

Present
Perfect



A Twilight
Fanfiction

g i s e l l e - l x

Present
Perfect

A Twilight novella

By

giselle-lx

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giselle@gisellelx.com
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For robsjenn
With my unending thanks for your support,
your patience,
and a wonderfully challenging prompt.

The way this story ends is that Edward is my best friend.

I know that's not how you're supposed to tell a story; it's the kind of thing that annoys the snot out of Jasper, or would, if he had any to be annoyed out. But it's the way I tell a story. Because I always know the end.

The Cullens—my family—are big readers. I think it's because of Carlisle, who did nothing but read for two centuries. And the rest of them all follow suit, even Jasper and Emmett, who you think wouldn't read much. But there're a lot more books than there are TV shows and even vampires get bored with bad TV.

Reading doesn't work very well for me, though. I see the final page turn, and I see the end of the book, and I see my reactions to the parts in the middle, and by the time I've picked something up I've decided to read, I already know the end. So if I read, I read differently—I read to appreciate the way the writer used her words, or the way he kept tension moving from scene to scene. I read to laugh at a funny line of dialogue.

I don't read to know the end. I always know that from the beginning.

So the end of this story is that Edward is my best friend.

But that's not how it begins.

The first time I saw Edward, he was running, which I didn't realize at the time would turn out to be one of the only things he loved. He ran with his mouth wide open and his head thrown back, his hair flying behind him like a banner and the sun turning it bright red in parts so that it looked like it was on fire. And out of nowhere, a streak of gold cut across his path and tackled him, and they fell to the ground and laughed so hard the grass shook.

Fifty years later I talked to Carlisle about that. Asked him if it happened. He searched his mind for a while. Edward says that Carlisle's mind is very organized, that dipping into it is like wandering into a doctor's office, with rows and rows of neat files all labeled with colored stickers. When he needs something, he goes to his big filing system and spends a moment hunting, then pulls out the right file and tells you what he thinks the contents tell him.

"I do remember that," he said after a moment, a smile spreading across his face. "He thought I was running behind him, but I was actually in the trees. I dropped forty feet out of a pin oak and tackled him from the side." He chuckled. "One of the few times I've ever surprised him. He learned to expect that maneuver and listen for the rustling of the leaves after that."

Carlisle smiles a lot when he talks about Edward. Edward is the best thing that's ever happened to him. I can't see the past, and the way it would have forked, but I can see the future, and as it turned out, the running day was in the future when I awoke.

To this day, I think it's interesting that my first vision of them was to know for certain that Carlisle would be happy. That I saw him tackling Edward, and the two of them laughing.

Jasper wasn't laughing when I saw him first. He was sitting on an upended bucket in the dark corner of a barn with his head in his hands. In fact, I couldn't tell if he was crying—well, at the time. Now that I remember it, I know he wasn't, because Jasper has cried a total of three times in the last seventy years. And one

of those was on our wedding day.

But I knew that I was in love with him.

You know how they talk about someone causing you heartache? Jasper caused me heartache. Right from the very beginning. It's a thing you can feel, a weird twinge in the area of your gut that seems to be radiating from where your heart is, even if you're like us, and your heart doesn't move. I've never asked, but I'm sure Carlisle would have some explanation for that, some discussion of the xiphoid process or the diaphragm or some something; the way your brain interacts with all those weird muscles that otherwise do things like keep your food down or allow you to breathe. He's a scientist, and that means he's always looking for the exact explanations of things.

Thing is, though, exact explanations can sometimes ruin what is otherwise a really good heartache.

So I knew from that heartache I was going to have to find the man on the bucket.

But I also knew I was going to have to find the laughing boy. And I guess that's as good a beginning as any.

Outside Shipshewana, Indiana

Shipshewana, Indiana is not a gorgeous town. It's a manufacturing town, and it looks it—close enough to Gary that the air gets choked off by the output of the coal plants. But it was cute, in its own way. Picturesque and idyllic; houses with honest-to-god white picket fences. So it seemed totally in order that the town doctor was out in front of the house in a white T-shirt and a pair of 501s, washing his Chevrolet. You could almost imagine that he was human, the way he stood there, humming as he ran over the car with a soapy rag.

Except that it was ninety degrees out, the asphalt was sizzling, and he wasn't wearing any shoes.

And his skin looked like someone had lit it aflame.

“What do you see?”

Jasper gets this worried tone to his voice, every time I see. Even now, when we've been together for the better part of a century. He always gets the tone. But it's a comfortable worry. At first, I always wound up assuring him that I was all right; that no matter what it looked like (and I guess it looks pretty weird), I always am fine. But later I learned it wasn't about me. Jasper worries about the people I see. Are they going to be hurt? Is there danger?

He's a soldier. Protecting people is just how his mind works. It's part of why I love him.

So when he looked at me worried, I answered him.

“I saw Carlisle washing the car,” I said. “When we get there, he'll be washing the car.”

Jasper's eyes clouded a bit. I had been addressing all of the Cullens by their names for years now. At one point, they had just been descriptions: “the leader,” “his mate,” “the big one,” “the

blonde,” “the boy.” But in my visions, they called one another by name. And gradually, so did I.

A hand squeezed mine. “What if they don't accept us?”

An understandable concern. It took almost thirty years for me to find Jasper, or really, for Jasper to give up. He kept trying to fight to be the vampire he thought he was supposed to be; even as his ability to kill eroded. He'd bounced through two covens, and spent a fair amount of time alone.

I was looking forward to the Cullens. The way Carlisle in his 501s thought himself as the father to the others. The way his mate, Esme, thought herself as the mother. They didn't like the word “coven,” I knew that much.

And they would accept us.

I knew that much, too.

I squeezed Jasper's hand back. “They will.”

We would arrive on a day when Edward, the boy, would be gone with Emmett, the big one. A sunny day, when Carlisle would be washing the car.

Calgary, Alberta

Maria is a little spitfire of a thing, mean as dirt on a good day and possibly the devil incarnate on a bad one. And that's not something I think because she once was with Jasper. That's an opinion that anybody would reach.

But I didn't see her coming to Calgary until it was too late.

Shipshewana, Indiana

When Edward came home from his hunting trip, it took him all of thirty seconds to start throwing things: smashed his boxes of records; howling obscenities at Carlisle and Esme and anyone else who would dare stand within earshot. He called me a harlot. A freak. A circus act.

He did, until I explained what was going on, anyway.

That was what I told the Cullens, about how Edward would respond. But the decision I couldn't see was Esme's, who even after a few hours already seemed as though she would gladly accept a new daughter and son. In my visions, I saw she enjoyed their home; that she took pride in its appearance and loved keeping it looking nice. I did not understand that she was a carpenter, and that the house was her work of art. And after I explained to all of them that I could See, they understood that Edward moving into the garage was the best idea.

So it was Esme's decision which thwarted the storm, because inside ten hours, before Edward came home, she built him a new room—turning a large storage space in the garage into a getaway for a confused vampire in a house full of couples. A bed, with a headboard with plenty of room for books; a whole wall of shelving perfectly sized for LPs. She even painted it; a pale shade of almond that glowed against all the color of Edward's music. That room, more than any she's built him since, was soaked with a mother's love. And when he came home, Edward screamed only a little.

And he didn't call me a harlot.

“Freak,” though...that one stuck.

In 1987 I got a vision of Edward getting married.

I didn't tell him about it. Too many steps between here and there.

Sometimes I wonder if I made a mistake not warning him.

Shipshewana, Indiana

Six months after Jasper and I arrived in Indiana, Carlisle turned thirty-seven. He was actually three hundred and six.

He and Esme both sighed about needing to move.

“It takes a long time to find our home,” Esme said, when I asked why she was so upset.

I shrugged. “There's a cabin outside Portland, Oregon for the five of us. Edward will have a whole floor to himself. About four miles away there's a little three bedroom home that Rosalie and Emmett will enjoy. The properties are on a stream right next to the Cascades. And the hospital is going to lose one of their general surgeons to Hopkins two days from now.”

Esme looked stunned.

I told her the house would look beautiful when she was done with it.

Newport, Oregon

Jasper and I hiked down from the Cascades to the Oregon coast at dusk. A lot of wildlife lives in the Cascades—mountain lions and deer and bears.

It's still hard for Jasper. Animals don't give you the strength that humans do, and he misses being strong. But he does it for me. And he does it because it makes him feel like he's a better person than he was before.

We sat on the beach, our bodies making indentations in the sand. I curled into his side, and he took off his shirt. Jasper has a lot of body hair compared to men these days. He has the second least of the men in our family, though—Emmett is the hairiest, followed by Carlisle, though Carlisle is blond and you don't really see it on him.

Edward didn't quite finish puberty, and he looks it. Jasper says he looks effeminate. Well, the word Jasper uses is “Aunt Nancy.”

He wrapped his arm over my shoulder as we sat and listened to the waves as they whooshed in and out. It was low tide, and little tide pools shimmered in what was left of the sunlight.

I mentioned that I was thinking about Edward.

“That boy is melancholy on two legs,” Jasper answered. “Not much you can do about it.” He pulled me closer to him and kissed the top of my head. “I like it that you worry.”

Melancholy on two legs. Not a terrible description. Edward spent a lot of time brooding. Sitting at his piano playing songs in minor keys. Pretending he didn't hear any of us when we walked up to him, even if it was Carlisle or Esme.

I leaned against Jasper some more. “Do you think we're bad for him?”

He laughed. “I think that boy is still too young to realize that if he's going to live forever, he better get used to change.” He kissed my head again. “You're change. A whole lotta change, in a teeny tiny package.”

I giggled. “Change on two legs?”

“Change on two legs.”

Jasper smiled. I couldn't see it—we were both still looking out at the ocean—but I could feel it.

We stayed until the nighttime tide came in.

In 1990, I found out that the girl's name was Isabella. There was something involving a high school classroom. Science. Chemistry, maybe, or Biology, I wasn't sure. She had long, brown hair. That was really all I had.

But it could have been any high school classroom, anywhere. And decisions can change.

Portland, Oregon

When Edward wrecked his piano, the debris took up the entire living room. The piano lay splintered on the middle of the floor. I hadn't realized until then that piano strings aren't stringy at all; they're big long straight wires that, if you break the rest of the thing, stick up at all sorts of angles. And Melancholy on Two Legs sat in the middle of them like a bird in a nest, with little white keys scattered around him like some freakish game of dominoes.

I knew why. Carlisle had made the announcement just a half-hour earlier, then disappeared to get his affairs in order at the hospital. We'd go back to the east coast; as far away from Oregon as we could get. That way no one would follow us.

Rosalie screamed that it was unfair and stalked out the back door, making Emmett chase her back to their house.

Esme started looking through her books of house designs.

And Edward...well, Edward destroyed his piano.

I went to sit down next to him. Maybe, I thought, I could convince him to pretend the keys actually were dominoes, and we could laugh.

But as soon as my bottom hit the floor, he leapt up, snarling.

"Edward," I said, but he cut me off.

"You never should have come here, Freak." His eyes flashed dark. "You and your husband. All you do is fuck things up for the rest of us."

I didn't realize he was gone until the sound of his bedroom door slamming echoed through the house, fading off into the sounds of Edward, playing piano...

At once, I saw the young man, brushing past my husband on the street. Too close. Too quickly. I saw the way Jasper turned,

the way his teeth glinted in the lamplight...

I jumped to my feet.

“Let's go hunt,” I told my husband. He looked at me like I had two heads, but then shrugged and followed me.

No one died.

We didn't leave Oregon.

And Edward's piano stayed intact.

But that was when I figured out that Jasper was right.

Edward is not a fan of change.

Calgary, Alberta

Our house in Calgary was about five miles from the highway.

Five miles takes us maybe two minutes to run.

That was probably the only thing we got lucky about that night.

Portland, Oregon

“Does Edward talk to you?”

The rumble under my stomach felt almost like my own laughter rather than Jasper's. It's like that, sometimes. On the whole, I find the Bible sort of silly, but there is that one line that gets quoted in weddings, “The two shall be one flesh”? That's what it is with Jasper. We become one flesh. When he laughs, it's like I'm laughing.

Carlisle and Esme and Edward were gone, out to the mountains to hunt. That left Jasper and me alone, and we took advantage. He kissed my neck, right where my collarbone hits, and then stuck the tiniest bit of the blade of his tongue into the little indentation there, which tickled.

I smacked him lightly on the cheek as he laughed.

“It's not funny.”

Jasper's eyebrows raised, and he gave me this grin of his, where he cocks half his smile and looks up from under his eyelashes. Jasper has ridiculous eyelashes for a man.

His tongue darted out again, and I giggled.

“You thinking that there's any way in hell that Edward talks to me?” He laughed. “No, that's hysterical.”

Another long pause.

“So he doesn't?”

“Edward doesn't talk to anyone.”

Jasper burrowed down into the covers, disappeared from the foot of the bed and then, just when I thought he was going to leave the room, pounced.

His eyes flashed with mischievous delight. “Go again?”

I nodded. Vampires don't get tired.

But as Jasper burrowed under the blankets and covered my

body with his once more, I kept thinking about what he'd said.

Portland, Oregon

I helped Esme put together our trunks for Vermont. There was a big house there, big enough for all of us, and it would be a good next stop after Oregon.

On the second to last afternoon in our soon-to-be old house, I sat in the middle of the living room, listening to Jasper play the guitar and watching Carlisle read when I saw a Coke bottle spinning through the air, its glass reflecting the light from the kitchen chandelier in a mottled pattern across the walls. Then it fell to the ground and smashed.

“You are a complete asshole!” a high voice cried. Then the back door opened and slammed closed with such force it fell off its hinges.

A rustle accompanied Carlisle's utterly unhurried page turn. I blinked, then got to my feet. The strumming stopped.

“You saw something?” Jasper asked.

I nodded. “Something small.”

Carlisle stopped turning pages when I headed for the stairs.

Edward's room was at the top of the stairs, on the right. He keeps a lot of things; little mementos of the ways he's lived his life. I don't know what all of them mean, but I do know that they all mean something.

I had seen it dozens of times before, but had never actually bothered to inventory it. No matter. The virtue of being a vampire is that my new memory is perfect.

Even if my old memory is nonexistent.

Rummaging through my brain, I went down the list of things that were on this shelf. A baseball card, one of Carlisle's. A sand fulgurite that had something to do with Emmett. A Coke bottle. *The* Coke bottle, from what I'd seen. A bookmark from the New

York City Public Library. A lighter...

That was the part that was missing. A little silver box, no bigger than a pack of cards.

My visions aren't always perfect. They don't always give every detail, and though I knew Edward winged the Coke bottle at Emmett in the kitchen, I wasn't exactly sure why.

Now I knew.

Rosalie and Emmett were out in the backyard with Esme, burning some of the debris from the remodel of the house. Emmett would've remembered the lighter, and he couldn't see what would happen.

Outside it was just beginning to get cold. For a brief moment, I could see my breath when I stepped out into the cool air, because I was warm from the temperature in the house. But it equalized after a minute, like it always does.

"Em," I said gently, and he turned, grinning.

Emmett is probably the most at home with what we are. The way he sees it, he got the best deal; he didn't die, and he ended up with Rose, who is the absolute center of his universe. He likes being stronger than any human and really, all of us. He liked having one brother; he likes having two even more. He teases me, but it's a sweet teasing.

When Edward called me "Freak," there was always the slightest tinge of truth.

He turned away from the bonfire, and it snapped and crackled behind him, making his hair look orange in the glow. Smoke billowed up as though it was coming out of the crown of his head. I laughed.

"Are you laughing at me?"

I pointed. "Just the fire. The smoke looks like it's coming out of your head."

He whirled like something had bitten him.

I started to laugh, and the next thing I knew, my shoulders

were pressed into the ground, with Emmett on top in a full-body tackle. He threw me over him into the grass, and red and orange leaves stuck in both our hair as we tumbled over each other, laughing.

“Hey, you two,” Esme called, but she was smiling. “Play nicely.”

“So, Crystal Ball,” Emmett said, still pinning my shoulders with his elbows. “You needed something?”

“What did you use to start the fire?” I asked.

Emmett frowned for a second, then produced the little silver lighter from his pocket. It glinted in the sunlight, and I saw the three initials engraved on it.

E. A. M.

“Who is EAM?” I wondered.

“It's Edward's,” Emmett replied.

I shoved him. “I know that much. But he's E. C.” I stretched out my hand, beckoning for it.

Emmett shrugged, shoving the lighter into my hand.

“He wasn't always.”

I blinked.

It was true. Jasper was Jasper Whitlock, Rosalie was still Rosalie Hale. Emmett was...so thoroughly a Cullen now that I'd never even bothered to ask.

Of course Edward had once not been Edward Cullen.

I was the only person who was just “Alice.”

Emmett waved a hand in front of my face, then snapped his fingers an inch from my nose. “You seeing something?”

“No,” I said, stepping back. “But I'm putting this back. In the future, don't borrow it from him.”

Emmett rolled his eyes. “You saw some epic hissy fit over a lighter, I'll bet.”

I shrugged. “Something like that.” I backed away toward the house, turning the lighter over in my hands.

E. A. M.

A weird twinge went through me.

I was halfway up the stairs before I recognized it as jealousy.

I laid the lighter next to the Coke bottle, which never got thrown.

Bennington, Vermont

Me in a white dress, Jasper in something vaguely resembling a suit. Lilacs in bloom; a weeping willow in the back yard.

That vision was always out of place, when I saw it, floating with no anchor to time—just place.

So when we arrived at the Vermont house, I laid eyes on the willow tree in the backyard and popped the question.

Jasper grumbled about my proposal “not being proper.”

He felt better when I let him get me a ring.

On the first day of spring that year, which happened to be nicely overcast, Carlisle found us a minister who made house calls. We stood under the tree and I promised Jasper that I'd be his forever.

Except for the vows, Jasper held his breath, just to be safe.

The only other people there were the rest of the family. Carlisle and Esme held hands so that their entire forearms touched, and while we were saying our vows, Esme put her head on Carlisle's shoulder and he ran his fingers through her hair. Rosalie stood in Emmett's arms.

And Edward stood alone, his arms wrapped around himself like he had some sort of need to stay warm.

When we'd wished the minister goodbye and thanked him (and paid him, but Carlisle did that and to this day I don't know how much he gave), I went looking for Edward.

His door was closed. Through it, I could hear him blasting Buddy Holly.

I knocked.

“Go away,” he called. Then he paused and added, “Congratulations. But go away.”

“I just wanted to thank you for being there,” I called back.

There wasn't an answer. I listened to Buddy sing for the better part of twenty minutes, to no avail.

Bennington, Vermont

I cornered Carlisle a month after my wedding. Every now and then he holes himself up in his study with his books, almost exactly the way Edward does in his room with his music. Jasper calls them a match made in Heaven.

That's when punch Jasper in the shoulder.

Carlisle was reading some medical journal, turning pages so eagerly you'd think he was reading a thriller. When I entered, he flipped it over and sat back in his chair, his palms flat on his desk and his arms open.

Carlisle has this way of letting you know it's okay to talk to him.

I slid onto the desk, one hip almost knocking over his pencil cup. It barely teetered; he caught it so fast I didn't even have time to warn him.

"It's funny how we sit," I said.

He raised his eyebrows. "How we sit?"

"Not how we sit, I guess. That we sit." I gestured to my lap. "I don't need to sit here alone with you. You know I don't need to sit."

Carlisle chuckled. "You're very good at the charade."

For a long time, neither of us said anything.

"You didn't come in here to talk to me about sitting, Alice," he said gently at last.

"No."

Carlisle just sat there, his eyebrows raised.

"What does the M stand for?" I asked at last.

"The M?"

"Edward. He has a lighter, up in his room, on his special shelf. E. A. M."

“Oh.” A smile spread across Carlisle's face. “Masen. Edward Anthony Masen.”

Edward Masen.

Just like Jasper had once been Jasper Whitlock, Edward was Edward Masen.

What had the Masens been like, I wondered. Did Mr. Masen look like Edward? Gangly and tall, with red-brown hair that looked like it was on fire in the sun? Did Mrs. Masen bake him cookies? They had both died, I knew that much. We all knew the story of how the Cullens started; Carlisle, alone in a hospital in Chicago, presented with the wild idea to create a companion and the orphaned boy who would be the perfect experiment. But what had the family been like before then? Who had they been?

Carlisle doesn't push conversations, which is one of the nicer things about talking to him. If he sees you're thinking, he just sits back and waits for you to ask a question or say more.

“What were they like?”

“They?”

“Edward's parents.”

For a moment, Carlisle's eyes glazed over, the way they do when he's thinking about something that happened a long time ago. Or something that means a lot to him. In this case, I guessed, it was both.

“I didn't meet his father,” he said carefully. “Not in any substantive way. He was delirious with fever by the time he was admitted, and he died within a few days. A lot of people did, then. It was such an awful disease.” He rubbed his temple, as though it was somehow possible for him to have a headache.

“His mother, though...” A little laugh escaped his lips. “I don't think I've ever treated a more difficult patient. I could not get her to do anything that was even remotely in her best interest if it in any way ran counter to what she felt she needed to do for Edward. He was so much worse off than her—he was the one

they brought in first. She got sick later, after she refused to leave the hospital and spent day after day exposed to the influenza.”

“She wouldn't leave him.”

“She wouldn't even entertain the idea.” Carlisle's eyes glazed over again. “She loved him a great, great deal.”

“And you don't?”

Carlisle chuckled. “Touché.” He hopped off the desk. “Why the sudden interest? Something isn't about to happen to him, is it?”

He did a remarkably good job at keeping the panic out of his voice when he asked that.

“No,” I answered. “I just wanted to know. Thank you.”

Carlisle nodded. “Anytime.”

I started to make my way out of the room, but Carlisle called after me.

“Alice?”

I turned.

“He doesn't really think you're a freak.”

Then he leaned back in his chair and went back to reading his journal

Forks, Washington

As predicted, Isabella turned up in a Biology classroom in Washington.

I'd thought it was Jasper at first, when I saw the classroom massacre that day in January. Twenty students slaughtered, blood spattering the walls like some kind of bad contemporary painting.

But Jasper was in my section of U.S. History, and I could see he wasn't going anywhere.

Edward held it in check, and the vision disappeared.

I cornered him in the hallway after class.

“Go talk to Carlisle,” I urged him. “Now.”

Edward is a runner. By which I mean not that he enjoys running, although he does. But I mean he runs when things don't go right.

But he's also stubborn, and so he waited until after school.

Bennington, Vermont

Edward plays melancholy music when he's upset. Sometimes, it's the only way any of the rest of us have to even figure it out.

So I was expecting the minor chords and the slow dirges when they started up. He sat there, his hair falling over his forehead as he leaned in toward the keyboard with each press; his brow wrinkling like it was taking a lot of effort. Which was completely silly; it doesn't take us effort to do anything.

Edward disappears like that, sometimes. It can be hours; he'll sit at the keyboard pedaling and playing, and the whole house will ring with some sad song. I didn't know music before the Cullens, but I know it now—Rachmaninoff is mad, and Liszt is sad, and Bach is content.

Joplin is for Esme.

But Edward rarely plays that.

I went in to sit next to him on the bench. The moment my bottom hit the wood, however, the piano closed with a thud, and Edward was gone.

Calgary, Alberta

Maria showed up in Calgary with almost no warning. I can see others of our kind, when they arrive; they move differently in my visions than humans do. They're crisper, just like they are in real life—superhuman. Brighter colors. Easily detectable movement.

I always see them coming.

Except for that one time.

~End of Part I~

Bennington, Vermont

Three months after we got married, Jasper and I sat beneath the willow tree and talked. We were barefoot, and Jasper kept walking his toes up my calves, which tickles and makes me giggle.

“Stop,” I said, but he just laughed.

“I like to hear you giggle,” he said. But he stopped, and instead we just sat there, listening to the wind whistle its way through the willow branches and made them sway in front of us like little strings.

The next time Jasper's feet worked their way up my legs, it wasn't to tickle. He flipped me onto my back, and our lips met. Jasper's a good kisser—a perfect kisser, and I know that without having to try anyone else. But he's also an empath, and that works against me sometimes.

He laid his head next to mine and stroked my hair. “Your head isn't here,” he said.

“My head is right here.”

I gestured to it.

Kissing my forehead, he laughed. “Yes, I understand. And I like this head.” He propped himself up on one elbow and ran his fingers through my hair.

He kissed me again.

“Nope,” he said. “Not here. Where is your head?”

I was thinking about our wedding, in fact. Standing there, under the willow, with the breeze rustling through Jasper's hair, causing it to wisp around his face. Kissing him after I said I wanted to be his wife forever.

And Edward, standing off to the side, with his arms wrapped around himself as though the breeze was a bitter winter

wind—like we were affected by a bitter winter wind.

His hair, blowing behind him as he stalked off into the house.

Buddy Holly, blasting from his bedroom.

“Alice?”

I sighed, and rolled over onto my side, propping my head up on one hand and staring at Jasper. He looks better with golden eyes, though I don't actually mind the red. The red bothers Carlisle and the others; the times that he's slipped. I think it reminds them that we're not all perfect. That's the real problem with Jasper slipping—it reminds them all that all of us could slip; it reminds them all that we're all that way. But me, I never mind the red, even though I think the gold is better.

The gold eyes bore down on me, looking confused and concerned and delighted all at once. Edward hears thoughts, which is obnoxious, but Jasper feels feelings. So I knew he knew that I was feeling sad, and happy, and lustful, and all the things that could get tangled up at once with lying in the grass under the willow tree where we were married, thinking about the boy who had become my brother.

It was the first time I'd thought that.

“Alice?”

“Do you think Edward thinks of himself as my brother?”

Jasper snorted. “I think Edward thinks too highly of himself to think of himself as anyone's anything.”

I punched him in the shoulder, and he faked a flinch. Then he rolled back over onto his back and stared up into the tree branches.

He didn't say anything for a long while.

“Do you think of him as your brother?” he asked at last.

I shrugged. “Maybe. He was sad at our wedding.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Jasper nodding. Of course, he would've felt that, too. Known Edward was feeling

sad.

Jasper closed his eyes, and I knew he was seeing what I was, the way Edward had stood there, with his arms wrapped around himself like he needed some kind of coat.

“He's lonely,” Jasper said after a long pause.

“Lonely? There are seven of us.” Seven people who were totally different, crammed into one house so firmly it felt entirely claustrophobic most of the time. Seven people vying for time alone in a bedroom. Seven people competing for a quiet corner to read.

“Seven of us and six of us are mated.”

And six of us are mated.

I hadn't thought about that.

Edward listened to love songs, most of the time. The upbeat ones. The ones where you sang about how the girl was your girl; how you had fun with your girl.

It was like I'd never heard them before.

That was when I decided to start paying more attention.

Lewistown, Montana

After Vermont, we moved to Montana. The open prairie suited Jasper. It was different than Texas, he said, but it was far enough north that it was overcast all the time, and that delighted him. He could wander around when he wanted. Chase wild mustangs.

Esme painted the mountains every day, and she sang while she painted.

I learned that singing meant she was happy.

Edward's piano wound up in the entryway, where light beamed across it in the middle of the afternoon. Esme installed a window hanging, but that only served to get the light to go across in stripes instead of one wide band, so that Edward's hands shimmered as he played.

I liked the shimmering.

One afternoon, I sat down next to him, and for once, he just kept going. It was a long piece, and when he got to the end of it, he just slowed and stopped and put his hands in his lap and looked at me.

"That was nice," I said. "It was like a lullaby."

He stared at his hands for a long time.

"I think...I think my mother used to play those for me. Or with me. I'm not sure." He turned so that his legs swung to either side of the bench, and he put his hands out flat and sideways.

Edward has large hands, and long fingers, with knuckles that curled over the edges of the bench as he gripped it. It seems like he was built to play the piano.

"I'm not," he muttered.

"Not what?"

“Not built to play the piano.” He gestured to the keys. “I mangled them, when I was first turned. Carlisle brought me one, and I broke it into little pieces trying to learn to play.” He frowned. “He thought it was funny.”

Carlisle often thinks things are funny that really aren't.

Edward nodded. Then he didn't say anything for a long time.

“What is it called?” I asked.

“What is what called?”

“That. The music.”

His lips pursed. “Nocturnes,” he answered. “Chopin.”

I had heard of him.

“That's why they sound like a lullaby,” he muttered. “That's what they are.”

And I could imagine that. Imagine a woman, who looked like a cross between Esme and Edward, sitting at the piano. Her fingers would be long, like Edward's, but her hair would stretch down her back. Carefully manicured nails would appear reflected in the shiny surface of the piano as they swept over the keyboard, and she would pedal softly, with a little, bronze-haired boy leaning sleepily into her side...

Edward vanished so abruptly the keyboard cover closed itself from the sheer force with which he flung himself from the piano.

Lewistown, Montana

He only let me listen to the Nocturnes. If it was Rachmaninoff, with the loud pounding chords, everyone was supposed to stay away. Joplin, Esme was allowed to come and stand behind him with her hands on his shoulders, and run her fingers through his hair like he was a little boy. Mozart and Hayden (who I didn't know before I knew Edward, but who I learned), those were okay for everyone to hear, as long as we kept our distance.

But the Nocturnes, I knew, I was allowed to sit on the bench and watch. The way his fingers moved over the keys, the way his head rocked toward the keyboard and then away from it, like it required his entire body to play.

It's a good thing that vampire minds can go so many directions at once, because it's necessary. When I get a vision, I don't get a choice about whether or not I see it; it's always there.

Carlisle decides to come downstairs and announces he's going to build a fire. Rosalie decides to thumb through the automotive catalog. That makes Esme think of something she wanted from Sears. She moves the flowers aside on the kitchen table to make room for the catalog.

I see all of it, like a ticker tape machine, and I sit there, waiting for my stock to turn up. Waiting for the part that involves me, or the part that I need to change.

Esme closes the catalog.

"It's quiet in here," she says, and she looks pointedly at Edward.

And Edward takes the hint, and stands up, and wanders toward the piano.

He starts to play Chopin.
In my mind, I quietly cheered.
Across the room, Edward looked up.
And then Carlisle came down the stairs.
“I think I'm going to build a fire,” he said.

Calgary, Alberta

When I first saw Jasper, I saw him with the pale gold eyes of one of our kind. He was running through the woods, as lithe as he always has been, barefoot, and with only a pair of pants rolled up to the knee.

He sprang at a moose, and as his teeth made contact, he snapped the animal's neck.

In the vision, I cheered.

Jasper has the power to keep from attacking humans; he always has had it. I thought it was a matter of making a choice.

But that night in Calgary, it was a matter of too great a temptation.

Lewistown, Montana

I listened to Edward play nocturnes for the better part of ten years.

Sometimes, I would just listen, thinking about us, or him, or our new family. Sometimes I would think about Jasper.

Sometimes I would imagine his mother sitting next to him while she played, with him leaning into her side, with her ruffling his hair.

Those times, he'd get up and walk away.

Forks, Washington

Edward returned to Forks after only two days. He ignored Isabella for a month.

Then he stopped a speeding car in the high school parking lot. He said it was because if her blood spilled, we'd all be in trouble.

I knew better.

Rosalie drove us to the hospital, which looks less like a hospital and more like a long shed. Inside it still smelled the same though—iodine and antiseptic, and if you focus on those smells, you can get through the blood part.

Edward was just coming out of Carlisle's office when we got there.

“I don't want to hear about it, Freak,” was all he said.

Jasper voted to kill her to keep our secret. When I explained who Bella was to Edward, he recanted, but it didn't make me less upset.

Carlisle voted that she'd stay alive. So she did.

None of us understood the mess we'd gotten ourselves into. Edward, least of all.

Lewistown, Montana

Snow doesn't bother vampires. That's why Jasper and I were all buried in it, in the Montana mountains. Sometimes, he and I take off for a few days. It's good for him. Recharges him. Jasper is an introvert; he gets his energy from being apart from people. I'm the other way entirely—I get mine from being in the thick of things.

But Jasper is mine, and he needs to go away sometimes to recharge, and that's okay with me. It gives us reason to go together. Which was how we ended up in the mountains, lying in a snowdrift.

I leaned my head against Jasper's chest and tried to imagine what it had sounded like, when he'd once had a heartbeat. What his body would sound like if it were full of whooshing blood instead of venom.

“What are you thinking?” he asked after a while.

“Nothing,” I muttered.

He laughed. “I'll buy that one when you don't come back with some important thing that's on your mind.” He smiled at me and tucked my hair behind my ear, stroking down my neck as he did so. It made me shiver a little.

I leaned into him a little more, and thought about our family. This group I brought us to, because I saw us all one day, standing together and laughing.

I told Jasper that, back in Philadelphia, when we first met. He was important; he was a crucial piece. He was my piece. Without him, there was no laughing family. There was no future for me.

For him, there was a future, too. One of running after Emmett, taking out grizzly bears, playing guitar next to the

fireplace while I leaned against his legs.

There was laughter in his future, too.

So once we had our pieces, we had to find this other piece, this bigger piece—the doctor and his wife, and the two sons and the beautiful daughter.

But we hadn't lived my vision. Not yet.

Jasper let out a little sigh, which I know is his way of telling me he knows I'm feeling something I'm not letting on.

“You're thinking about something,” he said.

“I'm a vampire. I'm always thinking about something.” I leaned up to him and kissed him on the nose. Then I scooped up snow and smashed it into his face, and took off running down the mountain with my husband on my heels.

Lewistown, Montana

“It's nice of you to sit and listen when Edward plays.”

In Montana, spring is late, and so it wasn't until June that Esme was outside weeding. She has this weird thing that she does, where she weeds the garden at human speed. She could, if she wanted to, have the entire plot done in under sixty seconds, but she doesn't do it that way. She puts on knee pads, and kneels in the dirt, and spends the better part of an afternoon tugging on little plants and patting the dirt back down gently, like the earth will break. She always asks if any of us are interested in helping.

The answer is usually no.

But Jasper likes to read, and that day, he was involved in some giant book that Carlisle gave him, and so I told Esme I'd help her. And then I realized why she liked to weed: because Esme likes to talk.

She ripped a plant out of the ground, letting it snap between her fingers. I reached for one, and she made an odd sound in her throat, like a buzzer.

“That's a carrot,” she said. “See how this part is curly? Different than this. It's straight.” She yanked another one of the plants—which to me, looked pretty curly—and tossed it onto her pile.

“What is this plant called, again?”

“Onion grass.” She rubbed her hands together. “That's why it stinks.”

“Carrots and onions. Aren't those supposed to go together?”

She laughed. “Onions, yes. And there are some of those growing over there.” She pointed to an odd plant, with shoots that looked like thin green twigs shooting out of the ground. “But this is onion grass—a whole different matter. It takes over

the yard.”

I tried, for a minute, just to pull up onion grass, but it was maddening. Inside the house, Emmett was playing Rosalie at chess, which seemed like more fun.

“You know, I'm happy to do this by myself,” Esme said gently.

“I thought Edward was the telepath?”

She laughed.

“Sometimes, it's just written all over your face.” She tossed a fistful of onion grass onto her pile, and then leaned back on her feet.

“I like that Edward is letting you listen to him play,” she said quietly. “It's good for him. He can't limit himself only to Carlisle and me. I don't know what it is that you do when you sit with him, but for some reason it works.”

I shrugged. “When I see he's going to pitch a fit, just I don't sit down.”

She burst out laughing. “I guess that does it” Gathering up her pile of weeds, she carried them to the edge of the garden, where she dumped them onto a heap of other weeds and pulled-up plants and grass clippings. The onion grass was already beginning to wilt, even in the scant few minutes since we'd ripped them from the earth, and it scattered on what little bit of wind bothered to blow in Montana in the middle of July.

“Why do you plant food?” I asked, as we walked back across the garden. She stopped.

“Why do I plant food?”

Esme's arms crossed over her chest, and her feet stepped to shoulder width. She stared out over the garden like a land surveyor. Little green shoots in neat furrows, freshly upturned earth from where we'd just yanked out weeds.

She didn't answer me for a long time.

“I guess I plant food because it's a nice reminder,” she said.

“I like that it's something that humans do. Reminds me that once, I was one of them, even if it was a long time ago now.” She smiled, and rested her hands on top of her abdomen, which she does sometimes when she's remembering her human life.

I can't see the past, so it was a whole year after Jasper and I arrived that I heard the story of Esme's baby. I try to imagine her like that, sometimes—holding a little baby, nursing him, rocking him to sleep. Carlisle said she had only four days with him, and that he died of something no one could do anything about.

When he says that, I think he's assuring himself more than her.

“It would be nice,” I muttered, before I'd even realized I'd had the thought.

“What would be nice?”

“It would be nice to remember what human life was like. Eating food, working in a garden...” I shrugged.

Esme put her arm around me.

“That's the thing about this,” she said. “You get to make new memories. It doesn't make up for losing the old—and you lost more than everybody else—but it does make it a little more bearable, I think.” She gestured back toward the house. “Shall we? Unless you see some reason we shouldn't.”

I shrugged and shook my head, and a moment later, we were back inside.

Lewistown, Montana

Edward is the most dangerous of all of us. Because he's young, Carlisle told me once. When he thinks something, he just acts on it. The way the brain works when you're a seventeen-year-old boy means that certain things just happen.

He chuckled and added, "I'd like to figure out what the vampire equivalent of adrenaline is."

Adrenaline or whatever you'd like to call it, it's what happens to Edward. Why one second I was sitting next to him at the piano, and the next, my bottom was on the floor, with the bench exploding into pieces as it slammed into the wall.

Usually, Edward's M.O. was just to get up, close the piano, and leave. He liked me listening to him, I thought, at least until I thought the wrong thing; until I started imagining him with his mother as a boy. But this time, he lost it.

The next sweep of his arm took with it all the music—it hadn't been nocturnes today, it was some concerto that he was trying to teach himself and so for the first time in a long time, he'd been using music. Calm, serene, playing something new.

At least, calm and serene until I sat down next to him and started imagining his mother again.

Edward threw me with enough force that it hurt, and I sat there, stunned, staring at him as he panted.

Esme started crying.

Jasper punched Edward so hard that his face literally began to shatter. Which of course got Carlisle upset, and then he was in the middle of it, too, pushing on Jasper's chest and Edward's so that they separated, snarling.

I sat on the floor, wondering what I'd done.

"Don't think about that!" Edward answered, and he spat.

“Just stop, Freak.”

“Stop what?” I asked.

“Just...stop!” Then he stalked off to his room again.

The door didn't slam.

Jasper knelt down and pulled me into his arms, running his hands through my hair, such as it is. “He didn't hurt you, did he?” When I shook my head, he turned to Carlisle. “You need to learn to control him.”

Carlisle took a deep breath and exhaled, like humans do. He has habits like that.

“It isn't my intention to control him, Jasper,” he said.

Jasper frowned, but Carlisle simply crossed the distance between us and patted me on the shoulder.

“You're all right?” he asked.

I nodded.

He turned toward the stairs, sighing. “I should go figure out what happened.”

“Leave me alone,” Edward called, and Carlisle looked despondent, but turned away.

I never did figure out what it was exactly that set Edward off so badly in my vision.

But when I saw him get out the sheet music that day, I did decide not to bother sitting down.

Calgary, Alberta

Maria showed up innocently enough, on a Saturday afternoon when the wind was blowing through town. Emmett said that means there will be a change in the weather. As a human, he was the son of a tobacco farmer. He knows those sorts of things.

When Jasper told me about Maria, I had pictured a statuesque woman, with long, dark hair. Maybe as tall as Jasper, and certainly every bit as strong.

Instead, she was a woman of my height, and almost my build; slight, wiry. Bossy.

It made me self-conscious at once.

Jasper said he was surprised to see her so far north.

Carlisle welcomed her in, but then left for work. He looked a little concerned, but when Esme whispered to him asking if it was a good idea that she visit, he reminded her that his friend Garrett, who doesn't share our ways, visits all the time. And why shouldn't Jasper have friends?

“It might do him good,” he said.

Carlisle is so rarely wrong about people; it caught all of us by surprise.

Lewistown, Montana

It was about two weeks after I saw the vision of him throwing the piano bench that I knocked on Edward's door. Motown, today. Carlisle and he had gone to some sort of concert in Detroit some time earlier.

Jasper thought it was kind of odd. He's a southerner; integration confused him. But there was no denying that Edward was happier listening to the records he brought back.

Edward's room was at the top of the stairs, and when he played a record, the sound drifted down through the whole house. Sometimes the floors would pulsate. Esme pretended to be annoyed, but really, I think she liked knowing he was up there, listening to music.

We could pretend he was being happy.

I listened to the Temptations crooning through Edward's door, and was steeling myself to knock when the door swung open and I almost fell into the room.

Edward looked slightly amused.

"Hi," I said.

"Can I help you?"

"I was just figuring that out," I told him, and he actually laughed.

"I know." He tapped the side of his head. "You think loud."

I walked into his room and sat down. Edward doesn't pretend he has any need for a bed; never has. He's big on nice couches, though, and this one was the best I'd seen so far. I plunked down on it, letting myself fall back into the cushions. The Temptations blasted so loudly I could feel my eardrums vibrating.

Edward crossed the room and turned them down.

“Thanks.”

He shrugged, and sat on a stool, with his legs splayed wide to either side.

Neither of us said anything for a long time. In my mind, I was busy replaying the vision. The bench shattering against the wall; the look on his face as Jasper shattered his cheekbone. Esme crying. Carlisle holding Edward and Jasper apart.

Edward blinked.

“What was that in answer to?”

“I don't know. That's what I was coming to ask.”

He put his hands between his legs, pressing down on the stool with the heels of his palms and pushing himself forward so that the whole stool rocked back and forth. It creaked a little, and made little thinking noises as first the front legs, then the back came free of the floor and then plopped back down.

I thought it would be nice to be able to read Edward's mind. This got a titter of laughter from him. But then he went all solemn again and kept thinking.

Finally, he shook his head.

“I don't know what it would have been,” he said. “I'm glad you stopped it, whatever it was.”

He blanched.

“Are you enjoying the Temptations?” I asked, and he smiled. Edward has this shy way of smiling, when he's smiling for real. Where he looks up from under his eyelashes, and you know that he's actually being genuine.

“We're going to make small talk, now?”

I shrugged. “We don't have to.”

He stood up. The stool made one last thunk onto the floor and sat silent.

“Great,” he said. “I'll talk to you later, Fr—Alice.”

I got up.

He plugged a set of headphones into the LP player, clamping

them over his ears. The big silver discs dwarfed his head, making him look disproportionate to his body. Then he flopped down on the couch and closed his eyes. His foot moved in time with the music.

Alice.

It was an improvement.

Sky Harbor Airport, Phoenix, Arizona

I always thought it was unbelievable, the way characters on TV behave when they find out someone has died. That they scream and howl and start running, and you have to fight to hold them still. Exaggerated for effect.

But when Edward stepped into the baggage claim at the Phoenix airport, he screamed. When he saw that we'd lost her. When he understood at once where she'd gone.

Right there, with all the passengers darting back and forth, and the loud speaker crackling on and off, and the baggage claims beeping and chugging, Edward came to stop, and then tipped sideways, and then fell to his knees so hard he rocked a little bit. Carlisle threw his arms around him, pulling him into an embrace, and Edward's hands made a hollow thumping noise as he pounded against Carlisle's chest.

“Let me go!” he screamed. “I have to save her! Carlisle, let me go!”

And he did save her.

I don't know why I was surprised.

Calgary, Alberta

The Trans-Canada highway runs through Calgary. The speed limit is a hundred kilometers per hour. That's a completely fine speed limit on a dry, sunny day.

It's a terrible speed limit on ice.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

From Montana, we moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire which is very cold in the winter. The house was tiny, and all seven of us lived there in four cramped bedrooms with hardly enough room to get around.

Carlisle suggested that maybe we get an upright instead of a baby grand this time.

Edward looked stricken.

Cramming a giant piano into the middle of a tiny living room is a lot easier than making Edward upset.

Calgary, Alberta

For the first day Maria was at the house, things actually went okay. I almost liked her; the way she talked in this odd mix of English and rapid-fire Spanish that kept me on my toes. I liked that she teased Jasper almost as much as I do. He took it like a gentleman.

The first day Maria was at the house, we actually relaxed.

Which was probably where we misstepped.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

It rains a great deal in New Hampshire. It was pouring down evening when Carlisle was at work. Esme and Rosalie were working on some sewing project I wasn't interested in, and Jasper and Emmett were battling it out at some new Parker Brothers game.

Muffled music from the second floor told me Edward was in his room.

As soon as I decided I should go find him, a framed photo went flying at my head and the glass shattered.

“Get out!” he screamed.

And then the world swung. Edward ran after me, laughing. He was in a field somewhere, with the mist of what might have been a pretty girl. We were sitting so close our knees touched.

He whispered.

I whispered back.

We both laughed.

So, I got up from my chair, and I went to find him.

He was sitting in the middle of his bedroom, reading from a little black book. I didn't know what it was.

“What are you reading?” I asked.

He leapt to his feet—had I surprised him somehow?—slammed the little book closed, and wrapped his hand around the nearest item he could find, which happened to be a framed photograph of a couple and their baby. I wanted to catch it, but I couldn't—it had to smash.

The smashing led to the whispering. And the laughing.

“Get out!” he screamed.

I nodded. I picked up the photo and handed it back to him.

The woman in the photo had Edward's eyes.

Forks, Washington

Edward's summer was blissful. Jasper could hardly leave him alone.

I probably should've guessed that it couldn't last.

That Bella Swan could get attacked by someone in our family was a possible outcome every time she came to our door. Even Carlisle showed up in one vision, although that was only once, and it disappeared pretty quick.

You learn to expect it not to happen, even though you're expecting it to happen, if that makes any sense.

Anyway, that's why I didn't have time to warn Edward before my husband lunged.

Emmett is strong, Edward is fast, and Carlisle is superhuman, and that's the only explanation I have for how that birthday party turned out okay.

But Edward is a runner.

So the next day we all ran.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

“Do you remember your family?” I asked Jasper.

He nuzzled himself into my shoulder, before he sighed.

“Alice...these conversations end badly.”

I shrugged. “I want to know.”

“You don't remember yours.”

“I know I don't. That's not the point.”

He rolled over in bed, flinging one arm over his head and staring up at the ceiling. I took advantage of the hole and snuggled up to him, resting my head against his chest under his arm.

It took him a long time to answer.

“I had two brothers,” he said quietly. “I don't really remember their names. Tad, maybe. I think that's what we called one of them.”

“Older?”

“Younger.” He closed his eyes. “I went off to war because I had to protect them.”

“And your parents?”

“Mama was a washerwoman. Daddy ranched, until the Indians came.” He grimaced. “The government wants to make a treaty with the Indians, according to the newspaper.”

My husband snorted.

“Don't you think that's fair?”

Jasper rolled over, propping his head up on one hand.

We see well in the dark, much better than humans—or so I'm told. So I could see every bit of Jasper's body as he lay on top of the covers, the way his eyebrow wrinkled a little bit as he frowned at me.

“Life isn't fair, Alice,” he said.

He got up and walked to the window without taking a blanket. The moonlight bounced off his naked skin, making him look an odd shade of blue.

“Nothing about any of this is fair to a one of us.”

Calgary, Alberta

Even though it would be one of the biggest accidents ever on the Trans-Canada highway, the Calgary accident started with one car. One car that hit one patch of ice at the wrong angle, or going a tiny bit too fast. It spun, and hit a car going in the other direction, which made that car spin, and that car wound up under a semi, which buckled in the middle, which slammed into another car.

It's always a possible outcome, any time anyone gets in any car. There's always one outcome of deciding to get behind the wheel that is a terrible crash. I've learned not to even worry about it.

That's the thing about seeing the future. When you do, you know that every single day ends in death. And every single day ends in happiness. It's just a matter of which choices get made by whom along the way that decide which outcome you get today.

That day, the driver of that one car got the death outcome. So did a lot of other people.

And that last part? That was my fault.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

I found myself alone in the Portsmouth house, which was rare. Rosalie and Emmett were off in Newfoundland, and Jasper was off hunting with Carlisle. Esme was drawing plans for a new house on the back porch.

Edward came home from the library early, sat down. Opened the piano and started to play.

Chopin Nocturnes.

I hadn't heard them in months.

Taking the invitation, I tiptoed across the living room. Sat down on the bench.

He didn't get up.

I listened to him play for the better part of two hours. Edward gets lost in his music. He closes his eyes, and he rocks back and forth as he plays, like his whole body is involved in the playing. Like pushing the pedal requires every muscle, and not just his right ankle.

As I listened, I found myself thinking of the photo that got thrown at me. The way the glass shattered and fell out of the frame. The way the woman looked—with her light eyes the same shape as Edward's. The man, with his strong build and his wild hair.

Their little baby.

The music stopped. Edward pushed himself back on the bench and reached for the keyboard cover.

“Don't,” I whispered. “It's good that you remember them.”

The keyboard cover closed with a soft thud and Edward disappeared.

Calgary, Alberta

“I promise, we'll be gone only a little while.” Jasper pressed his forehead to mine so that his hair fell forward and tickled my cheek. “A few hours. I just need to say some things to her, get her to see that I'm never coming back. Shake her off Peter and Charlotte's trail.”

It made sense. But my stomach was all knotted anyway.

At the time, I thought the stomach knot was about Maria.

Jasper pressed his lips to mine. Briefly, his mouth opened and he sucked my tongue inside it. Our tongues wrestled against each other, and he exhaled softly onto my cheek.

“I love you,” he said. “Only you.” He reached his hand to my face, stroking my cheek with his thumb. “She'll be gone soon.”

And then the door opened and closed and he was gone.

~End of Part II~

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

“Edward misses his parents.”

Carlisle looked up from the book he was reading, some unbelievably thick tome that must have been about brains or muscles or something—it had color pictures of things that resembled parts of the body but looked grotesque. Red and blue and yellow where there should have been just smooth skin and figure.

He placed a bookmark and snapped the book closed. Carlisle is the best at that; teaching himself to do things that humans do, like putting a bookmark in a big book so that he won't lose his place.

As though he's going to forget which was the last page he read.

He looked up at me very calmly.

“Of course he misses his parents,” he answered evenly. “I can't do much about that, Alice.”

I caught the look of pain that slid across his face then. He blames himself for what happened to Edward, even if Edward doesn't blame him. “Played God,” is how Carlisle puts it. And when Edward is being a real shit, he throws that back.

“No, I mean—” I stopped. “There's something about Jasper and me. Having us here makes it worse. It was okay when it was just the five of you, but with the two of us, too...”

This time Carlisle leaned back in his chair, propping his chin between his thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He's a very calm person, Carlisle, but do anything that even remotely resembles suggesting that Edward might leave again, and you throw him into this odd state. For the longest time, I didn't know what it was, and then I asked Esme about it, and she

explained about The Time. Which is how they all three talk about it, just The Time, and you can hear the capital letters in their voice. When I think about it, I remember seeing them during The Time, just the doctor and his wife, standing together by the window, lying by the fire.

Edward calls it his “rebellious period.”

Rebelling against Carlisle. Rebelling against everything his new family stood for.

But he came home from that. That, as far as I'm concerned, is the important part.

“He didn't stay gone,” I said quietly.

Carlisle blinked. Then he stood up, put the giant book back on the shelf, and swung his long pea coat over his shoulders. But before he reached the door, he turned.

“I can't *do* anything about Edward missing his family, Alice,” he said.

Then he closed the door behind him.

I haven't heard more pain in his voice before or since.

Forks, Washington

I have never in my life sworn at Esme more about her choice of locale than the twelve minutes it took me to drive in Carlisle's car from our house to Charlie Swan's. I went seventy miles an hour, cursing and praying that at least, since I couldn't save Bella, I could at least help Charlie.

There was only a little Volkswagon in the driveway when I pulled up.

Now, people don't normally surprise me, but Bella did that day, when she barreled into me full-force.

"I saw you jump," was all I could manage.

I was already attuned to her, I told her. I couldn't help but see.

Except when I couldn't.

Because the other boy, Jacob, had been with her.

It was lucky for all of us that Edward didn't take a werewolf with him to Italy

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Rosalie laughed when I told her I was concerned about Edward.

“He's just going to go on being a mope,” she said. “Everything he does; he just trudges from one day to the next.” She shook her head and rolled her eyes. “How Carlisle could think I could ever put up with someone like that...” she trailed off, and then gave me a wan smile.

“Well, he loves Esme. He just...had high hopes.”

She snorted. “Carlisle's a tyrant. Just a really, really polite one.” She slid back under the frame of Emmett's car. She had a little light in a cage that was on a giant cord that stretched all the way into the kitchen. The light hung underneath the engine and made it glow from where I could see through the open hood.

“Would you hold this up for me? I need about two more inches above the jack.”

I looked at my hands, which Rosalie didn't miss.

“You won't get that much grease on them,” she said, and I could tell she was rolling her eyes somewhere beneath all the engine parts and belts.

I slid a hand under the car and lifted it up a few more inches.

“Thanks,” she said.

“So, about Edward.”

The only sound from under the car was the ticking of the instrument Rose was using to adjust whatever it was. It zipped and unzipped, like the sound our grandfather clock made when you wind it.

Slowly, the zipping stopped.

Rosalie pushed herself out from under the car. There was a little streak of oil or grease or something of that nature across

the bridge of her nose and down the side of her cheek. Somehow, on Rose, that sort of thing just makes her look even more gorgeous.

“Honestly?” She wiped her face with the back of her hand. “I would stop worrying, Alice. All the rest of us have.”

We stared at each other a moment.

Then she shrugged, and slid herself back under the car.

Calgary, Alberta

Because Carlisle was an emergency surgeon, we had our own telephone line. And that meant that any time our phone rang, you *knew*.

By the time Carlisle hung up, I had seen the whole thing. The accident, which would go on for a half hour because of the fog. The highway, slick with blood and gasoline and oil, and littered with car parts. Carlisle, running between cars, grabbing bodies and carrying them to safety. In surgery all night, returning to us in the morning looking almost as tired as he might have if he were a human.

And, because they were running in the woods too near the crash, Maria...and Jasper.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Getting Edward's photo re-framed cost five dollars.

I hung it up in his room with a note that simply said, “More Chopin.”

That night, he played for three and a half hours without stopping.

Calgary, Alberta

Edward saw my vision at the same time I did. He was just moving to sit down at the piano, but instead of the peace-filled expression I usually saw when he was ready to sit down to play, I saw his face twist in horror.

“Can we stop them?” he asked.

I shook my head.

But Edward is the fastest of all of us, and he's also the most stubborn.

We left the front door open.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Edward didn't ask me about the photo, nor did he thank me for it. But he played almost every night, and most nights, I sat with him, listening, watching. Trying not to think of his mother and how it must have been, her sitting there with Edward leaning into her side.

Sometimes, my mind would drift though, and then I would hear his fingers falter as my imagining of his mother appeared in my mind.

Listening to him trip over the notes, I squeezed his arm.

"I'm here," I whispered.

He kept playing.

Forks, Washington

Charlie forbade Edward from visiting more than two hours at a time after I brought him and Bella back from Italy. So he was forced to spend more time at home.

One afternoon, I found him sitting in the backyard breaking twigs. They started out feet long, and then snapped in half, and in half, and in half, and in half. Methodically, rhythmically, like another piano concerto, just one played on wood.

When he finally got them small enough, he crushed them between his forefinger and thumb.

I sat down beside him in the grass. He didn't say anything, just kept breaking the twigs. When he ran out of them, he disappeared into the woods, came back with more, and kept going.

Two hours later, he finished pulverizing one and murmured, "It's different now."

"Because of Jacob?" I asked.

He shrugged and snapped a few more.

"What would have happened, Alice?" he whispered at last. "If we'd stayed?"

I shook my head.

"I know you saw it. When I was deciding what to do."

And he was right, because of course I was watching over him that night. The way he raced to the top of Mt. Olympus, and screamed against the howling wind. The pain that was coming if we left. The joy that would come if we stayed.

But there was joy now, too. There was joy coming. It was just going to be much harder won.

I put my arm over his shoulder.

"Now is what matters, Edward."

His shoulders trembled a little, but then he coughed and sat up straighter.

“Now isn't certain.”

I squeezed him, and for once, he didn't run.

“Now is never certain,” was all I said.

Calgary, Alberta

Vampires are fast in the snow. Even in feet of snow, like there was that night. We can race so quickly that we almost skim on top of it, our feet leaving little shimmering drags of tracks rather than giant footprints.

We were almost a mile away when we both caught the scent and stopped so abruptly that snow went spraying everywhere.

Blood.

A lot of it.

Edward gave me a pointed look.

I wondered if he could handle it.

He nodded quickly. "Can you?"

"We can hold our breath."

And instinctively, I reached for his hand. He took mine, squeezed it, and together, we ran.

The accident scene was an eerie nightmare. Blood spattered across the road. The odd yellow lights of the tow trucks; the snow pulsing odd shades of blue and red from the police cruisers. People screamed.

Near the edge of the scene, a woman stood, sobbing.

"He was right here," she screamed. "He was right here!"

Edward and I exchanged glances.

Vampires move too quickly for anyone except other vampires to see. But the scent near the woman was undeniable.

It was the scent I loved to bathe in at night.

"Oh, Jas," I heard myself say and found my hand was squeezed tightly.

Edward still hadn't let go of it.

"We can still find him," he said.

We had to run at human speed through the wreckage, jogging at a pace that felt glacial. As we did, we ran into Carlisle

coming the other way. I'd never seen him looking so disheveled—his shirt and pants were covered in blood, one of his sleeves was torn halfway off, his hair was drenched with snow and matted with some other substance. His skin pulsed an odd shade of purple in the glow from the emergency vehicles.

For someone with perpetually maintained energy, he looked exhausted.

“What—” he started to ask.

“Jasper,” Edward answered at once. “And Maria. They were out having a conversation. They weren't far from here.”

Carlisle closed his eyes, tilted his head upward, and muttered a word I'd never heard him say before.

When he opened them again, he laid a hand on Edward's shoulder. “Can you find them, son?”

Edward nodded.

“Then do. Please. Make that your priority. I'll handle whatever needs to be handled here. Just—keep them contained.”

Then he turned to me. “Alice, do you see anything?”

I shook my head. “I saw the accident. And Jasper. But I think there's nothing new coming.”

“Good. That's...that's good.” He squeezed Edward's shoulder. “Go, son. You and Alice need to find them. And fast.”

Edward nodded and sprinted off in the direction of Jasper's scent.

I was still holding his hand.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

A hospital in Calgary lost its ER surgeon, and Carlisle applied for the job.

The night before we were to move, Edward played Chopin for four hours, and I sat there the whole time. Vampires don't get tired, and we don't need to change positions. So I could just sit, and listen.

I tried not to think about Edward's mother, or the photo, or any of the things that the nocturnes usually made me think of.

At the end of one piece, Edward leaned back on the piano bench and pressed his hands backward against the wood so that it made his body rock back and forth a little.

I wondered what he was thinking.

He didn't answer right away.

After a few minutes, I thought maybe what he wanted was privacy, maybe some space to play some more. I swung my legs around to the other side of the piano bench and was halfway to standing when Edward whispered, "I was supposed to have a sister."

I stopped.

"I'm sorry?"

He shook his head, but in the "clearing out cobwebs" kind of way, not in the "don't talk to me" kind of way. Then he went on speaking.

"I think," he added. "I feel as though I remember my mother telling me that. But I don't remember much..." His head tilted to one side and he thought for a moment.

"Her name was...Margaret? I think," he said at last. "My mother was pregnant with her when I was very small."

This was fascinating. Both what he remembered, and that he

remembered it at all.

“What happened to her?”

He went silent again. His jaw locked, and his face went blank, and he stared at the keys, like black and white were going to swirl into some new medium and give him some information that he didn't already have. He didn't look up at me.

“She died,” he said at last.

Calgary, Alberta

In my vision, I could see exactly where Jasper was, except that I couldn't see exactly where he was. I saw landmarks: a fir tree with an odd shape in the trunk, a little stand of trees where the branches were so thick that the snow cover was little more than a dusting and you could see the pine needles littering the forest floor.

“All you've got are pine trees?”

But just as he said it, the scent of human blood hit us like a wall, fragrant, and lovely and almost irresistible...except we would resist.

“I guess we don't need the pine trees,” I muttered.

“Shut up,” Edward said. Then, as though realizing he'd been abrupt, he added, “You should hold your breath.”

I nodded, and we rushed toward the scent.

The scene was a lot worse than I'd imagined. At least ten corpses lay scattered in the clearing, some of them with grotesque injuries—bones sticking out of skin, severed limbs. I had already started to weep for the savagery my husband had committed when Edward muttered, “Those are accident injuries. All that blood from the wound was what drew them in the first place.”

We picked our way through the bodies, trying to hold our breath enough to tamp the desire to run back to the accident site ourselves. But we both needed to breathe just enough to keep Maria and Jasper in our sights.

Feeding causes a frenzy in our kind; it's one of the few ways we aren't like humans. We don't get lethargic after we eat. Exactly the opposite, in fact. I've seen it with all of them, the way

Rosalie and Emmett come back from a hunting trip together and even though Emmett is bragging about the bear and has blood running down his shirt, Rosalie is giggling and leaning into him. Carlisle and Esme disappear for a few hours and come back just serenely holding hands, but when you look more closely, you see that Esme has a stray leaf stuck somewhere in her hair and Carlisle has missed a belt loop or two.

It happens to me and Jasper, too.

Which was why I wasn't that surprised when we found the two of them, even though pain sliced through me with such force I fell to my knees and couldn't move. It had always been there, one of the possible outcomes of Maria's arrival. But you aren't tied to your destiny. The future doesn't work like that.

My husband had the ability to make choices.

Now, Emmett always says Edward hits like a girl; that he never learned properly as a human and that he couldn't hurt someone if his life depended on it. He always nudges Jasper to back him up, to tease Edward about how weak he is, and Jasper never does.

Because there, in the snow, with his pants unfastened and Maria with her head someplace it really should not have been, Jasper wound up on the service end of Edward's fist.

As it turns out, Edward hits like a vampire.

Jasper tried to stand up, but he stumbled; tripping over his own pants and falling, face first, into the thin cover of snow. Pine needles stuck in his hair, poking out this way and that and making him look ridiculous.

I wanted to move toward him, but I found I couldn't.

Edward socked him again.

Jasper is taller than Edward, but only by an inch; and an inch doesn't matter when the shorter person is pissed off. Edward grabbed Jasper by the collar and slammed him against a tree with such force the top of the tree broke off with a sickening crack

and fell to the ground, spraying all of us with freshly-fallen snow.

Maria started screaming.

“Go,” Jasper yelled. “Go, Maria, and don't come back.”

She took two steps and paused.

“And don't run toward the accident, either.”

A pained look crossed her face. “*Querido*,” she said softly, which is the Spanish word for lover. It's one of the better words in any language for describing that—it literally translates as “my wanted one.”

Jasper spat in her direction, a slick, pinkish concoction of blood and venom.

“Get out of here,” he snarled. It was slightly choked off, because Edward's hand was still around Jasper's throat, pinning him to the tree. Edward turned to Maria, too.

“Don't you dare come back,” he said. “Ever. Don't you ever find my family again. Don't you *ever* humiliate my sister like this again.”

Even with the wind howling, and the sirens wailing in the distance, I heard Maria gulp.

Then she nodded, and disappeared.

Calgary, Alberta

The night before the accident, I was sitting next to Edward when he suddenly stopped playing. He closed the piano, and put his hands to either side of him, pushing himself up off the bench about an inch and hanging there, like some sort of musical yogi.

“Edward?” I asked, when he was suspended there for over two minutes.

“Do you think I'm going to stay alone forever?” he mumbled.

I squeezed his arm and shook my head.

He didn't answer for a long time.

“But you don't see anyone.”

I shook my head again.

“I will,” I answered in a whisper. “I will see someone, Edward. Someday. I'm certain of it.”

He lowered himself back onto the bench, opened the piano, and started the slow, mournful strains of “Für Elise.”

Calgary, Alberta

There were thirteen bodies in all. Jasper offered to help us drag them back, but Edward literally barked at him, and so he stayed in the grove of trees, sitting with his back against a trunk and his knees huddled up to his chest.

He looked stunned. And scared.

“Button your fucking pants,” Edward snarled as we left.

The accident was such a mess, it was easy to hide the bodies and put them back in positions that made it look like they'd been thrown from the cars. Make people think that the bodies were mangled because they'd gotten caught between metal and concrete and not because they'd been carried off by two thirsty vampires.

Carlisle was still there, doing triage. When he saw us working, he just nodded solemnly, and turned back to his own patients.

When we were done, we returned to Jasper. He was fully clothed this time, but lying on his side in the snow, staring blankly. A pool of sticky red lay near him.

I looked at Edward, who stared down at Jasper.

“He couldn't keep it all down,” he said, after peering into Jasper's mind. Grabbing Jasper's arm, he yanked my husband to his feet.

“You *should* feel that ashamed,” he said. “I'm glad you felt so awful that you hurled.”

Jasper just closed his eyes and clutched his stomach.

The three of us walked back to the house at human speed. It took two hours.

Edward walked between us, one hand on Jasper's shoulder, like a warden, and one hand holding mine, like a friend.

Calgary, Alberta

Carlisle came home at four o'clock in the morning. It was already six on the east coast. He started calling real estate brokers at once. New York, Delaware, Rhode Island, New Hampshire...

At one point, he stopped talking. Several minutes passed before the sound of these odd, choking gasps floated down the stairs. At first, I was confused.

I'd never heard Carlisle sob before.

Forks, Washington

“I can't stand it,” Edward whined. “I don't know! I don't know what she's thinking.” He pummeled the lintel of the door so hard that it cracked.

“Careful. Esme put a lot of work into this house.”

His jaw flexed, but he put his hand back in his pocket. Then he sat down.

I dropped into the same posture and slung an arm over his shoulder. He slumped a little to make it easier. For a long time, he didn't say anything, just sat there and shook.

We'd moved to Ithaca. Then back to Forks, with Edward making what was very nearly his final stop in Italy along the way. And still, he came home to find that the thing he'd always longed for wasn't as simple as he wanted it to be.

He shoved his head into his hands and clawed at his hair, so that little tufts of it appeared between his fingers.

“She kissed him. Does she love him? Is that what that means?”

I shrugged. “Does Jasper love Maria?”

Often, Edward's gift annoys people; they don't like the invasion of privacy. It's uncomfortable to them that he can see everything, even if they don't mean for him to. But I find it useful, because you don't have to explain. Show, don't tell, like our English teachers say year after year, decade after decade, high school after college after high school.

So I showed him.

Me, picking the pine needles out of Jasper's hair that night as he just sat there, shaking.

The three weeks of him not looking at me.

The way he would cover his eyes when he walked too near a

mirror.

And of course, all that sadness and shame he projected onto the rest of us; the way even Carlisle and Esme snapped at each other for weeks. That we all knew it was Jasper, but no one would dare ask him to leave. We just put up with it.

The other four thought it was just because of the accident and the thirteen dead bodies.

We three are the gifted ones, Jasper, Edward, and I. You can't keep a secret from any one of us.

But we can keep one for one another.

Edward pressed himself against the wall. When he spoke, it was the voice of a child, curious about something he doesn't have the capacity yet to understand.

“How did you forgive him?”

I shrugged. “I love him, E. That's how it works, loving someone. There's give and take. And there are things which will break you a lot more than they'll ever break him...or her.”

He grunted. “So you're weak.”

I actually chuckled. It was a very Edward response. My brother sees things in black and white. Weakness and strength. He doesn't see all the possible permutations, the way one thing folds into another, how fragile any one decision is.

“Forgiving Jasper is the hardest thing I hope I'll ever have to do,” I told him. “It took everything I had.”

For a long time, he didn't answer. “So...forgive and forget?” he said at last. “Is that what you're advising me?”

I laughed and ruffled his hair. He yanked himself away as fast as possible. Edward doesn't like having his hair ruffled, and I know it, but I do it anyway sometimes.

A sister has to be annoying at least a little, as far as I'm concerned.

“Vampires don't forget anything,” I said.

Mineral, Virginia

Mineral, Virginia is, like the name sounds, a mining town. It's quaint and small, and they were delighted to have a skilled and handsome young doctor come and open a practice.

It's also very far from Calgary.

We set up in a little house on the outskirts of town, with a picket fence and Carlisle's Cadillac, and it reminded me of Shipshewana.

Jasper's eyes turned golden again after about two weeks.

We made love loudly, even though the house was small.

One brilliant day, when the sun was beating down on the house and the asphalt in the driveway sizzled, Edward and Jasper and I washed the car, barefoot. Jasper dumped water over my head so that my shirt stuck to my breasts. Then he leaned me back over the hood of the car and straddled my body as we kissed.

Edward put his arms out in front of him and feigned disgust as he backed away from the car.

One day, I thought at him. One day, you'll have this, too.

He shook his head and stuck his tongue out at me.

But he was smiling as he walked back into the house.

The thing about fate is that you choose it. It's based on little decisions that happen, bit by bit. And if one decision sets off a cascade, another one can stop it. My visions aren't always right because destiny is something you pick, every day that you live.

I saw Edward when I woke to this new life. And I knew that one day, he would be happy. And that I would be there to help him.

The way this story ends is that my brother became my best friend.

And my best friend married Isabella Swan.

And I, finally, have a whole family.

That's the way this story ends.

But we all choose to begin it again, every single day.

~ | *fin* | ~

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