

## Prologue

It couldn't be happening again. Not again. He had already been through so much in his too-long life to have this girl move here – and be **right here**. He knew it wasn't her fault; she couldn't help herself. But he couldn't suppress a black-eyed glare in her direction, which she returned with a timid turn of the head.

He gripped the easily breakable desk to restrain himself. One slip, and it would be all over. He knew that for a fact. Her beautiful chocolate brown eyes, which he had seen for only a second, were comparable to green eyes he'd been lost in so long ago. The scent was too familiar, also. Memories tried to surge up, memories he'd rather leave in the past. He had been doing that successfully for over fifty years now – had it really been that long? Time went so fast.

Through sheer willpower, he managed to push them back into the deep recesses of his mind, at least for now. He could think about **her** later, on the trip. He'd already made up his mind to get away from her. He couldn't bear to stay here, with this new girl. This bringer of bittersweet memories.

Did Biology always take this long? A fraction of a second before the bell rang, he was out of his seat, moving a bit too quickly for the human crowd around him. He sensed she was watching, but, like during lunch, he couldn't decipher her thoughts. And maybe that was a good thing. He didn't want to hear what this personal demon had to say.

Thirty minutes later, after dropping his worried brothers and sisters off at home and switching cars with his adoptive father, he sped off to nowhere in particular. Maybe Alaska. Maybe not. He couldn't imagine being near other people right now.

And there the memories were, slapping him harshly. Reminding him of a time when he was happy. Reminding him of how he ruined everything.

## One

Edward relaxed by the seashore, lounging on a boulder near the sea. The ocean crashed against him, but he took little notice, though it was January and the water had to be freezing.

He didn't have long to relax, however, as he heard laughter coming ever closer. If a human saw him in the sunlight, it would be...bad. And, as there wasn't a cloud in the sky, he figured he should book it.

His favorite thing about this life: the speed. It was beyond enjoyment; it was pure bliss. He weaved through the forest, going nowhere. They'd just moved to New England and he loved it so far. The forests were large, providing plenty of privacy. Plentiful wildlife, too, he thought as he grinned.

He and his family had been moving constantly since he had been...adopted, as he referred to it. He was thankful that they had finally found a place to put down roots. He knew he was being silly, that they couldn't stay here for more than a few years, but he already called it home.

It was 1956, the year of Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. For Edward, it was just another year in the life of an immortal. They blended together nowadays. It didn't really matter to him; he was just enjoying life.

Unlike most of his family, he wasn't resentful of Carlisle for changing him. Rosalie could gawk at him all she wanted - he actually liked it. The speed, the endless time, the beauty. He wasn't vain, but occasionally he found himself stopped in front of the mirror. Nearly forty years to get used to it, but he still hadn't. He should be 55 and gray, not 17 and inhumanly gorgeous.

The bare trees shook as he flew past them. He didn't even leave prints in the fresh, sparkling snow. Eventually, he found that he was circling closer and closer to his new home.

He skipped up the steps leading to the front door. Inside, he admired the grand foyer. A curved staircase dominated the left side, and the vintage desk, large in any other surroundings, was dwarfed on the right. The dark mahogany wood contrasted nicely with the pale cream walls, a color favored by Esme. He had to admit, she was an amazing renovator. Just weeks ago, this was falling apart. Now it was the most beautiful Victorian in New Hampshire.

He headed to the right, to the living room, and saw Rosalie and Emmett playing a game of tonsil hockey on the sofa.

"Get a room, guys," he mumbled, though he didn't really mind it. He

was happy Rosalie had found someone, though they were constantly at odds with each other.

"Shut up. You're just jealous," Rosalie shot back in the short moment her lips were separated from Emmett's.

Edward laughed. He couldn't imagine being jealous of Rosalie, especially not for this. His theory was that people searched for love because they weren't content with themselves, and he was incredibly content with his life.

He left the happy couple alone and skipped back into the foyer and up the stairs. He met Alice at the top.

"Hi, Alice."

"Hi, Eddie." They both grinned.

"Off to be unsocial, I see."

"You're much better?"

"Hunting isn't the same thing. That's necessary."

"Well, my alone time is necessary, too."

"Whatever you say..."

She sped down the stairs and out the door, leaving Edward unconsciously smiling. He truly loved his family, Rosalie included.

His piano awaited his return, pulling him to its keys. A song had been playing in his mind that morning, and he was anxious to play it for real. He set his fingers on the delicate keys, and of their own accord, they started to fill the room with a beautiful melody, haunting, yet an underlying sense of happiness.

But something was missing. Songwriting didn't always come easily, he knew. It tugged at the edges of his mind, not allowing him to play anything else. He just had to finish it, one way or another.

## Two

Ellie Kendrick sat backstage, getting blush brushed on. She'd told her crew countless times that she was able to do it herself, but did they ever listen? Of course not. They didn't realize that some teens actually liked to do their own makeup, famous or not.

She wished she'd never auditioned at that recording studio. It wasn't even her idea. Her mother had come home early from the grocery store one day and heard her singing into her hairbrush. She said that Ellie had a great voice and needed to go.

"They're holding an open audition in a few days! I think you'd do great, baby," she said happily. At the time, Ellie thought it would be fun to go try out, at least. She never thought she would actually get signed.

"But I'm only sixteen!" she said, shocked when she got the news.

"Lloyd Price was nineteen when he hit number one," the producer pointed out gently. Her voice was the best he'd heard in years, and he couldn't let her walk away.

She flustered for an answer. "That...that's different."

"Listen, you have an amazing voice. I think you would do well, and it would be fun! I've been on tours myself, and you can take my word for that."

She shouldn't have. He neglected to tell her that she would have to finish school on the road. He didn't say that, once on tour, she usually got four hours of sleep and little alone time. He didn't mention that there would be **thousands** of people coming to watch her.

All her friends back home were green with envy. Why didn't they – clearly prettier – get the record deal? They were good singers, too. It wasn't fair that she got to meet all the handsome boys.

She thought it was great at first. She could do what she loved with no worries. Her first single, "Love At First Sight", debuted at number one. Her self-titled record followed suit. She found herself a world-famous singer almost overnight. Her father wouldn't have to lift a finger the rest of his life. She could live in a Hollywood mansion with the boy of her dreams, writing songs.

The excitement faded after a week on tour. Between the long shows and nearly sleepless nights, she was exhausted and couldn't find much pleasure in it anymore.

But she had to suck it up and walk out there with a smile. Her fans were waiting. Gary, her – she always laughed at the word; it was so ridiculous that she had one – bodyguard, led her to the stage.

“Do I look okay?” she asked him.

“You look perfect,” he assured her. “Go on, you've got to get out there, Miss Kendrick.”

“Ellie,” she grumbled. Why couldn't anyone ever call her just “Ellie” anymore? It was always “Miss Kendrick” or “Miss Elizabeth”. She took a deep breath to calm herself before she walked onstage.

Three

"Why exactly are we going to a concert, Alice?" Edward asked for the hundredth time.

"Because I've never been to one," she said stubbornly.

"You hear one every day," he shot back.

She looked at him and said, "A real concert. With good music."

He grinned, knowing she didn't mean it. She was happy when he played.

"Besides, she's a really good singer. Have you heard 'Love At First Sight'? It's my favorite song!" She listened to it in her mind, forcing him to as well.

*People always said  
Love at first sight didn't exist  
But babe, we're proving them wrong*

*They tried to beat us down  
Tell us we're too young  
But babe, we're proving them wrong*

*When I first saw you  
I knew it was true  
From across the room  
Under the full moon  
I knew we were in love*

*Your parents didn't approve  
Mine weren't happy either  
But, babe, we're proving them wrong*

*All our friends said  
We wouldn't last  
But, babe, we're proving them wrong*

*When I first saw you  
I knew it was true  
From across the room  
Under the full moon  
I knew we were in love*

*You wanted to meet me  
One day after school  
Oh, how I worried  
We met in your garden  
You dropped to a knee  
And whispered the words  
That made everything perfect*

*When I first saw you  
I knew it was true  
From across the room  
Under the full moon  
I knew we were in love  
I knew we were in love*

Alice hummed along with the melody, and Edward found himself humming with her. It was catchy, he had to admit. And this girl **was** a really good singer. He became more eager to go to this concert as the time passed.

The theater was packed, and he had to hold his breath for the first time in years. The scent was overwhelming. But he wasn't going to do anything, or Alice wouldn't have brought him along.

She grabbed his arm and dragged him to the very front. Anyone who complained moved right out of the way – Edward didn't want to know why.

Once they were in place, he sniffed cautiously. Turns out, it wasn't as bad as he originally thought. He let out a deep breath, sighing with relief. He could see Alice grinning in his peripheral vision.

“Ooh, it's starting,” she squealed, jumping up and down. He rolled his eyes, but watched the curtains intently.

Ellie Kendrick walked onstage, and Edward was mesmerized. Her long, curly brown hair framed bright red cheeks. Her eyes were downcast – she was obviously embarrassed. Not a surprise; he guessed she was about fifteen, maybe sixteen.

But when the opening chords began, all embarrassment was gone. What fell from her mouth was angelic. That wasn't good enough, he thought, but it was the closest he could come. It was like an angel had fallen from heaven and was standing not three feet from him.

“People always said love at first sight didn't exist, but babe, we're

proving them wrong," she sang. Her eyes scanned the crowd, never looking straight down.

"When I first saw you, I knew it was true." Suddenly, Edward was looking into liquid emeralds, the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen. The first time he saw her, he knew it was true. He knew he was in love.

## Four

Ellie scanned the crowd, something she did every show. It was relaxing for her – it was such a cliché, but she imagined the audience in their underwear. She couldn't begin to guess how many people were here. They came in every shape and size.

But one was more beautiful than any of them. He was right in front, standing next to another excruciatingly beautiful girl – his sister? his girlfriend? - but even she couldn't compare to him. From his messy bronze hair to his warm, wondering gold eyes, he was perfect. She could just imagine what **he** looked like in his underwear.

Her mind went blank for a minute, and she stopped singing mid-chorus. A smile crept onto his face, making him even prettier – if that was possible. She just stared. A small voice in the back of her mind tried to pull her back to reality, tried to tell her that this was embarrassing beyond her worst nightmare and she should get the hell off the stage. She didn't listen. Getting off the stage would mean losing sight of the bronze-haired boy.

The short girl next to him whispered something in his ear, but he didn't respond. He was too busy looking at her. They gazed into each other's eyes until sounds became audible from the crowd. A mixture of laughter and angry protests reached Ellie and snapped her out of her trance.

Her cheeks turned bright red and she fled the stage, drawing more protests from the crowd. But she didn't run to the safety of her dressing room. If this boy was going to make her stop the concert, he was worth chasing after, right?

She pushed through the mass of people until she found him. He was talking to the girl, laughing. Probably about her, she thought despairingly. Too late to stop now, though.

She arrived breathlessly in front of the couple. Was it just the lighting or were they **really** pale?

"Hi," she panted.

He stiffened and the girl put her hand on his arm, as if to restrain him. What was wrong with him? Was it her breath? She had brushed her teeth just before she came onstage. Was he just really surprised to see her? She wasn't vain, but the thought cheered her up.

"Hi," he said through barely-moving lips. His almost-angry tone didn't faze her. What had happened just minutes ago was amazing, and she didn't want to let the feeling go just yet.

"So, um..."

"If you'll excuse us, we have to be going. It's getting late," he said

before she could say anything.

She saw the girl's expression before he dragged her away, and it was one of pity. For what, though? For her? Why would anyone pity her? She thought she had just experienced something only a select few get to – love at first sight. Like in her song, she knew it was true, no matter what issues he had. The only thing she regretted was not getting his number, or at least his name.

Now people were starting to kick up a fuss. They shouted at her to get back on the stage, what a waste of money this was! They came here to watch her sing, not fawn over some boy!

She took this as her cue to leave, and she fled to safety backstage.

“Why are you back here already, Miss Kendrick?” her makeup artist said. Ellie couldn't remember her name.

She twirled around, her light blue skirt flaring out from her legs. Her arms were up in the air. “I'm in love!” she exclaimed, laughing. Oh, what a marvelous feeling!

Meanwhile, Edward was driving home much too fast, still in shock over what had happened. He was eternally grateful to Alice for being there. If she hadn't held him back, the girl would have died then and there. Because of him. He hadn't harmed a human in nearly twenty five years – and he was proud of it – but he had come so close...

Was she to him what that unlucky lady had been to Emmett? It didn't have a name, as far as he knew, but he was pretty sure that's what she was. She was in terrible danger; he could go back and find her. Part of him **wanted** to go back and find her. The monstrous part.

“Don't do it, Edward,” Alice warned. “You're stronger than that.”

“I almost wasn't,” he mumbled.

Her expression became very fierce. “Listen to me. It wasn't **you** that was going to attack her. It's not **you** who still would, given the chance. It's your nature. You can't help it. Hell, it's my nature, too. It's all of our nature. None of us can help it; that's the way we are. But you...you were stronger than your nature. You conquered the unconquerable. Emmett couldn't do it. He wasn't strong enough. If I was in your place, I'm not sure I would have been able to. Your mind is stronger than your instincts, and I admire you for that. That being said, promise me. Promise you won't look for her. I know you'll be fine if you stay away from her, but if you go after her... Just promise, okay?”

“I'm not sure I can promise that.”

“You can. And you will. Now that that's settled...”

They talked about happier subjects – obviously intentional on Alice's part – but the worry still lurked at the back of his mind. As he said, he couldn't make any promises. Alice may have been certain of his mental strength, but he wasn't. Ellie Kendrick was in serious danger.

## Five

Unaware of the internal battle Edward faced, Ellie was in a permanent state of bliss. Something had happened that evening, something profound. Something that would change her life. She didn't know how, but she had a woman's intuition, and she had faith that wasn't the last time they saw each other.

She didn't even care about his reaction. He felt it too, she was certain. The look in his eyes when she was on the stage... Something else had happened when she was pushing through the crowd. Something that had made him leave so suddenly.

Too many somethings. She needed to see him again, to ask him what all those somethings were. They could figure them out together. She shivered – in a good way, of course. They had to be meant for each other; she got chills every time she thought of him.

“Miss Kendrick?” Gary was getting worried. She'd been in her own little world ever since she got back from the show. She hadn't moved from her bed, hadn't eaten, hadn't acknowledged his presence. “Miss Elizabeth?” No response.

A laugh, though nothing had been said. Was she going crazy? He hoped not; if she had to be committed, he had no job. And, of course, he cared about her health, physically and mentally. But right now, it was looking bleak.

“May I use the phone?” he asked. Nothing. Of course. He picked up the hotel phone and dialed the doctor in town. He had a list of emergency numbers for each city, but this was the first time one was needed.

A few rings, then, “Doctor Pellis's office, how can I help you?”

“Is Doctor Pellis there? I'd rather speak to him directly.”

“Just one moment.” There was a short pause. He could faintly hear her shouting at the other end. “I'm sorry, Doctor Pellis isn't in at the moment. You can speak with Doctor Cullen, if you'd rather.”

“Sure, put him on.”

The woman's voice was replaced with a man's, fresh out of medical school by the sound of it. He couldn't be more than thirty, Gary guessed.

“How can I be of assistance?”

“Gary? Who are you talking to?” He twirled around to see Ellie looking at him, confused.

“Hello?” Doctor Cullen said. “Hello?”

“Can I call you back? Tomorrow?”

"Of course."

"Thank you for your time." He hung up and set the phone back on the nightstand.

"Who were you talking to?" Ellie asked again. She seemed to be fine.

"Oh, nobody." He didn't want to bring up the subject, lest it trigger it again.

"You were running up my hotel bill to chat with your friends?" she accused with a smirk.

"Miss Kendrick, that's not..."

"Oh, I know. I was kidding. You know, a joke? People actually do it, and often. I know that's hard to get through your head, but it's true."

"What?"

Her smile faded. "You can leave now," she said.

"I'm supposed to watch you until eleven o'clock. It's only nine thirty," he protested.

"I said, you can leave."

He stood up. Though he didn't agree, she was the boss. "I'll be right next door if you need anything, Miss Kendrick."

"Ellie," she mumbled. He didn't hear.

A few seconds after the door shut, she burst into tears. This was another thing she hated about tours. Nobody had a sense of humor. She was the kind of person who needed socialization, and she wasn't getting any. Not really.

At that moment, her room's window slid open.

## Six

Edward had tried. He sincerely tried. But even he couldn't overcome his primal instincts.

To the outside world, it looked like he was searching for the girl. But wasn't really Edward who had sniffed out the forbidden scent. It wasn't really Edward who had scaled the hotel's wall. It wasn't really Edward who was quietly opening the window. The monster inside him had taken control of his body. He wasn't making decisions. He wasn't present.

It wasn't his fault. Everyone has their own monsters, and they have to come out once in a while. They are part of everyone, just like this bloodthirsty monster was part of Edward. It wasn't him, but it was a part of him.

The monster heard the girl crying, and it hesitated as Edward tried to fight his way back. But he couldn't do it. What the monster wanted was **right there** and it wasn't going to give up that easily.

It crept silently, as only a vampire can, into the large hotel room. The girl was just around the corner...she was so close. It didn't seem as though she noticed; there was no change in her crying.

In fact, she had noticed. She had felt another presence in the room the second the window slid open. She had thought it best not to acknowledge them at the time, though she couldn't figure out why. If it was a burglar or a murderer, shouldn't she scream?

It was best. It was the best thing she could have done. She kept crying, the monster kept coming forward, drawn to her tears. They just smelled so...good.

It was around the corner now. At any point, it could spring and the blood could be its. The hot, forbidden liquid would register on its taste buds. It would enter its stone cold body, warming it. It would turn its eyes red, back to its natural color. It didn't like the gold; it looked forward to crimson. Red was definitely the way to go. The color of what it craved so badly. The color of happiness, for the monster at least.

But she would never be enough. It would drain her soft, fragile body all too quickly; it would have to find another. There were humans next door. They didn't smell nearly as appetizing, but they would have to do.

She still didn't seem to notice the monster less than ten feet from her. So it was a shock when she raised her head from her hands and looked directly at it. Her tears were still wet in her hands; it would taste those first, as an appetizer of sorts. Its eyes traveled upward, seeing everything this human had to offer. Her skin was perfect; it would soon sink its teeth into it,

leaving puncture wounds for the delicious blood to flow. It was about to sacrifice her life for its pleasure, and she didn't scream. How strange.

No matter. She wouldn't have time to scream, anyway. It would end her suffering immediately. She should be grateful for that, at least. It crouched and grinned in anticipation.

"It's you," she said wonderingly. It was thrown off for just a fraction of a second, long enough for their eyes to cross paths. When they did, what happened was nothing short of miraculous. The bond between Ellie and Edward was so great that the monster simply disappeared, leaving a very confused Edward in its place.

For a moment, he wondered why he was crouched like this in a room he'd never seen before in front of the same girl he'd gone to see in concert this past evening. Then he remembered the struggle. He remembered everything the monster did, everything it thought, but it was like remembering someone else's thoughts. They didn't belong to him.

He remembered how he was just seconds away from murdering this innocent girl. With that, he straightened up.

To Ellie, all this took less than a second. She observed his inhumanly fast movements. She saw the bloodthirsty look on his face. She knew he wasn't human. Yet he was still everything she would ever want. He may not be of her species, but she desperately loved him. She wished he could hear her thoughts so he could know that.

Little did she know, he actually could hear her thoughts. The problem was, he didn't believe them. From his perspective, she had deluded herself into loving a monster. And as much as it would hurt them both, he had to stay away from her. It was too dangerous. He could, at any point, lose control and... He couldn't even think the word. He had to get out of here, before the monster could come out again.

"Wait!" Ellie exclaimed as he fled to the window. He blurred, he moved so fast. She was mesmerized by it; he was just so **beautiful**. She ran after him. She needed to get to him before he left forever. "Wait, at least tell me your name!"

He stopped just inside the window. She grabbed his arm, surprised at how cold it was. It didn't matter, she told herself. It didn't matter. Those times they'd locked eyes, it was like she could see into his soul. And she loved what was there, not the body it wore. She knew he truly was beautiful, inside and out.

"Wait," she commanded.

"I have to get out of here. It's not safe for you," he mumbled. His voice was like velvet, like a symphony of only the prettiest instruments. A

voice any singer would die to have. What would he sound like in a duet with her? No, she had to focus on the matters at hand.

“At least tell me your name. Please.”

He deliberated for a second then conceded. That was the least he could give her in return for almost killing her. “Cullen.”

“Cullen who?”

But he was gone into the night. She stuck her head out the window to try to spot him one last time. The chances were slim, she knew, and she didn't see anything. The rustle of leaves on a windless night was the only thing that reassured her that he had actually been here, in her room, stalking her, talking to her.

How amazing this whole night had been. She felt like screaming to the world, I'm in love! I'm in love, and it's the best feeling in the whole world!

She pulled her head back in and shut the window. Then, like a switch had been turned on, she was dancing around the room, twirling and singing.

“I'm in love! I, Ellie Kendrick, am in love! With a boy whose first name I don't even know!” She laughed at the absurdity of the whole situation. She was only sixteen and she was madly in love with a boy she'd seen twice. And who wasn't human. What would her mother say?

The thing is, she told herself, her mother's opinion didn't matter. Nobody's opinion mattered. She was in love and nobody could tell her otherwise, bring her down. Not even Cullen, whoever he was.

She flopped on the bed, thinking that she needed to count the number of times she had said “love” that night. It'd be hilarious, she thought. She fell asleep with thoughts of Cullen filling her mind.

## Seven

She – of course – dreamed of Edward that night. It wasn't real, but they were together, and that's all that she cared about. They kissed. Oh, did they kiss. Her subconscious had given her what she thought his hard, cool lips would feel like, what they would taste like. And she enjoyed it terribly. The only problem with good dreams: you have to wake up.

"Rise and shine, Miss Elizabeth!" Gary said brightly.

"Ungh. Mmm. Go away," she mumbled unintelligibly.

"You have to get up. You have a doctor's appointment, and you don't want to be late."

She sat straight up. "A doctor's appointment?"

"Yes, Miss Elizabeth."

"Ellie."

"Of course, Miss Kendrick."

She growled under her breath. "Why exactly do I have a doctor's appointment?"

He looked uncomfortable. "Er...just a routine checkup. It's necessary when you're traveling to so many places to make sure you didn't catch anything serious."

"Why don't I believe you?"

"Come on, Miss Kendrick. We only have twenty minutes. I let you sleep in as long as I could."

"At least you're good for something," she mumbled.

After fifteen minutes of rushing to get ready, she met Gary in the hallway.

"You look lovely, Miss Elizabeth, if I do say so myself."

"Ellie, Gary. Just Ellie."

"Of course. Let's get in the car, Miss Elizabeth."

She sulked in the backseat for the short ride. She had to admit, Boston was a beautiful city. But she didn't get to see much of it, and she wasn't going to. Wait. She was leaving later today. Off to New York. That meant no more Cullen. She was going to have to figure something out, and quickly.

When Gary opened the door, he saw a despairing, distant Ellie, exactly why he had called the doctor in the first place. "Come on out, Miss Elizabeth. We're here."

She got out of the car mechanically, and Gary led her into the small office. He signed her in at the check-in desk and they waited for the doctor to see them.

“Are you Elizabeth Kendrick?” a younger girl asked, maybe twenty five. “I am a huge fan!” There was no response. “What’s wrong with her?”

“Mental instability,” Gary chimed in, trying to sound as if he knew what that meant.

“Oh,” the twenty-something fan said, her face clouding with concern. “I hope it’s nothing serious.”

“We don’t think so, but it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“You’ve got that right. Well, all my best wishes.”

A minute or two later, “Elizabeth Kendrick?” was heard over the constant chatter of the waiting room.

“Come on, Miss Elizabeth. The doctor’s ready to see you now.” No response. Of course not.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Miss Kendrick,” Doctor Cullen said once they were in a room. He was even younger than Gary had expected, and much more...handsome.

“Ellie. Just Ellie,” she chimed in, impatient. Gary was surprised, but he didn’t show it.

“Ellie. My daughter’s a huge fan, you know. I’m Doctor Carlisle Cullen, by the way.”

“Wait...what did you say?”

“My daughter, Alice. She’s your biggest fan.”

“No, no. Your last name is Cullen?”

“Yes, it is.”

She was astounded at her luck. Honestly, what were the chances? But she had to play it cool; Gary was here. “Oh. So, why am I here?”

“I’m not quite sure. Mister Wagner here called me with mental instability concerns, but you don’t seem to have any.” He grinned, while Ellie glared at Gary. Mental instability? Routine checkup, her ass.

“He does have a tendency to jump to false conclusions.”

“Well, if that’s all you were worried about, Mister Wagner...”

“That’s it,” Gary said. His cheeks were bright red. He’d just gotten on his boss’s bad side – usually not a good thing to do.

“Then you’re free to go. Again, it was a pleasure to meet you in person, Ellie.”

He hurried off to his next patient, leaving Ellie and Gary sitting together. “Well, Miss Elizabeth, we’d best be off. Lots of things to do before your flight.” She still glared at him. “Come on, Miss Elizabeth. Do I need to call Doctor Cullen back in here?”

“Mental instability?” she growled. Uh oh. He flustered for an answer,

just managing a few unintelligible mumbles. "Mental instability?!" She kept raising her voice, and it made Gary uneasy. Make all the jokes you want, he didn't like conflict. "You think I have mental problems? You think that I'm going crazy?!"

"Miss Kendrick, let's thrash this out in a private place. This isn't the place."

"It's fine. Now, you listen. I am not crazy and I am taking my car out for a drive. You will stay here. I may or may not choose to come back for you."

"You don't have a driver's license, Miss Kendrick!"

"Give me the keys, Gary."

"No. It's not safe."

"Gary, if you value your job, you will give me the keys."

"No."

She reached onto his belt and grabbed them anyway. "And by the way, my name is Ellie." With that, she stormed out. Gary could hear a car engine starting and he ran after her. But it was too late. She sped away, already lost in the thick traffic.

Ellie kept glancing in the rearview mirror. She had actually done it. She had escaped her constant security and was home free. She could disappear. She could change her hair color, her name, and live happily ever after. Gary would never find her.

But she did have to give him credit; he found a link to Cullen. For that, she'd always be grateful. Doctor Cullen had to be related to the Cullen boy; they were both exceptionally beautiful and had the same gold eyes. She'd go back later and beg Doctor Cullen to take her home with him or something. She wasn't sure. For now, she just enjoyed the sights of Boston.

## Eight

Gary paced the parking lot worriedly. He knew he'd just lost his job, and that was something to worry about, but a minor something. The more pressing issue was the fact that his former boss was driving around a big city – and he didn't even know if she could drive! He debated whether or not to send out a search party. She would be furious, but he had already lost his job. What was there to worry about now? Her safety. And that was why he called the police.

He headed back into the doctor's office and asked to use their telephone. They agreed, and he soon got to the police operator. He told her the situation and she told him they would send out all the men they could. He set the phone down with worry eating a hole in his stomach. What if she was hurt? What if she had been in an accident? Then what he had done was justified, right? She couldn't be too mad at him.

Ellie wasn't hurt. She hadn't been in an accident. Though she didn't have a driver's license, she was as apt, or even more so, at driving than Gary. Her father was a chauffeur, and he had taught her to drive as soon as her feet reached the pedals.

She had driven around aimlessly for a while, then decided to check out the Boston Gardens. She'd always wanted to see them; she'd heard stories about how beautiful they were.

She parked far away from the Gardens, just in case. It was overcast but warm for spring; good walking weather since she was prone to sunburn. It was crowded on the streets, luckily for her. She simply disappeared into the crowd. There were so many other curly haired brunettes, there was next-to-nothing chance Gary would find her.

The Gardens were very pretty, but she couldn't concentrate on them. She was having a rare rational moment. What had she just done? She'd run away from her life, to what, to live with Cullen? They'd seen each other twice, once when he'd tried to kill her! She was certain of that. If anything different had happened last night, she wouldn't be standing here now. He wasn't even human! She had a sneaky suspicion she knew what he was, but she couldn't even think it. It didn't matter, she told herself repeatedly. It didn't matter. They were destined for each other, and he had felt it too. That was why he was able to stop. That was why he left. Because he was scared he would hurt her.

Just a few more hours, then she'd go back to Doctor Cullen's office. She needed to make sure Gary was gone, and that might take a while.

She was willing to wait.

Up ahead...was that a police officer? The man was a ways up, but it looked like a police uniform. He appeared to be talking to a blond woman who had passed her a minute or two ago. She had looked at Ellie as if she knew who she was, she just couldn't bring her name to mind. And now she was talking to the officer, pointing in her direction. He saw her. Oh crap.

She turned around and calmly walked in the other direction. Maybe if she just acted natural, he'd stop someone else. No such luck.

"Elizabeth Kendrick?" he said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"What?"

"We got a very worried call from Gary Wagner. He seemed to think you were in danger. I'm here to escort you back to your hotel room."

"I'm not in any danger. He tends to exaggerate. And the escort isn't necessary. I'll go back at my own leisure."

"I'm afraid I have to, Miss Kendrick." There was no way to get out of this. Only one thing to do.

"Help!" she screamed. Everyone looked in her direction. "Help!"

"Hush."

"Help! Police brutality! Police brutality!"

"Shh!"

"What's the problem, miss?" a heavysset man said. He had to have been twice the police officer's size.

"He threatened me," Ellie sniffled. She was someone who could cry on demand, and it came in handy this time.

"I did not!"

"Of course, deny it. Go against the word of this lovely, innocent young lady to save your sorry ass."

"I swear to you, I didn't do anything."

"Sure you didn't." The man punched the officer in the nose, spewing blood all over the sidewalk. A sickening crunch echoed in the ears of everyone nearby. "What is the world coming to when we can't even trust our police force?"

The officer glared at Ellie, his hands covering his nose. She smirked behind her rescuer's back. "I'll leave. But watch your back, Miss Kendrick. I'll find you again, and when I do, you won't get away so easily."

"Over my dead body," the heavysset man said. The officer headed back to his car. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, thank you. If you hadn't intervened...he might have killed me!"

"I'm terribly sorry you had to go through that."

She sniffed once more for effect. "I'll be okay. Again, thank you so much for all your help. How can I ever repay you?"

"No need. It was my pleasure." She pecked him on the cheek, leaving him red-faced as she hurried back to her car. She'd barely escaped that time, but next time she might not be so lucky.

As she got in, she realized that she needed a new car. A black Rolls Royce was way too noticable, however much she loved it. Her next stop was a used car shop. An older Buick sat out front; it was perfect. She'd seen quite a few like it while she was driving around.

She flounced inside and was greeted by a short Mexican, early twenties. "How can I help you?" he said in his thick Spanish accent.

"I'd like to make a trade. Can you do that?"

"Of course, of course. Is the car outside?"

"Yes."

As soon as he saw the car, his eyes popped. "This...is...your car?"

"Yep."

"Why in the world would you want to trade it?"

"What can I get for it?"

"Lady, you can get anything on the lot." He stroked the hood.

"I'll take that Buick right there." She pointed to the one she wanted.

"That '52? You're trading this car for that one?" She looked at him impatiently. He quickly changed his tune. "But it's still a lovely car. Runs great. Let me go get the keys."

Five minutes later, she drove off the lot in her new car. It wasn't a Royce, but it blended right in, and that's what she was going for. A quick pass by the doctor's office showed no sign of police cars. They could be waiting inside. Or worse, Gary could still be in there. But she took the risk; what if Doctor Cullen's shift was over soon? Then she'd never find Cullen.

She parked and went inside, very cautiously. But there was nobody out of the ordinary. She let out a sigh of relief and snuck into the back. Continuing her luck, the doctor was at a desk in plain view. No searching necessary.

"Excuse me, Doctor Cullen?" He looked up, surprised.

"Ellie! What are you doing here?"

"Um..." What could she say? She'd envisioned just asking if Cullen was related, but then what? Was she going to follow him home? Ask to spend the night? If they were what she thought they were, the answer would be no. But she had to try.

"Well, you see, I think I met your relative last night at the concert and we really hit it off and I wanted to know if maybe I could see him again

and I have no place to stay tonight so maybe I could stay with you?" All this came out in a flurry of words unintelligible to any human. Carlisle froze in shock. Was this the same girl Alice told him about? The one that Edward... And she wanted to see him again? Maybe she **was** mentally instable.

"Wow, Ellie. Well, I'm working really late tonight, and I think it would be much better for you to get a hotel."

"Oh. Okay, then."

She headed back to her car unsurprised. Of course he had declined. It was a stupid idea in the first place; who would have ever agreed to house a near-stranger for the night? But that wouldn't stop her from coming. She took her car in the back, where the parking lot was still visible, and prepared to wait.

## Nine

How far away did these people live? They'd been driving for nearly forty five minutes already. Oh well. It'd be worth it. Ellie didn't know if Doctor Cullen knew she was following him; wouldn't he have lost her by now? Instead, he seemed to slow down, almost as if to help her. He must be okay with it, though it seemed unlikely.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, they entered Hollis, New Hampshire. It was a typical small New England town, nothing special. They drove through the town center, to a bumpy back road that rattled her teeth. This car had really crappy shocks.

Ten minutes of this, then another narrower, winding road that presumably led to their house. She was bouncing in her seat with anticipation. Just a little longer, then she'd get to see Cullen. Maybe. It was much too late now, but she realized that this was insane. What if they didn't live together? What if he was leading her to the middle of nowhere, then leaving her to find her way back? Her hands tightened on the steering wheel. She couldn't turn back now. Cullen could be just down this road, and that thought was enough to keep her foot on the accelerator.

There was a break in the trees up ahead, and she stopped. She'd gone far enough. Up until now, she'd stayed a safe distance behind him, but continuing would mean going in sight of the house. Other members of his family could see her, and she didn't know how any of them would react.

So she slowly backed up, trying not to make much noise. That was nearly impossible; the Buick sounded closer to a train or a jet engine than a car. And backing up on this road was something she hoped never to do again. She couldn't turn around; the lane was too narrow. With the constant bends and twists, she came very close to hitting a few dozen trees.

When she was out, she headed into town to look for a place to stay. Of course, in a town this small, there wasn't even a fleabag motel. The only thing to do was to sleep in her car. This wasn't the way celebrities should spend their nights, she thought. But she wasn't a celebrity anymore. She'd given that up. She was just Ellie Kendrick, another nobody.

Silver Lake National Park, the sign read. It was as good a place as any to settle down for the night. They kept it open and unlocked during the night, and she found a nice place by a pond to park. She climbed

into the backseat and stretched out as far as she could. It wasn't the Ritz, but it would do for one night. In the muted moonlight, just before she closed her eyes, she could have sworn she saw the outline of a person.

Ellie was woken up by knocking on the car window. The light hurt her eyes, though it wasn't even sunny. She slowly raised her head and looked out the window. A familiar-looking girl with short, spiky black hair was grinning at her. She had been with Cullen at the concert.

She sat straight up, knocking her head on the roof. "Ow," she muttered. The girl was laughing, and Ellie frowned. She wasn't a morning person and her obvious amusement at Ellie wasn't helping. The car door opened and Ellie stumbled out. Her head was still spinning from sitting up so fast and it took a moment to regain her balance.

"Um...hi," she said.

"Hi! It's so great to meet you! I'm such a big fan." The girl shook Ellie's hand rapidly, and she noticed the coolness of it.

"Yeah, great. Uh, I didn't catch your name?"

"Oh, sorry. Alice Cullen." So this was the girl Doctor Cullen was talking about. But how could she, about Ellie's age, be his daughter? Adoption, maybe?

"Cullen?"

"I know, I know. You want to see Edward."

"Edward who?"

"You guys really hit it off the other night. He shouldn't have left like that." She rolled her eyes. "But that's Edward for you."

"That's his name?" Edward...it fit him perfectly.

"He would've come out to greet you personally, but it's hard for him."

"You knew I was here?"

"Of course, Ellie. Why do you think you're here right now?"

"Oh. Why exactly is it hard for Edward?"

"I know this isn't a good excuse, but he's not the most social person."

"Oh."

"Do you want to go meet the rest of my family? Esme hasn't been able to wait to meet you."

"There's more of you?"

"Seven of us altogether."

"Seven?"

"That's what I said." Alice was getting impatient. "Are you going to get in the car or what?"

Ellie got in the passenger seat quite willingly as soon as she saw

Alice's expression. "Here are the keys."

"I can't believe you'd give up a Rolls Royce for this," Alice grumbled.

"How'd you know about that?"

"I'm a knowledgeable person, Ellie. Now, hold on tight. We're going to get the most out of this piece of junk."

The tires squealed and the pair tore out of the park at nearly seventy miles an hour – and climbing. Alice floored it, yet she was constantly muttering about how it wasn't nearly fast enough. Ellie hung onto the seat for dear life. She was going to kill them both!

She didn't. They made it to the Cullen house with a final screeching stop that threw Ellie into the dashboard. "Wasn't that fun?" Alice said. "It could've gone faster, but it was acceptable."

"Faster? Are you kidding? You nearly crashed the car!"

Alice scoffed. "Didn't even come close. You underestimate my driving skills."

"Wow. Is this really your house?"

"No."

"Really?"

She gave Ellie a look that said, "I can't believe you're that dumb".

"Yes, of course it's my house. You have to compliment Esme on the renovations; she did all the work."

"She did an amazing job."

"Well, you can tell her yourself. Let's go inside."

Ellie got out of the car, albeit reluctantly. Alice saw the hesitation in her step and laughed. "There's nothing to worry about! We're not going to bite."

"Not funny, Alice."

"Sorry."

They walked up the steps together. Ellie gulped, quite audibly. Of course she worried. She was walking into the house of the person she'd stalked on their way home from work. What wasn't there to worry about?

## Ten

Alice had told the Cullens about Ellie last night while Carlisle was still being followed. Mixed reactions had ensued. Esme had been delighted at the idea of having a guest – and at Ellie's persistence. She'd found it amusing the way she trailed Carlisle on the way home and how she drove off as soon as she got near the house. Edward, however, had been appalled.

"She's...coming...here?"

"To see you."

"But...but...she can't!"

"But...but...she is. And you're going to have to at least say hello. She's driving all the way up here just so she could find you. It'd be terribly rude not to." Esme nodded in agreement.

"Alice, you know I can't."

"No, I don't know that."

"Well, you should. Especially after what happened the other night."

"Almost happened, Edward, almost."

"Isn't that enough?"

"The fact that you stopped is enough for me to know that you'll be fine. But if you want to go off and be unsocial, be my guest. I'm sure the rest of us would love to meet Ellie."

"I can't be here when she is," Edward insisted.

"She knows, Edward. She thinks she knows what went on that night."

Everyone was shocked at this, Edward the most. "She does?"

"Yes, she does. And she's still coming to see you."

"I couldn't face her," he whispered.

"Whatever. I'll go meet her tomorrow morning. By myself. Good welcome we're giving her."

"Do you think that's best, Alice? Should we really bring a human here?" Jasper worried.

"It's going to be fine. Everyone's going to be fine." That was enough reassurance for them. Nobody bet against Alice.

She opened the front door and ushered Ellie in. Esme was right there to greet her, while the rest of them hung back at first. "It's lovely to meet you, Ellie. I'm Esme," she said, and held out her hand. Ellie took it, though cautiously.

"Hello."

"And this is Emmett, Jasper, Rosalie, and you already know Carlisle,"

Alice said. Each waved as their names were called.

"Hi. It's nice to meet you all." Ellie looked down at her shoes. Embarrassed. Understandable. "Uh, is he around?" she whispered into Alice's ear, unaware that everyone could hear.

Alice sighed. "No. I tried, but he's very stubborn."

"Oh," Ellie said sadly.

Alice considered the situation for a moment. "You know what, I'll go get him. He should be here right now, and it's incredibly rude for him not to be."

"You don't have to do that."

"Already am. Esme, get her some food." She flounced outside to go drag Edward back.

Ellie, if not embarrassed at first, was mortified now. Of course she was starving; she hadn't eaten all day yesterday. But how could she eat now?

Esme didn't seem to notice, or if she did, she hid it well. "What would you like?"

"Um, what are my options?" Ellie said.

"Well, let's see." She took Ellie's hand and led her into the kitchen. It was amazingly big, even for a family of seven.

She settled on eggs, and though she could have made them herself easily, Esme insisted, saying that Ellie was the guest. It made her unbelievably uncomfortable, but wasn't she already? Besides, there was no point in even trying to argue with her.

The mouthwatering aroma of scrambled eggs soon filled the house, and by the time Esme brought out the plate, Ellie could have eaten the table.

"I hope you like it," she said with a smile. She watched as Ellie took the first bite and just managed to hold back a groan. "Good?"

"Mmm. Wow. This is amazing."

"Thanks."

Ellie shut up then. Talking took time out of devouring her first meal in nearly thirty six hours. When she was done, she stood up, only to see Cullen staring right at her. No, Edward. Edward Cullen. His golden eyes were amused, though it couldn't mask the blatant fear completely.

It wasn't as bad as he would have thought, being so close to her. He found that he could control himself – so long as she didn't get too close.

"Hi," she said softly.

"Hello."

"I'll leave you two lovebirds alone," Esme said, taking Ellie's plate. They just looked at each other, unsure of what to say.

"Listen," Ellie began.

"I'm," Edward said at the same time. "You first."

"I won't be mad if you leave. You don't have to stay."

"Ellie, why would I leave?"

"But...I thought..."

"Shush. I'm here, and I'm staying." They talked for a few minutes, just small talk. Ellie answered mechanically, not really concentrating on what Edward was saying. It was the movement of his lips that captivated her. Neither of them noticed that she was inching forward until she was so close Edward could feel the heat radiating from her body. She leaned forward...

He was across the room in a fraction of a second, instantly to Ellie's eyes. She wasn't sure what had just happened. Did she smell? He'd been right here, then he was over there...he'd moved the same way the other night. Was she going crazy? Or could he really be what she thought he was? Nobody could ever move that fast, unless they were superheroes or something.

"I have to leave." He was gone, leaving Ellie to sit in one of the chairs and wonder if she was right. If she was right, it would mean everything she thought she knew about the world was changing. But she couldn't be right...could she?

## Eleven

Edward stayed away for the rest of the day, leaving Alice to get Ellie acquainted with everyone. The two had really hit it off, and Ellie didn't leave Alice's side. Mostly that was due to the fact that, after Edward's reaction, she didn't trust anyone else.

Around nine thirty, she started yawning. By the time eleven rolled around, she could barely keep her eyes open.

"Tired?" Alice asked.

"What do you think? You had to come get me at seven thirty. Are you insane?"

Alice laughed. "Come on, let's get you upstairs." Her cool skin against Ellie's helped the sleepiness to go away for the short time needed to get up the stairs. "Your room's the last on the left."

"Wait...I have my own room?"

"You're going to be staying here for quite a while. We had an extra room. It only makes sense."

"Wow. How do I ever thank you, Alice?"

"You just did. Go on, make sure you like it."

Ellie flicked the switch and couldn't believe her eyes. A king-sized bed dominated the room, which was adorned in chocolate brown sheets. She had her own television. Sliding glass doors led to a balcony so close to the forest she could reach out and touch the trees. Enough clothes to fill a department store hung in an enormous closet.

"This is my room?" she whispered.

"Tomorrow we'll go through the closet."

"For what, a week?"

"Go to bed. You're going to need the sleep. It'll be a busy day tomorrow."

"Great," Ellie said sarcastically. She crawled under the down comforter, unable to resist the bed for long. "Night, Alice."

"Goodnight, Ellie."

Edward came back late that night, long after Ellie had fallen asleep. He felt terrible about behaving like that, but she had come too close to tempt fate.

"Ah, he returns," Alice said. She didn't look up from the book she was reading.

"She liked her bedroom?"

"Loved it, in fact. I didn't happen to mention that you had set it up

for her.”

He'd spent all last night putting it together; worried though he was about her living here, he wanted her to be as comfortable as possible.

“That's good. That she's happy with her room, that is.”

“I don't know why you don't tell her.”

“Tell her what?”

She looked up at him now. “Edward, we both know that you're going to be together in the end.”

“So?”

“So, why are you putting off the inevitable? She loves you, you know. Why don't you tell her that you love her back?”

“It's not safe for her. If she gets too attached, too close, it could be dangerous.”

“Nothing's going to happen. But do whatever you want. Don't trust the psychic.”

“It's not you I don't trust; it's myself.” She ignored him. He gave up and headed upstairs to his room. He pulled a book off his shelf at random and tried to read it. Ellie's thoughts kept creeping into his mind no matter what he did. Her dreams called to him, much as he wanted to stay away from her.

He resisted for a minute or two, but eventually his desire to be with her won. It was strange, wanting opposite things so strongly. On one hand, he wanted to be with her, needed to be with her. It was like there was a cord between them being pulled tighter each passing day. But he didn't want to hurt her. Why did the one girl he loved have to be the one girl he had to stay away from? It was cruel, really.

He pulled a chair up next to her bed and watched her dream.

Ellie slowly awoke, plenty of groans and blinking involved. She wondered why she was in a strange room, sleeping on a strange bed for one moment, then remembered all that had gone on yesterday.

She propped herself up on one elbow, which sunk ridiculously into the mattress. To the left, she saw that it was raining outside. Yet another crappy day. She sighed and flopped back on the bed.

She turned her head to the right and did a double take. Edward was sitting there, just watching her. She knew she should be creeped out by it, but she found it endearing instead.

“Good morning,” he said in his melodic voice.

“Morning. What are you doing in here?”

“I'm not allowed to be in my room?”

"This is your room?"

"Yes, it is."

"But Alice told me this was an empty room!"

"Don't worry. I volunteered to let you have it. It's our room now."

"If you say so..."

She sat back up again and Edward just managed to hold back a chuckle. "What?" she asked.

"Your...hair."

She ran to the mirror positioned just above the vanity. She had a vanity in her room, too? Ellie's hair was a mess. Some tufts stuck straight up, while others laid flat in knots that looked like they'd never come out. This happened every morning. But in front of Edward? Talk about mortifying.

She yanked a brush through her hair, trying to tame it as quickly as possible. When she turned around, he had mastered his straight face again. "Better?"

"It wasn't that bad in the first place." Yeah, right, she thought. His mouth curved into a smile.

"You're up! Great! Edward, get out. This day is dedicated to us girls," Alice said, clapping her hands. Ellie wasn't quite sure where she came from. She pushed Edward out of the room and shut the door. Ellie was trapped. Her only escape was the balcony, and though it was two stories to the ground, she was seriously considering it. She loved clothes and she loved Alice, but she didn't know if she could take a whole day of trying on outfits.

"Okay, let's start here." Alice walked toward the back wall, dragging Ellie with her. It was huge! Bigger than her room, maybe. How had they fit a closet this size into a house like this? And this was just for Edward. What did Alice's closet look like? Ellie wasn't sure she wanted to know.

Her only consolation was the fact that it had to be over sometime. It couldn't last forever. With shoes, makeup, and accessories needed to complete the fashion show, they only got five outfits done by lunchtime. They stopped only because Ellie's stomach was growling monstrously and Alice had to give in. Esme fixed cinnamon rolls, and yet again, they were amazing. She was a gift from the gods.

Soon, too soon, she had to go back upstairs. It had stopped raining, and the sun kept trying to peek through the clouds. Alice was doing Ellie's makeup when it finally broke through. For just a moment, sunlight streamed through the glass doors. Alice moved before it could hit her skin, yet you would never have noticed it was on purpose.

She knew Ellie knew – or that she thought she knew – but Ellie wasn't ready to know the truth just yet. Someday, she'd find out that she truly was living with seven vampires. Someday, she'd find out that she was in love with the one person most dangerous to her. Someday, she'd know everything. But not today.

## Twelve

"Someday" came a lot sooner than Alice would've thought.

Ellie and Edward were alone in the house. Alice, Esme, and Rosalie were on a shopping trip; Ellie had to get down on her knees and beg to be allowed to stay. Carlisle was working. Emmett and Jasper were hunting.

Ellie was still asleep, and Edward was downstairs playing his piano. The song he had started was moving along somewhat, but something was still missing. Something was needed.

He tried it again from the start. The house was filled with music. That's what woke Ellie up. She emerged from her dreams smiling; it was so beautiful. She didn't recognize it. Had he written it himself?

She brushed her hair before she went downstairs. Never again was he going to see her like that. The stairs didn't creak. She didn't make any noise, but Edward looked up at her entrance. Vampire hearing, though she didn't know that.

"Good morning."

"Morning. Did you write this?"

"Yes."

"It's beautiful."

"Thank you. It's not finished yet."

"Well, let's hear what you have done." Edward restarted and played the melody through. Ellie shocked that he could play something that complex, let alone write it. Her songwriting abilities were limited to three minute pop songs, while Edward wrote symphonies. It made her feel very insignificant.

He lingered on the last note, then tried a different chord than he had last time. It still didn't sound right. "That was amazing, Edward."

"I have no idea where to go from here. I've tried everything I can think of, but none seem to work just right."

"Hm...try this?" She sang the next few notes she'd heard in her mind, while Edward just stared. Again, the angelic voice. But this time, it vocalized the notes that sounded perfect after the final chord.

He played it out, adding some of his own after hers. They took turns playing and singing. Between the two of them, they got a lot more done. They only stopped because Ellie's stomach was growling insatiably.

Edward made grilled cheese, and of course he declined Ellie's offer to share. She was getting more and more suspicious every passing day, and more and more sure that she was right.

When she had eaten her lunch, they went back to the piano. Ellie was ecstatic they were doing something together – and something she enjoyed, at that. Edward was happy, too, but he was more reserved. With no one around, if she got too close, it could all be over. But he had to have confidence that wasn't going to happen.

Together, they attacked that melody. They located it in the recesses of their minds, excavated it, and polished it up until they were left with a shiny, sparkling finished product. And that finished product was spectacular.

“Okay, play it again,” Ellie said after they figured out the last little bit. Edward's hands flew over the keys, unleashing a song that was haunting, yet happy at the same time. It mirrored his own feelings about Ellie, he thought.

“It's perfect,” she said, smiling when the last note faded away.

“I think so too.” She looked longingly at the grand piano.

“You know, I've always wanted to learn how to play, but I've never gotten the chance. Guitar's more my thing, I guess.”

“I could teach you. If you want.”

“You would?”

“Sure, why not?”

“That'd be great!”

“Well, let's start today. Do you already know how to read notes?”

“Yep.”

“Okay, then.” He pulled out music books from the seat's storage. Ellie had to admit, he was an excellent teacher. If she did something wrong, he pointed it out gently. He always encouraged her, even if she was frustrated with herself.

It was hard! Doing two different things with your hands, having to read two sets of notes at the same time, it intimidated her. Part of the reason why she never took it up. But learning with Edward, that was totally different.

In a few hours, she had gotten down playing with the right hand, but she was still confused as to her left. She could play whole notes, but nothing other than that. It frustrated her immensely; guitar had come so naturally to her.

He set his fingers on hers to show her what to do, and the mere touch sent tingles through Ellie's body. Something happened to Edward, too, but it was deeper. For him, it cemented his love for her in place. Though he could never stay with her, he couldn't stay away from her either. It was a nasty catch-22.

While they were amazed at how much a simple touch could do, the phone started ringing. Neither of them moved. It was silent for a few moments, then it started up again. Edward made no move to answer it.

His piano was set in the living room, up on a platform. There were windows one hundred eighty degrees around it, giving him a nice view of the forest while he played.

The sun had been hidden behind thick clouds all day, but at that moment, fate decided to intervene. It poked through the clouds and shone through the windows. Edward didn't realize until it was too late. Ellie, as she looked at their hands on top of one another, saw sparkles. For one crazy, irrational moment, she wondered why Edward had covered himself in glitter.

Ellie looked up at Edward. Nothing but his hands were in the sunlight. He cursed under his breath, but before he could move away, she spoke.

“You...sparkle?”

## Thirteen

"Shut up!" Edward yelled. He couldn't take it. It was too much. He was grateful beyond words that he couldn't see Ellie's smiling, trusting face flashing behind his lids anymore.

Instead, he focused on the present. He was getting close to the Denalis' house now. He considered turning back; he knew Tanya would be hanging over him until he left, and he wasn't sure he could take that. But it would be silly not to press on. The Denalis might even be helpful in working through his emotions.

It was a struggle not to think about Ellie. It was so tempting to spend more time with her. Even knowing how everything worked out. Even knowing that if he kept remembering, it would eventually lead up to the ending.

After a few hours of internal debate, he pulled into the Denalis' driveway. Their house was an enlarged version of a log cabin, and combined with the foot or so of snow, it set the perfect scene. Mountains in the background, blue sky, a thin forest surrounding a rustic cabin.

Tanya was out the door before he could move. Of course.

"Edward! What a lovely surprise!" she said as she bear hugged him.

"Hello, Tanya." Kate, Irina, Carmen, and Eleazar hung back, but were all happy to see him as well. They just weren't so flamboyant about it.

"So what brings you up here? No troubles, I hope."

He tried not to grimace. "The house looks wonderful."

She caught on quickly. "Thank you. We've been busy with renovations the past month. The living room is still in progress, but we're done with the kitchen and the bedrooms..."

She proceeded to show him every square foot of the house. His expression worried her; there was something terribly wrong. It was something in Forks. He wouldn't have come up otherwise. Did he...no, he couldn't have! All the Cullens would have left, not just him. His eyes were still golden anyways. She was ashamed she'd even had the thought.

"You can stay here. If you want. If you're going to be staying here," she said as she showed him one of their many spare rooms.

"Thanks. Really."

"Anytime, Edward. You know that."

She left him alone then. From downstairs: "He needs to be left alone."

"What's going on?" said Carmen.

“Don't even ask him,” Tanya whispered.

“He seemed upset,” Kate chimed in.

“You think? Why else would he come here – alone?”

“I was just saying.”

He tuned them out and opened the large picture window. The wind blowing in was frigid, yet it felt warm against his skin. Inside, he felt chilled to the bone. It was just one more reminder of how he could never have been right for Ellie.

Her name overwhelmed him with more memories, and instead of pushing them away, he let them take him into the past. Back to a time when his worries, looking back, were nothing more than silly fears. Back to a time when he could look in her eyes and know that everything would be okay. He closed his eyes and smiled as the story of his life played once again.

## Fourteen

Despite Ellie's enthrallment with his skin, Edward shrunk back into the shadows. Her skin didn't sparkle, she thought. How unfair was that? Wait...why did he move? He was so pretty.

He laughed. Pretty?

"What's funny?" she said. He didn't answer. He knew he'd have to tell her everything now. It would be good, in a sense. No more secrets. However she reacted, everything would be on the table.

She stood up and walked closer. He wasn't worried; her thoughts were full of love. He had taken her in, given her a place to stay though they barely knew each other. He seemed to have some sort of aversion to her, yet he had given her his room and was teaching her how to play the piano. He seemed to accept her, couldn't she do the same?

He smiled at this, and she couldn't help but smile back. It was contagious. She was right in front of him now, and she took his hand. His cold, pale hand which, just seconds ago, was alight with a rainbow of colors.

She tried not to think of all the oddities she'd noticed, but it was nearly impossible. The beauty, the gold eyes, the pale, apparently sparkly skin, the fact that none of them ate, the fact that he wasn't able to get too close to her, the very first night...it all added up to one possibility.

"Come with me?" Edward asked. It was a rhetorical question. If he asked her, she would drive off a cliff with him.

He led her out the door and into the forest. In the small patch of yard between the house and the forest, she couldn't stop staring at him. But all too soon, they were in the trees where the sun couldn't penetrate the thick layer of leaves.

After a few minutes, he grew uncharacteristically impatient. Against all rational thought, he couldn't wait to tell her. They stopped for a moment and he turned to her. "You don't get motion sickness, do you?" She shook her head.

"Not squeamish about speed?" She thought of the drive with Alice and almost hesitated. But this was Edward. With him, she was fearless. Another shake.

"Then you'd better hold on tight." He grinned and reached for her waist.

"What are...oh!" She was on his back now. She knew he wouldn't let her slip, but she locked her arms around his neck. What was he doing? He did seem strong, but could he walk carrying an extra hundred and ten

pounds? Speed...was he going to run?

Oh, yes. He was going to run.

She couldn't close her eyes. Even if the pummeling wind would let her, she wouldn't have wanted to. It was just so...there really was no word to describe it. The trees flew by her at unbelievable speeds, the leaves and trunks blurring into undecipherable streaks of color. Yet it didn't feel like he was running. It didn't even feel like he was walking. It was so smooth that he could have been standing still.

The only times she'd had piggyback rides were when her older brother or father had hoisted her on their backs and paraded around the yard. More than once she'd been dropped. It had been long ago, but she clearly remembered the bounciness. She'd had to get down because, almost always, she'd nearly strangled her brother. It wasn't her fault; her hold had been around a person's neck, since her little arms wouldn't stretch any farther. The constant up and down motions had apparently made her elbows bang into his throat.

Not so with Edward. Even if the ride had been bouncy, she doubted he would have noticed the chokehold. She didn't know much about him, but she got the feeling that he was more durable than that.

He was enjoying it as much as she was. Maybe more. Now he got to share his happiness with someone else. He just ran for a few minutes, not quite sure where to stop. Where would the perfect place be? What would be the perfect background for the most important conversation of his life?

There was a meadow, nothing special, really. It was just an opening in the trees that he'd come across before. But now, in late spring, blooming wildflowers overwhelmed the grass so all you could see were shades of pink, yellow, purple, and white. This was as good a place as any.

Suddenly, they were stopped. Ellie wished they could keep running, but then she saw his neck. And his arms. And his face, turned halfway back. She unlocked her hands and was about to fall, but he caught her. He smiled, and all she could do was stare. It had to be a dream. He couldn't be here, with her.

A laugh. "Believe me, you're not dreaming."

"Huh?" Had she said that out loud?

"No." Wait...what was going on? "It's all part of why I brought you out here."

"And why is that?"

"I think you deserve to know."

"Know what?"

"Everything. In fact, you already do know."

"I do?"

"You do."

She only had to think about it for a second or two. "No..."

"You're very smart, I have to give you that."

"But...that can't be right!"

"Oh, it is."

Ellie was sidetracked for a minute. "How do you know?"

"I know lots of things about you."

"But how?"

"I can read minds." It was out. Very blunt, but after seeing what she had seen, was this that much of a shock?

"Oh," was all she said, but inside, she was panicking. He knew what she was thinking? That meant that every thought she'd had about him, every doubt about their humanity, every dream about him hadn't been private. How embarrassing!

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone," he said, barely holding back a grin.

She looked at him in desperation, but at the sight of his face, her fears dissolved. So what if he knew what she was thinking? "So. You're very special then, aren't you?"

"Not really. Mind reading's nothing compared to what Alice can do."

"What can Alice do?" Her voice was monotonous, shocked as she was by the thought of Alice, sweet, short little Alice being a vampire.

"She can see the future."

"Mind reader...psychic...anything else?"

"Jasper can control your mood."

"Oh. Cool."

He laughed again. "You're taking this very easily."

"Guess I am." Then she thought of something. "If you are...vampires..." The word fell uncertainly from her tongue. None of the Cullens seemed to fit the normal vampire protocol. "...Then how can Carlisle be a doctor?"

"Years of practice."

"Oh."

They were silent again, just looking into each other's eyes. His golden, hers emerald. Honestly, she didn't care. It wasn't like they had changed any since she'd ended up here.

He bit his lip and cast his eyes downward. "I don't know if I should..."

“What?”

“What if I hurt you?”

“What?”

He seemed to lean forward, but the movement was so minute she wasn't sure she saw it. “No, I won't.” He looked back at her. Why did she have to be so pretty? It was so tempting...

“What do you want to do, Edward?”

After a minute of deliberation, “I just want to try something. Tell me if...if I hurt you.”

“Uh...okay?”

He leaned forward and pressed his hand against her cheek. She could taste his cold, delicious breath, he was so close. A second of hesitation, then pure bliss. His freezing cold, smooth lips against hers. In reality, it was tad bit too hard, but she didn't notice. If anything, she wanted to be closer. In the heat of the moment, nothing registered in Ellie's brain but Edward. Edward's hand. Edward's hair. Edward's face. Edward's chest. Edward's lips.

When he broke the kiss, it was only because she was human. Even if she didn't want to, she had to breathe. He had to push her back; when he pulled away, she tried to follow.

How strong he was! She was fighting as hard as she could to go back to him, and it didn't seem to faze him one bit.

How could she have gone more than a week without **that**? She supposed it was addictive; you didn't know what you were missing until you've had a dose. But still. She was happy beyond words that she got to share her first kiss with a god.

“That was my first time, too. Believe me when I say that I'm ecstatic I got to share it with you,” he said, grinning. He was smiling a lot today, and that made him that much more beautiful.

She was still trying to catch her breath, but at that moment it didn't matter to either of them. No one really knows how long they were out there. Minutes, hours...it still wasn't enough for either of them.

The sun sank lower and lower until it set in the most magical sunset – for them, at least – in history. Shades of red, pink, and orange glowed from the half of the sun still visible. But it wasn't really the sky that grabbed their attention, nor the fading rays on Edward's skin (though, for Ellie, it was part of it). It was the fact that they were together, really together, and that evening was something neither of them would ever forget.

## Fifteen

Ellie hadn't even thought about the consequences of her actions. She'd shrugged them off, thinking that maybe they'd look for her – hence the police officer in the park – but they'd eventually let her go. Forget about her. It was silly and irrational, but that's what she thought.

She was soon finding out that wasn't the case.

Edward and Ellie were watching TV. They weren't alone in the house, but they were the only ones in the living room. Ellie was constantly snuggling closer, though there already weren't any gaps between their bodies.

They had settled on I Love Lucy, but neither was really concentrating on the show. Both could be seen glancing at the other, and every so often their eyes would meet. These times, they would just smile and look back at the television.

Ellie had never had a color TV. It was novel to see the red of Lucille Ball's lipstick instead of dark gray. Edward was just awaiting the time when the cameras would be of better quality.

The nightly news came on afterwards, and neither of them made any move to change it. An anchorwoman calmly discussed the beating – and killing – of a four year old girl.

“Penny Whitman was found in her apartment earlier today. Authorities say she was only four when she died.” It cut to footage of Penny, a black-haired girl who would have been beautiful if not for the bruises all over her face. Her mother was standing off to the side, bawling.

“The police have a suspect in custody. Her father, Bruce Whitman, is believed to be the only person around at the time of the beating, though he is adamant about his innocence.”

“How awful,” Ellie said. “I can't believe a father would do something like that.”

“Now to the nationwide search for Elizabeth Kendrick. The pop superstar was last seen on May twentieth, one week ago, by police officer Adam Richards.”

“I just want my baby back,” Ellie's mother said. Her eyes were teary and she had to turn away from the camera.

“It definitely wasn't a kidnapping,” the police officer said. “She said, and I quote, 'I'll go back at my own leisure.'”

“The family is offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for the runaway. With no apparent motive and no place to stay, authorities are baffled by her disappearance.”

"After the break, our experts will break down last night's Presidential speech. We'll be right back after these messages."

Edward turned the TV off and returned to the couch. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes.

"Ellie," he started.

"I'm not going back."

"But..."

"No. I couldn't go back. You know very well I'm in too deep to go to the surface again. I couldn't bear it."

"Your mother."

"She'll be fine."

"You were talking about how 'a father could do that'. Is your situation that different?"

She was furious that he would say something like that, but in the back of her mind, she realized that it was absolutely right. How could she do this to her parents?

"That's completely different," she growled.

"How?"

She ripped herself away and stomped up the stairs. He heard the door slam. It took a minute or two, but the sound of sniffles made their way downstairs. Then flat-out crying. Her thoughts were a jumbled mess of Edward, her parents, her friends, her future... He couldn't listen for long.

But what was he to do? She couldn't stay with him. Unless...would she agree, once she knew every detail? The plan refined itself in his mind. It just might work, he thought. It just might work.

## Sixteen

Ellie heard the voices before they came into her room; surprising, as she could barely hear her own thoughts over her crying. He was right. How could she do this to her parents? But she couldn't go back either. How could she live without Edward?

"Are you sure?"

"It's the only way."

"You would do that to her?"

"It's her decision."

"I'll wait out here."

Three knocks. "Can I come in?" Edward said through the closed door.

She sniffled, wiped her nose, and replied, "Yeah."

He was on the bed in an instant. "I'm sorry I was so harsh down there."

"Me too. I shouldn't have yelled at you."

A short kiss. "Ellie, I have to talk to you." She straightened up and looked at him. "It's about staying."

"I'm not going back."

"You didn't let me finish. I've figured out a way for you to stay with us. It involves...changing our circumstances a bit."

"Okay..."

He took her hand. "See, all of us Cullens started out the same way. To become a vampire, you need to be...changed."

"Changed?"

He hesitated for a second. Was he really planning on taking away her humanity? But he was giving her the choice, he argued. After he told her everything, she could choose. "Bitten."

"Oh."

"I love you, Ellie, and I want you to stay with me. I don't really see any other way than to change you. If you stayed human, well, it's hard for all of us, especially me."

"Why especially you?" Her face didn't show any emotions, mostly because her mind was blank. What was she supposed to think?

"You...call to me...so much more than anyone else. You've wondered why I can't get close to you. That's why."

"My blood is harder to resist?"

"Like a drug."

"So it sings to you? I'm your singer?"

He laughed. "Exactly. So you see, if you stayed human, it would be hard on all of us to be in such close proximity with you on a daily basis. Not that we couldn't deal with it, I just don't want to put you in danger. Another benefit: we could stay together forever."

"Why couldn't we be together forever otherwise?"

"Humans die, Ellie."

"You mean...you don't...die?"

He let that sink in for a minute. "We could run away together. We'd never have to worry about anyone finding us. We'd always be one step ahead of your family."

She shuddered. "I'd never be able to see my family again, would I?"

"No, Ellie. You wouldn't."

She weighed the options in her mind. Edward and the Cullens versus her family. Of course she loved her family to death, but was her bond with Edward stronger than that? She wasn't sure.

"And there's no other way? I couldn't stay human with you?"

"Not really."

"I need to think."

"Okay."

"Alone."

"I won't listen."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"You know I love you, Edward. No matter what I choose, know I love you."

"I love you too, Ellie. But don't let that influence your decision. Choose what feels right in your heart."

It was an impossible decision. Her mother, who'd always had such a strong bond with Ellie. Her brother, her father. Or Edward. True love. She hesitated for a minute. True love? Was it really true love? Or was it just a silly schoolgirl crush? No, it felt stronger than that. Plain old love? Whatever it was, she knew it would be nearly impossible to separate from him. But wouldn't it be nearly impossible to permanently separate from her family too? No phone calls, no visits.

She sighed and let it go. It was too hard to think about. She didn't have to choose right now.

## Seventeen

Edward wasn't literally biting his nails, but that was the feeling. What if she said no? Would she even want to stay with him if she wanted to stay human? She kept going back to her family. He wasn't supposed to listen, but he caught little snippets anyway.

But what if she said yes? He was overjoyed at the thought of spending the rest of his life with her. So what if he'd only known her for a few weeks? The feeling he got with her surpassed anything he could have imagined if he had been alone, and he couldn't give that up.

If it was her decision to leave, though, he wouldn't try to stop her. He wouldn't show her how hard it would be for him. He wouldn't try to make her feel guilty about leaving – anything but that. He knew how much he was talking about giving up, and so quickly. No goodbyes or anything.

He and Ellie lay on the bed. She'd long since pulled her hand from his. That might be a bad sign, but it was probably just because she needed to think, he told himself. It could be a bad sign, though, and that was what was putting him on edge.

He tried to imagine a life without her. Now. After he'd seen what it was like with someone else in his life. It was a scary thought. No more watching her dream. No more messy hair in the morning. No more warm hugs. No more kisses. No more collaborative songwriting. No more snuggling on the couch. No more Ellie.

His arm unconsciously wrapped around Ellie and squeezed her against his body. The warmth she radiated calmed him down. At least for this moment, she was with him. For this moment in time, they loved each other.

Ellie fluctuated all day. Her family, or the Cullens? As Edward pulled her closer, it made it hard to think. With him in such close proximity, he was all she could think about.

Who cares if she'd have to be bitten by a vampire – and turned into one? Edward had told her that they hunted animals instead of people. She ate meat now; would it be that much different? It couldn't be that bad.

Unable to help herself, she started to twist towards him for a kiss. He obliged, realizing her intentions before she turned all the way around. His lips were fierce against hers, but not too hard. Or if they were, she was beyond noticing. It was like a wildfire, burning through her body. When it reached her mind, she couldn't even remember thinking of leaving. How

could she have even considered giving **this** up?

Ellie was dizzy by the time they broke apart and had trouble catching her breath. He'd said that she should choose whatever felt right in her heart. But as she looked into his warm, loving gold eyes, she knew that he'd be crushed if she left. She would be devastated, too. So why would she leave and cause both of their destructions? It was such a silly choice. There really only ever was one outcome.

Edward smiled as he heard her decision.

## Eighteen

"Not immediately," Ellie said when she saw his expression. He nodded. "I'd want to call my parents, tell them goodbye."

"Of course, Ellie." He'd agree to anything she asked for right now, even if he was worried what would happen when she called.

"Another week?"

"You could have a month if you wanted."

"A week, Edward. I don't want to make this any harder than it is already."

"Okay, then. A week."

"Now, what exactly happens in a week?"

"It's not...pleasant." She would have asked what that meant, but she wasn't sure she wanted to know. She'd find out soon enough. "Carlisle will do the actual biting."

"You're going to be there, right?"

"Ellie..."

"What?"

"With you...being...you...and Carlisle biting you...I don't know if I'd be able to...restrain myself."

"If you can't be there with me, in my final minutes of humanity, I'm not doing it at all. If you love me enough, you'll be able to 'restrain yourself'."

"That's not fair." She grinned, knowing she had him. It wasn't that she wanted to cause him discomfort of any kind, just that if anything went wrong, she wanted his face to be the last thing she saw. That wasn't so selfish, was it?

"Ellie, either you don't understand or you don't care. Did you miss the part where I said that your blood is harder to resist than anyone else's?"

"Please?"

There was no point in arguing with her. He had to do it. "Fine," he said in exasperation. Though he was terrified, he didn't show it. What if something happened? What if he couldn't resist? What if he killed her? He'd never be able to live with himself. Faith, then. Faith was the only thing he had at this point. Like she said, if he loved her enough, he'd be able to do it. "Fine. I'll be there. Just pray that nothing will happen."

"I don't need to pray."

"Don't tell them where you are," Edward said as he handed Ellie the phone.

"Of course not. I just want to be able to tell them bye."

She dialed the familiar phone number and waited for someone to pick up. Two rings and, "Hello?" she said as she gripped the phone.

"Hey, Mom." The phone fell to the table with a clatter. Ellie's father came into the room.

"What's wrong?" he asked, seeing his wife's expression of shock. He saw the phone lying on the table and the worst scenario came to mind. He marched over to the phone, determined that he wouldn't react badly, whatever the news. "Hello? Who's there?" Mr. Kendrick said.

"Hi, Daddy," Ellie giggled.

"Ellie?"

"No, it's the president."

"Is it really you?"

"It's really me, Dad."

By this time, her mother had snapped out of it. Mrs. Kendrick ripped the phone out of her husband's hands and said, "Ellie?"

"Deja vu. Weird."

"Ellie!"

"Hi, Mom."

"W-w-w-where are you?"

Ellie sighed. "Had to get to this so quickly, didn't we."

"Elizabeth Kendrick, you tell me where you are."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"I can't explain. I just...this call was to talk to you one last time."

"One last time? What do you mean? Ellie, you just up and left, leaving no explanations and no goodbyes, and now you're calling 'one last time'?"

"I can't tell you how sorry I am. I never meant to hurt you."

"Come back home, Ellie. Please, I'm begging you."

"If I could I would. But where I am now...well, I'm in a better place. I'm going to be happier now. Just let me go, Mom."

"If you were so unhappy, w-w-why didn't you tell me? We could have c-c-cancelled all your shows, we could have been a n-n-normal family again."

"I'll love you forever. Tell Dad and Josh that, too. I'll always love you guys so, so much."

"Don't hang up! Ellie, don't hang up!"

"Bye, Mom."

"No, Ellie!" But the phone was already dead. She collapsed on the

couch and sobbed.

“What happened?” Mr. Kendrick asked. His stomach was doing flips as he watched his wife break down.

“S-s-she said she was calling one l-l-last t-t-time. She said she was in a b-b-better place and that she would be h-h-happier.” She couldn't say any more. And neither could he. They sat down and cried for all they had lost.

“I shouldn't have done that,” Ellie said. Her nose was starting to snuffle.

“You needed closure. You wouldn't have been happy any other way.”

“Forget about me. How could I do this to them? I call my mother, out of the blue, only to tell her that she'll never see me again? They would've been better off thinking I had just disappeared.”

“The past is the past, Ellie. You can't change what's already happened.”

“Thanks. That makes me feel so much better,” she snapped. “You didn't have to hang up on your family – permanently!”

“I didn't have a chance to say goodbye. Consider yourself lucky.”

“Edward, I didn't...”

“Forget about it.”

“If we're going to be together, we're going to have to tell each other about our pasts.”

“I said, forget about it.” He wouldn't look at her.

“I'm sorry,” she whispered.

He took a deep breath and tried to leave the past, well, in the past. It was hard, but he managed to force a tiny smile in Ellie's direction.

“It's...it's fine. Just forget I said anything.”

“You can't place the blame on yourself all the time. It was my fault for snapping.”

“Can we please not fight over whose fault it was? Please? Just forget the whole thing ever happened, okay? I really don't want to fight with you.”

“Okay. I don't want to fight with you either.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too. If you don't know that by now, you're probably screwed.”

## Nineteen

In the days leading up to her change, Ellie grew increasingly anxious. She'd jump whenever Edward's hands settled onto her shoulders, whenever she saw him in the morning, just staring at her and smiling, whenever he spoke to her before she saw him. Edward didn't appear to notice, at least, he didn't tell her he thought anything was amiss.

The truth was that she wasn't sure about the change anymore. Of course she wanted to stay with Edward – she always would. She just wasn't quite sure he was worth giving up her humanity for. But there wasn't any other way to be with him, not without putting herself in grave danger every day. So she sucked it up, didn't let Edward on to her doubts, and jumped whenever she was reminded exactly what she was getting, and so soon.

It was set for tomorrow morning, after she'd had her requested breakfast. The last meal. Esme would make anything she desired. Edward had made it clear that she could have anything she wanted, and she was taking him up on it. A disastrous phone call, a week of his agony...both had been granted to her against his better judgment, all because he just wanted her to be happy, even if he didn't think it was best for her. He would prove to change his mind later in his life, for a different girl in a different time, but for right now he would do anything to make her as happy as he possibly could.

And for that, she was immensely grateful. To know that she was loved meant the world to her. It was different than the feeling she got from knowing her family loved her. They were supposed to love her – they had to love her. With Edward, he wasn't forced to at all. He wanted to. He wanted to change her and wanted to keep her with him forever. This was what she wasn't going to give up, even if it came at a steep price.

The night before the change, Edward finally brought up her past behavior. "What's wrong, Ellie?"

"What do you mean?" She was getting ready for bed, which included brushing her hair, brushing her teeth, and talking with Edward. She'd done the first two and was out on the balcony, wishing they could have skipped the latter.

"You know exactly what I mean. You've been so jumpy all week. Is it tomorrow? Because we'll call it off. It's not too late. Just say the word and we'll wait. Or we'll figure something else out. You don't have to do this. No one's forcing you."

"I'm choosing to do this, Edward. I'm choosing of my own free will to

do this. Believe me, if I don't want to do this, I will say something. Just don't count on it."

He let out an inaudible breath he'd been holding as she'd talked. Her reassurances that she wasn't leaving were exactly what he needed right now. He'd spend the last week preparing himself for the worst. What else could be causing her behavior? But to know that she was going to follow through with this made his day. Made his life, even. "Just know you have an outlet. I don't want you to do anything you don't want to do."

"I promise the outlet won't be necessary." As she spoke, she watched a lone bat fly across the yard. It just circled the lawn for a few minutes, then suddenly swooped down and grabbed a mouse in its ruthless legs. Ellie wasn't sure what to make of this, whether it was a sign or just a gruesome sight she had happened to witness. But her heart suddenly raced with the sight of the mouse dangling from the bat's shadow against the full moon. She tried to dismiss the thought before it could register in her brain, but she worried that tomorrow she and the mouse could have something in common.

She tossed and turned all night. She didn't dream but was obviously agitated. Edward wondered what to do; she had said this was what she wanted, but it didn't seem like it. It seemed like she was doing it because there was no other way, and that wasn't the way to go. He wouldn't let her follow through unless she truly wanted it, not because she thought she wanted it.

When Ellie awoke, the first thing she saw wasn't Edward's face. Every morning she'd woken up here, he was faithfully sitting next to her bed, ready to greet her when she opened her eyes. Not today. She sat up quickly and wondered what was wrong. Something had to be wrong for him not to be here.

After a quick hair brushing, she headed downstairs only to be bludgeoned with the delicious scent of breakfast. Real breakfast. Esme had apparently made all of her favorite foods this morning – cinnamon rolls, pancakes, and her personal favorite, scrambled eggs.

She saw the gigantic plate waiting on the dining room table for her. Unable to resist and keep looking for Edward, she sat down and devoured what was, essentially, her last meal. It was way too much, but she ate the whole thing. She couldn't help herself.

"Like it?" Esme asked, walking into the room and sitting down at the table.

"Oh, Esme, it's delicious," she said behind a mouthful of food. "Thank you so much."

"My pleasure." When Ellie was done, she spoke up again: "So, are you excited about this?"

"This meaning the..."

"Yes."

"I'm excited."

"You are?"

"Of course."

"Good. Now tell me what you're really thinking."

She sighed. "To be totally honest, I'm not sure. On one hand, I can't leave Edward. I need him. I need all of you now. But what am I willing to sacrifice for that? Whatever he says, if I leave, I'll hurt both of us. So it only makes sense to do this, right? Stay with him forever, make both of us happy. But is it happy enough? I'm scared to death about that."

"I don't know what to tell you, other than to do what your heart tells you. Your mind can get in the way, rationalizing way too much. It tells you what makes sense, not what you really want. You get lulled into that feeling that what your mind is telling you is actually what you feel, but deep down, you always know what you truly want. Sometimes it's just hard getting past your mind and discovering what that is."

"I don't have a lot of time for discovering, Esme."

"You always have time, Ellie. You always have time."

Esme got up and went somewhere. Ellie didn't know, she didn't care. She was busy trying to take her advice. What did she really want? When Alice came in a few minutes later, she was no closer to finding the answer.

"Hey there, Ellie."

They hugged, and it just complicated things even more for Ellie. Another person she hadn't added to her original equation: Alice. The best friend she'd ever had. It'd hurt to lose her, too.

"Hi, Alice."

"I wanted to stop by before we went off."

"You're going off where?"

"Out."

"We'?"

"Everyone but Carlisle and Edward."

"But why...oh. Oh."

"Yeah. But don't worry, we won't be far."

"Where's Edward? I haven't seen him all morning."

"He wants to be alone for a bit."

“Why?” Ellie didn't expect an answer, and she didn't get one. “Well, have...fun.”

“Good luck, Ellie.” Then she was gone. So Edward wanted to be 'alone' for a bit? Where would he have gone, and why?

Before she could think about that much, Carlisle came downstairs. “Are you ready?”

“Edward needs to get here first. I'm not doing this without him.”

“You don't have to,” Edward said, his cool hands settling on her shoulders. But this time she didn't jump. She'd figured out what she truly wanted, and she wasn't going to let anything stand in the way of that.

“Hey. Where were you?”

“Oh, out.” In truth, he hadn't just been out. He'd been to their special place, the meadow where he'd confessed to her, praying that nothing would happen today. He believed in a higher power, at least at this point in his life, and had faith that it wouldn't let him do anything life-ruining. Still, it couldn't hurt to pray.

“Uh huh. You ready for this?”

“Are you?”

“Of course.”

“Then so am I.”

They made their way up the stairs and into her bedroom. Edward thought it would be easiest for her if she was somewhere familiar, and Ellie appreciated that.

“One last thing,” she said.

“What's that?”

But she didn't have time to answer, for her lips were busy. This kiss was comparable to their first in terms of passion. It was her last human kiss; she wanted to get the most out of it she could. Which meant that Edward was the one who had to pull away. He didn't want to, but he had to.

“Thank you.” She smiled at him, truly ready to do this. This was what she knew her heart had been telling her all along. She would stay with Edward, and they would live happily ever after. That was her fairytale, and she couldn't be more excited she was about to live it.

“No problem. In fact, I quite enjoyed it as well.”

“Okay, Carlisle, I'm ready now.”

As she laid down on the bed and grasped Edward's hand, she closed her eyes and smiled. But before she felt anything, she heard Alice bursting through the door.

“Stop!”

Twenty

"Where are we going?" Ellie asked. She didn't get an answer. She didn't expect to, since the past hundred times she'd asked, she hadn't gotten one.

She tried to remember how she got in this situation. It had all happened so fast. First things first: Alice came in, telling somebody to stop. She assumed it was Carlisle, but from the expression now on Edward's face, it might not have been. He had pulled his hand away, and that was when she opened her eyes. He was whispering to Alice, but only for a few seconds. Then he had whisked her away into a sports car and they were speeding off to...somewhere.

"What happened back there?" No answer. She gave up trying to pry something out of him and focused on the road. A green sign declared Boston was ten miles away.

"We're going to Boston?"

"No."

"He speaks!"

He just looked at her. "It's going to be a while before we get there."

"Get where?" Nothing. "Get **where**?"

"Are you hungry?"

She glared at him for a few seconds, then admitted, "Sort of."

"Any preferences?"

"Don't care."

Ten minutes later, they screeched into an expensive-looking Chinese restaurant. He got out first, opened her door, and held out his hand. She stared at it for a minute, but eventually took it.

Inside awaited the classiest restaurant she'd ever been to. And that didn't count the time her parents had taken her out for a celebratory dinner for the record deal.

Thinking of her parents made her feel queasy and not much like eating anymore. From the fish in the ridiculously huge tank, whose size was only comparable to a shark tank at an aquarium, to the Chinese waitresses in their silk kimonos, the environment made her want to throw up. It was so...overdone.

"I don't know if I can eat," she whispered.

"We're going to be on the road for a while. It's best if you grab something now."

"Well, okay..."

"Table for two?" he murmured to the seating hostess.

“Right this way.” Ellie marveled at the sheer size of the place. For Boston, this was comparable to other restaurants the way the fish tank was comparable to a normal fish bowl.

“Is this alright?”

“Fine, thank you.”

She left two menus. Ellie almost smiled. She picked up one of them and flipped through it. When she got to the end, she felt her jaw nearly hitting the table. Were they serious?

“What’s wrong?”

“Edward, do you realize that the cheapest thing on this menu is \$7.75? Well, no, that’s not true. The water’s only two.”

“Must be a big glass.”

“It better be.”

“Don’t worry about it. My treat.”

“How much money do you have?”

“Enough.”

“Apparently.”

“Are you ready to order?” a different waitress asked.

“I’ll have water -” A significant glance and an almost-giggle in Edward’s direction. “- and the vegetable lo mein.” She wasn’t even sure if she liked vegetable lo mein. If she didn’t want to have **one** egg roll (which was the single \$7.75 item), it was the next cheapest at \$8.50. She just couldn’t believe her eyes. Back home – a twinge that she tried to ignore – the most expensive entree at the local Chinese restaurant was the same price as a single glass of water at this place. It had better be some damn good lo mein.

It was. If food could be heaven, this would be it. She could just imagine what the roasted duck – a whopping \$20 and way out of her self-induced budget – would taste like. All queasiness forgotten, she gorged on this once-in-a-lifetime delicacy. Though it wasn’t a large quantity, it was well worth the \$8.50.

They were too soon back in the car and still heading south. Ellie wondered just what was south. She’d soon find out, and she wouldn’t like it, not one bit.

Ellie had fallen asleep hours ago. As he parked, he looked over her sleeping form, her face smiling with the happiest dreams she’d have in a long, long time. He almost turned around, but he had come this far. He had to finish it.

Ellie awoke to Edward’s lips brushing softly against hers. Her head

craned up, and their bodies were suddenly entangled in each others'. Edward had to wrestle to get her off of him. It would hurt too much if he let this go on any longer.

"What's wrong?" she asked in confusion. And when she saw her surroundings, she was more confused than ever. They were parked in front of a light olive green Tudor home with slightly darker forest green accents. The lawn was overgrown a bit, but you could tell it was usually perfectly manicured. Lilies of all colors completely surrounded the home. A stone walkway led up to the front porch. A rocking chair rocked with the slight breeze. Shadows could be seen through the lacy cream drapes. If the sun had been shining, it could have been mistaken for a fairytale home.

It was a fairytale home in a sense. To Ellie, at least. This was her parents' home.

"Edward, why are we here?" she gulped, barely holding back tears. Had he brought her for closure? That dreadful phone call certainly hadn't been a proper goodbye.

"No, Ellie. This isn't about closure."

"Then what's this for?"

"It's for..." He took a deep breath, unable to believe what he was about to say. "I brought you here because..."

"What?"

"Because this is where you belong."

Ellie was so shocked, she was numb. She didn't understand the words falling from his mouth. "But I belong with you." She tried to kiss him again, but he pushed her away and there was no use trying to resist.

"See, Ellie, that's the thing. You don't. Do you know what Alice saw this morning? Do you?"

"As I recall, you never told me."

"If she hadn't come when she had, you wouldn't be here right now. And that would have been because of me." Seeing her expression, he said, "Please understand, Ellie. Please understand. I'm not doing this to hurt you. I love you, and that's why I'm bringing you back to your family. I couldn't bear if I, or anyone else for that matter, hurt you. It's just too dangerous for you if you stay with me."

"But you are my family! You and Alice and Esme and the rest! And I thought that was the point of this whole changing thing, that I wouldn't be in danger anymore!"

"You would have died if we had carried through with the 'changing thing'." If he had been able to cry, he would be sobbing right now.

"You don't have to be there! I changed my mind. It'll just be Carlisle

and me. And then we'll be together forever and we won't have to worry about danger anymore and it'll be perfect."

"No."

She couldn't say anything. With that one word, her hysteria was gone from her system and what was left was crushing grief. He was...dumping her?

"No, I'm not dumping you. Anything but. I'm doing this because I love you. You deserve better than to live the rest of your life as a monster."

"Listen to me. You are not a monster. You are the best, kindest, most wonderful person on the planet, and anyone would have to be certifiably insane not to want you."

He didn't listen to her, or if he did, he didn't show it. "Besides, you were on the fence about giving up your family all this past week. Don't try to deny it. I know that call was hard for you. And I know that putting you through that again, making you choose again, would kill me. You don't have to choose anymore."

"I've already made my choice! I choose you!"

"Some wonderful, amazing man is going to come into your life. He's going to be all you ever wanted. He'll make you happy, no sacrifices needed. And he's going to be able to **live** with you. This life, you don't really live it. And you're too special of a person to give that up. You might not see that right now, but I do."

She couldn't talk. Huge sobs racked her body every few seconds. Edward couldn't take any more of this. A little bit longer, and he'd selfishly turn around and drive back to New Hampshire. That's why he got out of the car when he did.

She didn't fully appreciate all she was giving up. He couldn't believe he had been so selfish and actually encouraged trading her life in. No matter how long she worked at it, she'd always be held captive by a monster. He knew that firsthand. It had almost made him kill her. He couldn't sentence her to that non-life. It was no choice for a soul as beautiful and bright as hers.

He carried her to the door and knocked. The Kendricks rushed to the door, thinking it was the police, hoping they had found something. Mrs. Kendrick's eyes had cleared up, but her mind still sobbed, and Edward was sure he was doing the right thing. Even if it didn't seem like it to Ellie at this moment, he knew it would be the best thing in the long run.

When her parents saw her, they couldn't believe their eyes. Were they hallucinating? Her father couldn't help but reach out and touch their

red-eyed daughter who was, oddly enough, laying in some guy's arms. But they were willing to take her, however she arrived.

"Baby?" her mother said. "Ellie?"

Ellie choked out a sob, still unable to speak. Her parents took them as happy tears, as they both had them in their eyes too.

Edward set her down and they nearly crushed her with their hugs. In that instant, they were a family again, if not a totally happy family. For as soon as they let go, Ellie ran back to Edward. She clutched onto him, a useless gesture, but she needed to be with him. He couldn't be leaving her. He couldn't. Not after all that had happened. It was just a dream, just a really, really bad joke. Except that it wasn't. And that was something she'd never accept, not for as long as she lived.

He pushed her away. Gently, of course, but it might as well have been a shove off a sheer cliff. Below her waited dark, choppy waters that she couldn't handle without him, her own personal life vest. But her own personal life vest was sticking out its leg and tripping her over the edge. She had managed to hold onto a branch – his still being here – but it was breaking. Any second now, she'd tumble into the water. And she couldn't swim. She'd drown without something to keep her afloat. But what to do when the thing that keeps you alive is the thing that's killing you? Nothing. You can't do anything. But she tried. He walked away, and she just ran back after him. This time, he took the effort to take her back to her parents with instructions to keep her there. Her father held her arms as she thrust herself forward. He was getting into his car now. If he drove off, he wasn't coming back. Ever. It was the moment to live or the moment to die. It was the moment to fight, to fight as hard as she possibly could. She did, all to no avail.

"Edward!" she screamed. "Don't go!"

She thought she saw a flash of pain across his face, but she couldn't be sure. Even if her struggles had awakened some pity in his stone cold, murderous heart, he still got into his car and started the engine. He was a murderer now, however unintentional. He had killed something inside Ellie, something that would never work quite right again.

It nearly killed him to drive away, but he did. He had faith things would turn out alright in the end, that everything was for the best. Well, he didn't really believe that. Not for himself, at least. For Ellie, though, he knew she would be better off. He'd seen how she couldn't leave her family, and that was enough proof for him. If she had that strong of a bond with them, who was he to break it? She'd think she was happy with him, but deep down, she'd always resent him for taking that away from

her. And he couldn't bear that.

He almost looked back in the rearview mirror, but knew it would just cause him more guilt. It would be hard for her at first, but she'd get over him. Like he'd said, she meet a nice, **human** man who would love her and cherish her and do all the human things with her he never could.

He tried to drown out her thoughts, but it was impossible, what with her mental screaming. He sped up, hoping to get out of range soon. As it faded and then disappeared altogether, he let out a sigh of relief. He couldn't take much more.

Part of him wanted to turn the car around, break about a dozen traffic laws getting to her house, then sweep her off her feet and carry her home with him. He almost did. But he didn't. And, though neither of them could see it at that moment, it had been the best decision he'd ever made.

## Epilogue

It was hard for Ellie in the first few months. No, hard didn't even cover half of it. She barely slept, barely ate, and almost never came out of her room. Her parents prayed that she would get over it soon, for having her here but miserable was infinitely worse than letting her be somewhere she was happy. On the phone, she had said that she was in a better place. She begged them to let her go. And they didn't. That was why she came back, they were sure of it. They felt responsible for her behavior and were a few days from going and finding that boy themselves. They never did.

Ellie eventually got to the point where she would have the occasional meal with her family, but not before she'd lost nearly ten pounds. They'd brought her brother, Josh, over to try and talk to her. They were very close, and she usually told him everything. But when he shut the door and came back out in the living room, he was unsuccessful in gaining more than an inaudible greeting from her.

Her memories of her short stay with the Cullens faded after a while. She couldn't remember just what Alice's hair looked like, or exactly how Esme's cooking tasted, or the exact layout of her room. But she knew the memories of Edward would never fade. She remembered exactly what he looked like.

That is, until she met Mark. Her mother dragged Ellie shopping one day; she'd always loved going. Maybe doing something she used to like would help. Mark was a cashier at one of the stores. She had tried on a few outfits, just to please her mother. Apparently they looked good.

Mark saw something in Ellie from the first second he laid eyes on her. She saw something in him, too. He knew that she had been hurt; he could see that in her eyes. He also knew that she was the most beautiful person he'd ever seen. Call it fate, call it coincidence, call it whatever you want, but the universal term was love at first sight.

Being with Mark made Edward fade, little by little, until she could no longer remember exactly what was said when or the exact color of his skin. And she didn't mind. In fact, she liked the feeling a lot. Not that she would ever truly get over him. Just that she felt more free than she ever had. She wasn't being held captive by his memories anymore; she was able to live and let go. Mark made everything feel better, let her **live**, and they quickly fell in love.

Not long afterwards, Ellie started writing a new album. It helped her work through her feelings, aptly titled "Heartbreak". It was a breakup album, the sequel to her breakout album, "Love At First Sight". It sold more

than double the records of her first. Her tour sold out within the first two weeks, all thirty locations. Getting back into the music made her feel good, and she was back to normal.

Not surprisingly, the happy couple was married on Christmas 1960. They were only twenty when they exchanged vows, but the thought of leaving each other never crossed either of their minds.

The happiest day of Ellie's life, even counting the few weeks she was with Edward, was July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962. That's when Caroline Alice was born. They didn't argue over names. In fact, they both knew the second they found out. Caroline, that is. Ellie picked out Alice.

She never told Mark about the Cullens. She didn't know about the not-knowing rule, but she kept the secret to herself. It just felt too personal to share, even with her lifelong husband. He realized it was hard to talk about why she had gone into that depression, so he never asked.

August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1976 was another date that would be forever etched into Ellie's memory. She'd remember each miniscule detail of that night. Mark was on a business trip, so she and Caroline were alone until the next day. At precisely 9:53, Caroline rushed downstairs, breathless.

"Mom!"

"What is it?" Her daughter's face was bone white and her hands were clenched into fists.

"There was a guy outside my window."

"On the balcony?"

"Yeah."

"But how could he get up?"

"I know he was there, Mom. There was somebody looking into my window. But then when I looked back, he was gone. He must have been jumped off or something."

Ellie's stomach fell to the ground. Could...

"Could what?" Caroline was looking at her strangely. Had she said that out loud?

"Nothing. You stay down here. I'll see what's going on up there."

She climbed the stairs and headed into Caroline's room. Her room was as messy as any teenager's room, and Ellie had to step over shirts and shoes strewn across the floor.

She opened the French doors and walked onto the narrow balcony. The night air was particularly warm, even for August. Nothing looked amiss, but then again, she wasn't expecting anything to be. Very cautiously, she called the name she hadn't uttered since that horrible day 20 years ago.

“Edward?” It hurt less than she would have thought to say it. Now, of course, she realized how stupid this was. He had left her. Why would he come back, and twenty years later? Still, a tiny shred of hope blossomed in her heart. If only she could see him once more. But he didn't come. She waited for at least a minute, then gave up. If he was coming, he already would have.

She headed back in, but froze when she heard a soft, “Don't go.”

Her eyes widened and her breath started coming quicker and quicker until she was nearly hyperventilating. She couldn't turn around. The melodic voice that had haunted her dreams was right behind her. He was here.

“I'm sorry,” he said.

She slowly swiveled herself through sheer willpower. He was standing there in his seventeen year old perfection, a hint of a smile on his regretful face. “For what?”

“Coming here. I just had to make sure you were okay.”

Her heart warmed with those words, but the iciness crept in quickly, faster and faster. “Why should you care? You were the one who left me, remember?”

“I'm sorry,” he repeated. He winced as she dumped memory after memory on him.

She considered his expression, his coming back here to check on her, and thought that she believed him. “It's okay. It ended up okay.”

“I'm happy for you.”

“Caroline's downstairs; I can't stay for long.”

“She's beautiful, your daughter. And I'm sure this one will be, too.” He placed his hand against her growing stomach. The tiny heartbeat brought a smile to his face. He was certain he had made the right decision.

“Thanks. How's Alice?”

“She told me to tell you how touched she was by the namesake.”

All Ellie could do was smile. She knew she should be cursing him out right now for abandoning her and making her go through that. She knew she should have thrown him off the balcony and told him to leave. But she couldn't bring herself to do that.

At that moment, though, Caroline came up to see what was taking so long. “See anything, Mom?”

Ellie twirled around, not knowing exactly what to say. “Uh, no. All clear.”

“I heard you talking to somebody.”

"Myself, honey. Talking to myself."

"Uh...huh."

"Can you go dry the dishes? I'll be right down."

Caroline hesitated, knowing something was up. Her mother's face had never looked so...alive. But she did as she was told, knowing she could never win the argument.

Ellie turned back around, only to see...nothing. He was gone.

"Edward!" she whispered. No answer. He had left her again, leaving only his memory.

She went back downstairs, not knowing exactly how she felt about the visit. On one hand, part of her still loved him and loved his presence, however long. On the flipside, he had brought up memories she'd rather forget. However she felt, she knew it touched her that he still cared enough to come and check on her. Was this the first time he'd done it? If it was, it was also the last. She never saw him again.

Caroline was waiting for Ellie in the kitchen. "Mom, what went on up there? I know you were talking to somebody. You never talk to yourself."

"Nothing went on." She went back to washing dishes.

"Don't play dumb with me. I'm old enough to know, aren't I?"

Ellie sighed. It would help to dump on somebody, leaving out the supernatural parts, of course. "If I tell you, you have to promise not to tell **anyone**. Not Dad, not your friends, no one."

"I promise."

"I haven't even told Dad. You'll be the first person to know."

"Is this about a boy? A childhood sweetheart or something?"

"Yes. It's about a boy. A boy named Edward."