

## TANYA & ME

I would never tell Bella about this, not because it's a secret, particularly, but because it would either drive her crazy or make her angry without cause, since it's all in the past. When Rosalie first told Bella about the Denali clan and "all those women"—implying that they were throwing themselves at me—she was exaggerating, of course. I don't think Irina or Kate showed any particular interest, but Rose also says that I am naïve. Perhaps I am.

Tanya was throwing herself at me, though. I could hardly misconstrue her intentions, even if I hadn't been able to read her mind. I suppose Tanya had had her eye on me from the beginning, but I didn't realize that. To me, she merely seemed welcoming and friendly. And even when Emmett began to tease me about being the only bachelor vampire in the State of Alaska, I didn't think much about it. Tanya considered me attractive, I suppose, but we lived among humans and I was used to hearing such thoughts. It was the norm.

The first time I realized that there was something more to it, Tanya and I were on a hunting excursion. I had missed the women's hunting trip the day before, Carlisle had gone to Fairbanks to check out the regional medical center, and neither Jasper nor Emmett wanted to join me because they were busy creating the vampire version of "dodge ball." (One of them somersaulted down a snowy mountain slope while the other stood on an opposing slope and heaved large boulders at him.)

Tanya volunteered to come along and show me some polar bear hunting grounds. We did hunt after many more hours of travel than I had expected, Alaska being so much larger than the word "State" implies. It is practically its own continent. After we found bears and both of us had drunk our fill of blood, we started running

homeward across the crusty snow. As twilight settled in, Tanya slowed to a jog and then a walk and I followed her lead, curious what she may have seen or heard.

“Let’s sit for a while,” she suggested, indicating a large granite outcropping.

We sat and Tanya spoke to me about this and that...the family’s lifestyle in Denali, other places she had lived, how she and Carlisle had met. Then without warning, she turned and put her hand on my cheek and whispered, “Edward.” I stared, frozen in surprise as she leaned toward me with her lips pursed. At the last moment, I came to my senses, pulled my head away sharply, and stood up.

“I’m sorry...I thought...” she began.

“I’m flattered, but...no...thank you...I’m not...”

“I like you very much, Edward.”

“I like you too Tanya, as I do Irina and Kate.”

She peered upward at me and scrutinized my expression. I did not flinch or blink, not wanting to appear irresolute.

It’s not as if I hadn’t had females show an interest in me before. I had—often—and perhaps that’s why it was so easy to ignore Tanya’s thoughts and miss her signals until that very moment.

My previous admirers had always been human and were easily discouraged with a flash of my teeth or a cold stare. I had a feeling, though, that Tanya would not be so easily deterred. She said nothing more on that occasion, but merely stood and resumed running toward home, her thoughts a jumble of uncertainty and indecision...and frustration. She had been expecting our day and night together to end very differently.

I grew wary of being alone with Tanya after that, but she had a way of approaching me when I was unprepared for it or otherwise engaged. She would sit down on the bench next to me when I played Irina's baby grand piano, for instance, often closer than I would have preferred. The first time, she wrapped her arm around my waist and smiled when I looked at her. I smiled back and then—letting my left hand take over both left- and right-hand parts—I removed her arm, brought the back of her hand to my lips briefly, settled it firmly in her own lap, and then resumed playing with two hands. She looked at me searchingly and I gave her a friendly smile which she returned without enthusiasm.

The next time she joined me on the piano bench, I was ready for her, catching her hand just before she settled it on my right knee. This time when I returned it to her lap, she did not smile, but merely stood up and walked away.

After that, such encounters became like a game to Tanya, a challenge to see what she could get away with before I stopped her. With my ability to hear her thoughts, it was a game she couldn't win, though she did gain skill at hiding her intentions until the last possible second.

I learned, in turn, to read with my back to the wall so she couldn't come up behind me and wrap her arms around my waist if I was standing or lace her fingers through my hair if I was seated. I learned to lock the dressing room door when I changed clothes so that she didn't "accidentally" walk in when I was half naked. I altered my habit of tub bathing every week and merely wiped down my skin with a cloth and brushed the dust out of my hair when necessary.

A persistent woman, Tanya did not give up making advances despite my consistent rebuffs. Clearly, she was unused to rejection and seemed unable to accept it at face value, changing tactics

instead. When we were in the same room together, she began flashing “thought invitations” at me in the form of images of she and I snuggling, kissing, or lying together. I ignored these incursions as best I could and pretended that I saw nothing.

Believing my deception, Tanya began to escalate the mental assaults on the theory that if they were more outrageous or explicit, I would be less likely to “miss” them. She casually faked going about her business while she sent me thoughts and images of her many and varied sexual escapades. I had no way to escape from these assaults. I found them difficult to block, especially in those days, and I had to run a long distance to get beyond them (which I frequently did, thus establishing my long-held habit of running when stressed). The best I could do was leave her presence so she couldn’t observe my discomfort and amuse herself at my expense.

I have wondered whether the prospect of bedding a reluctant man is something of a draw for experienced females. The film, The Graduate, lends credence to the idea with its iconic tale of Mrs. Robinson seducing her daughter’s boyfriend—a youth a generation younger than herself. Perhaps a desire to defile the innocent is simply a human trait. Or maybe it was less my “innocence” than it was my unavailability that was attractive. Possibly, I was the least willing man Tanya had ever encountered, though perhaps she thought I was simply playing hard to get and could eventually be moved.

Perhaps if she had thought about it, she’d have remembered that we are all stuck in the state at which we were created. Since I was a seventeen-year-old sexual innocent when I was changed, she was unlikely to succeed in seducing me at all. Finding Bella was the miracle that changed me.

Eventually, my father began to discern that something was going on between Tanya and me. When he asked if I was

romantically interested in Tanya, I told him “Not at all, but ‘no’ doesn’t seem to be part of her vocabulary.” I gave him a rueful smile.

It wasn’t long afterwards that Carlisle decided it was time for the Cullens to move on. He made it clear to the Denalis that he was concerned we were becoming too conspicuous living altogether. He never told me anything different, but I knew the real reason and I must say that I was both grateful and relieved.

Edward

Ω