After my emotional breakdown of the previous night and Bella’s shock at seeing herself lactate, we’d spent a long night trying to talk through what was happening. I was roundly ashamed of myself for losing control the way I had, but Bella assured me that I hadn’t hurt her. She said that I was so used to treating her like a porcelain doll that what I considered to be “handling her roughly” was completely within the realm of normal human-to-human contact. I wasn’t sure I believed her, but it didn’t matter. Even if I hadn’t hurt her, I’d been way too out-of-control to have been “handling” her at all. I didn’t know what had come over me.

Bella thought she did, though. With her head on my chest, she’d spoken softly as if soothing the proverbial irritated grizzly.

“Edward, you’re furious that I won’t end this pregnancy. You think I’m risking my life and it’s hurting you that you have no say. Of course, you’re angry. Of course, you want to hurt me back.”

I buried my face in her hair. “No, Bella, no…no, I swear I don’t want to hurt you. I’d rather…”

“I know, darling,” Bella interrupted, stroking my hand. “It’s just a part of you that you weren’t aware of, I think. I don’t blame you…it’s natural, in a way.”

“Stop making excuses for me, please,” I begged. “I lost control of myself and that is unacceptable and I can’t tell you enough how sorry I am. I think I just lost my mind a little bit thinking of losing you…” My voice trailed off into that unhappy place I remembered so well.

“It’s completely understandable, Edward. And besides, you didn’t hurt me. You needed to get it out of your system and I know you’ll make it up to me later.” Bella smirked.

She was saying that she’d forgiven me, though I didn’t know if I could forgive myself—or trust myself with her while that “thing” was inside her. I just knew in my heart that it was not good, that at the rate it was growing, it could not be good in any way for Bella. It was then that I understood that I hadn’t been trying to hurt Bella…I’d been trying to destroy the “thing.” In an utterly irrational way, I’d declared war on it.

Understanding why I’d lost control with my precious wife didn’t make me feel any better about it, but it did ensure that I wouldn’t do it again. If I really wanted to get rid of the cancerous thing, that was no way to accomplish it.

After we talked about our predicament until neither of us could talk about it anymore, I had made it up to Bella, giving her everything she wanted from me precisely as she wanted it for as long as she wanted it. It wasn’t exactly a hardship. She’d finally passed
out in the same manner as she had the first night of our honeymoon. That was not a hardship either. Altogether, it almost made me forget how upset I’d been earlier.

It was a good thing that Emmett had been out hunting. At least Alice and Jasper would be discrete about anything they might have heard. Alice had been practicing her English to Korean translations so that I wouldn’t be bothered by her thoughts while making love with my wife. It was extremely considerate of her. Jasper, knowing how stressed out Bella and I were, had been promoting a calm, serene environment. That was kind too, though it didn’t solve anything. I wondered whether Bella and I would ever get to move into the private cottage that was Bella’s wedding present from the family. Work had slowed down on it since we’d returned home earlier than expected.

The following morning, Carlisle asked Bella and me to come to his office. Rosalie tagged along suspiciously. While we were flying home from Brazil, Carlisle not only had started researching Bella’s condition, but also had arranged for the delivery of extra medical equipment. During the night, he had reorganized his office to make room for an exam table and a portable sonogram machine—a great idea.

Bella had agreed to the sonogram. Like all of us, she wanted to see what was inside her, though she was happily excited about it, while I was filled with trepidation. At Bella’s invitation, Rosalie stood impatiently by her side, waiting for “the baby” to appear on the video screen.

First, Carlisle tried the standard exterior approach, moving the sonic transducer along Bella’s abdomen which had been smeared with copious amounts of conducting gel. The image was odd. Where one normally would see a fan-shaped hollow with shadows moving through it as the probe was repositioned, we could see only a semicircular band of white…nothing. I was not experienced at reading sonogram images, but even an amateur could tell that this wasn’t the expected outcome.

Carlisle asked Bella if he could try a transvaginal approach and she (blushing) agreed, still hoping to catch a glimpse of “the baby.” He and Rosalie left the room after he handed Bella a sheet for covering herself and showed her the probe that she was to insert before calling him back. Bella followed them out to visit the bathroom first.

When she returned, Bella removed her sweatpants and panties, then picked up the probe and handed it to me before arranging herself under the sheet. I visited the covered end of her and ducked my head beneath the cloth. She laughed at my theatrics. The view was lovely…my voluptuous wife naked below the waist with her knees up and spread apart, Carlisle’s rolling stool providing a close-up view. I couldn’t help myself…I leaned forward and kissed her on her sensitive spot.

“Mmm…mmm,” she moaned softly. If my family hadn’t been waiting, I would have enjoyed lingering under the sheet for a time. Instead, I placed the lubricated probe at the pink entrance to Bella’s vagina and pushed it gently inside of her. Being pregnant had made her so erotically charged that she reached to touch herself, despite our nearby audience. The thrill of watching her was almost more than I could stand without leaping.
onto the table with her. She spasmcd hard, though quietly, and when I emerged from beneath the sheet, I saw that blood had rushed into her cheeks and lips, turning them a luscious pink as well. Beautiful.

After Bella took a moment to compose herself and let her heart rate settle, I called for Carlisle. Wisely, he and Rosalie had retreated downstairs. Giving newlyweds plenty of space was just considered good manners in our house...having lived with Emmett and Rosalie for so long had trained all of us. After seventy-plus years, they still behaved like newlyweds.

Carlisle reached under the sheet and rotated the probe this way and that inside of Bella, looking for recognizable images to appear on the screen, but it was obvious to all of us that there was some kind of shield blocking the fetus from view. Carlisle asked Bella if he could examine her internally and she agreed. While I held my wife’s hand and Rosalie stood nearby, he reached beneath the sheet with one hand and placed the other on Bella’s bulge. A look of puzzlement crossed my father’s face when he pressed down on Bella’s abdomen to palpate her internal organs.

“What is it?” Bella asked anxiously when she saw his perplexity. He pressed and concentrated for a few more seconds before withdrawing his hand from beneath the sheet and peeling off his latex gloves.

“Well, nothing like I’ve ever seen before, that’s for certain,” Carlisle replied, “but probably nothing to worry about. It seems that there is a hard shell around the fetus that is impervious to sonogram imaging…it’s too dense to allow sound waves through.

“What does that mean?” Rosalie asked, before Bella could ask the question herself. I scowled at her for being intrusive.

“It appears that the membrane surrounding the fetus is made of a harder material than usual. I can only assume that it is a protective shield of vampire-like skin.”

Bella gasped and put her hand over her mouth, then recovered quickly.

“I guess that makes sense,” she said thoughtfully, glancing at me. “The baby is half vampire, after all.”

“That’s true,” my father replied. “It’s just inconvenient because we can’t get any kind of image through the barrier. Would you consent to an amniocentesis?”

“Is that where you stick a needle into the sac around the baby and pull out fluid?” Bella asked.

“Essentially, yes.”

“Absolutely not,” Rosalie replied for Bella. “What difference would that make, anyway?” I scowled at my sister again. Bella was interested in Carlisle’s answer.

“It might not make any difference. If the membrane is dense enough to prevent sound waves bouncing through it, it might also be too hard for a needle to pass through.”

“And even if you did,” Rosalie cut in, “how would that help you know that the baby is okay?”

“It would let me analyze the fetus’s DNA and perhaps discover something of its
nature. Or maybe not. It’s not a certainty.”
“But medically, it wouldn’t really do anything for Bella, right?” Rosalie pressed.
“Nothing directly, but in nonstandard pregnancies, it’s often useful to simply gather
as much information as possible. Sometimes different pieces fit together to reveal more
about the whole. I would compare its DNA to both yours and Edward’s, Bella, and look for
any obvious genetic anomalies.”
“Well, I definitely fit into the nonstandard pregnancy category,” Bella joked. I
squeezed her hand.
“I say ‘no,’ Bella. It might hurt the baby, for no good reason,” Rosalie asserted. In
her mind, I could also see she was worried that Carlisle would find something seriously
wrong with it and then Bella might agree to an abortion.
“Carlisle,” Bella said, “do you think a needle would penetrate the membrane?”
“That’s a good question. It would have to be a somewhat large needle, most likely
heavy steel.”
“If you think it would really help, I can do it,” Bella said, “but it does sound rather
painful for not much benefit.”
“We’d use a local anesthetic, but it can be uncomfortable,” Carlisle replied. “It’s up
to you.”
“Don’t do it,” Rosalie commanded. “What if it hurts the baby? You know he’s alive
and growing, because you can feel him move. What else is there to know?”
I hissed a warning at Rosalie. She was behaving as if this were her decision, not
Bella’s and, peripherally, mine.
Bella looked at me uncertainly and said, “I do agree with Rose, Edward. I’m not
anxious to take any more risks than necessary.”
“But what if it’s a risk not to know something we could find out from the
procedure?”
“I guess it’s a risk either way, but it just frightens me to think of having a needle
poke around near the baby. I don’t want to chance it.”
I stroked Bella’s forehead and nodded, then glanced at Carlisle.
“Okay, you can let me know later if you change your mind,” he said, as he prepared
to leave the room.
“Rose, let’s leave these two alone.” Carlisle motioned for Rosalie to lead the way
out of the room. With reluctance and a quick look at Bella, she did so.
Before I could move to help Bella sit up, she propped herself on her elbows and
cought my eyes with hers. Peripherally, I could see that she was easing the sheet up her
calves and over her knees slowly, higher and higher. I couldn’t help but look as she teased
me with another brief, but fine, view of what lay beneath. When I tore my eyes back to her
face, she grinned and wagged her eyebrows at me, her silly expression making me smile.
Despite all the tension and anxiety, we were still newlyweds. Leaning over to kiss her, I
reached under the sheet and heard the suddenly frantic racing of her heartbeat. She
wrapped her arms tightly around my neck and I picked her up then, sheet and all, and dashed her up to our third-floor bedroom.

I had profoundly mixed feelings about Bella’s pregnancy and was suspicious that no matter what happened to her or what we discovered about the fetus, she was not going to give it up. I had to come to terms with what that would mean for her, for me, and for our future together, but one thing was certain right now—Bella was extremely lusty since this pregnancy had taken hold. If she had her way, she would make love with me continually, maybe taking time out now and then to eat and sleep. It was the only aspect of this situation that I could be happy about.

I appreciated our family’s giving us space to be alone together. If this fetus survived to be born, then we would have much less time to enjoy each other privately, and if it didn’t, well…Bella’s health might be at issue. It might be at issue anyway. It was a huge worry, but I set it aside for the moment.

When I laid her on the bed, Bella took the lead. She pulled me down and kissed me, unbuttoning my shirt as she did so. Her hands didn’t hesitate at the bottom, but continued with the buttons of my trousers. I tried to stop thinking about the fetus, the pregnancy, and our future, and just allow her to use me as she would. But that wasn’t what she had in mind.

When I pulled up her sweatshirt, she raised her arms over her head so I could remove it, but when I ducked down to kiss her breasts, she put her hands on my cheeks and pulled my head back up. She kissed me again, and then started moving her lips down my body. She wanted to do something for me. I wondered if she was, in part, trying to make up for the pain she knew she was causing me by clinging to her potentially life-threatening pregnancy.

I touched the long dark locks that flowed down her bare back as she stroked my chest and tried sucking on my nipples. Her lips almost tickled, they were so soft against my skin, but the tickling was nice. Her hands smoothed their way across my belly, into the small of my back, and downward onto my buttocks, and then between them, running her fingers across a place I’d never been touched. It aroused me and I reached to pull her onto me, but she resisted. She kissed her way farther down, watching my face as she slowly took me to her mouth. I pressed my head back into the mattress and moaned in pleasure.

Her fingers were touching me everywhere, stroking and tickling as her lips moved around me, over and over. Slowly, inexorably, the tension mounted until I ached to let go. I held back when it occurred to me that I didn’t know if this was safe for Bella. Was semen venomous? Then I remembered an image of Rosalie (ugh!) in Emmett’s mind, stroking him this way. It must be okay…but then, Rosalie wasn’t human. Bella was obviously not concerned.

Then all of a sudden, neither was I.

Ahhhh! My body surrendered to her coaxing in a whoosh of intense pleasure. I lay there stunned and immobilized, overcome by the extremity of the sensation. In all the moments of a man’s life, this must be his most vulnerable time, I thought. Delilah didn’t
have to wait for Samson to fall asleep. I could hardly have been more helpless if I were unconscious.

Well, at least this wouldn’t impregnate her, I thought wryly when I had partially recovered my senses.

Bella was slowly working her way back up my body with her hands and lips, already accustomed to one benefit of my species—no recovery time required. Crouching above me, she guided me into her and slowly lowered herself. Her heat was almost searing. I rose impatiently, too aroused to remain passive. I had to move, to take some control. I had so little, it seemed.

I slid us down to the bottom of the bed. Bella looked into my eyes, wondering, and I stroked her cheek and then her lips with my fingers. She took my first two fingers into her mouth and sucked on them like a lollipop, watching my expression.

After a moment, I lifted my voluptuous wife off me and back onto the bed, then stood up and wrapped my arm around her waist, hoisting her onto her hands and knees. I pressed between her thighs from behind, then reached around and guided myself to her center, slowly pushing into her. She moaned a deep, guttural sound that mirrored my own.

My gawd! Entering her rearward was an entirely new experience…it so deep, so tight, so good. Bella rocked back and moaned loudly.

As I moved inside her, her beauty presented at a new angle, I abruptly hit the hard wall of the fetus’s shell and aggression surged through me. I froze. Sensing something was seriously wrong, Bella froze too, and then tried to scramble away. Instantly, I grabbed her waist and pulled her back. Though I might have done anything at that moment, I just held her there, her softness softening me, until the wave of anger and frustration subsided. My eyes stung with emotion.

Frightened at myself, but chastened, I curled around Bella’s back and pulled her tightly against me, cradling the protruding soccer ball in my hands. I stroked it, held it, and tried to love it as best I could. I felt a gentle movement beneath my hands and had the distinct impression the fetus was making itself known. I marveled at this terrifying miracle.

When the movements stopped, I ran my hands up the front of Bella’s fecund body, cupping her heavy breasts and squeezing her nipples simultaneously between my thumbs and forefingers. Bella squealed softly and began pushing back onto me, repeatedly stroking a particular spot inside her body. Something about the tightness of her deep inside, the way her pubic bone rubbed against me, or just the angle of the penetration took my breath away. I gulped air and tried to remain still to let Bella ride me from her hands and knees. I massaged her breasts and squeezed her nipples, feeling her deep muscles clench when I did. I pressed into her as far as I could when she orgasmed hard around me.

My hands were wet. I took my fingers to my mouth and licked them—mother’s milk. Something about that was highly erotic. I suppose it gave me a powerful feeling to have caused her body to change in such a profound way. I pressed deeply into her and massaged her breasts until I felt the last spasms inside her. Then I withdrew, easing her
down onto her left side so I could lie facing her with our legs intertwined. Her cheeks, lips, and nipples were bright pink, the color I loved. She looked so ripe, so lush and beautiful. I was simply awed by the changes in her. The stomach bulge had pushed her belly button outward and the blue veins beneath her skin pulsed full of blood. The miracle of conception. It was mind-blowing. Not your everyday experience for a vampire.

I leaned down and sucked on her right nipple and felt the warm fluid flow into my mouth. She moaned, seeming to take great pleasure in this. Nature’s way of encouraging a mother to feed her newborn child, I supposed. I ran my fingers through the crack between her buttocks and felt her moan vibrate through her chest. Wetting my fingers in her abundant fluid, I pressed my little finger against her sphincter muscle and felt her relax to let me in. I found her clitoris with my thumb and pulled at her nipples with my lips and tongue. Bella squeezed down on my finger and I pushed it deeper inside her. She moaned. I wanted to make her come again. My thumb moved at vampire speed, causing her to become paralyzed with pleasure. She started to spasm and I pushed into her feeling her muscles squeezing around me.

“Come, Bella,” I urged. Her body jerked roughly as her orgasm shook her inside and out, then I lost control as my body followed suit. I clamped my lips down on her right nipple and pulled at it. She cried out and I felt her shudder and shake inside.

“Bella, I love you,” I said softly, releasing her nipple for a short second, then resuming on the other side. She writhed in pleasure.

How could I have known this would be the last time?