

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALICE?

I couldn't let it go. It was too disturbing, too dark. And I loved her too much. The whole thing began before Bella and I were married. Believe me, I don't stand around pondering how or when or if the women around me have lost their virginity. It's just...this was a special case.

Before proposing to Bella, I'd had a rather personal conversation with my father concerning the nature of virginity for vampire women. He reassured me with regard to Bella, but I came away with a troubling conclusion about my sister.

I told Bella my concerns about Alice's history and she was, of course, sympathetic, but she didn't understand why I had to pursue it. After all, it didn't trouble Alice—I was pretty sure that she hadn't even thought about it. Rosalie had been assaulted and Bella very nearly had been herself. Why would I get obsessed about Alice's misfortune in particular?

What Bella didn't know was that it wasn't just Alice who concerned me. I had taken it upon myself to track down and punish Bella's tormenters and Esme's abusive former husband. Rosalie had exacted her own revenge on the men who had tortured her almost to death.

It wasn't exactly a desire for vengeance that would not allow me to leave Alice's history alone, but that was part of it. Even if she couldn't remember what had happened to her, shouldn't someone know and remember for her? Should there not be justice?

Bella loves Alice as much as I do, but she is good at forgetting unpleasant things, as she once told me. Perhaps being changed has changed that to a degree. She certainly didn't hold back her fury when Jacob imprinted on our daughter.

Bella agreed to go to Mississippi with me so I could visit the state hospital where Alice had been abandoned as a child. My sister had told me that she found her admission certificate among some ancient archives in the basement. I don't know what else I thought I might find there. It's not as if I

would stumble on a diary or something that pointed the finger at a culprit, if there was one.

Still, I wanted to see for myself. We would take a four-day trip and call it a vacation. Bella was interested in visiting New Orleans, so that would be the main focus of our time in the South. Renesmee was four years old and more mature than a twelve-year-old human child. We asked her if she wanted to come along, but she preferred to stay home with Jacob and Aunt Rose. That was more convenient, since we didn't want to tell her about my obsessive mission. It wasn't like we could keep our plans secret from Alice, but we didn't talk about it and she didn't ask. Perhaps she was making a point of giving Bella and me some privacy and hadn't looked at our future activities.

It wasn't hard to find the old asylum. Alice had told me a little about her trip there after we came back from Italy. I simply retraced her steps, leaving Bella to entertain herself in New Orleans, since she did not want to visit the place where Alice had been incarcerated.



I went at night, of course, to hide from the Mississippi sunshine. I slipped through the employee's entrance behind some workers during the shift change, moving so fast that they did not notice me.

The hospital basement appeared to have been abandoned long ago. It was like a cellar, dark and damp with ceilings only seven feet high, giving the space an oppressive feel. It was a warren of dark corridors and tiny rooms with grimy cinder-block walls and dirt floors.

At the back side of the hospital, a long corridor ran the length of the southern wing. On each side of it were rows of doorways into closet-sized rooms spaced five or six feet apart—obviously cells where inmates had been kept. Being underground with no windows, the cells would have been absolutely black dark when their doors were closed, though the doors had been removed. Some of them—solid oak with ten-inch hooded slits, presumably for passing food—were propped against a wall inside the cells.

I stood there, stunned by the realization that Alice likely had spent years of her life in one of these tiny rooms. I don't know how she survived. Perhaps she could see her future and that helped...knowing her life would be different one day. I stood there for a short while and then said a silent prayer for those who had suffered in that place.

In the northern wing of the basement, the cinder-block rooms were larger and of varying sizes. In one room that still had a door, I found a dozen old filing cabinets lining two of the walls. The farther back I looked, the older and rustier the metal cabinets became. They appeared not to have been touched in decades.

After opening a few drawers in different cabinets, I found one that contained employment records from the period during which Alice would have been there. I quickly scanned the files, recording in my head the names and addresses of employees, particularly patient caretakers and guards, and particularly males.

To my surprise, I was able to narrow down the identity of Alice's vampire friend to three. Only three male employees working the night shift would have had frequent access to female patients during the period of Alice's incarceration. I thought the most likely one of the three was the janitor responsible for cleaning the underground cells where disruptive patients were kept and where we believed Alice had spent much of her time.

I wondered whether the unknown vampire used the patients in the basement as a source of food. Any number of forgotten inmates like

Alice—whose family abandoned her there and reported her dead—could have been killed without repercussions. Perhaps that is why he never freed Alice. He wouldn't have wanted to lose a job like that. Dead patients were one thing, lost or kidnapped patients quite another.

In a different cabinet, I found what appeared to be infirmary records for the 1910s. One file documented electroshock treatments (EST), and specified patient names, dates, and any injuries sustained during the treatment. Reading through these records—which as far as I know, Alice either never found or didn't read—I was taken aback by the number of injuries the treatments inflicted, typically sprained muscles, broken teeth, burns, and bruises, but there were more than a few cases of cut or partially amputated tongues, torn ligaments, and broken bones, mostly limbs, ribs, and vertebrae.

When I located records of Alice's shock treatments, I was stunned at the number of them—eighty-six during one four-month period and there were four years of records. To the best of my knowledge, no more than twelve sessions are ever given to modern-day patients and contemporary electroconvulsive therapy (ECT—new name, same game) operates at much lower voltages than were used in the 1910s. What possibly could have justified such excessive use of shock except as an instrument of torture? I also wondered how many times it might have been used and not recorded. Just considering it was horrifying.

The regular infirmary records were separate from the EST records and the number of files for the ten years between 1908 and 1918 was enormous. I took the time to scan through some of them quickly.

Alice's name appeared now and then, but the entries were not out of the ordinary for inmates of an institution—flu, lice, fevers, as well as occasional injuries from accidents or fights.

The only entries in the infirmary records that begged for an explanation were the cases of venereal disease, especially syphilis,

among the female patients. As far as I know, there is only one way to acquire syphilis and since male and female patients lived in separate wings, it must have been introduced by male staff or visitors. (Or the patient was admitted with the disease, one of whose long-term effects is dementia.)

There were also a surprising number of "D & C" procedures, which—back when I was in medical school—was a discrete term for "abortion." No patient had more than one, though, as sterilization surgery appeared to be the standard follow-up treatment. The pattern of records told me more than I needed to know about what was happening to female patients, but not who was responsible.

It was then that I noticed part of a small wooden door at the back of the room, partially hidden behind a heavy filing cabinet. Moving the cabinet aside, I saw that the door—which had been painted to match the wall, camouflaging it—was three feet high and two feet across. It had no handle, so I poked a finger through the wood to create a pull and eased it open on its rusty hinges.

Crouching down to look inside, I saw a lone filing cabinet standing in the closet-like space. It was there I discovered the true horror that had played out in this godforsaken place.

The old-fashioned filing cabinet had a flat steel rod with two slots that slipped over steel loops at the top and bottom edges of the cabinet. A rusty padlock was run through each loop to hold the steel bar in place, which held the doors closed. So much rust had built up in the padlock keyholes that I guessed the keys to these particular locks had been lost long ago. It was trivial to snap them off and remove the steel bar.

The four metal drawers were rusted shut due to the dampness in the unventilated cavern and so I forced them open one by one, starting at the bottom. The lowest drawer contained a stinking glop of shredded, mildew-covered papers with fur, mouse droppings, feathers, and various other things mixed into it—a long-abandoned mouse nest.

The next drawer up was much the same, while the third drawer was mostly empty except for some old architectural drawings of the building's original design. Areas on the blueprints were faded to gray shadows, but I saw a date along the bottom of the sheet:

E. Mississippi Lunatic Asylum
October 1882
Isaacs & Hodge, Architects

Interesting to an historian, perhaps, but not to me.

The last drawer I opened, the topmost, contained files stacked one on top of another...financial records, inventories, construction documents, and at the very bottom, a black ledger. I opened the cover and saw a name handwritten in an antique French script:

M. de la Rochefoucauld

Inside, I found that each page contained a column of letters and lists of numbers. A random page read thus:

SD	2, 2.25, 2.50, 1.75
DS	1, 1, 1.50, 1, 1, 1.50
JE	2.25, 2, 2.50
MAB	5, 4.50, 4, 4, 3.50
PP	1, 1.15, 1
KEL	2, 1.50
AW	1, 1, 1.25
PW	0

Other pages looked similar and made no sense to me until I found one with a U.S. dollar sign in the second column. So, the numbers represented money. Another page had a date at the bottom: Febr 1916. Five pages later was the date, July 1916. Farther back, I found one with the year 1917 and toward the end of the ledger, 1920.

It would appear that each page represented a month and dollar amounts associated with different letters. Something bothered me about these pages, but I couldn't put my finger on it. The letters changed some from page to page, one set would disappear, another take its place, perhaps an old one would reappear. The ones with zeroes after them disappeared on subsequent pages.

I stared and stared. Were the letters acronyms? Abbreviations? French acronyms? Then it hit me. They were INITIALS!

My heart sank like a stone. **MAB=Mary Alice Brandon.** The book contained lists of inmates and monthly dollar amounts they earned. The amounts were too large for the menial labor that might have been available to them, so these inmates must have been providing extraordinary services. That could mean only one thing—this “M. de la Rochefoucauld,” who was not in the employee lists I saw, was prostituting asylum inmates.

Red-hot rage burned in me. Was that even his real name? Was he the vampire? The name was of French nobility and went back many centuries. Perhaps he was centuries old and used an American pseudonym in the twentieth century. But James had told us that Alice's creator was her friend and that he had saved her from James himself. Could a “friend” have committed such egregious offenses? Against a child?

But the evidence supported it—if not the vampire, then someone else. In the long history of sexual slavery on our planet, “unspoilt” females have always been the most valuable commodity. Customers pay high premiums to be a young girl's first. In 1916, Alice was a teenager, somewhere between 13 and 17—i.e., young—which would explain why MAB's dollar amounts were higher than the others. Her initials didn't appear on every page, but they did reappear periodically until nearly the end of the book, the dollar amounts decreasing only slightly over time. Alice's value would have remained high because she is so small that she could be taken for a girl much younger than she was.

Now that I had found evidence of what I'd halfway suspected, I had no idea what to do about it. I stood paralyzed, my fury collapsing into devastation, then blazing back, then collapsing again until I finally realized that there was little more I could do in that dark, gloomy hellhole. I hurriedly rifled through the remaining contents of the file cabinet, but found nothing else of interest.

As I pushed the drawers shut, the cabinet wobbled and I heard something slip against the wall behind it. I lifted the cabinet away from the wall and the item hit the dirt floor—it was another ledger book. This one had been subjected to the dampness of the concrete wall and on brief inspection, I saw that many pages were stained with mildew. I stacked it against the other, tucked them both under my arm, and left that horrid place, never to return. To this day, I have told no one about what I found, not even my beloved wife.

Edward

