

## Meeting Mike

*Sometimes things go wrong—the last day of November, 2015, things definitely went wrong. It was inevitable, really, living in the same area for so long. Even with our heightened senses, my ability to hear anyone’s mind from miles away, and our extended family watching and covering for us, it was bound to happen. Still, it was a shock.*

*It began with what Emmett refers to as the “grab ‘n’ smash” incident. Of course he heard it. Though Bella and I take care not to destroy our furniture, accidents happen. After nine years of intense use, I slipped up and our bed was reduced to a pile of rubble. Though Bella loathes shopping, she took on the task of replacing it with unusual vigor.*

*“Sometimes change is good,” she said as we drove to Seattle during the height of holiday shopping season to buy a new bedroom suite.*

*Traveling into familiar territory, it was always a possibility, and we took the usual precautions. We checked the weather forecast (nothing but clouds) and wore our celebrity disguises—hats and sunglasses—which, at best, were only partially successful at obscuring our appearance. We even drove the car, though Bella still loved to run everywhere.*



*I parked in the garage on Stewart Street, which connects to major department stores by tunnels and covered walkways. We scoured them all in search of the perfect items. Usually, it was less stressful to do this sort of thing when Alice was away. She grew bossier by the decade where family shopping was concerned, considering it her sole domain. On this occasion, though, we could have benefitted from her expertise.*

*Bella and I took to the streets, walking hand in hand—a casual, human couple’s stroll. We were in a crowd on 5th Avenue, but it felt like just the two of us, together and away from family.*

*By late afternoon, I was bored with our mission and being less attentive than I should have been. Plainly put, I didn’t hear it because I wasn’t listening for it. With Alice and Jasper away visiting Nahuel and his family in South America, my sister didn’t see it, or if she did, she had no way to warn us.*

*We rounded a corner and ran into Mike Newton. Mike Newton! I recognized the typically parochial train of his thoughts just before he looked up. In an instant, I grabbed Bella by the waist and leapt out of his field of vision, too quickly for his human eyes to process what he had seen. Thankfully, Bella went with it, no communication necessary. Body language said it all.*



*It was him, undeniably. Nine years had passed, and he had aged into what human females might consider an attractive man. He was fit and athletic-looking, slimmed down from the tub he’d reportedly been at the class reunion four years before. He wore a wedding band and, judging by his clothing, wasn’t doing badly for himself. He had grown and matured. Us, though, we hadn’t aged a day.*

*Someone walked beside him, but after our quick departure, the two shared no conversation. Mike’s mind had suddenly gone blank, no thoughts or words, just confusion rippling through.*

If I'd had a beating heart, it would have fisted in my chest as concern, fear, and frustration swept over me. Did he recognize us? Know without a doubt it was us? I remembered the countless times I'd wanted to kill him in high school—a shove down the stairs, a toss across biology class. I'd fantasized about snapping his neck on Bella's first day at school, the day my new life was set in motion, and on the last day I saw him, my wedding day, as he contemplated kissing my wife.

All were missed opportunities. Now I had to rifle through that long forgotten mind to determine what he might do next and whether we would have to act. I cursed myself for being careless when I should have had my guard up. What good was a mind reader who didn't bother to read minds?



Once we reached the car, I told Bella what had happened. Her expression mirrored my thoughts. What if...?

She waited in patient silence as I frantically searched—in my rush to get us

away, I'd lost him. I listened to voice after voice and scanned mind after mind until I finally located him. Then I picked through his thoughts and found only confusion. Nothing was clear. We were there for just a fraction of a second, barely enough time for him to notice our presence. He wasn't sure; he was questioning himself. To my great relief, his thoughts abruptly turned to getting home to his wife—and sex. I shook my head no and Bella relaxed as well.

This was our greatest fear—discovery. We risked so much by staying in the area and we knew it. The family often deliberated about what we

would do if someone recognized us. It never occurred to me that the someone might be Mike Newton. Killing him still appealed to me, though that would cause untold difficulties. The Quileute would have my head, not to mention Carlisle. But if Mike had recognized us before we fled the scene of our existence crime, we had to consider relocating.

Leaving was no longer the easy option it once was. We'd claimed the area. We were bound to it by family and by the fate that we tempted. This was our wakeup call. Our lives had to change—and soon.

We were lucky that time. Mike brushed off “the sighting” as a quirk of the mind, a figment of his imagination. We made our getaway so quickly he'd had no time to fully process our presence. He'd lost his edge. In years past, he never would have shaken it off. In years past, I was certain he had discovered what we were.

Time changes so much if you're human—or a mind reader who lets down his guard. I promised myself never to do so again.

Edward

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