LINES: 2489 to 2590

7. NIGHTMARE

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.

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.

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 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 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 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.

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 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.

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.