

12. COMPLICATIONS—Part B

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It was well after midnight when I found myself slipping through Bella’s window. This was becoming a habit that, in the light of day, I knew I should attempt to curb. But after nighttime fell and I had hunted—for though these visits might be irresponsible, I was determined they not be reckless—all of my resolve quickly faded.

There she lay, the sheet and blanket coiled around her restless body, her feet bound up outside the covers. I inhaled deeply through my nose, welcoming the searing pain that coursed down my throat. As always, Bella’s bedroom was warm and humid and saturated with her scent. Venom flowed into my mouth and my muscles tensed in readiness. But for what? Could I ever train my body to give up this devilish reaction to my beloved’s smell? I feared not.

Cautiously, I held my breath and moved to her bedside. I untangled the bedclothes and spread them carefully over her again. She twitched suddenly, her legs scissoring as she rolled to her other side. I froze.

“Edward,” she breathed. “Please.”

The thrill of hearing her call my name had not diminished. If only I could know what she wished of me. I would do almost anything to give her what she wanted.

My fingers burned at the memory of touching her skin. The sensation flashed up my arm and across my chest, causing me to inhale sharply. The breath carried the electric burn through my midsection and lower, spreading downward in a rush.

Aaahhh...the pain, the pleasure...a confusing mixture. Hastily, I retreated to the corner rocking chair to calm myself. A new level of urgency had been unleashed in my body. The electrical charge between Bella and myself continued to awaken my dormant human side.

Our plans for Saturday began to seem more and more reckless as I measured my growing desires against Alice’s visions. How selfish would I prove to be when I had Bella alone, with no witnesses to curb my appetites? It was a mistake, a huge mistake, even to consider pursuing this path—it was taunting the monster.

Bella’s breath quickened and she spoke, “I’m okay...miss you.” The endless rain drummed on the roof. Neither of us was at peace tonight.

As usual, the hours passed like minutes as I sat, fascinated, watching her eyelids flutter, her hands twitch, her feet kick. I heard my name several times, but the context was unclear. Once she softly said, “Perfect,” and I longed to know her dream.

As dawn approached, Bella seemed to relax and settle. I tread silently to her bedside, tidied her covers, then carefully...so carefully...pulled a wayward lock of hair away from her eyes and smoothed it behind her ear. Resisting the urge to stroke her creamy white cheek, I thrust my restless hands into the pockets of my trousers and stepped back.

Recalling an earlier curiosity, I knelt on the floor and examined the stack of books lying near her bed. Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, a trio of Shakespeare’s plays, the compendium of Jane Austen novels which had frustrated her that afternoon outside, a book of Flannery O’Connor short stories, and Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. I recognized several titles from the junior’s English reading list, but noted the others she had collected. She seemed to prefer classic authors closer to my era than her own. I shuffled through a stack of CDs sitting on her bedside table, smiling to learn we had musical, as well as

literary, preferences in common.

When the sun pushed its way up near the horizon, I reluctantly left through the window and raced home to change clothes for school. I longed for a day, an impossible day, when I never would be compelled to leave her side.

After changing and retrieving my car, I drove aimlessly around Forks as I awaited Charlie's departure and the appointed time to meet Bella for the drive to school. I felt drained, but oddly lighter, by the outpouring of secrets I had divulged yesterday. It was time to turn the focus away from me and back onto Bella. I began enumerating questions in my head. It seemed impossible to discover all there was to know about another person without the benefit of mind reading. How did unendowed souls ever accomplish it? There weren't enough hours in a day to ask everything that I wanted to know.

Bella approached my car with a slight hesitation before climbing in. I wondered if she were remembering the electrical charge between us the afternoon before. It had lingered all night with me, though she had been asleep and dreaming.

"Good morning. How are you today?" I examined her face closely for any trace of memory from the preceding night.

"Fine," she replied, though the dark rings under her eyes spoke clearly of her restless sleep.

"You look tired."

"I couldn't sleep," she said, hiding her face behind her hair.

I chuckled. "Neither could I."

She laughed at the joke.

"I guess that's right. I suppose I slept just a little bit more than you did."

"I'll wager you did." *And dreamed your private dreams. I wish I could have joined you there,* I thought.

"So what did you do last night?" she asked. Did she sense something of my secret life? Regardless, I could not allow her to glean more information from me while I still had so many unanswered questions.

"Not a chance. It's my day to ask questions," I insisted.

"Oh that's right," she allowed reluctantly. "What do you want to know?" I could tell that this was a trial to her in some way, as she wrinkled her forehead and frowned. I would start with some easy ones.

"What's your favorite color?" She rolled her eyes and sighed.

"It changes from day to day." So, she had a changing favorite. Could a changing favorite really be called a favorite? I let it go.

"What's your favorite color today?" I pressed. She wasn't going to dodge me all day.

"Probably brown."

I snorted. "Brown?" *Brown?* Isn't brown just a muddling of all the other colors together? Her mind baffled me.

"Sure. Brown is warm. I *miss* brown. Everything that's supposed to be brown—tree trunks, rocks, dirt—is all covered up with squashy green stuff here." (Once, in her sleep, she had said, "It's too green." Now I understood.)

I considered her milk-chocolate eyes, which were hidden behind her mahogany hair and changed my mind, "You're right. Brown is warm."

My hand launched itself, unbidden, to touch her hair, as it had done during the

night. *Oops, don't startle her.* I slowed my hand, but allowed myself to smooth her hair behind her shoulder, unveiling her face. Her tantalizing scent wafted through the close air. I inhaled deeply and flinched at the scorching of my throat.

At Forks High School, I pulled the Volvo into an empty space and turned off the engine. "What music is in your CD player right now?" My question was disingenuous, since I'd peeked last night.

She named the hard-rock CD I played whenever I needed to blast away my own thoughts or those of others around me. On that awful afternoon, back from Alaska, when I'd fled biology class to escape the temptation of Bella's blood, I had huddled in my car blasting this CD to drown out the monster. I wondered if Bella had been drowning out demons of her own—this music was so different from anything else she owned. I pulled my copy of the CD from under my seat and smiled at her, hoping she might comment on the coincidence.

"Debussy to this?" I questioned, but Bella kept her thoughts to herself as we exited the car and walked to class.

Time had begun to feel short. It was impossible to see how we could move forward together with Bella under constant threat. Not only did she risk her life every time she was with me, but she also risked her chance for a normal human life by entangling herself with mine. I couldn't give her what she deserved and I so easily could take away everything.

But I was hopelessly smitten. I could not stop myself from walking this treacherous path. I hoped (and feared) that we would soon get our answer, perhaps as early as Saturday. Either we would find some way to move forward, at least for a while, or this relationship would end, perhaps badly. It all depended on my ability to control my basest, and most powerful, inclinations.

There was so much I wanted to know and only two more days to get answers before things surely would change. Setting to the task, I started by asking about the movies and books she loved and those she disliked, the stories serving as shorthand for her views on real-world themes. She showed a preference for stories with strong female characters, those who wanted to control their own destinies, and stories with strong moral messages, though her morality didn't seem to follow any traditional set of beliefs that I could identify. She also seemed to favor themes of self-determination and struggle against stultifying realities. She loved *Romeo & Juliet*, though that couple foolishly perished in their attempt to defy societal rules. I already knew that Bella was a good person, brave, self-sacrificing, and kind, but she inexplicably loved *Wuthering Heights*, whose characters embodied the opposite traits.

I asked her about her preferences in food, flowers, friends, school subjects, and vacation destinations. I inquired about her favorite teachers, sports, gemstones, and scents. The latter three topics each drew a blush to her face and her subsequent silences tormented me. I couldn't tolerate not knowing why she was embarrassed. I pressed the questions until she admitted that her preference for topaz and onyx coincided with the dichotomous colors of my "dazzling" eyes. Her answer pleased me, but I was immediately annoyed at my pleasure.

She disliked participating in sports due to her perceived clumsiness and ineptitude at physical activities. When I asked her about her favorite scent, she inexplicably flushed crimson and refused to answer. Stubborn, stubborn girl.

Each tidbit of knowledge was precious to me. I carefully filed her answers away for

later examination. Today was the day for collecting information—I could weigh and sort through it all while I watched her sleep. It irritated me when the school bell interrupted my interrogations and we had to hurry to separate classes.

Over lunch, caught up in my questions, I was able (mostly) to tune out Rosalie’s silent screeching and hurling of insults—*idiot! fool! traitor!*—and Alice’s recent, disturbing visions, which I *would* prove wrong.

Right now, I only wanted to think about today and tomorrow, the hours remaining to me before Saturday—the Saturday—but traitorous thoughts that Alice might be right tormented me. I could only pray, if God even heard the blasphemies of my wretched kind, that Bella would live to see Sunday.

Banish the thought! I commanded myself. *More questions!* Perhaps the questions would distract me from all my doubts and fears. I focused intently on the list in my head and continued collecting Bella’s answers.

“Do you participate in religious activities?”

“No, though Charlie considers himself Lutheran and Renee’s traveled all over the spiritual map. I don’t feel connected to any particular religion or group. It’s never interested me much.”

“Did you go to summer camp?”

“Once, with the Girl Scouts. It was a nightmare, literally. Sleeping in the woods does not improve the quality of my dreams.”

It didn’t seem to matter what I asked her. Her answers were always fascinating, and led to more questions with more fascinating answers.

I was so involved with our dialog that I forgot about the second installment of *Lorenzo’s Oil* that Mr. Banner was setting up in biology. Yesterday had proved an interesting exercise in control—a different kind of control than I was used to practicing. Today, I scooted my chair farther away from Bella’s when the lights went out. No mistakes!

Even at this distance, the heat of Bella’s body warmed my skin, her scent engulfed me, and her magnetic pull urged me closer. When she looked up and caught my eye, I felt a jolt of electricity shoot between us and form a charged connection. Her heart seemed to be beating in my chest and my breath sped up to match the cadence of hers. My hands craved...ached...to touch her.

I began forming arguments to justify my desire. *Holding her hand wouldn’t hurt her, and would prevent me from stroking her hair...or curving my palm around her cheek...or...touching her waist...or...*

Ahhh!

I had to exert a concentrated effort to keep myself and my chair where they were. I crossed my arms, clenched my fists, and sat utterly still. It seemed Bella was faring no better than I, leaning forward onto the tabletop with her chin resting on her arms. Her fingers were white with the pressure of gripping the table’s edge.

The problem with touching Bella was the escalation of desire. One touch increased my longing for the next, and the next, which opened the door to even greater, more dangerous cravings. I remembered the burning in my hand and the jolt of electricity through my body. The blazing thirst was secondary now, distracted as I was by the softness of her pale skin, the thick tresses of her hair pooling on the tabletop, the delicate pink bow of her lips... Escalation, yes, that was clearly the problem.

Another problem was the heightening of my senses when I was this close to Bella. I could detect every twitch in her fingers and every tiny tightening of the muscles around her eyes. The sound of her breath moving in and out of her lungs seemed to drown all other sound, her heartbeats vibrated through the space between us and entered my body. The air was saturated with her fragrance, which deepened and grew more complex as her heart raced.

It would be shockingly easy to let go and allow my senses to lead me where they would. That urge was so like the act of hunting, though, that I dared not let my mind wander for a millisecond in that direction. What would happen if I did? Would satisfying my desire to touch her unleash my hunting instinct?

My anguish was immeasurable. If there was a God, why would He make me thus? Why would He torment me in this way?

I am not human—I am not a child of God, I reminded myself grimly.

At long last, when the hour was over and Mr. Banner turned on the lights, Bella released a great sigh and glanced sideways at me. She bore a look of relief mixed with what? Longing?

I stood at once and waited for her to gather her things, staying close enough to feel the heat roll off of her. We remained silent as we made our way to Bella's gym class. *She wishes to be touched*, my evil self argued. *Don't you want to give her what she wants?* Yes, yes, of course I did!

When we reached the gym door, Bella turned toward me, the longing still in her eyes. I gazed at her and though I knew better, and though I had promised myself *no escalation*, I reached to touch her face—her temple to her jawbone, one slow stroke with the back of my hand. Her heart stuttered and raced, and her skin grew warm under my touch. *If we could have this, only this...* But it just wasn't possible... was it? I yearned to pull her close, to feel the length of her body crushed against mine.

Abruptly, I turned and hurried away before desire undid me completely.

To interrupt the direction of my thoughts, I listened for Mike Newton's abrasive inner voice as I walked to Spanish class. It was noisy, as usual.

Bella seems a little distracted today. I didn't notice Cullen say anything to her in biology. I hope they're fighting. He's such a butt—in sky. If he weren't monopolizing Bella's attention, I bet she'd go out with me. I can't believe she's interested in that freakshow!

Mike remained sullen as he stood with Bella on the badminton court. He continued to play for both of them, but never looked at her or spoke to her. This pleased me in one way, but angered me in another.

If he hurts her feelings, I promised myself, I'll backhand him to the other side of campus. I'll toss him into a tree. I'll pound him to mush.

As soon as Spanish was over, I jumped up and walked swiftly—perhaps more swiftly than was prudent—to meet Bella at the gym door. I considered growling at Mike as he passed, but that thought quickly faded when Bella appeared. She saw me standing there and her whole body relaxed, her face opening into a smile. She hastened toward me, stopped short an inch or two away, and enveloped me in her scent.

Instantly, the desire to touch her welled up again. I wanted to wrap my arm around her waist and walk side-by-side with her to my car. It was such a simple thing for a human couple, but not for us. I forcefully banished the thought and returned to my questions as I drove her home from school.

Bella's life before Forks was a mystery to me. I knew that she came from Phoenix where she had lived with her mother. She had spoken of both in her restless dreams. I asked her about her life there, what she loved, what she missed, and what she remembered of growing up. This was clearly a beloved topic, for words poured from her without hesitation and seemingly without censure. She rarely spoke as fluidly and at such length as she did about "home." Every detail fascinated me.

Time sped by and the sun dropped toward the horizon as we sat parked in front of her house. With regret, I noted Charlie's muted inner voice approaching. He was vaguely hungry and seemed distracted by something I couldn't decipher. As I was listening for him, Bella spoke. "Are you finished?"

Ah, the questions. "Not even close—but your father will be home soon."

"Charlie!" she exclaimed, seeming startled by how long we'd been sitting there.

I had never been with Bella at this time of day and I suddenly realized that even in the tight confines of the car, my thirst barely disturbed me. I inhaled her fragrance, tasted her flavor on my tongue, and welcomed the fire. It almost felt like we could be ordinary lovers lingering over conversation, our bond untainted by monstrous desires. I wished this moment didn't have to end.

"How late is it?" Bella inquired.

"It's twilight," I replied, returning from my reverie. "It's the safest time of day for us, the easiest time. But also the saddest, in a way...the end of another day, the return of the night. Darkness is so predictable, don't you think?"

Bella's reply was not. "I like the night. Without the dark, we'd never see the stars. Not that you see them here much."

I laughed, appreciating her high regard for darkness...and perhaps, the creatures of the darkness.

I heard Charlie approaching and warned, "Charlie will be here in a few minutes. So, unless you want to tell him that you'll be with me Saturday..." I paused, half hoping she would invite me in and do just that.

"Thanks, but no thanks. Is it my turn tomorrow, then?"

"Certainly not! I told you I wasn't done, didn't I?" So, so far from done. There would never be enough time to know everything before I'd have to let her go.

"What more is there?" she demanded.

"You'll find out tomorrow," I replied, indulging myself by reaching across her body to open her door. The frenzied pounding of her heart thrilled me, distracting me almost enough to miss what was coming right at us.

"Dad, please don't embarrass me in front of Bella."

"Ah, Jacob, don't be so sensitive. I won't tell her that you're in luuuuuuv with her."

"Not good," I groaned. Just what we needed—more problems. *Jacob*. After Bella's fortuitous trip to the Quileute reservation, I'd asked Carlisle about Ephraim Black's descendants. Now here they were in the flesh.

I pushed Bella's door open and encouraged her to climb out as the car approached. "Charlie's around the corner." I glared into the headlights of the oncoming car as it pulled to the curb, facing us.

"Who's this? Oh my word! Oh no! Oh, Charlie," the elder Black exclaimed.

"What's wrong, Dad?"

I hoped Bella couldn't hear them speaking. She stood on the curb, staring first at

me, then at their intruding vehicle.

Why can't the Quileute mind their own business? I grumbled to myself. That boy, Jacob, has already broken the treaty. They'd better not push me too far...

I punched the gas pedal and fled. As I retreated, I heard Bella's father call out, "Billy!"