

## 21. THE RUSE

Carlisle drove the Jeep northbound on U.S. Highway 101. The strategy was to convince James that our party—the coven leader, the strongest, most threatening fighter, and the human’s personal protector—comprised Bella’s security detail, when in fact, we were the killing party and Bella was not with us. We would lure James with Bella’s scent to follow us far to the north, while Bella escaped with Alice and Jasper to the south. By driving Bella’s truck west, Esme and Rosalie would provide a secondary diversion for James’ mate, thus separating the two early in the chase.

We turned west onto an abandoned logging road and traveled a short distance into the Olympic National Forest where we parked the Jeep. Emmett knew the entire network of old logging roads and 4-wheel drive trails on the Olympic Peninsula, as offroading was one of his favorite pastimes. He often took the Jeep on hunting trips just for fun, although running straight through the forest was faster.

I listened for James’ mind—yes, he was following us, as Alice had predicted, and he believed that Bella was with us. Perfect. I nodded at Carlisle, then opened the cell phone and dialed Esme’s number. Since James was within hearing distance, I kept it cryptic.

“Yes?” she answered.

“It’s time.”

“Now,” I heard her say to Rosalie before she cut the connection. Heading west toward La Push, Rosalie and Esme would drive about fifteen minutes, then turn north onto a logging road in order to skirt the Quileute reservation, where the Cullens were not welcome. They would drive as far as they could, then continue running into the forest for as long as Victoria followed.

I listened for Victoria and caught the image of the red truck’s taillights in her mind. She had followed the truck. Good. It was safe for Jasper and Alice to get Bella out.

I dialed Alice. She answered silently. *Hi. Did Victoria follow the truck?*

“Yes,” I replied.

*Time for us to go then?*

“Yes.”

*Good luck, Edward.*

“You too.” Though I wanted to give Alice any number of additional warnings about caring for Bella, I refrained. The conversation that James had just heard would give him no clues as to what was going on and we had to keep it that way.

I hated reading his mind, seeing his obsession with Bella grow, feeling his excitement over tangling with me. I briefly wondered what James had been before he’d been changed. Hunter? Detective? Mafia hit man? He must have had some tracking ability, since becoming a vampire had undoubtedly enhanced it. Maybe he’d been skilled with scents. Perfume maker? Oenologist? Hound dog? On second thought, he lacked the refinement for any of those vocations.

Like most of us, James didn’t think about his human past, so there was no way to know. All I read from him was intense focus, determination, and cruelty. His mind read like an animal’s while he was tracking—more sensation and instinct than thought.

It didn’t matter. All we needed to know was whether he was behind us, and roughly how far. He was keeping his distance right now, making sure he didn’t lose us, but staying out of sound and scent range. He wanted us to think that we were conveying Bella—who

he thought was with us—safely out of the area.

We'd reached the end of the road. Carlisle pulled the Jeep off to the side and we exited, grabbed our gear, and disappeared into the trees. We needed to get a good headstart on the tracker.

We began our run, Emmett carrying the pack. There was a gentle mist falling through the trees. The moon shed enough light that the drops sparkled as they fell from the needles of the firs, cedars, and spruce trees, the giants of this ancient rainforest.

It could have been a pleasant outing were it not for the gravity of James' "game" and my constant worry over Bella's welfare. I had to trust that Alice would take care of her until we were reunited. Being apart after all that had happened between us—had it been just a weekend?—was painful in the extreme. My arm ached to encircle her waist. I longed to touch her hair. At least I was carrying her scent with me and that had to do for now.

Carlisle interrupted my thoughts.

*Edward?*

"Yes?" I said, signaling my attention.

*I've got a proposal.*

I nodded for him to continue.

*I'm thinking we run north toward Neah Bay. We should make it easily by 4:00 am, when the Makah will be getting their boats ready to launch. We can hire a fisherman to motor us across the strait to Vancouver Island.*

Crossing the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Canada was a good idea. The farther we got from Forks before confronting James, the better. If anything should go wrong, he might decide to go after Charlie. We needed his return time to be as long as possible. We also wanted any violence that occurred to be far out in the wilderness, away from humans.

Carlisle continued, *If Bella were with us, we wouldn't keep running for several days. We'd have to stop to let her eat and rest.*

I nodded again. This had also occurred to me.

*Once across the water, we'll run until we get reasonably far into the forest, then set up camp. James will have to swim the strait. By stopping, we give him a chance to catch up.*

I interrupted. "We will have to keep to the forest after daylight. Isn't the western side of British Columbia called the 'Sunshine Coast'?"

Carlisle smiled. "Actually, the term refers to the mainland. The tall mountains on Vancouver Island siphon off the rain before it gets to the mainland coast, which makes the coast sunny. Vancouver Island's west side gets more rain and less sunshine than even Forks. It's a true rainforest."

Emmett broke in. "We're going to Vancouver Island? Crossing the strait?"

"Yes," Carlisle replied.

"Great! I'll swim!"

"That's not a bad idea, Carlisle. Fewer scary strangers to be carried in the boat."

"Boat?" Emmett queried.

I signaled with one finger for him to hold on, and waited for Carlisle to finish.

*After a "sleeping" interval, we pack up and go north again, deeper into the wilderness, where we'll set up a second camp. Maybe we can get in some quick hunting. When we know James is within hearing range, Emmett and I will do some phony reconnaissance then leave you, presumably with Bella, while we "head back to Forks."*

The latter phrase was said in quotation marks.

*When James thinks we're gone, he'll approach the campsite. We'll have doubled back, of course, then we all close in.*

It was a solid plan and I assented with a nod. Assuming James was a good fighter, as Laurent had said, the only part that might be dangerous was when James engaged me. I'd have fight him alone, as Carlisle and Emmett couldn't be too near or James might detect them and retreat to escape the ambush. Of course, I would do my best to kill James, but at the very least, I would have to hold him off for a short while to give my father and brother time to return.

Laurent had said that James was "absolutely lethal." Well, I would be too—he was threatening my Bella. *Damn him!* An involuntary snarl escaped my lips. Carlisle and Emmett both looked up and I shook my head. I would let Carlisle explain the plan to Emmett. I wanted to be alone with my thoughts. We kept moving.

I wondered how Bella was faring. When I'd held her to me, silent tears streamed down her face. They tore at my heart and there was no time to ask what she was thinking. I couldn't know what was making her so sad. Fright? Separation? The altercation with her father? I knew she was needlessly worried about one of us getting hurt. It was impossible to convince her that we were not in danger—she was!

This danger was my fault. I'd said that she would be the death of me and that was true—if she died, I had decided that I would follow soon after. I could only hope that I didn't bring her death about prematurely. Somehow, when this was over, I *must* give her human life back to her. What I was doing was wrong in so many ways. But just thinking of leaving her sent a tearing pain through my chest...

I mustn't think of that right now. First I had to get her and my family, as well as myself, through this calamity intact.

We ran on and on, weaving between the trees. I heard Carlisle explain the plan to Emmett in tones too soft to carry through the forest. I couldn't hear James' thoughts now, anyway. He seemed to be staying outside my range. When we stopped, I'd loop back to make sure he was still following us. Or better yet, Emmett could stay behind in Neah Bay until he saw James, then catch up to us.

As we approached the northern tip of the Olympic Peninsula, the forest thinned in places and there were more deforested clear-cuts where logging companies had removed the trees in large swaths. Carlisle had taken this into account with the timing of our trip through this area. Our running and swimming across national boundaries would be less noticeable to humans—though not to James—in the dark.

We arrived at the town of Neah Bay at 4:30am. Neah Bay is the northernmost outpost in the lower forty-eight states and, along with the surrounding area, is the home of the Makah Nation. Fishing is an important part of the Makah's livelihood, so we were bound to find boats ready to launch at the local boatyard. We were hoping to locate a captain willing to carry Carlisle and I across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Canada, a not-entirely-legal service for which we would undoubtedly pay a hefty fee. Our cover story was that we were meeting a wilderness guide to go bear hunting. Once Emmett arrived, the story would be mostly true.

The Makahs might be leery of outsiders, but they relied on tourist dollars to help keep their businesses afloat, so it wasn't unusual to see strangers hanging around the wharf looking for a fishing charter or boat ride. The strait was a rough passage for small boats in windy weather, but it was quiet this early in the day.

*Later, Bro!*

Emmett handed the large duffle bag to me and turned back into the forest. He was in his element, happy to run, excited to swim the strait, and especially looking forward to fighting James.

Carlisle and I ventured down to the waterfront. Walking along one of the floating docks, we soon came upon an elderly native, alone on his boat preparing for the day's work. His hair was platinum silver, long, and plaited in the traditional single braid. His body was lithe, but stooped at the shoulders. The leathered skin on his face contained deep crags from sun exposure and age. We stopped to introduce ourselves.

"Hello, sir," Carlisle began.

The old man turned toward us, one corner of a large fishing net in his hands. He seemed to be sewing or repairing it with a slim ivory tool, which he passed deftly back and forth between the threads. He was working by the light of a bright Coleman lantern and the dock lights lined up on poles along the wharf. His hands didn't pause in their work.

"My name is Carlisle Cullen. This is my son, Edward. We would like to hire a boatman to take us across the strait to Port Renfrew," he said, naming the small fishing village across the water in Canada.

We waited for a reply, but the fisherman remained silent. I listened to his mind and found that it was also relatively silent. Very unusual. I caught individual words such as "strangers," "money," and "Robert," as well as some native words I didn't recognize.

*Does he hear us?*

I nodded and remained still.

*Should I ask again?*

My sense was that he was pondering a reply and would speak in his own time. I shook my head and waited. Carlisle followed my cue and stood still beside me. Vampires were good at this sort of thing. Some time, perhaps three minutes, passed before the fisherman made a decision.

"My son has boat. He will come." I heard him think *five* and took this to mean the time. The sun didn't rise until 7:30 at this time of year, so we had time.

I signaled "yes" to Carlisle, who replied politely, "Thank you very much. We will wait."

The old man did not acknowledge us further, so we walked down the pier taking in our surroundings. No sign of James, no mental activity, no scent. I hoped we would be well gone before he got close. It appeared he did not want us to know he was tracking us. Either that, or he no longer was. We would know soon enough.

I tried to keep my mind on our task, but in these moments of waiting, it was hard not to think of Bella. I wondered where she was now and whether she was all right. I was glad that Jasper was with her. He could soothe her worries and help keep her sane during this ordeal.

*Any sign of James?* Carlisle inquired.

I shook my head "no."

Carlisle pulled the cell phone out of his pocket and checked for a signal. Surprisingly, there was one. The Makahs were connected.

*I should call Esme.*

"It's safe," I told him.

Carlisle pressed buttons, then put the phone to his ear.

“Can you speak, love?” he asked, then remained silent, listening.

“Hmmm, I suppose that’s to be expected,” he replied, then waited for a question.

“I’d rather not say where, but we’ll continue.”

He shut the phone and put it back in his pocket. I raised my eyebrows.

*The woman, Victoria, turned back after half an hour. Rosalie has been following her all around Forks. She’s methodically traversing the streets and nearby roads, looking for a trail. Esme’s watching Charlie’s house.*

“Much as we expected,” I commented. I was pleased that Rosalie was making an effort. It was a good sign. She was probably a bit happier now that Bella was no longer traveling with Emmett.

I wondered where Bella was now. It would be good to call Alice and find out how she was doing, but I didn’t want to risk it while we were still this close to Forks. It would be better if we could lead James well into Canada without giving him any clues to our scheme. Besides, we had nothing to tell them, so there was no point.

Just then, I heard movement down by the docks. Carlisle and I turned simultaneously toward the sound and froze. Ah, another fisherman. Perhaps this was the old man’s son. We started walking back to the pier.

When we arrived at the top of the floating dock, we could see a local man with a short haircut, mid-50s perhaps, standing near the old man’s boat. We made our way down to meet him. He turned toward us with a friendly smile.

“Are you Carl and Edward?” he asked.

“It’s *Carlisle*, but yes we are.”

“Carlisle,” the man repeated, “I’m Robert Ulmer. This is my father, Albert. You’re looking for transportation to Vancouver Island?”

“Yes,” Carlisle replied. “We’re meeting a guide to go bear hunting. He told us we could find a boatman here who’d be willing to take us across the strait.”

“I could take you and fish on the way back. The tides are favorable this morning. When did you want to go over?”

“The sooner, the better,” Carlisle said. “Our guide will be on the clock starting at seven this morning.”

“I could be ready in twenty minutes,” Robert offered. “I need to gas up and check my lights. It’s good to go early and beat any wind that might kick up after sunrise. The strait can be exciting when the winds are high.”

“How long is the crossing?” I asked, speaking for the first time. Humans were suspicious of people who were too quiet, although that might not be true in this case. Obviously, Albert was a man of few words.

“An hour-and-a-half in good seas,” Robert responded.

“That suits us fine,” Carlisle said.

Fifteen minutes later, we were loaded onto a larger fishing boat with Robert at the helm. At the last minute, Albert had joined us and was busying himself with some lines at the back of the boat.

“How long are you here for?” Robert asked.

“Just a few days,” Carlisle answered. “We live in Forks, but we haven’t seen Vancouver Island yet.”

“Two countries, sometimes seem like a world apart. Speaking of which, we should get in early enough that we can avoid the harbormaster and docking fees. We just need to

get in and out quickly. The islanders have a congenial relationship with the Makahs. It suits both sides.” He gave us a sly smile.

“That’s fine with us,” Carlisle said. We just have the one bag of camping gear and we’re not bringing in weapons.”

*Not traditional weapons, anyway.*

“Yeah, the Canadian authorities do not look kindly upon Americans bringing in guns. Seriously frowned upon.” He grinned. “What do you do in Forks?”

“I’m a doctor at the local hospital and Edward is in high school. Spring break, you know.”

If Robert had any thoughts about Carlisle looking more like my brother than my father, I didn’t catch them. Minding one’s own business seemed to be a valued trait among the Northwest natives, I had decided, after living in the area for a couple of years.

It was obvious that Robert was used to tourists. He kept up a friendly conversation with little effort, seeming to be interested in the people who hired him. My guess was that he’d developed his social skills to balance his father, who fit the stereotype of the silent, stoic Indian.

Old-timers who had seen the kind of changes that Albert had seen were often stubborn about modernizing. This had not varied over the course of the century. They had lost so much in their long lives that they clung to the old ways and many were not interested in mixing with “the white man.”

That was more or less the sense I got of Albert. Though his mind wasn’t giving me a lot of information, he didn’t seem to harbor any particular suspicions about us. Neither did Robert, as far as I could tell. It helped that it was still dark outside—our skin and eyes were less noticeable.

After twenty minutes of silence, Albert suddenly spoke.

“You know any Quileutes?”

Perhaps a human wouldn’t have heard him. He spoke without concern for the low volume of his voice, as if there were no noisy boat engines straining against the swift current. Of course, we heard him fine.

Carlisle was surprised by the question, but answered politely. “Yes, I’ve met a number of tribe members at the Forks hospital.”

“Who?” Albert asked.

I couldn’t hear much going on in Albert’s mind and I wasn’t sure why. Perhaps his thoughts were partially shielded from me like Charlie’s, though what I could hear was of a different tenor than Charlie’s. Albert’s thoughts were disorganized and random. His question seemed to have no malice behind it, though. I nodded discretely at Carlisle.

“Well, let’s see,” he said. “I met Emily Young and Sam Uley several years ago and I’ve delivered babies for a number of families. I know the Black family and the Clearwaters, and perhaps a couple of others. We’ve only been in Forks for a few years.”

“You know Billy Black?”

“Yes, and his son, Jacob.”

“And his other son?”

Carlisle paused and looked at Albert before answering. “I wasn’t aware that Billy Black had another son.”

At that, Albert began to cackle. It was an odd noise, high-pitched and slightly hysterical. I tried to read what he was thinking, but it was clouded. I got “grandson,” and

something that sounded like “alley cat,” but nothing more. It was impossible to decipher his obscured thoughts.

The boat’s engine noise eased as we cleared the heavy, mid–strait current. Albert’s cackling had continued, much to our dismay, and suddenly rang out in the quieter pre–dawn air.

“Dad!” Robert cut in. “What are you going on about?”

Albert quieted instantly, like a little boy caught doing something naughty. Robert’s thoughts were easy to read, though not easy to decode... *Ugh! I hope he wasn’t telling tales about Black again. He just can’t let it go. Lily seems happy enough there and nobody else cares anymore! I’ll have to try talking to him again.*

I guessed that Robert had a close relative—perhaps a sister—named Lily who lived on the Quileute reservation. I wasn’t sure what connection she might have to Billy Black, though, if any. I’d never heard of her.

Robert turned to us and asked Carlisle, “Are you married?”

“Yes, my wife’s name is Esme.”

“How many children do you have?”

“Five adopted children. How about you?” he asked, trying to turn the conversation away from himself.

“Three kids, but they live with their mother off the rez,” Robert replied. “I’m still here looking after my dad and enjoying the fisherman’s life. It’s been in our family, and our tribe, actually, for many generations.”

“That’s a remarkable thing about the Quileutes too. Unlike American immigrants, their family traditions and tribal memories go back a long way.”

“Yes, the old ways do hang around,” Robert replied, glaring at his father.