

WHITER SHADE OF PALE

Alice came back suddenly, dropping me into the present in a state of shock. She'd gone into one of her trances while sitting at her computer. Nobody else had noticed for a time, though I recognized it immediately from where I stood by the dining room window watching Renesmee try to teach Jacob to waltz while his pack dozed nearby.

The vision that had fogged Alice's eyes and transformed her into a marble statue caught me unawares and I froze in rapt attention, unable to tear myself away. The image gelled in my mind... Renesmee in a white peasant-style gown reminiscent of the 1960s with an elaborate halo of yellow daisies and baby's breath in her hair. The Cullens and our extended family, including Tanya's expanded coven with the additions of Fred and Garrett, were gathered somewhere in the Olympic Forest along with the entire Quileute nation and Charlie Swan. I gazed in wonderment at my beautiful daughter whose hand I held as we paced down a path of evergreen needles between colossal trees painted with lime-colored moss.

Rosalie, Jacob, and Billy stood facing us with Emmett and Sam behind them. Rose wore a pale yellow gown that matched the vests Emmett and I wore beneath our charcoal-gray suits. Sam and Billy wore traditional Quileute attire—black leggings, tunics, and red and black capes decorated with white buttons arranged in the shapes of primitive whales, eagles, and salmon.

Jacob wore black leggings and an appliqued vest with a deep "V" neckline and no sides, which exposed more of his smooth cinnamon-colored skin than it covered. A blood-red sash wrapped around his waist and a woven headdress fashioned from cedar bark and raven feathers sat low on his forehead like a crown.

As my daughter and I approached the group, Emmett and Sam spread a double-width cape behind Jacob's back, and I directed Renesmee to the empty space beside the groom. Sam and Emmett then laid the garment ceremoniously over the couple's shoulders and tied it together in the front. When Jacob and Renesmee turned to approach an altar made from woven tree branches and covered in flowers, the back of the cape flowed behind them, revealing an intricately embroidered wolf and doe flanking one another—a marriage blanket.

Tribe members formed a circle around the gathering and soft drumbeats I hadn't noticed before increased in volume, the primal rhythm elaborated by voices singing in a native tongue. I saw myself turn and join my wife where she sat in a gold-colored gown atop a bench intricately carved from a cedar log.

When the singing and drumming stopped, Sam delivered a Quileute prayer and emotion swept through me as I realized I had just relinquished my daughter to her chosen husband. Bella and I had had her for such a brief time and never to ourselves, for Jacob had been there from the day of her birth laying his own claim to her. I saw myself wrap my arm around Bella when her shoulders began to shake, imagining how it must feel to give her daughter to a man she herself had once loved. Then it occurred to me that if it weren't for me, Bella likely would be standing where our daughter stood and the surrounding guests would look very different.

Alice's vision abruptly shifted and I recoiled instantly from the sound of piercing screams. It was my daughter's voice, distorted into an impossibly high register by what could only be excruciating pain. My legs flexed to thrust me forward and my arms stretched to annihilate whoever was hurting her. The horrific noise seared my consciousness and urged me to action inside this whisper of a dream that wasn't even mine.

Did I really want to know? Could I survive even a moment of the catastrophe in Alice's mind? But like a moth to flame, I couldn't even look away, much less flee from this disturbing, riveting prophecy. Drawn against my will, I followed Alice's eyes to a little white house with a wide front porch that sat nestled amongst ancient evergreen trees. Behind it was a long metal shed which, if instinct served, would house an engine repair shop.

Suddenly, Jacob slammed through the front door and raced into the trees where he bent and emptied the contents of his stomach into the forest duff. With a sense of dread, I followed the vision into a darkened room where my father stood at the foot of a hand-carved bed. I saw my daughter's copper curls spread across white cotton sheets, her naturally pale face now faded to the color of the bleached cloth upon which she lay. I knew what this was.

My body, which still stood at my parents' dining room window, fists tightly clenched, detected a touch.

"Edward, darling son, what's wrong?"

My eyes cleared and I found my mother standing beside me with her hand against my back. Across the room, Alice remained inert, though Jasper now stood behind her, his body curved protectively around hers. Rosalie was there, her eyes darting nervously between Alice and me, worried how the vision would affect her.

Bella was not home. She needed to hunt more often than the rest of us, so often joined whomever was going, in this case, Carlisle and Emmett. Renesmee might have gone too, but had elected to spend the day with Jacob.

"What's happening, dear heart? Can you tell me?"

I heard the ring of concern in my mother's voice, but I could not respond to her, drawn as I was...relentlessly, inexorably...to the room

where my daughter lay suffering, possibly dying. With a groan that sounded like a scream, I broke from my mother's half embrace.

"Not now..." I managed to reply before dashing out the back door and into the woods as Jacob had done in Alice's mind. How I wished I could bury what I was seeing and all its concomitant pain deep within the earth!

In the diffuse green light of the forest, I wedged my body between three closely spaced trees, hiding in the womb-like space as Alice's wretched vision continued to unfold, she as helpless to escape it as me. Peering over my father's shoulder, I saw Renesmee lying with her legs spread wide around a dripping pool of blood, a scene so reminiscent of Bella's ghastly parturition. Carlisle had cut deeply into my daughter's flesh behind where a toddler-sized head was trying to emerge. It was much too big! It was tearing her apart!

Nessie's screams rose against the crisp "snap snap" of her breaking bones and I felt all the more hopeless knowing that my father would have done everything in his power to prevent this kind of suffering.

Why didn't you take it out? I wanted to scream. Why is she delivering this monster at all? But inside the vision, there were no words, only agonized shrieks. I knew the answer, anyway—my daughter would make the same choice her mother had made, despite any advice to the contrary.

Huddling in my makeshift shelter, I experienced an overwhelming desire to rip Jacob Black's head from his body. My daughter's blood was draining from her in amounts signifying death and I sat idly by, helpless to divert any event leading to this conclusion. My daughter would die merely because she'd been born in proximity to genetic freaks who would extend their bloodlines at any cost! I didn't pause to consider the irony of my feelings or the inconvenient revelation of how Jacob must have suffered during

Bella's pregnancy. The desire to murder him and all his kind outweighed everything else.

Caught in the torture of knowledge, I slowly became aware of drumbeats in the near distance and knew instinctively it was the cadence of a death watch. The natives were ushering the soul of my daughter to the place from whence it came. More important to them, however, was the soul that lay in the balance, a future tribal chief. Song rose into the air, a mournful sound that took the rhythm of a heartbeat. I could hear the living hearts around me align themselves to the slow beat designed to create calm in a circumstance laden with stress.

It was a horrendous repetition of my wife's demise, this wrenching of my daughter's body in that little white house. I was held in torturous thrall, cowering in the dirt with my arms wrapped around my torso, utterly incapable of movement.

Will she die? Can she die? We didn't really know. Nahuel had lived for one hundred fifty years, but that was no proof he was immortal. There might be a reason why Joham's children were the only half vampire/half-humans we'd encountered. Perhaps the hybrids were not immortal.

Can we change her? I wondered desperately in my distress. *We have to change her!* But I also knew that changing Renesmee might kill her. Even worse than watching this disaster play out in front of me was not knowing how we had gotten to this place or what Carlisle was thinking in that humble delivery room.

Abruptly, the vision changed again. It was nighttime and members of the tribe had gathered around a large bonfire—Jacob and Billy Black, Sam Uley, and Sue Clearwater taking center stage, along with old Quil Ateara. It occurred to me that the scene couldn't be too far in the future if old Quil was still alive.

This was a tribal council meeting. I recognized that much. As before, I heard no voices and could not discern the topic of discussion, but excitement filled the air and Jacob was arguing fiercely with Sam Uley. Drums beat furiously somewhere out of sight and I saw Paul and the rest of Sam's pack seated as humans on the opposite side of the fire. The drumming grew louder and I considered covering my ears, though it would do no good.

Where is my daughter? I wanted to shout. Why was she not there? As the wife of the tribal chief, she should be privy to council meetings. Fear gripped my gut and I badly wished to un-know the truth I was beginning to suspect.

Then I heard a rustling sound and watched as Jacob's pack began to emerge from the forest, Leah at point, with Seth and a slim gray wolf with dark spots—Embry Call—spread slightly outward behind her. A chocolate-colored wolf with a lighter-colored face followed Seth—young Quil—and several others unknown to me filled out the triangular formation. I watched anxiously as the triangle of wolves, eight in all, moved across the clearing and stopped, leaving a gap at the front when Leah alone approached the council.

That's when I saw it...her...a lone wolf pup one-quarter the size of the full-grown wolves surrounding her. She was solidly white, ghostly in color, but for a pair of expressive brown eyes that sat too large over her muzzle. Her paws were far too big for her spindly legs and she wore an expression of mischief that was impossible to miss. The rest of the pack stood at strict attention in respect of the council, but not the little one. She caught a glimpse of tail moving behind her and turned to snap at it, missing. She snapped at it again, missing again, and then began spinning in a tight circle, lightning-fast, chasing her own appendage, though it continued to elude her. I might have laughed when she finally caught her furry tail between her teeth and wrestled it to the ground, except at that moment, the



rising moon cast a soft beam of light across the clearing and I was stunned into silence.

Still at play, surrounded by her wolf-pack guard, the pup began to glow as the ray of moonlight touched her fur, turning it into a cloud of light. I stared in fascination as the glow moved with her, washing first one then another of her caretakers with light. When she finally released her tail and held still for a moment, my keen eyes detected the cause.

Each of the snowy white hairs covering her body carried a microscopically tiny, gem-like tip which reflected light like a vampire's skin. My granddaughter—the white wolf—sparkled.

Edward

