trouble. Something silver caught my eye,

and I walked to the back of the truck — carefully

holding the side for support — to examine my tires.

There were thin chains crisscrossed in diamond

shapes around them. Charlie had gotten up who

knows how early to put snow chains on my truck. My

throat suddenly felt tight. I wasn't used to being

taken care of, and Charlie's unspoken concern caught

me by surprise.

I was standing by the back corner of the truck,

struggling to fight back the sudden wave of emotion

the snow chains had brought on, when I heard an

odd sound.

It was a high-pitched screech, and it was fast

becoming painfully loud. I looked up, startled.

I saw several things simultaneously. Nothing was

moving in slow motion, the way it does in the movies.

Instead, the adrenaline rush seemed to make my

brain work much faster, and I was able to absorb in

clear detail several things at once.

Edward Cullen was standing four cars down from me,

staring at me in horror. His face stood out from a sea

of faces, all frozen in the same mask of shock. But of

more immediate importance was the dark blue van

that was skidding, tires locked and squealing against

the brakes, spinning wildly across the ice of the

parking lot. It was going to hit the back corner of my

truck, and I was standing between them. I didn't even

have time to close my eyes.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Just before I heard the shattering crunch of the van

folding around the truck bed, something hit me, hard,

but not from the direction I was expecting. My head

cracked against the icy blacktop, and I felt something

solid and cold pinning me to the ground. I was lying

on the pavement behind the tan car I'd parked next

to. But I didn't have a chance to notice anything else,

because the van was still coming. It had curled

gratingly around the end of the truck and, still

spinning and sliding, was about to collide with me

again.

A low oath made me aware that someone was with

me, and the voice was impossible not to recognize.

Two long, white hands shot out protectively in front of

me, and the van shuddered to a stop a foot from my

face, the large hands fitting providentially into a deep

dent in the side of the van's body.

Then his hands moved so fast they blurred. One was

suddenly gripping under the body of the van, and

something was dragging me, swinging my legs around

like a rag doll's, till they hit the tire of the tan car. A

groaning metallic thud hurt my ears, and the van

settled, glass popping, onto the asphalt — exactly

where, a second ago, my legs had been. It was

absolutely silent for one long second before the

screaming began. In the abrupt bedlam, I could hear

more than one person shouting my name. But more

clearly than all the yelling, I could hear Edward

Cullen's low, frantic voice in my ear.

"Bella? Are you all right?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I'm fine." My voice sounded strange. I tried to sit up,

and realized he was holding me against the side of his

body in an iron grasp.

"Be careful," he warned as I struggled. "I think you hit

your head pretty hard."

I became aware of a throbbing ache centered above

my left ear.

"Ow," I said, surprised.

"That's what I thought." His voice, amazingly,

sounded like he was suppressing laughter.

"How in the..." I trailed off, trying to clear my head,

get my bearings.

"How did you get over here so fast?"

"I was standing right next to you, Bella," he said, his

tone serious again.

I turned to sit up, and this time he let me, releasing

his hold around my waist and sliding as far from me

as he could in the limited space. I looked at his

concerned, innocent expression and was disoriented

again by the force of his gold-colored eyes. What was I

asking him?

And then they found us, a crowd of people with tears

streaming down their faces, shouting at each other,

shouting at us.

"Don't move," someone instructed.

"Get Tyler out of the van!" someone else shouted.

There was a flurry of activity around us. I tried to get

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

up, but Edward's cold hand pushed my shoulder

down.

"Just stay put for now."

"But it's cold," I complained. It surprised me when he

chuckled under his breath. There was an edge to the

sound.

"You were over there," I suddenly remembered, and

his chuckle stopped short. "You were by your car."

His expression turned hard. "No, I wasn't."

"I saw you." All around us was chaos. I could hear the

gruffer voices of adults arriving on the scene. But I

obstinately held on to our argument; I was right, and

he was going to admit it.

"Bella, I was standing with you, and I pulled you out

of the way." He unleashed the full, devastating power

of his eyes on me, as if trying to communicate

something crucial.

"No." I set my jaw.

The gold in his eyes blazed. "Please, Bella."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Trust me," he pleaded, his soft voice overwhelming. I

could hear the sirens now. "Will you promise to

explain everything to me later?"

"Fine," he snapped, abruptly exasperated.

"Fine," I repeated angrily.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

It took six EMTs and two teachers — Mr. Varner and

Coach Clapp — to shift the van far enough away from

us to bring the stretchers in. Edward vehemently

refused his, and I tried to do the same, but the traitor

told them I'd hit my head and probably had a

concussion. I almost died of humiliation when they

put on the neck brace. It looked like the entire school

was there, watching soberly as they loaded me in the

back of the ambulance. Edward got to ride in the

front. It was maddening. To make matters worse,

Chief Swan arrived before they could get me safely

away.

"Bella!" he yelled in panic when he recognized me on

the stretcher.

"I'm completely fine, Char — Dad," I sighed. "There's

nothing wrong with me."

He turned to the closest EMT for a second opinion. I

tuned him out to consider the jumble of inexplicable

images churning chaotically in my head. When they'd

lifted me away from the car, I had seen the deep dent

in the tan car's bumper — a very distinct dent that fit

the contours of Edward's shoulders... as if he had

braced himself against the car with enough force to

damage the metal frame...

And then there was his family, looking on from the

distance, with expressions that ranged from

disapproval to fury but held no hint of concern for

their brother's safety.

I tried to think of a logical solution that could explain

what I had just seen — a solution that excluded the

assumption that I was insane. Naturally, the

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ambulance got a police escort to the county hospital. I

felt ridiculous the whole time they were unloading me.

What made it worse was that Edward simply glided

through the hospital doors under his own power. I

ground my teeth together.

They put me in the emergency room, a long room with

a line of beds separated by pastel-patterned curtains.

A nurse put a pressure cuff on my arm and a

thermometer under my tongue. Since no one bothered

pulling the curtain around to give me some privacy, I

decided I wasn't obligated to wear the stupid-looking

neck brace anymore. When the nurse walked away, I

quickly unfastened the Velcro and threw it under the

bed. There was another flurry of hospital personnel,

another stretcher brought to the bed next to me. I

recognized Tyler Crowley from my Government class

beneath the bloodstained bandages wrapped tightly

around his head. Tyler looked a hundred times worse

than I felt. But he was staring anxiously at me.

"Bella, I'm so sorry!"

"I'm fine, Tyler — you look awful, are you all right?"

As we spoke, nurses began unwinding his soiled

bandages, exposing a myriad of shallow slices all over

his forehead and left cheek.

He ignored me. "I thought I was going to kill you! I

was going too fast, and I hit the ice wrong..." He

winced as one nurse started dabbing at his face.

"Don't worry about it; you missed me."

"How did you get out of the way so fast? You were

there, and then you were gone..."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Umm... Edward pulled me out of the way."

He looked confused. "Who?"

"Edward Cullen — he was standing next to me." I'd

always been a terrible liar; I didn't sound convincing

at all.

"Cullen? I didn't see him... wow, it was all so fast, I

guess. Is he okay?"

"I think so. He's here somewhere, but they didn't

make him use a stretcher."

I knew I wasn't crazy. What had happened? There

was no way to explain away what I'd seen.

They wheeled me away then, to X-ray my head. I told

them there was nothing wrong, and I was right. Not

even a concussion. I asked if I could leave, but the

nurse said I had to talk to a doctor first. So I was

trapped in the ER, waiting, harassed by Tyler's

constant apologies and promises to make it up to me.

No matter how many times I tried to convince him I

was fine, he continued to torment himself. Finally, I

closed my eyes and ignored him. He kept up a

remorseful mumbling.

"Is she sleeping?" a musical voice asked. My eyes flew

open. Edward was standing at the foot of my bed,

smirking. I glared at him. It wasn't easy — it would

have been more natural to ogle.

"Hey, Edward, I'm really sorry — " Tyler began.

Edward lifted a hand to stop him.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No blood, no foul," he said, flashing his brilliant

teeth. He moved to sit on the edge of Tyler's bed,

facing me. He smirked again.

"So, what's the verdict?" he asked me.

"There's nothing wrong with me at all, but they won't

let me go," I complained. "How come you aren't

strapped to a gurney like the rest of us?"

"It's all about who you know," he answered. "But

don't worry, I came to spring you."

Then a doctor walked around the corner, and my

mouth fell open. He was young, he was blond... and

he was handsomer than any movie star I'd ever seen.

He was pale, though, and tired-looking, with circles

under his eyes. From Charlie's description, this had

to be Edward's father.

"So, Miss Swan," Dr. Cullen said in a remarkably

appealing voice, "how are you feeling?"

"I'm fine," I said, for the last time, I hoped. He walked

to the lightboard on the wall over my head, and

turned it on.

"Your X-rays look good," he said. "Does your head

hurt? Edward said you hit it pretty hard."

"It's fine," I repeated with a sigh, throwing a quick

scowl toward Edward. The doctor's cool fingers

probed lightly along my skull. He noticed when I

winced.

"Tender?" he asked.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Not really." I'd had worse.

I heard a chuckle, and looked over to see Edward's

patronizing smile. My eyes narrowed.

"Well, your father is in the waiting room — you can go

home with him now. But come back if you feel dizzy

or have trouble with your eyesight at all."

"Can't I go back to school?" I asked, imagining Charlie

trying to be attentive.

"Maybe you should take it easy today."

I glanced at Edward. "Does he get to go to school?"

"Someone has to spread the good news that we

survived," Edward said smugly.

"Actually," Dr. Cullen corrected, "most of the school

seems to be in the waiting room."

"Oh no," I moaned, covering my face with my hands.

Dr. Cullen raised his eyebrows. "Do you want to

stay?"

"No, no!" I insisted, throwing my legs over the side of

the bed and hopping down quickly. Too quickly — I

staggered, and Dr. Cullen caught me. He looked

concerned.

"I'm fine," I assured him again. No need to tell him my

balance problems had nothing to do with hitting my

head.

"Take some Tylenol for the pain," he suggested as he

steadied me.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"It doesn't hurt that bad," I insisted.

"It sounds like you were extremely lucky," Dr. Cullen

said, smiling as he signed my chart with a flourish.

"Lucky Edward happened to be standing next to me,"

I amended with a hard glance at the subject of my

statement.

"Oh, well, yes," Dr. Cullen agreed, suddenly occupied

with the papers in front of him. Then he looked away,

at Tyler, and walked to the next bed. My intuition

flickered; the doctor was in on it.

"I'm afraid that you'll have to stay with us just a little

bit longer," he said to Tyler, and began checking his

cuts.

As soon as the doctor's back was turned, I moved to

Edward's side.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" I hissed under my

breath. He took a step back from me, his jaw

suddenly clenched.

"Your father is waiting for you," he said through his

teeth. I glanced at Dr. Cullen and Tyler.

"I'd like to speak with you alone, if you don't mind," I

pressed. He glared, and then turned his back and

strode down the long room. I nearly had to run to

keep up. As soon as we turned the corner into a short

hallway, he spun around to face me.

"What do you want?" he asked, sounding annoyed.

His eyes were cold. His unfriendliness intimidated me.

My words came out with less severity than I'd

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intended. "You owe me an explanation," I reminded

him.

"I saved your life — I don't owe you anything." I

flinched back from the resentment in his voice. "You

promised."

"Bella, you hit your head, you don't know what you're

talking about." His tone was cutting.

My temper flared now, and I glared defiantly at him.

"There's nothing wrong with my head."

He glared back. "What do you want from me, Bella?"

"I want to know the truth," I said. "I want to know

why I'm lying for you."

"What do you think happened?" he snapped.

It came out in a rush.

"All I know is that you weren't anywhere near me —

Tyler didn't see you, either, so don't tell me I hit my

head too hard. That van was going to crush us both

— and it didn't, and your hands left dents in the side

of it — and you left a dent in the other car, and you're

not hurt at all —

and the van should have smashed my legs, but you

were holding it up..." I could hear how crazy it

sounded, and I couldn't continue. I was so mad I

could feel the tears coming; I tried to force them back

by grinding my teeth together.

He was staring at me incredulously. But his face was

tense, defensive.

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"You think I lifted a van off you?" His tone questioned

my sanity, but it only made me more suspicious. It

was like a perfectly delivered line by a skilled actor.

I merely nodded once, jaw tight.

"Nobody will believe that, you know." His voice held

an edge of derision now.

"I'm not going to tell anybody." I said each word

slowly, carefully controlling my anger.

Surprise flitted across his face. "Then why does it

matter?"

"It matters to me," I insisted. "I don't like to lie — so

there'd better be a good reason why I'm doing it."

"Can't you just thank me and get over it?"

"Thank you." I waited, fuming and expectant.

"You're not going to let it go, are you?"

"No."

"In that case... I hope you enjoy disappointment." We

scowled at each other in silence. I was the first to

speak, trying to keep myself focused. I was in danger

of being distracted by his livid, glorious face. It was

like trying to stare down a destroying angel.

"Why did you even bother?" I asked frigidly.

He paused, and for a brief moment his stunning face

was unexpectedly vulnerable.

"I don't know," he whispered.

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And then he turned his back on me and walked away.

I was so angry, it took me a few minutes until I could

move. When I could walk, I made my way slowly to

the exit at the end of the hallway. The waiting room

was more unpleasant than I'd feared. It seemed like

every face I knew in Forks was there, staring at me.

Charlie rushed to my side; I put up my hands.

"There's nothing wrong with me," I assured him

sullenly. I was still aggravated, not in the mood for

chitchat.

"What did the doctor say?"

"Dr. Cullen saw me, and he said I was fine and I

could go home." I sighed. Mike and Jessica and Eric

were all there, beginning to converge on us. "Let's go,"

I urged.

Charlie put one arm behind my back, not quite

touching me, and led me to the glass doors of the exit.

I waved sheepishly at my friends, hoping to convey

that they didn't need to worry anymore. It was a huge

relief — the first time I'd ever felt that way — to get

into the cruiser. We drove in silence. I was so

wrapped up in my thoughts that I barely knew

Charlie was there. I was positive that Edward's

defensive behavior in the hall was a confirmation of

the bizarre things I still could hardly believe I'd

witnessed.

When we got to the house, Charlie finally spoke.

"Um... you'll need to call Renee." He hung his head,

guilty. I was appalled. "You told Mom!"

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"Sorry."

I slammed the cruiser's door a little harder than

necessary on my way out. My mom was in hysterics,

of course. I had to tell her I felt fine at least thirty

times before she would calm down. She begged me to

come home

— forgetting the fact that home was empty at the

moment — but her pleas were easier to resist than I

would have thought. I was consumed by the mystery

Edward presented. And more than a little obsessed by

Edward himself. Stupid, stupid, stupid. I wasn't as

eager to escape Forks as I should be, as any normal,

sane person would be.

I decided I might as well go to bed early that night.

Charlie continued to watch me anxiously, and it was

getting on my nerves. I stopped on my way to grab

three Tylenol from the bathroom. They did help, and,

as the pain eased, I drifted to sleep.

That was the first night I dreamed of Edward Cullen.

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1

INVITATIONS

In my dream it was very dark, and what dim light

there was seemed to be radiating from Edward's skin.

I couldn't see his face, just his back as he walked

away from me, leaving me in the blackness. No matter

how fast I ran, I couldn't catch up to him; no matter

how loud I called, he never turned. Troubled, I woke

in the middle of the night and couldn't sleep again for

what seemed like a very long time. After that, he was

in my dreams nearly every night, but always on the

periphery, never within reach.

The month that followed the accident was uneasy,

tense, and, at first, embarrassing.

To my dismay, I found myself the center of attention

for the rest of that week. Tyler Crowley was

impossible, following me around, obsessed with

making amends to me somehow. I tried to convince

him what I wanted more than anything else was for

him to forget all about it — especially since nothing

had actually happened to me — but he remained

insistent. He followed me between classes and sat at

our now-crowded lunch table. Mike and Eric were

even less friendly toward him than they were to each

other, which made me worry that I'd gained another

unwelcome fan. No one seemed concerned about

Edward, though I explained over and over that he was

the hero — how he had pulled me out of the way and

had nearly been crushed, too. I tried to be convincing.

Jessica, Mike, Eric, and everyone else always

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commented that they hadn't even seen him there till

the van was pulled away.

I wondered to myself why no one else had seen him

standing so far away, before he was suddenly,

impossibly saving my life. With chagrin, I realized the

probable cause — no one else was as aware of

Edward as I always was. No one else watched him the

way I did. How pitiful. Edward was never surrounded

by crowds of curious bystanders eager for his

firsthand account. People avoided him as usual. The

Cullens and the Hales sat at the same table as

always, not eating, talking only among themselves.

None of them, especially Edward, glanced my way

anymore. When he sat next to me in class, as far from

me as the table would allow, he seemed totally

unaware of my presence. Only now and then, when

his fists would suddenly ball up — skin stretched

even whiter over the bones — did I wonder if he

wasn't quite as oblivious as he appeared. He wished

he hadn't pulled me from the path of Tyler's van —

there was no other conclusion I could come to.

I wanted very much to talk to him, and the day after

the accident I tried. The last time I'd seen him,

outside the ER, we'd both been so furious. I still was

angry that he wouldn't trust me with the truth, even

though I was keeping my part of the bargain

flawlessly. But he had in fact saved my life, no matter

how he'd done it. And, overnight, the heat of my anger

faded into awed gratitude.

He was already seated when I got to Biology, looking

straight ahead. I sat down, expecting him to turn

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toward me. He showed no sign that he realized I was

there.

"Hello, Edward," I said pleasantly, to show him I was

going to behave myself.

He turned his head a fraction toward me without

meeting my gaze, nodded once, and then looked the

other way.

And that was the last contact I'd had with him,

though he was there, a foot away from me, every day.

I watched him sometimes, unable to stop myself —

from a distance, though, in the cafeteria or parking

lot. I watched as his golden eyes grew perceptibly

darker day by day. But in class I gave no more notice

that he existed than he showed toward me. I was

miserable. And the dreams continued.

Despite my outright lies, the tenor of my e-mails

alerted Renee to my depression, and she called a few

times, worried. I tried to convince her it was just the

weather that had me down.

Mike, at least, was pleased by the obvious coolness

between me and my lab partner. I could see he'd been

worried that Edward's daring rescue might have

impressed me, and he was relieved that it seemed to

have the opposite effect. He grew more confident,

sitting on the edge of my table to talk before Biology

class started, ignoring Edward as completely as he

ignored us.

The snow washed away for good after that one

dangerously icy day. Mike was disappointed he'd

never gotten to stage his snowball fight, but pleased

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that the beach trip would soon be possible. The rain

continued heavily, though, and the weeks passed.

Jessica made me aware of another event looming on

the horizon — she called the first Tuesday of March to

ask my permission to invite Mike to the girls' choice

spring dance in two weeks.

"Are you sure you don't mind... you weren't planning

to ask him?" she persisted when I told her I didn't

mind in the least.

"No, Jess, I'm not going," I assured her. Dancing was

glaringly outside my range of abilities.

"It will be really fun." Her attempt to convince me was

halfhearted. I suspected that Jessica enjoyed my

inexplicable popularity more than my actual

company.

"You have fun with Mike," I encouraged.

The next day, I was surprised that Jessica wasn't her

usual gushing self in Trig and Spanish. She was

silent as she walked by my side between classes, and

I was afraid to ask her why. If Mike had turned her

down, I was the last person she would want to tell.

My fears were strengthened during lunch when

Jessica sat as far from Mike as possible, chatting

animatedly with Eric. Mike was unusually quiet. Mike

was still quiet as he walked me to class, the

uncomfortable look on his face a bad sign. But he

didn't broach the subject until I was in my seat and

he was perched on my desk. As always, I was

electrically aware of Edward sitting close enough to

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touch, as distant as if he were merely an invention of

my imagination.

"So," Mike said, looking at the floor, "Jessica asked

me to the spring dance."

"That's great." I made my voice bright and

enthusiastic. "You'll have a lot of fun with Jessica."

"Well..." He floundered as he examined my smile,

clearly not happy with my response. "I told her I had

to think about it."

"Why would you do that?" I let disapproval color my

tone, though I was relieved he hadn't given her an

absolute no.

His face was bright red as he looked down again. Pity

shook my resolve.

"I was wondering if... well, if you might be planning to

ask me." I paused for a moment, hating the wave of

guilt that swept through me. But I saw, from the

corner of my eye, Edward's head tilt reflexively in my

direction.

"Mike, I think you should tell her yes," I said.

"Did you already ask someone?" Did Edward notice

how Mike's eyes flickered in his direction?

"No," I assured him. "I'm not going to the dance at

all."

"Why not?" Mike demanded.

I didn't want to get into the safety hazards that

dancing presented, so I quickly made new plans.

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"I'm going to Seattle that Saturday," I explained. I

needed to get out of town anyway — it was suddenly

the perfect time to go.

"Can't you go some other weekend?"

"Sorry, no," I said. "So you shouldn't make Jess wait

any longer — it's rude."

"Yeah, you're right," he mumbled, and turned,

dejected, to walk back to his seat. I closed my eyes

and pressed my fingers to my temples, trying to push

the guilt and sympathy out of my head. Mr. Banner

began talking. I sighed and opened my eyes.

And Edward was staring at me curiously, that same,

familiar edge of frustration even more distinct now in

his black eyes.

I stared back, surprised, expecting him to look

quickly away. But instead he continued to gaze with

probing intensity into my eyes. There was no question

of me looking away. My hands started to shake.

"Mr. Cullen?" the teacher called, seeking the answer

to a question that I hadn't heard.

"The Krebs Cycle," Edward answered, seeming

reluctant as he turned to look at Mr. Banner.

I looked down at my book as soon as his eyes released

me, trying to find my place. Cowardly as ever, I

shifted my hair over my right shoulder to hide my

face. I couldn't believe the rush of emotion pulsing

through me —

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just because he'd happened to look at me for the first

time in a half-dozen weeks. I couldn't allow him to

have this level of influence over me. It was pathetic.

More than pathetic, it was unhealthy. I tried very

hard not to be aware of him for the rest of the hour,

and, since that was impossible, at least not to let him

know that I was aware of him. When the bell rang at

last, I turned my back to him to gather my things,

expecting him to leave immediately as usual.

"Bella?" His voice shouldn't have been so familiar to

me, as if I'd known the sound of it all my life rather

than for just a few short weeks. I turned slowly,

unwillingly. I didn't want to feel what I knew I would

feel when I looked at his too-perfect face. My

expression was wary when I finally turned to him; his

expression was unreadable. He didn't say anything.

"What? Are you speaking to me again?" I finally

asked, an unintentional note of petulance in my

voice.

His lips twitched, fighting a smile. "No, not really," he

admitted. I closed my eyes and inhaled slowly

through my nose, aware that I was gritting my teeth.

He waited.

"Then what do you want, Edward?" I asked, keeping

my eyes closed; it was easier to talk to him coherently

that way.

"I'm sorry." He sounded sincere. "I'm being very rude,

I know. But it's better this way, really."

I opened my eyes. His face was very serious.

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"I don't know what you mean," I said, my voice

guarded.

"It's better if we're not friends," he explained. "Trust

me." My eyes narrowed. I'd heard that before.

"It's too bad you didn't figure that out earlier," I

hissed through my teeth. "You could have saved

yourself all this regret."

"Regret?" The word, and my tone, obviously caught

him off guard. "Regret for what?"

"For not just letting that stupid van squish me." He

was astonished. He stared at me in disbelief.

When he finally spoke, he almost sounded mad. "You

think I regret saving your life?"

"I know you do," I snapped.

"You don't know anything." He was definitely mad. I

turned my head sharply away from him, clenching my

jaw against all the wild accusations I wanted to hurl

at him. I gathered my books together, then stood and

walked to the door. I meant to sweep dramatically out

of the room, but of course I caught the toe of my boot

on the doorjamb and dropped my books. I stood

there for a moment, thinking about leaving them.

Then I sighed and bent to pick them up. He was

there; he'd already stacked them into a pile. He

handed them to me, his face hard.

"Thank you," I said icily.

His eyes narrowed.

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"You're welcome," he retorted.

I straightened up swiftly, turned away from him

again, and stalked off to Gym without looking back.

Gym was brutal. We'd moved on to basketball. My

team never passed me the ball, so that was good, but

I fell down a lot. Sometimes I took people with me.

Today I was worse than usual because my head was

so filled with Edward. I tried to concentrate on my

feet, but he kept creeping back into my thoughts just

when I really needed my balance.

It was a relief, as always, to leave. I almost ran to the

truck; there were just so many people I wanted to

avoid. The truck had suffered only minimal damage in

the accident. I'd had to replace the taillights, and if I'd

had a real paint job, I would have touched that up.

Tyler's parents had to sell their van for parts.

I almost had a stroke when I rounded the corner and

saw a tall, dark figure leaning against the side of my

truck. Then I realized it was just Eric. I started

walking again.

"Hey, Eric," I called.

"Hi, Bella."

"What's up?" I said as I was unlocking the door. I

wasn't paying attention to the uncomfortable edge in

his voice, so his next words took me by surprise.

"Uh, I was just wondering... if you would go to the

spring dance with me?" His voice broke on the last

word.

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"I thought it was girls' choice," I said, too startled to

be diplomatic.

"Well, yeah," he admitted, shamefaced.

I recovered my composure and tried to make my smile

warm. "Thank you for asking me, but I'm going to be

in Seattle that day."

"Oh," he said. "Well, maybe next time."

"Sure," I agreed, and then bit my lip. I wouldn't want

him to take that too literally.

He slouched off, back toward the school. I heard a low

chuckle. Edward was walking past the front of my

truck, looking straight forward, his lips pressed

together. I yanked the door open and jumped inside,

slamming it loudly behind me. I revved the engine

deafeningly and reversed out into the aisle. Edward

was in his car already, two spaces down, sliding out

smoothly in front of me, cutting me off. He stopped

there — to wait for his family; I could see the four of

them walking this way, but still by the cafeteria. I

considered taking out the rear of his shiny Volvo, but

there were too many witnesses. I looked in my

rearview mirror. A line was beginning to form. Directly

behind me, Tyler Crowley was in his recently acquired

used Sentra, waving. I was too aggravated to

acknowledge him.

While I was sitting there, looking everywhere but at

the car in front of me, I heard a knock on my

passenger side window. I looked over; it was Tyler. I

glanced back in my rearview mirror, confused. His car

was still running, the door left open. I leaned across

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the cab to crank the window down. It was stiff. I got it

halfway down, then gave up.

"I'm sorry, Tyler, I'm stuck behind Cullen." I was

annoyed — obviously the holdup wasn't my fault.

"Oh, I know — I just wanted to ask you something

while we're trapped here." He grinned.

This could not be happening.

"Will you ask me to the spring dance?" he continued.

"I'm not going to be in town, Tyler." My voice sounded

a little sharp. I had to remember it wasn't his fault

that Mike and Eric had already used up my quota of

patience for the day.

"Yeah, Mike said that," he admitted.

"Then why — "

He shrugged. "I was hoping you were just letting him

down easy." Okay, it was completely his fault.

"Sorry, Tyler," I said, working to hide my irritation. "I

really am going out of town."

"That's cool. We still have prom."

And before I could respond, he was walking back to

his car. I could feel the shock on my face. I looked

forward to see Alice, Rosalie, Emmett, and Jasper all

sliding into the Volvo. In his rearview mirror,

Edward's eyes were on me. He was unquestionably

shaking with laughter, as if he'd heard every word

Tyler had said. My foot itched toward the gas pedal...

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one little bump wouldn't hurt any of them, just that

glossy silver paint job. I revved the engine.

But they were all in, and Edward was speeding away.

I drove home slowly, carefully, muttering to myself the

whole way.

When I got home, I decided to make chicken

enchiladas for dinner. It was a long process, and it

would keep me busy. While I was simmering the

onions and chilies, the phone rang. I was almost

afraid to answer it, but it might be Charlie or my

mom.

It was Jessica, and she was jubilant; Mike had caught

her after school to accept her invitation. I celebrated

with her briefly while I stirred. She had to go, she

wanted to call Angela and Lauren to tell them. I

suggested — with casual innocence — that maybe

Angela, the shy girl who had Biology with me, could

ask Eric. And Lauren, a standoffish girl who had

always ignored me at the lunch table, could ask Tyler;

I'd heard he was still available. Jess thought that was

a great idea. Now that she was sure of Mike, she

actually sounded sincere when she said she wished I

would go to the dance. I gave her my Seattle excuse.

After I hung up, I tried to concentrate on dinner —

dicing the chicken especially; I didn't want to take

another trip to the emergency room. But my head was

spinning, trying to analyze every word Edward had

spoken today. What did he mean, it was better if we

weren't friends?

My stomach twisted as I realized what he must have

meant. He must see how absorbed I was by him; he

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must not want to lead me on... so we couldn't even be

friends... because he wasn't interested in me at all. Of

course he wasn't interested in me, I thought angrily,

my eyes stinging — a delayed reaction to the onions. I

wasn't interesting. And he was. Interesting... and

brilliant... and mysterious... and perfect... and

beautiful...

and possibly able to lift full-sized vans with one hand.

Well, that was fine. I could leave him alone. I would

leave him alone. I would get through my self-imposed

sentence here in purgatory, and then hopefully some

school in the Southwest, or possibly Hawaii, would

offer me a scholarship. I focused my thoughts on

sunny beaches and palm trees as I finished the

enchiladas and put them in the oven.

Charlie seemed suspicious when he came home and

smelled the green peppers. I couldn't blame him —

the closest edible Mexican food was probably in

southern California. But he was a cop, even if just a

small-town cop, so he was brave enough to take the

first bite. He seemed to like it. It was fun to watch as

he slowly began trusting me in the kitchen.

"Dad?" I asked when he was almost done.

"Yeah, Bella?"

"Um, I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to

Seattle for the day a week from Saturday... if that's

okay?" I didn't want to ask permission —

it set a bad precedent — but I felt rude, so I tacked it

on at the end.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Why?" He sounded surprised, as if he were unable to

imagine something that Forks couldn't offer.

"Well, I wanted to get few books — the library here is

pretty limited — and maybe look at some clothes." I

had more money than I was used to having, since,

thanks to Charlie, I hadn't had to pay for a car. Not

that the truck didn't cost me quite a bit in the gas

department.

"That truck probably doesn't get very good gas

mileage," he said, echoing my thoughts.

"I know, I'll stop in Montesano and Olympia — and

Tacoma if I have to."

"Are you going all by yourself?" he asked, and I

couldn't tell if he was suspicious I had a secret

boyfriend or just worried about car trouble.

"Yes."

"Seattle is a big city — you could get lost," he fretted.

"Dad, Phoenix is five times the size of Seattle — and I

can read a map, don't worry about it."

"Do you want me to come with you?"

I tried to be crafty as I hid my horror.

"That's all right, Dad, I'll probably just be in dressing

rooms all day — very boring."

"Oh, okay." The thought of sitting in women's clothing

stores for any period of time immediately put him off.

"Thanks." I smiled at him.

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"Will you be back in time for the dance?"

Grrr. Only in a town this small would a father know

when the high school dances were.

"No — I don't dance, Dad." He, of all people, should

understand that — I didn't get my balance problems

from my mother.

He did understand. "Oh, that's right," he realized. The

next morning, when I pulled into the parking lot, I

deliberately parked as far as possible from the silver

Volvo. I didn't want to put myself in the path of too

much temptation and end up owing him a new car.

Getting out of the cab, I fumbled with my key and it

fell into a puddle at my feet. As I bent to get it, a

white hand flashed out and grabbed it before I could.

I jerked upright. Edward Cullen was right next to me,

leaning casually against my truck.

"How do you do that?" I asked in amazed irritation.

"Do what?" He held my key out as he spoke. As I

reached for it, he dropped it into my palm.

"Appear out of thin air."

"Bella, it's not my fault if you are exceptionally

unobservant." His voice was quiet as usual — velvet,

muted.

I scowled at his perfect face. His eyes were light again

today, a deep, golden honey color. Then I had to look

down, to reassemble my now- tangled thoughts.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Why the traffic jam last night?" I demanded, still

looking away. "I thought you were supposed to be

pretending I don't exist, not irritating me to death."

"That was for Tyler's sake, not mine. I had to give him

his chance." He snickered.

"You..." I gasped. I couldn't think of a bad enough

word. It felt like the heat of my anger should

physically burn him, but he only seemed more

amused.

"And I'm not pretending you don't exist," he

continued.

"So you are trying to irritate me to death? Since

Tyler's van didn't do the job?"

Anger flashed in his tawny eyes. His lips pressed into

a hard line, all signs of humor gone.

"Bella, you are utterly absurd," he said, his low voice

cold. My palms tingled — I wanted so badly to hit

something. I was surprised at myself. I was usually a

nonviolent person. I turned my back and started to

walk away.

"Wait," he called. I kept walking, sloshing angrily

through the rain. But he was next to me, easily

keeping pace.

"I'm sorry, that was rude," he said as we walked. I

ignored him. "I'm not saying it isn't true," he

continued, "but it was rude to say it, anyway."

"Why won't you leave me alone?" I grumbled.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I wanted to ask you something, but you sidetracked

me," he chuckled. He seemed to have recovered his

good humor.

"Do you have a multiple personality disorder?" I asked

severely.

"You're doing it again."

I sighed. "Fine then. What do you want to ask?"

"I was wondering if, a week from Saturday — you

know, the day of the spring dance — "

"Are you trying to be funny?" I interrupted him,

wheeling toward him. My face got drenched as I

looked up at his expression.

His eyes were wickedly amused. "Will you please allow

me to finish?" I bit my lip and clasped my hands

together, interlocking my fingers, so I couldn't do

anything rash.

"I heard you say you were going to Seattle that day,

and I was wondering if you wanted a ride."

That was unexpected.

"What?" I wasn't sure what he was getting at.

"Do you want a ride to Seattle?"

"With who?" I asked, mystified.

"Myself, obviously." He enunciated every syllable, as if

he were talking to someone mentally handicapped.

I was still stunned. "Why?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Well, I was planning to go to Seattle in the next few

weeks, and, to be honest, I'm not sure if your truck

can make it."

"My truck works just fine, thank you very much for

your concern." I started to walk again, but I was too

surprised to maintain the same level of anger.

"But can your truck make it there on one tank of

gas?" He matched my pace again.

"I don't see how that is any of your business." Stupid,

shiny Volvo owner.

"The wasting of finite resources is everyone's

business."

"Honestly, Edward." I felt a thrill go through me as I

said his name, and I hated it. "I can't keep up with

you. I thought you didn't want to be my friend."

"I said it would be better if we weren't friends, not

that I didn't want to be."

"Oh, thanks, now that's all cleared up." Heavy

sarcasm. I realized I had stopped walking again. We

were under the shelter of the cafeteria roof now, so I

could more easily look at his face. Which certainly

didn't help my clarity of thought.

"It would be more... prudent for you not to be my

friend," he explained.

"But I'm tired of trying to stay away from you, Bella."

His eyes were gloriously intense as he uttered that

last sentence, his voice smoldering. I couldn't

remember how to breathe.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Will you go with me to Seattle?" he asked, still

intense. I couldn't speak yet, so I just nodded.

He smiled briefly, and then his face became serious.

"You really should stay away from me," he warned.

"I'll see you in class." He turned abruptly and walked

back the way we'd come.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Chapter 5

I made my way to English in a daze. I didn't even

realize when I first walked in that class had already

started.

"Thank you for joining us, Miss Swan," Mr. Mason

said in a disparaging tone.

I flushed and hurried to my seat.

It wasn't till class ended that I realized Mike wasn't

sitting in his usual seat next to me. I felt a twinge of

guilt. But he and Eric both met me at the door as

usual, so I figured I wasn't totally unforgiven. Mike

seemed to become more himself as we walked, gaining

enthusiasm as he talked about the weather report for

this weekend. The rain was supposed to take a minor

break, and so maybe his beach trip would be

possible. I tried to sound eager, to make up for

disappointing him yesterday. It was hard; rain or no

rain, it would still only be in the high forties, if we

were lucky.

The rest of the morning passed in a blur. It was

difficult to believe that I hadn't just imagined what

Edward had said, and the way his eyes had looked.

Maybe it was just a very convincing dream that I'd

confused with reality. That seemed more probable

than that I really appealed to him on any level.

So I was impatient and frightened as Jessica and I

entered the cafeteria. I wanted to see his face, to see if

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

he'd gone back to the cold, indifferent person I'd

known for the last several weeks. Or if, by some

miracle, I'd really heard what I thought I'd heard this

morning. Jessica babbled on and on about her dance

plans — Lauren and Angela had asked the other boys

and they were all going together — completely

unaware of my inattention.

Disappointment flooded through me as my eyes

unerringly focused on his table. The other four were

there, but he was absent. Had he gone home? I

followed the still-babbling Jessica through the line,

crushed. I'd lost my appetite — I bought nothing but

a bottle of lemonade. I just wanted to go sit down and

sulk.

"Edward Cullen is staring at you again," Jessica said,

finally breaking through my abstraction with his

name. "I wonder why he's sitting alone today."

My head snapped up. I followed her gaze to see

Edward, smiling crookedly, staring at me from an

empty table across the cafeteria from where he

usually sat. Once he'd caught my eye, he raised one

hand and motioned with his index finger for me to

join him. As I stared in disbelief, he winked.

"Does he mean you?" Jessica asked with insulting

astonishment in her voice.

"Maybe he needs help with his Biology homework," I

muttered for her benefit. "Um, I'd better go see what

he wants." I could feel her staring after me as I

walked away.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

When I reached his table, I stood behind the chair

across from him, unsure.

"Why don't you sit with me today?" he asked, smiling.

I sat down automatically, watching him with caution.

He was still smiling. It was hard to believe that

someone so beautiful could be real. I was afraid that

he might disappear in a sudden puff of smoke, and I

would wake up.

He seemed to be waiting for me to say something.

"This is different," I finally managed.

"Well..." He paused, and then the rest of the words

followed in a rush. "I decided as long as I was going to

hell, I might as well do it thoroughly." I waited for him

to say something that made sense. The seconds

ticked by.

"You know I don't have any idea what you mean," I

eventually pointed out.

"I know." He smiled again, and then he changed the

subject. "I think your friends are angry with me for

stealing you."

"They'll survive." I could feel their stares boring into

my back.

"I may not give you back, though," he said with a

wicked glint in his eyes.

I gulped.

He laughed. "You look worried."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No," I said, but, ridiculously, my voice broke.

"Surprised, actually...

what brought all this on?"

"I told you — I got tired of trying to stay away from

you. So I'm giving up." He was still smiling, but his

ocher eyes were serious.

"Giving up?" I repeated in confusion.

"Yes — giving up trying to be good. I'm just going to

do what I want now, and let the chips fall where they

may." His smile faded as he explained, and a hard

edge crept into his voice.

"You lost me again."

The breathtaking crooked smile reappeared.

"I always say too much when I'm talking to you —

that's one of the problems."

"Don't worry — I don't understand any of it," I said

wryly.

"I'm counting on that."

"So, in plain English, are we friends now?"

"Friends..." he mused, dubious.

"Or not," I muttered.

He grinned. "Well, we can try, I suppose. But I'm

warning you now that I'm not a good friend for you."

Behind his smile, the warning was real.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You say that a lot," I noted, trying to ignore the

sudden trembling in my stomach and keep my voice

even.

"Yes, because you're not listening to me. I'm still

waiting for you to believe it. If you're smart, you'll

avoid me."

"I think you've made your opinion on the subject of

my intellect clear, too." My eyes narrowed.

He smiled apologetically.

"So, as long as I'm being... not smart, we'll try to be

friends?" I struggled to sum up the confusing

exchange.

"That sounds about right."

I looked down at my hands wrapped around the

lemonade bottle, not sure what to do now.

"What are you thinking?" he asked curiously.

I looked up into his deep gold eyes, became

befuddled, and, as usual, blurted out the truth.

"I'm trying to figure out what you are."

His jaw tightened, but he kept his smile in place with

some effort.

"Are you having any luck with that?" he asked in an

offhand tone.

"Not too much," I admitted.

He chuckled. "What are your theories?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I blushed. I had been vacillating during the last

month between Bruce Wayne and Peter Parker. There

was no way I was going to own up to that.

"Won't you tell me?" he asked, tilting his head to one

side with a shockingly tempting smile.

I shook my head. "Too embarrassing."

"That's really frustrating, you know," he complained.

"No," I disagreed quickly, my eyes narrowing, "I can't

imagine why that would be frustrating at all — just

because someone refuses to tell you what they're

thinking, even if all the while they're making cryptic

little remarks specifically designed to keep you up at

night wondering what they could possibly mean...

now, why would that be frustrating?" He grimaced.

"Or better," I continued, the pent-up annoyance

flowing freely now, "say that person also did a wide

range of bizarre things — from saving your life under

impossible circumstances one day to treating you like

a pariah the next, and he never explained any of that,

either, even after he promised. That, also, would be

very non-frustrating."

"You've got a bit of a temper, don't you?"

"I don't like double standards."

We stared at each other, unsmiling.

He glanced over my shoulder, and then,

unexpectedly, he snickered.

"What?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Your boyfriend seems to think I'm being unpleasant

to you — he's debating whether or not to come break

up our fight." He snickered again.

"I don't know who you're talking about," I said frostily.

"But I'm sure you're wrong, anyway."

"I'm not. I told you, most people are easy to read."

"Except me, of course."

"Yes. Except for you." His mood shifted suddenly; his

eyes turned brooding. "I wonder why that is."

I had to look away from the intensity of his stare. I

concentrated on unscrewing the lid of my lemonade. I

took a swig, staring at the table without seeing it.

"Aren't you hungry?" he asked, distracted.

"No." I didn't feel like mentioning that my stomach

was already full — of butterflies. "You?" I looked at

the empty table in front of him.

"No, I'm not hungry." I didn't understand his

expression — it looked like he was enjoying some

private joke.

"Can you do me a favor?" I asked after a second of

hesitation. He was suddenly wary. "That depends on

what you want."

"It's not much," I assured him.

He waited, guarded but curious.

"I just wondered... if you could warn me beforehand

the next time you decide to ignore me for my own

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

good. Just so I'm prepared." I looked at the lemonade

bottle as I spoke, tracing the circle of the opening with

my pinkie finger.

"That sounds fair." He was pressing his lips together

to keep from laughing when I looked up.

"Thanks."

"Then can I have one answer in return?" he

demanded.

"One."

"Tell me one theory."

Whoops. "Not that one."

"You didn't qualify, you just promised one answer," he

reminded me.

"And you've broken promises yourself," I reminded

him back.

"Just one theory — I won't laugh."

"Yes, you will." I was positive about that.

He looked down, and then glanced up at me through

his long black lashes, his ocher eyes scorching.

"Please?" he breathed, leaning toward me.

I blinked, my mind going blank. Holy crow, how did

he do that?

"Er, what?" I asked, dazed.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Please tell me just one little theory." His eyes still

smoldered at me.

"Um, well, bitten by a radioactive spider?" Was he a

hypnotist, too? Or was I just a hopeless pushover?

"That's not very creative," he scoffed.

"I'm sorry, that's all I've got," I said, miffed.

"You're not even close," he teased.

"No spiders?"

"Nope."

"And no radioactivity?"

"None."

"Dang," I sighed.

"Kryptonite doesn't bother me, either," he chuckled.

"You're not supposed to laugh, remember?"

He struggled to compose his face.

"I'll figure it out eventually," I warned him.

"I wish you wouldn't try." He was serious again.

"Because... ?"

"What if I'm not a superhero? What if I'm the bad

guy?" He smiled playfully, but his eyes were

impenetrable.

"Oh," I said, as several things he'd hinted fell

suddenly into place. "I see."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Do you?" His face was abruptly severe, as if he were

afraid that he'd accidentally said too much.

"You're dangerous?" I guessed, my pulse quickening

as I intuitively realized the truth of my own words. He

was dangerous. He'd been trying to tell me that all

along.

He just looked at me, eyes full of some emotion I

couldn't comprehend.

"But not bad," I whispered, shaking my head. "No, I

don't believe that you're bad."

"You're wrong." His voice was almost inaudible. He

looked down, stealing my bottle lid and then spinning

it on its side between his fingers. I stared at him,

wondering why I didn't feel afraid. He meant what he

was saying — that was obvious. But I just felt

anxious, on edge... and, more than anything else,

fascinated. The same way I always felt when I was

near him.

The silence lasted until I noticed that the cafeteria

was almost empty. I jumped to my feet. "We're going

to be late."

"I'm not going to class today," he said, twirling the lid

so fast it was just a blur.

"Why not?"

"It's healthy to ditch class now and then." He smiled

up at me, but his eyes were still troubled.

"Well, I'm going," I told him. I was far too big a coward

to risk getting caught.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

He turned his attention back to his makeshift top. "I'll

see you later, then."

I hesitated, torn, but then the first bell sent me

hurrying out the door

— with a last glance confirming that he hadn't moved

a centimeter. As I half-ran to class, my head was

spinning faster than the bottle cap. So few questions

had been answered in comparison to how many new

questions had been raised. At least the rain had

stopped. I was lucky; Mr. Banner wasn't in the room

yet when I arrived. I settled quickly into my seat,

aware that both Mike and Angela were staring at me.

Mike looked resentful; Angela looked surprised, and

slightly awed. Mr. Banner came in the room then,

calling the class to order. He was juggling a few small

cardboard boxes in his arms. He put them down on

Mike's table, telling him to start passing them around

the class.

"Okay, guys, I want you all to take one piece from

each box," he said as he produced a pair of rubber

gloves from the pocket of his lab jacket and pulled

them on. The sharp sound as the gloves snapped into

place against his wrists seemed ominous to me. "The

first should be an indicator card," he went on,

grabbing a white card with four squares marked on it

and displaying it. "The second is a four-pronged

applicator — " he held up something that looked like a

nearly toothless hair pick " — and the third is a sterile

micro-lancet." He held up a small piece of blue plastic

and split it open. The barb was invisible from this

distance, but my stomach flipped.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I'll be coming around with a dropper of water to

prepare your cards, so please don't start until I get to

you." He began at Mike's table again, carefully putting

one drop of water in each of the four squares. "Then I

want you to carefully prick your finger with the

lancet..." He grabbed Mike's hand and jabbed the

spike into the tip of Mike's middle finger. Oh no.

Clammy moisture broke out across my forehead.

"Put a small drop of blood on each of the prongs." He

demonstrated, squeezing Mike's finger till the blood

flowed. I swallowed convulsively, my stomach

heaving.

"And then apply it to the card," he finished, holding

up the dripping red card for us to see. I closed my

eyes, trying to hear through the ringing in my ears.

"The Red Cross is having a blood drive in Port Angeles

next weekend, so I thought you should all know your

blood type." He sounded proud of himself. "Those of

you who aren't eighteen yet will need a parent's

permission — I have slips at my desk."

He continued through the room with his water drops.

I put my cheek against the cool black tabletop and

tried to hold on to my consciousness. All around me I

could hear squeals, complaints, and giggles as my

classmates skewered their fingers. I breathed slowly

in and out through my mouth.

"Bella, are you all right?" Mr. Banner asked. His voice

was close to my head, and it sounded alarmed.

"I already know my blood type, Mr. Banner," I said in

a weak voice. I was afraid to raise my head.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Are you feeling faint?"

"Yes, sir," I muttered, internally kicking myself for not

ditching when I had the chance.

"Can someone take Bella to the nurse, please?" he

called. I didn't have to look up to know that it would

be Mike who volunteered.

"Can you walk?" Mr. Banner asked.

"Yes," I whispered. Just let me get out of here, I

thought. I'll crawl. Mike seemed eager as he put his

arm around my waist and pulled my arm over his

shoulder. I leaned against him heavily on the way out

of the classroom.

Mike towed me slowly across campus. When we were

around the edge of the cafeteria, out of sight of

building four in case Mr. Banner was watching, I

stopped.

"Just let me sit for a minute, please?" I begged. He

helped me sit on the edge of the walk.

"And whatever you do, keep your hand in your

pocket," I warned. I was still so dizzy. I slumped over

on my side, putting my cheek against the freezing,

damp cement of the sidewalk, closing my eyes. That

seemed to help a little.

"Wow, you're green, Bella," Mike said nervously.

"Bella?" a different voice called from the distance. No!

Please let me be imagining that horribly familiar

voice.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"What's wrong — is she hurt?" His voice was closer

now, and he sounded upset. I wasn't imagining it. I

squeezed my eyes shut, hoping to die. Or, at the very

least, not to throw up.

Mike seemed stressed. "I think she's fainted. I don't

know what happened, she didn't even stick her

finger."

"Bella." Edward's voice was right beside me, relieved

now. "Can you hear me?"

"No," I groaned. "Go away."

He chuckled.

"I was taking her to the nurse," Mike explained in a

defensive tone, "but she wouldn't go any farther."

"I'll take her," Edward said. I could hear the smile still

in his voice.

"You can go back to class."

"No," Mike protested. "I'm supposed to do it."

Suddenly the sidewalk disappeared from beneath me.

My eyes flew open in shock. Edward had scooped me

up in his arms, as easily as if I weighed ten pounds

instead of a hundred and ten.

"Put me down!" Please, please let me not vomit on

him. He was walking before I was finished talking.

"Hey!" Mike called, already ten paces behind us.

Edward ignored him. "You look awful," he told me,

grinning.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Put me back on the sidewalk," I moaned. The rocking

movement of his walk was not helping. He held me

away from his body, gingerly, supporting all my

weight with just his arms — it didn't seem to bother

him.

"So you faint at the sight of blood?" he asked. This

seemed to entertain him.

I didn't answer. I closed my eyes again and fought the

nausea with all my strength, clamping my lips

together.

"And not even your own blood," he continued,

enjoying himself. I don't know how he opened the

door while carrying me, but it was suddenly warm, so

I knew we were inside.

"Oh my," I heard a female voice gasp.

"She fainted in Biology," Edward explained.

I opened my eyes. I was in the office, and Edward was

striding past the front counter toward the nurse's

door. Ms. Cope, the redheaded front office

receptionist, ran ahead of him to hold it open. The

grandmotherly nurse looked up from a novel,

astonished, as Edward swung me into the room and

placed me gently on the crackly paper that covered

the brown vinyl mattress on the one cot. Then he

moved to stand against the wall as far across the

narrow room as possible. His eyes were bright,

excited.

"She's just a little faint," he reassured the startled

nurse. "They're blood typing in Biology."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

The nurse nodded sagely. "There's always one."

He muffled a snicker.

"Just lie down for a minute, honey; it'll pass."

"I know," I sighed. The nausea was already fading.

"Does this happen a lot?" she asked.

"Sometimes," I admitted. Edward coughed to hide

another laugh.

"You can go back to class now," she told him.

"I'm supposed to stay with her." He said this with

such assured authority that — even though she

pursed her lips — the nurse didn't argue it further.

"I'll go get you some ice for your forehead, dear," she

said to me, and then bustled out of the room.

"You were right," I moaned, letting my eyes close.

"I usually am — but about what in particular this

time?"

"Ditching is healthy." I practiced breathing evenly.

"You scared me for a minute there," he admitted after

a pause. His tone made it sound like he was

confessing a humiliating weakness. "I thought Newton

was dragging your dead body off to bury it in the

woods."

"Ha ha." I still had my eyes closed, but I was feeling

more normal every minute.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Honestly — I've seen corpses with better color. I was

concerned that I might have to avenge your murder."

"Poor Mike. I'll bet he’s mad."

"He absolutely loathes me," Edward said cheerfully.

"You can't know that," I argued, but then I wondered

suddenly if he could.

"I saw his face — I could tell."

"How did you see me? I thought you were ditching." I

was almost fine now, though the queasiness would

probably pass faster if I'd eaten something for lunch.

On the other hand, maybe it was lucky my stomach

was empty.

"I was in my car, listening to a CD." Such a normal

response — it surprised me.

I heard the door and opened my eyes to see the nurse

with a cold compress in her hand.

"Here you go, dear." She laid it across my forehead.

"You're looking better," she added.

"I think I'm fine," I said, sitting up. Just a little

ringing in my ears, no spinning. The mint green walls

stayed where they should. I could see she was about

to make me lie back down, but the door opened just

then, and Ms. Cope stuck her head in.

"We've got another one," she warned.

I hopped down to free up the cot for the next invalid.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I handed the compress back to the nurse. "Here, I

don't need this." And then Mike staggered through the

door, now supporting a sallow-looking Lee Stephens,

another boy in our Biology class. Edward and I drew

back against the wall to give them room.

"Oh no," Edward muttered. "Go out to the office,

Bella." I looked up at him, bewildered.

"Trust me — go."

I spun and caught the door before it closed, darting

out of the infirmary. I could feel Edward right behind

me.

"You actually listened to me." He was stunned.

"I smelled the blood," I said, wrinkling my nose. Lee

wasn't sick from watching other people, like me.

"People can't smell blood," he contradicted.

"Well, I can — that's what makes me sick. It smells

like rust... and salt." He was staring at me with an

unfathomable expression.

"What?" I asked.

"It's nothing."

Mike came through the door then, glancing from me

to Edward. The look he gave Edward confirmed what

Edward had said about loathing. He looked back at

me, his eyes glum.

"You look better," he accused.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Just keep your hand in your pocket," I warned him

again.

"It's not bleeding anymore," he muttered. "Are you

going back to class?"

"Are you kidding? I'd just have to turn around and

come back."

"Yeah, I guess... So are you going this weekend? To

the beach?" While he spoke, he flashed another glare

toward Edward, who was standing against the

cluttered counter, motionless as a sculpture, staring

off into space. I tried to sound as friendly as possible.

"Sure, I said I was in."

"We’re meeting at my dad's store, at ten." His eyes

flickered to Edward again, wondering if he was giving

out too much information. His body language made it

clear that it wasn't an open invitation.

"I'll be there," I promised.

"I'll see you in Gym, then," he said, moving

uncertainly toward the door.

"See you," I replied. He looked at me once more, his

round face slightly pouting, and then as he walked

slowly through the door, his shoulders slumped. A

swell of sympathy washed over me. I pondered seeing

his disappointed face again... in Gym.

"Gym," I groaned.

"I can take care of that." I hadn't noticed Edward

moving to my side, but he spoke now in my ear. "Go

sit down and look pale," he muttered. That wasn't a

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

challenge; I was always pale, and my recent swoon

had left a light sheen of sweat on my face. I sat in one

of the creaky folding chairs and rested my head

against the wall with my eyes closed. Fainting spells

always exhausted me.

I heard Edward speaking softly at the counter.

"Ms. Cope?”

"Yes?" I hadn't heard her return to her desk.

"Bella has Gym next hour, and I don't think she feels

well enough. Actually, I was thinking I should take

her home now. Do you think you could excuse her

from class?" His voice was like melting honey. I could

imagine how much more overwhelming his eyes

would be.

"Do you need to be excused, too, Edward?" Ms. Cope

fluttered. Why couldn't I do that?

"No, I have Mrs. Goff, she won't mind."

"Okay, it's all taken care of. You feel better, Bella,"

she called to me. I nodded weakly, hamming it up just

a bit.

"Can you walk, or do you want me to carry you

again?" With his back to the receptionist, his

expression became sarcastic.

"I'll walk."

I stood carefully, and I was still fine. He held the door

for me, his smile polite but his eyes mocking. I walked

out into the cold, fine mist that had just begun to fall.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

It felt nice — the first time I'd enjoyed the constant

moisture falling out of the sky — as it washed my face

clean of the sticky perspiration.

"Thanks," I said as he followed me out. "It's almost

worth getting sick to miss Gym."

"Anytime." He was staring straight forward, squinting

into the rain.

"So are you going? This Saturday, I mean?" I was

hoping he would, though it seemed unlikely. I

couldn't picture him loading up to carpool with the

rest of the kids from school; he didn't belong in the

same world. But just hoping that he might gave me

the first twinge of enthusiasm I'd felt for the outing.

"Where are you all going, exactly?" He was still

looking ahead, expressionless.

"Down to La Push, to First Beach." I studied his face,

trying to read it. His eyes seemed to narrow

infinite s imally .

He glanced down at me from the corner of his eye,

smiling wryly. "I really don't think I was invited."

I sighed. "I just invited you."

"Let's you and I not push poor Mike any further this

week. We don't want him to snap." His eyes danced;

he was enjoying the idea more than he should.

"Mike-schmike." I muttered, preoccupied by the way

he'd said "you and I." I liked it more than I should.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

We were near the parking lot now. I veered left,

toward my truck. Something caught my jacket,

yanking me back.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked,

outraged. He was gripping a fistful of my jacket in one

hand.

I was confused. "I'm going home."

"Didn't you hear me promise to take you safely home?

Do you think I'm going to let you drive in your

condition?" His voice was still indignant.

"What condition? And what about my truck?" I

complained.

"I'll have Alice drop it off after school." He was towing

me toward his car now, pulling me by my jacket. It

was all I could do to keep from falling backward. He'd

probably just drag me along anyway if I did.

"Let go!" I insisted. He ignored me. I staggered along

sideways across the wet sidewalk until we reached

the Volvo. Then he finally freed me — I stumbled

against the passenger door.

"You are so pushy!" I grumbled.

"It's open," was all he responded. He got in the

driver's side.

"I am perfectly capable of driving myself home!" I

stood by the car, fuming. It was raining harder now,

and I'd never put my hood up, so my hair was

dripping down my back.

Ill | P a g e

Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

He lowered the automatic window and leaned toward

me across the seat.

"Get in, Bella."

I didn't answer. I was mentally calculating my

chances of reaching the truck before he could catch

me. I had to admit, they weren't good.

"I'll just drag you back," he threatened, guessing my

plan. I tried to maintain what dignity I could as I got

into his car. I wasn't very successful — I looked like a

half-drowned cat and my boots squeaked.

"This is completely unnecessary," I said stiffly. He

didn't answer. He fiddled with the controls, turning

the heater up and the music down. As he pulled out

of the parking lot, I was preparing to give him the

silent treatment — my face in full pout mode — but

then I recognized the music playing, and my curiosity

got the better of my intentions.

"Clair de Lune?" I asked, surprised.

"You know Debussy?" He sounded surprised, too.

"Not well," I admitted. "My mother plays a lot of

classical music around the house — I only know my

favorites."

"It's one of my favorites, too." He stared out through

the rain, lost in thought.

I listened to the music, relaxing against the light gray

leather seat. It was impossible not to respond to the

familiar, soothing melody. The rain blurred everything

outside the window into gray and green smudges. I

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

began to realize we were driving very fast; the car

moved so steadily, so evenly, though, I didn't feel the

speed. Only the town flashing by gave it away.

"What is your mother like?" he asked me suddenly. I

glanced over to see him studying me with curious

eyes.

"She looks a lot like me, but she's prettier," I said. He

raised his eyebrows. "I have too much Charlie in me.

She's more outgoing than I am, and braver. She's

irresponsible and slightly eccentric, and she's a very

unpredictable cook. She's my best friend." I stopped.

Talking about her was making me depressed.

"How old are you, Bella?" His voice sounded

frustrated for some reason I couldn't imagine. He'd

stopped the car, and I realized we were at Charlie's

house already. The rain was so heavy that I could

barely see the house at all. It was like the car was

submerged under a river.

"I'm seventeen," I responded, a little confused.

"You don't seem seventeen."

His tone was reproachful; it made me laugh.

"What?" he asked, curious again.

"My mom always says I was born thirty-five years old

and that I get more middle-aged every year." I

laughed, and then sighed. "Well, someone has to be

the adult." I paused for a second. "You don't seem

much like a junior in high school yourself," I noted.

He made a face and changed the subject.

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"So why did your mother marry Phil?"

I was surprised he would remember the name; I'd

mentioned it just once, almost two months ago. It

took me a moment to answer.

"My mother... she's very young for her age. I think

Phil makes her feel even younger. At any rate, she's

crazy about him." I shook my head. The attraction

was a mystery to me.

"Do you approve?" he asked.

"Does it matter?" I countered. "I want her to be

happy... and he is who she wants."

"That's very generous... I wonder," he mused.

"What?"

"Would she extend the same courtesy to you, do you

think? No matter who your choice was?" He was

suddenly intent, his eyes searching mine.

"I-I think so," I stuttered. "But she's the parent, after

all. It's a little bit different."

"No one too scary then," he teased.

I grinned in response. "What do you mean by scary?

Multiple facial piercings and extensive tattoos?"

"That's one definition, I suppose."

"What's your definition?"

But he ignored my question and asked me another.

"Do you think that I could be scary?" He raised one

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eyebrow, and the faint trace of a smile lightened his

face.

I thought for a moment, wondering whether the truth

or a lie would go over better. I decided to go with the

truth. "Hmmm... I think you could be, if you wanted

to."

"Are you frightened of me now?" The smile vanished,

and his heavenly face was suddenly serious.

"No." But I answered too quickly. The smile returned.

"So, now are you going to tell me about your family?" I

asked to distract him. "It's got to be a much more

interesting story than mine." He was instantly

cautious. "What do you want to know?"

"The Cullens adopted you?" I verified.

"Yes."

I hesitated for a moment. "What happened to your

parents?"

"They died many years ago." His tone was matter-of-

fact.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled.

"I don't really remember them that clearly. Carlisle

and Esme have been my parents for a long time now."

"And you love them." It wasn't a question. It was

obvious in the way he spoke of them.

"Yes." He smiled. "I couldn't imagine two better

people."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You're very lucky."

"I know I am."

"And your brother and sister?"

He glanced at the clock on the dashboard.

"My brother and sister, and Jasper and Rosalie for

that matter, are going to be quite upset if they have to

stand in the rain waiting for me."

"Oh, sorry, I guess you have to go." I didn't want to

get out of the car.

"And you probably want your truck back before Chief

Swan gets home, so you don't have to tell him about

the Biology incident." He grinned at me.

"I'm sure he's already heard. There are no secrets in

Forks." I sighed. He laughed, and there was an edge

to his laughter.

"Have fun at the beach... good weather for

sunbathing." He glanced out at the sheeting rain.

"Won't I see you tomorrow?"

"No. Emmett and I are starting the weekend early."

"What are you going to do?" A friend could ask that,

right? I hoped the disappointment wasn't too

apparent in my voice.

"We're going to be hiking in the Goat Rocks

Wilderness, just south of Rainier."

I remembered Charlie had said the Cullens went

camping frequently.

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"Oh, well, have fun." I tried to sound enthusiastic. I

don't think I fooled him, though. A smile was playing

around the edges of his lips.

"Will you do something for me this weekend?" He

turned to look me straight in the face, utilizing the

full power of his burning gold eyes. I nodded

helplessly.

"Don't be offended, but you seem to be one of those

people who just attract accidents like a magnet. So...

try not to fall into the ocean or get run over or

anything, all right?" He smiled crookedly. The

helplessness had faded as he spoke. I glared at him.

"I'll see what I can do," I snapped as I jumped out into

the rain. I slammed the door behind me with

excessive force.

He was still smiling as he drove away.

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Chapter 6

As I sat in my room, trying to concentrate on the third

act of Macbeth, I was really listening for my truck. I

would have thought, even over the pounding rain, I

could have heard the engine's roar. But when I went

to peek out the curtain — again — it was suddenly

there.

I wasn't looking forward to Friday, and it more than

lived up to my non-expectations. Of course there were

the fainting comments. Jessica especially seemed to

get a kick out of that story. Luckily Mike had kept his

mouth shut, and no one seemed to know about

Edward's involvement. She did have a lot of questions

about lunch, though.

"So what did Edward Cullen want yesterday?" Jessica

asked in Trig.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully. "He never really

got to the point."

"You looked kind of mad," she fished.

"Did I?" I kept my expression blank.

"You know, I've never seen him sit with anyone but

his family before. That was weird."

"Weird," I agreed. She seemed annoyed; she flipped

her dark curls impatiently — I guessed she'd been

hoping to hear something that would make a good

story for her to pass on.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

The worst part about Friday was that, even though I

knew he wasn't going to be there, I still hoped. When I

walked into the cafeteria with Jessica and Mike, I

couldn't keep from looking at his table, where Rosalie,

Alice, and Jasper sat talking, heads close together.

And I couldn't stop the gloom that engulfed me as I

realized I didn't know how long I would have to wait

before I saw him again.

At my usual table, everyone was full of our plans for

the next day. Mike was animated again, putting a

great deal of trust in the local weatherman who

promised sun tomorrow. I'd have to see that before I

believed it. But it was warmer today — almost sixty.

Maybe the outing wouldn't be completely miserable.

I intercepted a few unfriendly glances from Lauren

during lunch, which I didn't understand until we were

all walking out of the room together. I was right

behind her, just a foot from her slick, silver blond

hair, and she was evidently unaware of that.

"...don't know why Bella" — she sneered my name —

"doesn't just sit with the Cullens from now on."

I heard her muttering to Mike. I'd never noticed what

an unpleasant, nasal voice she had, and I was

surprised by the malice in it. I really didn't know her

well at all, certainly not well enough for her to dislike

me — or so I'd thought. "She's my friend; she sits

with us," Mike whispered back loyally, but also a bit

territorially. I paused to let Jess and Angela pass me.

I didn't want to hear any more.

That night at dinner, Charlie seemed enthusiastic

about my trip to La Push in the morning. I think he

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felt guilty for leaving me home alone on the weekends,

but he'd spent too many years building his habits to

break them now. Of course he knew the names of all

the kids going, and their parents, and their great-

grandparents, too, probably. He seemed to approve. I

wondered if he would approve of my plan to ride to

Seattle with Edward Cullen. Not that I was going to

tell him.

"Dad, do you know a place called Goat Rocks or

something like that? I think it's south of Mount

Rainier," I asked casually.

"Yeah — why?"

I shrugged. "Some kids were talking about camping

there."

"It's not a very good place for camping." He sounded

surprised. "Too many bears. Most people go there

during the hunting season."

"Oh," I murmured. "Maybe I got the name wrong." I

meant to sleep in, but an unusual brightness woke

me. I opened my eyes to see a clear yellow light

streaming through my window. I couldn't believe it. I

hurried to the window to check, and sure enough,

there was the sun. It was in the wrong place in the

sky, too low, and it didn't seem to be as close as it

should be, but it was definitely the sun. Clouds

ringed the horizon, but a large patch of blue was

visible in the middle. I lingered by the window as long

as I could, afraid that if I left the blue would

disappear again.

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The Newtons' Olympic Outfitters store was just north

of town. I'd seen the store, but I'd never stopped there

— not having much need for any supplies required for

being outdoors over an extended period of time. In the

parking lot I recognized Mike's Suburban and Tyler's

Sentra. As I pulled up next to their vehicles, I could

see the group standing around in front of the

Suburban. Eric was there, along with two other boys I

had class with; I was fairly sure their names were Ben

and Conner. Jess was there, flanked by Angela and

Lauren. Three other girls stood with them, including

one I remembered falling over in Gym on Friday. That

one gave me a dirty look as I got out of the truck, and

whispered something to Lauren. Lauren shook out

her cornsilk hair and eyed me scornfully. So it was

going to be one of those days.

At least Mike was happy to see me.

"You came!" he called, delighted. "And I said it would

be sunny today, didn't I?"

"I told you I was coming," I reminded him.

"We're just waiting for Lee and Samantha... unless

you invited someone," Mike added.

"Nope," I lied lightly, hoping I wouldn't get caught in

the lie. But also wishing that a miracle would occur,

and Edward would appear. Mike looked satisfied.

"Will you ride in my car? It's that or Lee's mom's

minivan."

"Sure."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

He smiled blissfully. It was so easy to make Mike

happy.

"You can have shotgun," he promised. I hid my

chagrin. It wasn't as simple to make Mike and Jessica

happy at the same time. I could see Jessica glowering

at us now.

The numbers worked out in my favor, though. Lee

brought two extra people, and suddenly every seat

was necessary. I managed to wedge Jess in between

Mike and me in the front seat of the Suburban. Mike

could have been more graceful about it, but at least

Jess seemed appeased.

It was only fifteen miles to La Push from Forks, with

gorgeous, dense green forests edging the road most of

the way and the wide Quillayute River snaking

beneath it twice. I was glad I had the window seat.

We'd rolled the windows down — the Suburban was a

bit claustrophobic with nine people in it — and I tried

to absorb as much sunlight as possible. I'd been to

the beaches around La Push many times during my

Forks summers with Charlie, so the mile-long

crescent of First Beach was familiar to me. It was still

breathtaking. The water was dark gray, even in the

sunlight, white-capped and heaving to the gray, rocky

shore. Islands rose out of the steel harbor waters with

sheer cliff sides, reaching to uneven summits, and

crowned with austere, soaring firs. The beach had

only a thin border of actual sand at the water's edge,

after which it grew into millions of large, smooth

stones that looked uniformly gray from a distance,

but close up were every shade a stone could be: terra-

cotta, sea green, lavender, blue gray, dull gold. The

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tide line was strewn with huge driftwood trees,

bleached bone white in the salt waves, some piled

together against the edge of the forest fringe, some

lying solitary, just out of reach of the waves.

There was a brisk wind coming off the waves, cool

and briny. Pelicans floated on the swells while

seagulls and a lone eagle wheeled above them. The

clouds still circled the sky, threatening to invade at

any moment, but for now the sun shone bravely in its

halo of blue sky. We picked our way down to the

beach, Mike leading the way to a ring of driftwood

logs that had obviously been used for parties like ours

before. There was a fire circle already in place, filled

with black ashes. Eric and the boy I thought was

named Ben gathered broken branches of driftwood

from the drier piles against the forest edge, and soon

had a teepee- shaped construction built atop the old

cinders.

"Have you ever seen a driftwood fire?" Mike asked me.

I was sitting on one of the bone-colored benches; the

other girls clustered, gossiping excitedly, on either

side of me. Mike kneeled by the fire, lighting one of

the smaller sticks with a cigarette lighter.

"No," I said as he placed the blazing twig carefully

against the teepee.

"You'll like this then — watch the colors." He lit

another small branch and laid it alongside the first.

The flames started to lick quickly up the dry wood.

"It's blue," I said in surprise.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"The salt does it. Pretty, isn't it?" He lit one more

piece, placed it where the fire hadn't yet caught, and

then came to sit by me. Thankfully, Jess was on his

other side. She turned to him and claimed his

attention. I watched the strange blue and green

flames crackle toward the sky. After a half hour of

chatter, some of the boys wanted to hike to the

nearby tidal pools. It was a dilemma. On the one

hand, I loved the tide pools. They had fascinated me

since I was a child; they were one of the only things I

ever looked forward to when I had to come to Forks.

On the other hand, I'd also fallen into them a lot. Not

a big deal when you're seven and with your dad. It

reminded me of Edward's request — that I not fall

into the ocean.

Lauren was the one who made my decision for me.

She didn't want to hike, and she was definitely

wearing the wrong shoes for it. Most of the other girls

besides Angela and Jessica decided to stay on the

beach as well. I waited until Tyler and Eric had

committed to remaining with them before I got up

quietly to join the pro-hiking group. Mike gave me a

huge smile when he saw that I was coming.

The hike wasn't too long, though I hated to lose the

sky in the woods. The green light of the forest was

strangely at odds with the adolescent laughter, too

murky and ominous to be in harmony with the light

banter around me. I had to watch each step I took

very carefully, avoiding roots below and branches

above, and I soon fell behind. Eventually I broke

through the emerald confines of the forest and found

the rocky shore again. It was low tide, and a tidal

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

river flowed past us on its way to the sea. Along its

pebbled banks, shallow pools that never completely

drained were teeming with life.

I was very cautious not to lean too far over the little

ocean ponds. The others were fearless, leaping over

the rocks, perching precariously on the edges. I found

a very stable-looking rock on the fringe of one of the

largest pools and sat there cautiously, spellbound by

the natural aquarium below me. The bouquets of

brilliant anemones undulated ceaselessly in the

invisible current, twisted shells scurried about the

edges, obscuring the crabs within them, starfish

stuck motionless to the rocks and each other, while

one small black eel with white racing stripes wove

through the bright green weeds, waiting for the sea to

return. I was completely absorbed, except for one

small part of my mind that wondered what Edward

was doing now, and trying to imagine what he would

be saying if he were here with me.

Finally the boys were hungry, and I got up stiffly to

follow them back. I tried to keep up better this time

through the woods, so naturally I fell a few times. I

got some shallow scrapes on my palms, and the knees

of my jeans were stained green, but it could have

been worse.

When we got back to First Beach, the group we'd left

behind had multiplied. As we got closer we could see

the shining, straight black hair and copper skin of the

newcomers, teenagers from the reservation come to

socialize.

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The food was already being passed around, and the

boys hurried to claim a share while Eric introduced

us as we each entered the driftwood circle. Angela

and I were the last to arrive, and, as Eric said our

names, I noticed a younger boy sitting on the stones

near the fire glance up at me in interest. I sat down

next to Angela, and Mike brought us sandwiches and

an array of sodas to choose from, while a boy who

looked to be the oldest of the visitors rattled off the

names of the seven others with him. All I caught was

that one of the girls was also named Jessica, and the

boy who noticed me was named Jacob.

It was relaxing to sit with Angela; she was a restful

kind of person to be around — she didn't feel the

need to fill every silence with chatter. She left me free

to think undisturbed while we ate. And I was thinking

about how disjointedly time seemed to flow in Forks,

passing in a blur at times, with single images

standing out more clearly than others. And then, at

other times, every second was significant, etched in

my mind. I knew exactly what caused the difference,

and it disturbed me. During lunch the clouds started

to advance, slinking across the blue sky, darting in

front of the sun momentarily, casting long shadows

across the beach, and blackening the waves. As they

finished eating, people started to drift away in twos

and threes. Some walked down to the edge of the

waves, trying to skip rocks across the choppy surface.

Others were gathering a second expedition to the tide

pools. Mike — with Jessica shadowing him — headed

up to the one shop in the village. Some of the local

kids went with them; others went along on the hike.

By the time they all had scattered, I was sitting alone

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on my driftwood log, with Lauren and Tyler occupying

themselves by the CD player someone had thought to

bring, and three teenagers from the reservation

perched around the circle, including the boy named

Jacob and the oldest boy who had acted as

spokesperson.

A few minutes after Angela left with the hikers, Jacob

sauntered over to take her place by my side. He

looked fourteen, maybe fifteen, and had long, glossy

black hair pulled back with a rubber band at the

nape of his neck. His skin was beautiful, silky and

russet-colored; his eyes were dark, set deep above the

high planes of his cheekbones. He still had just a hint

of childish roundness left around his chin. Altogether,

a very pretty face. However, my positive opinion of his

looks was damaged by the first words out of his

mouth.

"You're Isabella Swan, aren't you?"

It was like the first day of school all over again.

"Bella," I sighed.

"I'm Jacob Black." He held his hand out in a friendly

gesture. "You bought my dad's truck."

"Oh," I said, relieved, shaking his sleek hand. "You're

Billy's son. I probably should remember you."

"No, I'm the youngest of the family — you would

remember my older sisters."

"Rachel and Rebecca," I suddenly recalled. Charlie

and Billy had thrown us together a lot during my

visits, to keep us busy while they fished. We were all

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too shy to make much progress as friends. Of course,

I'd kicked up enough tantrums to end the fishing

trips by the time I was eleven.

"Are they here?" I examined the girls at the ocean's

edge, wondering if I would recognize them now.

"No." Jacob shook his head. "Rachel got a scholarship

to Washington State, and Rebecca married a Samoan

surfer — she lives in Hawaii now."

"Married. Wow." I was stunned. The twins were only a

little over a year older than I was.

"So how do you like the truck?" he asked.

"I love it. It runs great."

"Yeah, but it's really slow," he laughed. "I was so

relived when Charlie bought it. My dad wouldn't let

me work on building another car when we had a

perfectly good vehicle right there."

"It's not that slow," I objected.

"Have you tried to go over sixty?"

"No," I admitted.

"Good. Don't." He grinned.

I couldn't help grinning back. "It does great in a

collision," I offered in my truck's defense.

"I don't think a tank could take out that old monster,"

he agreed with another laugh.

"So you build cars?" I asked, impressed.

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"When I have free time, and parts. You wouldn't

happen to know where I could get my hands on a

master cylinder for a 1986 Volkswagen Rabbit?" he

added jokingly. He had a pleasant, husky voice.

"Sorry," I laughed, "I haven't seen any lately, but I'll

keep my eyes open for you." As if I knew what that

was. He was very easy to talk with. He flashed a

brilliant smile, looking at me appreciatively in a way I

was learning to recognize. I wasn't the only one who

noticed.

"You know Bella, Jacob?" Lauren asked — in what I

imagined was an insolent tone — from across the fire.

"We've sort of known each other since I was born," he

laughed, smiling at me again.

"How nice." She didn't sound like she thought it was

nice at all, and her pale, fishy eyes narrowed.

"Bella," she called again, watching my face carefully,

"I was just saying to Tyler that it was too bad none of

the Cullens could come out today. Didn't anyone

think to invite them?" Her expression of concern was

unconvincing.

"You mean Dr. Carlisle Cullen's family?" the tall, older

boy asked before I could respond, much to Lauren's

irritation. He was really closer to a man than a boy,

and his voice was very deep.

"Yes, do you know them?" she asked condescendingly,

turning halfway toward him.

"The Cullens don't come here," he said in a tone that

closed the subject, ignoring her question.

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Tyler, trying to win back her attention, asked

Lauren's opinion on a CD

he held. She was distracted.

I stared at the deep-voiced boy, taken aback, but he

was looking away toward the dark forest behind us.

He'd said that the Cullens didn't come here, but his

tone had implied something more — that they weren't

allowed; they were prohibited. His manner left a

strange impression on me, and I tried to ignore it

without success.

Jacob interrupted my meditation. "So is Forks driving

you insane yet?"

"Oh, I'd say that's an understatement." I grimaced. He

grinned understandingly.

I was still turning over the brief comment on the

Cullens, and I had a sudden inspiration. It was a

stupid plan, but I didn't have any better ideas. I

hoped that young Jacob was as yet inexperienced

around girls, so that he wouldn't see through my

sure-to-be-pitiful attempts at flirting.

"Do you want to walk down the beach with me?" I

asked, trying to imitate that way Edward had of

looking up from underneath his eyelashes. It couldn't

have nearly the same effect, I was sure, but Jacob

jumped up willingly enough.

As we walked north across the multihued stones

toward the driftwood seawall, the clouds finally closed

ranks across the sky, causing the sea to darken and

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the temperature to drop. I shoved my hands deep into

the pockets of my jacket.

"So you're, what, sixteen?" I asked, trying not to look

like an idiot as I fluttered my eyelids the way I'd seen

girls do on TV.

"I just turned fifteen," he confessed, flattered.

"Really?" My face was full of false surprise. "I would

have thought you were older."

"I'm tall for my age," he explained.

"Do you come up to Forks much?" I asked archly, as

if I was hoping for a yes. I sounded idiotic to myself. I

was afraid he would turn on me with disgust and

accuse me of my fraud, but he still seemed flattered.

"Not too much," he admitted with a frown. "But when

I get my car finished I can go up as much as I want —

after I get my license," he amended.

"Who was that other boy Lauren was talking to? He

seemed a little old to be hanging out with us." I

purposefully lumped myself in with the youngsters,

trying to make it clear that I preferred Jacob.

"That's Sam — he's nineteen," he informed me.

"What was that he was saying about the doctor's

family?" I asked innocently.

"The Cullens? Oh, they're not supposed to come onto

the reservation." He looked away, out toward James

Island, as he confirmed what I'd thought I'd heard in

Sam's voice.

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"Why not?"

He glanced back at me, biting his lip. "Oops. I'm not

supposed to say anything about that."

"Oh, I won't tell anyone, I'm just curious." I tried to

make my smile alluring, wondering if I was laying it

on too thick.

He smiled back, though, looking allured. Then he

lifted one eyebrow and his voice was even huskier

than before.

"Do you like scary stories?" he asked ominously.

"I love them," I enthused, making an effort to smolder

at him. Jacob strolled to a nearby driftwood tree that

had its roots sticking out like the attenuated legs of a

huge, pale spider. He perched lightly on one of the

twisted roots while I sat beneath him on the body of

the tree. He stared down at the rocks, a smile

hovering around the edges of his broad lips. I could

see he was going to try to make this good. I focused

on keeping the vital interest I felt out of my eyes.

"Do you know any of our old stories, about where we

came from — the Quileutes, I mean?" he began.

"Not really," I admitted.

"Well, there are lots of legends, some of them claiming

to date back to the Flood — supposedly, the ancient

Quileutes tied their canoes to the tops of the tallest

trees on the mountain to survive like Noah and the

ark." He smiled, to show me how little stock he put in

the histories.

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"Another legend claims that we descended from

wolves — and that the wolves are our brothers still.

It's against tribal law to kill them.

"Then there are the stories about the cold ones." His

voice dropped a little lower.

"The cold ones?" I asked, not faking my intrigue now.

"Yes. There are stories of the cold ones as old as the

wolf legends, and some much more recent. According

to legend, my own great-grandfather knew some of

them. He was the one who made the treaty that kept

them off our land." He rolled his eyes.

"Your great-grandfather?" I encouraged.

"He was a tribal elder, like my father. You see, the

cold ones are the natural enemies of the wolf — well,

not the wolf, really, but the wolves that turn into

men, like our ancestors. You would call them

werewolves."

"Werewolves have enemies?"

"Only one."

I stared at him earnestly, hoping to disguise my

impatience as admiration.

"So you see," Jacob continued, "the cold ones are

traditionally our enemies. But this pack that came to

our territory during my great-grandfather's time was

different. They didn't hunt the way others of their

kind did — they weren't supposed to be dangerous to

the tribe. So my great-grandfather made a truce with

them. If they would promise to stay off our lands, we

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wouldn't expose them to the pale-faces." He winked at

me.

"If they weren't dangerous, then why... ?" I tried to

understand, struggling not to let him see how

seriously I was considering his ghost story.

"There's always a risk for humans to be around the

cold ones, even if they're civilized like this clan was.

You never know when they might get too hungry to

resist." He deliberately worked a thick edge of menace

into his tone.

"What do you mean, 'civilized'?"

"They claimed that they didn't hunt humans. They

supposedly were somehow able to prey on animals

instead."

I tried to keep my voice casual. "So how does it fit in

with the Cullens?

Are they like the cold ones your greatgrandfather

met?"

"No." He paused dramatically. "They are the same

ones." He must have thought the expression on my

face was fear inspired by his story. He smiled,

pleased, and continued.

"There are more of them now, a new female and a new

male, but the rest are the same. In my great-

grandfather's time they already knew of the leader,

Carlisle. He'd been here and gone before your people

had even arrived." He was fighting a smile.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"And what are they?" I finally asked. "What are the

cold ones?" He smiled darkly.

"Blood drinkers," he replied in a chilling voice. "Your

people call them vampires."

I stared out at the rough surf after he answered, not

sure what my face was exposing.

"You have goose bumps," he laughed delightedly.

"You're a good storyteller," I complimented him, still

staring into the waves.

"Pretty cra2y stuff, though, isn't it? No wonder my dad

doesn't want us to talk about it to anyone."

I couldn't control my expression enough to look at

him yet. "Don't worry, I won't give you away."

"I guess I just violated the treaty," he laughed.

"I'll take it to the grave," I promised, and then I

shivered.

"Seriously, though, don't say anything to Charlie. He

was pretty mad at my dad when he heard that some

of us weren't going to the hospital since Dr. Cullen

started working there."

"I won't, of course not."

"So do you think we're a bunch of superstitious

natives or what?" he asked in a playful tone, but with

a hint of worry. I still hadn't looked away from the

ocean.

I turned and smiled at him as normally as I could.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No. I think you're very good at telling scary stories,

though. I still have goose bumps, see?" I held up my

arm.

"Cool." He smiled.

And then the sound of the beach rocks clattering

against each other warned us that someone was

approaching. Our heads snapped up at the same time

to see Mike and Jessica about fifty yards away,

walking toward us.

"There you are, Bella," Mike called in relief, waving his

arm over his head.

"Is that your boyfriend?" Jacob asked, alerted by the

jealous edge in Mike's voice. I was surprised it was so

obvious.

"No, definitely not," I whispered. I was tremendously

grateful to Jacob, and eager to make him as happy as

possible. I winked at him, carefully turning away from

Mike to do so. He smiled, elated by my inept flirting.

"So when I get my license..." he began.

"You should come see me in Forks. We could hang

out sometime." I felt guilty as I said this, knowing that

I'd used him. But I really did like Jacob. He was

someone I could easily be friends with.

Mike had reached us now, with Jessica still a few

paces back. I could see his eyes appraising Jacob,

and looking satisfied at his obvious youth.

"Where have you been?" he asked, though the answer

was right in front of him.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Jacob was just telling me some local stories," I

volunteered. "It was really interesting."

I smiled at Jacob warmly, and he grinned back.

"Well," Mike paused, carefully reassessing the

situation as he watched our camaraderie. "We're

packing up — it looks like it's going to rain soon."

We all looked up at the glowering sky. It certainly did

look like rain.

"Okay." I jumped up. "I'm coming."

"It was nice to see you again," Jacob said, and I could

tell he was taunting Mike just a bit.

"It really was. Next time Charlie comes down to see

Billy, I'll come, too," I promised.

His grin stretched across his face. "That would be

cool."

"And thanks," I added earnestly.

I pulled up my hood as we tramped across the rocks

toward the parking lot. A few drops were beginning to

fall, making black spots on the stones where they

landed. When we got to the Suburban the others were

already loading everything back in. I crawled into the

backseat by Angela and Tyler, announcing that I'd

already had my turn in the shotgun position. Angela

just stared out the window at the escalating storm,

and Lauren twisted around in the middle seat to

occupy Tyler's attention, so I could simply lay my

head back on the seat and close my eyes and try very

hard not to think.

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Chapter 7

I told Charlie I had a lot of homework to do, and that I

didn't want anything to eat. There was a basketball

game on that he was excited about, though of course I

had no idea what was special about it, so he wasn't

aware of anything unusual in my face or tone.

Once in my room, I locked the door. I dug through my

desk until I found my old headphones, and I plugged

them into my little CD player. I picked up a CD that

Phil had given to me for Christmas. It was one of his

favorite bands, but they used a little too much bass

and shrieking for my tastes. I popped it into place and

lay down on my bed. I put on the headphones, hit

Play, and turned up the volume until it hurt my ears.

I closed my eyes, but the light still intruded, so I

added a pillow over the top half of my face.

I concentrated very carefully on the music, trying to

understand the lyrics, to unravel the complicated

drum patterns. By the third time I'd listened through

the CD, I knew all the words to the choruses, at least.

I was surprised to find that I really did like the band

after all, once I got past the blaring noise. I'd have to

thank Phil again. And it worked. The shattering beats

made it impossible for me to think —

which was the whole purpose of the exercise. I

listened to the CD again and again, until I was

singing along with all the songs, until, finally, I fell

asleep.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I opened my eyes to a familiar place. Aware in some

corner of my consciousness that I was dreaming, I

recognized the green light of the forest. I could hear

the waves crashing against the rocks somewhere

nearby. And I knew that if I found the ocean, I'd be

able to see the sun. I was trying to follow the sound,

but then Jacob Black was there, tugging on my hand,

pulling me back toward the blackest part of the

forest.

"Jacob? What's wrong?" I asked. His face was

frightened as he yanked with all his strength against

my resistance; I didn't want to go into the dark.

"Run, Bella, you have to run!" he whispered, terrified.

"This way, Bella!" I recognized Mike's voice calling out

of the gloomy heart of the trees, but I couldn't see

him.

"Why?" I asked, still pulling against Jacob's grasp,

desperate now to find the sun.

But Jacob let go of my hand and yelped, suddenly

shaking, falling to the dim forest floor. He twitched on

the ground as I watched in horror.

"Jacob!" I screamed. But he was gone. In his place

was a large red-brown wolf with black eyes. The wolf

faced away from me, pointing toward the shore, the

hair on the back of his shoulders bristling, low growls

issuing from between his exposed fangs.

"Bella, run!" Mike cried out again from behind me.

But I didn't turn. I was watching a light coming

toward me from the beach.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

And then Edward stepped out from the trees, his skin

faintly glowing, his eyes black and dangerous. He

held up one hand and beckoned me to come to him.

The wolf growled at my feet.

I took a step forward, toward Edward. He smiled then,

and his teeth were sharp, pointed.

"Trust me," he purred.

I took another step.

The wolf launched himself across the space between

me and the vampire, fangs aiming for the jugular.

"No!" I screamed, wrenching upright out of my bed.

My sudden movement caused the headphones to pull

the CD player off the bedside table, and it clattered to

the wooden floor.

My light was still on, and I was sitting fully dressed

on the bed, with my shoes on. I glanced, disoriented,

at the clock on my dresser. It was five-thirty in the

morning.

I groaned, fell back, and rolled over onto my face,

kicking off my boots. I was too uncomfortable to get

anywhere near sleep, though. I rolled back over and

unbuttoned my jeans, yanking them off awkwardly as

I tried to stay horizontal. I could feel the braid in my

hair, an uncomfortable ridge along the back of my

skull. I turned onto my side and ripped the rubber

band out, quickly combing through the plaits with my

fingers. I pulled the pillow back over my eyes.

It was all no use, of course. My subconscious had

dredged up exactly the images I'd been trying so

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desperately to avoid. I was going to have to face them

now.

I sat up, and my head spun for a minute as the blood

flowed downward. First things first, I thought to

myself, happy to put it off as long as possible. I

grabbed my bathroom bag.

The shower didn't last nearly as long as I hoped it

would, though. Even taking the time to blow-dry my

hair, I was soon out of things to do in the bathroom.

Wrapped in a towel, I crossed back to my room. I

couldn't tell if Charlie was still asleep, or if he had

already left. I went to look out my window, and the

cruiser was gone. Fishing again. I dressed slowly in

my most comfy sweats and then made my bed —

something I never did. I couldn't put it off any longer.

I went to my desk and switched on my old computer.

I hated using the Internet here. My modem was sadly

outdated, my free service substandard; just dialing up

took so long that I decided to go get myself a bowl of

cereal while I waited.

I ate slowly, chewing each bite with care. When I was

done, I washed the bowl and spoon, dried them, and

put them away. My feet dragged as I climbed the

stairs. I went to my CD player first, picking it up off

the floor and placing it precisely in the center of the

table. I pulled out the headphones, and put them

away in the desk drawer. Then I turned the same CD

on, turning it down to the point where it was

background noise. With another sigh, I turned to my

computer. Naturally, the screen was covered in pop-

up ads. I sat in my hard folding chair and began

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

closing all the little windows. Eventually I made it to

my favorite search engine. I shot down a few more

pop-ups and then typed in one word. Vampire.

It took an infuriatingly long time, of course. When the

results came up, there was a lot to sift through —

everything from movies and TV shows to role-playing

games, underground metal, and gothic cosmetic

companies. Then I found a promising site — Vampires

A — Z. I waited impatiently for it to load, quickly

clicking closed each ad that flashed across the screen.

Finally the screen was finished — simple white

background with black text, academic-looking. Two

quotes greeted me on the home page: Throughout the

vast shadowy world of ghosts and demons there is no

figure so terrible, no figure so dreaded and abhorred,

yet dight with such fearful fascination, as the

vampire, who is himself neither ghost nor demon, but

yet who partakes the dark natures and possesses the

mysterious and terrible qualities of both. — Rev.

Montague Summers

If there is in this world a well-attested account, it is

that of the vampires. Nothing is lacking: official

reports, affidavits of well-known people, of surgeons,

of priests, of magistrates; the judicial proof is most

complete. And with all that, who is there who believes

in vampires?

— Rousseau

The rest of the site was an alphabetized listing of all

the different myths of vampires held throughout the

world. The first I clicked on, the Danag, was a Filipino

vampire supposedly responsible for planting taro on

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

the islands long ago. The myth continued that the

Danag worked with humans for many years, but the

partnership ended one day when a woman cut her

finger and a Danag sucked her wound, enjoying the

taste so much that it drained her body completely of

blood.

I read carefully through the descriptions, looking for

anything that sounded familiar, let alone plausible. It

seemed that most vampire myths centered around

beautiful women as demons and children as victims;

they also seemed like constructs created to explain

away the high mortality rates for young children, and

to give men an excuse for infidelity. Many of the

stories involved bodiless spirits and warnings against

improper burials. There wasn't much that sounded

like the movies I'd seen, and only a very few, like the

Hebrew Estrie and the Polish Upier, who were even

preoccupied with drinking blood.

Only three entries really caught my attention: the

Romanian Varacolaci, a powerful undead being who

could appear as a beautiful, pale-skinned human, the

Slovak Nelapsi, a creature so strong and fast it could

massacre an entire village in the single hour after

midnight, and one other, the Stregoni benefici.

About this last there was only one brief sentence.

Stregoni benefici: An Italian vampire, said to be on

the side of goodness, and a mortal enemy of all evil

vampires.

It was a relief, that one small entry, the one myth

among hundreds that claimed the existence of good

vampires.

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Overall, though, there was little that coincided with

Jacob's stories or my own observations. I'd made a

little catalogue in my mind as I'd read and carefully

compared it with each myth. Speed, strength, beauty,

pale skin, eyes that shift color; and then Jacob's

criteria: blood drinkers, enemies of the werewolf, cold-

skinned, and immortal. There were very few myths

that matched even one factor.

And then another problem, one that I'd remembered

from the small number of scary movies that I'd seen

and was backed up by today's reading —

vampires couldn't come out in the daytime, the sun

would burn them to a cinder. They slept in coffins all

day and came out only at night. Aggravated, I

snapped off the computer's main power switch, not

waiting to shut things down properly. Through my

irritation, I felt overwhelming embarrassment. It was

all so stupid. I was sitting in my room, researching

vampires. What was wrong with me? I decided that

most of the blame belonged on the doorstep of the

town of Forks — and the entire sodden Olympic

Peninsula, for that matter.

I had to get out of the house, but there was nowhere I

wanted to go that didn't involve a three-day drive. I

pulled on my boots anyway, unclear where I was

headed, and went downstairs. I shrugged into my

raincoat without checking the weather and stomped

out the door.

It was overcast, but not raining yet. I ignored my

truck and started east on foot, angling across

Charlie's yard toward the ever-encroaching forest. It

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

didn't take long till I was deep enough for the house

and the road to be invisible, for the only sound to be

the squish of the damp earth under my feet and the

sudden cries of the jays.

There was a thin ribbon of a trail that led through the

forest here, or I wouldn't risk wandering on my own

like this. My sense of direction was hopeless; I could

get lost in much less helpful surroundings. The trail

wound deeper and deeper into the forest, mostly east

as far as I could tell. It snaked around the Sitka

spruces and the hemlocks, the yews and the maples. I

only vaguely knew the names of the trees around me,

and all I knew was due to Charlie pointing them out

to me from the cruiser window in earlier days. There

were many I didn't know, and others I couldn't be

sure about because they were so covered in green

parasites. I followed the trail as long as my anger at

myself pushed me forward. As that started to ebb, I

slowed. A few drops of moisture trickled down from

the canopy above me, but I couldn't be certain if it

was beginning to rain or if it was simply pools left

over from yesterday, held high in the leaves above me,

slowly dripping their way back to the earth. A recently

fallen tree — I knew it was recent because it wasn't

entirely carpeted in moss — rested against the trunk

of one of her sisters, creating a sheltered little bench

just a few safe feet off the trail. I stepped over the

ferns and sat carefully, making sure my jacket was

between the damp seat and my clothes wherever they

touched, and leaned my hooded head back against

the living tree.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

This was the wrong place to have come. I should have

known, but where else was there to go? The forest

was deep green and far too much like the scene in

last night's dream to allow for peace of mind. Now

that there was no longer the sound of my soggy

footsteps, the silence was piercing. The birds were

quiet, too, the drops increasing in frequency, so it

must be raining above. The ferns stood higher than

my head, now that I was seated, and I knew someone

could walk by on the path, three feet away, and not

see me.

Here in the trees it was much easier to believe the

absurdities that embarrassed me indoors. Nothing

had changed in this forest for thousands of years, and

all the myths and legends of a hundred different

lands seemed much more likely in this green haze

than they had in my clear-cut bedroom.

I forced myself to focus on the two most vital

questions I had to answer, but I did so unwillingly.

First, I had to decide if it was possible that what

Jacob had said about the Cullens could be true.

Immediately my mind responded with a resounding

negative. It was silly and morbid to entertain such

ridiculous notions. But what, then? I asked myself.

There was no rational explanation for how I was alive

at this moment. I listed again in my head the things

I'd observed myself: the impossible speed and

strength, the eye color shifting from black to gold and

back again, the inhuman beauty, the pale, frigid skin.

And more —

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

small things that registered slowly — how they never

seemed to eat, the disturbing grace with which they

moved. And the way be

sometimes spoke, with unfamiliar cadences and

phrases that better fit the style of a turn-of-the-

century novel than that of a twenty-first-century

classroom. He had skipped class the day we'd done

blood typing. He hadn't said no to the beach trip till

he heard where we were going. He seemed to know

what everyone around him was thinking... except me.

He had told me he was the villain, dangerous...

Could the Cullens be vampires?

Well, they were something. Something outside the

possibility of rational justification was taking place in

front of my incredulous eyes. Whether it be Jacob's

cold ones or my own superhero theory, Edward

Cullen was not... human. He was something more.

So then — maybe. That would have to be my answer

for now. And then the most important question of all.

What was I going to do if it was true?

If Edward was a vampire — I could hardly make

myself think the words —

then what should I do? Involving someone else was

definitely out. I couldn't even believe myself; anyone I

told would have me committed. Only two options

seemed practical. The first was to take his advice: to

be smart, to avoid him as much as possible. To cancel

our plans, to go back to ignoring him as far as I was

able. To pretend there was an impenetrably thick

glass wall between us in the one class where we were

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

forced together. To tell him to leave me alone — and

mean it this time. I was gripped in a sudden agony of

despair as I considered that alternative. My mind

rejected the pain, quickly skipping on to the next

option.

I could do nothing different. After all, if he was

something... sinister, he'd done nothing to hurt me so

far. In fact, I would be a dent in Tyler's fender if he

hadn't acted so quickly. So quickly, I argued with

myself, that it might have been sheer reflexes. But if it

was a reflex to save lives, how bad could he be? I

retorted. My head spun around in answerless circles.

There was one thing I was sure of, if I was sure of

anything. The dark Edward in my dream last night

was a reflection only of my fear of the word Jacob had

spoken, and not Edward himself. Even so, when I'd

screamed out in terror at the werewolf s lunge, it

wasn't fear for the wolf that brought the cry of "no" to

my lips. It was fear that he would be harmed —

even as he called to me with sharp-edged fangs, I

feared for him. And I knew in that I had my answer. I

didn't know if there ever was a choice, really. I was

already in too deep. Now that I knew — if I knew —

I could do nothing about my frightening secret.

Because when I thought of him, of his voice, his

hypnotic eyes, the magnetic force of his personality, I

wanted nothing more than to be with him right now.

Even if... but I couldn't think it. Not here, alone in the

darkening forest. Not while the rain made it dim as

twilight under the canopy and pattered like footsteps

across the matted earthen floor. I shivered and rose

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

quickly from my place of concealment, worried that

somehow the path would have disappeared with the

rain.

But it was there, safe and clear, winding its way out

of the dripping green maze. I followed it hastily, my

hood pulled close around my face, becoming

surprised, as I nearly ran through the trees, at how

far I had come. I started to wonder if I was heading

out at all, or following the path farther into the

confines of the forest. Before I could get too panicky,

though, I began to glimpse some open spaces through

the webbed branches. And then I could hear a car

passing on the street, and I was free, Charlie's lawn

stretched out in front of me, the house beckoning me,

promising warmth and dry socks.

It was just noon when I got back inside. I went

upstairs and got dressed for the day, jeans and a t-

shirt, since I was staying indoors. It didn't take too

much effort to concentrate on my task for the day, a

paper on Macbeth that was due Wednesday. I settled

into outlining a rough draft contentedly, more serene

than I'd felt since... well, since Thursday afternoon, if

I was being honest.

That had always been my way, though. Making

decisions was the painful part for me, the part I

agonized over. But once the decision was made, I

simply followed through — usually with relief that the

choice was made. Sometimes the relief was tainted by

despair, like my decision to come to Forks. But it was

still better than wrestling with the alternatives. This

decision was ridiculously easy to live with.

Dangerously easy. And so the day was quiet,

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productive — I finished my paper before eight. Charlie

came home with a large catch, and I made a mental

note to pick up a book of recipes for fish while I was

in Seattle next week. The chills that flashed up my

spine whenever I thought of that trip were no different

than the ones I'd felt before I'd taken my walk with

Jacob Black. They should be different, I thought. I

should be afraid — I knew I should be, but I couldn't

feel the right kind of fear.

I slept dreamlessly that night, exhausted from

beginning my day so early, and sleeping so poorly the

night before. I woke, for the second time since

arriving in Forks, to the bright yellow light of a sunny

day. I skipped to the window, stunned to see that

there was hardly a cloud in the sky, and those there

were just fleecy little white puffs that couldn't

possibly be carrying any rain. I opened the window —

surprised when it opened silently, without sticking,

not having opened it in who knows how many years

— and sucked in the relatively dry air. It was nearly

warm and hardly windy at all. My blood was electric

in my veins. Charlie was finishing breakfast when I

came downstairs, and he picked up on my mood

immediately.

"Nice day out," he commented.

"Yes," I agreed with a grin.

He smiled back, his brown eyes crinkling around the

edges. When Charlie smiled, it was easier to see why

he and my mother had jumped too quickly into an

early marriage. Most of the young romantic he'd been

in those days had faded before I'd known him, as the

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

curly brown hair — the same color, if not the same

texture, as mine — had dwindled, slowly revealing

more and more of the shiny skin of his forehead. But

when he smiled I could see a little of the man who

had run away with Renee when she was just two

years older than I was now.

I ate breakfast cheerily, watching the dust moats

stirring in the sunlight that streamed in the back

window. Charlie called out a goodbye, and I heard the

cruiser pull away from the house. I hesitated on my

way out the door, hand on my rain jacket. It would be

tempting fate to leave it home. With a sigh, I folded it

over my arm and stepped out into the brightest light

I'd seen in months.

By dint of much elbow grease, I was able to get both

windows in the truck almost completely rolled down. I

was one of the first ones to school; I hadn't even

checked the clock in my hurry to get outside. I parked

and headed toward the seldom-used picnic benches

on the south side of the cafeteria. The benches were

still a little damp, so I sat on my jacket, glad to have a

use for it. My homework was done — the product of a

slow social life — but there were a few Trig problems I

wasn't sure I had right. I took out my book

industriously, but halfway through rechecking the

first problem I was daydreaming, watching the

sunlight play on the red-barked trees. I sketched

inattentively along the margins of my homework. After

a few minutes, I suddenly realized I'd drawn five pairs

of dark eyes staring out of the page at me. I scrubbed

them out with the eraser.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Bella!" I heard someone call, and it sounded like

Mike. I looked around to realize that the school had

become populated while I'd been sitting there,

absentminded. Everyone was in t-shirts, some even in

shorts though the temperature couldn't be over sixty.

Mike was coming toward me in khaki shorts and a

striped Rugby shirt, waving.

"Hey, Mike," I called, waving back, unable to be

halfhearted on a morning like this.

He came to sit by me, the tidy spikes of his hair

shining golden in the light, his grin stretching across

his face. He was so delighted to see me, I couldn't

help but feel gratified.

"I never noticed before — your hair has red in it," he

commented, catching between his fingers a strand

that was fluttering in the light breeze.

"Only in the sun."

I became just a little uncomfortable as he tucked the

lock behind my ear.

"Great day, isn't it?"

"My kind of day," I agreed.

"What did you do yesterday?" His tone was just a bit

too proprietary.

"I mostly worked on my essay." I didn't add that I was

finished with it —

no need to sound smug.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

He hit his forehead with the heel of his hand. "Oh

yeah — that's due Thursday, right?"

"Urn, Wednesday, I think."

"Wednesday?" He frowned. "That's not good... What

are you writing yours on?"

"Whether Shakespeare's treatment of the female

characters is misogynistic."

He stared at me like I'd just spoken in pig Latin.

"I guess I'll have to get to work on that tonight," he

said, deflated. "I was going to ask if you wanted to go

out."

"Oh." I was taken off guard. Why couldn't I ever have

a pleasant conversation with Mike anymore without it

getting awkward?

"Well, we could go to dinner or something... and I

could work on it later." He smiled at me hopefully.

"Mike..." I hated being put on the spot. "I don't think

that would be the best idea."

His face fell. "Why?" he asked, his eyes guarded. My

thoughts flickered to Edward, wondering if that's

where his thoughts were as well.

"I think... and if you ever repeat what I'm saying right

now I will cheerfully beat you to death," I threatened,

"but I think that would hurt Jessica's feelings."

He was bewildered, obviously not thinking in that

direction at all.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

'Jessica?

"Really, Mike, are you blind?"

"Oh," he exhaled — clearly dazed. I took advantage of

that to make my escape.

"It's time for class, and I can't be late again." I

gathered my books up and stuffed them in my bag.

We walked in silence to building three, and his

expression was distracted. I hoped whatever thoughts

he was immersed in were leading him in the right

direction.

When I saw Jessica in Trig, she was bubbling with

enthusiasm. She, Angela, and Lauren were going to

Port Angeles tonight to go dress shopping for the

dance, and she wanted me to come, too, even though

I didn't need one. I was indecisive. It would be nice to

get out of town with some girlfriends, but Lauren

would be there. And who knew what I could be doing

tonight... But that was definitely the wrong path to let

my mind wander down. Of course I was happy about

the sunlight. But that wasn't completely responsible

for the euphoric mood I was in, not even close.

So I gave her a maybe, telling her I'd have to talk with

Charlie first. She talked of nothing but the dance on

the way to Spanish, continuing as if without an

interruption when class finally ended, five minutes

late, and we were on our way to lunch. I was far too

lost in my own frenzy of anticipation to notice much

of what she said. I was painfully eager to see not just

him but all the Cullens — to compare them with the

new suspicions that plagued my mind. As I crossed

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the threshold of the cafeteria, I felt the first true tingle

of fear slither down my spine and settle in my

stomach. Would they be able to know what I was

thinking? And then a different feeling jolted through

me — would Edward be waiting to sit with me again?

As was my routine, I glanced first toward the Cullens'

table. A shiver of panic trembled in my stomach as I

realized it was empty. With dwindling hope, my eyes

scoured the rest of the cafeteria, hoping to find him

alone, waiting for me. The place was nearly filled —

Spanish had made us late — but there was no sign of

Edward or any of his family. Desolation hit me with

crippling strength.

I shambled along behind Jessica, not bothering to

pretend to listen anymore.

We were late enough that everyone was already at our

table. I avoided the empty chair next to Mike in favor

of one by Angela. I vaguely noticed that Mike held the

chair out politely for Jessica, and that her face lit up

in response.

Angela asked a few quiet questions about the

Macbeth paper, which I answered as naturally as I

could while spiraling downward in misery. She, too,

invited me to go with them tonight, and I agreed now,

grasping at anything to distract myself.

I realized I'd been holding on to a last shred of hope

when I entered Biology, saw his empty seat, and felt a

new wave of disappointment. The rest of the day

passed slowly, dismally. In Gym, we had a lecture on

the rules of badminton, the next torture they had

lined up for me. But at least it meant I got to sit and

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listen instead of stumbling around on the court. The

best part was the coach didn't finish, so I got another

day off tomorrow. Never mind that the day after they

would arm me with a racket before unleashing me on

the rest of the class.

I was glad to leave campus, so I would be free to pout

and mope before I went out tonight with Jessica and

company. But right after I walked in the door of

Charlie's house, Jessica called to cancel our plans. I

tried to be happy that Mike had asked her out to

dinner — I really was relieved that he finally seemed

to be catching on — but my enthusiasm sounded

false in my own ears. She rescheduled our shopping

trip for tomorrow night.

Which left me with little in the way of distractions. I

had fish marinating for dinner, with a salad and

bread left over from the night before, so there was

nothing to do there. I spent a focused half hour on

homework, but then I was through with that, too. I

checked my e-mail, reading the backlog of letters from

my mother, getting snippier as they progressed to the

present. I sighed and typed a quick response. Mom,

Sorry. I've been out. I went to the beach with some

friends. And I had to write a paper.

My excuses were fairly pathetic, so I gave up on that.

It's sunny outside today - I know, I'm shocked, too -

so I'm going to go outside and soak up as much

vitamin D as I can. I love you, Bella.

I decided to kill an hour with non-school-related

reading. I had a small collection of books that came

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with me to Forks, the shabbiest volume being a

compilation of the works of Jane Austen. I selected

that one and headed to the backyard, grabbing a

ragged old quilt from the linen cupboard at the top of

the stairs on my way down.

Outside in Charlie's small, square yard, I folded the

quilt in half and laid it out of the reach of the trees'

shadows on the thick lawn that would always be

slightly wet, no matter how long the sun shone. I lay

on my stomach, crossing my ankles in the air,

flipping through the different novels in the book,

trying to decide which would occupy my mind the

most thoroughly. My favorites were Pride and

Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility. I'd read the first

most recently, so I started into Sense and Sensibility,

only to remember after I began three that the hero of

the story happened to be named Edward. Angrily, I

turned to Mansfield Park, but the hero of that piece

was named Edmund, and that was just too close.

Weren't there any other names available in the late

eighteenth century? I snapped the book shut,

annoyed, and rolled over onto my back. I pushed my

sleeves up as high as they would go, and closed my

eyes. I would think of nothing but the warmth on my

skin, I told myself severely. The breeze was still light,

but it blew tendrils of my hair around my face, and

that tickled a bit. I pulled all my hair over my head,

letting it fan out on the quilt above me, and focused

again on the heat that touched my eyelids, my

cheekbones, my nose, my lips, my forearms, my neck,

soaked through my light shirt...

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The next thing I was conscious of was the sound of

Charlie's cruiser turning onto the bricks of the

driveway. I sat up in surprise, realizing the light was

gone, behind the trees, and I had fallen asleep. I

looked around, muddled, with the sudden feeling that

I wasn't alone.

"Charlie?" I asked. But I could hear his door

slamming in front of the house.

I jumped up, foolishly edgy, gathering the now-damp

quilt and my book. I ran inside to get some oil heating

on the stove, realizing that dinner would be late.

Charlie was hanging up his gun belt and stepping out

of his boots when I came in.

"Sorry, Dad, dinner's not ready yet — I fell asleep

outside." I stifled a yawn.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "I wanted to catch the

score on the game, anyway."

I watched TV with Charlie after dinner, for something

to do. There wasn't anything on I wanted to watch,

but he knew I didn't like baseball, so he turned it to

some mindless sitcom that neither of us enjoyed. He

seemed happy, though, to be doing something

together. And it felt good, despite my depression, to

make him happy.

"Dad," I said during a commercial, "Jessica and

Angela are going to look at dresses for the dance

tomorrow night in Port Angeles, and they wanted me

to help them choose... do you mind if I go with them?"

"Jessica Stanley?" he asked.

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"And Angela Weber." I sighed as I gave him the

details. He was confused. "But you're not going to the

dance, right?"

"No, Dad, but I'm helping them find dresses — you

know, giving them constructive criticism." I wouldn't

have to explain this to a woman.

"Well, okay." He seemed to realize that he was out of

his depth with the girlie stuff. "It's a school night,

though."

"We'll leave right after school, so we can get back

early. You'll be okay for dinner, right?"

"Bells, I fed myself for seventeen years before you got

here," he reminded me.

"I don't know how you survived," I muttered, then

added more clearly,

"I'll leave some things for cold-cut sandwiches in the

fridge, okay?

Right on top."

It was sunny again in the morning. I awakened with

renewed hope that I grimly tried to suppress. I

dressed for the warmer weather in a deep blue V-neck

blouse — something I'd worn in the dead of winter in

Phoenix. I had planned my arrival at school so that I

barely had time to make it to class. With a sinking

heart, I circled the full lot looking for a space, while

also searching for the silver Volvo that was clearly not

there. I parked in the last row and hurried to English,

arriving breathless, but subdued, before the final bell.

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It was the same as yesterday — I just couldn't keep

little sprouts of hope from budding in my mind, only

to have them squashed painfully as I searched the

lunchroom in vain and sat at my empty Biology table.

The Port Angeles scheme was back on again for

tonight and made all the more attractive by the fact

that Lauren had other obligations. I was anxious to

get out of town so I could stop glancing over my

shoulder, hoping to see him appearing out of the blue

the way he always did. I vowed to myself that I would

be in a good mood tonight and not ruin Angela's or

Jessica's enjoyment in the dress hunting. Maybe I

could do a little clothes shopping as well. I refused to

think that I might be shopping alone in Seattle this

weekend, no longer interested in the earlier

arrangement. Surely he wouldn't cancel without at

least telling me.

After school, Jessica followed me home in her old

white Mercury so that I could ditch my books and

truck. I brushed through my hair quickly when I was

inside, feeling a slight lift of excitement as I

contemplated getting out of Forks. I left a note for

Charlie on the table, explaining again where to find

dinner, switched my scruffy wallet from my school

bag to a purse I rarely used, and ran out to join

Jessica. We went to Angela's house next, and she was

waiting for us. My excitement increased exponentially

as we actually drove out of the town limits.

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Chapter 8

Jess drove faster than the Chief, so we made it to Port

Angeles by four. It had been a while since I'd had a

girls' night out, and the estrogen rush was

invigorating. We listened to whiny rock songs while

Jessica jabbered on about the boys we hung out with.

Jessica's dinner with Mike had gone very well, and

she was hoping that by Saturday night they would

have progressed to the first-kiss stage. I smiled to

myself, pleased. Angela was passively happy to be

going to the dance, but not really interested in Eric.

Jess tried to get her to confess who her type was, but

I interrupted with a question about dresses after a

bit, to spare her. Angela threw a grateful glance my

way.

Port Angeles was a beautiful little tourist trap, much

more polished and quaint than Forks. But Jessica

and Angela knew it well, so they didn't plan to waste

time on the picturesque boardwalk by the bay. Jess

drove straight to the one big department store in

town, which was a few streets in from the bay area's

visitor-friendly face.

The dance was billed as semiformal, and we weren't

exactly sure what that meant. Both Jessica and

Angela seemed surprised and almost disbelieving

when I told them I'd never been to a dance in

Phoenix.

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"Didn't you ever go with a boyfriend or something?"

Jess asked dubiously as we walked through the front

doors of the store.

"Really," I tried to convince her, not wanting to

confess my dancing problems. "I've never had a

boyfriend or anything close. I didn't go out much."

"Why not?" Jessica demanded.

"No one asked me," I answered honestly.

She looked skeptical. "People ask you out here," she

reminded me, "and you tell them no." We were in the

juniors' section now, scanning the racks for dress-up

clothes.

"Well, except for Tyler," Angela amended quietly.

"Excuse me?" I gasped. "What did you say?"

"Tyler told everyone he's taking you to prom," Jessica

informed me with suspicious eyes.

"He said what?" I sounded like I was choking.

"I told you it wasn't true," Angela murmured to

Jessica. I was silent, still lost in shock that was

quickly turning to irritation. But we had found the

dress racks, and now we had work to do.

"That's why Lauren doesn't like you," Jessica giggled

while we pawed through the clothes.

I ground my teeth. "Do you think that if I ran him

over with my truck he would stop feeling guilty about

the accident? That he might give up on making

amends and call it even?"

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"Maybe," Jess snickered. '"If that's why he's doing

this." The dress selection wasn't large, but both of

them found a few things to try on. I sat on a low chair

just inside the dressing room, by the three-way

mirror, trying to control my fuming.

Jess was torn between two — one a long, strapless,

basic black number, the other a knee-length electric

blue with spaghetti straps. I encouraged her to go

with the blue; why not play up the eyes? Angela chose

a pale pink dress that draped around her tall frame

nicely and brought out honey tints in her light brown

hair. I complimented them both generously and

helped by returning the rejects to their racks. The

whole process was much shorter and easier than

similar trips I'd taken with Renee at home. I guess

there was something to be said for limited choices. We

headed over to shoes and accessories. While they

tried things on I merely watched and critiqued, not in

the mood to shop for myself, though I did need new

shoes. The girls'-night high was wearing off in the

wake of my annoyance at Tyler, leaving room for the

gloom to move back in.

"Angela?" I began, hesitant, while she was trying on a

pair of pink strappy heels — she was overjoyed to

have a date tall enough that she could wear high

heels at all.

Jessica had drifted to the jewelry counter and we

were alone.

"Yes?" She held her leg out, twisting her ankle to get a

better view of the shoe.

I chickened out. "I like those."

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"I think I'll get them — though they'll never match

anything but the one dress," she mused.

"Oh, go ahead — they're on sale," I encouraged. She

smiled, putting the lid back on a box that contained

more practical-looking off-white shoes. I tried again.

"Um, Angela..." She looked up curiously.

"Is it normal for the... Cullens" — I kept my eyes on

the shoes — "to be out of school a lot?" I failed

miserably in my attempt to sound nonchalant.

"Yes, when the weather is good they go backpacking

all the time — even the doctor. They're all real

outdoorsy," she told me quietly, examining her shoes,

too. She didn't ask one question, let alone the

hundreds that Jessica would have unleashed. I was

beginning to really like Angela.

"Oh." I let the subject drop as Jessica returned to

show us the rhinestone jewelry she'd found to match

her silver shoes. We planned to go to dinner at a little

Italian restaurant on the boardwalk, but the dress

shopping hadn't taken as long as we'd expected. Jess

and Angela were going to take their clothes back to

the car and then walk down to the bay. I told them I

would meet them at the restaurant in an hour — I

wanted to look for a bookstore. They were both willing

to come with me, but I encouraged them to go have

fun — they didn't know how preoccupied I could get

when surrounded by books; it was something I

preferred to do alone. They walked off to the car

chattering happily, and I headed in the direction Jess

pointed out.

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I had no trouble finding the bookstore, but it wasn't

what I was looking for. The windows were full of

crystals, dream-catchers, and books about spiritual

healing. I didn't even go inside. Through the glass I

could see a fifty-year-old woman with long, gray hair

worn straight down her back, clad in a dress right out

of the sixties, smiling welcomingly from behind the

counter. I decided that was one conversation I could

skip. There had to be a normal bookstore in town.

I meandered through the streets, which were filling

up with end-of-the-workday traffic, and hoped I was

headed toward downtown. I wasn't paying as much

attention as I should to where I was going; I was

wrestling with despair. I was trying so hard not to

think about him, and what Angela had said... and

more than anything trying to beat down my hopes for

Saturday, fearing a disappointment more painful than

the rest, when I looked up to see someone's silver

Volvo parked along the street and it all came crashing

down on me. Stupid, unreliable vampire, I thought to

myself.

I stomped along in a southerly direction, toward some

glass-fronted shops that looked promising. But when

I got to them, they were just a repair shop and a

vacant space. I still had too much time to go looking

for Jess and Angela yet, and I definitely needed to get

my mood in hand before I met back up with them. I

ran my fingers through my hair a couple of times and

took some deep breaths before I continued around the

corner. I started to realize, as I crossed another road,

that I was going the wrong direction. The little foot

traffic I had seen was going north, and it looked like

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the buildings here were mostly warehouses. I decided

to turn east at the next corner, and then loop around

after a few blocks and try my luck on a different street

on my way back to the boardwalk. A group of four

men turned around the corner I was heading for,

dressed too casually to be heading home from the

office, but they were too grimy to be tourists. As they

approached me, I realized they weren't too many

years older than I was. They were joking loudly

among themselves, laughing raucously and punching

each other's arms. I scooted as far to the inside of the

sidewalk as I could to give them room, walking

swiftly, looking past them to the corner.

"Hey, there!" one of them called as they passed, and

he had to be talking to me since no one else was

around. I glanced up automatically. Two of them had

paused, the other two were slowing. The closest, a

heavyset, dark-haired man in his early twenties,

seemed to be the one who had spoken. He was

wearing a flannel shirt open over a dirty t-shirt, cut-

off jeans, and sandals. He took half a step toward me.

"Hello," I mumbled, a knee-jerk reaction. Then I

quickly looked away and walked faster toward the

corner. I could hear them laughing at full volume

behind me.

"Hey, wait!" one of them called after me again, but I

kept my head down and rounded the corner with a

sigh of relief. I could still hear them chortling behind

me.

I found myself on a sidewalk leading past the backs of

several somber-colored warehouses, each with large

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bay doors for unloading trucks, padlocked for the

night. The south side of the street had no sidewalk,

only a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire

protecting some kind of engine parts storage yard. I'd

wandered far past the part of Port Angeles that I, as a

guest, was intended to see. It was getting dark, I

realized, the clouds finally returning, piling up on the

western horizon, creating an early sunset. The

eastern sky was still clear, but graying, shot through

with streaks of pink and orange. I'd left my jacket in

the car, and a sudden shiver made me cross my arms

tightly across my chest. A single van passed me, and

then the road was empty.

The sky suddenly darkened further, and, as I looked

over my shoulder to glare at the offending cloud, I

realized with a shock that two men were walking

quietly twenty feet behind me.

They were from the same group I'd passed at the

corner, though neither was the dark one who'd

spoken to me. I turned my head forward at once,

quickening my pace. A chill that had nothing to do

with the weather made me shiver again. My purse

was on a shoulder strap and I had it slung across my

body, the way you were supposed to wear it so it

wouldn't get snatched. I knew exactly where my

pepper spray was — still in my duffle bag under the

bed, never unpacked. I didn't have much money with

me, just a twenty and some ones, and I thought about

"accidentally" dropping my bag and walking away.

But a small, frightened voice in the back of my mind

warned me that they might be something worse than

thieves. I listened intently to their quiet footsteps,

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which were much too quiet when compared to the

boisterous noise they'd been making earlier, and it

didn't sound like they were speeding up, or getting

any closer to me. Breathe, I had to remind myself.

You don't know they're following you. I continued to

walk as quickly as I could without actually running,

focusing on the right-hand turn that was only a few

yards away from me now. I could hear them, staying

as far back as they'd been before. A blue car turned

onto the street from the south and drove quickly past

me. I thought of jumping out in front of it, but I

hesitated, inhibited, unsure that I was really being

pursued, and then it was too late. I reached the

corner, but a swift glance revealed that it was only a

blind drive to the back of another building. I was half-

turned in anticipation; I had to hurriedly correct and

dash across the narrow drive, back to the sidewalk.

The street ended at the next corner, where there was

a stop sign. I concentrated on the faint footsteps

behind me, deciding whether or not to run. They

sounded farther back, though, and I knew they could

outrun me in any case. I was sure to trip and go

sprawling if I tried to go any faster. The footfalls were

definitely farther back. I risked a quick glance over

my shoulder, and they were maybe forty feet back

now, I saw with relief. But they were both staring at

me.

It seemed to take forever for me to get to the corner. I

kept my pace steady, the men behind me falling ever

so slightly farther behind with every step. Maybe they

realized they had scared me and were sorry. I saw two

cars going north pass the intersection I was heading

for, and I exhaled in relief. There would be more

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people around once I got off this deserted street. I

skipped around the corner with a grateful sigh. And

skidded to a stop.

The street was lined on both sides by blank, doorless,

windowless walls. I could see in the distance, two

intersections down, streetlamps, cars, and more

pedestrians, but they were all too far away. Because

lounging against the western building, midway down

the street, were the other two men from the group,

both watching with excited smiles as I froze dead on

the sidewalk. I realized then that I wasn't being

followed. I was being herded.

I paused for only a second, but it felt like a very long

time. I turned then and darted to the other side of the

road. I had a sinking feeling that it was a wasted

attempt. The footsteps behind me were louder now.

"There you are!" The booming voice of the stocky,

dark-haired man shattered the intense quiet and

made me jump. In the gathering darkness, it seemed

like he was looking past me.

"Yeah," a voice called loudly from behind me, making

me jump again as I tried to hurry down the street.

"We just took a little detour." My steps had to slow

now. I was closing the distance between myself and

the lounging pair too quickly. I had a good loud

scream, and I sucked in air, preparing to use it, but

my throat was so dry I wasn't sure how much volume

I could manage. With a quick movement I slipped my

purse over my head, gripping the strap with one

hand, ready to surrender it or use it as weapon as

need demanded.

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The thickset man shrugged away from the wall as I

warily came to a stop, and walked slowly into the

street.

"Stay away from me," I warned in a voice that was

supposed to sound strong and fearless. But I was

right about the dry throat — no volume.

"Don't be like that, sugar," he called, and the raucous

laughter started again behind me.

I braced myself, feet apart, trying to remember

through my panic what little self-defense I knew. Heel

of the hand thrust upward, hopefully breaking the

nose or shoving it into the brain. Finger through the

eye socket — try to hook around and pop the eye out.

And the standard knee to the groin, of course. That

same pessimistic voice in my mind spoke up then,

reminding me that I probably wouldn't have a chance

against one of them, and there were four. Shut up! I

commanded the voice before terror could incapacitate

me. I wasn't going out without taking someone with

me. I tried to swallow so I could build up a decent

scream.

Headlights suddenly flew around the corner, the car

almost hitting the stocky one, forcing him to jump

back toward the sidewalk. I dove into the road — this

car was going to stop, or have to hit me. But the silver

car unexpectedly fishtailed around, skidding to a stop

with the passenger door open just a few feet from me.

"Get in," a furious voice commanded.

It was amazing how instantaneously the choking fear

vanished, amazing how suddenly the feeling of

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security washed over me — even before I was off the

street — as soon as I heard his voice. I jumped into

the seat, slamming the door shut behind me.

It was dark in the car, no light had come on with the

opening of the door, and I could barely see his face in

the glow from the dashboard. The tires squealed as he

spun around to face north, accelerating too quickly,

swerving toward the stunned men on the street. I

caught a glimpse of them diving for the sidewalk as

we straightened out and sped toward the harbor.

"Put on your seat belt," he commanded, and I realized

I was clutching the seat with both hands. I quickly

obeyed; the snap as the belt connected was loud in

the darkness. He took a sharp left, racing forward,

blowing through several stop signs without a pause.

But I felt utterly safe and, for the moment, totally

unconcerned about where we were going. I stared at

his face in profound relief, relief that went beyond my

sudden deliverance. I studied his flawless features in

the limited light, waiting for my breath to return to

normal, until it occurred to me that his expression

was murderously angry.

"Are you okay?" I asked, surprised at how hoarse my

voice sounded.

"No," he said curtly, and his tone was livid.

I sat in silence, watching his face while his blazing

eyes stared straight ahead, until the car came to a

sudden stop. I glanced around, but it was too dark to

see anything beside the vague outline of dark trees

crowding the roadside. We weren't in town anymore.

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"Bella?" he asked, his voice tight, controlled.

"Yes?" My voice was still rough. I tried to clear my

throat quietly.

"Are you all right?" He still didn't look at me, but the

fury was plain on his face.

"Yes," I croaked softly.

"Distract me, please," he ordered.

"I'm sorry, what?"

He exhaled sharply.

"Just prattle about something unimportant until I

calm down," he clarified, closing his eyes and

pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and

forefinger.

"Um." I wracked my brain for something trivial. "I'm

going to run over Tyler Crowley tomorrow before

school?"

He was still squeezing his eyes closed, but the corner

of his mouth twitched.

"Why?"

"He's telling everyone that he's taking me to prom —

either he's insane or he's still trying to make up for

almost killing me last... well, you remember it, and he

thinks prom is somehow the correct way to do this.

So I figure if I endanger his life, then we're even, and

he can't keep trying to make amends. I don't need

enemies and maybe Lauren would back off if he left

me alone. I might have to total his Sentra, though. If

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he doesn't have a ride he can't take anyone to

prom..." I babbled on.

"I heard about that." He sounded a bit more

composed.

"You did?" I asked in disbelief, my previous irritation

flaring. "If he's paralyzed from the neck down, he

can't go to the prom, either," I muttered, refining my

plan.

Edward sighed, and finally opened his eyes.

"Better?"

"Not really."

I waited, but he didn't speak again. He leaned his

head back against the seat, staring at the ceiling of

the car. His face was rigid.

"What's wrong?" My voice came out in a whisper.

"Sometimes I have a problem with my temper, Bella."

He was whispering, too, and as he stared out the

window, his eyes narrowed into slits. "But it wouldn't

be helpful for me to turn around and hunt down

those..." He didn't finish his sentence, looking away,

struggling for a moment to control his anger again.

"At least," he continued, "that's what I'm trying to

convince myself."

"Oh." The word seemed inadequate, but I couldn't

think of a better response.

We sat in silence again. I glanced at the clock on the

dashboard. It was past six- thirty.

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"Jessica and Angela will be worried," I murmured. "I

was supposed to meet them."

He started the engine without another word, turning

around smoothly and speeding back toward town. We

were under the streetlights in no time at all, still

going too fast, weaving with ease through the cars

slowly cruising the boardwalk. He parallel-parked

against the curb in a space I would have thought

much too small for the Volvo, but he slid in

effortlessly in one try. I looked out the window to see

the lights of La Bella Italia, and Jess and Angela just

leaving, pacing anxiously away from us.

"How did you know where... ?" I began, but then I just

shook my head. I heard the door open and turned to

see him getting out.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm taking you to dinner." He smiled slightly, but his

eyes were hard. He stepped out of the car and

slammed the door. I fumbled with my seat belt, and

then hurried to get out of the car as well. He was

waiting for me on the sidewalk.

He spoke before I could. "Go stop Jessica and Angela

before I have to track them down, too. I don't think I

could restrain myself if I ran into your other friends

again. "

I shivered at the threat in his voice.

"Jess! Angela!" I yelled after them, waving when they

turned. They rushed back to me, the pronounced

relief on both their faces simultaneously changing to

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surprise as they saw who I was standing next to. They

hesitated a few feet from us.

"Where have you been?" Jessica's voice was

suspicious.

"I got lost," I admitted sheepishly. "And then I ran into

Edward." I gestured toward him.

"Would it be all right if I joined you?" he asked in his

silken, irresistible voice. I could see from their

staggered expressions that he had never unleashed

his talents on them before.

"Er... sure," Jessica breathed.

"Um, actually, Bella, we already ate while we were

waiting — sorry," Angela confessed.

"That's fine — I'm not hungry." I shrugged.

"I think you should eat something." Edward's voice

was low, but full of authority. He looked up at Jessica

and spoke slightly louder. "Do you mind if I drive

Bella home tonight? That way you won't have to wait

while she eats."

"Uh, no problem, I guess..." She bit her lip, trying to

figure out from my expression whether that was what

I wanted. I winked at her. I wanted nothing more than

to be alone with my perpetual savior. There were so

many questions that I couldn't bombard him with till

we were by ourselves.

"Okay." Angela was quicker than Jessica. "See you

tomorrow, Bella...

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Edward." She grabbed Jessica's hand and pulled her

toward the car, which I could see a little ways away,

parked across First Street. As they got in, Jess turned

and waved, her face eager with curiosity. I waved

back, waiting for them to drive away before I turned

to face him.

"Honestly, I'm not hungry," I insisted, looking up to

scrutinize his face. His expression was unreadable.

"Humor me."

He walked to the door of the restaurant and held it

open with an obstinate expression. Obviously, there

would be no further discussion. I walked past him

into the restaurant with a resigned sigh. The

restaurant wasn't crowded — it was the off-season in

Port Angeles. The host was female, and I understood

the look in her eyes as she assessed Edward. She

welcomed him a little more warmly than necessary. I

was surprised by how much that bothered me. She

was several inches taller than I was, and unnaturally

blond.

"A table for two?" His voice was alluring, whether he

was aiming for that or not. I saw her eyes flicker to

me and then away, satisfied by my obvious

ordinariness, and by the cautious, no-contact space

Edward kept between us. She led us to a table big

enough for four in the center of the most crowded

area of the dining floor.

I was about to sit, but Edward shook his head at me.

"Perhaps something more private?" he insisted quietly

to the host. I wasn't sure, but it looked like he

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smoothly handed her a tip. I'd never seen anyone

refuse a table except in old movies.

"Sure." She sounded as surprised as I was. She

turned and led us around a partition to a small ring

of booths — all of them empty. "How's this?"

"Perfect." He flashed his gleaming smile, dazing her

momentarily.

"Um" — she shook her head, blinking — "your server

will be right out." She walked away unsteadily.

"You really shouldn't do that to people," I criticized.

"It's hardly fair."

"Do what?"

"Dazzle them like that — she's probably

hyperventilating in the kitchen right now."

He seemed confused.

"Oh, come on," I said dubiously. "You have to know

the effect you have on people."

He tilted his head to one side, and his eyes were

curious. "I dazzle people?"

"You haven't noticed? Do you think everybody gets

their way so easily?" He ignored my questions. "Do I

dazzle you?"

"Frequently," I admitted.

And then our server arrived, her face expectant. The

hostess had definitely dished behind the scenes, and

this new girl didn't look disappointed. She flipped a

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strand of short black hair behind one ear and smiled

with unnecessary warmth.

"Hello. My name is Amber, and I'll be your server

tonight. What can I get you to drink?" I didn't miss

that she was speaking only to him. He looked at me.

"I'll have a Coke." It sounded like a question.

"Two Cokes," he said.

"I'll be right back with that," she assured him with

another unnecessary smile. But he didn't see it. He

was watching me.

"What?" I asked when she left.

His eyes stayed fixed on my face. "How are you

feeling?"

"I'm fine," I replied, surprised by his intensity.

"You don’t feel dizzy, sick, cold... ?"

"Should I?"

He chuckled at my puzzled tone.

"Well, I'm actually waiting for you to go into shock."

His face twisted up into that perfect crooked smile.

"I don’t think that will happen," I said after I could

breathe again.

"I've always been very good at repressing unpleasant

things."

"Just the same, I'll feel better when you have some

sugar and food in you."

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Right on cue, the waitress appeared with our drinks

and a basket of breadsticks. She stood with her back

to me as she placed them on the table.

"Are you ready to order?" she asked Edward.

"Bella?" he asked. She turned unwillingly toward me.

I picked the first thing I saw on the menu. "Um... I'll

have the mushroom ravioli."

"And you?" She turned back to him with a smile.

"Nothing for me," he said. Of course not.

"Let me know if you change your mind." The coy smile

was still in place, but he wasn't looking at her, and

she left dissatisfied.

"Drink," he ordered.

I sipped at my soda obediently, and then drank more

deeply, surprised by how thirsty I was. I realized I had

finished the whole thing when he pushed his glass

toward me.

"Thanks," I muttered, still thirsty. The cold from the

icy soda was radiating through my chest, and I

shivered.

"Are you cold?"

"It's just the Coke," I explained, shivering again.

"Don't you have a jacket?" His voice was disapproving.

"Yes." I looked at the empty bench next to me. "Oh —

I left it in Jessica's car," I realized.

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Edward was shrugging out of his jacket. I suddenly

realized that I had never once noticed what he was

wearing — not just tonight, but ever. I just couldn't

seem to look away from his face. I made myself look

now, focusing. He was removing a light beige leather

jacket now; underneath he wore an ivory turtleneck

sweater. It fit him snugly, emphasizing how muscular

his chest was.

He handed me the jacket, interrupting my ogling.

"Thanks," I said again, sliding my arms into his

jacket. It was cold —

the way my jacket felt when I first picked it up in the

morning, hanging in the drafty hallway. I shivered

again. It smelled amazing. I inhaled, trying to identify

the delicious scent. It didn't smell like cologne. The

sleeves were much too long; I shoved them back so I

could free my hands.

"That color blue looks lovely with your skin," he said,

watching me. I was surprised; I looked down,

flushing, of course.

He pushed the bread basket toward me.

"Really, I'm not going into shock," I protested.

"You should be — a normal person would be. You

don't even look shaken." He seemed unsettled. He

stared into my eyes, and I saw how light his eyes

were, lighter than I'd ever seen them, golden

butterscotch.

"I feel very safe with you," I confessed, mesmerized

into telling the truth again.

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That displeased him; his alabaster brow furrowed. He

shook his head, frowning.

"This is more complicated than I'd planned," he

murmured to himself. I picked up a breadstick and

began nibbling on the end, measuring his expression.

I wondered when it would be okay to start questioning

him.

"Usually you're in a better mood when your eyes are

so light," I commented, trying to distract him from

whatever thought had left him frowning and somber.

He stared at me, stunned. "What?"

"You're always crabbier when your eyes are black — I

expect it then," I went on. "I have a theory about

that."

His eyes narrowed. "More theories?"

"Mm-hm." I chewed on a small bite of the bread,

trying to look indifferent.

"I hope you were more creative this time... or are you

still stealing from comic books?" His faint smile was

mocking; his eyes were still tight.

"Well, no, I didn't get it from a comic book, but I

didn't come up with it on my own, either," I

confessed.

"And?" he prompted.

But then the waitress strode around the partition

with my food. I realized we'd been unconsciously

leaning toward each other across the table, because

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we both straightened up as she approached. She set

the dish in front of me — it looked pretty good — and

turned quickly to Edward.

"Did you change your mind?" she asked. "Isn't there

anything I can get you?" I may have been imagining

the double meaning in her words.

"No, thank you, but some more soda would be nice."

He gestured with a long white hand to the empty cups

in front of me.

"Sure." She removed the empty glasses and walked

away.

"You were saying?" he asked.

"I'll tell you about it in the car. If..." I paused.

"There are conditions?" He raised one eyebrow, his

voice ominous.

"I do have a few questions, of course."

"Of course."

The waitress was back with two more Cokes. She sat

them down without a word this time, and left again.

I took a sip.

"Well, go ahead," he pushed, his voice still hard. I

started with the most undemanding. Or so I thought.

"Why are you in Port Angeles?"

He looked down, folding his large hands together

slowly on the table. His eyes flickered up at me from

under his lashes, the hint of a smirk on his face.

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"Next.

"But that's the easiest one," I objected.

"Next," he repeated.

I looked down, frustrated. I unrolled my silverware,

picked up my fork, and carefully speared a ravioli. I

put it in my mouth slowly, still looking down, chewing

while I thought. The mushrooms were good. I

swallowed and took another sip of Coke before I

looked up.

"Okay, then." I glared at him, and continued slowly.

"Let's say, hypothetically of course, that... someone...

could know what people are thinking, read minds,

you know — with a few exceptions."

"Just one exception," he corrected, "hypothetically."

"All right, with one exception, then." I was thrilled

that he was playing along, but I tried to seem casual.

"How does that work? What are the limitations? How

would... that someone...

find someone else at exactly the right time? How

would he know she was in trouble?" I wondered if my

convoluted questions even made sense.

"Hypothetically?" he asked.

"Sure."

"Well, if... that someone..."

"Let's call him 'Joe,'" I suggested.

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He smiled wryly. "Joe, then. If Joe had been paying

attention, the timing wouldn't have needed to be quite

so exact." He shook his head, rolling his eyes. "Only

you could get into trouble in a town this small. You

would have devastated their crime rate statistics for a

decade, you know."

"We were speaking of a hypothetical case," I reminded

him frostily. He laughed at me, his eyes warm.

"Yes, we were," he agreed. "Shall we call you 'Jane'?"

"How did you know?" I asked, unable to curb my

intensity. I realized I was leaning toward him again.

He seemed to be wavering, torn by some internal

dilemma. His eyes locked with mine, and I guessed he

was making the decision right then whether or not to

simply tell me the truth.

"You can trust me, you know," I murmured. I reached

forward, without thinking, to touch his folded hands,

but he slid them away minutely, and I pulled my

hand back.

"I don't know if I have a choice anymore." His voice

was almost a whisper. "I was wrong — you're much

more observant than I gave you credit for."

"I thought you were always right."

"I used to be." He shook his head again. "I was wrong

about you on one other thing, as well. You're not a

magnet for accidents — that's not a broad enough

classification. You are a magnet for trouble. If there is

anything dangerous within a ten-mile radius, it will

invariably find you."

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"And you put yourself into that category?" I guessed.

His face turned cold, expressionless. "Unequivocally."

I stretched my hand across the table again — ignoring

him when he pulled back slightly once more — to

touch the back of his hand shyly with my fingertips.

His skin was cold and hard, like a stone.

"Thank you." My voice was fervent with gratitude.

"That's twice now." His face softened. "Let's not try for

three, agreed?" I scowled, but nodded. He moved his

hand out from under mine, placing both of his under

the table. But he leaned toward me.

"I followed you to Port Angeles," he admitted,

speaking in a rush. "I've never tried to keep a specific

person alive before, and it's much more troublesome

than I would have believed. But that's probably just

because it's you. Ordinary people seem to make it

through the day without so many catastrophes." He

paused. I wondered if it should bother me that he was

following me; instead I felt a strange surge of

pleasure. He stared, maybe wondering why my lips

were curving into an involuntary smile.

"Did you ever think that maybe my number was up

the first time, with the van, and that you've been

interfering with fate?" I speculated, distracting myself.

"That wasn't the first time," he said, and his voice was

hard to hear. I stared at him in amazement, but he

was looking down. "Your number was up the first

time I met you."

I felt a spasm of fear at his words, and the abrupt

memory of his violent black glare that first day. . . but

the overwhelming sense of safety I felt in his presence

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stifled it. By the time he looked up to read my eyes,

there was no trace of fear in them.

"You remember?" he asked, his angel's face grave.

"Yes." I was calm.

"And yet here you sit." There was a trace of disbelief

in his voice; he raised one eyebrow.

"Yes, here I sit... because of you." I paused. "Because

somehow you knew how to find me today... ?" I

prompted.

He pressed his lips together, staring at me through

narrowed eyes, deciding again. His eyes flashed down

to my full plate, and then back to me.

"You eat, I'll talk," he bargained.

I quickly scooped up another ravioli and popped it in

my mouth.

"It's harder than it should be — keeping track of you.

Usually I can find someone very easily, once I've

heard their mind before." He looked at me anxiously,

and I realized I had frozen. I made myself swallow,

then stabbed another ravioli and tossed it in.

"I was keeping tabs on Jessica, not carefully — like I

said, only you could find trouble in Port Angeles —

and at first I didn't notice when you took off on your

own. Then, when I realized that you weren't with her

anymore, I went looking for you at the bookstore I

saw in her head. I could tell that you hadn't gone in,

and that you'd gone south... and I knew you would

have to turn around soon. So I was just waiting for

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you, randomly searching through the thoughts of

people on the street — to see if anyone had noticed

you so I would know where you were. I had no reason

to be worried... but I was strangely anxious..." He was

lost in thought, staring past me, seeing things I

couldn't imagine.

"I started to drive in circles, still... listening. The sun

was finally setting, and I was about to get out and

follow you on foot. And then — " He stopped, clenching

his teeth together in sudden fury. He made an effort

to calm himself.

"Then what?" I whispered. He continued to stare over

my head.

"I heard what they were thinking," he growled, his

upper lip curling slightly back over his teeth. "I saw

your face in his mind." He suddenly leaned forward,

one elbow appearing on the table, his hand covering

his eyes. The movement was so swift it startled me.

"It was very... hard — you can't imagine how hard —

for me to simply take you away, and leave them...

alive." His voice was muffled by his arm. "I could have

let you go with Jessica and Angela, but I was afraid if

you left me alone, I would go looking for them," he

admitted in a whisper. I sat quietly, dazed, my

thoughts incoherent. My hands were folded in my lap,

and I was leaning weakly against the back of the seat.

He still had his face in his hand, and he was as still

as if he'd been carved from the stone his skin

resembled.

Finally he looked up, his eyes seeking mine, full of his

own questions.

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"Are you ready to go home?" he asked.

"I'm ready to leave," I qualified, overly grateful that we

had the hour-long ride home together. I wasn't ready

to say goodbye to him. The waitress appeared as if

she'd been called. Or watching.

"How are we doing?" she asked Edward.

"We're ready for the check, thank you." His voice was

quiet, rougher, still reflecting the strain of our

conversation. It seemed to muddle her. He looked up,

waiting.

"S-sure," she stuttered. "Here you go." She pulled a

small leather folder from the front pocket of her black

apron and handed it to him. There was a bill in his

hand already. He slipped it into the folder and handed

it right back to her.

"No change." He smiled. Then he stood up, and I

scrambled awkwardly to my feet.

She smiled invitingly at him again. "You have a nice

evening." He didn't look away from me as he thanked

her. I suppressed a smile. He walked close beside me

to the door, still careful not to touch me. I

remembered what Jessica had said about her

relationship with Mike, how they were almost to the

first-kiss stage. I sighed. Edward seemed to hear me,

and he looked down curiously. I looked at the

sidewalk, grateful that he didn't seem to be able to

know what I was thinking.

He opened the passenger door, holding it for me as I

stepped in, shutting it softly behind me. I watched

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him walk around the front of the car, amazed, yet

again, by how graceful he was. I probably should have

been used to that by now — but I wasn't. I had a

feeling Edward wasn't the kind of person anyone got

used to.

Once inside the car, he started the engine and turned

the heater on high. It had gotten very cold, and I

guessed the good weather was at an end. I was warm

in his jacket, though, breathing in the scent of it

when I thought he couldn't see.

Edward pulled out through the traffic, apparently

without a glance, flipping around to head toward the

freeway.

"Now," he said significantly, "it's your turn."

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Chapter 9

"Can I ask just one more?" I pleaded as Edward

accelerated much too quickly down the quiet street.

He didn't seem to be paying any attention to the road.

He sighed.

"One," he agreed. His lips pressed together into a

cautious line.

"Well... you said you knew I hadn't gone into the

bookstore, and that I had gone south. I was just

wondering how you knew that." He looked away,

deliberating.

"I thought we were past all the evasiveness," I

grumbled. He almost smiled.

"Fine, then. I followed your scent." He looked at the

road, giving me time to compose my face. I couldn't

think of an acceptable response to that, but I filed it

carefully away for future study. I tried to refocus. I

wasn't ready to let him be finished, now that he was

finally explaining things.

"And then you didn't answer one of my first

questions..." I stalled. He looked at me with

disapproval. "Which one?"

"How does it work — the mind-reading thing? Can

you read anybody's mind, anywhere? How do you do

it? Can the rest of your family. . . ?" I felt silly, asking

for clarification on make-believe.

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"That's more than one," he pointed out. I simply

intertwined my fingers and gazed at him, waiting.

"No, it's just me. And I can't hear anyone, anywhere. I

have to be fairly close. The more familiar someone's...

'voice' is, the farther away I can hear them. But still,

no more than a few miles." He paused thoughtfully.

"It's a little like being in a huge hall filled with people,

everyone talking at once. It's just a hum — a buzzing

of voices in the background. Until I focus on one

voice, and then what they're thinking is clear.

"Most of the time I tune it all out — it can be very

distracting. And then it's easier to seem normal" — he

frowned as he said the word — "when I'm not

accidentally answering someone's thoughts rather

than their words."

"Why do you think you can't hear me?" I asked

curiously. He looked at me, his eyes enigmatic.

"I don't know," he murmured. "The only guess I have

is that maybe your mind doesn't work the same way

the rest of theirs do. Like your thoughts are on the

AM frequency and I'm only getting FM." He grinned at

me, suddenly amused.

"My mind doesn't work right? I'm a freak?" The words

bothered me more than they should — probably

because his speculation hit home. I'd always

suspected as much, and it embarrassed me to have it

confirmed.

"I hear voices in my mind and you're worried that

you're the freak," he laughed. "Don't worry, it's just a

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theory..." His face tightened. "Which brings us back to

you."

I sighed. How to begin?

"Aren't we past all the evasions now?" he reminded

me softly. I looked away from his face for the first

time, trying to find words. I happened to notice the

speedometer.

"Holy crow!" I shouted. "Slow down!"

"What's wrong?" He was startled. But the car didn't

decelerate.

"You're going a hundred miles an hour!" I was still

shouting. I shot a panicky glance out the window, but

it was too dark to see much. The road was only visible

in the long patch of bluish brightness from the

headlights. The forest along both sides of the road

was like a black wall

— as hard as a wall of steel if we veered off the road

at this speed.

"Relax, Bella." He rolled his eyes, still not slowing.

"Are you trying to kill us?" I demanded.

"We're not going to crash."

I tried to modulate my voice. "Why are you in such a

hurry?"

"I always drive like this." He turned to smile crookedly

at me.

"Keep your eyes on the road!"

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"I've never been in an accident, Bella — I've never

even gotten a ticket." He grinned and tapped his

forehead. "Built-in radar detector."

"Very funny." I fumed. "Charlie's a cop, remember? I

was raised to abide by traffic laws. Besides, if you

turn us into a Volvo pretzel around a tree trunk, you

can probably just walk away."

"Probably," he agreed with a short, hard laugh. "But

you can't." He sighed, and I watched with relief as the

needle gradually drifted toward eighty. "Happy?"

"Almost."

"I hate driving slow," he muttered.

"This is slow?"

"Enough commentary on my driving," he snapped.

"I'm still waiting for your latest theory."

I bit my lip. He looked down at me, his honey eyes

unexpectedly gentle.

"I won't laugh," he promised.

"I'm more afraid that you'll be angry with me."

"Is it that bad?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

He waited. I was looking down at my hands, so I

couldn't see his expression.

"Go ahead." His voice was calm.

"I don't know how to start," I admitted.

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"Why don't you start at the beginning... you said you

didn't come up with this on your own."

"No."

"What got you started — a book? A movie?" he

probed.

"No — it was Saturday, at the beach." I risked a

glance up at his face. He looked puzzled.

"I ran into an old family friend — Jacob Black," I

continued. "His dad and Charlie have been friends

since I was a baby."

He still looked confused.

"His dad is one of the Quileute elders." I watched him

carefully. His confused expression froze in place. "We

went for a walk — " I edited all my scheming out of the

story " — and he was telling me some old legends —

trying to scare me, I think. He told me one..." I

hesitated.

"Go on," he said.

"About vampires." I realized I was whispering. I

couldn't look at his face now. But I saw his knuckles

tighten convulsively on the wheel.

"And you immediately thought of me?" Still calm.

"No. He... mentioned your family."

He was silent, staring at the road.

I was worried suddenly, worried about protecting

Jacob.

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"He just thought it was a silly superstition," I said

quickly. "He didn't expect me to think anything of it."

It didn't seem like enough; I had to confess. "It was

my fault, I forced him to tell me."

"Why?"

"Lauren said something about you — she was trying

to provoke me. And an older boy from the tribe said

your family didn't come to the reservation, only it

sounded like he meant something different. So I got

Jacob alone and I tricked it out of him," I admitted,

hanging my head. He startled me by laughing. I

glared up at him. He was laughing, but his eyes were

fierce, staring ahead.

"Tricked him how?" he asked.

"I tried to flirt — it worked better than I thought it

would." Disbelief colored my tone as I remembered.

"I'd like to have seen that." He chuckled darkly. "And

you accused me of dazzling people — poor Jacob

Black."

I blushed and looked out my window into the night.

"What did you do then?" he asked after a minute.

"I did some research on the Internet."

"And did that convince you?" His voice sounded

barely interested. But his hands were clamped hard

onto the steering wheel.

"No. Nothing fit. Most of it was kind of silly. And

then..." I stopped.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"What?"

"I decided it didn't matter," I whispered.

"It didn't matter?" His tone made me look up — I had

finally broken through his carefully composed mask.

His face was incredulous, with just a hint of the anger

I'd feared.

"No," I said softly. "It doesn't matter to me what you

are." A hard, mocking edge entered his voice. "You

don't care if I'm a monster?

If I'm not human!"

"No."

He was silent, staring straight ahead again. His face

was bleak and cold.

"You're angry," I sighed. "I shouldn't have said

anything."

"No," he said, but his tone was as hard as his face.

"I'd rather know what you're thinking — even if what

you're thinking is insane."

"So I'm wrong again?" I challenged.

"That's not what I was referring to. 'It doesn't matter'!"

he quoted, gritting his teeth together.

"I'm right?" I gasped.

"Does it matter?"

I took a deep breath.

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"Not really." I paused. "But I am curious." My voice, at

least, was composed.

He was suddenly resigned. "What are you curious

about?"

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen," he answered promptly.

"And how long have you been seventeen?"

His lips twitched as he stared at the road. "A while,"

he admitted at last.

"Okay." I smiled, pleased that he was still being

honest with me. He stared down at me with watchful

eyes, much as he had before, when he was worried I

would go into shock. I smiled wider in

encouragement, and he frowned.

"Don't laugh — but how can you come out during the

daytime?" He laughed anyway. "Myth."

"Burned by the sun?"

"Myth."

"Sleeping in coffins?"

"Myth." He hesitated for a moment, and a peculiar

tone entered his voice.

"I can't sleep."

It took me a minute to absorb that. "At all?"

"Never," he said, his voice nearly inaudible. He turned

to look at me with a wistful expression. The golden

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

eyes held mine, and I lost my train of thought. I

stared at him until he looked away.

"You haven't asked me the most important question

yet." His voice was hard now, and when he looked at

me again his eyes were cold. I blinked, still dazed.

"Which one is that?"

"You aren't concerned about my diet?" he asked

sarcastically.

"Oh," I murmured, "that."

"Yes, that." His voice was bleak. "Don't you want to

know if I drink blood?"

I flinched. "Well, Jacob said something about that."

"What did Jacob say?" he asked flatly.

"He said you didn't... hunt people. He said your family

wasn't supposed to be dangerous because you only

hunted animals."

"He said we weren't dangerous?" His voice was deeply

skeptical.

"Not exactly. He said you weren't supposed to be

dangerous. But the Quileutes still didn't want you on

their land, just in case." He looked forward, but I

couldn't tell if he was watching the road or not.

"So was he right? About not hunting people?" I tried

to keep my voice as even as possible.

"The Quileutes have a long memory," he whispered. I

took it as a confirmation.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Don't let that make you complacent, though," he

warned me. "They're right to keep their distance from

us. We are still dangerous."

"I don't understand."

"We try," he explained slowly. "We're usually very

good at what we do. Sometimes we make mistakes.

Me, for example, allowing myself to be alone with

you."

"This is a mistake?" I heard the sadness in my voice,

but I didn't know if he could as well.

"A very dangerous one," he murmured.

We were both silent then. I watched the headlights

twist with the curves of the road. They moved too fast;

it didn't look real, it looked like a video game. I was

aware of the time slipping away so quickly, like the

black road beneath us, and I was hideously afraid

that I would never have another chance to be with

him like this again — openly, the walls between us

gone for once. His words hinted at an end, and I

recoiled from the idea. I couldn't waste one minute I

had with him.

"Tell me more," I asked desperately, not caring what

he said, just so I could hear his voice again.

He looked at me quickly, startled by the change in my

tone. "What more do you want to know?"

"Tell me why you hunt animals instead of people," I

suggested, my voice still tinged with desperation. I

realized my eyes were wet, and I fought against the

grief that was trying to overpower me.

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"I don't want to be a monster." His voice was very low.

"But animals aren't enough?"

He paused. "I can't be sure, of course, but I'd compare

it to living on tofu and soy milk; we call ourselves

vegetarians, our little inside joke. It doesn't

completely satiate the hunger — or rather thirst. But

it keens us strong enough to resist. Most of the time."

His tone turned ominous.

"Sometimes it's more difficult than others."

"Is it very difficult for you now?" I asked.

He sighed. "Yes."

"But you're not hungry now," I said confidently —

stating, not asking.

"Why do you think that?"

"Your eyes. I told you I had a theory. I've noticed that

people — men in particular — are crabbier when

they're hungry."

He chuckled. "You are observant, aren't you?"

I didn't answer; I just listened to the sound of his

laugh, committing it to memory.

"Were you hunting this weekend, with Emmett?" I

asked when it was quiet again.

"Yes." He paused for a second, as if deciding whether

or not to say something. "I didn't want to leave, but it

was necessary. It's a bit easier to be around you when

I'm not thirsty."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Why didn't you want to leave?"

"It makes me... anxious... to be away from you." His

eyes were gentle but intense, and they seemed to be

making my bones turn soft. "I wasn't joking when I

asked you to try not to fall in the ocean or get run

over last Thursday. I was distracted all weekend,

worrying about you. And after what happened

tonight, I'm surprised that you did make it through a

whole weekend unscathed." He shook his head, and

then seemed to remember something. "Well, not

totally unscathed."

"What?"

"Your hands," he reminded me. I looked down at my

palms, at the almost-healed scrapes across the heels

of my hands. His eyes missed nothing.

"I fell," I sighed.

"That's what I thought." His lips curved up at the

corners. "I suppose, being you, it could have been

much worse — and that possibility tormented me the

entire time I was away. It was a very long three days. I

really got on Emmett's nerves." He smiled ruefully at

me.

"Three days? Didn't you just get back today?"

"No, we got back Sunday."

"Then why weren't any of you in school?" I was

frustrated, almost angry as I thought of how much

disappointment I had suffered because of his

absence.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Well, you asked if the sun hurt me, and it doesn't.

But I can't go out in the sunlight — at least, not

where anyone can see."

"Why?"

"I'll show you sometime," he promised.

I thought about it for a moment.

"You might have called me," I decided.

He was puzzled. "But I knew you were safe."

"But I didn't know where you were. I — " I hesitated,

dropping my eyes.

"What?" His velvety voice was compelling.

"I didn't like it. Not seeing you. It makes me anxious,

too." I blushed to be saying this out loud.

He was quiet. I glanced up, apprehensive, and saw

that his expression was pained.

"Ah," he groaned quietly. "This is wrong." I couldn't

understand his response. "What did I say?"

"Don't you see, Bella? It's one thing for me to make

myself miserable, but a wholly other thing for you to

be so involved." He turned his anguished eyes to the

road, his words flowing almost too fast for me to

understand. "I don't want to hear that you feel that

way." His voice was low but urgent. His words cut me

"It's wrong. It's not safe. I'm dangerous, Bella —

please, grasp that."

"No." I tried very hard not to look like a sulky child.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I'm serious," he growled.

"So am I. I told you, it doesn't matter what you are.

It's too late." His voice whipped out, low and harsh.

"Never say that." I bit my lip and was glad he couldn't

know how much that hurt. I stared out at the road.

We must be close now. He was driving much too fast.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, his voice still raw.

I just shook my head, not sure if I could speak. I

could feel his gaze on my face, but I kept my eyes

forward.

"Are you crying?" He sounded appalled. I hadn't

realized the moisture in my eyes had brimmed over. I

quickly rubbed my hand across my cheek, and sure

enough, traitor tears were there, betraying me.

"No," I said, but my voice cracked.

I saw him reach toward me hesitantly with his right

hand, but then he stopped and placed it slowly back

on the steering wheel.

"I'm sorry." His voice burned with regret. I knew he

wasn't just apologizing for the words that had upset

me.

The darkness slipped by us in silence.

"Tell me something," he asked after another minute,

and I could hear him struggle to use a lighter tone.

"Yes?"

"What were you thinking tonight, just before I came

around the corner? I couldn't understand your

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

expression — you didn't look that scared, you looked

like you were concentrating very hard on something."

"I was trying to remember how to incapacitate an

attacker — you know, self-defense. I was going to

smash his nose into his brain." I thought of the dark-

haired man with a surge of hate.

"You were going to fight them?" This upset him.

"Didn't you think about running?"

"I fall down a lot when I run," I admitted.

"What about screaming for help?"

"I was getting to that part."

He shook his head. "You were right — I'm definitely

fighting fate trying to keep you alive."

I sighed. We were slowing, passing into the

boundaries of Forks. It had taken less than twenty

minutes.

"Will I see you tomorrow?" I demanded.

"Yes — I have a paper due, too." He smiled. "I'll save

you a seat at lunch."

It was silly, after everything we'd been through

tonight, how that little promise sent flutters through

my stomach, and made me unable to speak. We were

in front of Charlie's house. The lights were on, my

truck in its place, everything utterly normal. It was

like waking from a dream. He stopped the car, but I

didn't move.

"Do you promise to be there tomorrow?"

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"I promise."

I considered that for a moment, then nodded. I pulled

his jacket off, taking one last whiff.

"You can keep it — you don't have a jacket for

tomorrow," he reminded me. I handed it back to him.

"I don't want to have to explain to Charlie."

"Oh, right." He grinned.

I hesitated, my hand on the door handle, trying to

prolong the moment.

"Bella?" he asked in a different tone — serious, but

hesitant.

"Yes?" I turned back to him too eagerly.

"Will you promise me something?"

"Yes," I said, and instantly regretted my unconditional

agreement. What if he asked me to stay away from

him? I couldn't keep that promise.

"Don't go into the woods alone."

I stared at him in blank confusion. "Why?"

He frowned, and his eyes were tight as he stared past

me out the window.

"I'm not always the most dangerous thing out there.

Let's leave it at that."

I shuddered slightly at the sudden bleakness in his

voice, but I was relieved. This, at least, was an easy

promise to honor. "Whatever you say."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I'll see you tomorrow," he sighed, and I knew he

wanted me to leave now.

"Tomorrow, then." I opened the door unwillingly.

"Bella?" I turned and he was leaning toward me, his

pale, glorious face just inches from mine. My heart

stopped beating.

"Sleep well," he said. His breath blew in my face,

stunning me. It was the same exquisite scent that

clung to his jacket, but in a more concentrated form. I

blinked, thoroughly dazed. He leaned away. I was

unable to move until my brain had somewhat

unscrambled itself. Then I stepped out of the car

awkwardly, having to use the frame for support. I

thought I heard him chuckle, but the sound was too

quiet for me to be certain.

He waited till I had stumbled to the front door, and

then I heard his engine quietly rev. I turned to watch

the silver car disappear around the corner. I realized

it was very cold.

I reached for the key mechanically, unlocked the

door, and stepped inside. Charlie called from the

living room. "Bella?"

"Yeah, Dad, it's me." I walked in to see him. He was

watching a baseball game.

"You're home early."

"Am I?" I was surprised.

"It's not even eight yet," he told me. "Did you girls

have fun?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Yeah — it was lots of fun." My head was spinning as

I tried to remember all the way back to the girls' night

out I had planned. "They both found dresses."

"Are you all right?"

"I'm just tired. I did a lot of walking."

"Well, maybe you should go lie down." He sounded

concerned. I wondered what my face looked like.

"I'm just going to call Jessica first."

"Weren't you just with her?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes — but I left my jacket in her car. I want to make

sure she brings it tomorrow."

"Well, give her a chance to get home first."

"Right," I agreed.

I went to the kitchen and fell, exhausted, into a chair.

I was really feeling dizzy now. I wondered if I was

going to go into shock after all. Get a grip, I told

myself.

The phone rang suddenly, startling me. I yanked it off

the hook.

"Hello?" I asked breathlessly.

"Bella?"

"Hey, Jess, I was just going to call you."

"You made it home?" Her voice was relieved... and

surprised.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Yes. I left my jacket in your car — could you bring it

to me tomorrow?"

"Sure. But tell me what happened!" she demanded.

"Um, tomorrow — in Trig, okay?"

She caught on quickly. "Oh, is your dad there?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Okay, I'll talk to you tomorrow, then. Bye!" I could

hear the impatience in her voice.

"Bye, Jess."

I walked up the stairs slowly, a heavy stupor clouding

my mind. I went through the motions of getting ready

for bed without paying any attention to what I was

doing. It wasn't until I was in the shower — the water

too hot, burning my skin — that I realized I was

freezing. I shuddered violently for several minutes

before the steaming spray could finally relax my rigid

muscles. Then I stood in the shower, too tired to

move, until the hot water began to run out.

I stumbled out, wrapping myself securely in a towel,

trying to hold the heat from the water in so the aching

shivers wouldn't return. I dressed for bed swiftly and

climbed under my quilt, curling into a ball, hugging

myself to keep warm. A few small shudders trembled

through me. My mind still swirled dizzily, full of

images I couldn't understand, and some I fought to

repress. Nothing seemed clear at first, but as I fell

gradually closer to unconsciousness, a few certainties

became evident. About three things I was absolutely

positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there

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was part of him — and I didn't know how potent that

part might be — that thirsted for my blood. And third,

I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with

him.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Chapter 10

It was very hard, in the morning, to argue with the

part of me that was sure last night was a dream.

Logic wasn't on my side, or common sense. I clung to

the parts I couldn't have imagined — like his smell. I

was sure I could never have dreamed that up on my

own.

It was foggy and dark outside my window, absolutely

perfect. He had no reason not to be in school today. I

dressed in my heavy clothes, remembering I didn't

have a jacket. Further proof that my memory was

real. When I got downstairs, Charlie was gone again

— I was running later than I'd realized. I swallowed a

granola bar in three bites, chased it down with milk

straight from the carton, and then hurried out the

door. Hopefully the rain would hold off until I could

find Jessica. It was unusually foggy; the air was

almost smoky with it. The mist was ice cold where it

clung to the exposed skin on my face and neck. I

couldn't wait to get the heat going in my truck. It was

such a thick fog that I was a few feet down the

driveway before I realized there was a car in it: a silver

car. My heart thudded, stuttered, and then picked up

again in double time.

I didn't see where he came from, but suddenly he was

there, pulling the door open for me.

"Do you want to ride with me today?" he asked,

amused by my expression as he caught me by

surprise yet again. There was uncertainty in his voice.

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He was really giving me a choice — I was free to

refuse, and part of him hoped for that. It was a vain

hope.

"Yes, thank you," I said, trying to keep my voice calm.

As I stepped into the warm car, I noticed his tan

jacket was slung over the headrest of the passenger

seat. The door closed behind me, and, sooner than

should be possible, he was sitting next to me, starting

the car.

"I brought the jacket for you. I didn't want you to get

sick or something." His voice was guarded. I noticed

that he wore no jacket himself, just a light gray knit

V-neck shirt with long sleeves. Again, the fabric clung

to his perfectly muscled chest. It was a colossal

tribute to his face that it kept my eyes away from his

body.

"I'm not quite that delicate," I said, but I pulled the

jacket onto my lap, pushing my arms through the

too-long sleeves, curious to see if the scent could

possibly be as good as I remembered. It was better.

"Aren't you?" he contradicted in a voice so low I

wasn't sure if he meant for me to hear.

We drove through the fog-shrouded streets, always

too fast, feeling awkward. I was, at least. Last night

all the walls were down... almost all. I didn't know if

we were still being as candid today. It left me tongue-

tied. I waited for him to speak.

He turned to smirk at me. "What, no twenty questions

today?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Do my questions bother you?" I asked, relieved.

"Not as much as your reactions do." He looked like he

was joking, but I couldn't be sure.

I frowned. "Do I react badly?"

"No, that's the problem. You take everything so coolly

— it's unnatural. It makes me wonder what you're

really thinking."

"I always tell you what I'm really thinking."

"You edit," he accused.

"Not very much."

"Enough to drive me insane."

"You don't want to hear it," I mumbled, almost

whispered. As soon as the words were out, I regretted

them. The pain in my voice was very faint; I could

only hope he hadn't noticed it.

He didn't respond, and I wondered if I had ruined the

mood. His face was unreadable as we drove into the

school parking lot. Something occurred to me

belatedly.

"Where's the rest of your family?" I asked — more

than glad to be alone with him, but remembering that

his car was usually full.

"They took Rosalie's car." He shrugged as he parked

next to a glossy red convertible with the top up.

"Ostentatious, isn't it?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Um, wow," I breathed. "If she has that, why does she

ride with you?"

"Like I said, it's ostentatious. We try to blend in."

"You don't succeed." I laughed and shook my head as

we got out of the car. I wasn't late anymore; his

lunatic driving had gotten me to school in plenty of

time. "So why did Rosalie drive today if it's more

conspicuous?"

"Hadn't you noticed? I'm breaking all the rules now."

He met me at the front of the car, staying very close to

my side as we walked onto campus. I wanted to close

that little distance, to reach out and touch him, but I

was afraid he wouldn't like me to.

"Why do you have cars like that at all?" I wondered

aloud. "If you're looking for privacy?"

"An indulgence," he admitted with an impish smile.

"We all like to drive fast."

"Figures," I muttered under my breath.

Under the shelter of the cafeteria roofs overhang,

Jessica was waiting, her eyes about to bug out of

their sockets. Over her arm, bless her, was my jacket.

"Hey, Jessica," I said when we were a few feet away.

"Thanks for remembering." She handed me my jacket

without speaking.

"Good morning, Jessica," Edward said politely. It

wasn't really his fault that his voice was so

irresistible. Or what his eyes were capable of.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Er... hi." She shifted her wide eyes to me, trying to

gather her jumbled thoughts. "I guess I'll see you in

Trig." She gave me a meaningful look, and I

suppressed a sigh. What on earth was I going to tell

her?

"Yeah, I'll see you then."

She walked away, pausing twice to peek back over her

shoulder at us.

"What are you going to tell her?" Edward murmured.

"Hey, I thought you couldn't read my mind!" I hissed.

"I can't," he said, startled. Then understanding

brightened his eyes.

"However, I can read hers — she'll be waiting to

ambush you in class." I groaned as I pulled off his

jacket and handed it to him, replacing it with my own.

He folded it over his arm.

"So what are you going to tell her?"

"A little help?" I pleaded. "What does she want to

know?" He shook his head, grinning wickedly. "That's

not fair."

"No, you not sharing what you know — now that's not

fair." He deliberated for a moment as we walked. We

stopped outside the door to my first class.

"She wants to know if we're secretly dating. And she

wants to know how you feel about me," he finally

said.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Yikes. What should I say?" I tried to keep my

expression very innocent. People were passing us on

their way to class, probably staring, but I was barely

aware of them.

"Hmmm." He paused to catch a stray lock of hair that

was escaping the twist on my neck and wound it back

into place. My heart spluttered hyperactively. "I

suppose you could say yes to the first... if you don't

mind — it's easier than any other explanation."

"I don't mind," I said in a faint voice.

"And as for her other question... well, I'll be listening

to hear the answer to that one myself." One side of his

mouth pulled up into my favorite uneven smile. I

couldn't catch my breath soon enough to respond to

that remark. He turned and walked away.

"I'll see you at lunch," he called over his shoulder.

Three people walking in the door stopped to stare at

me.

I hurried into class, flushed and irritated. He was

such a cheater. Now I was even more worried about

what I was going to say to Jessica. I sat in my usual

seat, slamming my bag down in aggravation.

"Morning, Bella," Mike said from the seat next to me. I

looked up to see an odd, almost resigned look on his

face. "How was Port Angeles?"

"It was..." There was no honest way to sum it up.

"Great," I finished lamely. "Jessica got a really cute

dress."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Did she say anything about Monday night?" he

asked, his eyes brightening. I smiled at the turn the

conversation had taken.

"She said she had a really good time," I assured him.

"She did?" he said eagerly.

"Most definitely."

Mr. Mason called the class to order then, asking us to

turn in our papers. English and then Government

passed in a blur, while I worried about how to explain

things to Jessica and agonized over whether Edward

would really be listening to what I said through the

medium of Jess's thoughts. How very inconvenient

his little talent could be — when it wasn't saving my

life.

The fog had almost dissolved by the end of the second

hour, but the day was still dark with low, oppressing

clouds. I smiled up at the sky. Edward was right, of

course. When I walked into Trig Jessica was sitting in

the back row, nearly bouncing off her seat in

agitation. I reluctantly went to sit by her, trying to

convince myself it would be better to get it over with

as soon as possible.

"Tell me everything!" she commanded before I was in

the seat.

"What do you want to know?" I hedged.

"What happened last night?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"He bought me dinner, and then he drove me home."

She glared at me, her expression stiff with skepticism.

"How did you get home so fast?"

"He drives like a maniac. It was terrifying." I hoped he

heard that.

"Was it like a date — did you tell him to meet you

there?" I hadn't thought of that. "No — I was very

surprised to see him there." Her lips puckered in

disappointment at the transparent honesty in my

voice.

"But he picked you up for school today?" she probed.

"Yes — that was a surprise, too. He noticed I didn't

have a jacket last night," I explained.

"So are you going out again?"

"He offered to drive me to Seattle Saturday because

he thinks toy truck isn't up to it — does that count?"

"Yes." She nodded.

"Well, then, yes."

"W-o-w." She exaggerated the word into three

syllables. "Edward Cullen."

"I know," I agreed. "Wow" didn't even cover it.

"Wait!" Her hands flew up, palms toward me like she

was stopping traffic.

"Has he kissed you?"

"No," I mumbled. "It's not like that." She looked

disappointed. I'm sure I did, too.

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"Do you think Saturday... ?" She raised her eyebrows.

"I really doubt it." The discontent in my voice was

poorly disguised.

"What did you talk about?" She pushed for more

information in a whisper. Class had started but Mr.

Varner wasn't paying close attention and we weren't

the only ones still talking.

"I don't know, Jess, lots of stuff," I whispered back.

"We talked about the English essay a little." A very,

very little. I think he mentioned it in passing.

"Please, Bella," she begged. "Give me some details."

"Well... okay, I've got one. You should have seen the

waitress flirting with him — it was over the top. But

he didn't pay any attention to her at all." Let him

make what he could of that.

"That's a good sign," she nodded. "Was she pretty?"

"Very — and probably nineteen or twenty."

"Even better. He must like you."

"I think so, but it's hard to tell. He's always so

cryptic," I threw in for his benefit, sighing.

"I don't know how you're brave enough to be alone

with him," she breathed.

"Why?" I was shocked, but she didn't understand my

reaction.

"He's so... intimidating. I wouldn't know what to say

to him." She made a face, probably remembering this

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

morning or last night, when he'd turned the

overwhelming force of his eyes on her.

"I do have some trouble with incoherency when I'm

around him," I admitted.

"Oh well. He is unbelievably gorgeous." Jessica

shrugged as if this excused any flaws. Which, in her

book, it probably did.

"There's a lot more to him than that."

"Really? Like what?"

I wished I had let it go. Almost as much as I was

hoping he'd been kidding about listening in.

"I can't explain it right... but he's even more

unbelievable behind the face." The vampire who

wanted to be good — who ran around saving people's

lives so he wouldn't be a monster... I stared toward

the front of the room.

"Is that possible?" She giggled.

I ignored her, trying to look like I was paying

attention to Mr. Varner.

"So you like him, then?" She wasn't about to give up.

"Yes," I said curtly.

"I mean, do you really like him?" she urged.

"Yes," I said again, blushing. I hoped that detail

wouldn't register in her thoughts.

She'd had enough with the single syllable answers.

"How much do you like him?"

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"Too much," I whispered back. "More than he likes

me. But I don't see how I can help that." I sighed, one

blush blending into the next. Then, thankfully, Mr.

Varner called on Jessica for an answer. She didn't get

a chance to start on the subject again during class,

and as soon as the bell rang, I took evasive action.

"In English, Mike asked me if you said anything about

Monday night," I told her.

"You're kidding! What did you say?!" she gasped,

completely sidetracked.

"I told him you said you had a lot of fun — he looked

pleased."

"Tell me exactly what he said, and your exact

answer!" We spent the rest of the walk dissecting

sentence structures and most of Spanish on a minute

description of Mike's facial expressions. I wouldn't

have helped draw it out for as long as I did if I wasn't

worried about the subject returning to me.

And then the bell rang for lunch. As I jumped up out

of my seat, shoving my books roughly in my bag, my

uplifted expression must have tipped Jessica off.

"You're not sitting with us today, are you?" she

guessed.

"I don't think so." I couldn't be sure that he wouldn't

disappear inconveniently again.

But outside the door to our Spanish class, leaning

against the wall —

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

looking more like a Greek god than anyone had a

right to — Edward was waiting for me. Jessica took

one look, rolled her eyes, and departed.

"See you later, Bella." Her voice was thick with

implications. I might have to turn off the ringer on the

phone.

"Hello." His voice was amused and irritated at the

same time. He had been listening, it was obvious.

"Hi."

I couldn't think of anything else to say, and he didn't

speak — biding his time, I presumed — so it was a

quiet walk to the cafeteria. Walking with Edward

through the crowded lunchtime rush was a lot like

my first day here; everyone stared.

He led the way into the line, still not speaking, though

his eyes returned to my face every few seconds, their

expression speculative. It seemed to me that irritation

was winning out over amusement as the dominant

emotion in his face. I fidgeted nervously with the

zipper on my jacket.

He stepped up to the counter and filled a tray with

food.

"What are you doing?" I objected. "You're not getting

all that for me?" He shook his head, stepping forward

to buy the food.

"Half is for me, of course."

I raised one eyebrow.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

He led the way to the same place we'd sat that one

time before. From the other end of the long table, a

group of seniors gazed at us in amazement as we sat

across from each other. Edward seemed oblivious.

"Take whatever you want," he said, pushing the tray

toward me.

"I'm curious," I said as I picked up an apple, turning

it around in my hands, "what would you do if

someone dared you to eat food?"

"You're always curious." He grimaced, shaking his

head. He glared at me, holding my eyes as he lifted

the slice of pizza off the tray, and deliberately bit off a

mouthful, chewed quickly, and then swallowed. I

watched, eyes wide.

"If someone dared you to eat dirt, you could, couldn't

you?" he asked condescendingly.

I wrinkled my nose. "I did once... on a dare," I

admitted. "It wasn't so bad."

He laughed. "I suppose I'm not surprised." Something

over my shoulder seemed to catch his attention.

"Jessica's analyzing everything I do — she'll break it

down for you later." He pushed the rest of the pizza

toward me. The mention of Jessica brought a hint of

his former irritation back to his features. I put down

the apple and took a bite of the pizza, looking away,

knowing he was about to start.

"So the waitress was pretty, was she?" he asked

casually.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You really didn't notice?"

"No. I wasn't paying attention. I had a lot on my

mind."

"Poor girl." I could afford to be generous now.

"Something you said to Jessica... well, it bothers me."

He refused to be distracted. His voice was husky, and

he glanced up from under his lashes with troubled

eyes.

"I'm not surprised you heard something you didn't

like. You know what they say about eavesdropners," I

reminded him.

"I warned you I would be listening."

"And I warned you that you didn't want to know

everything I was thinking."

"You did," he agreed, but his voice was still rough.

"You aren't precisely right, though. I do want to know

what you're thinking —

everything. I just wish... that you wouldn't be

thinking some things." I scowled. "That's quite a

distinction."

"But that's not really the point at the moment."

"Then what is?" We were inclined toward each other

across the table now. He had his large white hands

folded under his chin; I leaned forward, my right

hand cupped around my neck. I had to remind myself

that we were in a crowded lunchroom, with probably

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

many curious eyes on us. It was too easy to get

wrapped up in our own private, tense little bubble.

"Do you truly believe that you care more for me than I

do for you?" he murmured, leaning closer to me as he

spoke, his dark golden eyes piercing. I tried to

remember how to exhale. I had to look away before it

came back to me.

"You're doing it again," I muttered.

His eyes opened wide with surprise. "What?"

"Dazzling me," I admitted, trying to concentrate as I

looked back at him.

"Oh." He frowned.

"It's not your fault," I sighed. "You can't help it."

"Are you going to answer the question?"

I looked down. "Yes."

"Yes, you are going to answer, or yes, you really think

that?" He was irritated again.

"Yes, I really think that." I kept my eyes down on the

table, my eyes tracing the pattern of the faux wood

grains printed on the laminate. The silence dragged

on. I stubbornly refused to be the first to break it this

time, fighting hard against the temptation to peek at

his expression. Finally he spoke, voice velvet soft.

"You're wrong." I glanced up to see that his eyes were

gentle.

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"You can't know that," I disagreed in a whisper. I

shook my head in doubt, though my heart throbbed

at his words and I wanted so badly to believe them.

"What makes you think so?" His liquid topaz eyes

were penetrating —

trying futilely, I assumed, to lift the truth straight

from my mind. I stared back, struggling to think

clearly in spite of his face, to find some way to

explain. As I searched for the words, I could see him

getting impatient; frustrated by my silence, he started

to scowl. I lifted my hand from my neck, and held up

one finger.

"Let me think," I insisted. His expression cleared, now

that he was satisfied that I was planning to answer. I

dropped my hand to the table, moving my left hand so

that my palms were pressed together. I stared at my

hands, twisting and untwisting my fingers, as I finally

spoke.

"Well, aside from the obvious, sometimes..." I

hesitated. "I can't be sure

— I don't know how to read minds — but sometimes

it seems like you're trying to say goodbye when you're

saying something else." That was the best I could sum

up the sensation of anguish that his words triggered

in me at times.

"Perceptive," he whispered. And there was the

anguish again, surfacing as he confirmed my fear.

"That's exactly why you're wrong, though," he began

to explain, but then his eyes narrowed. "What do you

mean, 'the obvious'?"

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"Well, look at me," I said, unnecessarily as he was

already staring. "I'm absolutely ordinary — well,

except for bad things like all the near-death

experiences and being so clumsy that I'm almost

disabled. And look at you." I waved my hand toward

him and all his bewildering perfection. His brow

creased angrily for a moment, then smoothed as his

eyes took on a knowing look. "You don't see yourself

very clearly, you know. I'll admit you're dead-on about

the bad things," he chuckled blackly, "but you didn't

hear what every human male in this school was

thinking on your first day."

I blinked, astonished. "I don't believe it..." I mumbled

to myself.

"Trust me just this once — you are the opposite of

ordinary." My embarrassment was much stronger

than my pleasure at the look that came into his eyes

when he said this. I quickly reminded him of my

original argument.

"But I'm not saying goodbye," I pointed out.

"Don't you see? That's what proves me right. I care

the most, because if I can do it" — he shook his head,

seeming to struggle with the thought —

"if leaving is the right thing to do, then I'll hurt myself

to keep from hurting you, to keep you safe."

I glared. "And you don't think I would do the same?"

"You'd never have to make the choice."

Abruptly, his unpredictable mood shifted again; a

mischievous, devastating smile rearranged his

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features. "Of course, keeping you safe is beginning to

feel like a full-time occupation that requires my

constant presence."

"No one has tried to do away with me today," I

reminded him, grateful for the lighter subject. I didn't

want him to talk about goodbyes anymore. If I had to,

I supposed I could purposefully put myself in danger

to keep him close... I banished that thought before his

quick eyes read it on my face. That idea would

definitely get me in trouble.

"Yet," he added.

"Yet," I agreed; I would have argued, but now I wanted

him to be expecting disasters.

"I have another question for you." His face was still

casual.

"Shoot."

"Do you really need to go to Seattle this Saturday, or

was that just an excuse to get out of saying no to all

your admirers?" I made a face at the memory. "You

know, I haven't forgiven you for the Tyler thing yet," I

warned him. "It's your fault that he's deluded himself

into thinking I'm going to prom with him."

"Oh, he would have found a chance to ask you

without me — I just really wanted to watch your face,"

he chuckled, I would have been angrier if his laughter

wasn't so fascinating. "If I'd asked you, would you

have turned me down?" he asked, still laughing to

himself.

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"Probably not," I admitted. "But I would have canceled

later — faked an illness or a sprained ankle."

He was puzzled. "Why would you do that?"

I shook my head sadly. "You've never seen me in

Gym, I guess, but I would have thought you would

understand."

"Are you referring to the fact that you can't walk

across a flat, stable surface without finding

something to trip over?"

"Obviously."

"That wouldn't be a problem." He was very confident.

"It's all in the leading." He could see that I was about

to protest, and he cut me off.

"But you never told me — are you resolved on going to

Seattle, or do you mind if we do something different?"

As long as the "we" part was in, I didn't care about

anything else.

"I'm open to alternatives," I allowed. "But I do have a

favor to ask." He looked wary, as he always did when I

asked an open-ended question.

"What?"

"Can I drive?"

He frowned. "Why?"

"Well, mostly because when I told Charlie I was going

to Seattle, he specifically asked if I was going alone

and, at the time, I was. If he asked again, I probably

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wouldn't lie, but I don't think he will ask again, and

leaving my truck at home would just bring up the

subject unnecessarily. And also, because your driving

frightens me." He rolled his eyes. "Of all the things

about me that could frighten you, you worry about

my driving." He shook his head in disgust, but then

his eyes were serious again. "Won't you want to tell

your father that you're spending the day with me?"

There was an undercurrent to his question that I

didn't understand.

"With Charlie, less is always more." I was definite

about that. "Where are we going, anyway?"

"The weather will be nice, so I'll be staying out of the

public eye... and you can stay with me, if you'd like

to." Again, he was leaving the choice up to me.

"And you'll show me what you meant, about the sun?"

I asked, excited by the idea of unraveling another of

the unknowns.

"Yes." He smiled, and then paused. "But if you don't

want to be... alone with me, I'd still rather you didn't

go to Seattle by yourself. I shudder to think of the

trouble you could find in a city that size." I was

miffed. "Phoenix is three times bigger than Seattle —

just in population. In physical size — "

"But apparently," he interrupted me, "your number

wasn't up in Phoenix. So I'd rather you stayed near

me." His eyes did that unfair smoldering thing again.

I couldn't argue, with the eyes or the motivation, and

it was a moot point anyway. "As it happens, I don't

mind being alone with you."

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"I know," he sighed, brooding. "You should tell

Charlie, though."

"Why in the world would I do that?"

His eyes were suddenly fierce. "To give me some small

incentive to bring you back."

I gulped. But, after a moment of thought, I was sure.

"I think I'll take my chances."

He exhaled angrily, and looked away.

"Let's talk about something else," I suggested.

"What do you want to talk about?" he asked. He was

still annoyed. I glanced around us, making sure we

were well out of anyone's hearing. As I cast my eyes

around the room, I caught the eyes of his sister, Alice,

staring at me. The others were looking at Edward. I

looked away swiftly, back to him, and I. asked the

first thing that came to mind.

"Why did you go to that Goat Rocks place last

weekend... to hunt? Charlie said it wasn't a good

place to hike, because of bears." He stared at me as if

I was missing something very obvious.

"Bears?" I gasped, and he smirked. "You know, bears

are not in season," I added sternly, to hide my shock.

"If you read carefully, the laws only cover hunting

with weapons," he informed me.

He watched my face with enjoyment as that slowly

sank in.

"Bears?" I repeated with difficulty.

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"Grizzly is Emmett's favorite." His voice was still

offhand, but his eyes were scrutinizing my reaction. I

tried to pull myself together.

"Hmmm," I said, taking another bite of pizza as an

excuse to look down. I chewed slowly, and then took a

long drink of Coke without looking up.

"So," I said after a moment, finally meeting his now-

anxious gaze.

"What's your favorite?"

He raised an eyebrow and the corners of his mouth

turned down in disapproval. "Mountain lion."

"Ah," I said in a politely disinterested tone, looking for

my soda again.

"Of course," he said, and his tone mirrored mine, "we

have to be careful not to impact the environment with

injudicious hunting. We try to focus on areas with an

overpopulation of predators — ranging as far away as

we need. There's always plenty of deer and elk here,

and they'll do, but where's the fun in that?" He smiled

teasingly.

"Where indeed," I murmured around another bite of

pizza.

"Early spring is Emmett's favorite bear season —

they're just coming out of hibernation, so they're more

irritable." He smiled at some remembered joke.

"Nothing more fun than an irritated grizzly bear," I

agreed, nodding. He snickered, shaking his head.

"Tell me what you're really thinking, please."

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"I'm trying to picture it — but I can't," I admitted.

"How do you hunt a bear without weapons?"

"Oh, we have weapons." He flashed his bright teeth in

a brief, threatening smile. I fought back a shiver

before it could expose me.

"Just not the kind they consider when writing

hunting laws. If you've ever seen a bear attack on

television, you should be able to visualize Emmett

hunting."

I couldn't stop the next shiver that flashed down my

spine. I peeked across the cafeteria toward Emmett,

grateful that he wasn't looking my way. The thick

bands of muscle that wrapped his arms and torso

were somehow even more menacing now.

Edward followed my gaze and chuckled. I stared at

him, unnerved.

"Are you like a bear, too?" I asked in a low voice.

"More like the lion, or so they tell me," he said lightly.

"Perhaps our preferences are indicative."

I tried to smile. "Perhaps," I repeated. But my mind

was filled with opposing images that I couldn't merge

together. "Is that something I might get to see?"

"Absolutely not!" His face turned even whiter than

usual, and his eyes were suddenly furious. I leaned

back, stunned and — though I'd never admit it to him

— frightened by his reaction. He leaned back as well,

folding his arms across his chest.

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"Too scary for me?" I asked when I could control my

voice again.

"If that were it, I would take you out tonight," he said,

his voice cutting. "You need a healthy dose of fear.

Nothing could be more beneficial for you."

"Then why?" I pressed, trying to ignore his angry

expression. He glared at me for a long minute.

"Later," he finally said. He was on his feet in one lithe

movement.

"We're going to be late."

I glanced around, startled to see that he was right

and the cafeteria was nearly vacant. When I was with

him, the time and the place were such a muddled

blur that I completely lost track of both. I jumped up,

grabbing my bag from the back of my chair.

"Later, then," I agreed. I wouldn't forget.

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COMPLICATIONS

Everyone watched us as we walked together to our lab

table. I noticed that he no longer angled the chair to

sit as far from me as the desk would allow. Instead,

he sat quite close beside me, our arms almost

touching.

Mr. Banner backed into the room then — what

superb timing the man had —

pulling a tall metal frame on wheels that held a

heavy-looking, outdated TV and VCR. A movie day —

the lift in the class atmosphere was almost tangible.

Mr. Banner shoved the tape into the reluctant VCR

and walked to the wall to turn off the lights.

And then, as the room went black, I was suddenly

hyperaware that Edward was sitting less than an inch

from me. I was stunned by the unexpected electricity

that flowed through me, amazed that it was possible

to be more aware of him than I already was. A crazy

impulse to reach over and touch him, to stroke his

perfect face just once in the darkness, nearly

overwhelmed me. I crossed my arms tightly across my

chest, my hands balling into fists. I was losing my

mind.

The opening credits began, lighting the room by a

token amount. My eyes, of their own accord, flickered

to him. I smiled sheepishly as I realized his posture

was identical to mine, fists clenched under his arms,

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right down to the eyes, peering sideways at me. He

grinned back, his eyes somehow managing to

smolder, even in the dark. I looked away before I

could start hyperventilating. It was absolutely

ridiculous that I should feel dizzy.

The hour seemed very long. I couldn't concentrate on

the movie — I didn't even know what subject it was

on. I tried unsuccessfully to relax, but the electric

current that seemed to be originating from

somewhere in his body never slackened. Occasionally

I would permit myself a quick glance in his direction,

but he never seemed to relax, either. The

overpowering craving to touch him also refused to

fade, and I crushed my fists safely against my ribs

until my fingers were aching with the effort. I

breathed a sigh of relief when Mr. Banner flicked the

lights back on at the end of class, and stretched my

arms out in front of me, flexing my stiff fingers.

Edward chuckled beside me.

"Well, that was interesting," he murmured. His voice

was dark and his eyes were cautious.

"Umm," was all I was able to respond.

"Shall we?" he asked, rising fluidly.

I almost groaned. Time for Gym. I stood with care,

worried my balance might have been affected by the

strange new intensity between us. He walked me to

my next class in silence and paused at the door; I

turned to say goodbye. His face startled me — his

expression was torn, almost pained, and so fiercely

beautiful that the ache to touch him flared as strong

as before. My goodbye stuck in my throat.

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He raised his hand, hesitant, conflict raging in his

eyes, and then swiftly brushed the length of my

cheekbone with his fingertips. His skin was as icy as

ever, but the trail his fingers left on my skin was

alarmingly warm — like I'd been burned, but didn't

feel the pain of it yet.

He turned without a word and strode quickly away

from me. I walked into the gym, lightheaded and

wobbly. I drifted to the locker room, changing in a

trancelike state, only vaguely aware that there were

other people surrounding me. Reality didn't fully set

in until I was handed a racket. It wasn't heavy, yet it

felt very unsafe in my hand. I could see a few of the

other kids in class eyeing me furtively. Coach Clapp

ordered us to pair up into teams.

Mercifully, some vestiges of Mike's chivalry still

survived; he came to stand beside me.

"Do you want to be a team?"

"Thanks, Mike — you don't have to do this, you

know." I grimaced apologetically.

"Don't worry, I'll keep out of your way." He grinned.

Sometimes it was so easy to like Mike.

It didn't go smoothly. I somehow managed to hit

myself in the head with my racket and clip Mike's

shoulder on the same swing. I spent the rest of the

hour in the back corner of the court, the racket held

safely behind my back. Despite being handicapped by

me, Mike was pretty good; he won three games out of

four singlehandedly. He gave me an unearned high

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five when the coach finally blew the whistle ending

class.

"So," he said as we walked off the court.

"So what?"

"You and Cullen, huh?" he asked, his tone rebellious.

My previous feeling of affection disappeared.

"That's none of your business, Mike," I warned,

internally cursing Jessica straight to the fiery pits of

Hades.

"I don't like it," he muttered anyway.

"You don't have to," I snapped.

"He looks at you like... like you're something to eat,"

he continued, ignoring me.

I choked back the hysteria that threatened to explode,

but a small giggle managed to get out despite my

efforts. He glowered at me. I waved and fled to the

locker room.

I dressed quickly, something stronger than butterflies

battering recklessly against the walls of my stomach,

my argument with Mike already a distant memory. I

was wondering if Edward would be waiting, or if I

should meet him at his car. What if his family was

there? I felt a wave of real terror. Did they know that I

knew? Was I supposed to know that they knew that I

knew, or not?

By the time I walked out of the gym, I had just about

decided to walk straight home without even looking

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toward the parking lot. But my worries were

unnecessary. Edward was waiting, leaning casually

against the side of the gym, his breathtaking face

untroubled now. As I walked to his side, I felt a

peculiar sense of release.

"Hi," I breathed, smiling hugely.

"Hello." His answering smile was brilliant. "How was

Gym?" My face fell a tiny bit. "Fine," I lied.

"Really?" He was unconvinced. His eyes shifted their

focus slightly, looking over my shoulder and

narrowing. I glanced behind me to see Mike's back as

he walked away.

"What?" I demanded.

His eyes slid back to mine, still tight. "Newton's

getting on my nerves."

"You weren't listening again?" I was horror-struck. All

traces of my sudden good humor vanished.

"How's your head?" he asked innocently.

"You're unbelievable!" I turned, stomping away in the

general direction of the parking lot, though I hadn't

ruled out walking at this point. He kept up with me

easily.

"You were the one who mentioned how I'd never seen

you in Gym — it made me curious." He didn't sound

repentant, so I ignored him. We walked in silence — a

furious, embarrassed silence on my part — to his car.

But I had to stop a few steps away — a crowd of

people, all boys, were surrounding it.

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Then I realized they weren't surrounding the Volvo,

they were actually circled around Rosalie's red

convertible, unmistakable lust in their eyes. None of

them even looked up as Edward slid between them to

open his door. I climbed quickly in the passenger

side, also unnoticed.

"Ostentatious," he muttered.

"What kind of car is that?" I asked.

"An M3."

"I don't speak Car and Driver."

"It's a BMW." He rolled his eyes, not looking at me,

trying to back out without running over the car

enthusiasts.

I nodded — I'd heard of that one.

"Are you still angry?" he asked as he carefully

maneuvered his way out.

"Definitely."

He sighed. "Will you forgive me if I apologize?"

"Maybe... if you mean it. And if you promise not to do

it again," I insisted.

His eyes were suddenly shrewd. "How about if I mean

it, and I agree to let you drive Saturday?" he

countered my conditions. I considered, and decided it

was probably the best offer I would get.

"Deal," I agreed.

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"Then I'm very sorry I upset you." His eyes burned

with sincerity for a protracted moment — playing

havoc with the rhythm of my heart — and then

turned playful. "And I'll be on your doorstep bright

and early Saturday morning."

"Um, it doesn't help with the Charlie situation if an

unexplained Volvo is left in the driveway."

His smile was condescending now. "I wasn't intending

to bring a car."

"How — "

He cut me off. "Don't worry about it. I'll be there, no

car." I let it go. I had a more pressing question.

"Is it later yet?" I asked significantly.

He frowned. "I supposed it is later."

I kept my expression polite as I waited.

He stopped the car. I looked up, surprised — of

course we were already at Charlie's house, parked

behind the truck. It was easier to ride with him if I

only looked when it was over. When I looked back at

him, he was staring at me, measuring with his eyes.

"And you still want to know why you can't see me

hunt?" He seemed solemn, but I thought I saw a trace

of humor deep in his eyes.

"Well," I clarified, "I was mostly wondering about your

reaction."

"Did I frighten you?" Yes, there was definitely humor

there.

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"No," I lied. He didn't buy it.

"I apologize for scaring you," he persisted with a slight

smile, but then all evidence of teasing disappeared. "It

was just the very thought of you being there... while

we hunted." His jaw tightened.

"That would be bad?"

He spoke from between clenched teeth. "Extremely."

"Because... ?"

He took a deep breath and stared through the

windshield at the thick, rolling clouds that seemed to

press down, almost within reach.

"When we hunt," he spoke slowly, unwillingly, "we

give ourselves over to our senses... govern less with

our minds. Especially our sense of smell. If you were

anywhere near me when I lost control that way..." He

shook his head, still gazing morosely at the heavy

clouds.

I kept my expression firmly under control, expecting

the swift flash of his eyes to judge my reaction that

soon followed. My face gave nothing away.

But our eyes held, and the silence deepened — and

changed. Flickers of the electricity I'd felt this

afternoon began to charge the atmosphere as he

gazed unrelentingly into my eyes. It wasn't until my

head started to swim that I realized I wasn't

breathing. When I drew in a jagged breath, breaking

the stillness, he closed his eyes.

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"Bella, I think you should go inside now." His low

voice was rough, his eyes on the clouds again.

I opened the door, and the arctic draft that burst into

the car helped clear my head. Afraid I might stumble

in my woozy state, I stepped carefully out of the car

and shut the door behind me without looking back.

The whir of the automatic window unrolling made me

turn.

"Oh, Bella?" he called after me, his voice more even.

He leaned toward the open window with a faint smile

on his lips.

"Yes?"

"Tomorrow it's my turn."

"Your turn to what?"

He smiled wider, flashing his gleaming teeth. "Ask the

questions." And then he was gone, the car speeding

down the street and disappearing around the corner

before I could even collect my thoughts. I smiled as I

walked to the house. It was clear he was planning to

see me tomorrow, if nothing else.

That night Edward starred in my dreams, as usual.

However, the climate of my unconsciousness had

changed. It thrilled with the same electricity that had

charged the afternoon, and I tossed and turned

restlessly, waking often. It was only in the early hours

of the morning that I finally sank into an exhausted,

dreamless sleep.

When I woke I was still tired, but edgy as well. I

pulled on my brown turtleneck and the inescapable

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jeans, sighing as I daydreamed of spaghetti straps

and shorts. Breakfast was the usual, quiet event I

expected. Charlie fried eggs for himself; I had my bowl

of cereal. I wondered if he had forgotten about this

Saturday. He answered my unspoken question as he

stood up to take his plate to the sink.

"About this Saturday..." he began, walking across the

kitchen and turning on the faucet.

I cringed. "Yes, Dad?"

"Are you still set on going to Seattle?" he asked.

"That was the plan." I grimaced, wishing he hadn't

brought it up so I wouldn't have to compose careful

half-truths.

He squeezed some dish soap onto his plate and

swirled it around with the brush. "And you're sure

you can't make it back in time for the dance?"

"I'm not going to the dance, Dad." I glared.

"Didn't anyone ask you?" he asked, trying to hide his

concern by focusing on rinsing the plate.

I sidestepped the minefield. "It's a girl's choice."

"Oh." He frowned as he dried his plate.

I sympathized with him. It must be a hard thing, to be

a father; living in fear that your daughter would meet

a boy she liked, but also having to worry if she didn't.

How ghastly it would be, I thought, shuddering, if

Charlie had even the slightest inkling of exactly what

I did like. Charlie left then, with a goodbye wave, and

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I went upstairs to brush my teeth and gather my

books. When I heard the cruiser pull away, I could

only wait a few seconds before I had to peek out of my

window. The silver car was already there, waiting in

Charlie's spot on the driveway. I bounded down the

stairs and out the front door, wondering how long this

bizarre routine would continue. I never wanted it to

end. He waited in the car, not appearing to watch as I

shut the door behind me without bothering to lock

the dead-bolt. I walked to the car, pausing shyly

before opening the door and stepping in. He was

smiling, relaxed —

and, as usual, perfect and beautiful to an

excruciating degree.

"Good morning." His voice was silky. "How are you

today?" His eyes roamed over my face, as if his

question was something more than simple courtesy.

"Good, thank you." I was always good — much more

than good — when I was near him.

His gaze lingered on the circles under my eyes. "You

look tired."

"I couldn't sleep," I confessed, automatically swinging

my hair around my shoulder to provide some

measure of cover.

"Neither could I," he teased as he started the engine. I

was becoming used to the quiet purr. I was sure the

roar of my truck would scare me, whenever I got to

drive it again.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I laughed. "I guess that's right. I suppose I slept just a

little bit more than you did."

"I'd wager you did."

"So what did you do last night?" I asked.

He chuckled. "Not a chance. It's my day to ask

questions."

"Oh, that's right. What do you want to know?" My

forehead creased. I couldn't imagine anything about

me that could be in any way interesting to him.

"What's your favorite color?" he asked, his face grave.

I rolled my eyes. "It changes from day to day."

"What's your favorite color today?" He was still

solemn.

"Probably brown." I tended to dress according to my

mood. He snorted, dropping his serious expression.

"Brown?" he asked skeptically.

"Sure. Brown is warm. I miss brown. Everything

that's supposed to be brown — tree trunks, rocks,

dirt — is all covered up with squashy green stuff

here," I complained.

He seemed fascinated by my little rant. He considered

for a moment, staring into my eyes.

"You're right," he decided, serious again. "Brown is

warm." He reached over, swiftly, but somehow still

hesitantly, to sweep my hair back behind my

shoulder.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

We were at the school by now. He turned back to me

as he pulled into a parking space.

"What music is in your CD player right now?" he

asked, his face as somber as if he'd asked for a

murder confession.

I realized I'd never removed the CD Phil had given me.

When I said the name of the band, he smiled

crookedly, a peculiar expression in his eyes. He

flipped open a compartment under his car's CD

player, pulled out one of thirty or so CDs that were

jammed into the small space, and handed it to me,

"Debussy to this?" He raised an eyebrow.

It was the same CD. I examined the familiar cover art,

keeping my eyes down.

It continued like that for the rest of the day. While he

walked me to English, when he met me after Spanish,

all through the lunch hour, he questioned me

relentlessly about every insignificant detail of my

existence. Movies I'd liked and hated, the few places

I'd been and the many places I wanted to go, and

books — endlessly books.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd talked so much.

More often than not, I felt self-conscious, certain I

must be boring him. But the absolute absorption of

his face, and his never-ending stream of questions,

compelled me to continue. Mostly his questions were

easy, only a very few triggering my easy blushes. But

when I did flush, it brought on a whole new round of

questions.

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Such as the time he asked my favorite gemstone, and

I blurted out topaz before thinking. He'd been flinging

questions at me with such speed that I felt like I was

taking one of those psychiatric tests where you

answer with the first word that comes to mind. I was

sure he would have continued down whatever mental

list he was following, except for the blush. My face

reddened because, until very recently, my favorite

gemstone was garnet. It was impossible, while staring

back into his topaz eyes, not to remember the reason

for the switch. And, naturally, he wouldn't rest until

I'd admitted why I was embarrassed.

"Tell me," he finally commanded after persuasion

failed — failed only because I kept my eyes safely

away from his face.

"It's the color of your eyes today," I sighed,

surrendering, staring down at my hands as I fiddled

with a piece of my hair. "I suppose if you asked me in

two weeks I'd say onyx." I'd given more information

than necessary in my unwilling honesty, and I

worried it would provoke the strange anger that flared

whenever I slipped and revealed too clearly how

obsessed I was.

But his pause was very short.

"What kinds of flowers do you prefer?" he fired off. I

sighed in relief, and continued with the

psychoanalysis. Biology was a complication again.

Edward had continued with his quizzing up until Mr.

Banner entered the room, dragging the audiovisual

frame again. As the teacher approached the light

switch, I noticed Edward slide his chair slightly

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farther away from mine. It didn't help. As soon as the

room was dark, there was the same electric spark, the

same restless craving to stretch my hand across the

short space and touch his cold skin, as yesterday.

I leaned forward on the table, resting my chin on my

folded arms, my hidden fingers gripping the table's

edge as I fought to ignore the irrational longing that

unsettled me. I didn't look at him, afraid that if he

was looking at me, it would only make self-control

that much harder. I sincerely tried to watch the

movie, but at the end of the hour I had no idea what

I'd just seen. I sighed in relief again when Mr. Banner

turned the lights on, finally glancing at Edward; he

was looking at me, his eyes ambivalent.

He rose in silence and then stood still, waiting for me.

We walked toward the gym in silence, like yesterday.

And, also like yesterday, he touched my face

wordlessly — this time with the back of his cool hand,

stroking once from my temple to my jaw — before he

turned and walked away. Gym passed quickly as I

watched Mike's one-man badminton show. He didn't

speak to me today, either in response to my vacant

expression or because he was still angry about our

squabble yesterday. Somewhere, in a corner of my

mind, I felt bad about that. But I couldn't concentrate

on him. I hurried to change afterward, ill at ease,

knowing the faster I moved, the sooner I would be

with Edward. The pressure made me more clumsy

than usual, but eventually I made it out the door,

feeling the same release when I saw him standing

there, a wide smile automatically spreading across my

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face. He smiled in reaction before launching into more

cross-examination.

His questions were different now, though, not as

easily answered. He wanted to know what I missed

about home, insisting on descriptions of anything he

wasn't familiar with. We sat in front of Charlie's

house for hours, as the sky darkened and rain

plummeted around us in a sudden deluge.

I tried to describe impossible things like the scent of

creosote —

bitter, slightly resinous, but still pleasant — the high,

keening sound of the cicadas in July, the feathery

barrenness of the trees, the very size of the sky,

extending white-blue from horizon to horizon, barely

interrupted by the low mountains covered with purple

volcanic rock. The hardest thing to explain was why it

was so beautiful to me — to justify a beauty that

didn't depend on the sparse, spiny vegetation that

often looked half dead, a beauty that had more to do

with the exposed shape of the land, with the shallow

bowls of valleys between the craggy hills, and the way

they held on to the sun. I found myself using my

hands as I tried to describe it to him.

His quiet, probing questions kept me talking freely,

forgetting, in the dim light of the storm, to be

embarrassed for monopolizing the conversation.

Finally, when I had finished detailing my cluttered

room at home, he paused instead of responding with

another question.

"Are you finished?" I asked in relief.

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"Not even close — but your father will be home soon."

"Charlie!" I suddenly recalled his existence, and

sighed. I looked out at the rain-darkened sky, but it

gave nothing away. "How late is it?" I wondered out

loud as I glanced at the clock. I was surprised by the

time

— Charlie would be driving home now.

"It's twilight," Edward murmured, looking at the

western horizon, obscured as it was with clouds. His

voice was thoughtful, as if his mind were somewhere

far away. I stared at him as he gazed unseeingly out

the windshield.

I was still staring when his eyes suddenly shifted

back to mine.

"It's the safest time of day for us," he said, answering

the unspoken question in my eyes. "The easiest time.

But also the saddest, in a way. . .

the end of another day, the return of the night.

Darkness is so predictable, don't you think?" He

smiled wistfully.

"I like the night. Without the dark, we'd never see the

stars." I frowned. "Not that you see them here much."

He laughed, and the mood abruptly lightened.

"Charlie will be here in a few minutes. So, unless you

want to tell him that you'll be with me Saturday..." He

raised one eyebrow.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Thanks, but no thanks." I gathered my books,

realizing I was stiff from sitting still so long. "So is it

my turn tomorrow, then?"

"Certainly not!" His face was teasingly outraged. "I

told you I wasn't done, didn't I?"

"What more is there?"

"You'll find out tomorrow." He reached across to open

my door for me, and his sudden proximity sent my

heart into frenzied palpitations. But his hand froze on

the handle.

"Not good," he muttered.

"What is it?" I was surprised to see that his jaw was

clenched, his eyes disturbed.

He glanced at me for a brief second. "Another

complication," he said glumly.

He flung the door open in one swift movement, and

then moved, almost cringed, swiftly away from me.

The flash of headlights through the rain caught my

attention as a dark car pulled up to the curb just a

few feet away, facing us.

"Charlie's around the corner," he warned, staring

through the downpour at the other vehicle.

I hopped out at once, despite my confusion and

curiosity. The rain was louder as it glanced off my

jacket.

I tried to make out the shapes in the front seat of the

other car, but it was too dark. I could see Edward

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illuminated in the glare of the new car's headlights;

he was still staring ahead, his gaze locked on

something or someone I couldn't see. His expression

was a strange mix of frustration and defiance.

Then he revved the engine, and the tires squealed

against the wet pavement. The Volvo was out of sight

in seconds.

"Hey, Bella," called a familiar, husky voice from the

driver's side of the little black car.

"Jacob?" I asked, squinting through the rain. Just

then, Charlie's cruiser swung around the corner, his

lights shining on the occupants of the car in front of

me.

Jacob was already climbing out, his wide grin visible

even through the darkness. In the passenger seat was

a much older man, a heavyset man with a memorable

face — a face that overflowed, the cheeks resting

against his shoulders, with creases running through

the russet skin like an old leather jacket. And the

surprisingly familiar eyes, black eyes that seemed at

the same time both too young and too ancient for the

broad face they were set in. Jacob's father, Billy

Black. I knew him immediately, though in the more

than five years since I'd seen him last I'd managed to

forget his name when Charlie had spoken of him my

first day here. He was staring at me, scrutinizing my

face, so I smiled tentatively at him. His eyes were

wide, as if in shock or fear, his nostrils flared. My

smile faded.

Another complication, Edward had said.

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Billy still stared at me with intense, anxious eyes. I

groaned internally. Had Billy recognized Edward so

easily? Could he really believe the impossible legends

his son had scoffed at?

The answer was clear in Billy's eyes. Yes. Yes, he

could.

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"Billy!" Charlie called as soon as he got out of the car.

I turned toward the house, beckoning to Jacob as I

ducked under the porch. I heard Charlie greeting

them loudly behind me.

"I'm going to pretend I didn't see you behind the

wheel, Jake," he said disapprovingly.

"We get permits early on the rez," Jacob said while I

unlocked the door and flicked on the porch light.

"Sure you do," Charlie laughed.

"I have to get around somehow." I recognized Billy's

resonant voice easily, despite the years. The sound of

it made me feel suddenly younger, a child.

I went inside, leaving the door open behind me and

turning on lights before I hung up my jacket. Then I

stood in the door, watching anxiously as Charlie and

Jacob helped Billy out of the car and into his

wheelchair. I backed out of the way as the three of

them hurried in, shaking off the rain.

"This is a surprise," Charlie was saying.

"It's been too long," Billy answered. "I hope it's not a

bad time." His dark eyes flashed up to me again, their

expression unreadable.

"No, it's great. I hope you can stay for the game."

Jacob grinned. "I think that's the plan — our TV

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broke last week." Billy made a face at his son. "And,

of course, Jacob was anxious to see Bella again," he

added. Jacob scowled and ducked his head while I

fought back a surge of remorse. Maybe I'd been too

convincing on the beach.

"Are you hungry?" I asked, turning toward the

kitchen. I was eager to escape Billy's searching gaze.

"Naw, we ate just before we came," Jacob answered.

"How about you, Charlie?" I called over my shoulder

as I fled around the corner.

"Sure," he replied, his voice moving in the direction of

the front room and the TV. I could hear Billy's chair

follow.

The grilled cheese sandwiches were in the frying pan

and I was slicing up a tomato when I sensed someone

behind me.

"So, how are things?" Jacob asked.

"Pretty good." I smiled. His enthusiasm was hard to

resist. "How about you? Did you finish your car?"

"No." He frowned. "I still need parts. We borrowed that

one." He pointed with his thumb in the direction of

the front yard.

"Sorry. I haven't seen any... what was it you were

looking for?"

"Master cylinder." He grinned. "Is something wrong

with the truck?" he added suddenly.

"No."

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"Oh. I just wondered because you weren't driving it." I

stared down at the pan, pulling up the edge of a

sandwich to check the bottom side. "I got a ride with

a friend."

"Nice ride." Jacob's voice was admiring. "I didn't

recognize the driver, though. I thought I knew most of

the kids around here." I nodded noncommittally,

keeping my eyes down as I flipped sandwiches.

"My dad seemed to know him from somewhere."

"Jacob, could you hand me some plates? They're in

the cupboard over the sink."

"Sure."

He got the plates in silence. I hoped he would let it

drop now.

"So who was it?" he asked, setting two plates on the

counter next to me. I sighed in defeat. "Edward

Cullen."

To my surprise, he laughed. I glanced up at him. He

looked a little embarrassed.

"Guess that explains it, then," he said. "I wondered

why my dad was acting so strange."

"That's right." I faked an innocent expression. "He

doesn't like the Cullens."

"Superstitious old man," Jacob muttered under his

breath.

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"You don't think he'd say anything to Charlie?" I

couldn't help asking, the words coming out in a low

rush.

Jacob stared at me for a moment, and I couldn't read

the expression in his dark eyes. "I doubt it," he finally

answered. "I think Charlie chewed him out pretty

good last time. They haven't spoken much since —

tonight is sort of a reunion, I think. I don't think he'd

bring it up again."

"Oh," I said, trying to sound indifferent.

I stayed in the front room after I carried the food out

to Charlie, pretending to watch the game while Jacob

chattered at me. I was really listening to the men's

conversation, watching for any sign that Billy was

about to rat me out, trying to think of ways to stop

him if he began. It was a long night. I had a lot of

homework that was going undone, but I was afraid to

leave Billy alone with Charlie. Finally, the game

ended.

"Are you and your friends coming back to the beach

soon?" Jacob asked as he pushed his father over the

lip of the threshold.

"I'm not sure," I hedged.

"That was fun, Charlie," Billy said.

"Come up for the next game," Charlie encouraged.

"Sure, sure," Billy said. "We'll be here. Have a good

night." His eyes shifted to mine, and his smile

disappeared. "You take care, Bella," he added

seriously.

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"Thanks," I muttered, looking away.

I headed for the stairs while Charlie waved from the

doorway.

"Wait, Bella," he said.

I cringed. Had Billy gotten something in before I'd

joined them in the living room?

But Charlie was relaxed, still grinning from the

unexpected visit.

"I didn't get a chance to talk to you tonight. How was

your day?"

"Good." I hesitated with one foot on the first stair,

searching for details I could safely share. "My

badminton team won all four games."

"Wow, I didn't know you could play badminton."

"Well, actually I can't, but my partner is really good," I

admitted.

"Who is it?" he asked with token interest.

"Um... Mike Newton," I told him reluctantly.

"Oh yeah — you said you were friends with the

Newton kid." He perked up.

"Nice family." He mused for a minute. "Why didn't you

ask him to the dance this weekend?"

"Dad!" I groaned. "He's kind of dating my friend

Jessica. Besides, you know I can't dance."

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"Oh yeah," he muttered. Then he smiled at me

apologetically. "So I guess it's good you'll be gone

Saturday... I've made plans to go fishing with the

guys from the station. The weather's supposed to be

real warm. But if you wanted to put your trip off till

someone could go with you, I'd stay home. I know I

leave you here alone too much."

"Dad, you're doing a great job." I smiled, hoping my

relief didn't show.

"I've never minded being alone — I'm too much like

you." I winked at him, and he smiled his crinkly-eyed

smile.

I slept better that night, too tired to dream again.

When I woke to the pearl gray morning, my mood was

blissful. The tense evening with Billy and Jacob

seemed harmless enough now; I decided to forget it

completely. I caught myself whistling while I was

pulling the front part of my hair back into a barrette,

and later again as I skipped down the stairs. Charlie

noticed.

"You're cheerful this morning," he commented over

breakfast. I shrugged. "It's Friday."

I hurried so I would be ready to go the second Charlie

left. I had my bag ready, shoes on, teeth brushed, but

even though I rushed to the door as soon as I was

sure Charlie would be out of sight, Edward was

faster. He was waiting in his shiny car, windows

down, engine off.

I didn't hesitate this time, climbing in the passenger

side quickly, the sooner to see his face. He grinned

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his crooked smile at me, stopping my breath and my

heart. I couldn't imagine how an angel could be any

more glorious. There was nothing about him that

could be improved upon.

"How did you sleep?" he asked. I wondered if he had

any idea how appealing his voice was.

"Fine. How was your night?"

"Pleasant." His smile was amused; I felt like I was

missing an inside joke.

"Can I ask what you did?" I asked.

"No." He grinned. "Today is still mine." He wanted to

know about people today: more about Renee, her

hobbies, what we'd done in our free time together.

And then the one grandmother I'd known, my few

school friends — embarrassing me when he asked

about boys I'd dated. I was relieved that I'd never

really dated anyone, so that particular conversation

couldn't last long. He seemed as surprised as Jessica

and Angela by my lack of romantic history.

"So you never met anyone you wanted?" he asked in a

serious tone that made me wonder what he was

thinking about.

I was grudgingly honest. "Not in Phoenix."

His lips pressed together into a hard line.

We were in the cafeteria at this point. The day had

sped by in the blur that was rapidly becoming

routine. I took advantage of his brief pause to take a

bite of my bagel.

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"I should have let you drive yourself today," he

announced, apropos of nothing, while I chewed.

"Why?" I demanded.

"I'm leaving with Alice after lunch."

"Oh." I blinked, bewildered and disappointed. "That's

okay, it's not that far of a walk."

He frowned at me impatiently. "I'm not going to make

you walk home. We'll go get your truck and leave it

here for you."

"I don't have my key with me," I sighed. "I really don't

mind walking." What I minded was losing my time

with him.

He shook his head. "Your truck will be here, and the

key will be in the ignition — unless you're afraid

someone might steal it." He laughed at the thought.

"All right," I agreed, pursing my lips. I was pretty sure

my key was in the pocket of a pair of jeans I wore

Wednesday, under a pile of clothes in the laundry

room. Even if he broke into my house, or whatever he

was planning, he'd never find it. He seemed to feel the

challenge in my consent. He smirked, overconfident.

"So where are you going?" I asked as casually as I

could manage.

"Hunting," he answered grimly. "If I'm going to be

alone with you tomorrow, I'm going to take whatever

precautions I can." His face grew morose... and

pleading. "You can always cancel, you know." I looked

down, afraid of the persuasive power of his eyes. I

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refused to be convinced to fear him, no matter how

real the danger might be. It doesn't matter, I repeated

in my head.

"No," I whispered, glancing back at his face. "I can't."

"Perhaps you're right," he murmured bleakly. His eyes

seemed to darken in color as I watched.

I changed the subject. "What time will I see you

tomorrow?" I asked, already depressed by the thought

of him leaving now.

"That depends... it's a Saturday, don't you want to

sleep in?" he offered.

"No," I answered too fast. He restrained a smile.

"The same time as usual, then," he decided. "Will

Charlie be there?"

"No, he's fishing tomorrow." I beamed at the memory

of how conveniently things had worked out.

His voice turned sharp. "And if you don't come home,

what will he think?"

"I have no idea," I answered coolly. "He knows I've

been meaning to do the laundry. Maybe he'll think I

fell in the washer." He scowled at me and I scowled

back. His anger was much more impressive than

mine.

"What are you hunting tonight?" I asked when I was

sure I had lost the glowering contest.

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"Whatever we find in the park. We aren't going far."

He seemed bemused by my casual reference to his

secret realities.

"Why are you going with Alice?" I wondered.

"Alice is the most... supportive." He frowned as he

spoke.

"And the others?" I asked timidly. "What are they?"

His brow puckered for a brief moment. "Incredulous,

for the most part." I peeked quickly behind me at his

family. They sat staring off in different directions,

exactly the same as the first time I'd seen them. Only

now they were four; their beautiful, bronze-haired

brother sat across from me, his golden eyes troubled.

"They don't like me," I guessed.

"That's not it," he disagreed, but his eyes were too

innocent. "They don't understand why I can't leave

you alone."

I grimaced. "Neither do I, for that matter."

Edward shook his head slowly, rolling his eyes toward

the ceiling before he met my gaze again. "I told you —

you don't see yourself clearly at all. You're not like

anyone I've ever known. You fascinate me." I glared at

him, sure he was teasing now.

He smiled as he deciphered my expression. "Having

the advantages I do," he murmured, touching his

forehead discreetly, "I have a better than average

grasp of human nature. People are predictable. But

you... you never do what I expect. You always take me

by surprise."

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I looked away, my eyes wandering back to his family,

embarrassed and dissatisfied. His words made me feel

like a science experiment. I wanted to laugh at myself

for expecting anything else.

"That part is easy enough to explain," he continued. I

felt his eyes on my face but I couldn't look at him yet,

afraid he might read the chagrin in my eyes. "But

there's more... and it's not so easy to put into words

— " I was still staring at the Cullens while he spoke.

Suddenly Rosalie, his blond and breathtaking sister,

turned to look at me. No, not to look — to glare, with

dark, cold eyes. I wanted to look away, but her gaze

held me until Edward broke off mid-sentence and

made an angry noise under his breath. It was almost

a hiss.

Rosalie turned her head, and I was relieved to be free.

I looked back at Edward — and I knew he could see

the confusion and fear that widened my eyes.

His face was tight as he explained. "I'm sorry about

that. She's just worried. You see... it's dangerous for

more than just me if, after spending so much time

with you so publicly..." He looked down.

"ip,,

"If this ends... badly." He dropped his head into his

hands, as he had that night in Port Angeles. His

anguish was plain; I yearned to comfort him, but I

was at a loss to know how. My hand reached toward

him involuntarily; quickly, though, I dropped it to the

table, fearing that my touch would only make things

worse. I realized slowly that his words should frighten

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me. I waited for that fear to come, but all I could seem

to feel was an ache for his pain.

And frustration — frustration that Rosalie had

interrupted whatever he was about to say. I didn't

know how to bring it up again. He still had his head

in his hands.

I tried to speak in a normal voice. "And you have to

leave now?"

"Yes." He raised his face; it was serious for a moment,

and then his mood shifted and he smiled. "It's

probably for the best. We still have fifteen minutes of

that wretched movie left to endure in Biology — I

don't think I could take any more."

I started. Alice — her short, inky hair in a halo of

spiky disarray around her exquisite, elfin face — was

suddenly standing behind his shoulder. Her slight

frame was willowy, graceful even in absolute stillness.

He greeted her without looking away from me. "Alice."

"Edward," she answered, her high soprano voice

almost as attractive as his.

"Alice, Bella — Bella, Alice," he introduced us,

gesturing casually with his hand, a wry smile on his

face.

"Hello, Bella." Her brilliant obsidian eyes were

unreadable, but her smile was friendly. "It's nice to

finally meet you." Edward flashed a dark look at her.

"Hi, Alice," I murmured shyly.

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"Are you ready?" she asked him.

His voice was aloof. "Nearly. I'll meet you at the car."

She left without another word; her walk was so fluid,

so sinuous that I felt a sharp pang of jealousy.

"Should I say 'have fun,' or is that the wrong

sentiment?" I asked, turning back to him.

"No, 'have fun' works as well as anything." He

grinned.

"Have fun, then." I worked to sound wholehearted. Of

course I didn't fool him.

"I'll try." He still grinned. "And you try to be safe,

please."

"Safe in Forks — what a challenge."

"For you it is a challenge." His jaw hardened.

"Promise."

"I promise to try to be safe," I recited. "I'll do the

laundry tonight —

that ought to be fraught with peril."

"Don't fall in," he mocked.

"I'll do my best."

He stood then, and I rose, too.

"I'll see you tomorrow," I sighed.

"It seems like a long time to you, doesn't it?" he

mused. I nodded glumly.

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"I'll be there in the morning," he promised, smiling his

crooked smile. He reached across the table to touch

my face, lightly brushing along my cheekbone again.

Then he turned and walked away. I stared after him

until he was gone.

I was sorely tempted to ditch the rest of the day, at

the very least Gym, but a warning instinct stopped

me. I knew that if I disappeared now, Mike and others

would assume I was with Edward. And Edward was

worried about the time we'd spent together publicly...

if things went wrong. I refused to dwell on the last

thought, concentrating instead on making things

safer for him.

I intuitively knew — and sensed he did, too — that

tomorrow would be pivotal. Our relationship couldn't

continue to balance, as it did, on the point of a knife.

We would fall off one edge or the other, depending

entirely upon his decision, or his instincts. My

decision was made, made before I'd ever consciously

chosen, and I was committed to seeing it through.

Because there was nothing more terrifying to me,

more excruciating, than the thought of turning away

from him. It was an impossibility.

I went to class, feeling dutiful. I couldn't honestly say

what happened in Biology; my mind was too

preoccupied with thoughts of tomorrow. In Gym, Mike

was speaking to me again; he wished me a good time

in Seattle. I carefully explained that I'd canceled my

trip, worried about my truck.

"Are you going to the dance with Cullen?" he asked,

suddenly sulky.

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"No, I'm not going to the dance at all."

"What are you doing, then?" he asked, too interested.

My natural urge was to tell him to butt out. Instead, I

lied brightly.

"Laundry, and then I have to study for the Trig test or

I'm going to fail."

"Is Cullen helping you study?"

"Edward," I emphasized, "is not going to help me

study. He's gone away somewhere for the weekend."

The lies came more naturally than usual, I noted with

surprise.

"Oh." He perked up. "You know, you could come to

the dance with our group anyway — that would be

cool. We'd all dance with you," he promised. The

mental image of Jessica's face made my tone sharper

than necessary.

"I'm not going to the dance, Mike, okay?"

"Fine." He sulked again. "I was just offering." When

the school day had finally ended, I walked to the

parking lot without enthusiasm. I did not especially

want to walk home, but I couldn't see how he would

have retrieved my truck. Then again, I was starting to

believe that nothing was impossible for him. The

latter instinct proved correct — my truck sat in the

same space he'd parked his Volvo in this morning. I

shook my head, incredulous, as I opened the

unlocked door and saw the key in the ignition.

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There was a piece of white paper folded on my seat. I

got in and closed the door before I unfolded it. Two

words were written in his elegant script.

Be safe.

The sound of the truck roaring to life frightened me. I

laughed at myself. When I got home, the handle of the

door was locked, the dead bolt unlocked, just as I'd

left it this morning. Inside, I went straight to the

laundry room. It looked just the same as I'd left it,

too. I dug for my jeans and, after finding them,

checked the pockets. Empty. Maybe I'd hung my key

up after all, I thought, shaking my head.

Following the same instinct that had prompted me to

lie to Mike, I called Jessica on the pretense of wishing

her luck at the dance. When she offered the same

wish for my day with Edward, I told her about the

cancellation. She was more disappointed than really

necessary for a third-party observer to be. I said

goodbye quickly after that. Charlie was absentminded

at dinner, worried over something at work, I guessed,

or maybe a basketball game, or maybe he was just

really enjoying the lasagna — it was hard to tell with

Charlie.

"You know, Dad..." I began, breaking into his reverie.

"What's that, Bell?"

"I think you're right about Seattle. I think I'll wait

until Jessica or someone else can go with me."

"Oh," he said, surprised. "Oh, okay. So, do you want

me to stay home?"

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"No, Dad, don't change your plans. I've got a million

things to do...

homework, laundry. . . I need to go to the library and

the grocery store. I'll be in and out all day... you go

and have fun."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely, Dad. Besides, the freezer is getting

dangerously low on fish

— we're down to a two, maybe three years' supply."

"You're sure easy to live with, Bella." He smiled.

"I could say the same thing about you," I said,

laughing. The sound of my laughter was off, but he

didn't seem to notice. I felt so guilty for deceiving him

that I almost took Edward's advice and told him

where I would be. Almost.

After dinner, I folded clothes and moved another load

through the dryer. Unfortunately it was the kind of

job that only keeps hands busy. My mind definitely

had too much free time, and it was getting out of

control. I fluctuated between anticipation so intense

that it was very nearly pain, and an insidious fear

that picked at my resolve. I had to keep reminding

myself that I'd made my choice, and I wasn't going

back on it. I pulled his note out of my pocket much

more often than necessary to absorb the two small

words he'd written. He wants me to be safe, I told

myself again and again. I would just hold on to the

faith that, in the end, that desire would win out over

the others. And what was my other choice — to cut

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him out of my life? Intolerable. Besides, since I'd

come to Forks, it really seemed like my life was about

him.

But a tiny voice in the back of my mind worried,

wondering if it would hurt very much... if it ended

badly.

I was relieved when it was late enough to be

acceptable for bedtime. I knew I was far too stressed

to sleep, so I did something I'd never done before. I

deliberately took unnecessary cold medicine — the

kind that knocked me out for a good eight hours. I

normally wouldn't condone that type of behavior in

myself, but tomorrow would be complicated enough

without me being loopy from sleep deprivation on top

of everything else. While I waited for the drugs to kick

in, I dried my clean hair till it was impeccably

straight, and fussed over what I would wear

tomorrow. With everything ready for the morning, I

finally lay in my bed. I felt hyper; I couldn't stop

twitching. I got up and rifled through my shoebox of

CDs until I found a collection of Chopin's nocturnes. I

put that on very quietly and then lay down again,

concentrating on relaxing individual parts of my body.

Somewhere in the middle of that exercise, the cold

pills took effect, and I gladly sank into

unconsciousness. I woke early, having slept soundly

and dreamlessly thanks to my gratuitous drug use.

Though I was well rested, I slipped right back into the

same hectic frenzy from the night before. I dressed in

a rush, smoothing my collar against my neck,

fidgeting with the tan sweater till it hung right over

my jeans. I sneaked a swift look out the window to

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see that Charlie was already gone. A thin, cottony

layer of clouds veiled the sky. They didn't look very

lasting.

I ate breakfast without tasting the food, hurrying to

clean up when I was done. I peeked out the window

again, but nothing had changed. I had just finished

brushing my teeth and was heading back downstairs

when a quiet knock sent my heart thudding against

my rib cage.

I flew to the door; I had a little trouble with the simple

dead bolt, but I yanked the door open at last, and

there he was. All the agitation dissolved as soon as I

looked at his face, calm taking its place. I breathed a

sigh of relief — yesterday's fears seemed very foolish

with him here.

He wasn't smiling at first — his face was somber. But

then his expression lightened as he looked me over,

and he laughed.

"Good morning," he chuckled.

"What's wrong?" I glanced down to make sure I hadn't

forgotten anything important, like shoes, or pants.

"We match." He laughed again. I realized he had a

long, light tan sweater on, with a white collar showing

underneath, and blue jeans. I laughed with him,

hiding a secret twinge of regret — why did he have to

look like a runway model when I couldn't?

I locked the door behind me while he walked to the

truck. He waited by the passenger door with a

martyred expression that was easy to understand.

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"We made a deal," I reminded him smugly, climbing

into the driver's seat, and reaching over to unlock his

door.

"Where to?" I asked.

"Put your seat belt on — I'm nervous already."

I gave him a dirty look as I complied.

"Where to?" I repeated with a sigh.

"Take the one-oh-one north," he ordered.

It was surprisingly difficult to concentrate on the road

while feeling his gaze on my face. I compensated by

driving more carefully than usual through the still-

sleeping town.

"Were you planning to make it out of Forks before

nightfall?"

"This truck is old enough to be your car's grandfather

— have some respect," I retorted.

We were soon out of the town limits, despite his

negativity. Thick underbrush and green-swathed

trunks replaced the lawns and houses.

"Turn right on the one-ten," he instructed just as I

was about to ask. I obeyed silently.

"Now we drive until the pavement ends."

I could hear a smile in his voice, but I was too afraid

of driving off the road and proving him right to look

over and be sure.

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"And what's there, at the pavement's end?" I

wondered.

"A trail."

"We're hiking?" Thank goodness I'd worn tennis

shoes.

"Is that a problem?" He sounded as if he'd expected as

much.

"No." I tried to make the lie sound confident. But if he

thought my truck was slow. . .

"Don't worry, it's only five miles or so, and we're in no

hurry." Five miles. I didn't answer, so that he

wouldn't hear my voice crack in panic. Five miles of

treacherous roots and loose stones, trying to twist my

ankles or otherwise incapacitate me. This was going

to be humiliating. We drove in silence for a while as I

contemplated the coming horror.

"What are you thinking?" he asked impatiently after a

few moments. I lied again. "Just wondering where

we're going."

"It's a place I like to go when the weather is nice." We

both glanced out the windows at the thinning clouds

after he spoke.

"Charlie said it would be warm today."

"And did you tell Charlie what you were up to?" he

asked.

"Nope."

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"But Jessica thinks we're going to Seattle together?"

He seemed cheered by the idea.

"No, I told her you canceled on me — which is true."

"No one knows you're with me?" Angrily, now.

"That depends... I assume you told Alice?"

"That's very helpful, Bella," he snapped.

I pretended I didn't hear that.

"Are you so depressed by Forks that it's made you

suicidal?" he demanded when I ignored him.

"You said it might cause trouble for you... us being

together publicly," I reminded him.

"So you're worried about the trouble it might cause

me — if you don't come home?" His voice was still

angry, and bitingly sarcastic. I nodded, keeping my

eyes on the road.

He muttered something under his breath, speaking so

quickly that I couldn't understand.

We were silent for the rest of the drive. I could feel the

waves of infuriated disapproval rolling off of him, and

I could think of nothing to say.

And then the road ended, constricting to a thin foot

trail with a small wooden marker. I parked on the

narrow shoulder and stepped out, afraid because he

was angry with me and I didn't have driving as an

excuse not to look at him. It was warm now, warmer

than it had been in Forks since the day I'd arrived,

almost muggy under the clouds. I pulled off my

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sweater and knotted it around my waist, glad that I'd

worn the light, sleeveless shirt — especially if I had

five miles of hiking ahead of me. I heard his door

slam, and looked over to see that he'd removed his

sweater, too. He was facing away from me, into the

unbroken forest beside my truck.

"This way," he said, glancing over his shoulder at me,

eyes still annoyed. He started into the dark forest.

"The trail?" Panic was clear in my voice as I hurried

around the truck to catch up to him.

"I said there was a trail at the end of the road, not

that we were taking it."

"No trail?" I asked desperately.

"I won't let you get lost." He turned then, with a

mocking smile, and I stifled a gasp. His white shirt

was sleeveless, and he wore it unbuttoned, so that

the smooth white skin of his throat flowed

uninterrupted over the marble contours of his chest,

his perfect musculature no longer merely hinted at

behind concealing clothes. He was too perfect, I

realized with a piercing stab of despair. There was no

way this godlike creature could be meant for me.

He stared at me, bewildered by my tortured

expression.

"Do you want to go home?" he said quietly, a different

pain than mine saturating his voice.

"No." I walked forward till I was close beside him,

anxious not to waste one second of whatever time I

might have with him.

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"What's wrong?" he asked, his voice gentle.

"I'm not a good hiker," I answered dully. "You'll have

to be very patient."

"I can be patient — if I make a great effort." He

smiled, holding my glance, trying to lift me out of my

sudden, unexplained dejection. I tried to smile back,

but the smile was unconvincing. He scrutinized my

face.

"I'll take you home," he promised. I couldn't tell if the

promise was unconditional, or restricted to an

immediate departure. I knew he thought it was fear

that upset me, and I was grateful again that I was the

one person whose mind he couldn't hear.

"If you want me to hack five miles through the jungle

before sundown, you'd better start leading the way," I

said acidly. He frowned at me, struggling to

understand my tone and expression.

He gave up after a moment and led the way into the

forest. It wasn't as hard as I had feared. The way was

mostly flat, and he held the damp ferns and webs of

moss aside for me. When his straight path took us

over fallen trees or boulders, he would help me, lifting

me by the elbow, and then releasing me instantly

when I was clear. His cold touch on my skin never

failed to make my heart thud erratically. Twice, when

that happened, I caught a look on his face that made

me sure he could somehow hear it.

I tried to keep my eyes away from his perfection as

much as possible, but I slipped often. Each time, his

beauty pierced me through with sadness. For the

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most part, we walked in silence. Occasionally he

would ask a random question that he hadn't gotten to

in the past two days of interrogation. He asked about

my birthdays, my grade school teachers, my

childhood pets — and I had to admit that after killing

three fish in a row, I'd given up on the whole

institution. He laughed at that, louder than I was

used to — bell-like echoes bouncing back to us from

the empty woods.

The hike took me most of the morning, but he never

showed any sign of impatience. The forest spread out

around us in a boundless labyrinth of ancient trees,

and I began to be nervous that we would never find

our way out again. He was perfectly at ease,

comfortable in the green maze, never seeming to feel

any doubt about our direction.

After several hours, the light that filtered through the

canopy transformed, the murky olive tone shifting to

a brighter jade. The day had turned sunny, just as

he'd foretold. For the first time since we'd entered the

woods, I felt a thrill of excitement — which quickly

turned to impatience.

"Are we there yet?" I teased, pretending to scowl.

"Nearly." He smiled at the change in my mood. "Do

you see the brightness ahead?"

I peered into the thick forest. "Um, should I?" He

smirked. "Maybe it's a bit soon for your eyes."

"Time to visit the optometrist," I muttered. His smirk

grew more pronounced.

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But then, after another hundred yards, I could

definitely see a lightening in the trees ahead, a glow

that was yellow instead of green. I picked up the pace,

my eagerness growing with every step. He let me lead

now, following noiselessly.

I reached the edge of the pool of light and stepped

through the last fringe of ferns into the loveliest place

I had ever seen. The meadow was small, perfectly

round, and filled with wildflowers — violet, yellow,

and soft white. Somewhere nearby, I could hear the

bubbling music of a stream. The sun was directly

overhead, filling the circle with a haze of buttery

sunshine. I walked slowly, awestruck, through the

soft grass, swaying flowers, and warm, gilded air. I

halfway turned, wanting to share this with him, but

he wasn't behind me where I thought he'd be. I spun

around, searching for him with sudden alarm. Finally

I spotted him, still under the dense shade of the

canopy at the edge of the hollow, watching me with

cautious eyes. Only then did I remember what the

beauty of the meadow had driven from my mind —

the enigma of Edward and the sun, which he'd

promised to illustrate for me today.

I took a step back toward him, my eyes alight with

curiosity. His eyes were wary, reluctant. I smiled

encouragingly and beckoned to him with my hand,

taking another step back to him. He held up a hand

in warning, and I hesitated, rocking back onto my

heels.

Edward seemed to take a deep breath, and then he

stepped out into the bright glow of the midday sun.

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Chapter 11

Edward in the sunlight was shocking. I couldn't get

used to it, though I'd been staring at him all

afternoon. His skin, white despite the faint flush from

yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like

thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the

surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt

open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his

scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale lavender

lids were shut, though of course he didn't sleep. A

perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone,

smooth like marble, glittering like crystal. Now and

then, his lips would move, so fast it looked like they

were trembling. But, when I asked, he told me he was

singing to himself; it was too low for me to hear.

I enjoyed the sun, too, though the air wasn't quite dry

enough for my taste. I would have liked to lie back, as

he did, and let the sun warm my face. But I stayed

curled up, my chin resting on my knees, unwilling to

take my eyes off him. The wind was gentle; it tangled

my hair and ruffled the grass that swayed around his

motionless form.

The meadow, so spectacular to me at first, paled next

to his magnificence. Hesitantly, always afraid, even

now, that he would disappear like a mirage, too

beautiful to be real... hesitantly, I reached out one

finger and stroked the back of his shimmering hand,

where it lay within my reach. I marveled again at the

perfect texture, satin smooth, cool as stone. When I

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looked up again, his eyes were open, watching me.

Butterscotch today, lighter, warmer after hunting. His

quick smile turned up the corners of his flawless lips.

"I don't scare you?" he asked playfully, but I could

hear the real curiosity in his soft voice.

"No more than usual."

He smiled wider; his teeth flashed in the sun.

I inched closer, stretched out my whole hand now to

trace the contours of his forearm with my fingertips. I

saw that my fingers trembled, and knew it wouldn't

escape his notice.

"Do you mind?" I asked, for he had closed his eyes

again.

"No," he said without opening his eyes. "You can't

imagine how that feels." He sighed.

I lightly trailed my hand over the perfect muscles of

his arm, followed the faint pattern of bluish veins

inside the crease at his elbow. With my other hand, I

reached to turn his hand over. Realizing what I

wished, he flipped his palm up in one of those

blindingly fast, disconcerting movements of his. It

startled me; my fingers froze on his arm for a brief

second.

"Sorry," he murmured. I looked up in time to see his

golden eyes close again. "It's too easy to be myself

with you."

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I lifted his hand, turning it this way and that as I

watched the sun glitter on his palm. I held it closer to

my face, trying to see the hidden facets in his skin.

"Tell me what you're thinking," he whispered. I looked

to see his eyes watching me, suddenly intent. "It's still

so strange for me, not knowing."

"You know, the rest of us feel that way all the time."

"It's a hard life." Did I imagine the hint of regret in his

tone? "But you didn't tell me."

"I was wishing I could know what you were

thinking..." I hesitated.

"And?"

"I was wishing that I could believe that you were real.

And I was wishing that I wasn't afraid."

"I don't want you to be afraid." His voice was just a

soft murmur. I heard what he couldn't truthfully say,

that I didn't need to be afraid, that there was nothing

to fear.

"Well, that's not exactly the fear I meant, though

that's certainly something to think about."

So quickly that I missed his movement, he was half

sitting, propped up on his right arm, his left palm still

in my hands. His angel's face was only a few inches

from mine. I might have — should have — flinched

away from his unexpected closeness, but I was

unable to move. His golden eyes mesmerized me.

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"What are you afraid of, then?" he whispered intently.

But I couldn't answer. As I had just that once before,

I smelled his cool breath in my face. Sweet, delicious,

the scent made my mouth water. It was unlike

anything else. Instinctively, unthinkingly, I leaned

closer, inhaling.

And he was gone, his hand ripped from mine. In the

time it took my eyes to focus, he was twenty feet

away, standing at the edge of the small meadow, in

the deep shade of a huge fir tree. He stared at me, his

eyes dark in the shadows, his expression unreadable.

I could feel the hurt and shock on my face. My empty

hands stung.

"I'm... sorry... Edward," I whispered. I knew he could

hear.

"Give me a moment," he called, just loud enough for

my less sensitive ears. I sat very still.

After ten incredibly long seconds, he walked back,

slowly for him. He stopped, still several feet away, and

sank gracefully to the ground, crossing his legs. His

eyes never left mine. He took two deep breaths, and

then smiled in apology.

"I am so very sorry." He hesitated. "Would you

understand what I meant if I said I was only human?"

I nodded once, not quite able to smile at his joke.

Adrenaline pulsed through my veins as the realization

of danger slowly sank in. He could smell that from

where he sat. His smile turned mocking.

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"I'm the world's best predator, aren't I? Everything

about me invites you in — my voice, my face, even my

smell. As if I need any of that!" Unexpectedly, he was

on his feet, bounding away, instantly out of sight,

only to appear beneath the same tree as before,

having circled the meadow in half a second.

"As if you could outrun me," he laughed bitterly. He

reached up with one hand and, with a deafening

crack, effortlessly ripped a two-foot-thick branch from

the trunk of the spruce. He balanced it in that hand

for a moment, and then threw it with blinding speed,

shattering it against another huge tree, which shook

and trembled at the blow.

And he was in front of me again, standing two feet

away, still as a stone.

"As if you could fight me off," he said gently. I sat

without moving, more frightened of him than I had

ever been. I'd never seen him so completely freed of

that carefully cultivated facade. He'd never been less

human... or more beautiful. Face ashen, eyes wide, I

sat like a bird locked in the eyes of a snake.

His lovely eyes seem to glow with rash excitement.

Then, as the seconds passed, they dimmed. His

expression slowly folded into a mask of ancient

sadness.

"Don't be afraid," he murmured, his velvet voice

unintentionally seductive. "I promise..." He hesitated.

"I swear not to hurt you." He seemed more concerned

with convincing himself than me.

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"Don't be afraid," he whispered again as he stepped

closer, with exaggerated slowness. He sat sinuously,

with deliberately unhurried movements, till our faces

were on the same level, just a foot apart.

"Please forgive me," he said formally. "I can control

myself. You caught me off guard. But I'm on my best

behavior now."

He waited, but I still couldn't speak.

"I'm not thirsty today, honestly." He winked.

At that I had to laugh, though the sound was shaky

and breathless.

"Are you all right?" he asked tenderly, reaching out

slowly, carefully, to place his marble hand back in

mine.

I looked at his smooth, cold hand, and then at his

eyes. They were soft, repentant. I looked back at his

hand, and then deliberately returned to tracing the

lines in his hand with my fingertip. I looked up and

smiled timidly.

His answering smile was dazzling.

"So where were we, before I behaved so rudely?" he

asked in the gentle cadences of an earlier century.

"I honestly can't remember."

He smiled, but his face was ashamed. "I think we

were talking about why you were afraid, besides the

obvious reason."

"Oh, right."

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Well?

I looked down at his hand and doodled aimlessly

across his smooth, iridescent palm. The seconds

ticked by.

"How easily frustrated I am," he sighed. I looked into

his eyes, abruptly grasping that this was every bit as

new to him as it was to me. As many years of

unfathomable experience as he had, this was hard for

him, too. I took courage from that thought.

"I was afraid... because, for, well, obvious reasons, I

can't stay with you. And I'm afraid that I'd like to stay

with you, much more than I should." I looked down at

his hands as I spoke. It was difficult for me to say this

aloud.

"Yes," he agreed slowly. "That is something to be

afraid of, indeed. Wanting to be with me. That's really

not in your best interest." I frowned.

"I should have left long ago," he sighed. "I should

leave now. But I don't know if I can."

"I don't want you to leave," I mumbled pathetically,

staring down again.

"Which is exactly why I should. But don't worry. I'm

essentially a selfish creature. I crave your company

too much to do what I should."

"I'm glad."

"Don't be!" He withdrew his hand, more gently this

time; his voice was harsher than usual. Harsh for

him, still more beautiful than any human voice. It

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was hard to keep up — his sudden mood changes left

me always a step behind, dazed.

"It's not only your company I crave! Never forget that.

Never forget I am more dangerous to you than I am to

anyone else." He stopped, and I looked to see him

gazing unseeingly into the forest.

I thought for a moment.

"I don't think I understand exactly what you mean —

by that last part anyway," I said.

He looked back at me and smiled, his mood shifting

yet again.

"How do I explain?" he mused. "And without

frightening you again... hmmmm." Without seeming

to think about it, he placed his hand back in mine; I

held it tightly in both of mine. He looked at our

hands.

"That's amazingly pleasant, the warmth." He sighed. A

moment passed as he assembled his thoughts.

"You know how everyone enjoys different flavors?" he

began. "Some people love chocolate ice cream, others

prefer strawberry?" I nodded.

"Sorry about the food analogy — I couldn't think of

another way to explain."

I smiled. He smiled ruefully back.

"You see, every person smells different, has a different

essence. If you locked an alcoholic in a room full of

stale beer, he'd gladly drink it. But he could resist, if

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he wished to, if he were a recovering alcoholic. Now

let's say you placed in that room a glass of hundred-

year-old brandy, the rarest, finest cognac — and filled

the room with its warm aroma — how do you think he

would fare then?"

We sat silently, looking into each other's eyes —

trying to read each other's thoughts.

He broke the silence first.

"Maybe that's not the right comparison. Maybe it

would be too easy to turn down the brandy. Perhaps I

should have made our alcoholic a heroin addict

instead."

"So what you're saying is, I'm your brand of heroin?" I

teased, trying to lighten the mood.

He smiled swiftly, seeming to appreciate my effort.

"Yes, you are exactly my brand of heroin."

"Does that happen often?" I asked.

He looked across the treetops, thinking through his

response.

"I spoke to my brothers about it." He still stared into

the distance. "To Jasper, every one of you is much the

same. He's the most recent to join our family. It's a

struggle for him to abstain at all. He hasn't had time

to grow sensitive to the differences in smell, in flavor."

He glanced swiftly at me, his expression apologetic.

"Sorry," he said.

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"I don't mind. Please don't worry about offending me,

or frightening me, or whichever. That's the way you

think. I can understand, or I can try to at least. Just

explain however you can."

He took a deep breath and gazed at the sky again.

"So Jasper wasn't sure if he'd ever come across

someone who was as" — he hesitated, looking for the

right word — "appealing as you are to me. Which

makes me think not. Emmett has been on the wagon

longer, so to speak, and he understood what I meant.

He says twice, for him, once stronger than the other."

"And for you?"

"Never."

The word hung there for a moment in the warm

breeze.

"What did Emmett do?" I asked to break the silence. It

was the wrong question to ask. His face grew dark,

his hand clenched into a fist inside mine. He looked

away. I waited, but he wasn't going to answer.

"I guess I know," I finally said.

He lifted his eyes; his expression was wistful,

pleading.

"Even the strongest of us fall off the wagon, don't we?"

"What are you asking? My permission?" My voice was

sharper than I'd intended. I tried to make my tone

kinder — I could guess what his honesty must cost

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him. "I mean, is there no hope, then?" How calmly I

could discuss my own death!

"No, no!" He was instantly contrite. "Of course there's

hope! I mean, of course I won't..." He left the sentence

hanging. His eyes burned into mine.

"It's different for us. Emmett... these were strangers

he happened across. It was a long time ago, and he

wasn't as... practiced, as careful, as he is now."

He fell silent and watched me intently as I thought it

through.

"So if we'd met... oh, in a dark alley or something..." I

trailed off.

"It took everything I had not to jump up in the middle

of that class full of children and — " He stopped

abruptly, looking away. "When you walked past me, I

could have ruined everything Carlisle has built for us,

right then and there. If I hadn't been denying my

thirst for the last, well, too many years, I wouldn't

have been able to stop myself." He paused, scowling

at the trees.

He glanced at me grimly, both of us remembering.

"You must have thought I was possessed."

"I couldn't understand why. How you could hate me

so quickly..."

"To me, it was like you were some kind of demon,

summoned straight from my own personal hell to ruin

me. The fragrance coming off your skin... I thought it

would make me deranged that first day. In that one

hour, I thought of a hundred different ways to lure

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you from the room with me, to get you alone. And I

fought them each back, thinking of my family, what I

could do to them. I had to run out, to get away before

I could speak the words that would make you

follow..."

He looked up then at my staggered expression as I

tried to absorb his bitter memories. His golden eyes

scorched from under his lashes, hypnotic and deadly.

"You would have come," he promised.

I tried to speak calmly. "Without a doubt."

He frowned down at my hands, releasing me from the

force of his stare.

"And then, as I tried to rearrange my schedule in a

pointless attempt to avoid you, you were there — in

that close, warm little room, the scent was

maddening. I so very nearly took you then. There was

only one other frail human there — so easily dealt

with."

I shivered in the warm sun, seeing my memories

anew through his eyes, only now grasping the danger.

Poor Ms. Cope; I shivered again at how close I'd come

to being inadvertently responsible for her death.

"But I resisted. I don't know how. I forced myself not

to wait for you, not to follow you from the school. It

was easier outside, when I couldn't smell you

anymore, to think clearly, to make the right decision.

I left the others near home — I was too ashamed to

tell them how weak I was, they only knew something

was very wrong — and then I went straight to

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Carlisle, at the hospital, to tell him I was leaving." I

stared in surprise.

"I traded cars with him — he had a full tank of gas

and I didn't want to stop. I didn't dare to go home, to

face Esme. She wouldn't have let me go without a

scene. She would have tried to convince me that it

wasn't necessary...

"By the next morning I was in Alaska." He sounded

ashamed, as if admitting a great cowardice. "I spent

two days there, with some old acquaintances... but I

was homesick. I hated knowing I'd upset Esme, and

the rest of them, my adopted family. In the pure air of

the mountains it was hard to believe you were so

irresistible. I convinced myself it was weak to run

away. I'd dealt with temptation before, not of this

magnitude, not even close, but I was strong. Who

were you, an insignificant little girl" — he grinned

suddenly — "to chase me from the place I wanted to

be? So I came back..." He stared off into space. I

couldn't speak.

"I took precautions, hunting, feeding more than usual

before seeing you again. I was sure that I was strong

enough to treat you like any other human. I was

arrogant about it.

"It was unquestionably a complication that I couldn't

simply read your thoughts to know what your

reaction was to me. I wasn't used to having to go to

such circuitous measures, listening to your words in

Jessica's mind... her mind isn't very original, and it

was annoying to have to stoop to that. And then I

couldn't know if you really meant what you said. It

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was all extremely irritating." He frowned at the

memory.

"I wanted you to forget my behavior that first day, if

possible, so I tried to talk with you like I would with

any person. I was eager actually, hoping to decipher

some of your thoughts. But you were too interesting, I

found myself caught up in your expressions... and

every now and then you would stir the air with your

hand or your hair, and the scent would stun me

again. . .

"Of course, then you were nearly crushed to death in

front of my eyes. Later I thought of a perfectly good

excuse for why I acted at that moment

— because if I hadn't saved you, if your blood had

been spilled there in front of me, I don't think I could

have stopped myself from exposing us for what we

are. But I only thought of that excuse later. At the

time, all I could think was, 'Not her.'"

He closed his eyes, lost in his agonized confession. I

listened, more eager than rational. Common sense

told me I should be terrified. Instead, I was relieved to

finally understand. And I was filled with compassion

for his suffering, even now, as he confessed his

craving to take my life. I finally was able to speak,

though my voice was faint. "In the hospital?" His eyes

flashed up to mine. "I was appalled. I couldn't believe

I had put us in danger after all, put myself in your

power — you of all people. As if I needed another

motive to kill you." We both flinched as that word

slipped out. "But it had the opposite effect," he

continued quickly. "I fought with Rosalie, Emmett,

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and Jasper when they suggested that now was the

time... the worst fight we've ever had. Carlisle sided

with me, and Alice." He grimaced when he said her

name. I couldn't imagine why. "Esme told me to do

whatever I had to in order to stay." He shook his head

indulgently.

"All that next day I eavesdropped on the minds of

everyone you spoke to, shocked that you kept your

word. I didn't understand you at all. But I knew that I

couldn't become more involved with you. I did my very

best to stay as far from you as possible. And every

day the perfume of your skin, your breath, your

hair... it hit me as hard as the very first day." He met

my eyes again, and they were surprisingly tender.

"And for all that," he continued, "I'd have fared better

if I had exposed us all at that first moment, than if

now, here — with no witnesses and nothing to stop

me — I were to hurt you."

I was human enough to have to ask. "Why?"

"Isabella." He pronounced my full name carefully,

then playfully ruffled my hair with his free hand. A

shock ran through my body at his casual touch.

"Bella, I couldn't live with myself if I ever hurt you.

You don't know how it's tortured me." He looked

down, ashamed again. "The thought of you, still,

white, cold... to never see you blush scarlet again, to

never see that flash of intuition in your eyes when

you see through my pretenses... it would be

unendurable." He lifted his glorious, agonized eyes to

mine. "You are the most important thing to me now.

The most important thing to me ever."

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My head was spinning at the rapid change in

direction our conversation had taken. From the

cheerful topic of my impending demise, we were

suddenly declaring ourselves. He waited, and even

though I looked down to study our hands between us,

I knew his golden eyes were on me. "You already

know how I feel, of course," I finally said. "I'm here...

which, roughly translated, means I would rather die

than stay away from you." I frowned. "I'm an idiot."

"You are an idiot," he agreed with a laugh. Our eyes

met, and I laughed, too. We laughed together at the

idiocy and sheer impossibility of such a moment.

"And so the lion fell in love with the lamb..." he

murmured. I looked away, hiding my eyes as I thrilled

to the word.

"What a stupid lamb," I sighed.

"What a sick, masochistic lion." He stared into the

shadowy forest for a long moment, and I wondered

where his thoughts had taken him.

"Why... ?" I began, and then paused, not sure how to

continue. He looked at me and smiled; sunlight

glinted off his face, his teeth.

"Yes?"

"Tell me why you ran from me before."

His smile faded. "You know why."

"No, I mean, exactly what did I do wrong? I'll have to

be on my guard, you see, so I better start learning

what I shouldn't do. This, for example" — I stroked

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the back of his hand — "seems to be all right." He

smiled again. "You didn't do anything wrong, Bella. It

was my fault."

"But I want to help, if I can, to not make this harder

for you."

"Well..." He contemplated for a moment. "It was just

how close you were. Most humans instinctively shy

away from us, are repelled by our alienness... I wasn't

expecting you to come so close. And the smell of your

throat." He stopped short, looking to see if he'd upset

me.

"Okay, then," I said flippantly, trying to alleviate the

suddenly tense atmosphere. I tucked my chin. "No

throat exposure." It worked; he laughed. "No, really, it

was more the surprise than anything else."

He raised his free hand and placed it gently on the

side of my neck. I sat very still, the chill of his touch a

natural warning — a warning telling me to be

terrified. But there was no feeling of fear in me. There

were, however, other feelings...

"You see," he said. "Perfectly fine." My blood was

racing, and I wished I could slow it, sensing that this

must make everything so much more difficult — the

thudding of my pulse in my veins. Surely he could

hear it.

"The blush on your cheeks is lovely," he murmured.

He gently freed his other hand. My hands fell limply

into my lap. Softly he brushed my cheek, then held

my face between his marble hands.

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"Be very still," he whispered, as if I wasn't already

frozen. Slowly, never moving his eyes from mine, he

leaned toward me. Then abruptly, but very gently, he

rested his cold cheek against the hollow at the base of

my throat. I was quite unable to move, even if I'd

wanted to. I listened to the sound of his even

breathing, watching the sun and wind play in his

bronze hair, more human than any other part of him.

With deliberate slowness, his hands slid down the

sides of my neck. I shivered, and I heard him catch

his breath. But his hands didn't pause as they softly

moved to my shoulders, and then stopped.

His face drifted to the side, his nose skimming across

my collarbone. He came to rest with the side of his

face pressed tenderly against my chest. Listening to

my heart.

"Ah," he sighed.

I don't know how long we sat without moving. It could

have been hours. Eventually the throb of my pulse

quieted, but he didn't move or speak again as he held

me. I knew at any moment it could be too much, and

my life could end — so quickly that I might not even

notice. And I couldn't make myself be afraid. I

couldn't think of anything, except that he was

touching me.

And then, too soon, he released me.

His eyes were peaceful.

"It won't be so hard again," he said with satisfaction.

"Was that very hard for you?"

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"Not nearly as bad as I imagined it would be. And

you?"

"No, it wasn't bad... for me."

He smiled at my inflection. "You know what I mean." I

smiled.

"Here." He took my hand and placed it against his

cheek. "Do you feel how warm it is?"

And it was almost warm, his usually icy skin. But I

barely noticed, for I was touching his face, something

I'd dreamed of constantly since the first day I'd seen

him.

"Don't move," I whispered.

No one could be still like Edward. He closed his eyes

and became as immobile as stone, a carving under

my hand.

I moved even more slowly than he had, careful not to

make one unexpected move. I caressed his cheek,

delicately stroked his eyelid, the purple shadow in the

hollow under his eye. I traced the shape of his perfect

nose, and then, so carefully, his flawless lips. His lips

parted under my hand, and I could feel his cool

breath on my fingertips. I wanted to lean in, to inhale

the scent of him. So I dropped my hand and leaned

away, not wanting to push him too far.

He opened his eyes, and they were hungry. Not in a

way to make me fear, but rather to tighten the

muscles in the pit of my stomach and send my pulse

hammering through my veins again.

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"I wish," he whispered, "I wish you could feel the...

complexity... the confusion... I feel. That you could

understand."

He raised his hand to my hair, then carefully brushed

it across my face.

"Tell me," I breathed.

"I don't think I can. I've told you, on the one hand, the

hunger — the thirst — that, deplorable creature that I

am, I feel for you. And I think you can understand

that, to an extent. Though" — he half-smiled — "as

you are not addicted to any illegal substances, you

probably can’t empathize completely.

"But..." His fingers touched my lips lightly, making

me shiver again.

"There are other hungers. Hungers I don't even

understand, that are foreign to me."

"I may understand that better than you think."

"I'm not used to feeling so human. Is it always like

this?"

"For me?" I paused. "No, never. Never before this." He

held my hands between his. They felt so feeble in his

iron strength.

"I don't know how to be close to you," he admitted. "I

don't know if I can."

I leaned forward very slowly, cautioning him with my

eyes. I placed my cheek against his stone chest. I

could hear his breath, and nothing else.

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"This is enough," I sighed, closing my eyes.

In a very human gesture, he put his arms around me

and pressed his face against my hair.

"You're better at this than you give yourself credit

for," I noted.

"I have human instincts — they may be buried deep,

but they're there." We sat like that for another

immeasurable moment; I wondered if he could be as

unwilling to move as I was. But I could see the light

was fading, the shadows of the forest beginning to

touch us, and I sighed.

"You have to go."

"I thought you couldn't read my mind."

"It's getting clearer." I could hear a smile in his voice.

He took my shoulders and I looked into his face.

"Can I show you something?" he asked, sudden

excitement flaring in his eyes.

"Show me what?"

"I'll show you how I travel in the forest." He saw my

expression. "Don't worry, you'll be very safe, and we'll

get to your truck much faster." His mouth twitched

up into that crooked smile so beautiful my heart

nearly stopped.

"Will you turn into a bat?" I asked warily.

He laughed, louder than I'd ever heard. "Like I haven't

heard that one before!"

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"Right, I'm sure you get that all the time."

"Come on, little coward, climb on my back."

I waited to see if he was kidding, but, apparently, he

meant it. He smiled as he read my hesitation, and

reached for me. My heart reacted; even though he

couldn't hear my thoughts, my pulse always gave me

away. He then proceeded to sling me onto his back,

with very little effort on my part, besides, when in

place, clamping my legs and arms so tightly around

him that it would choke a normal person. It was like

clinging to a stone.

"I'm a bit heavier than your average backpack," I

warned.

"Hah!" he snorted. I could almost hear his eyes

rolling. I'd never seen him in such high spirits before.

He startled me, suddenly grabbing my hand, pressing

my palm to his face, and inhaling deeply.

"Easier all the time," he muttered.

And then he was running.

If I'd ever feared death before in his presence, it was

nothing compared to how I felt now.

He streaked through the dark, thick underbrush of

the forest like a bullet, like a ghost. There was no

sound, no evidence that his feet touched the earth.

His breathing never changed, never indicated any

effort. But the trees flew by at deadly speeds, always

missing us by inches.

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I was too terrified to close my eyes, though the cool

forest air whipped against my face and burned them.

I felt as if I were stupidly sticking my head out the

window of an airplane in flight. And, for the first time

in my life, I felt the dizzy faintness of motion sickness.

Then it was over. We'd hiked hours this morning to

reach Edward's meadow, and now, in a matter of

minutes, we were back to the truck.

"Exhilarating, isn't it?" His voice was high, excited. He

stood motionless, waiting for me to climb down. I

tried, but my muscles wouldn't respond. My arms and

legs stayed locked around him while my head spun

uncomfortably.

"Bella?" he asked, anxious now.

"I think I need to lie down," I gasped.

"Oh, sorry." He waited for me, but I still couldn't

move.

"I think I need help," I admitted.

He laughed quietly, and gently unloosened my

stranglehold on his neck. There was no resisting the

iron strength of his hands. Then he pulled me around

to face him, cradling me in his arms like a small

child. He held me for a moment, then carefully placed

me on the springy ferns.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

I couldn't be sure how I felt when my head was

spinning so crazily.

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"Dizzy, I think."

"Put your head between your knees."

I tried that, and it helped a little. I breathed in and

out slowly, keeping my head very still. I felt him

sitting beside me. The moments passed, and

eventually I found that I could raise my head. There

was a hollow ringing sound in my ears.

"I guess that wasn't the best idea," he mused.

I tried to be positive, but my voice was weak. "No, it

was very interesting."

"Hah! You're as white as a ghost — no, you're as

white as me!"

"I think I should have closed my eyes."

"Remember that next time."

"Next time!" I groaned.

He laughed, his mood still radiant.

"Show-off," I muttered.

"Open your eyes, Bella," he said quietly.

And he was right there, his face so close to mine. His

beauty stunned my mind — it was too much, an

excess I couldn't grow accustomed to.

"I was thinking, while I was running..." He paused.

"About not hitting the trees, I hope."

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"Silly Bella," he chuckled. "Running is second nature

to me, it's not something I have to think about."

"Show-off," I muttered again.

He smiled.

"No," he continued, "I was thinking there was

something I wanted to try." And he took my face in

his hands again.

I couldn't breathe.

He hesitated — not in the normal way, the human

way.

Not the way a man might hesitate before he kissed a

woman, to gauge her reaction, to see how he would be

received. Perhaps he would hesitate to prolong the

moment, that ideal moment of anticipation,

sometimes better than the kiss itself.

Edward hesitated to test himself, to see if this was

safe, to make sure he was still in control of his need.

And then his cold, marble lips pressed very softly

against mine. What neither of us was prepared for

was my response.

Blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. My

breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his

hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted as I

breathed in his heady scent.

Immediately I felt him turn to unresponsive stone

beneath my lips. His hands gently, but with

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irresistible force, pushed my face back. I opened my

eyes and saw his guarded expression.

"Oops," I breathed.

"That's an understatement."

His eyes were wild, his jaw clenched in acute

restraint, yet he didn't lapse from his perfect

articulation. He held my face just inches from his. He

dazzled my eyes.

"Should I... ?" I tried to disengage myself, to give him

some room. His hands refused to let me move so

much as an inch.

"No, it's tolerable. Wait for a moment, please." His

voice was polite, controlled.

I kept my eyes on his, watched as the excitement in

them faded and gentled.

Then he smiled a surprisingly impish grin.

"There," he said, obviously pleased with himself.

"Tolerable?" I asked.

He laughed aloud. "I'm stronger than I thought. It's

nice to know."

"I wish I could say the same. I'm sorry."

"You are only human, after all."

"Thanks so much," I said, my voice acerbic.

He was on his feet in one of his lithe, almost invisibly

quick movements. He held out his hand to me, an

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unexpected gesture. I was so used to our standard of

careful non-contact. I took his icy hand, needing the

support more than I thought. My balance had not yet

returned.

"Are you still faint from the run? Or was it my kissing

expertise?" How lighthearted, how human he seemed

as he laughed now, his seraphic face untroubled. He

was a different Edward than the one I had known.

And I felt all the more besotted by him. It would cause

me physical pain to be separated from him now.

"I can't be sure, I'm still woozy," I managed to

respond. "I think it's some of both, though."

"Maybe you should let me drive."

"Are you insane?" I protested.

"I can drive better than you on your best day," he

teased. "You have much slower reflexes."

"I'm sure that's true, but I don't think my nerves, or

my truck, could take it."

"Some trust, please, Bella."

My hand was in my pocket, curled tightly around the

key. I pursed my lips, deliberated, then shook my

head with a tight grin.

"Nope. Not a chance."

He raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

I started to step around him, heading for the driver's

side. He might have let me pass if I hadn't wobbled

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slightly. Then again, he might not have. His arm

created an inescapable snare around my waist.

"Bella, I've already expended a great deal of personal

effort at this point to keep you alive. I'm not about to

let you behind the wheel of a vehicle when you can't

even walk straight. Besides, friends don't let friends

drive drunk," he quoted with a chuckle. I could smell

the unbearably sweet fragrance coming off his chest.

"Drunk?" I objected.

"You're intoxicated by my very presence." He was

grinning that playful smirk again.

"I can't argue with that," I sighed. There was no way

around it; I couldn't resist him in anything. I held the

key high and dropped it, watching his hand flash like

lightning to catch it soundlessly. "Take it easy — my

truck is a senior citizen."

"Very sensible," he approved.

"And are you not affected at all?" I asked, irked. "By

my presence?" Again his mobile features transformed,

his expression became soft, warm. He didn't answer

at first; he simply bent his face to mine, and brushed

his lips slowly along my jaw, from my ear to my chin,

back and forth. I trembled.

"Regardless," he finally murmured, "I have better

reflexes."

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Chapter 12

He could drive well, when he kept the speed

reasonable, I had to admit. Like so many things, it

seemed to be effortless to him. He barely looked at the

road, yet the tires never deviated so much as a

centimeter from the center of the lane. He drove one-

handed, holding my hand on the seat. Sometimes he

gazed into the setting sun, sometimes he glanced at

me — my face, my hair blowing out the open window,

our hands twined together. He had turned the radio

to an oldies station, and he sang along with a song I'd

never heard. He knew every line.

"You like fifties music?" I asked.

"Music in the fifties was good. Much better than the

sixties, or the seventies, ugh!" He shuddered. "The

eighties were bearable."

"Are you ever going to tell me how old you are?" I

asked, tentative, not wanting to upset his buoyant

humor.

"Does it matter much?" His smile, to my relief,

remained unclouded.

"No, but I still wonder..." I grimaced. "There's nothing

like an unsolved mystery to keep you up at night."

"I wonder if it will upset you," he reflected to himself.

He gazed into the sun; the minutes passed.

"Try me," I finally said.

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He sighed, and then looked into my eyes, seeming to

forget the road completely for a time. Whatever he

saw there must have encouraged him. He looked into

the sun — the light of the setting orb glittered off his

skin in ruby-tinged sparkles — and spoke.

"I was born in Chicago in 1901." He paused and

glanced at me from the corner of his eyes. My face

was carefully unsurprised, patient for the rest. He

smiled a tiny smile and continued. "Carlisle found me

in a hospital in the summer of 1918. I was seventeen,

and dying of the Spanish influenza."

He heard my intake of breath, though it was barely

audible to my own ears. He looked down into my eyes

again.

"I don't remember it well — it was a very long time

ago, and human memories fade." He was lost in his

thoughts for a short time before he went on. "I do

remember how it felt, when Carlisle saved me. It's not

an easy thing, not something you could forget."

"Your parents?"

"They had already died from the disease. I was alone.

That was why he chose me. In all the chaos of the

epidemic, no one would ever realize I was gone."

"How did he... save you?"

A few seconds passed before he answered. He seemed

to choose his words carefully.

"It was difficult. Not many of us have the restraint

necessary to accomplish it. But Carlisle has always

been the most humane, the most compassionate of

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us... I don't think you could find his equal throughout

all of history." He paused. "For me, it was merely very,

very painful." I could tell from the set of his lips, he

would say no more on this subject. I suppressed my

curiosity, though it was far from idle. There were

many things I needed to think through on this

particular issue, things that were only beginning to

occur to me. No doubt his quick mind had already

comprehended every aspect that eluded me.

His soft voice interrupted my thoughts. "He acted

from loneliness. That's usually the reason behind the

choice. I was the first in Carlisle's family, though he

found Esme soon after. She fell from a cliff. They

brought her straight to the hospital morgue, though,

somehow, her heart was still beating."

"So you must be dying, then, to become..." We never

said the word, and I couldn't frame it now.

"No, that's just Carlisle. He would never do that to

someone who had another choice." The respect in his

voice was profound whenever he spoke of his father

figure. "It is easier he says, though," he continued, "if

the blood is weak." He looked at the now-dark road,

and I could feel the subject closing again.

"And Emmett and Rosalie?"

"Carlisle brought Rosalie to our family next. I didn't

realize till much later that he was hoping she would

be to me what Esme was to him — he was careful

with his thoughts around me." He rolled his eyes.

"But she was never more than a sister. It was only

two years later that she found Emmett. She was

hunting — we were in Appalachia at the time — and

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found a bear about to finish him off. She carried him

back to Carlisle, more than a hundred miles, afraid

she wouldn't be able to do it herself. I'm only

beginning to guess how difficult that journey was for

her." He threw a pointed glance in my direction, and

raised our hands, still folded together, to brush my

cheek with the back of his hand.

"But she made it," I encouraged, looking away from

the unbearable beauty of his eyes.

"Yes," he murmured. "She saw something in his face

that made her strong enough. And they've been

together ever since. Sometimes they live separately

from us, as a married couple. But the younger we

pretend to be, the longer we can stay in any given

place. Forks seemed perfect, so we all enrolled in high

school." He laughed. "I suppose we'll have to go to

their wedding in a few years, again."

"Alice and Jasper?"

"Alice and Jasper are two very rare creatures. They

both developed a conscience, as we refer to it, with no

outside guidance. Jasper belonged to another...

family, a very different kind of family. He became

depressed, and he wandered on his own. Alice found

him. Like me, she has certain gifts above and beyond

the norm for our kind."

"Really?" I interrupted, fascinated. "But you said you

were the only one who could hear people's thoughts."

"That's true. She knows other things. She sees things

— things that might happen, things that are coming.

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But it's very subjective. The future isn't set in stone.

Things change."

His jaw set when he said that, and his eyes darted to

my face and away so quickly that I wasn't sure if I

only imagined it.

"What kinds of things does she see?"

"She saw Jasper and knew that he was looking for her

before he knew it himself. She saw Carlisle and our

family, and they came together to find us. She's most

sensitive to non-humans. She always sees, for

example, when another group of our kind is coming

near. And any threat they may pose."

"Are there a lot of... your kind?" I was surprised. How

many of them could walk among us undetected?

"No, not many. But most won't settle in any one

place. Only those like us, who've given up hunting

you people" — a sly glance in my direction —

"can live together with humans for any length of time.

We've only found one other family like ours, in a small

village in Alaska. We lived together for a time, but

there were so many of us that we became too

noticeable. Those of us who live... differently tend to

band together."

"And the others?"

"Nomads, for the most part. We've all lived that way at

times. It gets tedious, like anything else. But we run

across the others now and then, because most of us

prefer the North."

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"Why is that?"

We were parked in front of my house now, and he'd

turned off the truck. It was very quiet and dark; there

was no moon. The porch light was off so I knew my

father wasn't home yet.

"Did you have your eyes open this afternoon?" he

teased. "Do you think I could walk down the street in

the sunlight without causing traffic accidents?

There's a reason why we chose the Olympic

Peninsula, one of the most sunless places in the

world. It's nice to be able to go outside in the day. You

wouldn't believe how tired you can get of nighttime in

eighty-odd years."

"So that's where the legends came from?"

"Probably."

"And Alice came from another family, like Jasper?"

"No, and that is a mystery. Alice doesn't remember

her human life at all. And she doesn't know who

created her. She awoke alone. Whoever made her

walked away, and none of us understand why, or

how, he could. If she hadn't had that other sense, if

she hadn't seen Jasper and Carlisle and known that

she would someday become one of us, she probably

would have turned into a total savage."

There was so much to think through, so much I still

wanted to ask. But, to my great embarrassment, my

stomach growled. I'd been so intrigued, I hadn't even

noticed I was hungry. I realized now that I was

ravenous.

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"I'm sorry, I'm keeping you from dinner."

"I'm fine, really."

"I've never spent much time around anyone who eats

food. I forget."

"I want to stay with you." It was easier to say in the

darkness, knowing as I spoke how my voice would

betray me, my hopeless addiction to him.

"Can't I come in?" he asked.

"Would you like to?" I couldn't picture it, this godlike

creature sitting in my father's shabby kitchen chair.

"Yes, if it's all right." I heard the door close quietly,

and almost simultaneously he was outside my door,

opening it for me.

"Very human," I complimented him.

"It's definitely resurfacing."

He walked beside me in the night, so quietly I had to

peek at him constantly to be sure he was still there.

In the darkness he looked much more normal. Still

pale, still dreamlike in his beauty, but no longer the

fantastic sparkling creature of our sunlit afternoon.

He reached the door ahead of me and opened it for

me. I paused halfway through the frame.

"The door was unlocked?"

"No, I used the key from under the eave."

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I stepped inside, flicked on the porch light, and

turned to look at him with my eyebrows raised. I was

sure I'd never used that key in front of him.

"I was curious about you."

"You spied on me?" But somehow I couldn't infuse my

voice with the proper outrage. I was flattered.

He was unrepentant. "What else is there to do at

night?" I let it go for the moment and went down the

hall to the kitchen. He was there before me, needing

no guide. He sat in the very chair I'd tried to picture

him in. His beauty lit up the kitchen. It was a

moment before I could look away.

I concentrated on getting my dinner, taking last

night's lasagna from the fridge, placing a square on a

plate, heating it in the microwave. It revolved, filling

the kitchen with the smell of tomatoes and oregano. I

didn't take my eyes from the plate of food as I spoke.

"How often?" I asked casually.

"Hmmm?" He sounded as if I had pulled him from

some other train of thought.

I still didn't turn around. "How often did you come

here?"

"I come here almost every night."

I whirled, stunned. "Why?"

"You're interesting when you sleep." He spoke matter-

of-factly. "You talk."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No!" I gasped, heat flooding my face all the way to my

hairline. I gripped the kitchen counter for support. I

knew I talked in my sleep, of course; my mother

teased me about it. I hadn't thought it was something

I needed to worry about here, though.

His expression shifted instantly to chagrin. "Are you

very angry with me?"

"That depends!" I felt and sounded like I'd had the

breath knocked out of me.

He waited.

"On?" he urged.

"What you heard!" I wailed.

Instantly, silently, he was at my side, taking my

hands carefully in his.

"Don't be upset!" he pleaded. He dropped his face to

the level of my eyes, holding my gaze. I was

embarrassed. I tried to look away.

"You miss your mother," he whispered. "You worry

about her. And when it rains, the sound makes you

restless. You used to talk about home a lot, but it's

less often now. Once you said, 'It's too green.'" He

laughed softly, hoping, I could see, not to offend me

further.

"Anything else?" I demanded.

He knew what I was getting at. "You did say my

name," he admitted. I sighed in defeat. "A lot?"

"How much do you mean by 'a lot,' exactly?"

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"Oh no!" I hung my head.

He pulled me against his chest, softly, naturally.

"Don't be self-conscious," he whispered in my ear. "If I

could dream at all, it would be about you. And I'm not

ashamed of it." Then we both heard the sound of tires

on the brick driveway, saw the headlights flash

through the front windows, down the hall to us. I

stiffened in his arms.

"Should your father know I'm here?" he asked.

"I'm not sure..." I tried to think it through quickly.

"Another time then..."

And I was alone.

"Edward!" I hissed.

I heard a ghostly chuckle, then nothing else.

My father's key turned in the door.

"Bella?" he called. It had bothered me before; who else

would it be?

Suddenly he didn't seem so far off base.

"In here." I hoped he couldn't hear the hysterical edge

to my voice. I grabbed my dinner from the microwave

and sat at the table as he walked in. His footsteps

sounded so noisy after my day with Edward.

"Can you get me some of that? I'm bushed." He

stepped on the heels of his boots to take them off,

holding the back of Edward's chair for support. I took

my food with me, scarfing it down as I got his dinner.

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It burned my tongue. I filled two glasses with milk

while his lasagna was heating, and gulped mine to

put out the fire. As I set the glass down, I noticed the

milk trembling and realized my hand was shaking.

Charlie sat in the chair, and the contrast between

him and its former occupant was comical.

"Thanks," he said as I placed his food on the table.

"How was your day?" I asked. The words were rushed;

I was dying to escape to my room.

"Good. The fish were biting... how about you? Did you

get everything done that you wanted to?"

"Not really — it was too nice out to stay indoors." I

took another big bite.

"It was a nice day," he agreed. What an

understatement, I thought to myself.

Finished with the last bite of lasagna, I lifted my glass

and chugged the remains of my milk.

Charlie surprised me by being observant. "In a

hurry?"

"Yeah, I'm tired. I'm going to bed early."

"You look kinda keyed up," he noted. Why, oh why,

did this have to be his night to pay attention?

"Do I?" was all I could manage in response. I quickly

scrubbed my dishes clean in the sink, and placed

them upside down on a dish towel to dry.

"It's Saturday," he mused.

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I didn't respond.

"No plans tonight?" he asked suddenly.

"No, Dad, I just want to get some sleep."

"None of the boys in town your type, eh?" He was

suspicious, but trying to play it cool.

"No, none of the boys have caught my eye yet." I was

careful not to over-emphasize the word boys in my

quest to be truthful with Charlie.

"I thought maybe that Mike Newton... you said he was

friendly."

"He's Just a friend, Dad."

"Well, you're too good for them all, anyway. Wait till

you get to college to start looking." Every father's

dream, that his daughter will be out of the house

before the hormones kick in.

"Sounds like a good idea to me," I agreed as I headed

up the stairs.

"'Night, honey," he called after me. No doubt he would

be listening carefully all evening, waiting for me to try

to sneak out.

"See you in the morning, Dad." See you creeping into

my room tonight at midnight to check on me.

I worked to make my tread sound slow and tired as I

walked up the stairs to my room. I shut the door loud

enough for him to hear, and then sprinted on my

tiptoes to the window. I threw it open and leaned out

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into the night. My eyes scanned the darkness, the

impenetrable shadows of the trees.

"Edward?" I whispered, feeling completely idiotic. The

quiet, laughing response came from behind me.

"Yes?" I whirled, one hand flying to my throat in

surprise.

He lay, smiling hugely, across my bed, his hands

behind his head, his feet dangling off the end, the

picture of ease.

"Oh!" I breathed, sinking unsteadily to the floor.

"I'm sorry." He pressed his lips together, trying to hide

his amusement.

"Just give me a minute to restart my heart."

He sat up slowly, so as not to startle me again. Then

he leaned forward and reached out with his long arms

to pick me up, gripping the tops of my arms like I was

a toddler. He sat me on the bed beside him.

"Why don't you sit with me," he suggested, putting a

cold hand on mine.

"How's the heart?"

"You tell me — I'm sure you hear it better than I do." I

felt his quiet laughter shake the bed.

We sat there for a moment in silence, both listening to

my heartbeat slow. I thought about having Edward in

my room, with my father in the house.

"Can I have a minute to be human?" I asked.

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"Certainly." He gestured with one hand that I should

proceed.

"Stay," I said, trying to look severe.

"Yes, ma'am." And he made a show of becoming a

statue on the edge of my bed.

I hopped up, grabbing my pajamas from off the floor,

my bag of toiletries off the desk. I left the light off and

slipped out, closing the door. I could hear the sound

from the TV rising up the stairs. I banged the

bathroom door loudly, so Charlie wouldn't come up to

bother me. I meant to hurry. I brushed my teeth

fiercely, trying to be thorough and speedy, removing

all traces of lasagna. But the hot water of the shower

couldn't be rushed. It unknotted the muscles in my

back, calmed my pulse. The familiar smell of my

shampoo made me feel like I might be the same

person I had been this morning. I tried not to think of

Edward, sitting in my room, waiting, because then I

had to start all over with the calming process. Finally,

I couldn't delay anymore. I shut off the water,

toweling hastily, rushing again. I pulled on my holey

t-shirt and gray sweatpants. Too late to regret not

packing the Victoria's Secret silk pajamas my mother

got me two birthdays ago, which still had the tags on

them in a drawer somewhere back home.

I rubbed the towel through my hair again, and then

yanked the brush through it quickly. I threw the

towel in the hamper, flung my brush and toothpaste

into my bag. Then I dashed down the stairs so Charlie

could see that I was in my pajamas, with wet hair.

'"Night, Dad.

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'"Night, Bella." He did look startled by my appearance.

Maybe that would keep him from checking on me

tonight.

I took the stairs two at a time, trying to be quiet, and

flew into my room, closing the door tightly behind me.

Edward hadn't moved a fraction of an inch, a carving

of Adonis perched on my faded quilt. I smiled, and his

lips twitched, the statue coming to life.

His eyes appraised me, taking in the damp hair, the

tattered shirt. He raised one eyebrow. "Nice."

I grimaced.

"No, it looks good on you."

"Thanks," I whispered. I went back to his side, sitting

cross-legged beside him. I looked at the lines in the

wooden floor.

"What was all that for?"

"Charlie thinks I'm sneaking out."

"Oh." He contemplated that. "Why?" As if he couldn't

know Charlie's mind much more clearly than I could

guess.

"Apparently, I look a little overexcited."

He lifted my chin, examining my face.

"You look very warm, actually."

He bent his face slowly to mine, laying his cool cheek

against my skin. I held perfectly still.

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"Mmmmmm..." he breathed.

It was very difficult, while he was touching me, to

frame a coherent question. It took me a minute of

scattered concentration to begin.

"It seems to be... much easier for you, now, to be

close to me."

"Does it seem that way to you?" he murmured, his

nose gliding to the corner of my jaw. I felt his hand,

lighter than a moth's wing, brushing my damp hair

back, so that his lips could touch the hollow beneath

my ear.

"Much, much easier," I said, trying to exhale.

"Hmm."

"So I was wondering..." I began again, but his fingers

were slowly tracing my collarbone, and I lost my train

of thought.

"Yes?" he breathed.

"Why is that," my voice shook, embarrassing me, "do

you think?" I felt the tremor of his breath on my neck

as he laughed. "Mind over matter."

I pulled back; as I moved, he froze — and I could no

longer hear the sound of his breathing.

We stared cautiously at each other for a moment, and

then, as his clenched jaw gradually relaxed, his

expression became puzzled.

"Did I do something wrong?"

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"No — the opposite. You're driving me crazy," I

explained. He considered that briefly, and when he

spoke, he sounded pleased.

"Really?" A triumphant smile slowly lit his face.

"Would you like a round of applause?" I asked

sarcastically. He grinned.

"I'm just pleasantly surprised," he clarified. "In the

last hundred years or so," his voice was teasing, "I

never imagined anything like this. I didn't believe I

would ever find someone I wanted to be with... in

another way than my brothers and sisters. And then

to find, even though it's all new to me, that I'm good

at it... at being with you..."

"You're good at everything," I pointed out.

He shrugged, allowing that, and we both laughed in

whispers.

"But how can it be so easy now?" I pressed. "This

afternoon..."

"It's not easy," he sighed. "But this afternoon, I was

still... undecided. I am sorry about that, it was

unforgivable for me to behave so."

"Not unforgivable," I disagreed.

"Thank you." He smiled. "You see," he continued,

looking down now, "I wasn't sure if I was strong

enough..." He picked up one of my hands and pressed

it lightly to his face. "And while there was still that

possibility that I might be... overcome" — he breathed

in the scent at my wrist — "I was... susceptible. Until

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I made up my mind that I was strong enough, that

there was no possibility at all that I would... that I

ever could..."

I'd never seen him struggle so hard for words. It was

so... human.

"So there's no possibility now?"

"Mind over matter," he repeated, smiling, his teeth

bright even in the darkness.

"Wow, that was easy," I said.

He threw back his head and laughed, quietly as a

whisper, but still exuberantly.

"Easy for you!" he amended, touching my nose with

his fingertip. And then his face was abruptly serious.

"I'm trying," he whispered, his voice pained. "If it gets

to be... too much, I'm fairly sure I'll be able to leave."

I scowled. I didn't like the talk of leaving.

"And it will be harder tomorrow," he continued. "I've

had the scent of you in my head all day, and I've

grown amazingly desensitized. If I'm away from you

for any length of time, I'll have to start over again. Not

quite from scratch, though, I think."

"Don't go away, then," I responded, unable to hide the

longing in my voice.

"That suits me," he replied, his face relaxing into a

gentle smile.

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"Bring on the shackles — I'm your prisoner." But his

long hands formed manacles around my wrists as he

spoke. He laughed his quiet, musical laugh. He'd

laughed more tonight than I'd ever heard in all the

time I'd spent with him.

"You seem more... optimistic than usual," I observed.

"I haven't seen you like this before."

"Isn't it supposed to be like this?" He smiled. "The

glory of first love, and all that. It's incredible, isn't it,

the difference between reading about something,

seeing it in the pictures, and experiencing it?"

"Very different," I agreed. "More forceful than I'd

imagined."

"For example" — his words flowed swiftly now, I had

to concentrate to catch it all — "the emotion of

jealousy. I've read about it a hundred thousand times,

seen actors portray it in a thousand different plays

and movies. I believed I understood that one pretty

clearly. But it shocked me..." He grimaced. "Do you

remember the day that Mike asked you to the dance?"

I nodded, though I remembered that day for a

different reason. "The day you started talking to me

again."

"I was surprised by the flare of resentment, almost

fury, that I felt — I didn't recognize what it was at

first. I was even more aggravated than usual that I

couldn't know what you were thinking, why you

refused him. Was it simply for your friend's sake?

Was there someone else? I knew I had no right to care

either way. I tried not to care.

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"And then the line started forming," he chuckled. I

scowled in the darkness.

"I waited, unreasonably anxious to hear what you

would say to them, to watch your expressions. I

couldn't deny the relief I felt, watching the annoyance

on your face. But I couldn't be sure.

"That was the first night I came here. I wrestled all

night, while watching you sleep, with the chasm

between what I knew was right, moral, ethical, and

what I wanted. I knew that if I continued to ignore

you as I should, or if I left for a few years, till you

were gone, that someday you would say yes to Mike,

or someone like him. It made me angry.

"And then," he whispered, "as you were sleeping, you

said my name. You spoke so clearly, at first I thought

you'd woken. But you rolled over restlessly and

mumbled my name once more, and sighed. The

feeling that coursed through me then was unnerving,

staggering. And I knew I couldn't ignore you any

longer." He was silent for a moment, probably

listening to the suddenly uneven pounding of my

heart.

"But jealousy... it's a strange thing. So much more

powerful than I would have thought. And irrational!

Just now, when Charlie asked you about that vile

Mike Newton..." He shook his head angrily.

"I should have known you'd be listening," I groaned.

"Of course."

"That made you feel jealous, though, really?"

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"I'm new at this; you're resurrecting the human in

me, and everything feels stronger because it's fresh."

"But honestly," I teased, "for that to bother you, after I

have to hear that Rosalie — Rosalie, the incarnation

of pure beauty, Rosalie — was meant for you. Emmett

or no Emmett, how can I compete with that?"

"There's no competition." His teeth gleamed. He drew

my trapped hands around his back, holding me to his

chest. I kept as still as I could, even breathing with

caution.

"I know there's no competition," I mumbled into his

cold skin. "That's the problem."

"Of course Rosalie is beautiful in her way, but even if

she wasn't like a sister to me, even if Emmett didn't

belong with her, she could never have one tenth, no,

one hundredth of the attraction you hold for me." He

was serious now, thoughtful. "For almost ninety years

I've walked among my kind, and yours... all the time

thinking I was complete in myself, not realizing what I

was seeking. And not finding anything, because you

weren't alive yet."

"It hardly seems fair," I whispered, my face still

resting on his chest, listening to his breath come and

go. "I haven't had to wait at all. Why should I get off

so easily?"

"You're right," he agreed with amusement. "I should

make this harder for you, definitely." He freed one of

his hands, released my wrist, only to gather it

carefully into his other hand. He stroked my wet hair

softly, from the top of my head to my waist. "You only

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have to risk your life every second you spend with me,

that's surely not much. You only have to turn your

back on nature, on humanity... what's that worth?"

"Very little — I don't feel deprived of anything."

"Not yet." And his voice was abruptly full of ancient

grief. I tried to pull back, to look in his face, but his

hand locked my wrists in an unbreakable hold.

"What — " I started to ask, when his body became

alert. I froze, but he suddenly released my hands, and

disappeared. I narrowly avoided falling on my face.

"Lie down!" he hissed. I couldn't tell where he spoke

from in the darkness.

I rolled under my quilt, balling up on my side, the

way I usually slept. I heard the door crack open, as

Charlie peeked in to make sure I was where I was

supposed to be. I breathed evenly, exaggerating the

movement. A long minute passed. I listened, not sure

if I'd heard the door close. Then Edward's cool arm

was around me, under the covers, his lips at my ear.

"You are a terrible actress — I'd say that career path

is out for you."

"Darn it," I muttered. My heart was crashing in my

chest. He hummed a melody I didn't recognize; it

sounded like a lullaby. He paused. "Should I sing you

to sleep?"

"Right," I laughed. "Like I could sleep with you here!"

"You do it all the time," he reminded me.

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"But I didn't know you were here," I replied icily.

"So if you don't want to sleep..." he suggested,

ignoring my tone. My breath caught.

"If I don't want to sleep... ?"

He chuckled. "What do you want to do then?"

I couldn't answer at first.

"I'm not sure," I finally said.

"Tell me when you decide."

I could feel his cool breath on my neck, feel his nose

sliding along my jaw, inhaling.

"I thought you were desensitized."

"Just because I'm resisting the wine doesn't mean I

can't appreciate the bouquet," he whispered. "You

have a very floral smell, like lavender... or freesia," he

noted. "It's mouthwatering."

"Yeah, it's an off day when I don't get somebody

telling me how edible I smell."

He chuckled, and then sighed.

"I've decided what I want to do," I told him. "I want to

hear more about you."

"Ask me anything."

I sifted through my questions for the most vital. "Why

do you do it?" I said. "I still don't understand how you

can work so hard to resist what you... are. Please

don't misunderstand, of course I'm glad that you do. I

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just don't see why you would bother in the first

place." He hesitated before answering. "That's a good

question, and you are not the first one to ask it. The

others — the majority of our kind who are quite

content with our lot — they, too, wonder at how we

live. But you see, just because we've been... dealt a

certain hand... it doesn't mean that we can't choose

to rise above — to conquer the boundaries of a

destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain

whatever essential humanity we can."

I lay unmoving, locked in awed silence.

"Did you fall asleep?" he whispered after a few

minutes.

"No."

"Is that all you were curious about?"

I rolled my eyes. "Not quite."

"What else do you want to know?"

"Why can you read minds — why only you? And Alice,

seeing the future... why does that happen?"

I felt him shrug in the darkness. "We don't really

know. Carlisle has a theory. . . he believes that we all

bring something of our strongest human traits with

us into the next life, where they are intensified — like

our minds, and our senses. He thinks that I must

have already been very sensitive to the thoughts of

those around me. And that Alice had some

precognition, wherever she was."

"What did he bring into the next life, and the others?"

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"Carlisle brought his compassion. Esme brought her

ability to love passionately. Emmett brought his

strength, Rosalie her... tenacity. Or you could call it

pigheadedness." he chuckled. "Jasper is very

interesting. He was quite charismatic in his first life,

able to influence those around him to see things his

way. Now he is able to manipulate the emotions of

those around him — calm down a room of angry

people, for example, or excite a lethargic crowd,

conversely. It's a very subtle gift."

I considered the impossibilities he described, trying to

take it in. He waited patiently while I thought.

"So where did it all start? I mean, Carlisle changed

you, and then someone must have changed him, and

so on..."

"Well, where did you come from? Evolution? Creation?

Couldn't we have evolved in the same way as other

species, predator and prey? Or, if you don't believe

that all this world could have just happened on its

own, which is hard for me to accept myself, is it so

hard to believe that the same force that created the

delicate angelfish with the shark, the baby seal and

the killer whale, could create both our kinds

together?"

"Let me get this straight — I'm the baby seal, right?"

"Right." He laughed, and something touched my hair

— his lips?

I wanted to turn toward him, to see if it was really his

lips against my hair. But I had to be good; I didn't

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want to make this any harder for him than it already

was.

"Are you ready to sleep?" he asked, interrupting the

short silence. "Or do you have any more questions?"

"Only a million or two."

"We have tomorrow, and the next day, and the next..."

he reminded me. I smiled, euphoric at the thought.

"Are you sure you won't vanish in the morning?" I

wanted this to be certain. "You are mythical, after all."

"I won't leave you." His voice had the seal of a promise

in it.

"One more, then, tonight..." And I blushed. The

darkness was no help — I'm sure he could feel the

sudden warmth under my skin.

"What is it?"

"No, forget it. I changed my mind."

"Bella, you can ask me anything."

I didn't answer, and he groaned.

"I keep thinking it will get less frustrating, not hearing

your thoughts. But it just gets worse and worse."

"I'm glad you can't read my thoughts. It's bad enough

that you eavesdrop on my sleep-talking."

"Please?" His voice was so persuasive, so impossible

to resist. I shook my head.

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"If you don't tell me, I'll just assume it's something

much worse than it is," he threatened darkly.

"Please?" Again, that pleading voice.

"Well," I began, glad that he couldn't see my face.

"Yes?"

"You said that Rosalie and Emmett will get married

soon... Is that...

marriage... the same as it is for humans?"

He laughed in earnest now, understanding. "Is that

what you're getting at?"

I fidgeted, unable to answer.

"Yes, I suppose it is much the same," he said. "I told

you, most of those human desires are there, just

hidden behind more powerful desires."

"Oh," was all I could say.

"Was there a purpose behind your curiosity?"

"Well, I did wonder... about you and me... someday..."

He was instantly serious, I could tell by the sudden

stillness of his body. I froze, too, reacting

automatically.

"I don't think that... that... would be possible for us."

"Because it would be too hard for you, if I were that...

close?"

"That's certainly a problem. But that's not what I was

thinking of. It's just that you are so soft, so fragile. I

have to mind my actions every moment that we're

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together so that I don't hurt you. I could kill you quite

easily, Bella, simply by accident." His voice had

become just a soft murmur. He moved his icy palm to

rest it against my cheek. "If I was too hasty... if for

one second I wasn't paying enough attention, I could

reach out, meaning to touch your face, and crush

your skull by mistake. You don't realize how

incredibly breakable you are. I can never, never afford

to lose any kind of control when I'm with you." He

waited for me to respond, growing anxious when I

didn't. "Are you scared?" he asked.

I waited for a minute to answer, so the words would

be true. "No. I'm fine."

He seemed to deliberate for a moment. "I'm curious

now, though," he said, his voice light again. "Have you

ever... ?" He trailed off suggestively.

"Of course not." I flushed. "I told you I've never felt

like this about anyone before, not even close."

"I know. It's just that I know other people's thoughts.

I know love and lust don't always keep the same

company."

"They do for me. Now, anyway, that they exist for me

at all," I sighed.

"That's nice. We have that one thing in common, at

least." He sounded satisfied.

"Your human instincts..." I began. He waited. "Well,

do you find me attractive, in that way, at all?"

He laughed and lightly rumpled my nearly dry hair.

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"I may not be a human, but I am a man," he assured

me. I yawned involuntarily.

"I've answered your questions, now you should sleep,"

he insisted.

"I'm not sure if I can."

"Do you want me to leave?"

"No!" I said too loudly.

He laughed, and then began to hum that same,

unfamiliar lullaby; the voice of an archangel, soft in

my ear.

More tired than I realized, exhausted from the long

day of mental and emotional stress like I'd never felt

before, I drifted to sleep in his cold arms.

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Chapter 13

The muted light of yet another cloudy day eventually

woke me. I lay with my arm across my eyes, groggy

and dazed. Something, a dream trying to be

remembered, struggled to break into my

consciousness. I moaned and rolled on my side,

hoping more sleep would come. And then the previous

day flooded back into my awareness.

"Oh!" I sat up so fast it made my head spin.

"Your hair looks like a haystack... but I like it." His

unruffled voice came from the rocking chair in the

corner.

"Edward! You stayed!" I rejoiced, and thoughtlessly

threw myself across the room and into his lap. In the

instant that my thoughts caught up with my actions,

I froze, shocked by my own uncontrolled enthusiasm.

I stared up at him, afraid that I had crossed the

wrong line.

But he laughed.

"Of course," he answered, startled, but seeming

pleased by my reaction. His hands rubbed my back.

I laid my head cautiously against his shoulder,

breathing in the smell of his skin.

"I was sure it was a dream."

"You're not that creative," he scoffed.

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"Charlie!" I remembered, thoughtlessly jumping up

again and heading to the door.

"He left an hour ago — after reattaching your battery

cables, I might add. I have to admit I was

disappointed. Is that really all it would take to stop

you, if you were determined to go?"

I deliberated where I stood, wanting to return to him

badly, but afraid I might have morning breath.

"You're not usually this confused in the morning," he

noted. He held his arms open for me to return. A

nearly irresistible invitation.

"I need another human minute," I admitted.

"I'll wait."

I skipped to the bathroom, my emotions

unrecognizable. I didn't know myself, inside or out.

The face in the mirror was practically a stranger

— eyes too bright, hectic spots of red across my

cheekbones. After I brushed my teeth, I worked to

straighten out the tangled chaos that was my hair. I

splashed my face with cold water, and tried to breathe

normally, with no noticeable success. I half- ran back

to my room. It seemed like a miracle that he was

there, his arms still waiting for me. He reached out to

me, and my heart thumped unsteadily.

"Welcome back," he murmured, taking me into his

arms. He rocked me for a while in silence, until I

noticed that his clothes were changed, his hair

smooth.

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"You left?" I accused, touching the collar of his fresh

shirt.

"I could hardly leave in the clothes I came in — what

would the neighbors think?"

I pouted.

"You were very deeply asleep; I didn't miss anything."

His eyes gleamed.

"The talking came earlier."

I groaned. "What did you hear?"

His gold eyes grew very soft. "You said you loved me."

"You knew that already," I reminded him, ducking my

head.

"It was nice to hear, just the same."

I hid my face against his shoulder.

"I love you," I whispered.

"You are my life now," he answered simply.

There was nothing more to say for the moment. He

rocked us back and forth as the room grew lighter.

"Breakfast time," he said eventually, casually — to

prove, I'm sure, that he remembered all my human

frailties.

So I clutched my throat with both hands and stared

at him with wide eyes. Shock crossed his face.

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"Kidding!" I snickered. "And you said I couldn't act!"

He frowned in disgust. "That wasn't funny."

"It was very funny, and you know it." But I examined

his gold eyes carefully, to make sure that I was

forgiven. Apparently, I was.

"Shall I rephrase?" he asked. "Breakfast time for the

human."

"Oh, okay."

He threw me over his stone shoulder, gently, but with

a swiftness that left me breathless. I protested as he

carried me easily down the stairs, but he ignored me.

He sat me right side up on a chair.

The kitchen was bright, happy, seeming to absorb my

mood.

"What's for breakfast?" I asked pleasantly.

That threw him for a minute.

"Er, I'm not sure. What would you like?" His marble

brow puckered. I grinned, hopping up.

"That's all right, I fend for myself pretty well. Watch

me hunt." I found a bowl and a box of cereal. I could

feel his eyes on me as I poured the milk and grabbed

a spoon. I sat my food on the table, and then paused.

"Can I get you anything?" I asked, not wanting to be

rude. He rolled his eyes. "Just eat, Bella."

I sat at the table, watching him as I took a bite. He

was gazing at me, studying my every movement. It

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made me self-conscious. I cleared my mouth to speak,

to distract him.

"What's on the agenda for today?" I asked.

"Hmmm..." I watched him frame his answer carefully.

"What would you say to meeting my family?"

I gulped.

"Are you afraid now?" He sounded hopeful.

"Yes," I admitted; how could I deny it — he could see

my eyes.

"Don't worry." He smirked. "I'll protect you."

"I'm not afraid of them," I explained. "I'm afraid they

won't... like me. Won't they be, well, surprised that

you would bring someone... like me...

home to meet them? Do they know that I know about

them?"

"Oh, they already know everything. They'd taken bets

yesterday, you know"

— he smiled, but his voice was harsh — "on whether

I'd bring you back, though why anyone would bet

against Alice, I can't imagine. At any rate, we don't

have secrets in the family. It's not really feasible, what

with my mind reading and Alice seeing the future and

all that."

"And Jasper making you feel all warm and fuzzy

about spilling your guts, don't forget that."

"You paid attention," he smiled approvingly.

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"I've been known to do that every now and then." I

grimaced. "So did Alice see me coming?"

His reaction was strange. "Something like that," he

said uncomfortably, turning away so I couldn't see his

eyes. I stared at him curiously.

"Is that any good?" he asked, turning back to me

abruptly and eyeing my breakfast with a teasing look

on his face. "Honestly, it doesn't look very appetizing."

"Well, it's no irritable grizzly..." I murmured, ignoring

him when he glowered. I was still wondering why he

responded that way when I mentioned Alice. I hurried

through my cereal, speculating. He stood in the

middle of the kitchen, the statue of Adonis again,

staring abstractedly out the back windows.

Then his eyes were back on me, and he smiled his

heartbreaking smile.

"And you should introduce me to your father, too, I

think."

"He already knows you," I reminded him.

"As your boyfriend, I mean."

I stared at him with suspicion. "Why?"

"Isn't that customary?" he asked innocently.

"I don't know," I admitted. My dating history gave me

few reference points to work with. Not that any

normal rules of dating applied here.

"That's not necessary, you know. I don't expect you

to... I mean, you don't have to pretend for me."

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His smile was patient. "I'm not pretending."

I pushed the remains of my cereal around the edges

of the bowl, biting my lip.

"Are you going to tell Charlie I'm your boyfriend or

not?" he demanded.

"Is that what you are?" I suppressed my internal

cringing at the thought of Edward and Charlie and

the word boy friend all in the same room at the same

time.

"It's a loose interpretation of the word 'boy,' I'll admit."

"I was under the impression that you were something

more, actually," I confessed, looking at the table.

"Well, I don't know if we need to give him all the gory

details." He reached across the table to lift my chin

with a cold, gentle finger. "But he will need some

explanation for why I'm around here so much. I don't

want Chief Swan getting a restraining order put on

me."

"Will you be?" I asked, suddenly anxious. "Will you

really be here?"

"As long as you want me," he assured me.

"I'll always want you," I warned him. "Forever." He

walked slowly around the table, and, pausing a few

feet away, he reached out to touch his fingertips to

my cheek. His expression was unfathomable.

"Does that make you sad?" I asked.

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He didn't answer. He stared into my eyes for an

immeasurable period of time.

"Are you finished?" he finally asked.

I jumped up. "Yes."

"Get dressed — I'll wait here."

It was hard to decide what to wear. I doubted there

were any etiquette books detailing how to dress when

your vampire sweetheart takes you home to meet his

vampire family. It was a relief to think the word to

myself. I knew I shied away from it intentionally.

I ended up in my only skirt — long, khaki-colored,

still casual. I put on the dark blue blouse he'd once

complimented. A quick glance in the mirror told me

my hair was entirely impossible, so I pulled it back

into a pony tail.

"Okay." I bounced down the stairs. "I'm decent." He

was waiting at the foot of the stairs, closer than I'd

thought, and I bounded right into him. He steadied

me, holding me a careful distance away for a few

seconds before suddenly pulling me closer.

"Wrong again," he murmured in my ear. "You are

utterly indecent — no one should look so tempting,

it's not fair."

"Tempting how?" I asked. "I can change..." He sighed,

shaking his head. "You are so absurd." He pressed his

cool lips delicately to my forehead, and the room

spun. The smell of his breath made it impossible to

think.

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"Shall I explain how you are tempting me?" he said. It

was clearly a rhetorical question. His fingers traced

slowly down my spine, his breath coming more

quickly against my skin. My hands were limp on his

chest, and I felt lightheaded again. He tilted his head

slowly and touched his cool lips to mine for the

second time, very carefully, parting them slightly. And

then I collapsed.

"Bella?" His voice was alarmed as he caught me and

held me up.

"You... made... me... faint," I accused him dizzily.

"What am I going to do with you?" he groaned in

exasperation. "Yesterday I kiss you, and you attack

me! Today you pass out on me!" I laughed weakly,

letting his arms support me while my head spun.

"So much for being good at everything," he sighed.

"That's the problem." I was still dizzy. "You're too

good. Far, far too good."

"Do you feel sick?" he asked; he'd seen me like this

before.

"No — that wasn't the same kind of fainting at all. I

don't know what happened." I shook my head

apologeticallv, "I think I forgot to breathe."

"I can't take you anywhere like this."

"I'm fine," I insisted. "Your family is going to think I'm

insane anyway, what's the difference?"

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He measured my expression for a moment. "I'm very

partial to that color with your skin," he offered

unexpectedly. I flushed with pleasure, and looked

away.

"Look, I'm trying really hard not to think about what

I'm about to do, so can we go already?" I asked.

"And you're worried, not because you're headed to

meet a houseful of vampires, but because you think

those vampires won't approve of you, correct?"

"That's right," I answered immediately, hiding my

surprise at his casual use of the word.

He shook his head. "You're incredible."

I realized, as he drove my truck out of the main part

of town, that I had no idea where he lived. We passed

over the bridge at the Calawah River, the road

winding northward, the houses flashing past us

growing farther apart, getting bigger. And then we

were past the other houses altogether, driving

through misty forest. I was trying to decide whether to

ask or be patient, when he turned abruptly onto an

unpaved road. It was unmarked, barely visible among

the ferns. The forest encroached on both sides,

leaving the road ahead only discernible for a few

meters as it twisted, serpentlike, around the ancient

trees.

And then, after a few miles, there was some thinning

of the woods, and we were suddenly in a small

meadow, or was it actually a lawn? The gloom of the

forest didn't relent, though, for there were six

primordial cedars that shaded an entire acre with

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their vast sweep of branches. The trees held their

protecting shadow right up to the walls of the house

that rose among them, making obsolete the deep

porch that wrapped around the first story.

I don't know what I had expected, but it definitely

wasn't this. The house was timeless, graceful, and

probably a hundred years old. It was painted a soft,

faded white, three stories tall, rectangular and well

proportioned. The windows and doors were either part

of the original structure or a perfect restoration. My

truck was the only car in sight. I could hear the river

close by, hidden in the obscurity of the forest.

"Wow."

"You like it?" He smiled.

"It... has a certain charm."

He pulled the end of my ponytail and chuckled.

"Ready?" he asked, opening my door.

"Not even a little bit — let's go." I tried to laugh, but it

seemed to get stuck in my throat. I smoothed my hair

nervously.

"You look lovely." He took my hand easily, without

thinking about it. We walked through the deep shade

up to the porch. I knew he could feel my tension; his

thumb rubbed soothing circles into the back of my

hand. He opened the door for me.

The inside was even more surprising, less predictable,

than the exterior. It was very bright, very open, and

very large. This must have originally been several

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rooms, but the walls had been removed from most of

the first floor to create one wide space. The back,

south-facing wall had been entirely replaced with

glass, and, beyond the shade of the cedars, the lawn

stretched bare to the wide river. A massive curving

staircase dominated the west side of the room. The

walls, the high-beamed ceiling, the wooden floors, and

the thick carpets were all varying shades of white.

Waiting to greet us, standing just to the left of the

door, on a raised portion of the floor by a spectacular

grand piano, were Edward's parents. I'd seen Dr.

Cullen before, of course, yet I couldn't help but be

struck again by his youth, his outrageous perfection.

At his side was Esme, I assumed, the only one of the

family I'd never seen before. She had the same pale,

beautiful features as the rest of them. Something

about her heart-shaped face, her billows of soft,

caramel-colored hair, reminded me of the ingenues of

the silent-movie era. She was small, slender, yet less

angular, more rounded than the others. They were

both dressed casually, in light colors that matched

the inside of the house. They smiled in welcome, but

made no move to approach us. Trying not to frighten

me, I guessed.

"Carlisle, Esme," Edward's voice broke the short

silence, "this is Bella."

"You're very welcome, Bella." Carlisle's step was

measured, careful as he approached me. He raised

his hand tentatively, and I stepped forward to shake

hands with him.

"It's nice to see you again, Dr. Cullen."

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"Please, call me Carlisle."

"Carlisle." I grinned at him, my sudden confidence

surprising me. I could feel Edward's relief at my side.

Esme smiled and stepped forward as well, reaching

for my hand. Her cold, stone grasp was just as I

expected.

"It's very nice to know you," she said sincerely.

"Thank you. I'm glad to meet you, too." And I was. It

was like meeting a fairy tale — Snow White, in the

flesh.

"Where are Alice and Jasper?" Edward asked, but no

one answered, as they had just appeared at the top of

the wide staircase.

"Hey, Edward!" Alice called enthusiastically. She ran

down the stairs, a streak of black hair and white skin,

coming to a sudden and graceful stop in front of me.

Carlisle and Esme shot warning glances at her, but I

liked it. It was natural — for her, anyway.

"Hi, Bella!" Alice said, and she bounced forward to

kiss my cheek. If Carlisle and Esme had looked

cautious before, they now looked staggered. There

was shock in my eyes, too, but I was also very pleased

that she seemed to approve of me so entirely. I was

startled to feel Edward stiffen at my side. I glanced at

his face, but his expression was unreadable.

"You do smell nice, I never noticed before," she

commented, to my extreme embarrassment.

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No one else seemed to know quite what to say, and

then Jasper was there —

tall and leonine. A feeling of ease spread through me,

and I was suddenly comfortable despite where I was.

Edward stared at Jasper, raising one eyebrow, and I

remembered what Jasper could do.

"Hello, Bella," Jasper said. He kept his distance, not

offering to shake my hand. But it was impossible to

feel awkward near him.

"Hello, Jasper." I smiled at him shyly, and then at the

others. "It's nice to meet you all — you have a very

beautiful home," I added conventionally.

"Thank you," Esme said. "We’re so glad that you

came." She spoke with feeling, and I realized that she

thought I was brave.

I also realized that Rosalie and Emmett were nowhere

to be seen, and I remembered Edward's too-innocent

denial when I'd asked him if the others didn't like me.

Carlisle's expression distracted me from this train of

thought; he was gazing meaningfully at Edward with

an intense expression. Out of the corner of my eye, I

saw Edward nod once.

I looked away, trying to be polite. My eyes wandered

again to the beautiful instrument on the platform by

the door. I suddenly remembered my childhood

fantasy that, should I ever win a lottery, I would buy a

grand piano for my mother. She wasn't really good —

she only played for herself on our secondhand upright

— but I loved to watch her play. She was happy,

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absorbed — she seemed like a new, mysterious being

to me then, someone outside the "mom" persona I

took for granted. She'd put me through lessons, of

course, but like most kids, I whined until she let me

quit.

Esme noticed my preoccupation.

"Do you play?" she asked, inclining her head toward

the piano. I shook my head. "Not at all. But it's so

beautiful. Is it yours?"

"No," she laughed. "Edward didn't tell you he was

musical?"

"No." I glared at his suddenly innocent expression

with narrowed eyes. "I should have known, I guess."

Esme raised her delicate eyebrows in confusion.

"Edward can do everything, right?" I explained.

Jasper snickered and Esme gave Edward a reproving

look.

"I hope you haven't been showing off — it's rude," she

scolded.

"Just a bit," he laughed freely. Her face softened at

the sound, and they shared a brief look that I didn't

understand, though Esme's face seemed almost

smug.

"He's been too modest, actually," I corrected.

"Well, play for her," Esme encouraged.

"You just said showing off was rude," he objected.

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"There are exceptions to every rule," she replied.

"I'd like to hear you play," I volunteered.

"It's settled then." Esme pushed him toward the

piano. He pulled me along, sitting me on the bench

beside him.

He gave me a long, exasperated look before he turned

to the keys. And then his fingers flowed swiftly across

the ivory, and the room was filled with a composition

so complex, so luxuriant, it was impossible to believe

only one set of hands played. I felt my chin drop, my

mouth open in astonishment, and heard low chuckles

behind me at my reaction. Edward looked at me

casually, the music still surging around us without a

break, and winked. "Do you like it?"

"You wrote this?" I gasped, understanding.

He nodded. "It's Esme's favorite."

I closed my eyes, shaking my head.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm feeling extremely insignificant."

The music slowed, transforming into something

softer, and to my surprise I detected the melody of his

lullaby weaving through the profusion of notes.

"You inspired this one," he said softly. The music

grew unbearably sweet. I couldn't speak.

"They like you, you know," he said conversationally.

"Esme especially." I glanced behind me, but the huge

room was empty now.

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"Where did they go?"

"Very subtly giving us some privacy, I suppose." I

sighed. "They like me. But Rosalie and Emmett..." I

trailed off, not sure how to express my doubts.

He frowned. "Don't worry about Rosalie," he said, his

eyes wide and persuasive. "She'll come around."

I pursed my lips skeptically. "Emmett?"

"Well, he thinks I'm a lunatic, it's true, but he doesn't

have a problem with you. He's trying to reason with

Rosalie."

"What is it that upsets her?" I wasn't sure if I wanted

to know the answer.

He sighed deeply. "Rosalie struggles the most with...

with what we are. It's hard for her to have someone

on the outside know the truth. And she's a little

jealous."

"Rosalie is jealous of me?" I asked incredulously. I

tried to imagine a universe in which someone as

breathtaking as Rosalie would have any possible

reason to feel jealous of someone like me.

"You're human." He shrugged. "She wishes that she

were, too."

"Oh," I muttered, still stunned. "Even Jasper,

though..."

"That's really my fault," he said. "I told you he was the

most recent to try our way of life. I warned him to

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keep his distance." I thought about the reason for

that, and shuddered.

"Esme and Carlisle... ?" I continued quickly, to keep

him from noticing.

"Are happy to see me happy. Actually, Esme wouldn't

care if you had a third eye and webbed feet. All this

time she's been worried about me, afraid that there

was something missing from my essential makeup,

that I was too young when Carlisle changed me...

She's ecstatic. Every time I touch you, she just about

chokes with satisfaction."

"Alice seems very... enthusiastic."

"Alice has her own way of looking at things," he said

through tight lips.

"And you're not going to explain that, are you?" A

moment of wordless communication passed between

us. He realized that I knew he was keeping something

from me. I realized that he wasn't going to give

anything away. Not now.

"So what was Carlisle telling you before?"

His eyebrows pulled together. "You noticed that, did

you?" I shrugged. "Of course."

He looked at me thoughtfully for a few seconds before

answering. "He wanted to tell me some news — he

didn't know if it was something I would share with

you."

"Will you?"

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"I have to, because I'm going to be a little...

overbearingly protective over the next few days — or

weeks — and I wouldn't want you to think I'm

naturally a tyrant."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, exactly. Alice just sees some

visitors coming soon. They know we're here, and

they're curious."

"Visitors?"

"Yes... well, they aren't like us, of course — in their

hunting habits, I mean. They probably won't come

into town at all, but I'm certainly not going to let you

out of my sight till they're gone." I shivered.

"Finally, a rational response!" he murmured. "I was

beginning to think you had no sense of self-

preservation at all."

I let that one pass, looking away, my eyes wandering

again around the spacious room.

He followed my gaze. "Not what you expected, is it?"

he asked, his voice smug.

"No," I admitted.

"No coffins, no piled skulls in the corners; I don't even

think we have cobwebs... what a disappointment this

must be for you," he continued slyly. I ignored his

teasing. "It's so light... so open." He was more serious

when he answered. "It's the one place we never have

to hide."

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The song he was still playing, my song, drifted to an

end, the final chords shifting to a more melancholy

key. The last note hovered poignantly in the silence.

"Thank you," I murmured. I realized there were tears

in my eyes. I dabbed at them, embarrassed.

He touched the corner of my eye, trapping one I

missed. He lifted his finger, examining the drop of

moisture broodingly. Then, so quickly I couldn't be

positive that he really did, he put his finger to his

mouth to taste it.

I looked at him questioningly, and he gazed back for a

long moment before he finally smiled.

"Do you want to see the rest of the house?"

"No coffins?" I verified, the sarcasm in my voice not

entirely masking the slight but genuine anxiety I felt.

He laughed, taking my hand, leading me away from

the piano.

"No coffins," he promised.

We walked up the massive staircase, my hand trailing

along the satin-smooth rail. The long hall at the top of

the stairs was paneled with a honey-colored wood, the

same as the floorboards.

"Rosalie and Emmett's room... Carlisle's office...

Alice's room..." He gestured as he led me past the

doors.

He would have continued, but I stopped dead at the

end of the hall, staring incredulously at the ornament

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hanging on the wall above my head. Edward chuckled

at my bewildered expression.

"You can laugh," he said. "It is sort of ironic." I didn't

laugh. My hand raised automatically, one finger

extended as if to touch the large wooden cross, its

dark patina contrasting with the lighter tone of the

wall. I didn't touch it, though I was curious if the

aged wood would feel as silky as it looked.

"It must be very old," I guessed.

He shrugged. "Early sixteen-thirties, more or less." I

looked away from the cross to stare at him.

"Why do you keep this here?" I wondered.

"Nostalgia. It belonged to Carlisle's father."

"He collected antiques?" I suggested doubtfully.

"No. He carved this himself. It hung on the wall above

the pulpit in the vicarage where he preached."

I wasn't sure if my face betrayed my shock, but I

returned to gazing at the simple, ancient cross, just in

case. I quickly did the mental math; the cross was

over three hundred and seventy years old. The silence

stretched on as I struggled to wrap my mind around

the concept of so many years.

"Are you all right?" He sounded worried.

"How old is Carlisle?" I asked quietly, ignoring his

question, still staring up.

"He just celebrated his three hundred and sixty-

second birthday," Edward said. I looked back at him,

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a million questions in my eyes. He watched me

carefully as he spoke.

"Carlisle was born in London, in the sixteen-forties,

he believes. Time wasn't marked as accurately then,

for the common people anyway. It was just before

Cromwell's rule, though."

I kept my face composed, aware of his scrutiny as I

listened. It was easier if I didn't try to believe.

"He was the only son of an Anglican pastor. His

mother died giving birth to him. His father was an

intolerant man. As the Protestants came into power,

he was enthusiastic in his persecution of Roman

Catholics and other religions. He also believed very

strongly in the reality of evil. He led hunts for witches,

werewolves... and vampires." I grew very still at the

word. I'm sure he noticed, but he went on without

pausing.

"They burned a lot of innocent people — of course the

real creatures that he sought were not so easy to

catch.

"When the pastor grew old, he placed his obedient son

in charge of the raids. At first Carlisle was a

disappointment; he was not quick to accuse, to see

demons where they did not exist. But he was

persistent, and more clever than his father. He

actually discovered a coven of true vampires that lived

hidden in the sewers of the city, only coming out by

night to hunt. In those days, when monsters were not

just myths and legends, that was the way many lived.

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"The people gathered their pitchforks and torches, of

course" — his brief laugh was darker now — "and

waited where Carlisle had seen the monsters exit into

the street. Eventually one emerged."

His voice was very quiet; I strained to catch the

words.

"He must have been ancient, and weak with hunger.

Carlisle heard him call out in Latin to the others

when he caught the scent of the mob. He ran through

the streets, and Carlisle — he was twenty-three and

very fast —

was in the lead of the pursuit. The creature could

have easily outrun them, but Carlisle thinks he was

too hungry, so he turned and attacked. He fell on

Carlisle first, but the others were close behind, and

he turned to defend himself. He killed two men, and

made off with a third, leaving Carlisle bleeding in the

street."

He paused. I could sense he was editing something,

keeping something from me.

"Carlisle knew what his father would do. The bodies

would be burned —

anything infected by the monster must be destroyed.

Carlisle acted instinctively to save his own life. He

crawled away from the alley while the mob followed

the fiend and his victim. He hid in a cellar, buried

himself in rotting potatoes for three days. It's a

miracle he was able to keep silent, to stay

undiscovered.

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"It was over then, and he realized what he had

become." I'm not sure what my face was revealing,

but he suddenly broke off.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm fine," I assured him. And, though I bit my lip in

hesitation, he must have seen the curiosity burning

in my eyes.

He smiled. "I expect you have a few more questions

for me."

"A few."

His smile widened over his brilliant teeth. He started

back down the hall, pulling me along by the hand.

"Come on, then," he encouraged. "I'll show you."

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He led me back to the room that he'd pointed out as

Carlisle's office. He paused outside the door for an

instant.

"Come in," Carlisle's voice invited.

Edward opened the door to a high-ceilinged room with

tall, west-facing windows. The walls were paneled

again, in a darker wood — where they were visible.

Most of the wall space was taken up by towering

bookshelves that reached high above my head and

held more books than I'd ever seen outside a library.

Carlisle sat behind a huge mahogany desk in a

leather chair. He was just placing a bookmark in the

pages of the thick volume he held. The room was how

I'd always imagined a college dean's would look —

only Carlisle looked too young to fit the part.

"What can I do for you?" he asked us pleasantly,

rising from his seat.

"I wanted to show Bella some of our history," Edward

said. "Well, your history, actually."

"We didn't mean to disturb you," I apologized.

"Not at all. Where are you going to start?"

"The Waggoner," Edward replied, placing one hand

lightly on my shoulder and spinning me around to

look back toward the door we'd just come through.

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Every time he touched me, in even the most casual

way, my heart had an audible reaction. It was more

embarrassing with Carlisle there. The wall we faced

now was different from the others. Instead of

bookshelves, this wall was crowded with framed

pictures of all sizes, some in vibrant colors, others

dull monochromes. I searched for some logic, some

binding motif the collection had in common, but I

found nothing in my hasty examination.

Edward pulled me toward the far left side, standing

me in front of a small square oil painting in a plain

wooden frame. This one did not stand out among the

bigger and brighter pieces; painted in varying tones of

sepia, it depicted a miniature city full of steeply

slanted roofs, with thin spires atop a few scattered

towers. A wide river filled the foreground, crossed by a

bridge covered with structures that looked like tiny

cathedrals.

"London in the sixteen-fifties," Edward said.

"The London of my youth," Carlisle added, from a few

feet behind us. I flinched; I hadn't heard him

approach. Edward squeezed my hand.

"Will you tell the story?" Edward asked. I twisted a

little to see Carlisle's reaction.

He met my glance and smiled. "I would," he replied.

"But I'm actually running a bit late. The hospital

called this morning — Dr. Snow is taking a sick day.

Besides, you know the stories as well as I do," he

added, grinning at Edward now.

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It was a strange combination to absorb — the

everyday concerns of the town doctor stuck in the

middle of a discussion of his early days in

seventeenth-century London.

It was also unsettling to know that he spoke aloud

only for my benefit. After another warm smile for me,

Carlisle left the room.

I stared at the little picture of Carlisle's hometown for

a long moment.

"What happened then?" I finally asked, staring up at

Edward, who was watching me. "When he realized

what had happened to him?" He glanced back to the

paintings, and I looked to see which image caught his

interest now. It was a larger landscape in dull fall

colors — an empty, shadowed meadow in a forest,

with a craggy peak in the distance.

"When he knew what he had become," Edward said

quietly, "he rebelled against it. He tried to destroy

himself. But that's not easily done."

"How?" I didn't mean to say it aloud, but the word

broke through my shock.

"He jumped from great heights," Edward told me, his

voice impassive. "He tried to drown himself in the

ocean... but he was young to the new life, and very

strong. It is amazing that he was able to resist...

feeding... while he was still so new. The instinct is

more powerful then, it takes over everything. But he

was so repelled by himself that he had the strength to

try to kill himself with starvation."

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"Is that possible?" My voice was faint.

"No, there are very few ways we can be killed." I

opened my mouth to ask, but he spoke before I could.

"So he grew very hungry, and eventually weak. He

strayed as far as he could from the human populace,

recognizing that his willpower was weakening, too.

For months he wandered by night, seeking the

loneliest places, loathing himself.

"One night, a herd of deer passed his hiding place. He

was so wild with thirst that he attacked without a

thought. His strength returned and he realized there

was an alternative to being the vile monster he feared.

Had he not eaten venison in his former life? Over the

next months his new philosophy was born. He could

exist without being a demon. He found himself again.

"He began to make better use of his time. He'd always

been intelligent, eager to learn. Now he had unlimited

time before him. He studied by night, planned by day.

He swam to France and — "

"He swam to France?"

"People swim the Channel all the time, Bella," he

reminded me patiently.

"That's true, I guess. It just sounded funny in that

context. Go on."

"Swimming is easy for us — "

"Everything is easy for you," I griped.

He waited, his expression amused.

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"I won't interrupt again, I promise."

He chuckled darkly, and finished his sentence.

"Because, technically, we don't need to breathe."

"You — "

"No, no, you promised." He laughed, putting his cold

finger lightly to my lips. "Do you want to hear the

story or not?"

"You can't spring something like that on me, and then

expect me not to say anything," I mumbled against

his finger.

He lifted his hand, moving it to rest against my neck.

The speed of my heart reacted to that, but I persisted.

"You don't have to breathe?" I demanded.

"No, it's not necessary. Just a habit." He shrugged.

"How long can you go... without breathing?"

"Indefinitely, I suppose; I don't know. It gets a bit

uncomfortable —

being without a sense of smell."

"A bit uncomfortable," I echoed.

I wasn't paying attention to my own expression, but

something in it made him grow somber. His hand

dropped to his side and he stood very still, his eyes

intent on my face. The silence lengthened. His

features were immobile as stone.

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"What is it?" I whispered, touching his frozen face. His

face softened under my hand, and he sighed. "I keep

waiting for it to happen."

"For what to happen?"

"I know that at some point, something I tell you or

something you see is going to be too much. And then

you'll run away from me, screaming as you go." He

smiled half a smile, but his eyes were serious. "I won’t

stop you. I want this to happen, because I want you

to be safe. And yet, I want to be with you. The two

desires are impossible to reconcile..." He trailed off,

staring at my face. Waiting.

"I'm not running anywhere," I promised.

"We’ll see," he said, smiling again.

I frowned at him. "So, go on — Carlisle was swimming

to France." He paused, getting back into his story.

Reflexively, his eyes flickered to another picture — the

most colorful of them all, the most ornately framed,

and the largest; it was twice as wide as the door it

hung next to. The canvas overflowed with bright

figures in swirling robes, writhing around long pillars

and off marbled balconies. I couldn't tell if it

represented Greek mythology, or if the characters

floating in the clouds above were meant to be biblical.

"Carlisle swam to France, and continued on through

Europe, to the universities there. By night he studied

music, science, medicine — and found his calling, his

penance, in that, in saving human lives." His

expression became awed, almost reverent. "I can't

adequately describe the struggle; it took Carlisle two

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centuries of torturous effort to perfect his self-control.

Now he is all but immune to the scent of human

blood, and he is able to do the work he loves without

agony. He finds a great deal of peace there, at the

hospital..." Edward stared off into space for a long

moment. Suddenly he seemed to recall his purpose.

He tapped his finger against the huge painting in

front of us.

"He was studying in Italy when he discovered the

others there. They were much more civilized and

educated than the wraiths of the London sewers." He

touched a comparatively sedate quartet of figures

painted on the highest balcony, looking down calmly

on the mayhem below them. I examined the grouping

carefully and realized, with a startled laugh, that I

recognized the golden-haired man.

"Solimena was greatly inspired by Carlisle's friends.

He often painted them as gods," Edward chuckled.

"Aro, Marcus, Caius," he said, indicating the other

three, two black-haired, one snowy-white. "Nighttime

patrons of the arts."

"What happened to them?" I wondered aloud, my

fingertip hovering a centimeter from the figures on the

canvas.

"They're still there." He shrugged. "As they have been

for who knows how many millennia. Carlisle stayed

with them only for a short time, just a few decades.

He greatly admired their civility, their refinement, but

they persisted in trying to cure his aversion to 'his

natural food source,' as they called it. They tried to

persuade him, and he tried to persuade them, to no

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avail. At that point, Carlisle decided to try the New

World. He dreamed of finding others like himself. He

was very lonely, you see.

"He didn't find anyone for a long time. But, as

monsters became the stuff of fairy tales, he found he

could interact with unsuspecting humans as if he

were one of them. He began practicing medicine. But

the companionship he craved evaded him; he couldn't

risk familiarity.

"When the influenza epidemic hit, he was working

nights in a hospital in Chicago. He'd been turning

over an idea in his mind for several years, and he had

almost decided to act — since he couldn't find a

companion, he would create one. He wasn't absolutely

sure how his own transformation had occurred, so he

was hesitant. And he was loath to steal anyone's life

the way his had been stolen. It was in that frame of

mind that he found me. There was no hope for me; I

was left in a ward with the dying. He had nursed my

parents, and knew I was alone. He decided to try..."

His voice, nearly a whisper now, trailed off. He stared

unseeingly through the west windows. I wondered

which images filled his mind now, Carlisle's memories

or his own. I waited quietly.

When he turned back to me, a gentle angel's smile lit

his expression.

"And so we've come full circle," he concluded.

"Have you always stayed with Carlisle, then?" I

wondered.

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"Almost always." He put his hand lightly on my waist

and pulled me with him as he walked through the

door. I stared back at the wall of pictures, wondering

if I would ever get to hear the other stories.

Edward didn't say any more as we walked down the

hall, so I asked,

"Almost?"

He sighed, seeming reluctant to answer. "Well, I had a

typical bout of rebellious adolescence — about ten

years after I was... born... created, whatever you want

to call it. I wasn't sold on his life of abstinence, and I

resented him for curbing my appetite. So I went off on

my own for a time."

"Really?" I was intrigued, rather than frightened, as I

perhaps should have been.

He could tell. I vaguely realized that we were headed

up the next flight of stairs, but I wasn't paying much

attention to my surroundings.

"That doesn't repulse you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I guess... it sounds reasonable."

He barked a laugh, more loudly than before. We were

at the top of the stairs now, in another paneled

hallway.

"From the time of my new birth," he murmured, "I

had the advantage of knowing what everyone around

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me was thinking, both human and non- human alike.

That's why it took me ten years to defy Carlisle — I

could read his perfect sincerity, understand exactly

why he lived the way he did.

"It took me only a few years to return to Carlisle and

recommit to his vision. I thought I would be exempt

from the... depression... that accompanies a

conscience. Because I knew the thoughts of my prey,

I could pass over the innocent and pursue only the

evil. If I followed a murderer down a dark alley where

he stalked a young girl — if I saved her, then surely I

wasn't so terrible."

I shivered, imagining only too clearly what he

described — the alley at night, the frightened girl, the

dark man behind her. And Edward, Edward as he

hunted, terrible and glorious as a young god,

unstoppable. Would she have been grateful, that girl,

or more frightened than before?

"But as time went on, I began to see the monster in

my eyes. I couldn't escape the debt of so much

human life taken, no matter how justified. And I went

back to Carlisle and Esme. They welcomed me back

like the prodigal. It was more than I deserved."

We'd come to a stop in front of the last door in the

hall.

"My room," he informed me, opening it and pulling me

through. His room faced south, with a wall-sized

window like the great room below. The whole back

side of the house must be glass. His view looked down

on the winding Sol Due River, across the untouched

forest to the Olympic Mountain range. The mountains

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were much closer than I would have believed. The

western wall was completely covered with shelf after

shelf of CDs. His room was better stocked than a

music store. In the corner was a sophisticated-looking

sound system, the kind I was afraid to touch because

I'd be sure to break something. There was no bed,

only a wide and inviting black leather sofa. The floor

was covered with a thick golden carpet, and the walls

were hung with heavy fabric in a slightly darker

shade.

"Good acoustics?" I guessed.

He chuckled and nodded.

He picked up a remote and turned the stereo on. It

was quiet, but the soft jazz number sounded like the

band was in the room with us. I went to look at his

mind-boggling music collection.

"How do you have these organized?" I asked, unable

to find any rhyme or reason to the titles.

He wasn't paying attention.

"Ummm, by year, and then by personal preference

within that frame," he said absently.

I turned, and he was looking at me with a peculiar

expression in his eyes.

"What?"

"I was prepared to feel... relieved. Having you know

about everything, not needing to keep secrets from

you. But I didn't expect to feel more than that. I like

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it. It makes me... happy." He shrugged, smiling

slightly.

"I'm glad," I said, smiling back. I'd worried that he

might regret telling me these things. It was good to

know that wasn't the case. But then, as his eyes

dissected my expression, his smile faded and his

forehead creased.

"You're still waiting for the running and the

screaming, aren't you?" I guessed.

A faint smile touched his lips, and he nodded.

"I hate to burst your bubble, but you're really not as

scary as you think you are. I don't find you scary at

all, actually," I lied casually. He stopped, raising his

eyebrows in blatant disbelief. Then he flashed a wide,

wicked smile.

"You really shouldn't have said that," he chuckled. He

growled, a low sound in the back of his throat; his

lips curled back over his perfect teeth. His body

shifted suddenly, half-crouched, tensed like a lion

about to pounce.

I backed away from him, glaring.

"You wouldn't."

I didn't see him leap at me — it was much too fast. I

only found myself suddenly airborne, and then we

crashed onto the sofa, knocking it into the wall. All

the while, his arms formed an iron cage of protection

around me — I was barely jostled. But I still was

gasping as I tried to right myself.

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He wasn't having that. He curled me into a ball

against his chest, holding me more securely than iron

chains. I glared at him in alarm, but he seemed well

in control, his jaw relaxed as he grinned, his eyes

bright only with humor.

"You were saying?" he growled playfully.

"That you are a very, very terrifying monster," I said,

my sarcasm marred a bit by my breathless voice.

"Much better," he approved.

"Um." I struggled. "Can I get up now?" He just

laughed.

"Can we come in?" a soft voice sounded from the hall.

I struggled to free myself, but Edward merely

readjusted me so that I was somewhat more

conventionally seated on his lap. I could see it was

Alice, then, and Jasper behind her in the doorway.

My cheeks burned, but Edward seemed at ease.

"Go ahead." Edward was still chuckling quietly. Alice

seemed to find nothing unusual in our embrace; she

walked — almost danced, her movements were so

graceful — to the center of the room, where she folded

herself sinuously onto the floor. Jasper, however,

paused at the door, his expression a trifle shocked.

He stared at Edward's face, and I wondered if he was

tasting the atmosphere with his unusual sensitivity.

"It sounded like you were having Bella for lunch, and

we came to see if you would share," Alice announced.

I stiffened for an instant, until I realized Edward was

grinning —

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whether at her comment or my response, I couldn't

tell.

"Sorry, I don't believe I have enough to spare," he

replied, his arms holding me recklessly close.

"Actually," Jasper said, smiling despite himself as he

walked into the room, "Alice says there's going to be a

real storm tonight, and Emmett wants to play ball.

Are you game?"

The words were all common enough, but the context

confused me. I gathered that Alice was a bit more

reliable than the weatherman, though. Edward's eyes

lit up, but he hesitated.

"Of course you should bring Bella," Alice chirped. I

thought I saw Jasper throw a quick glance at her.

"Do you want to go?" Edward asked me, excited, his

expression vivid.

"Sure." I couldn't disappoint such a face. "Um, where

are we going?"

"We have to wait for thunder to play ball — you'll see

why," he promised.

"Will I need an umbrella?"

They all three laughed aloud.

"Will she?" Jasper asked Alice.

"No." She was positive. "The storm will hit over town.

It should be dry enough in the clearing."

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"Good, then." The enthusiasm in Jasper's voice was

catching, naturally. I found myself eager, rather than

scared stiff.

"Let's go see if Carlisle will come." Alice bounded up

and to the door in a fashion that would break any

ballerina's heart.

"Like you don't know," Jasper teased, and they were

swiftly on their way. Jasper managed to

inconspicuously close the door behind them.

"What will we be playing?" I demanded.

"You will be watching," Edward clarified. "We will be

playing baseball." I rolled my eyes. "Vampires like

baseball?"

"It's the American pastime," he said with mock

solemnity.

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It was just beginning to drizzle when Edward turned

onto my street. Up until that moment, I'd had no

doubt that he'd be staying with me while I spent a few

interim hours in the real world.

And then I saw the black car, a weathered Ford,

parked in Charlie's driveway — and heard Edward

mutter something unintelligible in a low, harsh voice.

Leaning away from the rain under the shallow front

porch, Jacob Black stood behind his father's

wheelchair. Billy's face was impassive as stone as

Edward parked my truck against the curb. Jacob

stared down, his expression mortified.

Edward's low voice was furious. "This is crossing the

line."

"He came to warn Charlie?" I guessed, more horrified

than angry. Edward just nodded, answering Billy's

gaze through the rain with narrowed eyes.

I felt weak with relief that Charlie wasn't home yet.

"Let me deal with this," I suggested. Edward's black

glare made me anxious.

To my surprise, he agreed. "That's probably best. Be

careful, though. The child has no idea."

I bridled a little at the word child. "Jacob is not that

much younger than I am," I reminded him.

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He looked at me then, his anger abruptly fading. "Oh,

I know," he assured me with a grin.

I sighed and put my hand on the door handle.

"Get them inside," he instructed, "so I can leave. I'll be

back around dusk."

"Do you want my truck?" I offered, meanwhile

wondering how I would explain its absence to Charlie.

He rolled his eyes. "I could walk home faster than this

truck moves."

"You don’t have to leave," I said wistfully.

He smiled at my glum expression. "Actually, I do.

After you get rid of them" — he threw a dark glance in

the Blacks' direction — "you still have to prepare

Charlie to meet your new boyfriend." He grinned

widely, showing all of his teeth.

I groaned. "Thanks a lot."

He smiled the crooked smile that I loved. "I'll be back

soon," he promised. His eyes flickered back to the

porch, and then he leaned in to swiftly kiss me just

under the edge of my jaw. My heart lurched

frantically, and I, too, glanced toward the porch.

Billy's face was no longer impassive, and his hands

clutched at the armrests of his chair.

"Soon," I stressed as I opened the door and stepped

out into the rain. I could feel his eyes on my back as I

half-ran through the light sprinkle toward the porch.

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"Hey, Billy. Hi, Jacob." I greeted them as cheerfully as

I could manage.

"Charlie's gone for the day — I hope you haven't been

waiting long."

"Not long," Billy said in a subdued tone. His black

eyes were piercing.

"I just wanted to bring this up." He indicated a brown

paper sack resting in his lap.

"Thanks," I said, though I had no idea what it could

be. "Why don't you come in for a minute and dry off?"

I pretended to be oblivious to his intense scrutiny as I

unlocked the door, and waved them in ahead of me.

"Here, let me take that," I offered, turning to shut the

door. I allowed myself one last glance at Edward. He

was waiting, perfectly still, his eyes solemn.

"You'll want to put it in the fridge," Billy noted as he

handed me the package. "It's some of Harry

Clearwater's homemade fish fry — Charlie's favorite.

The fridge keeps it drier." He shrugged.

"Thanks," I repeated, but with feeling this time. "I was

running out of new ways to fix fish, and he's bound to

bring home more tonight."

"Fishing again?" Billy asked with a subtle gleam in his

eye. "Down at the usual spot? Maybe I'll run by and

see him."

"No," I quickly lied, my face going hard. "He was

headed someplace new...

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but I have no idea where."

He took in my changed expression, and it made him

thoughtful.

"Jake," he said, still appraising me. "Why don't you go

get that new picture of Rebecca out of the car? I'll

leave that for Charlie, too."

"Where is it?" Jacob asked, his voice morose. I

glanced at him, but he was staring at the floor, his

eyebrows pulling together.

"I think I saw it in the trunk," Billy said. "You may

have to dig for it." Jacob slouched back out into the

rain.

Billy and I faced each other in silence. After a few

seconds, the quiet started to feel awkward, so I

turned and headed to the kitchen. I could hear his

wet wheels squeak against the linoleum as he

followed. I shoved the bag onto the crowded top shelf

of the fridge, and spun around to confront him. His

deeply lined face was unreadable.

"Charlie won't be back for a long time." My voice was

almost rude. He nodded in agreement, but said

nothing.

"Thanks again for the fish fry," I hinted.

He continued nodding. I sighed and folded my arms

across my chest. He seemed to sense that I had given

up on small talk. "Bella," he said, and then he

hesitated.

I waited.

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"Bella," he said again, "Charlie is one of my best

friends."

"Yes."

He spoke each word carefully in his rumbling voice. "I

noticed you've been spending time with one of the

Cullens."

"Yes," I repeated curtly.

His eyes narrowed. "Maybe it's none of my business,

but I don't think that is such a good idea."

"You're right," I agreed. "It is none of your business."

He raised his graying eyebrows at my tone. "You

probably don't know this, but the Cullen family has

an unpleasant reputation on the reservation."

"Actually, I did know that," I informed him in a hard

voice. This surprised him. "But that reputation

couldn't be deserved, could it?

Because the Cullens never set foot on the reservation,

do they?" I could see that my less than subtle

reminder of the agreement that both bound and

protected his tribe pulled him up short.

"That's true," he acceded, his eyes guarded. "You

seem... well informed about the Cullens. More

informed than I expected."

I stared him down. "Maybe even better informed than

you are." He pursed his thick lips as he considered

that. "Maybe." he allowed, but his eyes were shrewd.

"Is Charlie as well informed?" He had found the weak

chink in my armor.

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"Charlie likes the Cullens a lot," I hedged. He clearly

understood my evasion. His expression was unhappy,

but unsurprised.

"It's not my business," he said. "But it may be

Charlie's."

"Though it would be my business, again, whether or

not I think that it's Charlie's business, right?"

I wondered if he even understood my confused

question as I struggled not to say anything

compromising. But he seemed to. He thought about it

while the rain picked up against the roof, the only

sound breaking the silence.

"Yes," he finally surrendered. "I guess that's your

business, too." I sighed with relief. "Thanks, Billy."

"Just think about what you're doing, Bella," he urged.

"Okay," I agreed quickly.

He frowned. "What I meant to say was, don't do what

you're doing." I looked into his eyes, filled with

nothing but concern for me, and there was nothing I

could say.

Just then the front door banged loudly, and I jumped

at the sound.

"There's no picture anywhere in that car." Jacob's

complaining voice reached us before he did. The

shoulders of his shirt were stained with the rain, his

hair dripping, when he rounded the corner.

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"Hmm," Billy grunted, suddenly detached, spinning

his chair around to face his son. "I guess I left it at

home."

Jacob rolled his eyes dramatically. "Great."

"Well, Bella, tell Charlie" — Billy paused before

continuing — "that we stopped by, I mean."

"I will," I muttered.

Jacob was surprised. "Are we leaving already?"

"Charlie's gonna be out late," Billy explained as he

rolled himself past Jacob.

"Oh." Jacob looked disappointed. "Well, I guess I'll see

you later, then, Bella."

"Sure," I agreed.

"Take care," Billy warned me. I didn't answer.

Jacob helped his father out the door. I waved briefly,

glancing swiftly toward my now-empty truck, and

then shut the door before they were gone. I stood in

the hallway for a minute, listening to the sound of

their car as it backed out and drove away. I stayed

where I was, waiting for the irritation and anxiety to

subside. When the tension eventually faded a bit, I

headed upstairs to change out of my dressy clothes. I

tried on a couple of different tops, not sure what to

expect tonight. As I concentrated on what was

coming, what had just passed became insignificant.

Now that I was removed from Jasper's and Edward's

influence, I began to make up for not being terrified

before. I gave up quickly on choosing an outfit —

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throwing on an old flannel shirt and jeans — knowing

I would be in my raincoat all night anyway. The

phone rang and I sprinted downstairs to get it. There

was only one voice I wanted to hear; anything else

would be a disappointment. But I knew that if he

wanted to talk to me, he'd probably just materialize in

my room.

"Hello?" I asked, breathless.

"Bella? It's me," Jessica said.

"Oh, hey, Jess." I scrambled for a moment to come

back down to reality. It felt like months rather than

days since I'd spoken to Jess. "How was the dance?"

"It was so much fun!" Jessica gushed. Needing no

more invitation than that, she launched into a

minute-by-minute account of the previous night. I

mmm'd and ahh'd at the right places, but it wasn't

easy to concentrate. Jessica, Mike, the dance, the

school — they all seemed strangely irrelevant at the

moment. My eyes kept flashing to the window, trying

to judge the degree of light behind the heavy clouds.

"Did you hear what I said, Bella?" Jess asked,

irritated.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"I said, Mike kissed me! Can you believe it?"

"That's wonderful, Jess," I said.

"So what did you do yesterday?" Jessica challenged,

still sounding bothered by my lack of attention. Or

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maybe she was upset because I hadn't asked for

details.

"Nothing, really. I just hung around outside to enjoy

the sun." I heard Charlie's car in the garage.

"Did you ever hear anything more from Edward

Cullen?" The front door slammed and I could hear

Charlie banging around under the stairs, putting his

tackle away.

"Um." I hesitated, not sure what my story was

anymore.

"Hi there, kiddo!" Charlie called as he walked into the

kitchen. I waved at him.

Jess heard his voice. "Oh, your dad's there. Never

mind — we'll talk tomorrow. See you in Trig."

"See ya, Jess." I hung up the phone.

"Hey, Dad," I said. He was scrubbing his hands in the

sink. "Where's the fish?"

"I put it out in the freezer."

"I'll go grab a few pieces before they freeze — Billy

dropped off some of Harry Clearwater's fish fry this

afternoon." I worked to sound enthusiastic.

"He did?" Charlie's eyes lit up. "That's my favorite."

Charlie cleaned up while I got dinner ready. It didn't

take long till we were sitting at the table, eating in

silence. Charlie was enjoying his food. I was

wondering desperately how to fulfill my assignment,

struggling to think of a way to broach the subject.

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"What did you do with yourself today?" he asked,

snapping me out of my reverie.

"Well, this afternoon I just hung out around the

house..." Only the very recent part of this afternoon,

actually. I tried to keep my voice upbeat, but my

stomach was hollow. "And this morning I was over at

the Cullens'." Charlie dropped his fork.

"Dr. Cullen's place?" he asked in astonishment. I

pretended not to notice his reaction. "Yeah."

"What were you doing there?" He hadn't picked his

fork back up.

"Well, I sort of have a date with Edward Cullen

tonight, and he wanted to introduce me to his

parents... Dad?"

It appeared that Charlie was having an aneurysm.

"Dad, are you all right?"

"You are going out with Edward Cullen?" he

thundered. Uh-oh. "I thought you liked the Cullens."

"He's too old for you," he ranted.

"We're both juniors," I corrected, though he was more

right than he dreamed.

"Wait..." He paused. "Which one is Edwin?"

"Edward is the youngest, the one with the reddish

brown hair." The beautiful one, the godlike one...

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"Oh, well, that's" — he struggled — "better, I guess. I

don't like the look of that big one. I'm sure he's a nice

boy and all, but he looks too...

mature for you. Is this Edwin your boyfriend?"

"It's Edward, Dad."

"Is he?"

"Sort of, I guess."

"You said last night that you weren't interested in any

of the boys in town." But he picked up his fork again,

so I could see the worst was over.

"Well, Edward doesn't live in town, Dad."

He gave me a disparaging look as he chewed.

"And, anyways," I continued, "it's kind of at an early

stage, you know. Don't embarrass me with all the

boyfriend talk, okay?"

"When is he coming over?"

"He'll be here in a few minutes."

"Where is he taking you?"

I groaned loudly. "I hope you're getting the Spanish

Inquisition out of your system now. We're going to

play baseball with his family." His face puckered, and

then he finally chuckled. "You're playing baseball?"

"Well, I'll probably watch most of the time."

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"You must really like this guy," he observed

suspiciously. I sighed and rolled my eyes for his

benefit.

I heard the roar of an engine pull up in front of the

house. I jumped up and started cleaning my dishes.

"Leave the dishes, I can do them tonight. You baby

me too much." The doorbell rang, and Charlie stalked

off to answer it. I was half a step behind him.

I hadn't realized how hard it was pouring outside.

Edward stood in the halo of the porch light, looking

like a male model in an advertisement for raincoats.

"Come on in, Edward."

I breathed a sigh of relief when Charlie got his name

right.

"Thanks, Chief Swan," Edward said in a respectful

voice.

"Go ahead and call me Charlie. Here, I'll take your

jacket."

"Thanks, sir."

"Have a seat there, Edward."

I grimaced.

Edward sat down fluidly in the only chair, forcing me

to sit next to Chief Swan on the sofa. I quickly shot

him a dirty look. He winked behind Charlie's back.

"So I hear you're getting my girl to watch baseball."

Only in Washington would the fact that it was raining

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buckets have no bearing at all on the playing of

outdoor sports.

"Yes, sir, that's the plan." He didn't look surprised

that I'd told my father the truth. He might have been

listening, though.

"Well, more power to you, I guess."

Charlie laughed, and Edward joined in.

"Okay." I stood up. "Enough humor at my expense.

Let's go." I walked back to the hall and pulled on my

jacket. They followed.

"Not too late, Bell."

"Don't worry, Charlie, I'll have her home early,"

Edward promised.

"You take care of my girl, all right?"

I groaned, but they ignored me.

"She'll be safe with me, I promise, sir."

Charlie couldn't doubt Edward's sincerity, it rang in

every word. I stalked out. They both laughed, and

Edward followed me. I stopped dead on the porch.

There, behind my truck, was a monster Jeep. Its tires

were higher than my waist. There were metal guards

over the headlights and tail-lights, and four large

spotlights attached to the crash bar. The hardtop was

shiny red.

Charlie let out a low whistle.

"Wear your seat belts," he choked out.

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Edward followed me around to my side and opened

the door. I gauged the distance to the seat and

prepared to jump for it. He sighed, and then lifted me

in with one hand. I hoped Charlie didn't notice. As he

went around to the driver's side, at a normal, human

pace, I tried to put on my seat belt. But there were too

many buckles.

"What's all this?" I asked when he opened the door.

"It's an off-roading harness."

"Uh-oh."

I tried to find the right places for all the buckles to fit,

but it wasn't going too quickly. He sighed again and

reached over to help me. I was glad that the rain was

too heavy to see Charlie clearly on the porch. That

meant he couldn't see how Edward's hands lingered

at my neck, brushed along my collarbones. I gave up

trying to help him and focused on not

hyperventilating.

Edward turned the key and the engine roared to life.

We pulled away from the house.

"This is a... um... big Jeep you have."

"It's Emmett's. I didn't think you'd want to run the

whole way."

"Where do you keep this thing?"

"We remodeled one of the outbuildings into a garage."

"Aren't you going to put on your seat belt?"

He threw me a disbelieving look.

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Then something sunk in.

"Run the whole way? As in, we're still going to run

part of the way?" My voice edged up a few octaves.

He grinned tightly. "You're not going to run."

"I'm going to be sick."

"Keep your eyes closed, you'll be fine."

I bit my lip, fighting the panic.

He leaned over to kiss the top of my head, and then

groaned. I looked at him, puzzled.

"You smell so good in the rain," he explained.

"In a good way, or in a bad way?" I asked cautiously.

He sighed. "Both, always both."

I don't know how he found his way in the gloom and

downpour, but he somehow found a side road that

was less of a road and more of a mountain path. For a

long while conversation was impossible, because I

was bouncing up and down on the seat like a

jackhammer. He seemed to enjoy the ride, though,

smiling hugely the whole way.

And then we came to the end of the road; the trees

formed green walls on three sides of the Jeep. The

rain was a mere drizzle, slowing every second, the sky

brighter through the clouds.

"Sorry, Bella, we have to go on foot from here."

"You know what? I'll just wait here."

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"What happened to all your courage? You were

extraordinary this morning."

"I haven't forgotten the last time yet." Could it have

been only yesterday?

He was around to my side of the car in a blur. He

started unbuckling me.

"I'll get those, you go on ahead," I protested.

"Hmmm..." he mused as he quickly finished. "It seems

I'm going to have to tamper with your memory."

Before I could react, he pulled me from the Jeep and

set my feet on the ground. It was barely misting now;

Alice was going to be right.

"Tamper with my memory?" I asked nervously.

"Something like that." He was watching me intently,

carefully, but there was humor deep in his eyes. He

placed his hands against the Jeep on either side of

my head and leaned forward, forcing me to press back

against the door. He leaned in even closer, his face

inches from mine. I had no room to escape.

"Now," he breathed, and just his smell disturbed my

thought processes,

"what exactly are you worrying about?"

"Well, um, hitting a tree — " I gulped " — and dying.

And then getting sick."

He fought back a smile. Then he bent his head down

and touched his cold lips softly to the hollow at the

base of my throat.

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"Are you still worried now?" he murmured against my

skin.

"Yes." I struggled to concentrate. "About hitting trees

and getting sick." His nose drew a line up the skin of

my throat to the point of my chin. His cold breath

tickled my skin.

"And now?" His lips whispered against my jaw.

"Trees," I gasped. "Motion sickness." He lifted his face

to kiss my eyelids. "Bella, you don't really think I

would hit a tree, do you?"

"No, but I might." There was no confidence in my

voice. He smelled an easy victory.

He kissed slowly down my cheek, stopping just at the

corner of my mouth.

"Would I let a tree hurt you?" His lips barely brushed

against my trembling lower lip.

"No," I breathed. I knew there was a second part to

my brilliant defense, but I couldn't quite call it back.

"You see," he said, his lips moving against mine.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, is there?"

"No," I sighed, giving up.

Then he took my face in his hands almost roughly,

and kissed me in earnest, his unyielding lips moving

against mine.

There really was no excuse for my behavior.

Obviously I knew better by now. And yet I couldn't

seem to stop from reacting exactly as I had the first

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time. Instead of keeping safely motionless, my arms

reached up to twine tightly around his neck, and I

was suddenly welded to his stone figure. I sighed, and

my lips parted.

He staggered back, breaking my grip effortlessly.

"Damn it, Bella!" he broke off, gasping. "You'll be the

death of me, I swear you will."

I leaned over, bracing my hands against my knees for

support.

"You're indestructible," I mumbled, trying to catch my

breath.

"I might have believed that before I met you. Now let's

get out of here before I do something really stupid," he

growled.

He threw me across his back as he had before, and I

could see the extra effort it took for him to be as

gentle as he was. I locked my legs around his waist

and secured my arms in a choke hold around his

neck.

"Don't forget to close your eyes," he warned severely. I

quickly tucked my face into his shoulder blade, under

my own arm, and squeezed my eyes shut.

And I could hardly tell we were moving. I could feel

him gliding along beneath me, but he could have been

strolling down the sidewalk, the movement was so

smooth. I was tempted to peek, just to see if he was

really flying through the forest like before, but I

resisted. It wasn't worth that awful dizziness. I

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contented myself with listening to his breath come

and go evenly.

I wasn't quite sure we had stopped until he reached

back and touched my hair.

"It's over, Bella."

I dared to open my eyes, and, sure enough, we were

at a standstill. I stiffly unlocked my stranglehold on

his body and slipped to the ground, landing on my

backside.

"Oh!" I huffed as I hit the wet ground.

He stared at me incredulously, evidently not sure

whether he was still too mad to find me funny. But

my bewildered expression pushed him over the edge,

and he broke into a roar of laughter.

I picked myself up, ignoring him as I brushed the

mud and bracken off the back of my jacket. That only

made him laugh harder. Annoyed, I began to stride off

into the forest.

I felt his arm around my waist.

"Where are you going, Bella?"

"To watch a baseball game. You don't seem to be

interested in playing anymore, but I'm sure the others

will have fun without you."

"You're going the wrong way."

I turned around without looking at him, and stalked

off in the opposite direction. He caught me again.

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"Don't be mad, I couldn't help myself. You should

have seen your face." He chuckled before he could

stop himself.

"Oh, you're the only one who's allowed to get mad?" I

asked, raising my eyebrows.

"I wasn't mad at you."

'"Bella, you'll be the death of me'?" I quoted sourly.

"That was simply a statement of fact."

I tried to turn away from him again, but he held me

fast.

"You were mad," I insisted.

"Yes."

"But you just said — "

"That I wasn't mad at you. Can't you see that, Bella?"

He was suddenly intense, all trace of teasing gone.

"Don't you understand?"

"See what?" I demanded, confused by his sudden

mood swing as much as his words.

"I'm never angry with you — how could I be? Brave,

trusting... warm as you are."

"Then why?" I whispered, remembering the black

moods that pulled him away from me, that I'd always

interpreted as well-justified frustration —

frustration at my weakness, my slowness, my unruly

human reactions...

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He put his hands carefully on both sides of my face. "I

infuriate myself," he said gently. "The way I can't

seem to keep from putting you in danger. My very

existence puts you at risk. Sometimes I truly hate

myself. I should be stronger, I should be able to — " I

placed my hand over his mouth. "Don't."

He took my hand, moving it from his lips, but holding

it to his face.

"I love you," he said. "It's a poor excuse for what I'm

doing, but it's still true."

It was the first time he'd said he loved me — in so

many words. He might not realize it, but I certainly

did.

"Now, please try to behave yourself," he continued,

and he bent to softly brush his lips against mine.

I held properly still. Then I sighed.

"You promised Chief Swan that you would have me

home early, remember?

We'd better get going."

"Yes, ma'am."

He smiled wistfully and released all of me but one

hand. He led me a few feet through the tall, wet ferns

and draping moss, around a massive hemlock tree,

and we were there, on the edge of an enormous open

field in the lap of the Olympic peaks. It was twice the

size of any baseball stadium.

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I could see the others all there; Esme, Emmett, and

Rosalie, sitting on a bare outcropping of rock, were

the closest to us, maybe a hundred yards away. Much

farther out I could see Jasper and Alice, at least a

quarter of a mile apart, appearing to throw something

back and forth, but I never saw any ball. It looked like

Carlisle was marking bases, but could they really be

that far apart?

When we came into view, the three on the rocks rose.

Esme started toward us. Emmett followed after a long

look at Rosalie's back; Rosalie had risen gracefully

and strode off toward the field without a glance in our

direction. My stomach quivered uneasily in response.

"Was that you we heard, Edward?" Esme asked as

she approached.

"It sounded like a bear choking," Emmett clarified. I

smiled hesitantly at Esme. "That was him."

"Bella was being unintentionally funny," Edward

explained, quickly settling the score.

Alice had left her position and was running, or

dancing, toward us. She hurtled to a fluid stop at our

feet. "It's time," she announced. As soon as she spoke,

a deep rumble of thunder shook the forest beyond us,

and then crashed westward toward town.

"Eerie, isn’t it?" Emmett said with easy familiarity,

winking at me.

"Let's go." Alice reached for Emmett's hand and they

darted toward the oversized field; she ran like a

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gazelle. He was nearly as graceful and just as fast —

yet Emmett could never be compared to a gazelle.

"Are you ready for some ball?" Edward asked, his eyes

eager, bright. I tried to sound appropriately

enthusiastic. "Go team!" He snickered and, after

mussing my hair, bounded off after the other two. His

run was more aggressive, a cheetah rather than a

gazelle, and he quickly overtook them. The grace and

power took my breath away.

"Shall we go down?" Esme asked in her soft, melodic

voice, and I realized I was staring openmouthed after

him. I quickly reassembled my expression and

nodded. Esme kept a few feet between us, and I

wondered if she was still being careful not to frighten

me. She matched her stride to mine without seeming

impatient at the pace.

"You don't play with them?" I asked shyly.

"No, I prefer to referee — I like keeping them honest,"

she explained.

"Do they like to cheat, then?"

"Oh yes — you should hear the arguments they get

into! Actually, I hope you don't, you would think they

were raised by a pack of wolves."

"You sound like my mom," I laughed, surprised.

She laughed, too. "Well, I do think of them as my

children in most ways. I never could get over my

mothering instincts — did Edward tell you I had lost a

child?"

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"No," I murmured, stunned, scrambling to

understand what lifetime she was remembering.

"Yes, my first and only baby. He died just a few days

after he was born, the poor tiny thing," she sighed. "It

broke my heart — that's why I jumped off the cliff,

you know," she added matter-of-factly.

"Edward just said you f-fell," I stammered.

"Always the gentleman." She smiled. "Edward was the

first of my new sons. I've always thought of him that

way, even though he's older than I, in one way at

least." She smiled at me warmly. "That's why I'm so

happy that he's found you, dear." The endearment

sounded very natural on her lips.

"He's been the odd man out for far too long; it's hurt

me to see him alone."

"You don't mind, then?" I asked, hesitant again. "That

I'm... all wrong for him?"

"No." She was thoughtful. "You're what he wants. It

will work out, somehow," she said, though her

forehead creased with worry. Another peal of thunder

began.

Esme stopped then; apparently, we'd reached the

edge of the field. It looked as if they had formed

teams. Edward was far out in left field, Carlisle stood

between the first and second bases, and Alice held

the ball, positioned on the spot that must be the

pitcher's mound. Emmett was swinging an aluminum

bat; it whistled almost untraceably through the air. I

waited for him to approach home plate, but then I

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realized, as he took his stance, that he was already

there — farther from the pitcher's mound than I

would have thought possible. Jasper stood several

feet behind him, catching for the other team. Of

course, none of them had gloves.

"All right," Esme called in a clear voice, which I knew

even Edward would hear, as far out as he was.

"Batter up."

Alice stood straight, deceptively motionless. Her style

seemed to be stealth rather than an intimidating

windup. She held the ball in both hands at her waist,

and then, like the strike of a cobra, her right hand

flicked out and the ball smacked into Jasper's hand.

"Was that a strike?" I whispered to Esme.

"If they don't hit it, it's a strike," she told me. Jasper

hurled the ball back to Alice's waiting hand. She

permitted herself a brief grin. And then her hand

spun out again.

This time the bat somehow made it around in time to

smash into the invisible ball. The crack of impact was

shattering, thunderous; it echoed off the mountains

— I immediately understood the necessity of the

thunderstorm.

The ball shot like a meteor above the field, flying deep

into the surrounding forest.

"Home run," I murmured.

"Wait," Esme cautioned, listening intently, one hand

raised. Emmett was a blur around the bases, Carlisle

shadowing him. I realized Edward was missing.

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"Out!" Esme cried in a clear voice. I stared in disbelief

as Edward sprang from the fringe of the trees, ball in

his upraised hand, his wide grin visible even to me.

"Emmett hits the hardest," Esme explained, "but

Edward runs the fastest." The inning continued

before my incredulous eyes. It was impossible to keep

up with the speed at which the ball flew, the rate at

which their bodies raced around the field.

I learned the other reason they waited for a

thunderstorm to play when Jasper, trying to avoid

Edward's infallible fielding, hit a ground ball toward

Carlisle. Carlisle ran into the ball, and then raced

Jasper to first base. When they collided, the sound

was like the crash of two massive falling boulders. I

jumped up in concern, but they were somehow

unscathed.

"Safe," Esme called in a calm voice.

Emmett's team was up by one — Rosalie managed to

flit around the bases after tagging up on one of

Emmett's long flies — when Edward caught the third

out. He sprinted to my side, sparkling with

excitement.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"One thing's for sure, I'll never be able to sit through

dull old Major League Baseball again."

"And it sounds like you did so much of that before,"

he laughed.

"I am a little disappointed," I teased.

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"Why?" he asked, puzzled.

"Well, it would be nice if I could find just one thing

you didn't do better than everyone else on the planet."

He flashed his special crooked smile, leaving me

breathless.

"I'm up," he said, heading for the plate.

He played intelligently, keeping the ball low, out of the

reach of Rosalie's always-ready hand in the outfield,

gaining two bases like lightning before Emmett could

get the ball back in play. Carlisle knocked one so far

out of the field — with a boom that hurt my ears —

that he and Edward both made it in. Alice slapped

them dainty high fives. The score constantly changed

as the game continued, and they razzed each other

like any street ballplayers as they took turns with the

lead. Occasionally Esme would call them to order. The

thunder rumbled on, but we stayed dry, as Alice had

predicted.

Carlisle was up to bat, Edward catching, when Alice

suddenly gasped. My eyes were on Edward, as usual,

and I saw his head snap up to look at her. Their eyes

met and something flowed between them in an

instant. He was at my side before the others could

ask Alice what was wrong.

"Alice?" Esme's voice was tense.

"I didn't see — I couldn't tell," she whispered. All the

others were gathered by this time.

"What is it, Alice?" Carlisle asked with the calm voice

of authority.

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"They were traveling much quicker than I thought. I

can see I had the perspective wrong before," she

murmured.

Jasper leaned over her, his posture protective. "What

changed?" he asked.

"They heard us playing, and it changed their path,"

she said, contrite, as if she felt responsible for

whatever had frightened her. Seven pairs of quick

eyes flashed to my face and away.

"How soon?" Carlisle said, turning toward Edward. A

look of intense concentration crossed his face.

"Less than five minutes. They're running — they want

to play." He scowled.

"Can you make it?" Carlisle asked him, his eyes

flicking toward me again.

"No, not carrying — " He cut short. "Besides, the last

thing we need is for them to catch the scent and start

hunting."

"How many?" Emmett asked Alice.

"Three," she answered tersely.

"Three!" he scoffed. "Let them come." The steel bands

of muscle flexed along his massive arms.

For a split second that seemed much longer than it

really was, Carlisle deliberated. Only Emmett seemed

unperturbed; the rest stared at Carlisle's face with

anxious eyes.

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"Let's just continue the game," Carlisle finally

decided. His voice was cool and level. "Alice said they

were simply curious." All this was said in a flurry of

words that lasted only a few seconds. I had listened

carefully and caught most of it, though I couldn't hear

what Esme now asked Edward with a silent vibration

of her lips. I only saw the slight shake of his head and

the look of relief on her face.

"You catch, Esme," he said. "I'll call it now." And he

planted himself in front of me.

The others returned to the field, warily sweeping the

dark forest with their sharp eyes. Alice and Esme

seemed to orient themselves around where I stood.

"Take your hair down," Edward said in a low, even

voice. I obediently slid the rubber band out of my hair

and shook it out around me.

I stated the obvious. "The others are coming now."

"Yes, stay very still, keep quiet, and don't move from

my side, please." He hid the stress in his voice well,

but I could hear it. He pulled my long hair forward,

around my face.

"That won't help," Alice said softly. "I could smell her

across the field."

"I know." A hint of frustration colored his tone.

Carlisle stood at the plate, and the others joined the

game halfheartedly.

"What did Esme ask you?" I whispered.

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He hesitated for a second before he answered.

"Whether they were thirsty," he muttered unwillingly.

The seconds ticked by; the game progressed with

apathy now. No one dared to hit harder than a bunt,

and Emmett, Rosalie, and Jasper hovered in the

infield. Now and again, despite the fear that numbed

my brain, I was aware of Rosalie's eyes on me. They

were expressionless, but something about the way

she held her mouth made me think she was angry.

Edward paid no attention to the game at all, eyes and

mind ranging the forest.

"I'm sorry, Bella," he muttered fiercely. "It was stupid,

irresponsible, to expose you like this. I'm so sorry."

I heard his breath stop, and his eyes zeroed in on

right field. He took a half step, angling himself

between me and what was coming. Carlisle, Emmett,

and the others turned in the same direction, hearing

sounds of passage much too faint for my ears.

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They emerged one by one from the forest edge,

ranging a dozen meters apart. The first male into the

clearing fell back immediately, allowing the other

male to take the front, orienting himself around the

tall, dark-haired man in a manner that clearly

displayed who led the pack. The third was a woman;

from this distance, all I could see of her was that her

hair was a startling shade of red.

They closed ranks before they continued cautiously

toward Edward's family, exhibiting the natural

respect of a troop of predators as it encounters a

larger, unfamiliar group of its own kind.

As they approached, I could see how different they

were from the Cullens. Their walk was catlike, a gait

that seemed constantly on the edge of shifting into a

crouch. They dressed in the ordinary gear of

backpackers: jeans and casual button-down shirts in

heavy, weatherproof fabrics. The clothes were frayed,

though, with wear, and they were barefoot. Both men

had cropped hair, but the woman's brilliant orange

hair was filled with leaves and debris from the woods.

Their sharp eyes carefully took in the more polished,

urbane stance of Carlisle, who, flanked by Emmett

and Jasper, stepped guardedly forward to meet them.

Without any seeming communication between them,

they each straightened into a more casual, erect

bearing.

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The man in front was easily the most beautiful, his

skin olive-toned beneath the typical pallor, his hair a

glossy black. He was of a medium build, hard-

muscled, of course, but nothing next to Emmett's

brawn. He smiled an easy smile, exposing a flash of

gleaming white teeth. The woman was wilder, her eyes

shifting restlessly between the men facing her, and

the loose grouping around me, her chaotic hair

quivering in the slight breeze. Her posture was

distinctly feline. The second male hovered

unobtrusively behind them, slighter than the leader,

his light brown hair and regular features both

nondescript. His eyes, though completely still,

somehow seemed the most vigilant.

Their eyes were different, too. Not the gold or black I

had come to expect, but a deep burgundy color that

was disturbing and sinister. The dark-haired man,

still smiling, stepped toward Carlisle.

"We thought we heard a game," he said in a relaxed

voice with the slightest of French accents. "I'm

Laurent, these are Victoria and James." He gestured

to the vampires beside him.

"I'm Carlisle. This is my family, Emmett and Jasper,

Rosalie, Esme and Alice, Edward and Bella." He

pointed us out in groups, deliberately not calling

attention to individuals. I felt a shock when he said

my name.

"Do you have room for a few more players?" Laurent

asked sociably. Carlisle matched Laurent's friendly

tone. "Actually, we were just finishing up. But we'd

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certainly be interested another time. Are you planning

to stay in the area for long?"

"We're headed north, in fact, but we were curious to

see who was in the neighborhood. We haven't run into

any company in a long time."

"No, this region is usually empty except for us and the

occasional visitor, like yourselves."

The tense atmosphere had slowly subsided into a

casual conversation; I guessed that Jasper was using

his peculiar gift to control the situation.

"What's your hunting range?" Laurent casually

inquired. Carlisle ignored the assumption behind the

inquiry. "The Olympic Range here, up and down the

Coast Ranges on occasion. We keep a permanent

residence nearby. There's another permanent

settlement like ours up near Denali."

Laurent rocked back on his heels slightly.

"Permanent? How do you manage that?" There was

honest curiosity in his voice.

"Why don't you come back to our home with us and

we can talk comfortably?" Carlisle invited. "It's a

rather long story." James and Victoria exchanged a

surprised look at the mention of the word

"home," but Laurent controlled his expression better.

"That sounds very interesting, and welcome." His

smile was genial. "We've been on the hunt all the way

down from Ontario, and we haven't had the chance to

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clean up in a while." His eyes moved appreciatively

over Carlisle's refined appearance.

"Please don't take offense, but we'd appreciate it if

you'd refrain from hunting in this immediate area. We

have to stay inconspicuous, you understand," Carlisle

explained.

"Of course." Laurent nodded. "We certainly won't

encroach on your territory. We just ate outside of

Seattle, anyway," he laughed. A shiver ran up my

spine.

"We'll show you the way if you'd like to run with us —

Emmett and Alice, you can go with Edward and Bella

to get the Jeep," he casually added. Three things

seemed to happen simultaneously while Carlisle was

speaking. My hair ruffled with the light breeze,

Edward stiffened, and the second male, James,

suddenly whipped his head around, scrutinizing me,

his nostrils flaring.

A swift rigidity fell on all of them as James lurched

one step forward into a crouch. Edward bared his

teeth, crouching in defense, a feral snarl ripping from

his throat.

It was nothing like the playful sounds I'd heard from

him this morning; it was the single most menacing

thing I had ever heard, and chills ran from the crown

of my head to the back of my heels.

"What's this?" Laurent exclaimed in open surprise.

Neither James nor Edward relaxed their aggressive

poses. James feinted slightly to the side, and Edward

shifted in response.

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"She's with us." Carlisle's firm rebuff was directed

toward James. Laurent seemed to catch my scent less

powerfully than James, but awareness now dawned

on his face.

"You brought a snack?" he asked, his expression

incredulous as he took an involuntary step forward.

Edward snarled even more ferociously, harshly, his

lip curling high above his glistening, bared teeth.

Laurent stepped back again.

"I said she's with us," Carlisle corrected in a hard

voice.

"But she's human," Laurent protested. The words

were not at all aggressive, merely astounded.

"Yes." Emmett was very much in evidence at Carlisle's

side, his eyes on James. James slowly straightened

out of his crouch, but his eyes never left me, his

nostrils still wide. Edward stayed tensed like a lion in

front of me.

When Laurent spoke, his tone was soothing — trying

to defuse the sudden hostility. "It appears we have a

lot to learn about each other."

"Indeed." Carlisle's voice was still cool.

"But we'd like to accept your invitation." His eyes

flicked toward me and back to Carlisle. "And, of

course, we will not harm the human girl. We won't

hunt in your range, as I said."

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James glanced in disbelief and aggravation at Laurent

and exchanged another brief look with Victoria,

whose eyes still flickered edgily from face to face.

Carlisle measured Laurent's open expression for a

moment before he spoke.

"Well show you the way. Jasper, Rosalie, Esme?" he

called. They gathered together, blocking me from view

as they converged. Alice was instantly at my side, and

Emmett fell back slowly, his eyes locked on James as

he backed toward us.

"Let's go, Bella." Edward's voice was low and bleak.

This whole time I'd been rooted in place, terrified into

absolute immobility. Edward had to grip my elbow

and pull sharply to break my trance. Alice and

Emmett were close behind us, hiding me. I stumbled

alongside Edward, still stunned with fear. I couldn't

hear if the main group had left yet. Edward's

impatience was almost tangible as we moved at

human speed to the forest edge.

Once we were into the trees, Edward slung me over

his back without breaking stride. I gripped as tightly

as possible as he took off, the others close on his

heels. I kept my head down, but my eyes, wide with

fright, wouldn't close. They plunged through the now-

black forest like wraiths. The sense of exhilaration

that usually seemed to possess Edward as he ran was

completely absent, replaced by a fury that consumed

him and drove him still faster. Even with me on his

back, the others trailed behind.

We reached the Jeep in an impossibly short time, and

Edward barely slowed as he flung me in the backseat.

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"Strap her in," he ordered Emmett, who slid in beside

me. Alice was already in the front seat, and Edward

was starting the engine. It roared to life and we

swerved backward, spinning around to face the

winding road.

Edward was growling something too fast for me to

understand, but it sounded a lot like a string of

profanities.

The jolting trip was much worse this time, and the

darkness only made it more frightening. Emmett and

Alice both glared out the side windows. We hit the

main road, and though our speed increased, I could

see much better where we were going. And we were

headed south, away from Forks.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

No one answered. No one even looked at me.

"Dammit, Edward! Where are you taking me?"

"We have to get you away from here — far away —

now." He didn't look back, his eyes on the road. The

speedometer read a hundred and five miles an hour.

"Turn around! You have to take me home!" I shouted.

I struggled with the stupid harness, tearing at the

straps.

"Emmett," Edward said grimly.

And Emmett secured my hands in his steely grasp.

"No! Edward! No, you can't do this."

"I have to, Bella, now please be quiet."

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"I won't! You have to take me back — Charlie will call

the FBI! They'll be all over your family — Carlisle and

Esme! They'll have to leave, to hide forever!"

"Calm down, Bella." His voice was cold. "We've been

there before."

"Not over me, you don't! You're not ruining everything

over me!" I struggled violently, with total futility.

Alice spoke for the first time. "Edward, pull over." He

flashed her a hard look, and then sped up.

"Edward, let's just talk this through."

"You don't understand," he roared in frustration. I'd

never heard his voice so loud; it was deafening in the

confines of the Jeep. The speedometer neared one

hundred and fifteen. "He's a tracker, Alice, did you

see that? He's a tracker!"

I felt Emmett stiffen next to me, and I wondered at his

reaction to the word. It meant something more to the

three of them than it did to me; I wanted to

understand, but there was no opening for me to ask.

"Pull over, Edward." Alice's tone was reasonable, but

there was a ring of authority in it I'd never heard

before.

The speedometer inched passed one-twenty.

"Do it, Edward."

"Listen to me, Alice. I saw his mind. Tracking is his

passion, his obsession — and he wants her, Alice —

her, specifically. He begins the hunt tonight."

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"He doesn't know where — '

He interrupted her. "How long do you think it will

take him to cross her scent in town? His plan was

already set before the words were out of Laurent's

mouth."

I gasped, knowing where my scent would lead.

"Charlie! You can't leave him there! You can't leave

him!" I thrashed against the harness.

"She's right," Alice said.

The car slowed slightly.

"Let's just look at our options for a minute," Alice

coaxed. The car slowed again, more noticeably, and

then suddenly we screeched to a stop on the shoulder

of the highway. I flew against the harness, and then

slammed back into the seat.

"There are no options," Edward hissed.

"I'm not leaving Charlie!" I yelled.

He ignored me completely.

"We have to take her back," Emmett finally spoke.

"No." Edward was absolute.

"He's no match for us, Edward. He won't be able to

touch her."

"He'll wait."

Emmett smiled. "I can wait, too."

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"You didn't see — you don't understand. Once he

commits to a hunt, he's unshakable. We'd have to kill

him."

Emmett didn't seem upset by the idea. "That's an

option."

"And the female. She's with him. If it turns into a

fight, the leader will go with them, too."

"There are enough of us."

"There's another option," Alice said quietly.

Edward turned on her in fury, his voice a blistering

snarl. "There — is —

no — other — option!"

Emmett and I both stared at him in shock, but Alice

seemed unsurprised. The silence lasted for a long

minute as Edward and Alice stared each other down.

I broke it. "Does anyone want to hear my plan?"

"No," Edward growled. Alice glared at him, finally

provoked.

"Listen," I pleaded. "You take me back."

"No," he interrupted.

I glared at him and continued. "You take me back. I

tell my dad I want to go home to Phoenix. I pack my

bags. We wait till this tracker is watching, and then

we run. He'll follow us and leave Charlie alone.

Charlie won't call the FBI on your family. Then you

can take me any damned place you want."

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They stared at me, stunned.

"It's not a bad idea, really." Emmett's surprise was

definitely an insult.

"It might work — and we simply can't leave her father

unprotected. You know that," Alice said.

Everyone looked at Edward.

"It's too dangerous — I don't want him within a

hundred miles of her." Emmett was supremely

confident. "Edward, he's not getting through us." Alice

thought for a minute. "I don't see him attacking. He'll

try to wait for us to leave her alone."

"It won't take long for him to realize that's not going to

happen."

"I demand that you take me home." I tried to sound

firm. Edward pressed his fingers to his temples and

squeezed his eyes shut.

"Please," I said in a much smaller voice.

He didn't look up. When he spoke, his voice sounded

worn.

"You're leaving tonight, whether the tracker sees or

not. You tell Charlie that you can't stand another

minute in Forks. Tell him whatever story works. Pack

the first things your hands touch, and then get in

your truck. I don't care what he says to you. You have

fifteen minutes. Do you hear me? Fifteen minutes

from the time you cross the doorstep." The Jeep

rumbled to life, and he spun us around, the tires

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squealing. The needle on the speedometer started to

race up the dial.

"Emmett?" I asked, looking pointedly at my hands.

"Oh, sorry." He let me loose.

A few minutes passed in silence, other than the roar

of the engine. Then Edward spoke again.

"This is how it's going to happen. When we get to the

house, if the tracker is not there, I will walk her to the

door. Then she has fifteen minutes." He glared at me

in the rearview mirror. "Emmett, you take the outside

of the house. Alice, you get the truck. I'll be inside as

long as she is. After she's out, you two can take the

Jeep home and tell Carlisle."

"No way," Emmett broke in. "I'm with you."

"Think it through, Emmett. I don't know how long I'll

be gone."

"Until we know how far this is going to go, I'm with

you." Edward sighed. "If the tracker is there," he

continued grimly, "we keep driving."

"We're going to make it there before him," Alice said

confidently. Edward seemed to accept that. Whatever

his problem with Alice was, he didn't doubt her now.

"What are we going to do with the Jeep?" she asked.

His voice had a hard edge. "You're driving it home."

"No, I'm not," she said calmly.

The unintelligible stream of profanities started again.

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"We can't all fit in my truck," I whispered.

Edward didn't appear to hear me.

"I think you should let me go alone," I said even more

quietly. He heard that.

"Bella, please just do this my way, just this once," he

said between clenched teeth.

"Listen, Charlie's not an imbecile," I protested. "If

you're not in town tomorrow, he's going to get

suspicious."

"That's irrelevant. We'll make sure he's safe, and

that's all that matters."

"Then what about this tracker? He saw the way you

acted tonight. He's going to think you're with me,

wherever you are."

Emmett looked at me, insultingly surprised again.

"Edward, listen to her," he urged. "I think she's right."

"Yes, she is," Alice agreed.

"I can't do that." Edward's voice was icy.

"Emmett should stay, too," I continued. "He definitely

got an eyeful of Emmett."

"What?" Emmett turned on me.

"You'll get a better crack at him if you stay," Alice

agreed. Edward stared at her incredulously. "You

think I should let her go alone?"

"Of course not," Alice said. "Jasper and I will take

her."

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"I can't do that," Edward repeated, but this time there

was a trace of defeat in his voice. The logic was

working on him.

I tried to be persuasive. "Hang out here for a week — "

I saw his expression in the mirror and amended " — a

few days. Let Charlie see you haven't kidnapped me,

and lead this James on a wild-goose chase. Make

sure he's completely off my trail. Then come and meet

me. Take a roundabout route, of course, and then

Jasper and Alice can go home." I could see him

beginning to consider it.

"Meet you where?"

"Phoenix." Of course.

"No. He'll hear that's where you're going," he said

impatiently.

"And you'll make it look like that's a ruse, obviously.

He'll know that we'll know that he's listening. He'll

never believe I'm actually going where I say I am

going."

"She's diabolical," Emmett chuckled.

"And if that doesn't work?"

"There are several million people in Phoenix," I

informed him.

"It's not that hard to find a phone book."

"I won't go home."

"Oh?" he inquired, a dangerous note in his voice.

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"I'm quite old enough to get my own place."

"Edward, we'll be with her," Alice reminded him.

"What are you going to do in Phoenix?" he asked her

scathingly.

"Stay indoors."

"I kind of like it." Emmett was thinking about

cornering James, no doubt.

"Shut up, Emmett."

"Look, if we try to take him down while she's still

around, there's a much better chance that someone

will get hurt — she'll get hurt, or you will, trying to

protect her. Now, if we get him alone..." He trailed off

with a slow smile. I was right.

The Jeep was crawling slowly along now as we drove

into town. Despite my brave talk, I could feel the hairs

on my arms standing up. I thought about Charlie,

alone in the house, and tried to be courageous.

"Bella." Edward's voice was very soft. Alice and

Emmett looked out their windows. "If you let anything

happen to yourself — anything at all — I'm holding

you personally responsible. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," I gulped.

He turned to Alice.

"Can Jasper handle this?"

"Give him some credit, Edward. He's been doing very,

very well, all things considered."

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"Can you handle this?" he asked.

And graceful little Alice pulled back her lips in a

horrific grimace and let loose with a guttural snarl

that had me cowering against the seat in terror.

Edward smiled at her. "But keep your opinions to

yourself," he muttered suddenly.

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Chapter 14

Charlie was waiting up for me. All the house lights

were on. My mind was blank as I tried to think of a

way to make him let me go. This wasn't going to be

pleasant.

Edward pulled up slowly, staying well back from my

truck. All three of them were acutely alert, ramrod

straight in their seats, listening to every sound of the

wood, looking through every shadow, catching every

scent, searching for something out of place. The

engine cut off, and I sat, motionless, as they

continued to listen.

"He's not here," Edward said tensely. "Let's go."

Emmett reached over to help me get out of the

harness.

"Don't worry, Bella," he said in a low but cheerful

voice, "we'll take care of things here quickly."

I felt moisture filling up my eyes as I looked at

Emmett. I barely knew him, and yet, somehow, not

knowing when I would see him again after tonight

was anguishing. I knew this was just a faint taste of

the goodbyes I would have to survive in the next hour,

and the thought made the tears begin to spill.

"Alice, Emmett." Edward's voice was a command.

They slithered soundlessly into the darkness,

instantly disappearing. Edward opened my door and

took my hand, then drew me into the protecting

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enclosure of his arm. He walked me swiftly toward the

house, eyes always roving through the night.

"Fifteen minutes," he warned under his breath.

"I can do this." I sniffled. My tears had given me an

inspiration. I stopped on the porch and took hold of

his face in my hands. I looked fiercely into his eyes.

"I love you," I said in a low, intense voice. "I will

always love you, no matter what happens now."

"Nothing is going to happen to you, Bella," he said

just as fiercely.

"Just follow the plan, okay? Keep Charlie safe for me.

He's not going to like me very much after this, and I

want to have the chance to apologize later."

"Get inside, Bella. We have to hurry." His voice was

urgent.

"One more thing," I whispered passionately. "Don't

listen to another word I say tonight!" He was leaning

in, and so all I had to do was stretch up on my toes to

kiss his surprised, frozen lips with as much force as I

was capable of. Then I turned and kicked the door

open.

"Go away, Edward!" I yelled at him, running inside

and slamming the door shut in his still-shocked face.

"Bella?" Charlie had been hovering in the living room,

and he was already on his feet.

"Leave me alone!" I screamed at him through my

tears, which were flowing relentlessly now. I ran up

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the stairs to my room, throwing the door shut and

locking it. I ran to my bed, flinging myself on the floor

to retrieve my duffel bag. I reached swiftly between

the mattress and box spring to grab the knotted old

sock that contained my secret cash hoard. Charlie

was pounding on my door.

"Bella, are you okay? What's going on?" His voice was

frightened.

"I'm going borne," I shouted, my voice breaking in the

perfect spot.

"Did he hurt you?" His tone edged toward anger.

"No!" I shrieked a few octaves higher. I turned to my

dresser, and Edward was already there, silently

yanking out armfuls of random clothes, which he

proceeded to throw to me.

"Did he break up with you?" Charlie was perplexed.

"No!" I yelled, slightly more breathless as I shoved

everything into the bag. Edward threw another

drawer's contents at me. The bag was pretty much

full now.

"What happened, Bella?" Charlie shouted through the

door, pounding again.

"I broke up with him!" I shouted back, jerking on the

zipper of my bag. Edward's capable hands pushed

mine away and zipped it smoothly. He put the strap

carefully over my arm.

"I'll be in the truck — go!" he whispered, and pushed

me toward the door. He vanished out the window.

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I unlocked the door and pushed past Charlie roughly,

struggling with my heavy bag as I ran down the

stairs.

"What happened?" he yelled. He was right behind me.

"I thought you liked him."

He caught my elbow in the kitchen. Though he was

still bewildered, his grip was firm.

He spun me around to look at him, and I could see in

his face that he had no intention of letting me leave. I

could think of only one way to escape, and it involved

hurting him so much that I hated myself for even

considering it. But I had no time, and I had to keep

him safe. I glared up at my father, fresh tears in my

eyes for what I was about to do.

"I do like him — that's the problem. I can't do this

anymore! I can't put down any more roots here! I

don't want to end up trapped in this stupid, boring

town like Mom! I'm not going to make the same dumb

mistake she did. I hate it — I can't stay here another

minute!"

His hand dropped from my arm like I'd electrocuted

him. I turned away from his shocked, wounded face

and headed for the door.

"Bells, you can't leave now. It's nighttime," he

whispered behind me. I didn't turn around. "I'll sleep

in the truck if I get tired."

"Just wait another week," he pled, still shell-shocked.

"Renee will be back by then."

This completely derailed me. "What?"

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Charlie continued eagerly, almost babbling with relief

as I hesitated.

"She called while you were out. Things aren't going so

well in Florida, and if Phil doesn't get signed by the

end of the week, they're going back to Arizona. The

assistant coach of the Sidewinders said they might

have a spot for another shortstop."

I shook my head, trying to reassemble my now-

confused thoughts. Every passing second put Charlie

in more danger.

"I have a key," I muttered, turning the knob. He was

too close, one hand extended toward me, his face

dazed. I couldn't lose any more time arguing with

him. I was going to have to hurt him further.

"Just let me go, Charlie." I repeated my mother's last

words as she'd walked out this same door so many

years ago. I said them as angrily as I could manage,

and I threw the door open. "It didn't work out, okay? I

really, really hate Forks!"

My cruel words did their job — Charlie stayed frozen

on the doorstep, stunned, while I ran into the night. I

was hideously frightened of the empty yard. I ran

wildly for the truck, visualizing a dark shadow behind

me. I threw my bag in the bed and wrenched the door

open. The key was waiting in the ignition.

"I'll call you tomorrow!" I yelled, wishing more than

anything that I could explain everything to him right

then, knowing I would never be able to. I gunned the

engine and peeled out.

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Edward reached for my hand.

"Pull over," he said as the house, and Charlie,

disappeared behind us.

"I can drive," I said through the tears pouring down

my cheeks. His long hands unexpectedly gripped my

waist, and his foot pushed mine off the gas pedal. He

pulled me across his lap, wrenching my hands free of

the wheel, and suddenly he was in the driver's seat.

The truck didn't swerve an inch.

"You wouldn't be able to find the house," he

explained. Lights flared suddenly behind us. I stared

out the back window, eyes wide with horror.

"It's just Alice," he reassured me. He took my hand

again. My mind was filled with the image of Charlie in

the doorway. "The tracker?"

"He heard the end of your performance," Edward said

grimly.

"Charlie?" I asked in dread.

"The tracker followed us. He's running behind us

now." My body went cold.

"Can we outrun him?"

"No." But he sped up as he spoke. The truck's engine

whined in protest. My plan suddenly didn't feel so

brilliant anymore.

I was staring back at Alice's headlights when the

truck shuddered and a dark shadow sprung up

outside the window.

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My bloodcurdling scream lasted a fraction of a second

before Edward's hand clamped down on my mouth.

"It's Emmett!"

He released my mouth, and wound his arm around

my waist.

"It's okay, Bella," he promised. "You're going to be

safe." We raced through the quiet town toward the

north highway.

"I didn't realize you were still so bored with small-

town life," he said conversationally, and I knew he

was trying to distract me. "It seemed like you were

adjusting fairly well — especially recently. Maybe I

was just flattering myself that I was making life more

interesting for you."

"I wasn't being nice," I confessed, ignoring his attempt

at diversion, looking down at my knees. "That was the

same thing my mom said when she left him. You

could say I was hitting below the belt."

"Don't worry. He'll forgive you." He smiled a little,

though it didn't touch his eyes.

I stared at him desperately, and he saw the naked

panic in my eyes.

"Bella, it's going to be all right."

"But it won't be all right when I'm not with you," I

whispered.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"We'll be together again in a few days," he said,

tightening his arm around me. "Don't forget that this

was your idea."

"It was the best idea — of course it was mine." His

answering smile was bleak and disappeared

immediately.

"Why did this happen?" I asked, my voice catching.

"Why me?" He stared blackly at the road ahead. "It's

my fault — I was a fool to expose you like that." The

rage in his voice was directed internally.

"That's not what I meant," I insisted. "I was there, big

deal. It didn't bother the other two. Why did this

James decide to kill met There're people all over the

place, why me?"

He hesitated, thinking before he answered.

"I got a good look at his mind tonight," he began in a

low voice. "I'm not sure if there's anything I could

have done to avoid this, once he saw you. It is

partially your fault." His voice was wry. "If you didn't

smell so appallingly luscious, he might not have

bothered. But when I defended you... well, that made

it a lot worse. He's not used to being thwarted, no

matter how insignificant the object. He thinks of

himself as a hunter and nothing else. His existence is

consumed with tracking, and a challenge is all he

asks of life. Suddenly we've presented him with a

beautiful challenge — a large clan of strong fighters

all bent on protecting the one vulnerable element. You

wouldn't believe how euphoric he is now. It's his

favorite game, and we've just made it his most

exciting game ever." His tone was full of disgust.

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He paused a moment.

"But if I had stood by, he would have killed you right

then," he said with hopeless frustration.

"I thought... I didn't smell the same to the others... as

I do to you," I said hesitantly.

"You don't. But that doesn't mean that you aren't still

a temptation to every one of them. If you had

appealed to the tracker — or any of them —

the same way you appeal to me, it would have meant

a fight right there." I shuddered.

"I don't think I have any choice but to kill him now,"

he muttered.

"Carlisle won't like it."

I could hear the tires cross the bridge, though I

couldn't see the river in the dark. I knew we were

getting close. I had to ask him now.

"How can you kill a vampire?"

He glanced at me with unreadable eyes and his voice

was suddenly harsh.

"The only way to be sure is to tear him to shreds, and

then burn the pieces."

"And the other two will fight with him?"

"The woman will. I'm not sure about Laurent. They

don't have a very strong bond — he's only with them

for convenience. He was embarrassed by James in the

meadow..."

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"But James and the woman — they'll try to kill you?"

I asked, my voice raw.

"Bella, don't you dare waste time worrying about me.

Your only concern is keeping yourself safe and —

please, please — trying not to be reckless."

"Is he still following?"

"Yes. He won't attack the house, though. Not tonight."

He turned off onto the invisible drive, with Alice

following behind. We drove right up to the house. The

lights inside were bright, but they did little to alleviate

the blackness of the encroaching forest. Emmett had

my door open before the truck was stopped; he pulled

me out of the seat, tucked me like a football into his

vast chest, and ran me through the door.

We burst into the large white room, Edward and Alice

at our sides. All of them were there; they were already

on their feet at the sound of our approach. Laurent

stood in their midst. I could hear low growls rumble

deep in Emmett's throat as he set me down next to

Edward.

"He's tracking us," Edward announced, glaring

balefully at Laurent. Laurent's face was unhappy. "I

was afraid of that." Alice danced to Jasper's side and

whispered in his ear; her lips quivered with the speed

of her silent speech. They flew up the stairs together.

Rosalie watched them, and then moved quickly to

Emmett's side. Her beautiful eyes were intense and —

when they flickered unwillingly to my face — furious.

"What will he do?" Carlisle asked Laurent in chilling

tones.

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"I'm sorry," he answered. "I was afraid, when your boy

there defended her, that it would set him off."

"Can you stop him?"

Laurent shook his head. "Nothing stops James when

he gets started."

"Well stop him," Emmett promised. There was no

doubt what he meant.

"You can't bring him down. I've never seen anything

like him in my three hundred years. He's absolutely

lethal. That's why I joined his coven." His coven, I

thought, of course. The show of leadership in the

clearing was merely that, a show.

Laurent was shaking his head. He glanced at me,

perplexed, and back to Carlisle. "Are you sure it's

worth it?"

Edward's enraged roar filled the room; Laurent

cringed back. Carlisle looked gravely at Laurent. "I'm

afraid you're going to have to make a choice."

Laurent understood. He deliberated for a moment. His

eyes took in every face, and finally swept the bright

room.

"I'm intrigued by the life you've created here. But I

won't get in the middle of this. I bear none of you any

enmity, but I won't go up against James. I think I will

head north — to that clan in Denali." He hesitated.

"Don't underestimate James. He's got a brilliant mind

and unparalleled senses. He's every bit as comfortable

in the human world as you seem to be, and he won't

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come at you head on... I'm sorry for what's been

unleashed here. Truly sorry." He bowed his head, but

I saw him flicker another puzzled look at me.

"Go in peace," was Carlisle's formal answer.

Laurent took another long look around himself, and

then he hurried out the door.

The silence lasted less than a second.

"How close?" Carlisle looked to Edward.

Esme was already moving; her hand touched an

inconspicuous keypad on the wall, and with a groan,

huge metal shutters began sealing up the glass wall. I

gaped.

"About three miles out past the river; he's circling

around to meet up with the female."

"What's the plan?"

"Well lead him off, and then Jasper and Alice will run

her south."

"And then?"

Edward's tone was deadly. "As soon as Bella is clear,

we hunt him."

"I guess there's no other choice," Carlisle agreed, his

face grim. Edward turned to Rosalie.

"Get her upstairs and trade clothes," Edward

commanded. She stared back at him with livid

disbelief.

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"Why should I?" she hissed. "What is she to me?

Except a menace — a danger you've chosen to inflict

on all of us."

I flinched back from the venom in her voice.

"Rose..." Emmett murmured, putting one hand on her

shoulder. She shook it off.

But I was watching Edward carefully, knowing his

temper, worried about his reaction.

He surprised me. He looked away from Rosalie as if

she hadn't spoken, as if she didn't exist.

"Esme?" he asked calmly.

"Of course," Esme murmured.

Esme was at my side in half a heartbeat, swinging me

up easily into her arms, and dashing up the stairs

before I could gasp in shock.

"What are we doing?" I asked breathlessly as she set

me down in a dark room somewhere off the second-

story hall.

"Trying to confuse the smell. It won't work for long,

but it might help get you out." I could hear her

clothes falling to the floor.

"I don't think I'll fit..." I hesitated, but her hands were

abruptly pulling my shirt over my head. I quickly

stripped my jeans off myself. She handed me

something, it felt like a shirt. I struggled to get my

arms through the right holes. As soon as I was done

she handed me her slacks. I yanked them on, but I

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couldn't get my feet out; they were too long. She deftly

rolled the hems a few times so I could stand.

Somehow she was already in my clothes. She pulled

me back to the stairs, where Alice stood, a small

leather bag in one hand. They each grabbed one of my

elbows and half-carried me as they flew down the

stairs.

It appeared that everything had been settled

downstairs in our absence. Edward and Emmett were

ready to leave, Emmett carrying a heavy-looking

backpack over his shoulder. Carlisle was handing

something small to Esme. He turned and handed

Alice the same thing — it was a tiny silver cell phone.

"Esme and Rosalie will be taking your truck, Bella,"

he told me as he passed. I nodded, glancing warily at

Rosalie. She was glowering at Carlisle with a resentful

expression.

"Alice, Jasper — take the Mercedes. You'll need the

dark tint in the south."

They nodded as well.

"We’re taking the Jeep."

I was surprised to see that Carlisle intended to go

with Edward. I realized suddenly, with a stab of fear,

that they made up the hunting party.

"Alice," Carlisle asked, "will they take the bait?"

Everyone watched Alice as she closed her eyes and

became incredibly still. Finally her eyes opened. "He'll

track you. The woman will follow the truck. We

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should be able to leave after that." Her voice was

certain.

"Let's go." Carlisle began to walk toward the kitchen.

But Edward was at my side at once. He caught me up

in his iron grip, crushing me to him. He seemed

unaware of his watching family as he pulled my face

to his, lifting my feet off the floor. For the shortest

second, his lips were icy and hard against mine. Then

it was over. He set me down, still holding my face, his

glorious eyes burning into mine. His eyes went blank,

curiously dead, as he turned away.

And they were gone.

We stood there, the others looking away from me as

the tears streaked noiselessly down my face.

The silent moment dragged on, and then Esme's

phone vibrated in her hand. It flashed to her ear.

"Now," she said. Rosalie stalked out the front door

without another glance in my direction, but Esme

touched my cheek as she passed.

"Be safe." Her whisper lingered behind them as they

slipped out the door. I heard my truck start

thunderously, and then fade away.

Jasper and Alice waited. Alice's phone seemed to be

at her ear before it buzzed.

"Edward says the woman is on Esme's trail. I'll get the

car." She vanished into the shadows the way Edward

had gone.

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Jasper and I looked at each other. He stood across

the length of the entryway from me... being careful.

"You're wrong, you know," he said quietly.

"What?" I gasped.

"I can feel what you're feeling now — and you are

worth it."

"I'm not," I mumbled. "If anything happens to them, it

will be for nothing."

"You're wrong," he repeated, smiling kindly at me. I

heard nothing, but then Alice stepped through the

front door and came toward me with her arms held

out.

"May I?" she asked.

"You're the first one to ask permission." I smiled

wryly. She lifted me in her slender arms as easily as

Emmett had, shielding me protectively, and then we

flew out the door, leaving the lights bright behind us.

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Chapter 15

When I woke up I was confused. My thoughts were

hazy, still twisted up in dreams and nightmares; it

took me longer than it should have to realize where I

was.

This room was too bland to belong anywhere but in a

hotel. The bedside lamps, bolted to the tables, were a

dead giveaway, as were the long drapes made from

the same fabric as the bedspread, and the generic

watercolor prints on the walls.

I tried to remember how I got here, but nothing came

at first. I did remember the sleek black car, the glass

in the windows darker than that on a limousine. The

engine was almost silent, though we'd raced across

the black freeways at more than twice the legal speed.

And I remembered Alice sitting with me on the dark

leather backseat. Somehow, during the long night, my

head had ended up against her granite neck. My

closeness didn't seem to bother her at all, and her

cool, hard skin was oddly comforting to me. The front

of her thin cotton shirt was cold, damp with the tears

that streamed from my eyes until, red and sore, they

ran dry.

Sleep had evaded me; my aching eyes strained open

even though the night finally ended and dawn broke

over a low peak somewhere in California. The gray

light, streaking across the cloudless sky, stung my

eyes. But I couldn't close them; when I did, the

images that flashed all too vividly, like still slides

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behind my lids, were unbearable. Charlie's broken

expression — Edward's brutal snarl, teeth bared —

Rosalie's resentful glare — the keen-eyed scrutiny of

the tracker — the dead look in Edward's eyes after he

kissed me the last time... I couldn't stand to see

them. So I fought against my weariness and the sun

rose higher.

I was still awake when we came through a shallow

mountain pass and the sun, behind us now, reflected

off the tiled rooftops of the Valley of the Sun. I didn't

have enough emotion left to be surprised that we'd

made a three-day journey in one. I stared blankly at

the wide, flat expanse laid out in front of me. Phoenix

— the palm trees, the scrubby creosote, the

haphazard lines of the intersecting freeways, the

green swaths of golf courses and turquoise splotches

of swimming pools, all submerged in a thin smog and

embraced by the short, rocky ridges that weren't

really big enough to be called mountains.

The shadows of the palm trees slanted across the

freeway — defined, sharper than I remembered, paler

than they should be. Nothing could hide in these

shadows. The bright, open freeway seemed benign

enough. But I felt no relief, no sense of homecoming.

"Which way to the airport, Bella?" Jasper had asked,

and I flinched, though his voice was quite soft and

un-alarming. It was the first sound, besides the purr

of the car, to break the long night's silence.

"Stay on the I-ten," I'd answered automatically. "We'll

pass right by it." My brain had worked slowly through

the fog of sleep deprivation.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Are we flying somewhere?" I'd asked Alice.

"No, but it's better to be close, just in case." I

remembered beginning the loop around Sky Harbor

International... but not ending it. I suppose that must

have been when I'd fallen asleep. Though, now that I'd

chased the memories down, I did have a vague

impression of leaving the car — the sun was just

falling behind the horizon — my arm draped over

Alice's shoulder and her arm firm around my waist,

dragging me along as I stumbled through the warm,

dry shadows. I had no memory of this room.

I looked at the digital clock on the nightstand. The red

numbers claimed it was three o'clock, but they gave

no indication if it was night or day. No edge of light

escaped the thick curtains, but the room was bright

with the light from the lamps.

I rose stiffly and staggered to the window, pulling

back the drapes. It was dark outside. Three in the

morning, then. My room looked out on a deserted

section of the freeway and the new long-term parking

garage for the airport. It was slightly comforting to be

able to pinpoint time and place.

I looked down at myself. I was still wearing Esme's

clothes, and they didn't fit very well at all. I looked

around the room, glad when I discovered my duffel

bag on top of the low dresser.

I was on my way to find new clothes when a light tap

on the door made me jump.

"Can I come in?" Alice asked.

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I took a deep breath. "Sure."

She walked in, and looked me over cautiously. "You

look like you could sleep longer," she said.

I just shook my head.

She drifted silently to the curtains and closed them

securely before turning back to me.

"We'll need to stay inside," she told me.

"Okay." My voice was hoarse; it cracked.

"Thirsty?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I'm okay. How about you?"

"Nothing unmanageable." She smiled. "I ordered some

food for you, it's in the front room. Edward reminded

me that you have to eat a lot more frequently than we

do."

I was instantly more alert. "He called?"

"No," she said, and watched as my face fell. "It was

before we left." She took my hand carefully and led

me through the door into the living room of the hotel

suite. I could hear a low buzz of voices coming from

the TV. Jasper sat motionlessly at the desk in the

corner, his eyes watching the news with no glimmer

of interest.

I sat on the floor next to the coffee table, where a tray

of food waited, and began picking at it without

noticing what I was eating. Alice perched on the arm

of the sofa and stared blankly at the TV like Jasper.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I ate slowly, watching her, turning now and then to

glance quickly at Jasper. It began to dawn on me that

they were too still. They never looked away from the

screen, though commercials were playing now. I

pushed the tray away, my stomach abruptly uneasy.

Alice looked down at me.

"What's wrong, Alice?" I asked.

"Nothing's wrong." Her eyes were wide, honest... and I

didn't trust them.

"What do we do now?"

"We wait for Carlisle to call."

"And should he have called by now?" I could see that I

was near the mark. Alice's eyes flitted from mine to

the phone on top of her leather bag and back.

"What does that mean?" My voice quavered, and I

fought to control it.

"That he hasn't called yet?"

"It just means that they don't have anything to tell

us." But her voice was too even, and the air was

harder to breathe. Jasper was suddenly beside Alice,

closer to me than usual.

"Bella," he said in a suspiciously soothing voice. "You

have nothing to worry about. You are completely safe

here."

"I know that."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Then why are you frightened?" he asked, confused.

He might feel the tenor of my emotions, but he

couldn't read the reasons behind them.

"You heard what Laurent said." My voice was just a

whisper, but I was sure they could hear me. "He said

James was lethal. What if something goes wrong, and

they get separated? If something happens to any of

them, Carlisle, Emmett... Edward..." I gulped. "If that

wild female hurts Esme..." My voice had grown

higher, a note of hysteria beginning to rise in it. "How

could I live with myself when it's my fault? None of

you should be risking yourselves for me — "

"Bella, Bella, stop," he interrupted me, his words

pouring out so quickly they were hard to understand.

"You're worrying about all the wrong things, Bella.

Trust me on this — none of us are in jeopardy. You

are under too much strain as it is; don't add to it with

wholly unnecessary worries. Listen to me!" he

ordered, for I had looked away. "Our family is strong.

Our only fear is losing you."

"But why should you — "

Alice interrupted this time, touching my cheek with

her cold fingers.

"It's been almost a century that Edward's been alone.

Now he's found you. You can't see the changes that

we see, we who have been with him for so long. Do

you think any of us want to look into his eyes for the

next hundred years if he loses you?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

My guilt slowly subsided as I looked into her dark

eyes. But, even as the calm spread over me, I knew I

couldn't trust my feelings with Jasper there.

It was a very long day.

We stayed in the room. Alice called down to the front

desk and asked them to ignore our maid service for

now. The windows stayed shut, the TV on, though no

one watched it. At regular intervals, food was

delivered for me. The silver phone resting on Alice's

bag seemed to grow bigger as the hours passed.

My babysitters handled the suspense better than I

did. As I fidgeted and paced, they simply grew more

still, two statues whose eyes followed me

imperceptibly as I moved. I occupied myself with

memorizing the room; the striped pattern of the

couches, tan, peach, cream, dull gold, and tan again.

Sometimes I stared at the abstract prints, randomly

finding pictures in the shapes, like I'd found pictures

in the clouds as a child. I traced a blue hand, a

woman combing her hair, a cat stretching. But when

the pale red circle became a staring eye, I looked

away. As the afternoon wore on, I went back to bed,

simply for something to do. I hoped that by myself in

the dark, I could give in to the terrible fears that

hovered on the edge of my consciousness, unable to

break through under Jasper's careful supervision.

But Alice followed me casually, as if by some

coincidence she had grown tired of the front room at

the same time. I was beginning to wonder exactly

what sort of instructions Edward had given her. I lay

across the bed, and she sat, legs folded, next to me. I

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ignored her at first, suddenly tired enough to sleep.

But after a few minutes, the panic that had held off in

Jasper's presence began to make itself known. I gave

up on the idea of sleep quickly then, curling up into a

small ball, wrapping my arms around my legs.

"Alice?" I asked.

"Yes?"

I kept my voice very calm. "What do you think they're

doing?"

"Carlisle wanted to lead the tracker as far north as

possible, wait for him to get close, and then turn and

ambush him. Esme and Rosalie were supposed to

head west as long as they could keep the female

behind them. If she turned around, they were to head

back to Forks and keep an eye on your dad. So I

imagine things are going well if they can't call. It

means the tracker is close enough that they don't

want him to overhear."

"And Esme?"

"I think she must be back in Forks. She won't call if

there's any chance the female will overhear. I expect

they're all just being very careful."

"Do you think they're safe, really?"

"Bella, how many times do we have to tell you that

there's no danger to us?"

"Would you tell me the truth, though?"

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"Yes. I will always tell you the truth." Her voice was

earnest. I deliberated for a moment, and decided she

meant it.

"Tell me then... how do you become a vampire?"

My question caught her off guard. She was quiet. I

rolled over to look at her, and her expression seemed

ambivalent.

"Edward doesn't want me to tell you that," she said

firmly, but I sensed she didn't agree.

"That's not fair. I think I have a right to know."

"I know."

I looked at her, waiting.

She sighed. "He'll be extremely angry."

"It's none of his business. This is between you and

me. Alice, as a friend, I'm begging you." And we were

friends now, somehow — as she must have known we

would be all along.

She looked at me with her splendid, wise eyes...

choosing.

"I'll tell you the mechanics of it," she said finally, "but

I don't remember it myself, and I've never done it or

seen it done, so keep in mind that I can only tell you

the theory."

I waited.

"As predators, we have a glut of weapons in our

physical arsenal — much, much more than really

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necessary. The strength, the speed, the acute senses,

not to mention those of us like Edward, Jasper, and I,

who have extra senses as well. And then, like a

carnivorous flower, we are physically attractive to our

prey."

I was very still, remembering how pointedly Edward

had demonstrated the same concept for me in the

meadow.

She smiled a wide, ominous smile. "We have another

fairly superfluous weapon. We're also venomous," she

said, her teeth glistening. "The venom doesn't kill —

it's merely incapacitating. It works slowly, spreading

through the bloodstream, so that, once bitten, our

prey is in too much physical pain to escape us. Mostly

superfluous, as I said. If we're that close, the prey

doesn't escape. Of course, there are always

exceptions. Carlisle, for example."

"So... if the venom is left to spread..." I murmured.

"It takes a few days for the transformation to be

complete, depending on how much venom is in the

bloodstream, how close the venom enters to the heart.

As long as the heart keeps beating, the poison

spreads, healing, changing the body as it moves

through it. Eventually the heart stops, and the

conversion is finished. But all that time, every minute

of it, a victim would be wishing for death."

I shivered.

"It's not pleasant, you see."

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"Edward said that it was very hard to do... I don't

quite understand," I said.

"We're also like sharks in a way. Once we taste the

blood, or even smell it for that matter, it becomes very

hard to keep from feeding. Sometimes impossible. So

you see, to actually bite someone, to taste the blood,

it would begin the frenzy. It's difficult on both sides —

the blood-lust on the one hand, the awful pain on the

other."

"Why do you think you don't remember?"

"I don't know. For everyone else, the pain of

transformation is the sharpest memory they have of

their human life. I remember nothing of being

human." Her voice was wistful.

We lay silently, wrapped in our individual

meditations.

The seconds ticked by, and I had almost forgotten her

presence, I was so enveloped in my thoughts.

Then, without any warning, Alice leaped from the bed,

landing lightly on her feet. My head jerked up as I

stared at her, startled.

"Something's changed." Her voice was urgent, and she

wasn't talking to me anymore.

She reached the door at the same time Jasper did. He

had obviously heard our conversation and her sudden

exclamation. He put his hands on her shoulders and

guided her back to the bed, sitting her on the edge.

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"What do you see?" he asked intently, staring into her

eyes. Her eyes were focused on something very far

away. I sat close to her, leaning in to catch her low,

quick voice.

"I see a room. It's long, and there are mirrors

everywhere. The floor is wooden. He's in the room,

and he's waiting. There's gold... a gold stripe across

the mirrors."

"Where is the room?"

"I don't know. Something is missing — another

decision hasn't been made yet."

"How much time?"

"It's soon. He'll be in the mirror room today, or maybe

tomorrow. It all depends. He's waiting for something.

And he's in the dark now." Jasper's voice was calm,

methodical, as he questioned her in a practiced way.

"What is he doing?"

"He's watching TV... no, he's running a VCR, in the

dark, in another place."

"Can you see where he is?"

"No, it's too dark."

"And the mirror room, what else is there?"

"Just the mirrors, and the gold. It's a band, around

the room. And there's a black table with a big stereo,

and a TV. He's touching the VCR

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there, but he doesn't watch the way he does in the

dark room. This is the room where he waits." Her eyes

drifted, then focused on Jasper's face.

"There's nothing else?"

She shook her head. They looked at each other,

motionless.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

Neither of them answered for a moment, then Jasper

looked at me.

"It means the tracker's plans have changed. He's

made a decision that will lead him to the mirror room,

and the dark room."

"But we don't know where those rooms are?"

"No."

"But we do know that he won't be in the mountains

north of Washington, being hunted. He'll elude them."

Alice's voice was bleak.

"Should we call?" I asked. They traded a serious look,

undecided. And the phone rang.

Alice was across the room before I could lift my head

to look at it. She pushed a button and held the phone

to her ear, but she didn't speak first.

"Carlisle," she breathed. She didn't seem surprised or

relieved, the way I felt.

"Yes," she said, glancing at me. She listened for a long

moment.

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"I just saw him." She described again the vision she'd

seen. "Whatever made him get on that plane... it was

leading him to those rooms." She paused. "Yes," Alice

said into the phone, and then she spoke to me.

"Bella?"

She held the phone out toward me. I ran to it.

"Hello?" I breathed.

"Bella," Edward said.

"Oh, Edward! I was so worried."

"Bella," he sighed in frustration, "I told you not to

worry about anything but yourself." It was so

unbelievably good to hear his voice. I felt the hovering

cloud of despair lighten and drift back as he spoke.

"Where are you?"

"We're outside of Vancouver. Bella, I'm sorry — we

lost him. He seems suspicious of us — he's careful to

stay just far enough away that I can't hear what he's

thinking. But he's gone now — it looks like he got on

a plane. We think he's heading back to Forks to start

over." I could hear Alice filling in Jasper behind me,

her quick words blurring together into a humming

noise.

"I know. Alice saw that he got away."

"You don't have to worry, though. He won't find

anything to lead him to you. You just have to stay

there and wait till we find him again."

"I'll be fine. Is Esme with Charlie?"

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"Yes — the female has been in town. She went to the

house, but while Charlie was at work. She hasn't

gone near him, so don't be afraid. He's safe with Esme

and Rosalie watching."

"What is she doing?"

"Probably trying to pick up the trail. She's been all

through the town during the night. Rosalie traced her

through the airport, all the roads around town, the

school... she's digging, Bella, but there's nothing to

find."

"And you're sure Charlie's safe?"

"Yes, Esme won't let him out of her sight. And we'll be

there soon. If the tracker gets anywhere near Forks,

we'll have him."

"I miss you," I whispered.

"I know, Bella. Believe me, I know. It's like you've

taken half my self away with you."

"Come and get it, then," I challenged.

"Soon, as soon as I possibly can. I will make you safe

first." His voice was hard.

"I love you," I reminded him.

"Could you believe that, despite everything I've put

you through, I love you, too?"

"Yes, I can, actually."

"I'll come for you soon."

"I'll be waiting."

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As soon as the phone went dead, the cloud of

depression began to creep over me again.

I turned to give the phone back to Alice and found her

and Jasper bent over the table, where Alice was

sketching on a piece of hotel stationery. I leaned on

the back of the couch, looking over her shoulder. She

drew a room: long, rectangular, with a thinner,

square section at the back. The wooden planks that

made up the floor stretched lengthwise across the

room. Down the walls were lines denoting the breaks

in the mirrors. And then, wrapping around the walls,

waist high, a long band. The band Alice said was gold.

"It's a ballet studio," I said, suddenly recognizing the

familiar shapes. They looked at me, surprised.

"Do you know this room?" Jasper's voice sounded

calm, but there was an undercurrent of something I

couldn't identify. Alice bent her head to her work, her

hand flying across the page now, the shape of an

emergency exit taking shape against the back wall,

the stereo and TV on a low table by the front right

corner.

"It looks like a place I used to go for dance lessons —

when I was eight or nine. It was shaped just the

same." I touched the page where the square section

jutted out, narrowing the back part of the room.

"That's where the bathrooms were — the doors were

through the other dance floor. But the stereo was

here" — I pointed to the left corner — "it was older,

and there wasn't a TV. There was a window in the

waiting room — you would see the room from this

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perspective if you looked through it." Alice and Jasper

were staring at me.

"Are you sure it's the same room?" Jasper asked, still

calm.

"No, not at all — I suppose most dance studios would

look the same — the mirrors, the bar." I traced my

finger along the ballet bar set against the mirrors. "It's

just the shape that looked familiar." I touched the

door, set in exactly the same place as the one I

remembered.

"Would you have any reason to go there now?" Alice

asked, breaking my reverie.

"No, I haven't been there in almost ten years. I was a

terrible dancer —

they always put me in the back for recitals," I

admitted.

"So there's no way it could be connected with you?"

Alice asked intently.

"No, I don't even think the same person owns it. I'm

sure it's just another dance studio, somewhere."

"Where was the studio you went to?" Jasper asked in

a casual voice.

"It was just around the corner from my mom's house.

I used to walk there after school..." I said, my voice

trailing off. I didn't miss the look they exchanged.

"Here in Phoenix, then?" His voice was still casual.

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"Yes," I whispered. "Fifty-eighth Street and Cactus."

We all sat in silence, staring at the drawing.

"Alice, is that phone safe?"

"Yes," she reassured me. "The number would just

trace back to Washington."

"Then I can use it to call my mom."

"I thought she was in Florida."

"She is — but she's coming home soon, and she can't

come back to that house while..." My voice trembled. I

was thinking about something Edward had said,

about the red-haired female at Charlie's house, at the

school, where my records would be.

"How will you reach her?"

"They don't have a permanent number except at the

house — she's supposed to check her messages

regularly."

"Jasper?" Alice asked.

He thought about it. "I don't think there's any way it

could hurt — be sure you don't say where you are, of

course."

I reached eagerly for the phone and dialed the familiar

number. It rang four times, and then I heard my

mom's breezy voice telling me to leave a message.

"Mom," I said after the beep, "it's me. Listen, I need

you to do something. It's important. As soon as you

get this message, call me at this number." Alice was

already at my side, writing the number for me on the

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bottom of her picture. I read it carefully, twice. "Please

don't go anywhere until you talk to me. Don't worry,

I'm okay, but I have to talk to you right away, no

matter how late you get this call, all right? I love you,

Mom. Bye." I closed my eyes and prayed with all my

might that no unforeseen change of plans would bring

her home before she got my message.

I settled into the sofa, nibbling on a plate of leftover

fruit, anticipating a long evening. I thought about

calling Charlie, but I wasn't sure if I should be home

by now or not. I concentrated on the news, watching

out for stories about Florida, or about spring training

strikes or hurricanes or terrorist attacks — anything

that might send them home early.

Immortality must grant endless patience. Neither

Jasper nor Alice seemed to feel the need to do

anything at all. For a while, Alice sketched the vague

outline of the dark room from her vision, as much as

she could see in the light from the TV. But when she

was done, she simply sat, looking at the blank walls

with her timeless eyes. Jasper, too, seemed to have no

urge to pace, or peek through the curtains, or run

screaming out the door, the way I did.

I must have fallen asleep on the couch, waiting for the

phone to ring again. The touch of Alice's cold hands

woke me briefly as she carried me to the bed, but I

was unconscious again before my head hit the pillow.

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Chapter 16

I could feel it was too early again when I woke, and I

knew I was getting the schedule of my days and

nights slowly reversed. I lay in my bed and listened to

the quiet voices of Alice and Jasper in the other room.

That they were loud enough for me to hear at all was

strange. I rolled till my feet touched the floor and then

staggered to the living room. The clock on the TV said

it was just after two in the morning. Alice and Jasper

were sitting together on the sofa, Alice sketching

again while Jasper looked over her shoulder. They

didn't look up when I entered, too engrossed in Alice's

work.

I crept to Jasper's side to peek.

"Did she see something more?" I asked him quietly.

"Yes. Something's brought him back to the room with

the VCR, but it's light now."

I watched as Alice drew a square room with dark

beams across its low ceiling. The walls were paneled

in wood, a little too dark, out of date. The floor had a

dark carpet with a pattern in it. There was a large

window against the south wall, and an opening

through the west wall led to the living room. One side

of that entrance was stone — a large tan stone

fireplace that was open to both rooms. The focus of

the room from this perspective, the TV and VCR,

balanced on a too-small wooden stand, were in the

southwest corner of the room. An aged sectional sofa

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curved around in front of the TV, a round coffee table

in front of it.

"The phone goes there," I whispered, pointing.

Two pairs of eternal eyes stared at me.

"That's my mother's house."

Alice was already off the couch, phone in hand,

dialing. I stared at the precise rendering of my

mother's family room. Uncharacteristically, Jasper

slid closer to me. He lightly touched his hand to my

shoulder, and the physical contact seemed to make

his calming influence stronger. The panic stayed dull,

unfocused.

Alice's lips were trembling with the speed of her

words, the low buzzing impossible to decipher. I

couldn't concentrate.

"Bella," Alice said. I looked at her numbly.

"Bella, Edward is coming to get you. He and Emmett

and Carlisle are going to take you somewhere, to hide

you for a while."

"Edward is coming?" The words were like a life vest,

holding my head above the flood.

"Yes, he's catching the first flight out of Seattle. We'll

meet him at the airport, and you'll leave with him."

"But, my mother... he came here for my mother,

Alice!" Despite Jasper, the hysteria bubbled up in my

voice.

"Jasper and I will stay till she's safe."

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"I can't win, Alice. You can't guard everyone I know

forever. Don't you see what he's doing? He's not

tracking me at all. He'll find someone, he'll hurt

someone I love... Alice, I can't — "

"We'll catch him, Bella," she assured me.

"And what if you get hurt, Alice? Do you think that's

okay with me? Do you think it's only my human

family he can hurt me with?" Alice looked

meaningfully at Jasper. A deep, heavy fog of lethargy

washed over me, and my eyes closed without my

permission. My mind struggled against the fog,

realizing what was happening. I forced my eyes open

and stood up, stepping away from Jasper's hand.

"I don't want to go back to sleep," I snapped.

I walked to my room and shut the door, slammed it

really, so I could be free to go to pieces privately. This

time Alice didn't follow me. For three and a half hours

I stared at the wall, curled in a ball, rocking. My mind

went around in circles, trying to come up with some

way out of this nightmare. There was no escape, no

reprieve. I could see only one possible end looming

darkly in my future. The only question was how many

other people would be hurt before I reached it.

The only solace, the only hope I had left, was knowing

that I would see Edward soon. Maybe, if I could just

see his face again, I would also be able to see the

solution that eluded me now.

When the phone rang, I returned to the front room, a

little ashamed of my behavior. I hoped I hadn't

offended either of them, that they would know how

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grateful I was for the sacrifices they were making on

my account. Alice was talking as rapidly as ever, but

what caught my attention was that, for the first time,

Jasper was not in the room. I looked at the clock — it

was five-thirty in the morning.

"They're just boarding their plane," Alice told me.

"They'll land at nine-forty-five." Just a few more hours

to keep breathing till he was here.

"Where's Jasper?"

"He went to check out."

"You aren't staying here?"

"No, we're relocating closer to your mother's house."

My stomach twisted uneasily at her words.

But the phone rang again, distracting me. She looked

surprised, but I was already walking forward,

reaching hopefully for the phone.

"Hello?" Alice asked. "No, she's right here." She held

the phone out to me. Your mother, she mouthed.

"Hello?"

"Bella? Bella?" It was my mother's voice, in a familiar

tone I had heard a thousand times in my childhood,

anytime I'd gotten too close to the edge of the

sidewalk or strayed out of her sight in a crowded

place. It was the sound of panic.

I sighed. I'd been expecting this, though I'd tried to

make my message as unalarming as possible without

lessening the urgency of it.

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"Calm down, Mom," I said in my most soothing voice,

walking slowly away from Alice. I wasn't sure if I

could lie as convincingly with her eyes on me.

"Everything is fine, okay? Just give me a minute and

I'll explain everything, I promise."

I paused, surprised that she hadn't interrupted me

yet.

"Mom?"

"Be very careful not to say anything until I tell you

to." The voice I heard now was as unfamiliar as it was

unexpected. It was a man's tenor voice, a very

pleasant, generic voice — the kind of voice that you

heard in the background of luxury car commercials.

He spoke very quickly.

"Now, I don't need to hurt your mother, so please do

exactly as I say, and she'll be fine." He paused for a

minute while I listened in mute horror. "That's very

good," he congratulated. "Now repeat after me, and do

try to sound natural. Please say, 'No, Mom, stay

where you are.'"

"No, Mom, stay where you are." My voice was barely

more than a whisper.

"I can see this is going to be difficult." The voice was

amused, still light and friendly. "Why don't you walk

into another room now so your face doesn't ruin

everything? There's no reason for your mother to

suffer. As you're walking, please say, 'Mom, please

listen to me.' Say it now."

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"Mom, please listen to me," my voice pleaded. I

walked very slowly to the bedroom, feeling Alice's

worried stare on my back. I shut the door behind me,

trying to think clearly through the terror that gripped

my brain.

"There now, are you alone? Just answer yes or no."

"Yes."

"But they can still hear you, I'm sure."

"Yes."

"All right, then," the agreeable voice continued, "say,

'Mom, trust me.'"

"Mom, trust me."

"This worked out rather better than I expected. I was

prepared to wait, but your mother arrived ahead of

schedule. It's easier this way, isn't it? Less suspense,

less anxiety for you."

I waited.

"Now I want you to listen very carefully. I'm going to

need you to get away from your friends; do you think

you can do that? Answer yes or no."

"No."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I was hoping you would be a

little more creative than that. Do you think you could

get away from them if your mother's life depended on

it? Answer yes or no."

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Somehow, there had to be a way. I remembered that

we were going to the airport. Sky Harbor International

Airport: crowded, confusingly laid out...

"Yes."

"That's better. I'm sure it won't be easy, but if I get

the slightest hint that you have any company, well,

that would be very bad for your mother," the friendly

voice promised. "You must know enough about us by

now to realize how quickly I would know if you tried

to bring anyone along with you. And how little time I

would need to deal with your mother if that was the

case. Do you understand? Answer yes or no."

"Yes." My voice broke.

"Very good, Bella. Now this is what you have to do. I

want you to go to your mother's house. Next to the

phone there will be a number. Call it, and I'll tell you

where to go from there." I already knew where I would

go, and where this would end. But I would follow his

instructions exactly. "Can you do that? Answer yes or

no."

"Yes."

"Before noon, please, Bella. I haven't got all day," he

said politely.

"Where's Phil?" I asked tersely.

"Ah, be careful now, Bella. Wait until I ask you to

speak, please." I waited.

"It's important, now, that you don't make your friends

suspicious when you go back to them. Tell them that

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your mother called, and that you talked her out of

coming home for the time being. Now repeat after me,

'Thank you, Mom.’ Say it now."

"Thank you, Mom." The tears were coming. I tried to

fight them back.

"Say, 'I love you, Mom, I'll see you soon.’ Say it now."

"I love you, Mom." My voice was thick. "I'll see you

soon," I promised.

"Goodbye, Bella. I look forward to seeing you again."

He hung up. I held the phone to my ear. My joints

were frozen with terror — I couldn't unbend my

fingers to drop it.

I knew I had to think, but my head was filled with the

sound of my mother's panic. Seconds ticked by while

I fought for control. Slowly, slowly, my thoughts

started to break past that brick wall of pain. To plan.

For I had no choices now but one: to go to the

mirrored room and die. I had no guarantees, nothing

to give to keep my mother alive. I could only hope that

James would be satisfied with winning the game, that

beating Edward would be enough. Despair gripped

me; there was no way to bargain, nothing I could offer

or withhold that could influence him. But I still had

no choice. I had to try.

I pushed the terror back as well as I could. My

decision was made. It did no good to waste time

agonizing over the outcome. I had to think clearly,

because Alice and Jasper were waiting for me, and

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evading them was absolutely essential, and absolutely

impossible.

I was suddenly grateful that Jasper was gone. If he

had been here to feel my anguish in the last five

minutes, how could I have kept them from being

suspicious? I choked back the dread, the anxiety,

tried to stifle it. I couldn't afford it now. I didn't know

when he would return. I concentrated on my escape. I

had to hope that my familiarity with the airport would

turn the odds in my favor. Somehow, I had to keep

Alice away...

I knew Alice was in the other room waiting for me,

curious. But I had to deal with one more thing in

private, before Jasper was back. I had to accept that I

wouldn't see Edward again, not even one last glimpse

of his face to carry with me to the mirror room. I was

going to hurt him, and I couldn't say goodbye. I let

the waves of torture wash over me, have their way for

a time. Then I pushed them back, too, and went to

face Alice.

The only expression I could manage was a dull, dead

look. I saw her alarm and I didn't wait for her to ask. I

had just one script and I'd never manage

improvisation now.

"My mom was worried, she wanted to come home. But

it's okay, I convinced her to stay away." My voice was

lifeless.

"We'll make sure she's fine, Bella, don't worry." I

turned away; I couldn't let her see my face.

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My eye fell on a blank page of the hotel stationery on

the desk. I went to it slowly, a plan forming. There

was an envelope there, too. That was good.

"Alice," I asked slowly, without turning, keeping my

voice level. "If I write a letter for my mother, would

you give it to her? Leave it at the house, I mean."

"Sure, Bella." Her voice was careful. She could see me

coming apart at the seams. I had to keep my

emotions under better control. I went into the

bedroom again, and knelt next to the little bedside

table to write.

"Edward," I wrote. My hand was shaking, the letters

were hardly legible. I love you. I am so sorry. He has

my mom, and I have to try. I know it may not work. I

am so very, very sorry.

Don't be angry with Alice and Jasper. If I get away

from them it will be a miracle. Tell them thank you for

me. Alice especially, please. And please, please, don't

come after him. That's what he wants. I think. I can't

bear it if anyone has to be hurt because of me,

especially you. Please, this is the only thing I can ask

you now. For me. I love you. Forgive me.

Bella

I folded the letter carefully, and sealed it in the

envelope. Eventually he would find it. I only hoped he

would understand, and listen to me just this once.

And then I carefully sealed away my heart.

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Chapter 17

It had taken much less time than I'd thought — all

the terror, the despair, the shattering of my heart.

The minutes were ticking by more slowly than usual.

Jasper still hadn't come back when I returned to

Alice. I was afraid to be in the same room with her,

afraid that she would guess... and afraid to hide from

her for the same reason. I would have thought I was

far beyond the ability to be surprised, my thoughts

tortured and unstable, but I was surprised when I

saw Alice bent over the desk, gripping the edge with

two hands.

"Alice?"

She didn't react when I called her name, but her head

was slowly rocking side to side, and I saw her face.

Her eyes were blank, dazed... My thoughts flew to my

mother. Was I already too late?

I hurried to her side, reaching out automatically to

touch her hand.

"Alice!" Jasper's voice whipped, and then he was right

behind her, his hands curling over hers, loosening

them from their grip on the table. Across the room,

the door swung shut with a low click.

"What is it?" he demanded.

She turned her face away from me, into his chest.

"Bella," she said.

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"I'm right here," I replied.

Her head twisted around, her eyes locking on mine,

their expression still strangely blank. I realized at

once that she hadn't been speaking to me, she'd been

answering Jasper's question.

"What did you see?" I said — and there was no

question in my flat, uncaring voice.

Jasper looked at me sharply. I kept my expression

vacant and waited. His eyes were confused as they

flickered swiftly between Alice's face and mine, feeling

the chaos... for I could guess what Alice had seen

now. I felt a tranquil atmosphere settle around me. I

welcomed it, using it to keep my emotions disciplined,

under control.

Alice, too, recovered herself.

"Nothing, really," she answered finally, her voice

remarkably calm and convincing. "Just the same

room as before."

She finally looked at me, her expression smooth and

withdrawn. "Did you want breakfast?"

"No, I'll eat at the airport." I was very calm, too. I went

to the bathroom to shower. Almost as if I were

borrowing Jasper's strange extra sense, I could feel

Alice's wild — though well-concealed — desperation to

have me out of the room, to be alone with Jasper. So

she could tell him that they were doing something

wrong, that they were going to fail...

I got ready methodically, concentrating on each little

task. I left my hair down, swirling around me,

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covering my face. The peaceful mood Jasper created

worked its way through me and helped me think

clearly. Helped me plan. I dug through my bag until I

found my sock full of money. I emptied it into my

pocket.

I was anxious to get to the airport, and glad when we

left by seven. I sat alone this time in the back of the

dark car. Alice leaned against the door, her face

toward Jasper but, behind her sunglasses, shooting

glances in my direction every few seconds.

"Alice?" I asked indifferently.

She was wary. "Yes?"

"How does it work? The things that you see?" I stared

out the side window, and my voice sounded bored.

"Edward said it wasn't definite... that things change?"

It was harder than I would have thought to say his

name. That must have been what alerted Jasper, why

a fresh wave of serenity filled the car.

"Yes, things change..." she murmured — hopefully, I

thought. "Some things are more certain than others...

like the weather. People are harder. I only see the

course they're on while they're on it. Once they

change their minds — make a new decision, no

matter how small — the whole future shifts."

I nodded thoughtfully. "So you couldn't see James in

Phoenix until he decided to come here."

"Yes," she agreed, wary again.

And she hadn't seen me in the mirror room with

James until I'd made the decision to meet him there. I

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tried not to think about what else she might have

seen. I didn't want my panic to make Jasper more

suspicious. They would be watching me twice as

carefully now, anyway, after Alice's vision. This was

going to be impossible.

We got to the airport. Luck was with me, or maybe it

was just good odds. Edward's plane was landing in

terminal four, the largest terminal, where most flights

landed — so it wasn't surprising that his was. But it

was the terminal I needed: the biggest, the most

confusing. And there was a door on level three that

might be the only chance.

We parked on the fourth floor of the huge garage. I led

the way, for once more knowledgeable about my

surroundings than they were. We took the elevator

down to level three, where the passengers unloaded.

Alice and Jasper spent a long time looking at the

departing flights board. I could hear them discussing

the pros and cons of New York, Atlanta, Chicago.

Places I'd never seen. And would never see.

I waited for my opportunity, impatient, unable to stop

my toe from tapping. We sat in the long rows of chairs

by the metal detectors, Jasper and Alice pretending to

people-watch but really watching me. Every inch I

shifted in my seat was followed by a quick glance out

of the corner of their eyes. It was hopeless. Should I

run? Would they dare to stop me physically in this

public place? Or would they simply follow?

I pulled the unmarked envelope out of my pocket and

set it on top of Alice's black leather bag. She looked at

me.

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"My letter," I said. She nodded, tucking it under the

top flap. He would find it soon enough.

The minutes passed and Edward's arrival grew closer.

It was amazing how every cell in my body seemed to

know he was coming, to long for his coming. That

made it very hard. I found myself trying to think of

excuses to stay, to see him first and then make my

escape. But I knew that was impossible if I was going

to have any chance to get away. Several times Alice

offered to go get breakfast with me. Later, I told her,

not yet.

I stared at the arrival board, watching as flight after

flight arrived on time. The flight from Seattle crept

closer to the top of the board. And then, when I had

only thirty minutes to make my escape, the numbers

changed. His plane was ten minutes early. I had no

more time.

"I think I'll eat now," I said quickly.

Alice stood. "I'll come with you."

"Do you mind if Jasper comes instead?" I asked. "I'm

feeling a little..." I didn't finish the sentence. My eyes

were wild enough to convey what I didn't say.

Jasper stood up. Alice's eyes were confused, but — I

saw to my relief —

not suspicious. She must be attributing the change in

her vision to some maneuver of the tracker's rather

than a betrayal by me.

Jasper walked silently beside me, his hand on the

small of my back, as if he were guiding me. I

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pretended a lack of interest in the first few airport

cafes, my head scanning for what I really wanted. And

there it was, around the corner, out of Alice's sharp

sight: the level-three ladies' room.

"Do you mind?" I asked Jasper as we passed. "I'll just

be a moment."

"I'll be right here," he said.

As soon as the door shut behind me, I was running. I

remembered the time I had gotten lost from this

bathroom, because it had two exits. Outside the far

door it was only a short sprint to the elevators, and if

Jasper stayed where he said he would, I'd never be in

his line of sight. I didn't look behind me as I ran. This

was my only chance, and even if he saw me, I had to

keep going. People stared, but I ignored them. Around

the corner the elevators were waiting, and I dashed

forward, throwing my hand between the closing doors

of a full elevator headed down. I squeezed in beside

the irritated passengers, and checked to make sure

that the button for level one had been pushed. It was

already lit, and the doors closed.

As soon as the door opened I was off again, to the

sound of annoyed murmurs behind me. I slowed

myself as I passed the security guards by the luggage

carousels, only to break into a run again as the exit

doors came into view. I had no way of knowing if

Jasper was looking for me yet. I would have only

seconds if he was following my scent. I jumped out

the automatic doors, nearly smacking into the glass

when they opened too slowly.

Along the crowded curb there wasn't a cab in sight.

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I had no time. Alice and Jasper were either about to

realize I was gone, or they already had. They would

find me in a heartbeat.

A shuttle to the Hyatt was just closing its doors a few

feet behind me.

"Wait!" I called, running, waving at the driver.

"This is the shuttle to the Hyatt," the driver said in

confusion as he opened the doors.

"Yes," I huffed, "that's where I'm going." I hurried up

the steps. He looked askance at my luggage-less

state, but then shrugged, not caring enough to ask.

Most of the seats were empty. I sat as far from the

other travelers as possible, and watched out the

window as first the sidewalk, and then the airport,

drifted away. I couldn't help imagining Edward, where

he would stand at the edge of the road when he found

the end of my trail. I couldn't cry yet, I told myself. I

still had a long way to go. My luck held. In front of the

Hyatt, a tired-looking couple was getting their last

suitcase out of the trunk of a cab. I jumped out of the

shuttle and ran to the cab, sliding into the seat

behind the driver. The tired couple and the shuttle

driver stared at me.

I told the surprised cabbie my mother's address. "I

need to get there as soon as possible."

"That's in Scottsdale," he complained.

I threw four twenties over the seat.

"Will that be enough?

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"Sure, kid, no problem."

I sat back against the seat, folding my arms across

my lap. The familiar city began to rush around me,

but I didn't look out the windows. I exerted myself to

maintain control. I was determined not to lose myself

at this point, now that my plan was successfully

completed. There was no point in indulging in more

terror, more anxiety. My path was set. I just had to

follow it now.

So, instead of panicking, I closed my eyes and spent

the twenty minutes'

drive with Edward.

I imagined that I had stayed at the airport to meet

Edward. I visualized how I would stand on my toes,

the sooner to see his face. How quickly, how

gracefully he would move through the crowds of

people separating us. And then I would run to close

those last few feet between us — reckless as always —

and I would be in his marble arms, finally safe. I

wondered where we would have gone. North

somewhere, so he could be outside in the day. Or

maybe somewhere very remote, so we could lay in the

sun together again. I imagined him by the shore, his

skin sparkling like the sea. It wouldn't matter how

long we had to hide. To be trapped in a hotel room

with him would be a kind of heaven. So many

questions I still had for him. I could talk to him

forever, never sleeping, never leaving his side.

I could see his face so clearly now. . . almost hear his

voice. And, despite all the horror and hopelessness, I

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was fleetingly happy. So involved was I in my escapist

daydreams, I lost all track of the seconds racing by.

"Hey, what was the number?"

The cabbie's question punctured my fantasy, letting

all the colors run out of my lovely delusions. Fear,

bleak and hard, was waiting to fill the empty space

they left behind.

"Fifty-eight twenty-one." My voice sounded strangled.

The cabbie looked at me, nervous that I was having

an episode or something.

"Here we are, then." He was anxious to get me out of

his car, probably hoping I wouldn't ask for my

change.

"Thank you," I whispered. There was no need to be

afraid, I reminded myself. The house was empty. I

had to hurry; my mom was waiting for me, frightened,

depending on me.

I ran to the door, reaching up automatically to grab

the key under the eave. I unlocked the door. It was

dark inside, empty, normal. I ran to the phone,

turning on the kitchen light on my way. There, on the

whiteboard, was a ten-digit number written in a

small, neat hand. My fingers stumbled over the

keypad, making mistakes. I had to hang up and start

again. I concentrated only on the buttons this time,

carefully pressing each one in turn. I was successful.

I held the phone to my ear with a shaking hand. It

rang only once.

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"Hello, Bella," that easy voice answered. "That was

very quick. I'm impressed."

"Is my mom all right?"

"She's perfectly fine. Don't worry, Bella, I have no

quarrel with her. Unless you didn't come alone, of

course." Light, amused.

"I'm alone." I'd never been more alone in my entire

life.

"Very good. Now, do you know the ballet studio just

around the corner from your home?"

"Yes. I know how to get there."

"Well, then, I'll see you very soon."

I hung up.

I ran from the room, through the door, out into the

baking heat. There was no time to look back at my

house, and I didn't want to see it as it was now —

empty, a symbol of fear instead of sanctuary. The last

person to walk through those familiar rooms was my

enemy. From the corner of my eye, I could almost see

my mother standing in the shade of the big

eucalyptus tree where I'd played as a child. Or

kneeling by the little plot of dirt around the mailbox,

the cemetery of all the flowers she'd tried to grow. The

memories were better than any reality I would see

today. But I raced away from them, toward the

corner, leaving everything behind me.

I felt so slow, like I was running through wet sand — I

couldn't seem to get enough purchase from the

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concrete. I tripped several times, once falling,

catching myself with my hands, scraping them on the

sidewalk, and then lurching up to plunge forward

again. But at last I made it to the corner. Just

another street now; I ran, sweat pouring down my

face, gasping. The sun was hot on my skin, too bright

as it bounced off the white concrete and blinded me. I

felt dangerously exposed. More fiercely than I would

have dreamed I was capable of, I wished for the green,

protective forests of Forks... of home.

When I rounded the last corner, onto Cactus, I could

see the studio, looking just as I remembered it. The

parking lot in front was empty, the vertical blinds in

all the windows drawn. I couldn't run anymore — I

couldn't breathe; exertion and fear had gotten the

best of me. I thought of my mother to keep my feet

moving, one in front of the other. As I got closer, I

could see the sign inside the door. It was handwritten

on hot pink paper; it said the dance studio was closed

for spring break. I touched the handle, tugged on it

cautiously. It was unlocked. I fought to catch my

breath, and opened the door.

The lobby was dark and empty, cool, the air

conditioner thrumming. The plastic molded chairs

were stacked along the walls, and the carpet smelled

like shampoo. The west dance floor was dark, I could

see through the open viewing window. The east dance

floor, the bigger room, was lit. But the blinds were

closed on the window.

Terror seized me so strongly that I was literally

trapped by it. I couldn't make my feet move forward.

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And then my mother's voice called.

"Bella? Bella?" That same tone of hysterical panic. I

sprinted to the door, to the sound of her voice.

"Bella, you scared me! Don't you ever do that to me

again! " Her voice continued as I ran into the long,

high-ceilinged room.

I stared around me, trying to find where her voice was

coming from. I heard her laugh, and I whirled to the

sound.

There she was, on the TV screen, tousling my hair in

relief. It was Thanksgiving, and I was twelve. We'd

gone to see my grandmother in California, the last

year before she died. We went to the beach one day,

and I'd leaned too far over the edge of the pier. She'd

seen my feet flailing, trying to reclaim my balance.

"Bella? Bella?" she'd called to me in fear.

And then the TV screen was blue.

I turned slowly. He was standing very still by the back

exit, so still I hadn't noticed him at first. In his hand

was a remote control. We stared at each other for a

long moment, and then he smiled.

He walked toward me, quite close, and then passed

me to put the remote down next to the VCR. I turned

carefully to watch him.

"Sorry about that, Bella, but isn't it better that your

mother didn't really have to be involved in all this?"

His voice was courteous, kind. And suddenly it hit

me. My mother was safe. She was still in Florida.

She'd never gotten my message. She'd never been

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terrified by the dark red eyes in the abnormally pale

face before me. She was safe.

"Yes," I answered, my voice saturated with relief.

"You don't sound angry that I tricked you."

"I'm not." My sudden high made me brave. What did it

matter now? It would soon be over. Charlie and Mom

would never be harmed, would never have to fear. I

felt almost giddy. Some analytical part of my mind

warned me that I was dangerously close to snapping

from the stress.

"How odd. You really mean it." His dark eyes assessed

me with interest. The irises were nearly black, just a

hint of ruby around the edges. Thirsty. "I will give

your strange coven this much, you humans can be

quite interesting. I guess I can see the draw of

observing you. It's amazing — some of you seem to

have no sense of your own self-interest at all."

He was standing a few feet away from me, arms

folded, looking at me curiously. There was no menace

in his face or stance. He was so very average-looking,

nothing remarkable about his face or body at all. Just

the white skin, the circled eyes I'd grown so used to.

He wore a pale blue, long-sleeved shirt and faded blue

jeans.

"I suppose you're going to tell me that your boyfriend

will avenge you?" he asked, hopefully it seemed to me.

"No, I don't think so. At least, I asked him not to."

"And what was his reply to that?"

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"I don't know." It was strangely easy to converse with

this genteel hunter. "I left him a letter."

"How romantic, a last letter. And do you think he will

honor it?" His voice was just a little harder now, a

hint of sarcasm marring his polite tone.

"I hope so."

"Hmmm. Well, our hopes differ then. You see, this

was all just a little too easy, too quick. To be quite

honest, I'm disappointed. I expected a much greater

challenge. And, after all, I only needed a little luck." I

waited in silence.

"When Victoria couldn't get to your father, I had her

find out more about you. There was no sense in

running all over the planet chasing you down when I

could comfortably wait for you in a place of my

choosing. So, after I talked to Victoria, I decided to

come to Phoenix to pay your mother a visit. I'd heard

you say you were going home. At first, I never

dreamed you meant it. But then I wondered. Humans

can be very predictable; they like to be somewhere

familiar, somewhere safe. And wouldn't it be the

perfect ploy, to go to the last place you should be

when you're hiding — the place that you said you'd

be.

"But of course I wasn't sure, it was just a hunch. I

usually get a feeling about the prey that I'm hunting,

a sixth sense, if you will. I listened to your message

when I got to your mother's house, but of course I

couldn't be sure where you'd called from. It was very

useful to have your number, but you could have been

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in Antarctica for all I knew, and the game wouldn't

work unless you were close by.

"Then your boyfriend got on a plane to Phoenix.

Victoria was monitoring them for me, naturally; in a

game with this many players, I couldn't be working

alone. And so they told me what I'd hoped, that you

were here after all. I was prepared; I'd already been

through your charming home movies. And then it was

simply a matter of the bluff.

"Very easy, you know, not really up to my standards.

So, you see, I'm hoping you're wrong about your

boyfriend. Edward, isn't it?" I didn't answer. The

bravado was wearing off. I sensed that he was coming

to the end of his gloat. It wasn't meant for me

anyway. There was no glory in beating me, a weak

human.

"Would you mind, very much, if I left a little letter of

my own for your Edward?"

He took a step back and touched a palm-sized digital

video camera balanced carefully on top of the stereo.

A small red light indicated that it was already

running. He adjusted it a few times, widened the

frame. I stared at him in horror.

"I'm sorry, but I just don't think he'll be able to resist

hunting me after he watches this. And I wouldn't

want him to miss anything. It was all for him, of

course. You're simply a human, who unfortunately

was in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and

indisputably running with the wrong crowd, I might

add."

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He stepped toward me, smiling. "Before we begin..." I

felt a curl of nausea in the pit of my stomach as he

spoke. This was something I had not anticipated.

"I would just like to rub it in, just a little bit. The

answer was there all along, and I was so afraid

Edward would see that and ruin my fun. It happened

once, oh, ages ago. The one and only time my prey

escaped me.

"You see, the vampire who was so stupidly fond of

this little victim made the choice that your Edward

was too weak to make. When the old one knew I was

after his little friend, he stole her from the asylum

where he worked

— I never will understand the obsession some

vampires seem to form with you humans — and as

soon as he freed her he made her safe. She didn't

even seem to notice the pain, poor little creature.

She'd been stuck in that black hole of a cell for so

long. A hundred years earlier and she would have

been burned at the stake for her visions. In the

nineteen-twenties it was the asylum and the shock

treatments. When she opened her eyes, strong with

her fresh youth, it was like she'd never seen the sun

before. The old vampire made her a strong new

vampire, and there was no reason for me to touch her

then." He sighed. "I destroyed the old one in

vengeance."

"Alice," I breathed, astonished.

"Yes, your little friend. I was surprised to see her in

the clearing. So I guess her coven ought to be able to

derive some comfort from this experience. I get you,

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but they get her. The one victim who escaped me,

quite an honor, actually.

"And she did smell so delicious. I still regret that I

never got to taste... She smelled even better than you

do. Sorry — I don't mean to be offensive. You have a

very nice smell. Floral, somehow..." He took another

step toward me, till he was just inches away. He lifted

a lock of my hair and sniffed at it delicately. Then he

gently patted the strand back into place, and I felt his

cool fingertips against my throat. He reached up to

stroke my cheek once quickly with his thumb, his

face curious. I wanted so badly to run, but I was

frozen. I couldn't even flinch away.

"No," he murmured to himself as he dropped his

hand, "I don't understand." He sighed. "Well, I

suppose we should get on with it. And then I can call

your friends and tell them where to find you, and my

little message."

I was definitely sick now. There was pain coming, I

could see it in his eyes. It wouldn't be enough for him

to win, to feed and go. There would be no quick end

like I'd been counting on. My knees began to shake,

and I was afraid I was going to fall.

He stepped back, and began to circle, casually, as if

he were trying to get a better view of a statue in a

museum. His face was still open and friendly as he

decided where to start.

Then he slumped forward, into a crouch I recognized,

and his pleasant smile slowly widened, grew, till it

wasn't a smile at all but a contortion of teeth, exposed

and glistening.

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I couldn't help myself — I tried to run. As useless as I

knew it would be, as weak as my knees already were,

panic took over and I bolted for the emergency door.

He was in front of me in a flash. I didn't see if he used

his hand or his foot, it was too fast. A crushing blow

struck my chest — I felt myself flying backward, and

then heard the crunch as my head bashed into the

mirrors. The glass buckled, some of the pieces

shattering and splintering on the floor beside me.

I was too stunned to feel the pain. I couldn't breathe

yet. He walked toward me slowly.

"That's a very nice effect," he said, examining the

mess of glass, his voice friendly again. "I thought this

room would be visually dramatic for my little film.

That's why I picked this place to meet you. It's

perfect, isn't it?"

I ignored him, scrambling on my hands and knees,

crawling toward the other door.

He was over me at once, his foot stepping down hard

on my leg. I heard the sickening snap before I felt it.

But then I did feel it, and I couldn't hold back my

scream of agony. I twisted up to reach for my leg, and

he was standing over me, smiling.

"Would you like to rethink your last request?" he

asked pleasantly. His toe nudged my broken leg and I

heard a piercing scream. With a shock, I realized it

was mine.

"Wouldn't you rather have Edward try to find me?" he

prompted.

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"No!" I croaked. "No, Edward, don't — " And then

something smashed into my face, throwing me back

into the broken mirrors.

Over the pain of my leg, I felt the sharp rip across my

scalp where the glass cut into it. And then the warm

wetness began to spread through my hair with

alarming speed. I could feel it soaking the shoulder of

my shirt, hear it dripping on the wood below. The

smell of it twisted my stomach.

Through the nausea and dizziness I saw something

that gave me a sudden, final shred of hope. His eyes,

merely intent before, now burned with an

uncontrollable need. The blood — spreading crimson

across my white shirt, pooling rapidly on the floor —

was driving him mad with thirst. No matter his

original intentions, he couldn't draw this out much

longer. Let it be quick now, was all I could hope as

the flow of blood from my head sucked my

consciousness away with it. My eyes were closing. I

heard, as if from underwater, the final growl of the

hunter. I could see, through the long tunnels my eyes

had become, his dark shape coming toward me. With

my last effort, my hand instinctively raised to protect

my face. My eyes closed, and I drifted.

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As I drifted, I dreamed.

Where I floated, under the dark water, I heard the

happiest sound my mind could conjure up — as

beautiful, as uplifting, as it was ghastly. It was

another snarl; a deeper, wilder roar that rang with

fury. I was brought back, almost to the surface, by a

sharp pain slashing my upraised hand, but I couldn't

find my way back far enough to open my eyes. And

then I knew I was dead.

Because, through the heavy water, I heard the sound

of an angel calling my name, calling me to the only

heaven I wanted.

"Oh no, Bella, no!" the angel's voice cried in horror.

Behind that longed-for sound was another noise — an

awful tumult that my mind shied away from. A

vicious bass growling, a shocking snapping sound,

and a high keening, suddenly breaking off. . .

I tried to concentrate on the angel's voice instead.

"Bella, please! Bella, listen to me, please, please,

Bella, please!" he begged.

Yes, I wanted to say. Anything. But I couldn't find my

lips.

"Carlisle!" the angel called, agony in his perfect voice.

"Bella, Bella, no, oh please, no, no!" And the angel

was sobbing tearless, broken sobs. The angel

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shouldn't weep, it was wrong. I tried to find him, to

tell him everything was fine, but the water was so

deep, it was pressing on me, and I couldn't breathe.

There was a point of pressure against my head. It

hurt. Then, as that pain broke through the darkness

to me, other pains came, stronger pains. I cried out,

gasping, breaking through the dark pool.

"Bella!" the angel cried.

"She's lost some blood, but the head wound isn't

deep," a calm voice informed me. "Watch out for her

leg, it's broken." A howl of rage strangled on the

angel's lips.

I felt a sharp stab in my side. This couldn't be heaven,

could it? There was too much pain for that.

"Some ribs, too, I think," the methodical voice

continued. But the sharp pains were fading. There

was a new pain, a scalding pain in my hand that was

overshadowing everything else.

Someone was burning me.

"Edward." I tried to tell him, but my voice was so

heavy and slow. I couldn't understand myself.

"Bella, you're going to be fine. Can you hear me,

Bella? I love you."

"Edward," I tried again. My voice was a little clearer.

"Yes, I'm here."

"It hurts," I whimpered.

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"I know, Bella, I know" — and then, away from me,

anguished — "can't you do anything?"

"My bag, please... Hold your breath, Alice, it will

help," Carlisle promised.

"Alice?" I groaned.

"She's here, she knew where to find you."

"My hand hurts," I tried to tell him.

"I know, Bella. Carlisle will give you something, it will

stop."

"My hand is burning!" I screamed, finally breaking

through the last of the darkness, my eyes fluttering

open. I couldn't see his face, something dark and

warm was clouding my eyes. Why couldn't they see

the fire and put it out?

His voice was frightened. "Bella?"

"The fire! Someone stop the fire!" I screamed as it

burned me.

"Carlisle! Her hand!"

"He bit her." Carlisle's voice was no longer calm, it

was appalled. I heard Edward catch his breath in

horror.

"Edward, you have to do it." It was Alice's voice, close

by my head. Cool fingers brushed at the wetness in

my eyes.

"No!" he bellowed.

"Alice," I moaned.

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"There may be a chance," Carlisle said.

"What?" Edward begged.

"See if you can suck the venom back out. The wound

is fairly clean." As Carlisle spoke, I could feel more

pressure on my head, something poking and pulling

at my scalp. The pain of it was lost in the pain of the

fire.

"Will that work?" Alice's voice was strained.

"I don't know," Carlisle said. "But we have to hurry."

"Carlisle, I..." Edward hesitated. "I don't know if I can

do that." There was agony in his beautiful voice again.

"It's your decision, Edward, either way. I can't help

you. I have to get this bleeding stopped here if you're

going to be taking blood from her hand."

I writhed in the grip of the fiery torture, the movement

making the pain in my leg flare sickeningly.

"Edward!" I screamed. I realized my eyes were closed

again. I opened them, desperate to find his face. And I

found him. Finally, I could see his perfect face,

staring at me, twisted into a mask of indecision and

pain.

"Alice, get me something to brace her leg!" Carlisle

was bent over me, working on my head. "Edward, you

must do it now, or it will be too late." Edward's face

was drawn. I watched his eyes as the doubt was

suddenly replaced with a blazing determination. His

jaw tightened. I felt his cool, strong fingers on my

burning hand, locking it in place. Then his head bent

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over it, and his cold lips pressed against my skin. At

first the pain was worse. I screamed and thrashed

against the cool hands that held me back. I heard

Alice's voice, trying to calm me. Something heavy held

my leg to the floor, and Carlisle had my head locked

in the vise of his stone arms.

Then, slowly, my writhing calmed as my hand grew

more and more numb. The fire was dulling, focusing

into an ever-smaller point.

I felt my consciousness slipping as the pain subsided.

I was afraid to fall into the black waters again, afraid I

would lose him in the darkness.

"Edward," I tried to say, but I couldn't hear my voice.

They could hear me.

"He's right here, Bella."

"Stay, Edward, stay with me..."

"I will." His voice was strained, but somehow

triumphant. I sighed contentedly. The fire was gone,

the other pains dulled by a sleepiness seeping

through my body.

"Is it all out?" Carlisle asked from somewhere far

away.

"Her blood tastes clean," Edward said quietly. "I can

taste the morphine."

"Bella?" Carlisle called to me.

I tried to answer. "Mmmmm?"

"Is the fire gone?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Yes," I sighed. "Thank you, Edward."

"I love you," he answered.

"I know," I breathed, so tired.

I heard my favorite sound in the world: Edward's

quiet laugh, weak with relief.

"Bella?" Carlisle asked again.

I frowned; I wanted to sleep. "What?"

"Where is your mother?"

"In Florida," I sighed. "He tricked me, Edward. He

watched our videos." The outrage in my voice was

pitifully frail.

But that reminded me.

"Alice." I tried to open my eyes. "Alice, the video — he

knew you, Alice, he knew where you came from." I

meant to speak urgently, but my voice was feeble. "I

smell gasoline," I added, surprised through the haze

in my brain.

"It's time to move her," Carlisle said.

"No, I want to sleep," I complained.

"You can sleep, sweetheart, I'll carry you," Edward

soothed me. And I was in his arms, cradled against

his chest — floating, all the pain gone.

"Sleep now, Bella" were the last words I heard.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

My eyes opened to a bright, white light. I was in an

unfamiliar room, a white room. The wall beside me

was covered in long vertical blinds; over my head, the

glaring lights blinded me. I was propped up on a

hard, uneven bed — a bed with rails. The pillows were

flat and lumpy. There was an annoying beeping

sound somewhere close by. I hoped that meant I was

still alive. Death shouldn't be this uncomfortable.

My hands were all twisted up with clear tubes, and

something was taped across my face, under my nose.

I lifted my hand to rip it off.

"No, you don't." And cool fingers caught my hand.

"Edward?" I turned my head slightly, and his

exquisite face was just inches from mine, his chin

resting on the edge of my pillow. I realized again that I

was alive, this time with gratitude and elation. "Oh,

Edward, I'm so sorry!"

"Shhhh," he shushed me. "Everything's all right now."

"What happened?" I couldn't remember clearly, and

my mind rebelled against me as I tried to recall.

"I was almost too late. I could have been too late," he

whispered, his voice tormented.

"I was so stupid, Edward. I thought he had my mom."

"He tricked us all."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I need to call Charlie and my mom," I realized

through the haze.

"Alice called them. Renee is here — well, here in the

hospital. She's getting something to eat right now."

"She's here?" I tried to sit up, but the spinning in my

head accelerated, and his hand pushed me gently

down onto the pillows.

"She'll be back soon," he promised. "And you need to

stay still."

"But what did you tell her?" I panicked. I had no

interest in being soothed. My mom was here and I

was recovering from a vampire attack. "Why did you

tell her I'm here?"

"You fell down two flights of stairs and through a

window." He paused.

"You have to admit, it could happen."

I sighed, and it hurt. I stared down at my body under

the sheet, the huge lump that was my leg.

"How bad am I?" I asked.

"You have a broken leg, four broken ribs, some cracks

in your skull, bruises covering every inch of your

skin, and you've lost a lot of blood. They gave you a

few transfusions. I didn't like it — it made you smell

all wrong for a while."

"That must have been a nice change for you."

"No, I like how you smell."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"How did you do it?" I asked quietly. He knew what I

meant at once.

"I'm not sure." He looked away from my wondering

eyes, lifting my gauze-wrapped hand from the bed

and holding it gently in his, careful not to disrupt the

wire connecting me to one of the monitors. I waited

patiently for the rest.

He sighed without returning my gaze. "It was

impossible... to stop," he whispered. "Impossible. But

I did." He looked up finally, with half a smile. "I must

love you."

"Don't I taste as good as I smell?" I smiled in

response. That hurt my face.

"Even better — better than I'd imagined."

"I'm sorry," I apologized.

He raised his eyes to the ceiling. "Of all the things to

apologize for."

"What should I apologize for?"

"For very nearly taking yourself away from me

forever."

"I'm sorry," I apologized again.

"I know why you did it." His voice was comforting. "It

was still irrational, of course. You should have waited

for me, you should have told me."

"You wouldn't have let me go."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"No," he agreed in a grim tone, "I wouldn't." Some very

unpleasant memories were beginning to come back to

me. I shuddered, and then winced.

He was instantly anxious. "Bella, what's wrong?"

"What happened to James?"

"After I pulled him off you, Emmett and Jasper took

care of him." There was a fierce note of regret in his

voice.

This confused me. "I didn't see Emmett and Jasper

there."

"They had to leave the room... there was a lot of

blood."

"But you stayed."

"Yes, I stayed."

"And Alice, and Carlisle..." I said in wonder.

"They love you, too, you know."

A flash of painful images from the last time I'd seen

Alice reminded me of something. "Did Alice see the

tape?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes." A new sound darkened his voice, a tone of

sheer hatred.

"She was always in the dark, that's why she didn't

remember."

"I know. She understands now." His voice was even,

but his face was black with fury.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I tried to reach his face with my free hand, but

something stopped me. I glanced down to see the IV

pulling at my hand.

"Ugh." I winced.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously — distracted, but not

enough. The bleakness did not entirely leave his eyes.

"Needles," I explained, looking away from the one in

my hand. I concentrated on a warped ceiling tile and

tried to breathe deeply despite the ache in my ribs.

"Afraid of a needle," he muttered to himself under his

breath, shaking his head. "Oh, a sadistic vampire,

intent on torturing her to death, sure, no problem,

she runs off to meet him. An IV, on the other hand..."

I rolled my eyes. I was pleased to discover that this

reaction, at least, was pain-free. I decided to change

the subject.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

He stared at me, first confusion and then hurt

touching his eyes. His brows pulled together as he

frowned. "Do you want me to leave?"

"No!" I protested, horrified by the thought. "No, I

meant, why does my mother think you're here? I need

to have my story straight before she gets back."

"Oh," he said, and his forehead smoothed back into

marble. "I came to Phoenix to talk some sense into

you, to convince you to come back to Forks." His wide

eyes were so earnest and sincere, I almost believed

him myself. "You agreed to see me, and you drove out

to the hotel where I was staying with Carlisle and

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Alice — of course I was here with parental

supervision," he inserted virtuously, "but you tripped

on the stairs on the way to my room and... well, you

know the rest. You don't need to remember any

details, though; you have a good excuse to be a little

muddled about the finer points."

I thought about it for a moment. "There are a few

flaws with that story. Like no broken windows."

"Not really," he said. "Alice had a little bit too much

fun fabricating evidence. It's all been taken care of

very convincingly — you could probably sue the hotel

if you wanted to. You have nothing to worry about,"

he promised, stroking my cheek with the lightest of

touches.

"Your only job now is to heal."

I wasn't so lost to the soreness or the fog of

medication that I didn't respond to his touch. The

beeping of the monitor jumped around erratically —

now he wasn't the only one who could hear my heart

misbehave.

"That's going to be embarrassing," I muttered to

myself. He chuckled, and a speculative look came into

his eye. "Hmm, I wonder..." He leaned in slowly; the

beeping noise accelerated wildly before his lips even

touched me. But when they did, though with the most

gentle of pressure, the beeping stopped altogether.

He pulled back abruptly, his anxious expression

turning to relief as the monitor reported the restarting

of my heart.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"It seems that I'm going to have to be even more

careful with you than usual." He frowned.

"I was not finished kissing you," I complained. "Don't

make me come over there."

He grinned, and bent to press his lips lightly to mine.

The monitor went wild.

But then his lips were taut. He pulled away.

"I think I hear your mother," he said, grinning again.

"Don't leave me," I cried, an irrational surge of panic

flooding through me. I couldn't let him go — he might

disappear from me again. He read the terror in my

eyes for a short second. "I won't," he promised

solemnly, and then he smiled. "I'll take a nap." He

moved from the hard plastic chair by my side to the

turquoise faux-leather recliner at the foot of my bed,

leaning it all the way back, and closing his eyes. He

was perfectly still.

"Don't forget to breathe," I whispered sarcastically. He

took a deep breath, his eyes still closed.

I could hear my mother now. She was talking to

someone, maybe a nurse, and she sounded tired and

upset. I wanted to jump out of the bed and run to

her, to calm her, promise that everything was fine.

But I wasn't in any sort of shape for jumping, so I

waited impatiently.

The door opened a crack, and she peeked through.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Mom!" I whispered, my voice full of love and relief.

She took in Edward's still form on the recliner, and

tiptoed to my bedside.

"He never leaves, does he?" she mumbled to herself.

"Mom, I'm so glad to see you!"

She bent down to hug me gently, and I felt warm

tears falling on my cheeks.

"Bella, I was so upset!"

"I'm sorry, Mom. But everything's fine now, it's okay,"

I comforted her.

"I'm just glad to finally see your eyes open." She sat

on the edge of my bed.

I suddenly realized I didn't have any idea when it was.

"How long have they been closed?"

"It's Friday, hon, you've been out for a while."

"Friday?" I was shocked. I tried to remember what day

it had been when...

but I didn't want to think about that.

"They had to keep you sedated for a while, honey —

you've got a lot of injuries."

"I know." I could feel them.

"You're lucky Dr. Cullen was there. He's such a nice

man... very young, though. And he looks more like a

model than a doctor..."

"You met Carlisle?

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"And Edward's sister Alice. She's a lovely girl."

"She is," I agreed wholeheartedly.

She glanced over her shoulder at Edward, lying with

his eyes closed in the chair. "You didn't tell me you

had such good friends in Forks." I cringed, and then

moaned.

"What hurts?" she demanded anxiously, turning back

to me. Edward's eyes flashed to my face.

"It's fine," I assured them. "I just have to remember

not to move." He lapsed back into his phony slumber.

I took advantage of my mother's momentary

distraction to keep the subject from returning to my

less-than-candid behavior. "Where's Phil?" I asked

quickly.

"Florida — oh, Bella! You'll never guess! Just when we

were about to leave, the best news!"

"Phil got signed?" I guessed.

"Yes! How did you guess! The Suns, can you believe

it?"

"That's great, Mom," I said as enthusiastically as I

could manage, though I had little idea what that

meant.

"And you'll like Jacksonville so much," she gushed

while I stared at her vacantly. "I was a little bit

worried when Phil started talking about Akron, what

with the snow and everything, because you know how

I hate the cold, but now Jacksonville! It's always

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

sunny, and the humidity really isn't that bad. We

found the cutest house, yellow, with white trim, and a

porch just like in an old movie, and this huge oak

tree, and it's just a few minutes from the ocean, and

you'll have your own bathroom — "

"Wait, Mom!" I interrupted. Edward still had his eyes

closed, but he looked too tense to pass as asleep.

"What are you talking about? I'm not going to Florida.

I live in Forks."

"But you don’t have to anymore, silly," she laughed.

"Phil will be able to be around so much more now...

we've talked about it a lot, and what I'm going to do is

trade off on the away games, half the time with you,

half the time with him."

"Mom." I hesitated, wondering how best to be

diplomatic about this. "I want to live in Forks. I'm

already settled in at school, and I have a couple of

girlfriends" — she glanced toward Edward again when

I reminded her of friends, so I tried another direction

— "and Charlie needs me. He’s just all alone up there,

and he can’t cook at all."

"You want to stay in Forks?" she asked, bewildered.

The idea was inconceivable to her. And then her eyes

flickered back toward Edward.

"Why?"

"I told you — school, Charlie — ouch!" I'd shrugged.

Not a good idea. Her hands fluttered helplessly over

me, trying to find a safe place to pat. She made do

with my forehead; it was unbandaged.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Bella, honey, you hate Forks," she reminded me.

"It's not so bad."

She frowned and looked back and forth between

Edward and me, this time very deliberately.

"Is it this boy?" she whispered.

I opened my mouth to lie, but her eyes were

scrutinizing my face, and I knew she would see

through that.

"He's part of it," I admitted. No need to confess how

big a part. "So, have you had a chance to talk with

Edward?" I asked.

"Yes." She hesitated, looking at his perfectly still form.

"And I want to talk to you about that."

Uh-oh. "What about?" I asked.

"I think that boy is in love with you," she accused,

keeping her voice low.

"I think so, too," I confided.

"And how do you feel about him?" She only poorly

concealed the raging curiosity in her voice.

I sighed, looking away. As much as I loved my mom,

this was not a conversation I wanted to have with her.

"I'm pretty crazy about him." There — that sounded

like something a teenager with her first boyfriend

might say.

"Well, he seems very nice, and, my goodness, he's

incredibly good-looking, but you're so young, Bella..."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Her voice was unsure; as far as I could remember,

this was the first time since I was eight that she'd

come close to trying to sound like a parental

authority. I recognized the reasonable-but-firm tone

of voice from talks I'd had with her about men.

"I know that, Mom. Don't worry about it. It's just a

crush," I soothed her.

"That's right," she agreed, easily pleased.

Then she sighed and glanced guiltily over her

shoulder at the big, round clock on the wall.

"Do you need to go?"

She bit her lip. "Phil's supposed to call in a little

while... I didn't know you were going to wake up..."

"No problem, Mom." I tried to tone down the relief so

she wouldn't get her feelings hurt. "I won't be alone."

"I'll be back soon. I've been sleeping here, you know,"

she announced, proud of herself.

"Oh, Mom, you don't have to do that! You can sleep at

home — I'll never notice." The swirl of painkillers in

my brain was making it hard to concentrate even

now, though, apparently, I'd been sleeping for days.

"I was too nervous," she admitted sheepishly. "There's

been some crime in the neighborhood, and I don't like

being there alone."

"Crime?" I asked in alarm.

"Someone broke into that dance studio around the

corner from the house and burned it to the ground —

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there's nothing left at all! And they left a stolen car

right out front. Do you remember when you used to

dance there, honey?"

"I remember." I shivered, and winced.

"I can stay, baby, if you need me."

"No, Mom, I'll be fine. Edward will be with me." She

looked like that might be why she wanted to stay. "I'll

be back tonight." It sounded as much like a warning

as it sounded like a promise, and she glanced at

Edward again as she said it.

"I love you, Mom."

"I love you, too, Bella. Try to be more careful when

you walk, honey, I don't want to lose you."

Edward's eyes stayed closed, but a wide grin flashed

across his face. A nurse came bustling in then to

check all my tubes and wires. My mother kissed my

forehead, patted my gauze-wrapped hand, and left.

The nurse was checking the paper readout on my

heart monitor.

"Are you feeling anxious, honey? Your heart rate got a

little high there."

"I'm fine," I assured her.

"I'll tell your RN that you're awake. She'll be in to see

you in a minute."

As soon as she closed the door, Edward was at my

side.

"You stole a car?" I raised my eyebrows.

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He smiled, unrepentant. "It was a good car, very fast."

"How was your nap?" I asked.

"Interesting." His eyes narrowed.

"What?"

He looked down while he answered. "I'm surprised. I

thought Florida... and your mother... well, I thought

that's what you would want." I stared at him

uncomprehendingly. "But you'd be stuck inside all

day in Florida. You'd only be able to come out at

night, just like a real vampire."

He almost smiled, but not quite. And then his face

was grave. "I would stay in Forks, Bella. Or

somewhere like it," he explained. "Someplace where I

couldn't hurt you anymore."

It didn't sink in at first. I continued to stare at him

blankly as the words one by one clicked into place in

my head like a ghastly puzzle. I was barely conscious

of the sound of my heart accelerating, though, as my

breathing became hyperventilation, I was aware of the

sharp aching in my protesting ribs.

He didn't say anything; he watched my face warily as

the pain that had nothing to do with broken bones,

pain that was infinitely worse, threatened to crush

me.

And then another nurse walked purposefully into the

room. Edward sat still as stone as she took in my

expression with a practiced eye before turning to the

monitors.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Time for more pain meds, sweetheart?" she asked

kindly, tapping the IV

feed.

"No, no," I mumbled, trying to keep the agony out of

my voice. "I don't need anything." I couldn't afford to

close my eyes now.

"No need to be brave, honey. It's better if you don't get

too stressed out; you need to rest." She waited, but I

just shook my head.

"Okay," she sighed. "Hit the call button when you're

ready." She gave Edward a stern look, and threw one

more anxious glance at the machinery, before leaving.

His cool hands were on my face; I stared at him with

wild eyes.

"Shhh, Bella, calm down."

"Don't leave me," I begged in a broken voice.

"I won't," he promised. "Now relax before I call the

nurse back to sedate you."

But my heart couldn't slow.

"Bella." He stroked my face anxiously. "I'm not going

anywhere. I'll be right here as long as you need me."

"Do you swear you won't leave me?" I whispered. I

tried to control the gasping, at least. My ribs were

throbbing.

He put his hands on either side of my face and

brought his face close to mine. His eyes were wide

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

and serious. "I swear." The smell of his breath was

soothing. It seemed to ease the ache of my breathing

He continued to hold my gaze while my body slowly

relaxed and the beeping returned to a normal pace.

His eyes were dark, closer to black than gold today.

"Better?" he asked.

"Yes," I said cautiously.

He shook his head and muttered something

unintelligible. I thought I picked out the word

"overreaction."

"Why did you say that?" I whispered, trying to keep

my voice from shaking. "Are you tired of having to

save me all the time? Do you want me to go away?"

"No, I don't want to be without you, Bella, of course

not. Be rational. And I have no problem with saving

you, either — if it weren't for the fact that I was the

one putting you in danger... that I'm the reason that

you're here."

"Yes, you are the reason." I frowned. "The reason I'm

here — alive."

"Barely." His voice was just a whisper. "Covered in

gauze and plaster and hardly able to move."

"I wasn't referring to my most recent near-death

experience," I said, growing irritated. "I was thinking

of the others — you can take your pick. If it weren't

for you, I would be rotting away in the Forks

cemetery."

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He winced at my words, but the haunted look didn't

leave his eyes.

"That's not the worst part, though," he continued to

whisper. He acted as if I hadn't spoken. "Not seeing

you there on the floor... crumpled and broken." His

voice was choked. "Not thinking I was too late. Not

even hearing you scream in pain — all those

unbearable memories that I'll carry with me for the

rest of eternity. No, the very worst was feeling...

knowing that I couldn't stop. Believing that I was

going to kill you myself."

"But you didn't."

"I could have. So easily."

I knew I needed to stay calm... but he was trying to

talk himself into leaving me, and the panic fluttered

in my lungs, trying to get out.

"Promise me," I whispered.

"What?"

"You know what." I was starting to get angry now. He

was so stubbornly determined to dwell on the

negative.

He heard the change in my tone. His eyes tightened.

"I don't seem to be strong enough to stay away from

you, so I suppose that you'll get your way... whether it

kills you or not," he added roughly.

"Good." He hadn't promised, though — a fact that I

had not missed. The panic was only barely contained;

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

I had no strength left to control the anger. "You told

me how you stopped... now I want to know why," I

demanded.

"Why?" he repeated warily.

"Why you did it. Why didn't you just let the venom

spread? By now I would be just like you."

Edward's eyes seemed to turn flat black, and I

remembered that this was something he'd never

intended me to know. Alice must have been

preoccupied by the things she'd learned about

herself... or she'd been very careful with her thoughts

around him — clearly, he'd had no idea that she'd

filled me in on the mechanics of vampire conversions.

He was surprised, and infuriated. His nostrils flared,

his mouth looked as if it was chiseled from stone.

He wasn't going to answer, that much was clear.

"I'll be the first to admit that I have no experience

with relationships," I said. "But it just seems logical...

a man and woman have to be somewhat equal... as

in, one of them can't always be swooping in and

saving the other one. They have to save each other

equally." He folded his arms on the side of my bed

and rested his chin on his arms. His expression was

smooth, the anger reined in. Evidently he'd decided

he wasn't angry with me. I hoped I'd get a chance to

warn Alice before he caught up with her.

"You have saved me," he said quietly.

"I can't always be Lois Lane," I insisted. "I want to be

Superman, too."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You don't know what you're asking." His voice was

soft; he stared intently at the edge of the pillowcase.

"I think I do."

"Bella, you don't know. I've had almost ninety years to

think about this, and I'm still not sure."

"Do you wish that Carlisle hadn't saved you?"

"No, I don't wish that." He paused before continuing.

"But my life was over. I wasn't giving anything up."

"You are my life. You're the only thing it would hurt

me to lose." I was getting better at this. It was easy to

admit how much I needed him. He was very calm,

though. Decided.

"I can't do it, Bella. I won't do that to you."

"Why not?" My throat rasped and the words weren't

as loud as I'd meant them to be. "Don't tell me it's too

hard! After today, or I guess it was a few days ago...

anyway, after that, it should be nothing." He glared at

me.

"And the pain?" he asked.

I blanched. I couldn't help it. But I tried to keep my

expression from showing how clearly I remembered

the feeling... the fire in my veins.

"That's my problem," I said. "I can handle it."

"It's possible to take bravery to the point where it

becomes insanity."

"It's not an issue. Three days. Big deal."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Edward grimaced again as my words reminded him

that I was more informed than he had ever intended

me to be. I watched him repress the anger, watched

as his eyes grew speculative.

"Charlie?" he asked curtly. "Renee?"

Minutes passed in silence as I struggled to answer his

question. I opened my mouth, but no sound came

out. I closed it again. He waited, and his expression

became triumphant because he knew I had no true

answer.

"Look, that's not an issue either," I finally muttered;

my voice was as unconvincing as it always was when

I lied. "Renee has always made the choices that work

for her — she'd want me to do the same. And

Charlie's resilient, he's used to being on his own. I

can't take care of them forever. I have my own life to

live."

"Exactly," he snapped. "And I won't end it for you."

"If you're waiting for me to be on my deathbed, I've got

news for you! I was just there!"

"You're going to recover," he reminded me.

I took a deep breath to calm myself, ignoring the

spasm of pain it triggered. I stared at him, and he

stared back. There was no compromise in his face.

"No," I said slowly. "I'm not."

His forehead creased. "Of course you are. You may

have a scar or two..."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You're wrong," I insisted. "I'm going to die."

"Really, Bella." He was anxious now. "You'll be out of

here in a few days. Two week at most."

I glared at him. "I may not die now... but I'm going to

die sometime. Every minute of the day, I get closer.

And I'm going to get old." He frowned as what I was

saying sunk in, pressing his long fingers to his

temples and closing his eyes. "That's how it's

supposed to happen. How it should happen. How it

would have happened if I didn't exist — and I

shouldn't exist."

I snorted. He opened his eyes in surprise. "That's

stupid. That's like going to someone who's just won

the lottery, taking their money, and saying, 'Look,

let's just go back to how things should be. It's better

that way.' And I'm not buying it."

"I'm hardly a lottery prize," he growled.

"That's right. You're much better."

He rolled his eyes and set his lips. "Bella, we're not

having this discussion anymore. I refuse to damn you

to an eternity of night and that's the end of it."

"If you think that's the end, then you don't know me

very well," I warned him. "You're not the only vampire

I know."

His eyes went black again. "Alice wouldn't dare." And

for a moment he looked so frightening that I couldn't

help but believe it — I couldn't imagine someone

brave enough to cross him.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Alice already saw it, didn't she?" I guessed. "That's

why the things she says upset you. She knows I'm

going to be like you... someday."

"She's wrong. She also saw you dead, but that didn't

happen, either."

"You'll never catch me betting against Alice."

We stared at each other for a very long time. It was

quiet except for the whirring of the machines, the

beeping, the dripping, the ticking of the big clock on

the wall. Finally, his expression softened.

"So where does that leave us?" I wondered.

He chuckled humorlessly. "I believe it's called an

impasse." I sighed. "Ouch," I muttered.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, eyeing the button for

the nurse.

"I'm fine," I lied.

"I don't believe you," he said gently.

"I'm not going back to sleep."

"You need rest. All this arguing isn't good for you."

"So give in," I hinted.

"Nice try." He reached for the button.

"No!"

He ignored me.

"Yes?" the speaker on the wall squawked.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I think we're ready for more pain medication," he

said calmly, ignoring my furious expression.

"I'll send in the nurse." The voice sounded very bored.

"I won't take it," I promised.

He looked toward the sack of fluids hanging beside

my bed. "I don't think they're going to ask you to

swallow anything."

My heart rate started to climb. He read the fear in my

eyes, and sighed in frustration.

"Bella, you're in pain. You need to relax so you can

heal. Why are you being so difficult? They're not going

to put any more needles in you now."

"I'm not afraid of the needles," I mumbled. "I'm afraid

to close my eyes." Then he smiled his crooked smile,

and took my face between his hands. "I told you I'm

not going anywhere. Don't be afraid. As long as it

makes you happy, I'll be here."

I smiled back, ignoring the ache in my cheeks. "You're

talking about forever, you know."

"Oh, you'll get over it — it's just a crush."

I shook my head in disbelief — it made me dizzy. "I

was shocked when Renee swallowed that one. I know

you know better."

"That's the beautiful thing about being human," he

told me. "Things change."

My eyes narrowed. "Don't hold your breath."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

He was laughing when the nurse came in,

brandishing a syringe.

"Excuse me," she said brusquely to Edward.

He got up and crossed to the end of the small room,

leaning against the wall. He folded his arms and

waited. I kept my eyes on him, still apprehensive. He

met my gaze calmly.

"Here you go, honey." The nurse smiled as she

injected the medicine into my tube. "You'll feel better

now."

"Thanks," I mumbled, unenthusiastic. It didn't take

long. I could feel the drowsiness trickling through my

bloodstream almost immediately.

"That ought to do it," she muttered as my eyelids

drooped. She must have left the room, because

something cold and smooth touched my face.

"Stay." The word was slurred.

"I will," he promised. His voice was beautiful, like a

lullaby. "Like I said, as long as it makes you happy...

as long as it's what's best for you." I tried to shake my

head, but it was too heavy. "'S not the same thing," I

mumbled.

He laughed. "Don't worry about that now, Bella. You

can argue with me when you wake up."

I think I smiled. '"Kay."

I could feel his lips at my ear.

"I love you," he whispered.

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"Me, too."

"I know," he laughed quietly.

I turned my head slightly. . . searching. He knew what

I was after. His lips touched mine gently.

"Thanks," I sighed.

"Anytime."

I wasn't really there at all anymore. But I fought

against the stupor weakly. There was just one more

thing I wanted to tell him.

"Edward?" I struggled to pronounce his name clearly.

"Yes?"

"I'm betting on Alice," I mumbled.

And then the night closed over me.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Edward helped me into his car, being very careful of

the wisps of silk and chiffon, the flowers he'd just

pinned into my elaborately styled curls, and my bulky

walking cast. He ignored the angry set of my mouth.

When he had me settled, he got in the driver's seat

and headed back out the long, narrow drive.

"At what point exactly are you going to tell me what's

going on?" I asked grumpily. I really hated surprises.

And he knew that.

"I'm shocked that you haven't figured it out yet." He

threw a mocking smile in my direction, and my breath

caught in my throat. Would I ever get used to his

perfection?

"I did mention that you looked very nice, didn't I?" I

verified.

"Yes." He grinned again. I'd never seen him dress in

black before, and, with the contrast against his pale

skin, his beauty was absolutely surreal. That much I

couldn't deny, even if the fact that he was wearing a

tuxedo made me very nervous.

Not quite as nervous as the dress. Or the shoe. Only

one shoe, as my other foot was still securely encased

in plaster. But the stiletto heel, held on only by satin

ribbons, certainly wasn't going to help me as I tried to

hobble around.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"I'm not coming over anymore if Alice is going to treat

me like Guinea Pig Barbie when I do," I griped. I'd

spent the better part of the day in Alice's staggeringly

vast bathroom, a helpless victim as she played

hairdresser and cosmetician. Whenever I fidgeted or

complained, she reminded me that she didn't have

any memories of being human, and asked me not to

ruin her vicarious fun. Then she'd dressed me in the

most ridiculous dress — deep blue, frilly and off the

shoulders, with French tags I couldn't read — a dress

more suitable for a runway than Forks. Nothing good

could come of our formal attire, of that I was sure.

Unless...

but I was afraid to put my suspicions into words,

even in my own head. I was distracted then by the

sound of a phone ringing. Edward pulled his cell

phone from a pocket inside his jacket, looking briefly

at the caller ID before answering.

"Hello, Charlie," he said warily.

"Charlie?" I frowned.

Charlie had been... difficult since my return to Forks.

He had compartmentalized my bad experience into

two defined reactions. Toward Carlisle he was almost

worshipfully grateful. On the other hand, he was

stubbornly convinced that Edward was at fault —

because, if not for him, I wouldn't have left home in

the first place. And Edward was far from disagreeing

with him. These days I had rules that hadn't existed

before: curfews... visiting hours.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

Something Charlie was saying made Edward's eyes

widen in disbelief, and then a grin spread across his

face.

"You're kidding!" He laughed.

"What is it?" I demanded.

He ignored me. "Why don't you let me talk to him?"

Edward suggested with evident pleasure. He waited

for a few seconds.

"Hello, Tyler, this is Edward Cullen." His voice was

very friendly, on the surface. I knew it well enough to

catch the soft edge of menace. What was Tyler doing

at my house? The awful truth began to dawn on me. I

looked again at the inappropriate dress Alice had

forced me into.

"I'm sorry if there's been some kind of

miscommunication, but Bella is unavailable tonight."

Edward's tone changed, and the threat in his voice

was suddenly much more evident as he continued.

"To be perfectly honest, she'll be unavailable every

night, as far as anyone besides myself is concerned.

No offense. And I'm sorry about your evening." He

didn't sound sorry at all. And then he snapped the

phone shut, a huge smirk on his face.

My face and neck flushed crimson with anger. I could

feel the rage-induced tears starting to fill my eyes.

He looked at me in surprise. "Was that last part a bit

too much? I didn't mean to offend you."

I ignored that.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You're taking me to the prom!" I yelled.

It was embarrassingly obvious now. If I'd been paying

any attention at all, I'm sure I would have noticed the

date on the posters that decorated the school

buildings. But I'd never dreamed he was thinking of

subjecting me to this. Didn't he know me at all?

He wasn't expecting the force of my reaction, that was

clear. He pressed his lips together and his eyes

narrowed. "Don't be difficult, Bella." My eyes flashed

to the window; we were halfway to the school already.

"Why are you doing this to me?" I demanded in

horror. He gestured to his tuxedo. "Honestly, Bella,

what did you think we were doing?"

I was mortified. First, because I'd missed the obvious.

And also because the vague suspicions —

expectations, really — that I'd been forming all day,

as Alice tried to transform me into a beauty queen,

were so far wide of the mark. My half-fearful hopes

seemed very silly now. I'd guessed there was some

kind of occasion brewing. But prom! That was the

furthest thing from my mind.

The angry tears rolled over my cheeks. I remembered

with dismay that I was very uncharacteristically

wearing mascara. I wiped quickly under my eyes to

prevent any smudges. My hand was unblackened

when I pulled it away; maybe Alice had known I

would need waterproof makeup.

"This is completely ridiculous. Why are you crying?"

he demanded in frustration.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Because I'm mad!

"Bella." He turned the full force of his scorching

golden eyes on me.

"What?" I muttered, distracted.

"Humor me," he insisted.

His eyes were melting all my fury. It was impossible to

fight with him when he cheated like that. I gave in

with poor grace.

"Fine," I pouted, unable to glare as effectively as I

would have liked.

"I'll go quietly. But you'll see. I'm way overdue for

more bad luck. I'll probably break my other leg. Look

at this shoe! It's a death trap!" I held out my good leg

as evidence.

"Hmmm." He stared at my leg longer than was

necessary. "Remind me to thank Alice for that

tonight."

"Alice is going to be there?" That comforted me

slightly.

"With Jasper, and Emmett... and Rosalie," he

admitted. The feeling of comfort disappeared. There

had been no progress with Rosalie, though I was on

quite good terms with her sometimes-husband.

Emmett enjoyed having me around — he thought my

bizarre human reactions were hilarious... or maybe it

was just the fact that I fell down a lot that he found

so funny. Rosalie acted as if I didn't exist. While I

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

shook my head to dispel the direction my thoughts

had taken, I thought of something else.

"Is Charlie in on this?" I asked, suddenly suspicious.

"Of course." He grinned, and then chuckled.

"Apparently Tyler wasn't, though."

I gritted my teeth. How Tyler could be so delusional, I

couldn't imagine. At school, where Charlie couldn't

interfere, Edward and I were inseparable — except for

those rare sunny days.

We were at the school now; Rosalie's red convertible

was conspicuous in the parking lot. The clouds were

thin today, a few streaks of sunlight escaping through

far away in the west.

He got out and walked around the car to open my

door. He held out his hand.

I sat stubbornly in my seat, arms folded, feeling a

secret twinge of smugness. The lot was crowded with

people in formal dress: witnesses. He couldn't remove

me forcibly from the car as he might have if we'd been

alone.

He sighed. "When someone wants to kill you, you're

brave as a lion — and then when someone mentions

dancing..." He shook his head. I gulped. Dancing.

"Bella, I won't let anything hurt you — not even

yourself. I won't let go of you once, I promise."

I thought about that and suddenly felt much better.

He could see that in my face.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"There, now," he said gently, "it won't be so bad." He

leaned down and wrapped one arm around my waist.

I took his other hand and let him lift me from the car.

He kept his arm tightly around me, supporting me as

I limped toward the school.

In Phoenix, they held proms in hotel ballrooms. This

dance was in the gym, of course. It was probably the

only room in town big enough for a dance. When we

got inside, I giggled. There were actual balloon arches

and twisted garlands of pastel crepe paper festooning

the walls.

"This looks like a horror movie waiting to happen," I

snickered.

"Well," he muttered as we slowly approached the

ticket table — he was carrying most of my weight, but

I still had to shuffle and wobble my feet forward —

"there are more than enough vampires present." I

looked at the dance floor; a wide gap had formed in

the center of the floor, where two couples whirled

gracefully. The other dancers pressed to the sides of

the room to give them space — no one wanted to

stand in contrast with such radiance. Emmett and

Jasper were intimidating and flawless in classic

tuxedos. Alice was striking in a black satin dress with

geometric cutouts that bared large triangles of her

snowy white skin. And Rosalie was... well, Rosalie.

She was beyond belief. Her vivid scarlet dress was

backless, tight to her calves where it flared into a

wide ruffled train, with a neckline that plunged to her

waist. I pitied every girl in the room, myself included.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Do you want me to bolt the doors so you can

massacre the unsuspecting townsfolk?" I whispered

conspiratorially.

"And where do you fit into that scheme?" He glared.

"Oh, I'm with the vampires, of course."

He smiled reluctantly. "Anything to get out of

dancing."

"Anything."

He bought our tickets, then turned me toward the

dance floor. I cringed against his arm and dragged my

feet.

"I've got all night," he warned.

Eventually he towed me out to where his family was

twirling elegantly —

if in a style totally unsuitable to the present time and

music. I watched in horror.

"Edward." My throat was so dry I could only manage a

whisper. "I honestly can't dance!" I could feel the

panic bubbling up inside my chest.

"Don't worry, silly," he whispered back. "I can." He

put my arms around his neck and lifted me to slide

his feet under mine.

And then we were whirling, too.

"I feel like I'm five years old," I laughed after a few

minutes of effortless waltzing.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You don't look five," he murmured, pulling me closer

for a second, so that my feet were briefly a foot from

the ground.

Alice caught my eye on a turn and smiled in

encouragement — I smiled back. I was surprised to

realize that I was actually enjoying myself... a little.

"Okay, this isn't half bad," I admitted.

But Edward was staring toward the doors, and his

face was angry.

"What is it?" I wondered aloud. I followed his gaze,

disoriented by the spinning, but finally I could see

what was bothering him. Jacob Black, not in a tux,

but in a long-sleeved white shirt and tie, his hair

smoothed back into his usual ponytail, was crossing

the floor toward us. After the first shock of

recognition, I couldn't help but feel bad for Jacob. He

was clearly uncomfortable — excruciatingly so. His

face was apologetic as his eyes met mine.

Edward snarled very quietly.

"Behave!" I hissed.

Edward's voice was scathing. "He wants to chat with

you." Jacob reached us then, the embarrassment and

apology even more evident on his face.

"Hey, Bella, I was hoping you would be here." Jacob

sounded like he'd been hoping the exact opposite. But

his smile was just as warm as ever.

"Hi, Jacob." I smiled back. "What's up?"

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Can I cut in?" he asked tentatively, glancing at

Edward for the first time. I was shocked to notice that

Jacob didn't have to look up. He must have grown

half a foot since the first time I'd seen him. Edward's

face was composed, his expression blank. His only

answer was to set me carefully on my feet, and take a

step back.

"Thanks," Jacob said amiably.

Edward just nodded, looking at me intently before he

turned to walk away. Jacob put his hands on my

waist, and I reached up to put my hands on his

shoulders.

"Wow, Jake, how tall are you now?"

He was smug. "Six- two."

We weren't really dancing — my leg made that

impossible. Instead we swayed awkwardly from side

to side without moving our feet. It was just as well;

the recent growth spurt had left him looking gangly

and uncoordinated, he was probably no better a

dancer than I was.

"So, how did you end up here tonight?" I asked

without true curiosity. Considering Edward's reaction,

I could guess.

"Can you believe my dad paid me twenty bucks to

come to your prom?" he admitted, slightly ashamed.

"Yes, I can," I muttered. "Well, I hope you're enjoying

yourself, at least. Seen anything you like?" I teased,

nodding toward a group of girls lined up against the

wall like pastel confections.

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"Yeah," he sighed. "But she's taken." He glanced down

to meet my curious gaze for just a second — then we

both looked away, embarrassed.

"You look really pretty, by the way," he added shyly.

"Um, thanks. So why did Billy pay you to come here?"

I asked quickly, though I knew the answer.

Jacob didn't seem grateful for the subject change; he

looked away, uncomfortable again. "He said it was a

'safe' place to talk to you. I swear the old man is

losing his mind."

I joined in his laughter weakly.

"Anyway, he said that if I told you something, he

would get me that master cylinder I need," he

confessed with a sheepish grin.

"Tell me, then. I want you to get your car finished." I

grinned back. At least Jacob didn't believe any of this.

It made the situation a bit easier. Against the wall,

Edward was watching my face, his own face

expressionless. I saw a sophomore in a pink dress

eyeing him with timid speculation, but he didn't seem

to be aware of her.

Jacob looked away again, ashamed. "Don't get mad,

okay?"

"There's no way I'll be mad at you, Jacob," I assured

him. "I won't even be mad at Billy. Just say what you

have to."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Well — this is so stupid, I'm sorry, Bella — he wants

you to break up with your boyfriend. He asked me to

tell you 'please.'" He shook his head in disgust.

"He's still superstitious, eh?"

"Yeah. He was... kind of over the top when you got

hurt down in Phoenix. He didn't believe... "Jacob

trailed off self-consciously.

My eyes narrowed. "I fell."

"I know that," Jacob said quickly.

"He thinks Edward had something to do with me

getting hurt." It wasn't a question, and despite my

promise, I was angry.

Jacob wouldn't meet my eyes. We weren't even

bothering to sway to the music, though his hands

were still on my waist, and mine around his neck.

"Look, Jacob, I know Billy probably won't believe this,

but just so you know" — he looked at me now,

responding to the new earnestness in my voice —

"Edward really did save my life. If it weren't for

Edward and his father, I'd be dead."

"I know," he claimed, but he sounded like my sincere

words had affected him some. Maybe he'd be able to

convince Billy of this much, at least.

"Hey, I'm sorry you had to come do this, Jacob," I

apologized. "At any rate, you get your parts, right?"

"Yeah," he muttered. He was still looking awkward...

upset.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"There's more?" I asked in disbelief.

"Forget it," he mumbled, "I'll get a job and save the

money myself." I glared at him until he met my gaze.

"Just spit it out, Jacob."

"It's so bad."

"I don't care. Tell me," I insisted.

"Okay... but, geez, this sounds bad." He shook his

head. "He said to tell you, no, to warn you, that —

and this is his plural, not mine" — he lifted one hand

from my waist and made little quotations marks in

the air

— '"We'll be watching.'" He watched warily for my

reaction. It sounded like something from a mafia

movie. I laughed out loud.

"Sorry you had to do this, Jake," I snickered.

"I don't mind that much." He grinned in relief. His

eyes were appraising as they raked quickly over my

dress. "So, should I tell him you said to butt the hell

out?" he asked hopefully.

"No," I sighed. "Tell him I said thanks. I know he

means well." The song ended, and I dropped my arms.

His hands hesitated at my waist, and he glanced at

my bum leg. "Do you want to dance again? Or can I

help you get somewhere?" Edward answered for me.

"That's all right, Jacob. I'll take it from here." Jacob

flinched, and stared wide-eyed at Edward, who stood

just beside us.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Hey, I didn't see you there," he mumbled. "I guess I'll

see you around, Bella." He stepped back, waving

halfheartedly.

I smiled. "Yeah, I'll see you later."

"Sorry," he said again before he turned for the door.

Edward's arms wound around me as the next song

started. It was a little up-tempo for slow dancing, but

that didn't seem to concern him. I leaned my head

against his chest, content.

"Feeling better?" I teased.

"Not really," he said tersely.

"Don't be mad at Billy," I sighed. "He just worries

about me for Charlie's sake. It's nothing personal."

"I'm not mad at Billy," he corrected in a clipped voice.

"But his son is irritating me."

I pulled back to look at him. His face was very

serious.

"Why?"

"First of all, he made me break my promise."

I stared at him in confusion.

He half-smiled. "I promised I wouldn't let go of you

tonight," he explained.

"Oh. Well, I forgive you."

"Thanks. But there's something else." Edward

frowned. I waited patiently.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"He called you pretty," he finally continued, his frown

deepening.

"That's practically an insult, the way you look right

now. You're much more than beautiful."

I laughed. "You might be a little biased."

"I don't think that's it. Besides, I have excellent

eyesight." We were twirling again, my feet on his as he

held me close.

"So are you going to explain the reason for all of this?"

I wondered. He looked down at me, confused, and I

glared meaningfully at the crepe paper.

He considered for a moment, and then changed

direction, spinning me through the crowd to the back

door of the gym. I caught a glimpse of Jessica and

Mike dancing, staring at me curiously. Jessica waved,

and I smiled back quickly. Angela was there, too,

looking blissfully happy in the arms of little Ben

Cheney; she didn't look up from his eyes, a head

lower than hers. Lee and Samantha, Lauren, glaring

toward us, with Conner; I could name every face that

spiraled past me. And then we were outdoors, in the

cool, dim light of a fading sunset.

As soon as we were alone, he swung me up into his

arms, and carried me across the dark grounds till he

reached the bench beneath the shadow of the

madrone trees. He sat there, keeping me cradled

against his chest. The moon was already up, visible

through the gauzy clouds, and his face glowed pale in

the white light. His mouth was hard, his eyes

troubled.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"The point?" I prompted softly.

He ignored me, staring up at the moon.

"Twilight, again," he murmured. "Another ending. No

matter how perfect the day is, it always has to end."

"Some things don't have to end," I muttered through

my teeth, instantly tense.

He sighed.

"I brought you to the prom," he said slowly, finally

answering my question, "because I don't want you to

miss anything. I don't want my presence to take

anything away from you, if I can help it. I want you to

be human. I want your life to continue as it would

have if I'd died in nineteen-eighteen like I should

have."

I shuddered at his words, and then shook my head

angrily. "In what strange parallel dimension would I

ever have gone to prom of my own free will? If you

weren't a thousand times stronger than me, I would

never have let you get away with this."

He smiled briefly, but it didn't touch his eyes. "It

wasn't so bad, you said so yourself."

"That's because I was with you."

We were quiet for a minute; he stared at the moon

and I stared at him. I wished there was some way to

explain how very uninterested I was in a normal

human life.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Will you tell me something?" he asked, glancing

down at me with a slight smile.

"Don't I always?"

"Just promise you'll tell me," he insisted, grinning. I

knew I was going to regret this almost instantly.

"Fine."

"You seemed honestly surprised when you figured out

that I was taking you here," he began.

"I was," I interjected.

"Exactly," he agreed. "But you must have had some

other theory... I'm curious — what did you think I

was dressing you up for?" Yes, instant regret. I

pursed my lips, hesitating. "I don't want to tell you."

"You promised," he objected.

"I know."

"What's the problem?"

I knew he thought it was mere embarrassment

holding me back. "I think it will make you mad — or

sad."

His brows pulled together over his eyes as he thought

that through. "I still want to know. Please?"

I sighed. He waited.

"Well... I assumed it was some kind of... occasion.

But I didn't think it would be some trite human

thing... prom!" I scoffed.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"Human?" he asked flatly. He'd picked up on the key

word. I looked down at my dress, fidgeting with a

stray piece of chiffon. He waited in silence.

"Okay," I confessed in a rush. "So I was hoping that

you might have changed your mind... that you were

going to change me, after all." A dozen emotions

played across his face. Some I recognized: anger...

pain. . .

and then he seemed to collect himself and his

expression became amused.

"You thought that would be a black tie occasion, did

you?" he teased, touching the lapel of his tuxedo

jacket.

I scowled to hide my embarrassment. "I don't know

how these things work. To me, at least, it seems more

rational than prom does." He was still grinning. "It's

not funny," I said.

"No, you're right, it's not," he agreed, his smile fading.

"I'd rather treat it like a joke, though, than believe

you're serious."

"But I am serious."

He sighed deeply. "I know. And you're really that

willing?" The pain was back in his eyes. I bit my lip

and nodded.

"So ready for this to be the end," he murmured,

almost to himself, "for this to be the twilight of your

life, though your life has barely started. You're ready

to give up everything."

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"It's not the end, it's the beginning," I disagreed under

my breath.

"I'm not worth it," he said sadly.

"Do you remember when you told me that I didn't see

myself very clearly?" I asked, raising my eyebrows.

"You obviously have the same blindness."

"I know what I am."

I sighed.

But his mercurial mood shifted on me. He pursed his

lips, and his eyes were probing. He examined my face

for a long moment.

"You're ready now, then?" he asked.

"Urn." I gulped. "Yes?"

He smiled, and inclined his head slowly until his cold

lips brushed against the skin just under the corner of

my jaw.

"Right now?" he whispered, his breath blowing cool on

my neck. I shivered involuntarily.

"Yes," I whispered, so my voice wouldn't have a

chance to break. If he thought I was bluffing, he was

going to be disappointed. I'd already made this

decision, and I was sure. It didn't matter that my

body was rigid as a plank, my hands balled into fists,

my breathing erratic...

He chuckled darkly, and leaned away. His face did

look disappointed.

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Twilight - Stephanie Meyer

"You can't really believe that I would give in so easily,"

he said with a sour edge to his mocking tone.

"A girl can dream."

His eyebrows rose. "Is that what you dream about?

Being a monster?"

"Not exactly," I said, frowning at his word choice.

Monster, indeed.

"Mostly I dream about being with you forever."

His expression changed, softened and saddened by

the subtle ache in my voice.

"Bella." His fingers lightly traced the shape of my lips.

"I will stay with you — isn't that enough?"

I smiled under his fingertips. "Enough for now." He

frowned at my tenacity. No one was going to

surrender tonight. He exhaled, and the sound was

practically a growl.

I touched his face. "Look," I said. "I love you more

than everything else in the world combined. Isn't that

enough?"

"Yes, it is enough," he answered, smiling. "Enough for

forever." And he leaned down to press his cold lips

once more to my throat.

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