

6. DREAMS

It had been a long week. Bella was absolutely determined to try making love again. She thought that practice, rather than abstaining, was the cure for our disastrous night. But I could see no other possible outcome than what had already happened. What would make it turn out differently? I was clearly incapable of controlling my strength.

So...I'd tried to distract her with other activities to take her mind off of making love...a very difficult endeavor when it was practically all I could think about myself. I wanted her no less for having harmed her. In fact, having experienced her body in such a profound way, I now knew what I'd been missing, and I desired her all the more. I couldn't let down my guard for a second or she'd cotton on to that.

Alice had not helped matters. What women wore as swimming costumes in the twenty-first century would have been taken for handkerchiefs in the early twentieth. Despite the bruises, Bella looked scandalously appealing in the skimpy bikinis Alice had packed for her. She also had stuffed Bella's suitcase with fancy French lingerie. Bella had gotten bolder over the course of the week and her nightwear had become increasingly provocative.

I was sure she had no idea how alluring she was, how attracted I was to her, or how close I had come to ravishing her several times. I was a good dissembler, as I had to be. If I showed any hint of faltering resolve, I knew she would take full advantage and I would hurt her again, perhaps even more seriously.

So, whenever I felt my jaw go slack or my breath catch as Bella paraded around in one sexy costume after another, day after day, night after night, I focused on the purple and black continents adorning her body to cement my resolve.

The night of the injuries—sadly, the first night of our honeymoon—I was so upset that I couldn't stay in bed with Bella. I was too restless, too distraught, and frankly, too aroused. I was afraid I might lose my head in the night, despite her terrible injuries. I disgusted myself.

Shortly after Bella fell asleep the second time, I'd carefully disentangled myself from her arms—though the “carefully” part had been unnecessary, since she was sleeping like a brick—and located my cell phone. Alice must have known I would call because my father picked up on the first ring.

“Edward?” he inquired, sounding worried.

“I've hurt her, Carlisle, I've hurt Bella,” I lamented, my voice breaking.

“Stay calm, Edward. Is Bella there with you? Tell me what happened.”

“She’s sleeping now, but she’s sleeping like the dead, almost like she’s comatose...”

“Did you check her eyes?”

“No, it’s not a concussion or anything...”

“Edward, tell me how Bella is injured.” He spoke firmly in the particular tone he used when a patient was panicking. I realized I *was* panicking and made an effort to calm myself.

“Well, we made love and everything seemed to be fine, but she got up a little bit ago and her body is...” The words wouldn’t come out.

“Son, tell me *immediately* what is going on,” Carlisle spoke sternly, like one would to an out-of-control child...or a crazy person. It sobered me up.

“She’s bruised, Dad, black and blue, her whole body, my handprints are all over her body.” The words finally came out in a rush.

Carlisle went silent for a moment. That frightened me.

“Is she in pain, Edward?”

“Well, she flinched away when I touched her, but she seemed to be sleep-walking or something and I couldn’t talk...”

“So, there is no head injury.”

“No.”

“Does she have severe abdominal pain or cramping?”

“I don’t think so. She was walking around.”

“Blood?”

Oh! I scanned my body quickly and saw that there were traces of blood where I might have expected them to be.

“A small amount.”

“Bella was a virgin, is that right, Edward? So that would be normal unless she’s bleeding heavily.”

“Um, yes...um, no... I mean, she bled a little when she tore.”

“Okay, then. No unusual bleeding.”

“No.”

“As for the bruising, you said the bruises were in the shape of your hands?”

“Yes, I think I squeezed her too hard.”

“Edward, it sounds like the bruising is on the surface and not due to internal injuries, is that right?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Okay, and there are no other injuries? Broken bones?”

I panicked for a moment, wondering if I had broken any of her precious bones. Then I recalled that when the fiend, James, had broken her bones, she couldn’t move without crying out in pain. I cringed at the memory.

“No, I don’t think so.”

“It sounds like Bella is going to be fine, Edward. If she has no head injury and she’s been moving around without waking up, then I would assume she’s having no significant pain that would indicate bone damage or internal injuries.”

“But she looks horrid and I don’t even remember doing it!”

“There is one thing to consider. If Bella is even slightly anemic, she would bruise easily and that’s a very common condition for women in their child-bearing years. She would also feel excessively tired and her hands and feet might be slightly cold, though that might not happen in the warm climate you’re in.”

“What can I do?”

“Feed her. Anything animal-based. Seafood and red meat are especially good—and chicken liver—but any animal-based protein has iron. Hold on a second...”

“What?”

“Alice says that she packed vitamins with iron, so have her take those. She’ll be fine, Edward.”

“Are you sure?”

“Just ask her about any pain she has when she wakes up. If she has abdominal pain, then take her to Rio. I can give you the name of a doctor there. Alice doesn’t think you’ll need to go, but if you do, call me back in the morning... your morning.”

I waited anxiously as that first day passed. Then the second day passed and I began to breathe a little easier. Bella would admit only to a little soreness, but not to being in pain. She showed no other signs of injury besides the bruises from our one blissful night together. I reminded myself that it couldn’t have been “blissful” when one of the participants came away from it so damaged. Still... for me...

But I could not think about that.

After a week, Bella’s bruises had improved dramatically, the purple ones fading to yellowish stains and the black ones turning light gray. The fading of Bella’s bruises seemed to be inversely proportional to the strengthening of her will in her campaign to “try again.” Her extreme exhaustion, probably due to iron deficiency, as Carlisle had suggested, helped along by a constant flurry of outdoor activities, had been the only thing that had saved me from Bella’s machinations and her from my desire. With all of the exercise I pressed on her each day—swimming, walking, climbing—and the heavy meals I cooked for her afterwards, Bella had fallen into a heavy sleep almost as soon as we lay down every night.

This had been the most difficult night so far. I could not *believe* what she was wearing. I had very nearly leaped across the room and taken her when she appeared ready for bed. The garment, if you could call such a concoction a garment, was a mere collection of threads tied together in artful patterns. The black silk lace was as sheer as a window, though more stimulating to peer through, and—draped from the shoulders of my Bella,

with peek-a-boo views of her perfect, round breasts and the cute, reddish, triangle of hair between her legs, and a full-on view of her nearly bare buttocks—absolutely impossible for a red-blooded man to resist. The fact that I was not red-blooded seemed to make little difference. I was bewitched.

Of course, I affected to be unaffected, though when she entered the bedroom in that black negligee, my lust for her surely had registered for a moment or two. It was a little disturbing to think that Alice, possibly having foreseen the outcome of our first night together and our subsequent dispute, was conspiring to undermine my resolve—and coming very close to success.

“What do you think?” Bella inquired, turning in a slow circle to give me a view of *every* part of her.

I almost choked on the gush of venom that flowed into my mouth and had to cover by clearing my throat. “You look beautiful,” I answered truthfully in the understatement of the century. “You always do.”

“Thanks,” Bella responded with an equal lack of zest, though hers was genuine rather than forced.

We had moved to the second bedroom in the cottage to avoid the white down scattered copiously all over the other one. Gustavo was coming to clean the following day and I would ask him to take care of the mess for us. Bella seemed to like the guest room though it looked less like a bridal suite with its blue silk bed coverings and drapes and though the bed was a queen-size, rather than the double-queen in the master bedroom.

I pulled Bella’s scantily clad body across my chest where she liked to sleep to stay cool overnight. In Brazil, we didn’t require a heavy blanket between us.

“I’ll make you a deal,” Bella said with a yawn.

I didn’t have to ask what she meant. “I will not make any deals with you,” I told her firmly.

“You haven’t even heard what I’m offering.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Bella huffed in disappointment. “Dang it. And I really wanted...” Her voice trailed off without finishing the thought. “Oh well.”

I rolled my eyes. This had to be a trick to make me curious, since she never asked for *anything*. Bella yawned and closed her eyes. Judging by previous nights, I knew she would be asleep in a matter of minutes. The little vixen.

“All right,” I caved with a sigh. “What is it you want?”

“Well, I was thinking... I know that the whole Dartmouth thing was just supposed to be a cover story, but honestly, one semester of college probably wouldn’t kill me,” Bella stated. She was repeating the words I’d said to her when I originally tried to convince her to put off becoming what I was. “Charlie would get a thrill out of Dartmouth stories, I bet.” Another point I’d made to her. “Sure, it might be embarrassing if I can’t keep up with all

the brainiacs. Still...eighteen, nineteen. It's really not such a big difference. It's not like I'm going to get crow's feet in the next year."

I. Could. Not. Believe. My. Ears.

"You would wait," I said in disbelief. "You would stay human."

Bella didn't answer.

"Why are you *doing* this to me?" I cried in frustration. "Isn't it hard enough without all of this?" I clutched a handful of sheer black lace adorning her upper thigh and crumpled it in my hand. I had to concentrate not to rip it off of her in anger. *That* would only make things worse. I tried to calm my voice. "It doesn't matter. I won't make any deals with you."

"I want to go to college," Bella argued.

"No, you don't. And there is nothing that is worth risking your life again. That's worth hurting you."

"But I *do* want to go. Well, it's not college as much as it's that I want—I want to be human a little while longer."

I shut my eyes and snorted like an angry bull...one of Maria's most dangerous.

"You are making me insane, Bella. Haven't we had this argument a million times, you always begging to be a vampire without delay?"

"Yes, but...well, I have a reason to be human that I didn't have before."

"What's that?"

"Guess," she teased and slithered up my body to steal a kiss. I wouldn't wound her by rejecting the kiss, but I would *not* let her seduce me with it either. I kept it light and pulled her away when she tried to make more of it. I snuggled her into the crook of my arm, amused in spite of myself.

"You are *so* human, Bella. Ruled by your hormones." I chuckled, realizing how easy it would be for *me* to be ruled by her hormones too. Thrilling even. But no...

"That's the whole point, Edward. I *like* this part of being human. I don't want to give it up yet. I don't want to wait through years of being a blood-crazed newborn for some part of this to come back to me."

Bella was fighting a losing battle in more ways than one. She yawned and I smiled, knowing she would pass out any minute.

"You're tired. Sleep, love." I began to hum Bella's lullaby for her. It usually had the desired effect.

"I wonder why I'm so tired," Bella complained. "That couldn't be part of your scheme or anything."

I chuckled once and resumed humming. Of course it was. Exercise and food. Food and exercise. Sunshine. Repeat to exhaustion. It was much easier to control my physical desire for her when she was asleep, especially since she'd been snoring and drooling a lot lately.

"For as tired as I've been, you'd think I'd sleep better," Bella remarked.

What? “You’ve been sleeping like the dead, Bella. You haven’t said a word in your sleep since we got here. If it weren’t for the snoring, I’d worry you were slipping into a coma.”

“I haven’t been tossing? That’s weird. Usually I’m all over the bed when I’m having nightmares. And shouting.” She didn’t mention the snoring, though it was something new for her.

“You’ve been having nightmares?”

“Vivid ones. They make me so tired.” Bella yawned again. “I can’t believe I haven’t been babbling about them all night.”

“What are they about?”

“Different things—but the same, you know, because of the colors.”

“Colors?”

“It’s all so bright and real. Usually, when I’m dreaming, I know that I am. With these, I don’t know I’m asleep. It makes them scarier.”

Scarier? That was troubling. “What is frightening you?” I asked softly.

Bella shuddered. “Mostly...” She didn’t finish the thought.

“Mostly?” I queried.

“The Volturi,” she whispered in an anxious voice.

I held her more tightly. “They aren’t going to bother us anymore. You’ll be immortal soon, and they’ll have no reason.”

Bella’s face illustrated her fear as she played out some frightening scenario in her mind. She would be scarred forever by that trip to Italy! Not to mention the return visit of the Volturi guard, who casually tortured and burned a helpless newborn to death right in front of her.

“What can I do to help?” I asked softly, holding her close. It was my fault that she had such nightmares.

“They’re just dreams, Edward,” she said, minimizing her distress, as usual.

“Do you want me to sing to you? I’ll sing all night if it will keep the bad dreams away.”

“They’re not all bad. Some are nice. So... colorful. Underwater, with the fish and the coral. It all seems like it’s really happening—I don’t know that I’m dreaming. Maybe this island is the problem. It’s really *bright* here.”

“Do you want to go home?”

“No. No, not yet. Can’t we stay awhile longer?”

“We can stay as long as you want, Bella,” I promised.

“When does the semester start? I wasn’t paying attention before.”

I ignored that insincere question, sighed heavily at her capriciousness, and began to hum. Very soon, she started snoring.

It was after two or three hours of stone-still slumber that Bella began to shake and moan. I assumed she was having one of the frightening dreams she’d described to me.

“Bella?” I whispered, rocking her in my arms to awaken her. “Are you all right, sweetheart?”

She gasped and opened her eyes. “Oh.” She gasped again. Tears came washing down her face in a torrent.

“Bella!” I cried. “What’s wrong?” I brushed at the tears with my fingers to no avail. They kept coming.

“It was only a dream,” Bella explained, sobbing as if her heart would break.

“It’s okay, love, you’re fine. I’m here.” I rocked her in my arms anxiously. *What could I do?* “Did you have another nightmare? It wasn’t real, it wasn’t real,” I said, trying to soothe her, but she didn’t stop crying.

“Not a nightmare,” she moaned. “It was a *good* dream.”

“Then why are you crying?” I couldn’t make sense of her anguish.

“Because I woke up,” Bella bawled, clinging to me desperately.

I chuckled, but the sound was choked off. “Everything’s all right, Bella. Take deep breaths.”

“It was so real. I *wanted* it to be real.”

“Tell me about it,” I pressed. “Maybe that will help.”

“We were on the beach...” Bella’s thought hung in the air, unfinished, as she leaned back and gazed into my face.

“And?” I prompted when she didn’t continue.

Bella had started to contain the tears when she moaned again. “Oh, Edward...”

Her voice both pained and worried me. *What could I do?* “Tell me, Bella,” I begged.

She hesitated for a moment, then raised her eyes to my face, wrapped her arms around my neck, and kissed me with so much passion—desperation, really—that I faltered. I responded immediately to her intense desire with my own before I caught myself.

“No, Bella,” I cautioned, pushing her away gently as I *had* to do.

Her sorrow turned into absolute desolation. She dropped her arms helplessly and began sobbing anew. The sound ripped through my heart.

“I’m s-s-s-orry,” she stuttered through her tears.

I pulled her close again and held her, torn between her pain and her safety. It was *torture* to deny her.

“I can’t, Bella, I can’t!” I moaned.

“Please,” she begged. “Please, Edward?”

She raised her tear-stained face to me, her eyes imploring. In that moment, I simply could not bear to witness that kind of pain on my beloved’s face and not give her what she wanted—especially since I wanted it as badly as she did.

I groaned with my own pain—of desire, of self-denial, and finally, of failure, as my bulwark of determination cracked open. I returned her kiss and all of my pent-up need burst through the breach. I wanted her. *I wanted her.*

Frighteningly, I had no control over the torrent of passion that came flooding from me. I needed to feel her skin on mine and I didn't even try to be civilized about it. I seized the silk lace and pulled, desperate to get at what was underneath. The fabric gave no resistance and I found what I wanted. I latched onto her left breast with my lips and tongue, licking, sucking. I burrowed one hand under her buttocks and began to knead handfuls of her soft flesh. Frenzied, I moved my mouth to her right breast. Bella's nipples, already erect, became flushed with blood, swelled, and turned a deep rose color. I stroked one while I sucked the other and, like an infant, I calmed down and became safer for her.

I kissed my way to her mouth and found her tongue. It was soft and sensuous, hot and wet, like another part of her I remembered so vividly. I'd regained a measure of control, but I was no less in need. I tore off my flannel pajama bottoms with one hand and rolled onto her, holding my weight on my arms. She raised her knees, one on either side of me, and her delicious scent floated into the air.

She took me in her hand and conveyed me to that wet, sensuous place I had ached for since our wedding night. She was ready for me...more than ready.

I managed to whisper, "Bella, are you sure? You're not sore inside?"

"Yes and no in that order..." she murmured.

I had no will to belabor the point. I groaned as I slipped inside of her, the memory I'd relived all week paling next to the reality. Extreme pleasure and profound relief washed over me...body *and* soul. All the pain of denying us both—my anguish, her need—healed with every glide. Bella responded with a flood of pent-up desire seeking release. Within a couple minutes of burying myself between her thighs, a cry rose from her throat and she began to orgasm powerfully around me. I threw back my head and moaned as her velvet grip tugged at me, urging all of me into her. It went on and on, stealing my breath, my wits, and all vestiges of resistance to her pleasure. I came hard then, shuddering on top of her as her hands moved softly up and down my back, my sides, my front.

It was an hour, a minute, or maybe a day before I regained myself, lifted my head, and saw Bella's soft brown eyes on my face. Joy surged through me. I let go of the mahogany headboard my hands were gripping and watched two handfuls of sawdust float to the floor. I cradled Bella's head between my forearms and kissed her softly. We had made love and she was safe! It was going to be okay. It was all going to be okay. By the time I had disengaged myself and settled at her side, she was asleep.

Bella was so worried that I would be angry with her for shattering my tenuous willpower that she woke up apologizing. Feeling guilty for being utterly irresistible—it was cute.

"How much trouble am I in?" she asked meekly, propping herself on her elbows to look at my face. I was lying with my arms beneath my head, looking at the ceiling.

“Heaps,” I warned before looking at her from the corners of my eyes and lifting one side of my mouth.

Bella looked relieved. “I am sorry. I didn’t mean... Well, I don’t know exactly what that was last night.” Bella shook her head in confusion.

“You never did tell me what your dream was about.”

“I guess I didn’t—” She looked away and laughed uncomfortably. “But I sort of *showed* you what it was about.”

“Oh,” I exclaimed in surprise. “Interesting.” I’d had *no* idea. I just thought she was frightened.

“It was a very good dream.” Bella mused and then paused before asking, “Am I forgiven?”

“I’m thinking about it.” I was annoyed that I’d lost control of myself as I had, but I would have been extremely angry if I had hurt her again. Bella checked herself over and found no damage. What a relief!

“How are *you* feeling?” she asked tentatively.

I laughed at her expression.

“What?”

“You look so guilty—like you’ve committed a crime.”

“I *feel* guilty,” she muttered.

“So you seduced your all-too-willing husband. That’s not a capital offense.” *It could have been, though*, I thought ruefully.

“The word *seduced* implies a certain amount of premeditation.” Bella’s face blushed beautifully, humanly red. “You’re not angry?”

I smiled. “I’m not angry.”

“Why not?”

“Well...I didn’t hurt you, for one thing. It was easier this time, to control myself, to channel the excesses.” I looked toward the damaged headboard. “Maybe because I had a better idea of what to expect.”

A anticipative smile spread across Bella’s face. “I *told* you that it was all about practice.”

I rolled my eyes, but I could see she was ecstatic at my change of attitude and hopeful that I might no longer insist on abstinence. Even *I* had hope now that, despite my disproportionate strength and Bella’s unfortunate status as my natural prey, we might share a full marital relationship while she remained human.

“I like it here,” Bella commented after eating her usual breakfast of eggs. She had cooked them herself and they were underdone to my eye. “We’ll probably have to leave soon, though, won’t we, to make it to Dartmouth in time?”

Oh, right, I thought sarcastically. “You can give up the college pretense now—you’ve gotten what you wanted. And we didn’t agree to a deal, so there are no strings attached.”

“It wasn’t a pretense, Edward,” Bella rebutted. “I don’t spend *my* free time plotting like some people do. *What can we do to wear Bella out today?*” she said, mimicking my voice. I chuckled. It was funny when she put it like that. “I really do want a little more time being human.” Bella leaned across the table and stroked my bare chest with her hand. “I have not had enough.”

“For *this?*” I questioned doubtfully as Bella’s hand continued down my stomach to the top of my trousers where I halted its progress. “Sex was the key all along? Why didn’t *I* think of that?” I rolled my eyes. “I could have saved myself a lot of arguments.”

Bella laughed. “Yeah, probably.”

“You are *so* human.”

“I know.”

But I *was* excited about the other part of the deal. “We’re going to Dartmouth? Really?”

“I’ll probably fail out in one semester.”

“I’ll tutor you.” I promised, grinning. “You’re going to love college.”

After discussing our new plans for the months following our honeymoon, Bella brought the subject back around to where we’d started...being human.

“So I was thinking...” she began, a wheedling sound entering her voice. “You know what I was saying about practice before?”

I laughed. I had known she would try to take advantage! Maybe I’d even been counting on it.

“Can you hold on to that thought?” I asked. “I hear a boat. The cleaning crew must be here.”