

23. RESCUE

“It’s time to call Alice,” I said as we followed James’ trail through the West Vancouver ferry terminal and outside to a nearby taxi stand. As discouraged as I felt, I was still anxious to check on Bella. The thought of talking to her lifted my spirits.

“Let’s look for James at the airport first. If we locate him, then we’ll have a little more information to share,” Carlisle suggested. He was right. We hired a cab to take us to the airport Hilton where Emmett ditched the duffle in a large waste bin. We knew the camping gear would set off the metal detectors at the airport and we preferred to avoid scrutiny whenever possible.

When we entered the airport terminal, we located the check-in area for U.S.-bound passengers and paced the vicinity looking for signs of James. We found his scent there, but it was hard to tell how new it was or where it led, since there was so much olfactory interference from the hundreds of people who passed through the terminal each day. We could only assume that he was flying back to Seattle, and then running to Forks to start over with his search for Bella.

While Carlisle dialed Alice’s cell phone, Emmett went to the departures board to find the next flight to Seattle.

“Hello, Alice.”

“*Carlisle.*”

“Is Bella with you? Is she okay?”

“*Yes.*”

“We’ve lost James. Victoria joined him up north, possibly gave him some information, and they ran. We think he’s boarded a plane, probably to Seattle. Can you give us any more information?”

“I just saw him. He’s in a dark room running a tape on a VCR and watching and waiting. Later, he’ll go to a bigger room full of mirrors with some kind of gold band around the center and a light wood floor. There’s a VCR, TV, and stereo on a black table. I don’t know where it is, but he’ll be there tonight or tomorrow. Whatever made him get on that plane...it was leading him to those rooms.”

“I see. Thank you Alice. Is Bella able to speak with Edward now?”

“*Yes. Bella?*” Alice called.

Carlisle held out the phone to me.

“Hello?” Bella answered.

“Bella.” I exhaled with immense relief. The pain in my chest lessened slightly. She was all right.

“Oh Edward! I was so worried.”

“Bella, I told you not to worry about anything but yourself.”

“Where are you?”

“We’re outside of Vancouver. Bella, I’m sorry—we lost him. He seems suspicious of us—he’s careful to stay just far enough away that I can’t hear what he’s thinking. But he’s gone now—it looks like he got on a plane. We think he’s heading back to Forks to start over.”

“I know. Alice saw that he got away.”

“You don’t have to worry, though,” I assured her. “He won’t find anything to lead him to you. You just have to stay there until we catch up to him again.”

“I’ll be fine. Is Esme with Charlie?”

“Yes—the female has been in town. She went to the house while Charlie was at work. She hasn’t gone near him, so don’t be afraid. He’s safe with Esme and Rosalie watching.”

“What is she doing?”

“Probably trying to pick up the trail. She’s been all through the town during the night. Rosalie tracked her through the airport, along all the streets in town, at the school... she’s digging, Bella, but there’s nothing to find.”

“And you’re sure Charlie’s safe?”

“Yes, Esme won’t let him out of her sight. And we’ll be there soon. If the tracker gets anywhere near Forks, we’ll have him.”

“I miss you,” she whispered.

“I know, Bella. Believe me, I know. It’s like you’ve taken half my self away with you.”

“Come and get it, then,” she challenged. I wanted to do that so badly I could taste it.

“Soon, as soon as I possibly can. I *will* make you safe first.” Anger flared in me.

“I love you,” she said and the anger cooled.

“Could you believe that, despite everything I’ve put you through, I love you too?”

“Yes, I can, actually.”

“I’ll come for you soon,” I promised.

“I’ll be waiting.”

I ended the call reluctantly, but with renewed determination to rid the world of the vampire, James. And the female too, if she got in the way. I *was* a killer after all.

Emmett had rejoined us with news of a Seattle flight in an hour. After purchasing first-class seats, we ducked into the nearest airport shop and bought clean clothes and some hand luggage to hold our discarded clothes, money, passports, some toiletries, and a couple of books and magazines. Nothing looked more suspicious than boarding a plane without luggage, especially on international flights.

Within two hours, we landed at SeaTac airport, located between Seattle and Tacoma. We dumped our new traveling bags in the trash behind a Starbucks coffee shop and ran northwest to Forks. Going on foot was fast, we could keep searching for a scent trail.

We reached the outskirts of Forks having found no fresh trace of James. Carlisle called Esme, who was alternating with Rosalie to watch over Charlie when he was home from work. They’d seen no sign of Victoria or James there, either. We split up and began tracking systematically through town, covering every street and road. We also went to our house, the high school, and the airport, repeating Victoria’s earlier steps.

We found Victoria’s scent, but it wasn’t fresh. This jibed with our discovery that Victoria had come to Vancouver Island to meet James. What could she possibly have told him that caused them both to disappear? I didn’t believe for a moment that they had given up. As we were contemplating our next move, Carlisle’s cell phone rang.

Carlisle remained quiet and listened while Alice updated the picture for us. She saw James in a room with dark paneled walls and Bella had recognized Alice’s drawing as her mother’s living room! James was either in Phoenix or soon would be! Not only that...he would find Renee’s house!

Was he waiting for Renee? For Bella? How had he known to go there? Neither he

nor Victoria had been inside Charlie's house to find the address. We knew that much. Where else...? Wait, wait, wait...the school must have Renee's address on file. Did Victoria go through the school records? Clever. That would explain it.

Alice had also seen James in a room surrounded by mirrors. What did that mean? Then abruptly, I realized that it simply didn't matter. None of this mattered! I had to get to Bella as quickly as possible.

Carlisle looked at me with a questioning eye and made the obvious suggestion.

I think we should fly to Phoenix now. Do you agree?

"Yes! Yes! Let's go now!" I didn't want to waste another second.

Carlisle spoke briefly with Alice, then hung up the phone.

"Emmett, Alice sees James at Bella's mother's house in Phoenix. Are you with us?" Carlisle asked him, already knowing the answer.

"Hell, yes!" Emmett agreed. "I'd hate for all this effort to end in nothing!"

"Then let's go," Carlisle directed.

I was already two miles gone.

Edward, when you reach SeaTac, get us three seats on the first flight to Phoenix. We'll catch up with you after we retrieve the bags we tossed at Starbucks.

"Done," I said to myself, knowing I was too far away for Carlisle to hear me.

We were on our way to Phoenix and that was the best we could do. I knew that Jasper and Alice were capable of protecting Bella until we got there, and that James wouldn't even try to get past them to hurt her, but still, I was nervous. Worse than nervous, actually, I was distraught. I couldn't get to Phoenix fast enough. My brother and sister were bringing Bella to the airport to meet us. We would arrive and there she'd be, no delay. It was a small blessing.

Edward, how do you want to proceed when we get there? Carlisle asked me from across the aisle.

"Get Bella out!"

And her mother?

"After I take Bella away, everyone converges on Renee's house and takes care of him. And the female too, if she's there."

And what if it's a trick? Perhaps you shouldn't go alone.

"Three on James, two guarding Bella?"

It seems prudent, Edward. Jasper, Emmett, and Alice can handle James, or even James and Victoria. I would come with you. Or Jasper could, but he might resist leaving Alice.

"Yes, he would."

What do you make of the mirrored room? Carlisle was trying to distract me, but I didn't mind.

"Nothing at all. Where are there mirrored rooms?"

Clothing stores, gyms.

"Hmm...ladies' boudoirs, dressing rooms." I was remembering the old vaudeville houses turned movie theaters with their red velvet curtains, opulent wall decorations, chandeliers, and "resting rooms," that contained brocade or velvet chaises longue, and lots of mirrors for ladies to use while "powdering their noses."

Hotel rooms, banquet halls, Carlisle continued with the list.

“Dance studios, spas.”

Halls of mirrors.

“The mirrored room is a hall of mirrors.”

But no funhouse.

“It gets us nowhere.” Impatience and frustration overcame me, and I retreated inside my head for the duration.

Unlike a human who might fidget, or pace, or talk excessively, a vampire under severe stress goes still...dead still...the kind of unnatural stillness that humans notice. I sat in my seat, inert, for some time before Emmett, sitting next to me, took notice and kicked my foot. The force would have broken a human ankle, but I couldn't be bothered to respond. He waited for ten seconds, then elbowed me with a pointed thrust that would have shattered a mortal's arm. Again, I barely noticed. Irritated, and determined to snap me out of my statue-like state, he began cursing in a voice too low for human ears...the crudest, filthiest curse words and combinations I'd ever heard, some I hadn't heard, and some whose meanings were a complete mystery to me.

It did the trick. I blinked several times and inhaled sharply. I must have looked like a mannequin coming to life. Across the aisle, Carlisle was pretending to sleep. I glanced over and saw the corner of his mouth twitch upward in amusement. Mine curved up slightly too.

Good old Emmett. My brother could be relied upon to drag me out of myself. Still, I was impatient. The minutes crawled by.

Then all of a sudden, I was desperate for time to stop so that somehow I could alter what was happening at that very minute. As our plane approached the airport runway, preparing to touch down, I heard Alice's frantic mental voice.

Edward! She's gone! She's gone! She's gone to meet him!! Oh Edward, I am so sorry! Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!

I leaped to my feet in panic, wrenching the seatbelt from its mooring with a clean snap. Emmett, his hand lightning fast, grabbed my shoulder and bounced me back down into the seat. It was unlikely that the human passengers had noticed. My movement would have looked like a blur of color, if anyone had noticed it at all.

Edward, what is it?!

What's wrong?!

Both Carlisle and Emmett hurled alarmed questions at me.

I spoke so quickly that only my family could understand the words.

“It's Alice. She says Bella's meeting him! HE'S GOT BELLA!”

How?

Where?

But I was listening for Alice's thoughts, trying to glean anything I could. I had never felt such terror in my long existence.

...ballet studio in Scottsdale, corner of 58th Street and Cactus. It's around the corner from her mother's house. I've got a car.

I saw a map image moving through Alice's mind... the airport, then Phoenix proper, then northeast Phoenix to Scottsdale, 58th Street and Cactus. Alice couldn't know whether I was hearing her thoughts, so she repeated everything from the beginning. I made sure I received it all before retelling Carlisle and Emmett. Now I was *frantic* to escape this

suffocating tin torpedo and find Bella.

“Carlisle, I’m going to run off the plane. Alice has a car waiting.”

“Yes, Edward. We’ll be right behind you.”

“How did he get her, Edward?” Emmett asked.

“She’s meeting him, that’s all I know. He must have tricked her somehow.”

“But how did she get away from Jasper and Alice?” Emmett pressed.

“I don’t know, I don’t know...” I anguished.

The plane was pulling into the gate—finally! What were they doing now? *Open the doors already!*

“Carlisle, I’m gone!” I timed my leap from the seat so that I was at the exit hatch the instant it opened, and was through it before the flight attendant had turned around. Thank goodness for our first-class seats! I never would have gotten out of coach so fast without hurting someone. I raced through the concourse, not being careful, not caring who saw me. It wasn’t like anyone could catch me or even identify who I was.

Emmett and Carlisle followed my lead, escaping the plane quickly—I heard them running through the concourse not far behind me. I exited the airport terminal at the arrivals level, where Alice and Jasper were waiting at the curb in what I knew to be a very capable Cadillac sedan. I slid behind the wheel as Alice bounced into Jasper’s lap on the passenger’s side. Carlisle and Emmett stuffed themselves into the back seat, yanking the doors closed as I stomped on the gas pedal.

Please, if there is a God, let me not be too late!

I drove that Cadillac like a rocket through Phoenix, running every red light and dodging the other vehicles on the road. I remained silent. There was no point in chastising Alice—she was as terrified for Bella as I was. She was explaining in a stricken voice how Bella had tricked her and Jasper to make her escape. Her words tumbled over one another as she spoke. I saw the ending to the story in her mind before she’d finished telling it to Carlisle and Emmett.

“I saw that she might get separated from us, so we were watching her every move. We’d smelled James’ scent outside the airport and I thought he might make a grab for her. When she asked Jasper to escort her to breakfast, I started seeing her separated from us, but I didn’t realize it was her decision and not James’ that was changing the images. At the last moment, when Jasper agreed to wait for her outside the ladies room, I finally saw the outcome, but I couldn’t get there fast enough to warn Jasper. It still seemed okay, because I saw that we’d catch her at the taxi stand, but she jumped on a passing shuttle bus at the last second and that’s when I knew he would get her.”

Hearing that, I roared in rage and helplessness.

Alice was practically babbling now, spilling everything that came into her head.

“With this car, there’s a chance we can get there in time to catch her. It depends on how fast we get through traffic to Scottsdale. Oh, hurry, Edward, hurry...!” she cried, then continued her story without pausing.

“You were due to land any minute, so I grabbed this Cadillac out of short-term parking. Carlisle’s Mercedes is buried in the bowels of the long-term parking lot. But I always think it’s better, anyway, to do any major speeding and dangerous maneuvers in a stolen car.”

I was half listening to Alice’s words and half reading other details in her mind. I could see that Bella had been terribly distraught and frightened. Despite that, she had been

clever in escaping her guardians. We had to assume that James was holding Bella's mother hostage. There was no other explanation that made any sense whatsoever.

That coward, James!! Tormenting defenseless humans for his amusement! It was no wonder I loathed what I was, when such as he were among my kind. He would kill Renee anyway. Two for one—I was sure he wouldn't bother to save one for the other.

I focused on getting to 58th and Cactus as quickly as possible, pulling any stunt that would help. I drove on sidewalks, raced through alleyways, and ignored one-way street signs to bypass traffic clogs. I didn't slow down for corners and we rose up on two wheels more than once. Even while driving like a "bat out of hell"—that phrase *must* be somehow connected to vampire lore—there was plenty of space in my mind to compile a list of the one hundred most excruciating ways to destroy James. It was a good outlet for my rage until I got to James and could tear him apart, limb from limb.

In another part of my mind, I was desperately begging whatever superior being might exist to save Bella, not to take her away so soon after I had found her. *To please spare her life—I would sacrifice anything...anything...including myself.*

Finally, I was planning how I would end my own life if...I was too late. I had realized with utter clarity during this ordeal that I could not continue if Bella did not.

It takes a vampire to kill a vampire. From Carlisle's experience, I knew a vampire could not kill himself. My family would not help me, so I'd have to find another vampire to do it. If we caught James, and Bella was already...gone, perhaps he would oblige me. But if my brothers got their hands on him first, he would be dead before he could kill me. Still, I would find a way, if need be. I cared nothing for my life without Bella. And if not James, then perhaps the Volturi—they could be provoked. I would go to Italy.

The time for chasing such eventualities was ending. We were on 58th Street and approaching Cactus. *There! There it was! The dance studio!* Part of my mind veered off to wonder why he had chosen this place. Why not Renee's house if he were holding Renee hostage? Perhaps he thought we could find him there, but not here. He seemed to know about my telepathy, but perhaps he didn't know of Alice's precognition.

I could not hear Renee's mind in the vicinity. That did not bode well. Of course, I could not hear Bella's mind, either, but I heard James's evil thoughts. He was enjoying his game, toying with me by tormenting Bella.

Was she still alive?? *Please God, let me not be too late! Listen...listen...YES!* I could hear one heart beating, but no human thoughts. It must be her! Did that mean Renee was already gone? How would Bella cope...?

"Bella's alive!" I exclaimed, a flicker of hope returning, though I could not yet be certain. Renee could be unconscious and Bella could be...

"And James is here!" A deep growl began to rumble in my chest, when a memory—James' memory—burst into my head. It was the sound of Bella's shin bone shattering when he stomped on it, and her tortured scream.

"HE'S HURT BELLA!"

Our tires squealed around the last corner and screeched to a halt in the parking lot. I leapt out and ran, dragging the car door with me for a few feet before I remembered to let go. Jasper and Emmett were on my heels and Carlisle and Alice were on theirs. I crashed through the double doors of the studio, forearms first, smashing them into splinters. And everywhere, in every direction, I saw reflected images of *HIM* in the mirrors. He was crouched over Bella—*MY BELLA!*

“JAMES!!” I thundered, loud enough to rattle windows in the neighborhood.

He raised his head in time to see me coming, then lunged at Bella, his teeth bared. I was on him in a fraction of a second, my arm whistling through the air, bashing his head with the thunderous sound of granite crushing granite. His body flew across the room and crashed into a mirrored wall, an explosion of mirror shards falling around him.

I leapt on the villain before he could rise. Unable to contain my fury, I gripped his throat in my hands and pounded his head into the floor, over and over. The wood was splintered and the concrete below pulverized to grit before James got an angle to kick me off. He leaped up, sneering, his head dented, his body crouched and circling, his arms stretched outward in defense. I faced off with him as he feinted toward me, anticipating each of his movements with my own. Distracted by my threat, he didn't see Emmett and Jasper as they leapt on him from behind, each grabbing an arm. They would tear him to pieces. I hoped they would work slowly.

It was then that my mind fully registered the scent filling the room—the sweet aroma of Bella's blood. Fear gripped me. *Was she lost?* Rushing to her, I saw she was lying in a crumpled heap amidst mirror shards floating in a pool of her blood. One leg was twisted into an improbable angle below her knee.

“Oh no, Bella, no!” I cried, shock and horror knocking my legs out from under me. I collapsed at her side.

Carlisle was already there, kneeling near Bella's head. Alice stood stunned and immobile at her feet. As I began to grasp what James had done to her, rage and fear dissolved into despair. How had I let this happen?

“Bella, please! Bella, listen to me, please, please, Bella, please!”

Perhaps if I begged and pleaded hard enough she would stay with me. But she gave no indication that she could hear or feel anything now.

“Carlisle!” I cried, begging for a miracle. He squeezed my arm encouragingly, then continued his methodical examination of her injuries.

Some part of my mind heard the demise of the sadistic vampire behind us—the vicious growling, the wrenching metallic sound, and the final, fatal screeching—but it meant nothing to me in my anguish.

“Bella, Bella, no, oh please, no, no!” My body was wracked with the torment of the soulless creature who has no right to pray and no tears to weep.

Then through her paralysis, she sucked in a great whoosh of air and released it in a wretched sound of suffering, neither a word nor a scream, but eloquent of raw pain. The sound was torturous.

“Bella!”

“She's lost some blood, but the head wound isn't deep,” Carlisle reassured me. “Watch out for her leg, it's broken.”

A guttural howl of fury and pain escaped me.

“Some ribs, too, I think,” Carlisle added, calmly taking inventory of her bones.

Again, I howled, my body shaking and shuddering.

“Edward.” The word, barely recognizable, floated on the air. Somehow, Bella had reached out from her darkness and called my name! It was the miracle I'd prayed for.

“Bella, you're going to be fine. Can you hear me, Bella? I love you.”

“Edward,” she said again, more clearly.

“Yes, I'm here.”

“It hurts.”

“I know, Bella, I know,” I cried, my heart wrenching in two. To Carlisle, I complained impatiently, “Can’t you do anything?”

“My bag please... Hold your breath, Alice, it will help,” Carlisle advised, noticing her tight grimace as she wiped blood from Bella’s face.

“Alice?” Bella moaned.

“She’s here,” I answered for her in her distress. “She knew where to find you.”

“My hand hurts,” Bella slurred.

“I know, Bella. Carlisle will give you something, it will stop.”

Suddenly she screamed out. “My hand is BURNING!”

Her eyes snapped open, blood from her head wound pooling around her lids.

“Bella?” I didn’t understand. Was she hallucinating?

“The fire! Someone stop the fire!” she screamed again, trying to be understood.

Her pain tortured me. I grabbed her hands and scanned them for an overlooked wound—and then I saw it. I gasped, horrified. For there, in a pattern etched in blood, were the unmistakable bite marks of the recently deceased James.

“Carlisle! Her hand!”

“He bit her.” Carlisle echoed my thought in a stunned voice.

“Edward, you have to do it,” Alice stated matter-of-factly as she tried to wipe more blood from Bella’s eyes, while resisting her—undoubtedly, fierce—desire.

“No!” I roared. What was she saying? I would not steal Bella’s life! But had James already done that with his bite? No! No! No!

“Alice,” Bella cried, as if in supplication.

Then Carlisle shocked us both.

“There may be a chance,” he said as he continued methodically plucking glass from Bella’s bloody head wound.

“What?” I exclaimed, ready to grasp at any straw.

“See if you can suck the venom back out,” he directed, quashing my fledgling hope with his ludicrous words. “The wound is fairly clean.” He spoke calmly as if his insane suggestion were possible.

“Will that work?” Alice asked, surprised. The idea intrigued her, but also intensified her thirst. Despite that, she was coping remarkably well with the mouth-watering fragrance that saturated the air.

“I don’t know,” Carlisle admitted. “But we have to hurry.”

I was astounded, thunderstruck, by the thought of pressing my lips to Bella’s wound and pulling her warm, sweet blood into my mouth. Hadn’t I dreamed of this?

Ahh! My throat was in flames. And then I was horrified, ashamed, repulsed by my own monstrous nature.

“Carlisle, I....I don’t know if I can do that.” My voice stuttered and broke. It was degrading—mortifying—to admit my weakness, even to myself.

“It’s your decision, Edward, either way. I can’t help you. I have to get this bleeding stopped here if you’re going to be taking blood from her hand.”

A Solomon’s choice! There must be no God! How could a higher being persecute me thus?

In that moment, as my mind wrestled with this excruciating dilemma and its potentially fatal outcome, my choice was made for me when Bella screamed.

“Edward!” Her agony was palpable. As much as I wished to keep her alive, I wished not to hear that tortured cry again. I *must* end her suffering, even if—*God forgive me!*—she never suffered again.

Carlisle’s authoritative voice rang out.

“Alice, get me something to brace her leg!” Then he said, “Edward, you must do it now, or it will be too late.”

No choice...no choice...no choice...I can do this...I can do this...I must do this...I must do this...I will do this! I will...! I chanted the words in my head.

With doomed determination, I clutched Bella’s hand in both of mine and pulled the abominable bite wound toward my mouth. My trembling lips touched her skin, followed by the teeth of the monster, sinking in, reopening her wound. Swooning, I began to suck her sweet, sweet blood onto my tongue.

The taste! I moaned deeply as I drew her into my body. My throat was met with a soothing balm of ecstasy. Her blood was more potent than I had ever dreamed. My thoughts became incoherent, disconnected, as my unholy desire raged.

Want...her...more...her...all...mine...her...her...me... As I sunk into that velvet well of no return, Bella screamed and thrashed, struggling against the searing pain of James’ venom—and now mine—burning in her veins. Carlisle and Alice held her still, like a sacrifice, as I continued to draw passionately on her precious blood... filling me, soothing me. It was a heaven I’d never imagined, this pulsing of Bella’s essence into me. It was a place I would gladly go to die. And yet, I recognized somewhere at the back of my dim awareness that her glorious flavor was tainted, first by the enemy’s venom and now by the bitter note of opiates, as Carlisle’s morphine injection spread through Bella’s body.

The corruption of the foreign substance in her blood slowed, but did not stop, me. It did stop her screaming and her eyes fluttered closed, but she fought her way back to the surface and whispered my name.

“Edward.”

“He’s right here, Bella,” Alice’s musical voice rang out, as if I, and not the monster, were crouched over my love.

But I had heard my name on her lips. It was another kind of desire fulfilled... something deep, deeper than the bloodlust. It pulled me back from the abyss, granted me a pinprick of lucidity.

I must wean myself from Bella’s lifeblood, a part of me recognized, but the monster was strong. *So strong!*

Carlisle, sensing my torment, settled his strong, reassuring hand on my shoulder. He spoke silently to me, protecting Bella from his words. *You must stop now, Edward, or she will die. Find the will, my son. Find the will.*

From some buried reserve I didn’t know was in me, I located a kernel of resolve. I clung to it and, with a herculean effort, wrestled her hand from my lethal mouth. I laid it down at her side slowly and deliberately.

“Stay, Edward, stay with me...,” Bella begged as she felt me detach from her. She did not know what she asked.

“I will,” I choked out, the flavor of her still thick on my tongue, in my throat. My love for her had achieved the impossible—it had released Bella from the monster’s grip.

“Is it all out?” Carlisle inquired.

“Her blood tastes clean. I can taste the morphine,” I replied, chastened by my

hideous inclinations, but relieved to have overcome them at the critical moment.

“Bella?” Carlisle disturbed her drug-induced fog.

“Mmmmm?”

“Is the fire gone?”

“Yes...thank you Edward,” she uttered dreamily.

“I love you,” I said, my voice shaky.

“I know.”

Such audacity. I laughed with joy and relief.

“Bella?” Carlisle pressed.

She scowled, intent on drifting off to sleep. “What?”

“Where is your mother?”

She sighed. “In Florida. He tricked me, Edward. He watched our videos.”

“Alice,” Bella continued. “Alice, the video—he knew you, Alice, he knew where you came from.” Her voice was softly floating.

The startled look on Alice’s face turned to consternation then to wonder. She looked at me with curious, but frightened, eyes. I raised my eyebrows in astonishment.

“I smell gasoline,” Bella croaked.

It was our duty to destroy all evidence of our presence here. Emmett and Jasper had ripped out some floorboards, soaked them in gasoline siphoned from the car, and set them on fire, tossing the bits and pieces of James into the flames. A dense, almost animate, lavender smoke snaked upward from his pyre. My heart was glad...and relieved.

“It’s time to move her,” Carlisle stated.

“No, I want to sleep,” Bella whined.

“You can sleep, sweetheart, I’ll carry you.”

Very gently, I picked her up and cradled her to my chest, happy that she was alive...happy I had let her live.

“Sleep now, Bella,” I soothed, as her eyelids closed.