



Welcome Foolish Mortals

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Summary

Creaking hallways. Ghosts. Monsters. Howling winds. Blood. He haunts her dreams, she taunts his very nature. She would be the death of him...if he weren't there already. A Twilight-Disney-Halloween fairy tale.

Chapter 1

Thanks so much to Breath-of-Twilight for inviting me to participate in the 2010 Countdown to Halloween II - One haunted Hallows Eve! It was so much fun! Congratulations if you read it there and guessed me as the author of that story!

Thanks as always to my amazing betas Awesomesauce76 and Brits23, and my prereader Kyla713. I flove you all!

Disclaimer: All Twilight characters belong to Stephenie Meyer. The Haunted Mansion and all Disney references belong to Disney.

Rated NC-17 for the usual reasons.

"Welcome, foolish mortals, to the Haunted Mansion. I am your host - your ghost host...Kindly step all the way in please and make room for everyone. There's no turning back...now."

The creaking doors slammed closed behind me as I stared menacingly at the group of bewildered tourists I'd trapped in the foyer. They blinked nervously against the darkness, their eyes not yet adjusted from the blazing sunlight outside to the musty dark that now enshrouded them. Somewhere in the group, a baby started to wail.

A door to their left rolled backwards, opening into an octagonal-shaped room. Some of them looked back at me, smiling nervously as I regarded them with an insidious glare. The entire bunch shuffled into the next room just as I slipped in stealthily behind them; by now I had become accustomed to treading lightly in the dark.

The door coiled shut with a loud clatter and some of them jumped in surprise. I paced the edges of the room around them, like a lioness stalking her prey, forcing them to hover in a tight bundle in the center of the room. Some tried to keep their eyes on me while others looked around in horror. The walls seemed to be stretching taller, the portraits hanging there elongating themselves to uncover previously hidden and gruesome images.

As the ceiling reached the apex of its climb, I hissed at one of the nervously

laughing teenage tourists just before all source of light in the tiny room disappeared. Many of the trapped bodies began to scream in fright. They all looked up to the roof when a bolt of lightning suddenly illuminated it, revealing a hanging corpse.

I pulled my arm from a hidden panel in the wall just as the lights came back on, leaving the pack of guests none the wiser. A door on the opposite side of the room from the first one cranked open, unveiling even more nervous people being herded further inside. My group shuffled forward, looking back at me and the creepy stretching room behind them with a sense of dread.

As the door slowly rattled shut again, I leaned back against the fake wood paneling on the wall and sighed; my feet hurt and someone in that last bunch had positively reeked.

The door on the other side opened as the ceiling began to shrink down to its normal size. My trainer, Mike, whose blond shag and baby face made him look to sweet an innocent for the dark hallways of the Haunted Mansion, ducked into the room.

"Time for your break, Bella."

"Thank God," I groaned. I hadn't sat down in what felt like hours; it was past seven in the evening and I was beyond exhausted, eager for my only half hour break.

Mike raised his hand for a high five in his characteristically boyish manner and I smiled tiredly, hitting his hand back with slightly less enthusiasm. Even though he was five years older than me, he still acted like a kid, and hovered with annoying persistence. I knew what I was doing by that point on the ride, so I was pretty sure Mike's constant attention meant he'd developed a crush on me. I wasn't interested and tried to keep my distance, but it didn't seem to sway him one tiny bit.

"Enjoy your break!" he called out as I stepped through foyer. I waved and pushed a door open into the dimly lit hallway, electric candelabras flickering tongues of orange light against the walls. I found the entrance to our break room with ease in the near-darkness. Plopping down into one of the empty plastic chairs in the small room, I lifted my throbbing feet to rest them on another chair, feeling my tired limbs protest the movement. I'd started my shift only four hours ago, and already, it felt like forty.

It had been over a month and a half since I had started the Walt Disney World College Program; I was spending the Fall semester of my junior year here in

Orlando, Florida. I'd never given much thought to working in "the happiest place on earth," but when a representative came to visit back at Seattle Pacific University last year, all that changed.

I'd told him I didn't think I was the "Disney type"; I wasn't cheerful and outgoing. As a matter of fact, I was quiet, enjoyed reading over thrill rides, and was kind of a loner. But when he'd told me that not every cast member in Disney needed a twenty-four-seven smile, I was suddenly interested. Eager to escape the cold, wet weather of Washington, I filled out an application.

When I received my acceptance packet a few weeks later, I'd been thrilled to discover that I would be working at the Haunted Mansion at the Magic Kingdom. By September, I was packing up my things, waving goodbye to my parents Charlie and Renee when they brought me to the airport, and flying off to spend the next three and a half months in the palm trees and sunshine of Florida.

I really liked working at the Mansion because it was one of the only places in Disney where you could be mean and grumpy. Making the people there feel uneasy was part of the show. I got used to the dark corridors, the musty smell and the annoying tourists who pretended to scream in fear inside. It got pretty entertaining when one of us did actually manage to scare them in earnest.

Now it was October and I'd finally learned all the ropes. I'd learned that the tourists who came to Disney were called guests. I'd been trained on all the scenes in the ride: the stretching rooms, the eerie music room with a piano that played by itself, the attic with animatronic ghosts popping up, the graveyard with the singing busts.

I'd memorized all the different positions in the ride too: greeter, manning the two "stretching" rooms, the moving belts where we loaded and unloaded guests into the little cars clicking along their pre-routed track. I'd been taught where all the emergency exits were and how to pull open the safety bars in an evacuation.

I'd been taught all this by Mike, who had extended an exuberant hand to meet me back on my first day at Park training.

"Hey, you must be Isabella Swan, my new trainee," he had said, while giving me a not-so-subtle once over. I'd looked away uncomfortably, feeling extraordinarily unattractive dressed in the Haunted Mansion costume: a dark green blouse with fake lace, a matching skirt and a "bat hat" clipped to my head that looked like a century-old doily.

"It's Bella," I'd corrected him.

"Bella, sure...you got it!" He laughed nervously. "Welcome to the Disney College Program."

Mike had motioned for me to walk ahead of him, and we made our way quietly through the massive web of tunnels underneath the Magic Kingdom.

"So, how long have you worked here?" I had asked, trying to break the awkward silence.

"A while," was his non-committal answer, but he turned my way with a huge, self-important grin. "I'm trained on all the rides in Ad-lib-"

"Ad-lib?" I asked, cutting him off.

"Oh - Adventureland-Liberty Square. That's the Haunted Mansion, Hall of Presidents, Riverboat, Tiki Birds, Pirates of the Caribbean, Jungle Cruise and Aladdin's Magic Carpets. I've been trained on *all* of them," he announced proudly as he held a heavy door open for me, leading up to a flight of steps.

We came out of a hidden door by the Hall of Presidents, into the sunlight, and were immediately surrounded by Mickey-shaped balloons, ice cream carts, colonial music piped through invisible speakers, fatigued parents and children having temper tantrums.

Up ahead the Haunted Mansion loomed, a large brick building with towering turrets and barred windows. Surrounding the building was a lush rose garden, punctuated by fake gravestones. A tin bat sat atop a weather vane on the highest peak. The sound of a howling dog screeched mournfully through the air, followed by a clap of thunder that seemed oddly out of place in the beautiful weather. Speakers hidden around the wrought-iron gated entrance piped in the creepy sound of imaginary wind howling past.

I laughed at the memory as I stood in the break room and stretched my arms up above my head. The gloominess of this ride was a stark contrast to the cheerfulness of the rest of the Magic Kingdom, with its child friendly rides, bright colors and waving, mute characters.

The break room door squeaked open, startling me. I quickly lowered my arms as the door to the break room opened and Jessica Stanley walked in. She glared at me, her upper lip curling into an unmistakable sneer.

I'd met Jessica during my first week of training as well. She was a full-time employee like Mike, who had been going over ride safety precautions with me when Jessica came in for her lunch break.

"So this must be your new C.P.," she had said to Mike, looking me over. Her tone was dripping with sarcasm. "Lucky you."

"What's a C.P.?" I asked warily, having learned by then that most of the cast members spoke in abbreviated code. Working there was like being part of a cult.

"College Program kid," she had answered distastefully in a bored tone without turning to face me, pulling a container of yogurt out of the tiny dorm-sized fridge wedged in the corner of the room.

One of our managers had poked her head in at that point. Walkie-talkie in hand, she asked Mike if he could assist her with a guest issue outside. He'd apologized to me and slipped out of the room, Jessica's gaze following him.

"Let me give you a bit of advice for your time here at Disney," she had said, still staring distastefully at the exit.

"What's that?"

Jessica turned her head towards me, a slightly maniacal glint in her eyes as they narrowed menacingly.

"Don't *fuck* anybody."

And with that, she'd thrown her yogurt in the garbage and stormed out of the room, leaving me shocked and slightly amused in her wake.

I'd assumed from the daggers she was throwing where Mike had previously stood that they *had* fucked and it hadn't worked out so well.

It was already over a month later, and Jessica had never warmed to me. As she and I stood uncomfortably in the break room, I gave her a weak smile, which she promptly ignored. When I felt my phone buzzing in my pocket, signaling an incoming text, I reached for it quickly - I'd never been so relieved for a distraction in my entire life.

I reached up to the hook on the wall where I'd hung my bag, pulled my phone from it and checked my text messages. I had missed several of them while I'd been

in what was called "rotation" in the ride: moving from position to position at different points throughout the Mansion.

The first message was from Angela, my roommate.

Text me when you're on break.

Another one from her had come in a half hour later:

Jake, Paul and I have breaks at 7:30. If you're off then, meet us in the Mouseketeria.

I chuckled, still amused over the aptly named cast-member cafeteria. A third seemed to have arrived only a minute before I looked at my phone.

Bella, baby, get your sexy, haunted ass down here.

I laughed at Jake's text; he was openly gay, completely out and flaming, but flirted shamelessly with me nonetheless. His boyfriend, Paul, didn't seem to mind. Everyone knew they were joined at the hip anyway.

Angela and I had been assigned as house-mates at the Vista Way College Program housing. We got along instantly from our first nervous smiles at one another. We'd met Jake and Paul, both sophomores from U.C.L.A., when we began our first day of College Program training, or as we liked to call it, "Introduction to Shoving Pixie Dust Up Your Ass 101." We'd all become fast friends while we sat through endless videos and seminars on the history of Disney, and were soon running around the parks together on our days off.

Once October was upon us and the countdown to Halloween began, Paul told us the story he'd heard about "George," the ghost who haunted the Pirate ride.

"He was a maintenance worker and died before the ride was finished," Paul had whispered to us as we settled ourselves onto a bench in one of the ride's boats. "The rumor is he waits for new cast members to arrive, and if they don't acknowledge him by saying hello, he shuts down the ride."

Angela and I croaked out a squeaky, "Hi, George" as the boat set off into the murky waters, but Jake shook his head in disbelief.

"Honey, I stopped believing in ghosts when I was ten. George can kiss my sweet ass."

As soon as the words were spoken the boat jolted to a halt. After a few moments of suspended animation, the ride soundtrack was shut off and replaced with an announcement that Pirates had unexpectedly shut down and needed to be evacuated.

We all made sure to say hello to George from that point on.

Stealing a glance at the clock, I saw I still had twenty-seven minutes of my break left. If I ran, I could still make it down to the cafeteria and meet my friends. I quickly grabbed my bag, sprinted past Jessica and out the break room, and through a door that went backstage.

I hurried down the alley that snaked behind the rides and down into the wide mouth of the tunnel entrance. A complex network of underground hallways transversed the entire "basement" of the Magic Kingdom so that no cast member would be able to walk between "lands" in the wrong costume. At Disney, they called that "bad show."

"This entire *meal* is bad show," Paul squeaked in a high-pitched voice. "It's like they cook everything in grease and lard here. Have they ever even heard of cellulite?"

"Sorry, Paul - oh, there she is! Bella!" I saw Angela jump up from a booth against the wall and wave at me.

As I was about to head her way, I heard another voice call out my name. . Mike was hurrying in behind me, out of breath. "I'm on break, too! I thought I would join you?"

I tried to hide my grimace as wondered briefly if he'd traded breaks with someone else when I'd left for mine. His attention was morphing from annoying to just plain creepy. "Well I was just about to meet up with my friends. You're welcome to join us."

I waved my hand to the table where my gang sat, and Mike beamed at me, not discouraged in the slightest. "Sounds great."

He followed me to the table and introductions were made. Mike offered to grab some food for me so I could rest my feet. I started to unroll a few bills from where they were wadded up at the bottom of my bag, but Mike refused my money with a smile and backed away towards the food counters.

"Looks like somebody got herself a sugar daddy," Jake teased me once Mike was too far away to hear us.

"Ugh, don't even say that," I moaned.

"He does have a cute ass," Paul said, craning his head to get a better look . Jake swatted him on the shoulder.

"Sorry, boys but I think he's straight," Angela said, nodding towards me as evidence of Mike's sexual orientation.

"Oh *please*, honey," Jake said. "We're all gay here at Disney. Or at least hetero-flexible!"

We all dissolved into laughter. Jake was right - Disney was the most sexually charged environment I'd ever worked in. The guests who came through every day would never know it, but backstage cast members were going at it constantly. I'd been appalled the first time I'd seen Belle making out with Aladdin behind "It's a Small World", surprised at their blatant disregard for being caught, not to mention their blatant cheating on their fairy-tale significant others.

"What are we all laughing at?" Mike asked as he returned with our food.

"Nothing, sugar, nothing," Paul said, wiping tears of laughter off his face.

As our laughter died down, a sudden icy breeze whipped through the dining room. It seemed as if the entire cafeteria got eerily silent. I glanced over my shoulder in curiosity in time to see the door to the cafeteria opening to show the most picturesque couple I'd ever seen, decked out in the elegant suit and gown worn for The Hall of Presidents. They looked so natural in the clothing that I almost forgot they were in costumes, and not straight out of the eighteen hundreds. They were both extremely pale and seemed to float as they entered the room gracefully, the woman's hand perched delicately on the man's forearm.

"Who are *they*?" I asked, my voice nearly a whisper as I stared in amazement.

Mike stiffened in his chair as he glanced up at the entrance. "That's Carlisle and Esme Cullen. They're seasonal cast members who only come to work here during the cooler months," he told me, distaste clear in his voice. "I was wondering when they'd be showing up this year."

I glanced back at him for a moment, wondering why he seemed to dislike them so

much. But my eyes were once again drawn to the entrance, as another couple followed the first in.

The most classically beautiful woman I'd ever seen sauntered in on the arm of an incredibly huge man, his bemused smile surrounded by dimples. They were pale like the first couple, their skin a chalky, milk-like pallor, but the girl's blonde waves cascaded down her shoulders, making the Haunted Mansion costume she wore look like haute couture. Her partner had short, dark curly hair, and his colossal muscles were visible through the stiff fabric of his Jungle Cruise shirt and khaki pants.

"The huge one is Emmett Cullen and the blonde with him is his girlfriend, Rosalie. She's a real bitch," Mike explained through a mouthful of bagel. The grotesque way he gnawed through his food contrasted starkly with the astounding beauty of the family gracing the room.

The door opened to unveil a third couple. The female had dark, spiky hair and danced fluidly into the room under the arm of her partner. She wore the yellow blouse, red vest and bell-bottom orange pants of the Pirates costume. She beamed adoringly at the blonde man whose hand she held, who gave her a strained smile in return. As he followed her into the cafeteria, his long locks tucked under the navy cap of the Riverboat costume, I gazed in awe as their pure beauty radiated forward.

Mike continued his explanation. "The little one is Alice Cullen, and her husband, Jasper. He's a total weirdo."

"Husband?" I asked in surprise. "They don't look old enough to be married. How long have they been working here?"

"Forever," he scoffed. When I turned back to glare at him, he mumbled that he really didn't know.

"They've been working here for years and get the best shifts because they know the scheduling coordinator." Mike swallowed quickly and continued "They never work during the daylight hours; just the second shift, twilight to close."

Wondering why anyone would come to Florida only to work at night, I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. But it wasn't the feeling as if I were being watched by a ghost. Instead, my shiver was one of intense lust, and my gaze was inexplicably drawn back toward the door as the last of the Cullens entered the room.

As I watched the lone figure entering the cafeteria, my breath caught in my throat and my cheeks flushed red with heat. He was perfect; tall and thin, but with an

inherent strength rippling underneath the Haunted Mansion dark green jacket and slacks he wore.

I searched for my voice as I started, my words coming out as a breathless whisper. "Who's *that*?"

"That's Edward Cullen," Mike grumbled, his tone especially irritable. "He's kind of a legend here with the girls. They've all wanted him-"

"I can certainly see why," Angela cooed, leaning forward and crossing her arms on the table.

Mike cleared his throat and continued, unfettered by the interruption. "But he's never been interested in any of them. I don't know, I guess no one here is good enough for him."

My curiosity flared as I stared unabashedly at Edward Cullen. I could see why everyone wanted him as well - his unruly hair was a coppery-auburn hue with a hint of blond dancing at the tips. His skin was pale porcelain, like the others', but accented with pouty, full lips.

Edward's long fingers slid into his pockets as he walked, his eyes cast downward. I squinted and turned my head, trying to catch a glimpse of his eye color, shrouded as they were behind a veil of incredibly thick lashes. Edward paused at the table where his family had gathered and sat at the end, finally looking up and regarding the room with a venomous look clouding his features.

He was devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful. And I was powerless to do anything but gawk at him.

The air conditioning flicked on full force then, the breeze from the vents around us lifting my hair off my neck and away from my face. Edward's glare shot over to our table, and when our gazes met, I gasped softly. His eyes were completely black, dark as midnight, the look within them vicious. My breath trapped in my chest as my heart spiked with an unsettling mixture of fear and longing.

Confused by his angry gaze, I froze, desperate to look away but unable to tear my eyes from his enticingly frightening stare. His eyes were smoldering - hot and predatory. He inhaled deeply, as if he were savoring a delicious scent. And then, so quickly I nearly missed it, his tongue slipped out and danced across his upper lip. My breathing shuddered to a halt and my mouth dropped open slightly as he then tugged on his lower lip with his teeth, his eyes still boring into mine.

Dual shockwaves of terror and lust ricocheted through me, flooding together as a pooling wetness between my thighs. Involuntarily, I mimicked his action, licking my own lip and biting it as well, causing him to snicker and raise an eyebrow at me from across the room.

I was shaken from my trance as I heard Paul fake a growl and Mike sigh audibly. I forced my eyes back toward Mike's, blinking as if I were coming out of a dream.

"Down, Bella," Jake chided me. "There's no way a boy that pretty could be straight."

"Ain't that the truth," Angela grumbled.

Mike cleared his throat. "Uh, Bella? You might want to eat your dinner," he instructed icily, nodding to my untouched food. "Your break ends in like six minutes."

I cursed softly and quickly began shoveling down my food, but I couldn't shake the sensation of Edward Cullen's eyes on me. Several furtive glances in his direction proved me right, but his insidious expression had morphed into a sinuous smile. He was all at once both the scariest and the sexiest man I'd ever seen. The combination made my stomach roll and sent burning shivers down my spine.

Minutes later, I barely had time to say goodbye to Angela, Jake and Paul as I hurried from the room, my skin prickling with the knowledge of Edward's stare. I stole one last glance in his direction, looking through the glass windows from the main corridor as the door closed behind me. Edward caught my eye, and his terrifying beauty sent sensations through my body I'd never felt before, and my teeth involuntarily sank into my lip in response. I had merely a second to see Edward stiffen in his chair when Mike hollered at me from the middle of the hallway.

"Bella! Come on!"

I raced after him back to the Mansion, wondering exactly who Edward Cullen *really* was. Although I didn't see his face again for the rest of the night, I couldn't shake the memory of those dark eyes on me.

If I was completely honest with myself, I didn't want to shake it.

I wanted more.

* WFM *

Lips skimming along my jaw, inhaling deeply. Long, cool fingers trail against my cheek. Frigid breath against my neck, my collarbone. A strong, hard body hovering over mine

My eyelids flutter open but I am not awake.

Pools of gold rimmed by thick lashes smile down at me.

"What are you doing here?" I murmur, foggy with sleep.

He chuckles, a voice thick with desire. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

"But, how did you get in?"

"The window." His lips are back against my neck. Gentle kisses just beneath my ear.

"What do you want?" I whisper.

"Shhh," he murmurs back. A chill rolls off his body, but mine is blazing hot. "Don't ask so many questions."

Soft lips brush against my own.. Sweet caresses of his mouth against mine. Tongue against tongue, smooth and wet, dipping teasingly into my mouth. My fingers dive into his hair and wrap around fine, silky strands.

Covers pull swiftly back. His lips begin a path down my belly, trailing lower, lower.

Wet kisses press against my thighs. My shorts and panties slide down my legs.

"You're mine," he whispers.

Icy tongue parting my folds, sliding languidly against hot, sensitive flesh. Pleasure courses through me, shocking me with its intensity.

"Yes, yours...Edward!"

"Bella?"

I gasped, consciousness hitting me like a freight train. I sat straight up in bed, my eyes racing around the room. Where had he gone? Darkness enshrouded the

windows and I squinted, looking for signs of him beyond the fluttering curtains, but Edward was nowhere to be seen. It had only been a dream.

"Bella, are you okay?" I jumped again, but relaxed when I realized it was only Angela, standing at the door of my room "You were moaning, like you were having a bad dream or....something."

'Or something' is right.

"I'm fine - it was just a dream." I assured her. "Sorry I woke you. Go back to bed."

"Okay, get some rest." She waved tiredly and left the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

I flopped back down on the bed, my body still aching with need. In my dream, Edward's eyes hadn't been coal colored and furious like they'd been the day before. Instead they were a warm ochre, amber honey. He'd appeared come to me like an apparition, peeling back my covers and touching me, kissing me...licking me.

Heat rushed through my body and I shifted under the covers, noticing for the first time since I woke up that my panties and sleep shorts were pooled around my ankles.

I shivered with a sudden chill. In my dream, Edward's entire body had been cold to the touch. What could that have meant? I realized then that the chill wasn't from the lingering sensations of my dream - my window was open, the curtains fluttering on the breeze.

I didn't remember opening it.

Reaching for the glass of water on my nightstand, I paused, my hand in mid air. Perched delicately next to the glass was a single, perfectly bloomed long-stemmed rose, just like the ones in the Haunted Mansion graveyard. I lifted the flower delicately, handling the stem with trepidation and inhaling the petals' fragrant scent.

*It **was** just a dream... wasn't it?*

* WFM *

The next evening, I was nearly at the end of my shift at the Mansion. It was almost midnight, a half hour to closing time. I was yawning, nearly swaying on my feet with

exhaustion - it had been a busy night.

For most of the night, the line of people waiting to get into the ride was so long it had extended practically into Fantasyland. The closer to Halloween it got, the more popular the Haunted Mansion was, and the 31st was only a week away. The several, themed Halloween parties that happened over the course of the month attracted kids and families who loved to be frightened, as well as local teenagers looking for a spot to make out. Fewer hours of sunlight also conveniently made the mansion look spookier; it loomed in the hazy hues of dusk, promising chills and thrills within.

I had hoped for chills and thrills of my own - I knew Edward had been working at the Mansion that night, too. I'd caught glimpses of him throughout the evening, but I'd never gotten close enough to talk to him. My skin was crawling with the need to get closer to him, to discern the dream version from the real thing.

For the last half hour, I'd been standing outside with Rosalie Cullen, who hadn't introduced herself to me or spoken a word since we'd been out here. She was anti-social and surly with me, however, she had done an excellent job at scaring the groups of tourists, staring them down as they walked past. Some seemed genuinely frightened by Rosalie, as if she posed more of a threat than just a cast member in a costume, and rushed past her into the line heading inside the ride.

I didn't find Rosalie frightening per say, but rather intimidating with her statuesque beauty. Every one of her features was perfect, and I felt grossly inferior, intensely plain as I stood there in her shadow.

"Congratulations, Rosalie," Mike's voice rang out as he appeared from within the Mansion. "You've been selected for an early release this evening."

I turned as Mike neared, my previous fatigue suddenly forgotten and my heart stuttering to a halt when I noticed Edward was standing next to him. He was scowling, his eyes narrowed and too shielded by those lashes for me to see the color, but his arms crossed elegantly behind his back, carrying with him an affectation of genteelness I'd only seen in old movies.

Memories of my dream came rushing to me, every muscle in my body coiling tight with need. How on earth did he have this effect on me, when we'd never even spoken?

"So you're good to clock out," Mike continued.

"Thank God." Rosalie abruptly untied her costume's apron, pulling it from her

body and sighing in relief. She looked beyond thrilled to be finished early with her shift. She didn't even bother to thank or speak to Mike and glided past him, nodding at Edward as she made her way backstage. He quirked an eyebrow at her as she slid by, as if some kind of silent communication had gone unheard between them.

"So, Bella," Mike began, breaking an awkward silence. "Edward is going to be out here at greeter with you for the rest of the night. We're down to a skeleton crew tonight, no pun intended."

He laughed at his own joke and Edward glowered at him. Mike stopped laughing and nervously cleared his throat. "So, uh, Bella, you know what to do when the last guests come through, right?"

I rolled my eyes. After almost two months there, he was still checking to make sure I remembered Disney procedures. His hovering was getting downright irritating.

"Yes, Mike. I'm pretty sure I've gotten the hang of it by *now*."

For a split second, I saw the corner of Edward's mouth flicker up into a smile. My stomach fluttered, elated that my sarcasm had broken through that stoic exterior.

"Great! Yes. Well, okay...um." He glanced up at Edward, who looked at Mike as if he were a bug to be squashed. "See you both in thirty minutes."

Mike retreated away from us, Edward continuing to silently stare him down. With one last, uncertain look, he turned on his heel and hurried inside. Edward then stepped gracefully across the cobblestones, stalking closer to me and I stood frozen, in awe of his beauty.

He was silent for a few minutes, never looking my way and glaring at the giggling guests who hurried past us. Every inch of my body tingled, electrified by his presence and my heart pounded as he opened his mouth, those perfect lips parting as he began to speak.

"I apologize that I haven't introduced myself yet." Edward's voice was soft, musical - bewtiching. "I'm Edward Cullen."

For a moment, I couldn't get my voice to work and simply stared at his profile. "I know," I finally blurted out. "Mike told me yesterday. I'm-"

"Bella Swan," he finished for me, a small smile playing on his lips, still looking

away. "I know." Finally lifting those impossibly long lashes, he looked up at me.

His eyes were golden.

What the heck? They are definitely the color they were...in my dream!

"It's lovely to meet you," he murmured softly.

"Your eyes," I stuttered out. "They were a different color yesterday when I saw you in the tunnels. They were black and now they're gold."

Edward's lopsided grin morphed into a sexy sneer. "You're very observant, Bella Swan." His voice was cocky, condescending and incredibly sultry, like liquid lust.

"Why...why were they dark before?" I questioned, blinking back memories of ravenous, amber eyes from my heated dream.

He shrugged nonchalantly and leaned back against one of the columns, crossing his arms over his chest. "I was hungry."

"Oh," I stammered. *What kind of answer is that?* "Did you have a good dinner then?"

"Not really," he sighed longingly. "My parents and siblings are all vegetarians. I don't enjoy it. Appalachian Alligator really doesn't...*satisfy* me."

"But..." I blinked at him, flustered by his confusing statement. "Alligator isn't a vegetable."

Edward dissolved into husky laughter, his beautiful lips parting to reveal perfect, white teeth. "I guess that depends on who you're talking to."

I shook my head at his cryptic conversation, and then glanced up at the clock, realizing the time with a start. As the last group of guests scampered by us down the covered walkway, I unhooked the extra link of chain to close off the line.

"It's midnight," I pointed out to Edward, who was watching my every move. "Time to close the gate."

"Yes, yes. Midnight," Edward mused disinterestedly, a soft sigh escaping him. "The bewitching hour, when Cinderella's coach turns back into a pumpkin."

I locked the gate closed and began to head down to the ride entrance. Edward pushed off the column to follow me. He was at least a head taller than me, and he bent down slightly to whisper in my ear as we walked.

"What the fairy tales *don't* say, Bella, is that the monsters can come out to play any time of the evening they want."

I didn't understand what he meant, but as he spoke, his breath came out in a rush over my ear and neck. The strangely cool air washed over my skin, sending delicious chills down my body, swirling inside me until I felt my nipples pebble under my blouse. I swayed where I stood, feeling my knees start to buckle..

"Tired?" Edward chuckled as my eyes momentarily slid shut. "Did you not get enough sleep last night, Bella?"

My eyes snapped open and met his. He winked at me, a wicked gleam in his sparkling eyes. He grinned salaciously, as if he knew a secret about me he was dying to share. Was it possible he somehow knew about my dream?

"Um, no...not really," I finally answered. Edward's nearness was intoxicating and I gazed at him like an idiot, dazzled by his very presence.

All too soon he turned away, reaching over the fence in front of the rose garden, grasping the stem of a flower with his fist.

"Hey! Be careful!" I shouted, reaching for his arm to stop him. "Those thorns are nasty." Mike had hurt himself badly the month before when he'd reached for one, planning to pin it behind his name tag.

But Edward didn't flinch as his hand easily wrapped around the sharp stem, breaking the flower off. He presented the blood-red rose to me and bowed his head slightly, gentlemanly; it was a mannerism from an earlier time.

I took the rose gingerly from his hand, which he then pulled away quickly, almost blindingly fast. He had to have hurt himself after all.

"Let me see your hand," I said, my voice shaking slightly.

Edward raised an eyebrow at my command, but after a moment's hesitation, he silently placed his hand in mine. As soon as our palms met, I shuddered - his skin was the temperature of ice. And as I held up his hand and examined it, I saw there wasn't a single cut on him.

"How-?" I began but Edward quieted me, placing one pale, long finger over my open lips. Bewildered, I was lost to the sensation of him dragging his cool pointer finger back and forth against my lower lip.

"Don't ask so many questions," he whispered as he gently pulled his hand away. My breath caught at the familiar words, an echo from my dream.

The doors to the main entrance suddenly creaked open, inciting delighted shrieks from the last tourists of the night.

"No more bodies, please!" Mike hooted from the entranceway. He attempted an evil laugh and ended up sounding more like The Count from *Sesame Street*. He raised the back of his costume coat like a bat as he let out his comical laugh again and closed the doors behind him.

Relieved for the quiet once again, I looked back at Edward, but snapped my head around in surprise when I found myself alone. I caught a flash of movement out of the corner of my eye and turned to see the tails of Edward's coat disappearing into a side door.

I looked down at the rose in my hand, a duplicate of the one I'd found on my bedside table last night.

In that moment, there were three things about which I was absolutely positive. First, there was something off about Edward Cullen. Second, I wanted him - badly. And third, the night before hadn't been a dream at all.

* WFM *

He slips in through my window like a phantom.

"You're back," I whisper, my voice heavy with sleep.

I ache for him, so desperate to feel him again I think I could lose my mind.

*"I couldn't stay away." His words are whispers against my throat. "God, you smell so fucking **good**."*

His lips and tongue are everywhere, nipping, tasting, kissing, sucking.

I quiver under his touch, whimpering, crying, unraveling.

*"Please, please," I beg him. "I **need** you. I need to feel you again."*

Cold fingers trace patterns along my neck. "Tell me what you want."

"You, Edward. I want you."

"You would be the death of me, Bella Swan," he murmurs. "If I weren't dead already."

I don't know what he means. All thoughts disappear as cold hands drift down my body, hitching my leg up over his hip.

"Mine," he reminds me.

My reply dies on a whine as his hand slips into my panties, his cold finger sliding inside where I'm drenched for him, bringing me pleasure like I've never known.

Kissing, licking, grinding, moaning. I am coming, coming, endlessly coming.

When I woke up, my sheets smelled sweet, all warm musk and sandalwood, with the hint of something forbidden, and I knew that Edward really had been in my room, again.

I had barely seen Edward for a couple of days after our encounter outside the Mansion; I'd only passed him once or twice in the tunnels since he'd been scheduled for shifts on other rides. But I continued to have unconscious visits from him nearly every night.

In the haze of my dream-like sleep, he was sweet, attentive, and utterly irresistible. I had no idea how I stayed unconscious when he came to me, bringing me otherworldly sensations. Every morning I awoke, not certain how I stayed asleep while he played my body like a finely tuned instrument.

One night, I tried to stay up, waiting apprehensively on a chair by the window, but my exhaustion from my long shifts at work took over. I found myself hours later tucked into my bed, another long-stemmed rose left on my night table. What I couldn't understand was why Edward was sneaking into my room; I had no idea what he found so appealing in me, but if he wanted me, why couldn't he just say it?

I also couldn't put my finger on his apparent strangeness; the cold skin, the changing eye color. It was all too weird for me to figure out. But I woke from each

dream hungry for more, driven to figure out who Edward Cullen really was.

On the 29th, it rained all day. Edward and I had both been at the Mansion, but we'd been circling through the positions in our rotation around one another, always at opposite ends of the building. The disappointment was killing me - I just wanted a few minutes alone with him. I was starting to go crazy, wondering if my dreams were real or not. I needed to know the truth.

I was running one of the two stretching rooms. Eric Yorkie, another veteran cast member, was in the other one. Unlike Mike, he was actually quite good at scaring guests; he was famous for coming up silently behind the big, tough fathers, yelling into their ears and making them squeal like little girls.

Taking my place by the front doors, listening to the throngs of impatient tourists on the other side, I waited for the point in the music that was my cue to open the doors. I heard the familiar lull of the haunting organ music, and flipped the door switch.

"When hinges creak in doorless chambers, and strange and frightening sounds echo through the halls..."

Rain-soaked tourists wandered blindly through the entrance like lambs for the slaughter, most of them drenched from the Florida downpour. They shuffled inside, their shorts and t-shirts hidden under yellow, overpriced Mickey Mouse rain parkas. They blinked against the sudden darkness of the Mansion foyer as they stumbled forward.

"Whenever candle lights flicker and the air is deathly still..."

I almost missed my cue to close the doors when out of the corner of my eye I saw a figure slip in from the hidden hallway at the other end of the room. My pulse spiked and I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I turned over my shoulder and glanced toward the back of the crowded foyer.

A wicked grin was all I needed to see. It was Edward, ghostly and hiding in the shadows. My pulse spiked, my skin tingling.

"That is the time when ghosts are present, practicing their terror with ghoulish delight."

"No more bodies please!" I said to the pressing crowd, forcing closed the squeaking foyer doors until they shut with a loud click. I didn't need to turn around

to know Edward was directly behind me - I felt him, his strange icy breath, his electrifying presence. I turned slowly to meet the silent intensity of his gaze, his breath hissing out with audible pants.

He took a slow, deep breath, his eyes fluttering closed on the inhale.

In the foyer, the tourists hooted and howled as the door to the stretching room rolled open on its own. Edward slowly stepped back from me, sweeping his arm out in a grand gesture in direction of the crowd of guests. Swallowing audibly, I stepped past him forcing myself out of the haze he wove and remembering that I had a job to do.

He followed closely behind as I prodded the group into the stretching room, his malevolent glower making some people laugh uneasily.

The door rolled shut with a slam and Edward and I began walking in opposite directions around the circular room. Trailing my fingers against the carpeted wall as I moved, he followed as my mirror image, tracking me about the room. My thighs clenched as I was flooded with cloudy recollections of my "dreams": his eyes full of hunger, his hands urgent and needy on my body.

I circled around all the guests, glaring at the petrified children who clung to their tired parents' legs, the oblivious honeymooners looking for a dark ride to make out in, and all the giggling teenagers.

At my cue in the ride soundtrack, I said my line. "Drag your wretched bodies away from the walls and into the *dead* center of the room."

My dead-pan voice and dual meaning of the line brought out the usual chuckles from the crowd, fathers and big brothers portraying bravado with the occasional annoying, evil laugh. But to me, it was all background noise. Everything around me was Edward. I gazed across the room to where he stood, staring at me darkly from the other side of the room.

The walls began their ascent upward, stretching to reveal gruesome paintings. With the guests' attentions distracted as they all looked skyward, I silently made my way across the room toward Edward, my pulse pounding violently in my ears.

The soundtrack, so familiar to my ears, droned on.

"Is this haunted room actually stretching, or is it your imagination, hmm?"

Either my own imagination had been playing tricks on me, or Edward *was* sneaking into my room each night, making me quiver and pant with his fingers and lips. One way or another, I was going to find out.

When we were finally face to face I leaned close to him, breathing in his sweet scent. Emboldened by the dark room and the memories of our midnight trysts, I curled my finger, motioning for him to bend down closer.

He acquiesced, bringing his ear to my lips in the shadows. Underneath the loud narration of the ride soundtrack, I whispered, "I know you've been coming to my room at night."

Edward pulled back to look at me, and the corner of his mouth turned up in a sinful grin. "You don't know *anything* yet," he replied, shaking his head.

Just then, the ceiling reached its highest point, stopping with a loud creak. As always in that point of the ride, the lights were suddenly extinguished.

In those few seconds of darkness, my body was suddenly spun around. I felt Edward's hands on my belly as he sensuously pulled my back to his front, the tips of his long fingers spreading out over my hip bones and brushing lower. One hand gently pushed down on my belly, shooting ribbons of pleasure down between my legs. My neck arched back as I felt him, hard and straining and grinding against my ass.

Flashes of fake lightning ripped across the room, illuminating a mannequin hanging from the ceiling. The tourists screamed and hollered with delight.

Those familiar sensations of terror and desire churned in my stomach as Edward brought his mouth to my ear.

"I have been making you come every night, my delicious little Bella," he murmured, his words causing me to whimper and writhe against him. "I know every sensitive spot on your body, know exactly how to make you shiver and moan. But *you* don't know anything about *me*."

Just as I was about to rejoice in the knowledge that it hadn't all been figments of my subconscious, Edward's right hand grasped my hair roughly, yanking my head to the side. It was pain and pleasure mixed into a sinfully delicious terror that I could never get enough of. I arched backwards into him as he pressed his lips just below my jaw line, and then hissed out a breath as he raked a surprisingly sharp set of teeth down the column of my throat. Edward sucked in a deep breath, his teeth

nipping lightly against the skin of my neck.

"You don't know what you've done to me," he spat in an angry whisper, still holding me tightly. "How I've never wanted anyone whose path I've crossed in this wretched place until I met you."

Edward tugged my hair harder, forcing me to turn and look up at him. Even in the dark of this room, I could see his glare was fierce, inhuman.

"Why are you doing this to me?" he rasped venomously, but then his gaze softened. "Why are you haunting me?" Edward released his grip on my hair, moving his fingers up to stroke my throat. I felt his nose graze against me, raising my skin into gooseflesh as he inhaled deeply.

"You have no idea how much I crave you, how your scent torments me. My need for you is making me insane enough to expose myself and my family, letting you see me for what I truly am."

A fake recorded scream filled the air and I knew we only had seconds left before the lights came back on. I didn't know what he was trying to tell me, but I didn't care; I needed to feel him.

I reached behind me, running my palms up his thighs, desperate to touch him. Edward never let me put my hands on him in my dreams. But as soon as my fingers grazed his thighs, his hands left my sides abruptly and pulled them away from his, holding them prisoner behind my back.

"Some day soon, you will know me, Bella Swan. And then I will make you scream with pleasure...and maybe a tiny bit of pain."

His mouth latched onto my neck and I moaned at the sensation of his cool lips and sharp teeth sucking greedily against my flesh. In the next second, a fake crash echoed through the speakers, signaling the end of the stretching room scene. Suddenly Edward's cool body was no longer pressed against mine - he had vanished and I nearly fell backwards into the empty space behind me as the lights flickered back on.

In a panic, I realized I'd never flipped the switch to open the other door; if it remained closed and the guests saw me flailing about by the secret panel it would ruin the illusion. But then, I heard the familiar creak of the door opening. I looked around me in confusion to find Edward half a dozen feet away and leaning across the panel. One of his shoulders was resting lazily against the wall, his arms crossed,

and he smirked at me.

How did he move so fast?

The guests, thrilled to move on to the next portion of the ride, got their bearings and began to file out. Still standing with his arms crossed, tall and gorgeous, Edward smirked at me, his black eyes glittering as he smiled at his bit of mischief..

I looked back up at him from behind the curtain of my hair. Now that I'd confronted him on his nighttime visits, I felt I had more questions than answers. What did he mean when he said I was haunting him? Before I could ask him anything more, Eric popped his head in.

"Dude, my last group had a guy who smelled like wet dog in it," he complained. "Cullen, you mind covering me for a few? I've gotta take a leak."

Never taking his eyes from me, Edward nodded. "I'm just about at the end of my shift, but I have a few minutes before I leave."

Dejection settled in the pit of my stomach – he was leaving, and I'd barely found out anything at all.

When Eric thanked him and scampered out of the room, Edward pushed himself off the wall. "Will you be here on Halloween night?" he asked, his voice a sensual hush.

I shook my head. "I have the night off."

"Good," he replied. "Meet me here, then."

And then he slipped out into the foyer, disappearing into the darkness.

* WFM *

"You're mine, Bella."

Kissing endlessly, wet lips against wet lips, nipping, sucking.

"Please, let me touch you tonight.," My voice vibrates out from me into the darkness.

"God, don't beg me, Bella," he pleads. "I don't have the will to resist you."

"You always touch me, taste me." I'm dizzy with want. "Let me have you."

I slide my fingers down his bare chest, his perfect, pale skin glowing with moonlight.

My fingers curve against the soft trail of hair down his taut belly.

His amber eyes wanting, wanting.

My fingers dip into his boxers, my hand moving lower. I shake with desire at the sound of his moan. His cool breath comes out in ragged pants.

I stroke the soft, yet hard, flesh. I want to see, want to watch. Want to taste, want to feel.

*"Let me taste you. **Please.**"*

"It's too risky," he groans. "I could hurt you."

"I don't care," I whimper, feeling myself grow wet for him as I caress his broad tip with my thumb, dragging the pre-come gathered there down his shaft as I stroke, making him hiss and shiver.

"You've been sent from hell to torment me, I know it," he moans, hips undulating against my movements. "To show me everything that's good in the world and keep it just out of my grasp."

"I'm not out of your grasp. I'm right here," I stroke harder, faster. His flesh is so smooth - I want him inside me. "Please take me."

He shakes his head wildly at me, his eyes opening wide in desperation. "No, Bella."

"Please," I beg, my voice a soft whine. His back arches with pleasure, a low growl falling from his lips, and then -

I woke up in the dark with a start, the curtain fluttering. Edward was gone.

It was Halloween morning - the first day off I had in a week. After I collected my wits, I slipped on a bathing suit, grabbed a bagel from the fridge and took a book to the pool. I wanted to relax, but my thoughts were consumed with Edward. A call from Angela saved me from the twisted wonderings in my head.

"So I have no costume to wear for Halloween tonight."

I chuckled. "We wear costumes every day. Do we really need one tonight?"

"Of course we do!" she hollered. "There's a bus to the mall in a half hour. We're going shopping."

When nightfall came, I rode the bus from Vista Way to the Magic Kingdom with Angela, Jake and Paul. We had all managed to score the night off from work, and were dressed in costumes for the "Not-So-Scary Halloween Party."

"Guess who groped Bella in the stretching room?" Angela smiled conspiratorially at Jake and Paul, perched on a bus seat in her fifties poodle skirt.

"Thanks for keeping it a secret, Ang." I rolled my eyes, ignoring Jake and Paul's gaping mouths. I hadn't planned on telling her anything, but it couldn't be helped once she saw the purple hickey Edward had left on my neck. I hadn't told her about the late night visits from him though.

"I thought Mike said no one here was ever good enough for Edward," Paul reminded us.

"I guess that was before he met Bella." Angela teased. "It's so romantic."

"It's not romantic," Jake rebutted, his fireman costume rustling against the seat. He looked like a poster boy for the song Y.M.C.A. next to Paul in a police man's outfit. "It's creepy. *Edward's* creepy."

"No, he's not!" I snapped defensively.

"He kinda is," Angela agreed and I glared at her. "In a sexy way, though. You look totally hot by the way."

I looked down and tugged my skirt down over my thighs; Angela had found this devil costume when we'd gone shopping at the mall the other day and insisted I buy it. Truthfully, I'd gotten used to wearing skirts and costumes over the last two months, but this one was a bit different.

It was black velvet with a panel of red under the bust line, black satin straps corseting across it. The sleeves were long and sheer, made out of a billowy, red fabric. The skirt just barely hugged the curve of my ass with ruffles along the seam and a red, forked tail hung down behind it. The costume came complete with a red

headband of devil's horns. We'd had also found black fishnet tights and sexy black boots to match.

"No, the Cullens are definitely odd. I saw the little dark-haired one—Alice—you know, the one who usually works at Pirates most of the time? Well, she totally freaked out a guest the other day," Paul told us.

"What do you mean?" I asked, not sure I wanted to hear the answer. We all leaned in closer on our seats to hear Paul's story.

"Well I was passing by and Alice was standing at greeter when this family walks by, and the little girl is eating ice cream. She waves at the little girl, kneels down and tells her she doesn't have to cry, that her parents will get her another ice cream. The father looks at her like, 'what the hell is with this chick?'"

Paul paused for a breath, eyeing us as if he were telling a creepy ghost story. "Then out of nowhere, the little girl trips. Her ice cream cone slams onto the cement and she starts crying, just like Alice said she would. It was really freaking weird!"

"See? Definitely creepy," Jake agreed. "You know, I don't think I've ever seen them eat."

"And those golden contacts? Maybe they're cool wherever *they* come from," Paul laughed. "But not here!"

I'd never seen Edward eat, either, and thought back to his odd comment about not enjoying Appalachian alligator. And were his eyes actually contacts? I had seen his eyes change from black to gold and back again.

He told me they changed when he was hungry...

Everything I had learned about Edward began racing through my mind: his cold, hard flesh that didn't bleed against the rose thorns, his strength as he held me to him, his impossibly quick movements as he sped across the foyer, how he appeared in my window each night like a ghost.

"And what is *with* that pale skin? We're in Florida, for crying out loud!" Paul whined.

"Maybe they can't come out in the sunlight," Angela giggled. "Like they burn up in it or something."

Edward's words echoed in my head: "*What the fairy tales don't say, Bella, is that the monsters can come out to play any time of the evening they want.*"

Did he mean *he* was a monster?

"Maybe they're the undead. Like vampires!" Jake cackled, jumping on Paul and sucking on his neck.

"You would be the death of me, Bella Swan, if I weren't dead already."

My eyes widened and I gasped, turning my face away from them and out the window as I stared into the dark night.

It couldn't be possible...could it?

"Sure," Paul cried out with laughter, pushing Jake off him. "Even blood suckers want to come to the happiest place on earth."

"Why would they come *here*?" Angela played along. "Wouldn't it be too tempting with so many people to eat?"

"Honey, have you smelled some of the guests lately?" Jake asked her. "I sure as hell wouldn't want to eat any of them."

My knee bounced furiously as I jiggled my foot with nervous energy, desperate to get to the park quicker.

He couldn't be a vampire...they don't exist. There's just no way.

As the bus parked at the Magic Kingdom entrance, I stood quickly, tugging my skirt down again as I moved. I was eager to get outside and find Edward as soon as possible. He had told me to meet him at the park. I had no idea where to find him, but had a sneaking suspicion that he would be the one finding me.

As we wandered down Main Street, we saw that everything had been totally transformed for Halloween: a giant, Mickey Mouse-shaped Jack o' Lantern took the place of Walt Disney's Statue in the main square. Every light bulb now had an orange tinge and hidden fog machines sent a spooky mist rolling down the street. Instead of the cheerful music usually piped through the in-ground speakers, the Haunted Mansion music was heard throughout the park. The sounds of an eerie wind, bell tolling and howling dog set the scene for ghoulish things ahead.

"Let's watch the parade first," Angela suggested. Distracted as I searched every dark corner for Edward's presence, I nodded absent-mindedly.

We passed Cinderella's castle, which was lit in purples, greens and blues with the images of tiny ghosts flitting along the turrets. Jake and Paul hurried eagerly ahead, trying to find an empty spot for us along the already crowded parade route. They located one just to the left of The Hall of Presidents entrance, where I spotted Carlisle and Esme Cullen standing outside, decked out in their 1800's costume finery.

As we ducked under the ropes cordoning off the street, they both saw me and nodded politely. I could have sworn, before I hid behind Jake's mammoth body, that their faces held the hint of a smile.

Could they know about me?

I quickly pushed the thought from my head as the park lights dimmed, announcing the impending arrival of the Headless Horseman, the herald of the parade. Angela squealed and clapped, gripping Paul excitedly as the 'clip-clop' sound of hooves along pavement grew louder.

A flash of movement on the opposite side of the street caught my eye and I froze. Standing in the shadows behind the excited crowd was Edward, dressed in all black and staring intently at me. His scowl turned into a smirk as he caught my eye; how long had he been waiting there, watching me?

Relief flooded through me at finally seeing him and I released a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding. I began to raise my hand to wave at him, but at that moment, a colossal horse came galloping down the street, its rider's dark cloak fluttering out behind him and his pumpkin-head in his hands.

The crowd clapped and yelled as the Horseman approached and, in the second it took for him to pass by us, Edward vanished, only to appear once again a few feet away from me, leaning casually against a tree.

I gaped in shock and then blushed with embarrassment as his eyes trailed down my body, no doubt taking in my costume. The conscious memory of his hands on my body from our private moments in Stretch made my legs begin to tremble, and I felt my panties get damp under his heated gaze. I wondered if somehow Edward could smell my arousal on the warm evening air, because even from this distance, I could see his hands clench into fists and his nostrils flare.

The parade began rolling down the street: the Disney Villains walking proudly, dancers dressed as zombies and characters throwing candy into the crowd. Each time my eyes flickered from the parade back to Edward, he'd quickly moved to a different spot, forcing me to search him out every single time.

Why is he doing this?

"Dressed as the devil, are we?" Edward's voice was suddenly at my ear, and I jumped, startled. "That's appropriate...since you're my own personal *hell*." His whisper was dripping with sex and anger.

I whipped around to face him, but I saw nothing but thin air. Edward was taunting me. Jake eyed me warily as I turned back, asking if I was okay. I nodded and waved him off, searching the crowd for Edward's next hiding spot.

A float carrying the "Hitchhiking Ghosts" from Mansion slowly rode by, and I looked up to see Edward perched on the roof of the building beside us.

"I'm not scared of you," I said softly, wondering if he could hear me.

In a flash, I felt him behind me once again, his breath fanning out on the back of my neck. "Oh, but you should be."

"Well, I'm not." I jerked around again, only to discover him a few yards away, under the eaves of the Hall of Presidents entrance.

Turning back to my friends who were awestruck by the parade, my eye caught Carlisle who was flashing a disapproving look at his son.

*What the **hell** is going on here?*

Suddenly, I got angry; angry at Edward for being such an enigma, for coming to my room and doing unspeakable things to my body during the night, making me ache for him every waking moment. I was fed up with him acting like one person when he was in my bed, in my dreams, and another when we were both awake. I was furious at his bizarre comments that didn't make any sense, and for filling my head with questions he never answered.

I wanted them answered, and I wanted it now.

"Ang, I'm not feeling so hot," I lied quickly, looking over my shoulder to make sure Edward was staying put. "I'm going to find a bathroom, okay?"

"Sure, Bells," she replied with uncertainty. I was pretty sure she knew I wasn't telling the truth. "Just text me if you need me, okay?"

I nodded and backed away, pacing slowly to where Edward hid. He slipped further away and I followed him into a dark alleyway that was a dozen or so yards from the street.

"Don't come any closer," he warned when I was near enough to hear him. He glared at me, his eyes black, deadly and hypnotic.

"Why?" I asked, challenging him and taking another step forward.

"Because you don't know what I'll do to you!" he growled.

"I know what you've already done," I replied defiantly in a low voice, glaring angrily back at him. His eyebrows raised in surprise at the challenge in my tone. "I know you've come into my world, and in the span of a week, made me crave you more than any man I've ever known."

He hissed at my words and I advanced toward him slowly; I didn't think he liked being the one stalked.

"I know you've spoken to me in riddles," I continued, now directly in front of him. I felt no fear as I faced him, calling his bluff. "Maybe you're trying to throw me off but it won't work. I know what you are. I've figured it out. And. It. Doesn't. Scare. Me."

Edward's eyes narrowed as he leaned closer. "Well, maybe *this* will!"

I barely had time to register the sensation of his cold hands on my arms when I was suddenly whipped around, my back to the wall, Edward pressed up against me. The sensation hovered on the edge of pain; the rough brick behind me scraped against my skin, but I could also feel every inch of his body along my front, especially the part of him that was hard and needy. I whimpered and pushed my hips forward against him, even as I stood there, trapped between him and the wall.

"You don't know how easily I could kill you. You don't know how badly I want to," he spat with a sneer. "You have no idea how much I want to sink my teeth into your throat and my cock into your wet heat, drinking and fucking you until you cry out in agony and rapture."

He let go and turned abruptly away from me, shoving his hands in his pockets. Anger seeped out of him and he looked up at me from under his lashes, shame in his

eyes.

"My desire for you is like an incurable illness and a divine gift, relentlessly tempting the monster inside me with your luscious body and your insanely sweet-smelling blood." His voice was barely a whisper.

"So it's true," I said softly. "That's why your skin is so cold, why you can move so fast. You're a...vampire."

Edward's shoulders rolled forward in defeat. "I didn't want you to find out," he admitted.

I blinked, not sure what to say next. "Edward...what the *hell* are vampires doing in Disney World?"

"All the questions you could ask, and *that's* the first one you come up with?" He chuckled loudly as he turned back to me, his eyes sparkling with humor slowly shifting to sadness. "I'm a fantasy character, Bella. Don't you think I belong here, in the land of make believe?"

I stared at him, waiting. "Tell me the truth."

He sighed and closed his eyes. "Alice saw you."

"She...saw me?" I replied, confused by yet another cryptic comment.

"Yes, she can...see things that happen. In the future," he explained reluctantly. "When Alice saw you coming, she insisted we start working here. She didn't know when, so we've been coming back for years, every single Halloween through Christmas"

Edward began to pace back and forth. "It wasn't an easy feat," he continued. "We had to look for food, make sure we wouldn't need to work in the daylight, and find jobs to do here that wouldn't make us tear our hair out."

He glanced at the castle with disdain, a scowl marring his perfect features. "I'm not exactly the cheerful type."

"Me neither." We certainly had *that* in common. His scowl melted into a small grin.

"My family didn't mind though; they all have a bit of a flair for the dramatic. And

they like dressing up in costume. Except Rosalie; she really hates the polyester."

He flashed me a smile and I giggled softly, relieved that the gentle, sweet Edward of my dreams was finally making an appearance. The light-heartedness was short lived, though, as he roughly rubbed his hands over his eyes and face, gripping his beautiful hair awkwardly with one hand as the other fell to his side.

"Alice said you would be my reason for existing, my...mate."

His...what? Edward eyes were pained once again.

"What she didn't see was that you would still be human. When that vision became clear, I told her it was impossible, that she was crazy!" He gripped his hair in fists so tightly I feared he would rip it out. "But from the first second I saw you, the first moment I filled my lungs with your tantalizing scent, I was irrevocably changed."

The intensity of the emotion that sparked from his eyes made me feel as if I were melting and electrified all at the same time. The knowledge that this beautiful creature was so drawn to me was beyond my wildest dreams.

"I was addicted to you, lusting after your body. I never, *ever* wanted anyone so much. And your...blood," his brow creased as he paused and looked down in self-deprecation. "It has tempted me more than any human I've ever come across in a hundred years."

I gasped at the mention of his age, my heart immediately filling with sorrow for the decades he must have spent alone. "Aren't there a lot of..." I gulped, forcing out the words, "people who smell that good to you?"

Edward sighed and paced away from me. "No. I've never come across anyone whose scent has wrecked me like yours has."

I shivered with the knowledge that I affected him this much; that he'd been taming his baser nature to keep me safe.

"You remember what I told you about us being vegetarians?" he asked me. I nodded in response.

"My family doesn't believe in taking human life," he explained. "I agreed with them...until I met you." His raven eyes turned on me, sparkling with a restrained hunger and excitement.

"I tried to push you away, tried to scare you so you wouldn't want me, but I was so drawn to you, I couldn't stop." Edward continued as he looked back up at me, his eyes filled with a tortured grief. "Coming to you in your sleep, bringing your body pleasure when you were half in a dream; it was the only way I could let myself be close to you."

I felt my blood racing through my veins and wondered if he could hear the thick liquid pounding.

Edward inhaled, closing his eyes and clenching his fists. I could see the thick muscles in his forearms standing out just beyond the short sleeves of his thin black shirt. I wanted him - wanted his body and his...teeth inside me.

"So...it would kill me if you...bit me?"

He nodded solemnly. "It could, if I couldn't control myself. Or it could turn you."

"Into a vampire?"

"Yes, Bella, it could turn you into one of us. But there's a chance it wouldn't, if I didn't lose control...if I didn't let my venom get into your system."

"There's venom in your body?" My shocked question echoed in the alleyway.

"Shhh!" he warned violently, looking around. Then he chuckled and sighed. "You certainly do ask a lot of questions."

His crooked grin settled me and I silently measured my options.

"Any chance you wouldn't lose control?" I asked him. "If I...let you...?"

His brow furrowed in alarm as I trailed off. "Are you...*offering* your blood to me?" The words were whispered with trepidation. I realized with surprising clarity that I wanted to give that to him; that not only did I want to take away his loneliness, but I wanted to quench the thirst that had plagued him for a century.

"Yes," I answered softly, more drawn to him than I'd ever been. "I want to."

"You don't know what you're saying," he huffed furiously, backing away from me. "You're crazy! What if I couldn't stop? This is no life for you."

"Maybe you wouldn't lose control," I said soothingly, following him as he stepped

back. "Alice saw us together - maybe it's meant to be. Maybe it would be...all right."

"Or I could kill you!" he snarled, turning his back on me. "I couldn't live with myself if that happened."

The parade music swelled around us, the crowd cheering as the last float rolled by and Edward's tone softened to the barest whisper. "Why would you want a creature who is half monster and half man, and doesn't know where the division between them lies?"

I closed the distance between us and stood behind him, reaching my arm over his shoulder to brush my fingertips against his perfect face. "You've consumed me, both in my waking mind and my dreams," I murmured. "I know why I came here, now. It was to find you."

He turned to me, and I watched the pain in his eyes melt away.

"I don't care which part of you is monster and which part is man. I want you both."

Edward's hands lifted in slow motion, capturing my face in his. I quivered as he moved in close to me, desperate to feel his lips on mine while I was awake. The world around us began to wash away as he kissed me gently at first, barely brushing his lips against mine, but then it quickly became more passionate, and we poured into the kiss all the devotion we'd been aching to give one another.

"Get a room, you two!" Paul's voice suddenly called out, his voice echoing through the hallway and startling us apart. I looked over at my friends sheepishly.

"Shut up!" Angela smacked him on the shoulder. "I think it's sweet."

"Yeah, come on, you two. If you want to make out, there's a haunted house just over there you can do it in," Jake teased, smirking at us.

My face flushed hot with embarrassment and Edward stared at the pink coloring my cheeks before laughing softly and took my hand in his.

"That's a very good point," Edward mused, running his thumb over my knuckles. "Thank you for the recommendation."

He began to walk past my friends, tugging me behind him and I waved at them as I followed. Angela raised her thumb to her ear and pinky to her mouth, miming the words 'call me' and I nodded as Edward pulled me away.

He tucked me into his arm, pulling me against him and pressing his lips to my temple, inhaling deeply. "Think you're up for a little scare?" he asked, nodding towards the Mansion.

At that point, there was nothing scarier or that I wanted more than to be in the dark with Edward. "Absolutely."

My body quaked with anticipation as we raced ahead, skirting around the line to the 'Cast Member's Only' entrance on the side. We slipped quietly through the foyer entrance where Eric was about to let in another group of guests.

"Oh, man, I'm wiped," he said to us. Edward squeezed my hand, impatient to have me all to himself.

"How about you take a quick break and let us into Stretch alone?" Edward suggested. "The crowd can handle waiting a few more minutes."

"Sounds like a plan, my man. That group is brutal out there." Eric waved us into the stretching room as the doors rolled open and winked at me. "Enjoy."

As soon as the heavy door cranked shut and we were finally alone together, Edward pulled me flush against him, kissing my neck. "My little demon," he whispered. My moan echoed in the empty room.

His fingers slid into my hair, yanking the red horned headband off and throwing it to the floor. "You won't be needing those. I'm devil enough for the both of us."

As his tongue explored my mouth, teasing, dipping, I felt his fingertips trace down the outside of my arm, and back up the underside, leaving a blazing path in their wake. He grasped my hips and ghosted one hand up my torso, the other holding me tightly to him as I wove my fingers into his wild hair.

Edward sucked my lower lip into his mouth and ran his palm softly over my breast. I whimpered as he began to knead more firmly, raking his thumb over my puckered nipple through the thin fabric of my costume. My hips moved reflexively towards his, pushing against his marble frame, aching for more contact.

"Have you ever-" he began, looking up at me suddenly, my nipple tightening from the chill of his mouth and the air in the room.

"What?" I asked breathlessly.

"No, never mind. Fuck! Don't tell me. It doesn't matter anyway; you belong to *me* now." Edward bent his head to continue his ministrations on my other breast, burying his question under his need for my body.

Instinctively I knew what he was asking: *had I ever been with anyone else before?* The same thought lingered in my mind, but I didn't want to know about anyone who'd had him before me, human or vampire.

He was right; it didn't matter. He was *mine* now, too.

Recorded thunder boomed through the room and the lights went out along with the soundtrack, the fake lightning illuminating the ceiling and shrill scream filling the air. I barely noticed it, lost as I was in Edward's touch.

He pulled away from me and reached for the hidden panel, opening the door on the other side. "Such an eager little human," he chuckled, watching my chest rise and fall with excited pants, reaching for my hand, his eyes blazing.

We hurried ahead to where the little buggies were usually loaded with guests, but found it empty except for the two bored cast members standing there. My heart and feet skidded to a halt as we came closer; it was Alice and Rosalie.

"Hey, you two," Alice beamed at us. "The last group of guests went through about four minutes ago, so you should have a good amount of space to yourselves in there."

Holy cow, she must have known we'd be coming through like this.

She winked at Edward and then reached out to shake my hand. "I'm Alice, by the way. It's nice to finally meet you, Bella." I returned the handshake, feeling awkward as hell, but she simply danced backward away from us toward where Rosalie stood stoically and waved us on our way.

I climbed into the little black car. As Edward followed me in, he held his foot out on a lever on the floor to stop the safety bar from securing us, and then reached for me, lifting me over him so I was straddling his lap.

"Finally," Edward growled, his voice gravelly with need. "I hope you didn't like this costume very much." He raised his fingers to the corseted bust of my outfit and sliced it down the middle, ripping through it with ease. As the car lurched forward into the belly of the ride, he cupped my breasts in his cold hands so that the velvet edges of the fabric slid down and exposed my nipples.

"Fucking perfect." His words were a feral rumble in his chest. Edward leaned forward to lick one of my pink buds and then the other. The screams, howls and yelps of fabricated ghosts were the soundtrack to our moans.

As Edward gently, carefully sucked one of my pert nipples into his mouth, I felt myself get impossibly wetter for him, my damp panties grinding against the front of his jeans. He hissed in a breath, as if he could smell the dampness that was now soaking through both our clothes. I shook as he tugged my hips up, raising me onto my knees. He lowered his hand to reach under the skirt and tore my panties away from my body.

"Mine," he growled, reaching back to stuff the ruined garment into his pocket. I cried out, my head sinking back at the sound of the word he'd repeated to me in the darkness of my room. When his hungry fingers returned to my flesh, Edward deftly parted my folds, stroking tight circles against my clit.

My eyes squeezed shut and I shivered against the frigid pleasure his fingers brought me. It felt as if an ice cube was sinuously being rubbed against me, melting into ribbons of liquid flowing down my thighs. My mouth dropped open as he then cupped my sex fully with his chilly palm and slid lower, sinking a long, cold finger deep inside me.

"Oh God, Edward!" I gripped his shoulders as he slowly thrust his finger in, and he hissed as I felt myself drenching his hand.

"So wet, so fucking wet just for me," he rasped, his cool breath sending chills rushing down my spine, crashing into the sensations he was creating inside me. It felt so good, better than anything I could remember from my dreams, and I dug my nails into his skin so deeply it would have punctured any mortal man.

"I want to see you come when you're awake, when you know what I'm doing to you." He slowly pulled his finger all the way out, added another and pushed them both all the way back inside me. "God, I can't fucking *wait*."

I wanted that; I wanted that so badly, I thought I'd lose my mind. But I wanted something else more.

"No, no, not yet. You have to let me touch you first," I moaned, grinding against his hand as he continued to stroke me from the inside.

"Fuck, Bella." Edward groaned. His eyes flickered from my own which were heavily lidded with pleasure and straining to stay open, to staring at where his

fingers disappeared into me. "I want you. I want you so fucking much."

"Then *take* me." I ground against his hand, greedy to feel more, to feel all of him. "Please!"

He hesitated, and then slid his fingers out of me. Panting, I climbed off him, watching from the cushioned bench as he unbuttoned his jeans, lifted his hips and slid his pants and boxers down to his knees.

I whimpered at the sight when his cock sprang free, hard and long and perfect. I reached forward without thinking, pure instinct and raw need. Edward's eyes slid shut, his eyebrows coming together as if he were in pain as I wrapped my fingers around his smooth flesh. He let out a strangled moan and gripped the bench so tightly with his hands it started to creak in protest under the pressure.

I bit my lip as I stroked him, watching his cock push through my fingers, his hips rocking forward and back with the movements of my hand. "God, Bella, you have no idea how good that feels."

I pumped him faster with my hand and his soft grunts filled the air. Licking my lips, I bent down closer to where I was stroking him. He must have seen where I was going, but before he could protest or had the chance to push me away, I closed my lips around the head of his cock, sucking down until he nudged the back of my throat. The sound of his hand slamming against the roof the car reverberated around us.

"Oh my God, Bella, what are you doing to me?" he whimpered. I swirled my tongue against the sensitive skin and sucked him harder into my mouth as I continued to stroke him with my hand. Sparks shot through me at the sound his pleased moan. He gasped loudly and I was delirious with want as he pulsed, his seed spilling into my mouth, tasting of a million sweet things I could not begin to explain.

When he finally slumped against the back of the car, I sat up and licked my lips, making sure I didn't miss a single drop. Still panting, his cock still thick and hard, he growled, pulling me on top of him. We slid together, my slick skin rubbing against where he was amazingly still hard and needy. My mouth came down on his and I kissed him as hard as I could. Suddenly one of his razor sharp teeth accidentally sliced into my lower lip. I yelped, but Edward held me to him, staring.

His eyes flickered from my bleeding mouth to my eyes, wild with need and fear.

"Do it," I coaxed, suddenly needing him to drink from me almost as much as he did.

He was trembling as he moved closer, slowly, so slowly. I closed my eyes as I felt his tongue dart out to lick the drop of blood off my lip.

"Oh fuck, Bella," he moaned, his eyes rolling back in his head.

"Do I taste as good as you'd hoped?" I asked, completely absent of fear. I only felt need for him; the need to kiss, to touch, to *fuck*.

"Even better," he ground out. "Like heaven and hell combined."

I grinned in triumph. Watching the beautiful creature in front of me fall apart was better than any drug I could ever have imagined.

Edward's eyes opened slowly and he groaned, resting his forehead against mine as his fingers gently flexed against the skin on my hip.

"Bella," he said softly. "I still don't know if I can control myself. I've tasted your blood now, but it's not enough...I want more."

"Then bite me, drink from me, I don't care." I was mad with need, past all logic or reason. Nothing mattered; not the possibility of death or becoming like him. All that mattered was getting him inside me.

I ran my still bleeding lip along his mouth, purposely tempting him. Edward shuddered at the taste, and then grasped my hips tightly, holding me up so his tip brushed against my sensitive clit before sliding slowly inside. We both gasped at the contact and I fell against him, the feelings of fullness and pleasure and *finally* ripping me apart from the inside out. Each time I rose up and sank back down onto him, I moaned louder, feeling pleasure so intense I never wanted it to end.

The little car turned then so it that tilted backwards, riding its track down a steep slope into the graveyard scene. The change in gravity drew me downward, drawing Edward even deeper inside my body. He moaned against my flesh as he thrust up into me.

"Bella," he ground out, hands squeezing my hips, pulling me down against him with every deep plunge. He gripped me tightly as the car leveled itself and our bodies found a rhythm once more. Edward kissed a path from my lips down my neck, his nose ghosting above where my blood pounded through my veins with a liquid

fire, calling to him just beneath the thin veil of my flesh.

His entire body froze as he went rigid as stone – I could feel him straining to hold himself back.

"It's all right, Edward." It was odd, but I felt so safe, so certain it was right.

He lifted his hands to caress my face, lifting it so his could look into my eyes. "Bella Swan, you are my tormentor and my savior," he whispered and then bent his head, his teeth sinking into my flesh.

A blinding pain shot through me and he took a long deep pull, drawing the hot liquid from my throat. I cried out as I felt hot blood spilling down over my neck and collarbone. But as he sucked pull after pull from me, resuming his movements within my body, slowly, the throbbing sting slid over into ecstasy. His groans of pleasure vibrated through my body and I became overwhelmed with sensation of both his cock and his teeth inside me, pushing me over the edge. The exquisite bliss overcame the pain of his bite and I felt my orgasm beginning to crest.

"Edward!" I gasped, pleasure coursing through me. "I'm going to...oh God!"

My body began to shake as he suddenly pulled his teeth free, licking the wound closed and bringing his mouth to mine. I could taste my blood on his lips as he kissed me, his strong hands gripping my hips to the point of pain.

"Look at me!" he growled, pulling away from my mouth. I stared into his eyes as my release began to crest. "You. Are. Mine."

"Yours! Yes!" I fell apart, clutching him as I writhed and shuddered. He fell violently over the edge after me, kissing me hard and swallowing my frantic cries and moans.

When I could open my eyes again, Edward was concerned, his gaze worriedly inspecting my neck. "Are you all right?"

I touched my now closing wound with my hand. "I'm fine," I assured him. "I told you that you wouldn't hurt me. Although I can't say the same for my costume."

I tugged up what remainder of it was left so I'd look halfway decent when the ride ended. But Edward beamed happily at me, looking very proud of himself. He smiled and kissed me softly. I think we were both relieved at the way things turned out.

The haunting soundtrack of the end of the ride reminded us how close we were to the end of it, and if we didn't move, we were just seconds away from being caught. I quickly climbed off him and he pulled his jeans back up while I attempted to smooth down what remained of my clothing.

As our car pulled around to the exit area, Edward's demeanor changed and his body stiffened, his eyes trained on a spot up ahead. Two people were making out wildly, and when I realized that it was Jessica and Mike, I could help but chuckle.

Don't fuck anybody, my ass, Jessica.

Oh well - who was I to talk?

At the sound of my laughter, Mike abruptly pulled away from Jessica while she sprang behind him to fix her clothes. He turned our way, revealing an oddly smug expression on his face. I guessed he was thrilled to be getting some too. "Hey, you two. Happy Halloween."

Edward simply nodded. He was incredibly tense, but I squeezed his hand in reassurance. I was pretty sure we weren't the only ones getting in on in dark corners that night. This *was* Disney, after all.

"Nice uh...costumes, you two," Jessica mumbled awkwardly, nodding at the traces of blood that still dotted Edward's lips and trail of red now drying on my neck. "Nice touch with the blood and all; it looks very real."

Edward quickly wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and grabbed my hand, pulling me close to him as we stood and stepped out of the car.

"Enjoy the rest of your night," Mike called out. I turned to wave, but Edward ushered me quickly toward the exit, not looking back.

Once we were outside in the cool night air, Edward backed me into a dark corner of our own. He encased me within his arms against the stone wall, his eyes blazing.

"You really are just a foolish mortal," he pondered softly, fingers reaching up to stroke my bite mark.

"Maybe so." I shrugged, playfully tugging on his t-shirt and pulling him closer to me. "But I'm *your* foolish mortal."

Edward chuckled softly, shaking his head before leaning in to kiss me. "And

there's no turning back now."

If you've never experienced the WDW Haunted Mansion, here's some good guest videos of the ride-through: <http://youtu.be/XANIhjjRR30> and <http://youtu.be/BdosP09o34c> and a pretty good video of the Halloween parade: <http://youtu.be/dnFZHnwj0wA>

Bella's costume: <http://bit.ly/a4oBsq>

Big hugs to Heatherdawnff for making the amazing banner for this fic: http://i9.photobucket.com/albums/a86/Kassiah/Banners/wfm_MERGE_quote.png

And also to Rob-nipulations for making me my very own Mansionward Manip:

<http://robnipulations.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/mansionward.png>

Leave me some love and let me know what you thought of Mansionward! And as they say on the WDW Jungle Cruise, "Thanks for coming, thanks for laughing, but if you didn't laugh, well thanks for leaving!"

Chapter 2

Author's note: Thanks so much to Kyla713 for betaing and Awesomesauce76 for prereading. And thanks so much to Fandom Gives Back for raising money for such a wonderful cause.

Disclaimer: All things Twilight belong to Stephanie Meyer, but Mansionward is mine.

EPOV

I didn't kill her!

The thought amazed me as I looked down at Bella, her face beaming despite the darkness in the corner we shared near the Haunted Mansion exit. After threatening her life, drinking her blood and finally experiencing the heaven of being inside her, somehow I'd managed to keep this amazing creature alive.

Bella gazed up at me adoringly. With those starry, doe-eyes, she looked like she belonged there, like she was straight out of a fairy tale.

Who would have ever believed I'd find the love of my existence at Walt Disney World? Vampires and "once upon a time" didn't usually go hand in hand. Neither did "happily ever after."

And yet, there I was at the happiest place on earth, actually feeling...happy, for the first time in decades.

It had seemed so absurd when Alice first said that I would find my mate there. I thought she was playing a joke on me when she first mentioned it. Her vision about my future love had always been strangely hazy though; she'd only seen the girl's brown hair, silhouetted by the dark turrets of the Haunted Mansion. As the visions became clearer, she saw gardens of pumpkins and children in costumes. It didn't take much thinking to realize I would find her near Halloween.

It was, without a doubt, the most ridiculous vision she'd ever had.

A group of vampires in Disney World? During *Halloween*? It sounded like a bad premise for a TV show on the WB channel. And yet, my family was so desperate for

me to find happiness that they starting making a yearly pilgrimage to Orlando, becoming Seasonal Cast Members during the cooler months, just to give me the opportunity to find her.

It was quite a feat - figuring out how to live in the south without exposing our secret. Pale skin that sparkled in the sun didn't exactly scream native Floridian. After securing a home large enough to accommodate all of us, the next issue was discerning what we could eat. Most of the family was not thrilled to discover alligator was going to be our meal of choice for a while.

Next we had to make sure we could work shifts that always began after sundown. Making friends with the scheduling coordinator solved that problem, however, and it worked to our advantage that most employees weren't the biggest fans of the closing shifts.

We, of course, never minded skulking through the shadows.

Thankfully, most of my adopted family enjoyed the time we spent each year at the Magic Kingdom. Carlisle enjoyed the implicit education in the Hall of Presidents, and also looked back on the eighteen hundreds' era costuming with a great fondness. In addition, he apparently thoroughly appreciated the way Esme's waistline looked in the corseted dress of that attraction - a fact which made their trips to Disney more like yet another honeymoon.

Emmett got as much a kick out of working there as my parents did. Having been an avid hunter before being attacked by a bear at the end of his human life, Emmett liked working the Jungle Cruise. With his sick sense of humor, he also found it outrageously entertaining to think that all those humans had no idea they were trapped on a boat with a vampire who could rip them apart as soon as look at them. Still, his torture of the guests was relegated to simply telling them the bad jokes of the Jungle Cruise script.

Jasper enjoyed The Riverboat, feeling as if it took him back to a simpler time, although he did struggle greatly with being around so many humans. His difficulty made me feel even worse for allowing the family to make such an incredible sacrifice.

As for the others, Alice loved the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, finding the buccaneer-esque pants to be incredibly flattering, but Rosalie...well, she just found a way to complain about nearly everything, the polyester costumes being the first on her list.

Emmett, however, found ways to placate her, each year finding a new spot on Disney property to defile her in. Between them and our parents, along with Alice's affinity for being ravaged like a kidnapped damsel by Jasper deep within the shadows of the Pirates ride, it was like being constantly surrounded by horny teenagers.

Well, we *were* in Disney, after all.

In my years working there, I discovered there was no single place of business that was more lewd and indecent behind the scenes. Disney was supposed to be wholesome and good, backstage it was complete lechery.

It was amusing to watch, but most of the time it only fueled my loneliness as years went by without any luck. Season after season, I waited to discover my mate, but with the uncertainty of Alice's premonition, we were never sure exactly when she would show.

The reasoning for the haziness was always a mystery as well. At first, Alice assumed it was because the girl was undecided about her future, and I started to doubt we would ever find her. As each year passed, though, Alice was concerned she'd lost her touch, but then she had a vision that rocked all of us:

She realized my mate would be human.

I told her it was impossible, even refused to join my family before they left for the season. How was it in any way feasible that I was supposed to have a human mate? However, it was Carlisle's insistence that convinced me to join them. He reminded me that I had more strength and control than any vampire he'd ever seen. If anyone could handle loving a human, it would be me. So I'd reluctantly followed them on our most recent mission to the land of Mickey Mouse.

Thank God I did.

"Hey, you're so quiet. Everything okay?" Bella whispered, bringing me back to the present.

"I'm fine." Kissing Bella tenderly, I gazed into her eyes in awe, able to fully take in her beauty with my need for her, as well as my bloodlust, both momentarily sated.

Momentarily was the key word. Despite the fact that I'd been inside Bella's sensuous body less than five minutes earlier, I knew it was only a matter of time before I wanted her again. As Bella's fingers played at the edge of my shirt, I knew it

was very little time, at that. That human girl had the capacity to drive me to insanity.

My eyes slid closed as I played over the last half hour in my mind: tearing off Bella's devilish Halloween costume once we were within the belly of the ride. The way she drew me into her hot, wet mouth - her soft, pink lips surrounding me, massaging my cock with her tongue. How she climbed onto my lap and rode me hard, writhing against every deep thrust inside her.

And then she'd offered me her blood, angling her neck so the smooth column of her throat was exposed. It took every ounce of willpower to stop myself from tearing into her flesh and sucking her dry. But somehow, I'd held on to my control by a thread. I'd tasted her blood and been inside her body, both without ending her life.

I didn't kill her! I didn't even change her!

I'd kept my venom from seeping into her as well, stopping any possibility of turning her, and there she stood before me, in one piece, eyes hooded and warm with sexual satisfaction.

I had to give myself a pat on the back for that one. Although I was pretty sure I had on the same 'just-fucked-and-damn-well-at-that' look that she wore, as well.

"I'm more than fine, actually," I told her, opening my eyes and laughing softly. "I just...can't believe everything is okay. That we're both standing here, like this."

Bella's gentle laugh lit up my dead, cold heart. "Well, believe it." She pressed her soft, warm lips to mine, and as I felt myself get drawn once again into her kiss, I tried to wrap my head around just how well things had unfolded.

When I'd first laid eyes on Bella in that horrid underground cafeteria in the tunnels beneath the Magic Kingdom, I felt the world shift underneath my feet. One look and I knew that girl was *her* - my mate. I could see she was pure perfection - smooth porcelain skin, wide brown eyes and the slightest blush coloring her cheeks. She was exquisite, and for a moment, I was able to forget the challenge of her humanity and simply bask in her beauty.

But then the air turned on, lifting the chestnut waves of her hair, allowing her scent to waft through the room toward me. It hit me like a battering ram, lighting up every carnal switch in my body. She smelled like strawberries and cream mixed with the heavenly perfume of a woman's aroused skin. It was heady and deep and intoxicating.

No one, in all my years as a vampire, had ever smelled *that good*.

All thoughts of the very reason we'd been coming to Orlando each year disappeared from my mind. Any yearning for a mate vanished. The only thought in my head was that the creature before me was going to be the most glorious human I'd ever tasted, well worth ignoring years of abstinence from their blood.

She wasn't going to prove a challenge at all, either; I could see that when I licked my lips at the scent of her, she licked her own right back. It would make it all the easier to lure her someplace private, someplace where I could maybe even taste that sweet arousal as well before puncturing her-

"*That's her, you idiot! Stop scaring the crap out of her!*" Alice's thoughts interrupted my own, her voice a hiss in my head.

The distraction had given the delicious human time to scamper out of the room with that bumbling idiot, Mike.

"What?" I'd spat at my adopted sister, my legs shaking as I held myself from the desire to chase after the enticing meal rounding the corner.

"The girl you look like you're about to maul?" Alice chastised. "That's *Bella*, you idiot!"

My mouth dropped open, still watering from the scent of the delectable brunette. My brain took over once again, logic taking hold, short circuiting my bloodlust and replacing it with the bond I'd immediately felt for the girl.

Yes, that had to have been her. I had been more drawn to her than any single person in my entire existence, but surely fate wouldn't tempt my self-control by entwining my future with a girl who smelled that good.

"You're sure?" I asked, my voice trembling. "You're certain that's her?"

Alice nodded. "Positive. She's here on the College Program. Her name is Bella."

A thousand curses echoed through my mind, and I sank down into an empty chair at my family's table in disbelief, clawing at my hair.

"Why would you let me come here and put her at risk...knowing that she smelled like...*that?*"

"Smelled like what, dude?" Emmett cocked his head, waving a hand around the room. "She doesn't smell any different than any of the others here, and you're better with that than the rest of us."

"Some of them smell pretty awful, actually," Rosalie added, turning up her nose in disgust.

I released my hair from my fists and raised my head in confusion. "You didn't notice how different she smelled? How much...*better*?"

I gulped down the venom that had started dripping down my throat. Even the memory of her scent, diluted as it was, was still driving me completely mad. Emmett simply shrugged.

"Does this mean we can leave now?" Rosalie snapped. "And never come back?"

"Rose, not now," Carlisle reprimanded gently, then turned my way. "Edward, are you saying her scent tempts you more than other humans?"

"Yes," I replied through gritted teeth. For the first time in decades, I remembered what it was like to be fueled by bloodlust, physically incapable of ignoring the scent to which I was drawn.

"That's...not good." Carlisle exhaled, his tone laced with worry. Alice looked like she was hiding something. I glared at the pair them.

"What aren't you telling me?" I demanded, my voice a hollow growl. Already my throat was burning, the thirst I'd worked for so long to overcome threatening to derail me.

"She's your singer," Carlisle explained and Alice's gaze lowered to her lap, looking defeated. "It's the only explanation."

My singer.

I had thought it was simply a legend - the idea that there was one single human whose scent would unravel me to the point of depraved need. Now that I had breathed in her blissfully tempting aroma, I understood the truth of it, and wasn't sure how I was ever going to manage not killing her.

"You *knew* this? You knew she was going to be *this* irresistible to me?" My eyes shot daggers at Alice's. Hers were wide, golden and remorseful. I knew mine had to

be black with hunger.

She nodded sadly. "I knew...if I told you, you'd never come here. But she's your match, Edward. She's everything you...everything *we've* all been waiting for." Alice took a breath. "We're all going to love her, too."

As I sat there in that ridiculously cheerful cafeteria, surrounded by the utterly bizarre sight of fairy tale characters, dressed in full make-up and wigs chomping on their overpriced human food, I finally understood the depths of my horrible fate:

I was being punished for my sins. That was the only reason I could see for such an awful twist of circumstances.

My family had all suffered the same tragedy as I had, becoming the walking undead, and yet they'd all managed to find love without a Herculean task to overcome. Why was I being forced to endure such an unbearable destiny?

"Well, Alice," I growled, pushing away from the table. "You were right." Ignoring the concerned words from my family, I ran from the park, planning on feeding and then abandoning them. I would get as far away as I could from Florida.

Looking for something, anything I could eat, I made it all the way to the Gulf Coast, bleeding packs of animals dry as I went. Their blood was a weak comparison to the delectable lure of Bella's, but I forced myself to drink. No, not drink, kill...decimate. And while I fed, I told myself I didn't need a mate. I'd survived that long without the pleasure of a feminine touch - I could find a way to manage alone for the rest of my damned existence.

I would *have* to.

An intense loneliness took over me, so devastating it was almost as painful as the need for Bella's blood. I rubbed my eyes with force, trying to banish the memory of her face - as perfect and pure as her blood - from my mind, but it was no use. Her image had been seared within me.

And, without thinking, I found myself slowly making my way back to Orlando. My body drunkenly sloshing from the fluids I'd consumed, I found myself drawn the Disney College Program housing, instead of my family's home.

I had to see her face, just one more time.

"What are you thinking about?" Bella murmured against my mouth as my kisses

slowed.

"The first night I came to you." I ran my lips across Bella's jawline, whispering softly into her ear. "The first night I sneaked into your room." She shuddered against me in response to the memory, and I felt myself hardening again, thinking about that fateful night.

Teetering on the edge of sanity, my bloodlust temporarily in check, I had stood outside the window to her dorm room, telling myself I was only going to look at her. I was going to prove that she was nothing special - that what I'd felt when I'd seen her earlier that day was just a prelude to the intense cravings for the slick liquid beating through her veins.

But then, I parted the curtains and saw her sleeping face, and my long dead heart seemed to stutter and begin beating once again. I was in the room before I knew it, and as I knelt down beside her bed, I knew that my world had just inexorably changed.

Bella was fast asleep, her dark hair splayed across her pillow, lashes brushing against pale cheeks. Her soft pink lips were open as she exhaled in slumber. She was so peaceful, that for a moment, every thought roaring through my head quieted - she was so unbearably beautiful.

Sleeping like that, Bella was like Snow White under the spell of the poisoned apple, or Sleeping Beauty under Maleficent's curse.

But I was not a Prince. There was no rescue I could offer her, no galloping off on a white steed into the sunset. I could only bring her pain. Possibly even death.

I had to leave.

Just one touch, I told myself. Just one, and then I'll go.

With a trembling hand, I reached up to ghost the backs of my knuckles against her satin smooth cheek. A breath shuddered from my useless lungs and I felt my entire body shift - as if my atoms had begun reforming at that one single touch. As if I were going through the change again, but that time, not becoming a vampire, but becoming...hers.

And she was *mine*.

Powerless to stop myself, I bent closer, skimming my lips along her jaw. Her scent

wrecked me to the point that my other hand closed around her bed frame in a fist so tight the wood creaked in protest. I had to feel her - I needed to feel the warmth of her body.

Climbing onto the mattress above her still sleeping form, I was compelled by this divine creature - driven to kiss, to taste, to touch and to claim. When her eyelids fluttered open, I braced myself for her scream.

The only screams that came from her that night, however, were ones of pure pleasure.

"That was a good night," Bella mused, arching her head backward against the stone wall and giving me access to her throat. Immediately drawn to the bite mark I'd left on her, possessiveness fired through me, my breath escaping on a hiss. She was *mine*. I had claimed her. *At last*.

Although, I was a bit ashamed that when I'd finally taken her, it had been rough, hard and loud, as well as within the dark hallways of a haunted house. Not exactly the romantic first encounter I *should* have had with the love of my existence. She deserved better, and I had wanted to give it to her, but never felt I could.

That was why whenever I came to her, I made sure she was asleep. If she was awake and touched me, I was certain I would lose control.

All those nights that I'd sneaked into Bella's room, bringing her to one sweet release after another while she lay there blissfully in a semi-conscious dream, I was terrified I would crack - that I would rip her apart before I'd even blinked. Each time her hot little body had been near me during our shifts at the Mansion, I had to hold myself back from stealing her away into a dark hallway somewhere and draining her dry.

But somehow I had done it - I'd licked and drank and touched and *fucked* - and still Bella stood before me, whole and in one piece.

I was beyond happy - ecstatic even. I felt like I could break out into spontaneous song and dance. I wanted to dress Bella up in one of those ridiculous princess gowns and parade her around, like Beauty and her Beast. I wanted to take her to the top of Cinderella's castle, and watch the fireworks explode while perched among their brilliant fire.

*Wow, maybe I **do** belong in the happiest place on earth.*

"So, what are we going to do with the rest of tonight?" Bella's voice was laced with mischievousness as she quirked an eyebrow at me. My cock twitched and I pressed her harder against the wall, sliding my thigh between her legs, listening to her breathing hitch.

Screw the gowns and the fireworks - I wanted to find another dark corner to hide away with Bella. Within minutes, I could be making her beg, pant and scream my-

"Well, you can *start* by getting to know your new best friend!"

Alice's voice interrupted me from my intentions. Reluctantly, I pulled away from Bella's warmth and turned around. Steps away from us, with her arms crossed and her lips twisted into an 'I-told-you-so' smirk, stood my darling sister.

"New best friend?" Bella whispered.

Alice's face broke out into something that could only be described as glee. She advanced toward us, clapping as she skipped. "Of course, silly. Edward's not the only one who's been waiting for you."

Bella's eyes widened in confusion, her perfect mouth dropping open in bewilderment.

I slid an arm around Bella's shoulders, pulling her to me. "Uh, Alice? Let's dial down the weird a little, okay? Bella's had a lot to take in for one night."

The beautiful girl in my arms laughed softly. "Yeah, seeing Mike and Jessica all over each other was weird enough to *totally* freak me out."

Bella never ceased to amaze me: her courage and her ability to take everything she'd learned that evening in stride tugged at my heart. I bent my head to kiss the smooth hair on the top of her head, breathing in the delicious perfume of her scent.

"Eww! That had to be nasty to see!" Alice scrunched up her nose. It couldn't have been more perfect timing that Jessica and Mike chose that moment to emerge from the Mansion exit.

Blushing fiercely, Jessica escaped through a doorway toward the break room. Mike paused as he straightened his costume's tie, his gaze flickering toward Bella, eyes leering. A growl rumbled low in my throat, but Mike righted his gaze quickly and flashed a smile at Alice.

"I hope you all have a *lovely* evening," he pronounced to us before slipping through a door backstage. There was something about his tone - something odd I couldn't put my finger on - but the need to figure it out dissipated as Alice and Bella's eyes met, the two erupting into giggles.

Her laughter filled my ears, and suddenly, I wasn't sure how I'd ever lived without her.

My sister reached a hand toward Bella, her grin broad enough to show her teeth. "Well, I'm on a break now, so Edward, why don't you let the two of us have a little girl time together?"

Bella glanced up at me in question, silently asking permission. She genuinely seemed to want to get to know Alice, and as much as I didn't want to let go of Bella, I could see my sister was not going to be deterred.

"Besides," Alice continued. "Maybe now would be a good time for you go and check in with everyone?" She gazed at me meaningfully, and a moment later, her thoughts echoed in my head: "*They've all been really worried about you, Edward.*"

I sighed - she was right. I'd been completely awful to our family over the past few weeks. The way I'd seemed an hour ago, there was no knowing if I was going to finally lose it for good and bleed Bella dry. If I filtered out all the thoughts around me, I could even hear Carlisle's worry for me where he stood, several dozen yards away.

It was in that one moment that I realized something important that had escaped my attention over the past two weeks. Despite the fact that I could usually hear the inner musings of everyone around me, vampire and human alike, I couldn't hear *Bella's* thoughts.

How did I not realize that before?

In the frenzied haze I'd been in, my need for Bella, both body and blood, had so eclipsed everything else that I hadn't noticed the absence of her thoughts. I'd craved her so much that I had barely been able to hear anything over the thick, pulsing beat of her heart when she was near.

For a moment, I forced myself to concentrate, trying to hear Bella's voice over all the rest. There was nothing. My brow furrowed, and I recognized that I needed to talk to Carlisle, too.

"Edward?"

I glanced down at Bella, who was still waiting for an answer, her face torn but hopeful. In the warm depths of her eyes, I could see her struggling between the desire to stay with me and to spend some time with Alice. Amazed at how Bella and I already seemed to be able to communicate through looks alone, I nodded at her, letting Alice pull her from my arms.

"All right. I'll be back soon?" My pledge to Bella came out as a question - as if I were requesting her permission to leave her side as well. How incredible was it that this creature I'd been running from now had me completely bonded to her, body, mind and heart.

She leaned forward to press a sweet, chaste kiss to my cold cheek before ghosting her lips closer to my ear. "*Very soon, okay?*" Her hot breath washed over my skin, and my eyes slid closed, my vampire memory acutely recalling the sensation of that same air on my accompanying her tongue on my cock.

Swallowing down the venom that began pooling at the back of my throat, I hazarded a glance down at Bella, my lids heavily lidded with desire. She trembled when our eyes met. "Very soon," I agreed and her top teeth sank down into her lip.

The sight of it drew a sharp hiss from my lungs - I wanted to be the one biting that lip.

"Okay, you two. There will be plenty of time for *that* later." Alice winked at me, tugging at Bella's wrist. I winced, not wanting to know exactly how detailed my sister's premonitions of Bella and me were.

"Have fun," I whispered, pressing my lips to Bella's forehead, before wheeling around and disappearing into the crowd. All around, tourists were dressed for Halloween - some in the same kind of ghostly, gruesome outfits one would find at parties, and some decked out in Disney costumes. Children were lined up to trick or treat at candy stations all over the park, carrying plastic jack-o-lanterns in the shape of Mickey Mouse's head.

For the first time in nearly a decade of working there, I smiled.

"Well that's something I haven't seen in a while."

Carlisle's voice rang through my head as I approached him, standing regally at the entrance to the Hall of Presidents, a relieved grin on his face. "I'm guessing

everything...worked out?" he asked, a wry smile gracing his features.

I chuckled, feeling as if my cheeks would flush with embarrassment if I were still human. Clearing my throat, I replied quietly, "Better than I could have ever imagined."

"That's wonderful, Edward. We were all very worried about you."

I grimaced. Now that my head was a bit clearer, I could see the pain I'd caused my family. "I'm sorry about how I've behaved."

My father sighed and shook his head, reaching out to place a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "We understood you were going through a great deal of suffering, son."

"We knew you could handle it, darling," Esme added, stepping up to Carlisle and slipping her hand into the crook of his arm.

Their faith in me was, as always, as gratifying as it was overwhelming. I thanked them for love and understanding, but then the nagging worry about Bella's thoughts overshadowed everything. "There is one thing that's a little...odd, though."

"Is it something you can tell us..." Carlisle trailed off, waving his hand in the direction of the excited guests around us, gleefully skipping down the cobblestone streets of Liberty Square. "*In front of humans,*" his thought finished in my head.

I leaned forward, lowering my voice to a decibel only they could perceive. "I can't...*hear...her.*"

Carlisle's eyebrows knit together. "*You mean, her thoughts?*"

I inclined my head in a slight nod, speaking softly. "It's been like this since the start, I think. I've just been a little...preoccupied when I'm with her."

"I imagine it had to be difficult to concentrate in her presence."

I was sure Carlisle simply meant the constant proximity to my singer's blood. Thank God, he didn't realize that from the first moment I laid eyes on Bella, I had been so consumed with lust, I couldn't think straight. If I were human, I would have blushed.

He cleared his throat, capturing my attention, and I heard his thoughts again.

"Well, it's certainly an interesting phenomenon. Have you told Bella yet?" When I shook my head, Carlisle continued. *"Have you mentioned how sunlight affects us, or when we will have to leave Florida?"*

"No." I looked at the ground in embarrassment. I didn't exactly want to admit that I'd been too busy with my tongue in Bella's mouth to tell her about all the ins and outs of my vampire existence.

"Well, I supposed we'll all discuss more later at home?" he asked aloud.

Home. The simple word sent off a flurry of nerves and hope buoying up in my stomach. Would Bella want to come back to our home with me? Just the thought of her warm, delectable body in my unslept-in-bed had my phantom pulse thundering for her again. My teeth set on edge with need, my fists clenching at my side.

Attempting to regain control and taking a calming breath, I nodded at my parents. "Yes, at home."

"All right. Our shifts should all end in an hour. We'll see you then." They returned to their jobs and I started to turn back in the direction of the Mansion. Before I could move, though, Alice's thoughts shouted through my head, louder than if she'd been by my ear with a blowhorn.

"Don't even think of coming back here, yet, Edward! I've still got ten more minutes of my break and I want my Bella time!"

My fingers curled into fists, sharp nails biting at stone flesh as I groaned in frustration. It had been less than five minutes, and I was already going out of my mind at being away from my girl.

"Fine," I huffed, knowing she could hear me.

Pivoting around, I headed toward Adventureland, planning to bide my time by checking in with Jasper and Emmett. However, the Riverboat ride was off on its ambling trail around Tom Sawyer Island, with Jasper at the helm.

Damn, I could have used a shot of calm from him right about now.

Instead, I wound through the herds of people hurrying towards Splash and Thunder Mountain, and found myself for once, not hating the humans surrounding me.

For years I'd found their happiness unbearable to watch - all the happy families enjoying their vacations together simply reminded me how I continued to remain so desperately alone. That was why I preferred to work in the Haunted Mansion - I could be...well...*me*. But that day, I felt as if happiness was just within my grasp, too, and I couldn't help but smile.

I rounded the corner, passing by Pirates of the Caribbean and entering the bright lights and woodland sounds of The Jungle Cruise. A boat emerged from the mass of fake trees, and I heard Emmett's voice booming over the loudspeaker, cracking jokes as he navigated toward the dock.

"And now I'm going to tell you what my parents told me on my eighteenth birthday," he quipped. "The free ride's over. Get out!"

The guests erupted into laughter, some applauding as they exited the boat. Another Jungle Skipper swung over the boxed seats, sending Emmett out for his break. Boundless energy radiated from my massive brother as he hopped onto the dock, tipping his straw hat at the female cast member, who was driving his boat toward the next group of awaiting guests.

I stepped closer to him and Emmett studied my face as I approached. He then grinned widely, holding his hand out for a bump. "I think my big brother got some tonight!"

I hesitated, and then rapped my knuckles lightly against Emmett's outstretched fist.

"Niiiiice," he rumbled appreciatively. "Well? Spill!"

I rolled my eyes at him, and as I followed him back to the cast member break area beyond the boat dock, I asked, "What, do you want details? Positions?"

"Hell to the yes, my brother!"

I paused, not wanting to degrade what Bella and I shared to just 'getting some.' It hadn't just been sex. It was life-changing, earth shattering...It was fucking *awesome*.

"It was beyond my wildest expectations," I admitted softly as we sat down on a bench by the quietly lolling boats backstage.

"And you managed not to kill her!" Emmett exclaimed. My eyes widened in warning, my head whipping around to make sure we were alone. He nudged my side

and whispered, "Relax, dumbass. We're alone back here."

Calming myself once again, I turned back to face him. "Yes, I managed not to, even though..."

Emmett lowered his gaze, catching my down-turned one. "Even though..."

I cleared my throat. Recalling the memory of what Bella had let me do to her sent a fresh rush of venom down my throat, an intense shot of lust beating through my body. "She let me drink from her."

My brother's jaw dropped open in shock, but one corner of his lips remained up in a smile as mischief winked in his eyes. "While you were doing it?" he asked. I winced at his juvenile words, but nodded all the same. "Daaaamn."

As he whistled low in admiration of my strength, I couldn't help but recall with pristine clarity how Bella's body had arched in pleasure. I could almost hear her soft panting breaths as she bared her neck, smooth and white, offering herself to me. I shifted uncomfortably, my erection becoming painfully hard. *Just a few more minutes and Alice's break will be over. Then I can have Bella again, over and over, every way I can think of.*

"So, now what?" Emmett asked, his voice yanking me starkly from my fantasies. I blinked, trying to clear my head, but only succeeding in staring at him blankly. As if he were talking to someone hard of hearing, Emmett spoke slowly. "How are you going to make this work - the whole vampire human singer thing?"

"I uh...I guess I hadn't thought that far ahead. Alice's predictions never got farther than-"

I abruptly stopped talking, my words cut off by the images suddenly forced into my head. Alice was having a series of visions, all suddenly filtering into my consciousness from hers. I sucked in a breath, every cell in my body freezing at what she was seeing.

Bella in pain, the piercing sound of her scream.

White, cold hands at her throat.

Her face twisting into a grotesque mask of pain.

The sickening snap of her neck breaking.

Bella's lifeless body in a pool of blood.

"No!" I shouted, jumping to my feet and knocking the bench I'd been sitting on to the ground.

"What the hell, man?" Emmett bellowed, standing quickly. "What's happening?"

Horrifying mental pictures continued to assault my mind. Over and over again, versions of the same vision ricocheted from Alice's mind to mine - different settings, but the events still exactly the same. I doubled over in agony, gripping my hair with my fists as I was forced to watch Bella's murder dozens of times.

Every possible scenario ended the exact same way - there was no changing it. Why was this going to happen? I'd *just* found her! She couldn't be taken away from me now!

I wrenched my eyes open through the bloody haze of Alice's visions, the intense need to be by Bella's side becoming the only reason for my existence. "I have to go," I snarled at Emmett, turning unsteadily and racing toward the exit.

"Why? What happened?" Emmett called out from behind me.

I snarled, nearly thrown back off my feet as a new wave of images came through, my love's brutal death being repeated again before my eyes. "Bella's in danger."

- WFM -

Panic flared deep in my chest as I neared the Haunted Mansion cast member entrance. It had taken every ounce of self control not to run at top speed through the teeming crowd, and I nearly ripped the flimsy door from its hinges. The break room entry nearly suffered the same fate.

"Alice? Are you all-?" Bella's hushed and frightened words were cut off as I threw the door open. She was kneeling before Alice, my sister's pale hand in hers. Concern was etched on Bella's perfect face while Alice's was completely blank, her eyes unfocused as she absorbed the torrent of visions.

"I don't know what happened," Bella began as she rose, not even questioning how I seemed to already know something was wrong. "She just stopped talking."

I opened my mouth to attempt a reply, but I simply couldn't speak, not even to reassure her that Alice was hardly the one in danger. I was powerless to do anything

until I had Bella warm and safe in my arms.

Without answering, I simply lunged for her, grasping her wrist and pulling her to me. Burying one hand in the silky strands of her hair, the other sliding to the small of her back, I crushed her to my side as hard as I dared, breathing in with relief the scent that had previously tormented me.

"Edward, what is it?" Bella whispered, wrapping her arms around me. Her voice broke with worry. "What's going on? Is Alice okay?"

"Alice will be fine," I ground out, trying to soothe her, but then another intense wave of horrific images washed through Alice's mind, and I swayed on my feet. My voice croaking, I forced a hoarse whisper, "Everything is going to be fine."

*She has to be fine. She **has** to!*

Perhaps if we left Florida immediately, and took her someplace far away -

Alice shuddered and a groan rattled through my teeth, another set of images flashing through my mind from hers at a blisteringly fast pace: Bella's body twisted and broken, her blood pooling on a bed of Alaskan snow. Next, in Rio, her eyes glazing over as death took hold. Every possible place I could have taken her all ended in the same awful fate.

"Edward!" Bella was yelling, but I could hardly hear her over the torrent of agonizing visions. I felt her fingers twisting into my shirt, anxiety rolling off her tiny body. She seemed so fragile, so very frail, so...human. I wished there was something, *anything* I could do to protect her.

And then my jaw froze as suddenly, teeth grinding together as pictures that were vastly different from all the rest wedged into my consciousness.

Bella, vital and alive, surrounded by my family, their gazes loving and supportive.

My body poised above hers in the dark of my bedroom, her back arching with pleasure.

My teeth sinking into the soft flesh of her neck. Her mouth dropping open, eyelids fluttering shut.

The image that followed rocked me to the point that I had to brace one hand against the wall, hearing the wood paneling creak and moan. Bella's tiny fists

gripped my shirt as she called out my name, but her voice only registered as a pale echo as the picture slammed through my mind.

My Bella, her jaw set in a determined line, fierce and magnificent in her beauty. Skin white and pale, her eyes blood red.

The image vanished and Alice jumped, her startled eyes coming into focus as we gazed at one another in understanding.

It was no Halloween costume she wore in that last vision - Bella was a vampire.

"Edward, please talk to me!" Bella pulled her arms from around me and shoved against my chest to get my attention. The impact barely registered, but I blinked in surprise, then tightened my embrace around her small frame, absorbing her frustration.

"It's nothing," I repeated, not even able to admit to myself what was happening. I just couldn't manage to say it out loud.

But Alice finally intervened. "Edward, you *have* to tell her!"

Bella whipped around, relieved to finally hear my sister's voice again, but her expression melted once more into confusion as she turned back to face me. "Tell me what?"

My eyes slid closed in defeat. Bella, becoming one of us. How could I allow it? After I'd struggled so much to keep her...alive.

It was no use. No matter what I did, one way or another, she was doomed.

"Edward."

I opened my eyes at the sound of Bella's soft voice, my body obeying her even when my mind could not. Lifting my hand from the dent I had left on the wall, I reached up to stroke Bella's smooth cheek. She leaned into my palm, eyes softening at my touch. "Edward, tell me what?"

I couldn't bring myself to answer and stood there mutely, gazing into her eyes as they searched mine to the depth of my being.

*I can't lose her. I **can't**.*

"He needs to tell you that I'm fine," Alice announced, breaking the silence. "But it's *you* we need to worry about."

I snarled out a warning at her, but it was too late.

"Me? What do you mean, me?" Bella gasped. Her eyes flickered from Alice's back to mine, wide with worry.

"You're in danger, Bella," Alice said sadly, her voice reflecting a small measure of the agony I felt

"Danger?" Bella's tone rose, her alarm visible on her face. "How? Why?"

The distant sound of a door off the hallway creaking open echoed in my ear, and I let out a hiss. "Not. *Here*." I didn't care to find out the how's and why's of Alice's visions - I just knew I needed Bella off Disney Property, away from anyone who could possibly hurt her.

Alice must have heard the humans coming closer as well, because she stood quickly, wrapping her costume's great coat over Bella's shoulders. "My break is over. Take her home. We'll all meet you there soon."

I nodded and tucked Bella into my arms without another word, ushering her through the dark hallway and out into the evening air. Bella placed a hand gently on my stomach, her touch burning through the fabric. I shook off the urgent need to take her - I couldn't afford to have anything distracting me.

But she pulled at my t-shirt, trying to get some answers. "Edward, wait, please tell me what's happening?"

"It's not safe here," I muttered, pulling her toward the backstage exit door.

"But how am I not safe in the *Magic-freaking-Kingdom*?"

"Not. *Here*!" I barked. Bella recoiled, blood draining from her face as she shrank away from me in fear, her shoulders curling inward. She let go of me, wrapping her arms defensively around her middle and I could see her tremble. Immediately, I regretted my tone. *Fuck!*

I forced my voice to soften. "I'm sorry. Please, Bella, I just need to get you out of here."

She looked so frightened, I could hardly bear it. Before I had a chance to apologize, to reach for her again, the door slammed open behind us. Alarmed and ready to do anything to defend Bella, I felt my lips curl up in defense as I prepared to pounce. But it was only Jessica, stepping out from the shadows.

"Wow, you guys are still here? You really get into that Halloween spirit," she said, rolling her eyes. "It's cute, in a freakishly weird way."

I winced and reached for Bella's hand, urging her with my eyes to stay by my side. I wasn't sure who I could trust anymore.

"Hey, have either of you seen Mike?" Jessica continued. I had to grit my teeth to stop from shouting at her. *We can't be bothered with your mindless romantic dramas right now!*

Looking slightly numbed, Bella moved to my side and answered flatly, "No, not since earlier."

Jessica shrugged in response, waving a bored hand at us and walking away. As soon as she was out of earshot, I reached for Bella's hand, tugging it down from where it held onto her stomach and entwining my fingers through hers.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, leaning in to brush my lips along her cheek. "Please let take you home with me?" Bella nodded, but when I pulled back I could see her lashes were wet with tears.

As I towed her behind me through the backstage door, leading us around the path that wound behind Cinderella's castle and to the mouth of the tunnels, I silently cursed myself.

Some Prince Charming I turned out to be.

Instead of being Bella's happily ever after, I'd only brought death to her door. She should have known it all along: I was a villain, plain and simple.

"Ouch!"

I heard Bella cry out, her hand ripping from my grip as she stumbled. Reflexes instinctually firing, my hand swooped behind her head before it hit the pavement, stopping her fall.

"Are you hurt? What happened?" I crouched down low and cradled her as she

groaned, sitting up in my arms and reaching for her ankle.

"Damn, stupid new boots." She sighed and gazed up at me regretfully. "I rolled my ankle. These heels aren't exactly built for running."

I settled her on the ground and gingerly removed her shoe, testing her ankle's mobility with gentle pulls and pushes. It didn't seem broken, only bruised, but I didn't relish her wince as I slipped the shoe back on.

It was such a backwards Cinderella's-glass-slipper moment, it wasn't even funny.

"Can you manage to climb on my back?" I asked her, already having decided to run us both home.

Her eyes widened. "You're going to...carry me?"

I nodded, offering her my hand. When I'd helped her to stand behind me and she'd enclosed her arms around my chest, I hoisted her legs around my hips, holding her steady.

"Wow." Her voice was a soft brush against my ear. "You really are my knight in shining armor."

My breathing hitched, my head dropping down to my chest. A knight? I couldn't have been farther from honorable. I'd lusted for her blood, craved her body, and had put her in grave danger. But somehow, Bella saw past the monster that had put her in such an awful position, and saw something in me I never had.

She saw someone worth loving.

I lifted my head, turning back over my shoulder to face her. "Hold on tight, baby," I said, and then quoted my favorite Disney movie of all time, *Peter Pan*. "Cause here we *go!*"

- WFM -

We arrived a short time later at my parents' house - a grand villa on the edge of the sweeping marshland of Lake Apopka. It was isolated and far enough from Disney World proper that we could all hunt in peace without being noticed, and close enough to marshland that there were plenty of alligator to spare.

I ran through woods and under highways, with Bella holding on like she was on a

high-speed roller coaster. At one point, she'd finally buried her face against my shoulder, squeaking that it was better not to look. After I'd slowed to a stop in our driveway, I pulled a windswept Bella from my back, being careful not to put too much pressure on her wounded ankle as I settled her on shaky feet.

"I didn't know you'd be carrying me the *whole* way back. I thought it was just to the parking lot. Don't vampires have cars?"

"It was faster this way." I shrugged a sheepish grin forming on my lips. "And yes, we have cars."

"Well, *you* should come with a safety warning," she murmured, shaking her head. "'Caution: this ride may induce dizziness, nausea or vomiting.'"

Another joke.

I gazed at her lovingly, reaching for her once again and nodding my head in the direction of the house. She placed her hand in mine and trailed behind me. As I palmed my pocket for the key to the front door, Bella asked, "So...are we...*safe*, here?"

Her voice was small, scared, and I realized just how much faith she had put in me. Without knowing who or what was putting her in danger, or how we even knew about it to begin with, Bella had blindly allowed me to take her wherever I felt we'd be protected.

"We should be," I answered, but the truth was, I didn't really know.

We stepped into the quiet foyer, shutting the heavy oak door behind us. She pulled the Mansion great coat from her shoulders, revealing once again her sexy devil Halloween costume.

We gazed at one another, and in the silence, I could suddenly hear Bella's heart pounding, blood thudding through her body. I listened closely to the sound, knowing that every pump of that vital organ meant she was there, she was breathing and away from danger. Suddenly, the delectable aroma of her life force no longer enticed me to steal from her vein - instead, I depended on it, *needed* that scent.

It reminded me she was alive.

"Come here," I whispered, opening my arms.

Gazing up at me uneasily, she stepped in the circle of my embrace and wrapped her arms around me, her head against my chest. "When are you going to tell me what's happening?" she whispered.

I swallowed nervously, rocking her in my arms. If I owed her anything at that point, it was the truth. "You know how Alice has visions?"

Bella's head bobbed, a silent nod against my sternum, so I continued. "Well she has seen several of them, all ending in the same way: you being..." Clearing my throat, I steeled myself to say the word. "...murdered."

She didn't move, except to tighten her hold around my waist. Bella's voice cracked when she asked, "By who?"

"I didn't see."

"See?" She lifted her head, pressing her chin to my chest. "How did *you* see Alice's vision?"

Exhaling, I replied distastefully, "I can read minds."

At that she pulled back to look up at me, deep pools of brown wide with wonder. "Seriously?" When I nodded grimly, she asked, "Can you tell me what I'm thinking right now?"

"No." I lifted a hand to brush away a strand of hair that had fallen loose, tucking it tenderly behind her ear. "It would seem that you're the only person whose thoughts I *can't* hear."

"Oh." For a moment, Bella seemed disappointed. "So, can you read the minds of whoever it is that wants to-" She paused, swallowing as she gained her courage. "To kill me? And, you know, outsmart them?"

I sighed, shaking my head grimly. Keeping one arm firmly locked around her shoulders, I led her to the living room, settling us both down onto one of the soft leather couches. She crawled onto my lap and I took a moment to breathe deeply, inhaling her delicious scent, before going on.

"Alice's visions are subjective, based on the decisions of the people they're about. Whoever wants to hurt you seems to be able to anticipate our plans."

Bella's eyebrows settled down, her features curling into a frown. "I don't

understand."

The hand that wasn't clasping her to me snaked up into my hair, scratching and tugging at the strands - a nervous habit I'd developed over the years - as I tried to find the words to explain it all.

"As soon as Alice saw the first vision, we both immediately tried to think of a way around it. Another vision followed, with the same ending. It kept happening until-"

No. I don't want to tell her the last part.

"Until what?" she prompted softly, shifting on my lap, her proximity to my cock making me immediately hard. I groaned, willing my body to settle down - *now is **not** the time* - but Bella drew her fingers along my jawline, leaving a path of fire in their wake. "Edward? Until what?"

"Bella," I breathed, my chest aching. "I don't want this for you. Any of it."

She turned until she'd framed my hips with her thighs and cupped my face with both hands, thumbs tracing over my cheeks. "We'll find a way to stop it from happening."

I couldn't believe that she was the one comforting *me* in that moment. Her strength, her determination - God, she was too incredible for words - and my emotions went into overdrive. The intensity of my feelings for her were more than I ever could have imagined, and the burning sensation I always felt in the few moments when my body yearned to cry stabbed at my eyes. I forced them closed against the stinging pain as I leaned my forehead against her.

"Bella." Her name fell from my lips. I wanted to tell her I loved her, that I had from the first moment I saw her and that I would do anything to protect her, but I was silenced by the warm press of her timid kiss.

I kissed her back, gently at first, soft and tender brushes my mouth against hers, until her tongue slipped out and lapped at my lower lip. I hissed sharply in response, my hands immediately burrowing into her hair, anchoring her to me, kissing deeply. Bella gasped and the taste of her hot breath in my mouth sent hot jolts of desire down my spine straight to my erection.

"Take me," she pleaded. "Make me forget all this, just for a little while."

"God, yes." It was what I needed, too.

Releasing the silky strands of her hair, I let one hand drop to her thigh, rubbing my palm over the fishnet stockings still enveloping her legs. The other ran delicately over her smooth collarbone, bringing gooseflesh to the surface and making her shiver. My middle finger slid lower, dipping just above the corseted lines of her costume and into the crevice between her breasts.

"Edward."

The way Bella moaned my name was half pleasure, half agonized desire. As she squirmed on my lap, I dragged that same finger tip over to one breast, circling over the satin slowly, tightening my movements until it brushed against her stiff nipple.

She gasped and I could feel the rush of wet heat between her legs, even through the fabric that still separated us. "Feel good?" Bella nodded, her head starting to sink back, exposing her throat.

Venom pooled in my throat, my teeth tingling, but I beat back the wave of bloodlust, needing Bella's sensual responses to my touch even more. So I gently pinched her nipple, watching with pride as she shuddered again, eyes slamming shut.

"Want you," she whined when I palmed her breast fully, my other hand inching under her costume and toward her panties. I was an inch away from fingering the seam when I heard Emmett's truck rumbling down the driveway.

"Fuck!" I grumbled and Bella's eyes flew open, her face flushed with need. "My family is here."

We had just enough time to right our clothing before they came barreling through the front door. Rosalie's heels pounded a few steps down the hallway before she paused, sniffing the air. "Oh, perfect. We're running back thinking the whole world is ending and he's getting laid."

She glowered at me as she walked into the living room, throwing her purse onto one of the chairs. Emmett came up beside her, resting a hand on her shoulder.

"If I knew danger was just around the corner, I'd rock your world first, too, baby." He kissed her on the cheek, his words eliciting a reluctant grin. "Bella, I don't think we've officially met."

As he came forward, reaching a hand toward her to shake, I found it difficult to allow anyone else to touch her, even my own brother. I held onto her shoulders,

needing her body in front of mine while I calmed down.

Not that they didn't all know what we were doing, regardless of where I stood.

Bella and Emmett shook hands while a grim Alice entered the room, Jasper and my parents in tow. She hurried over to Bella, kissing her cheek before Esme welcomed Bella into her arms. Jasper simply gave her a terse nod before hurrying across the room, putting as much distance as he could between himself and the temptation of blood.

When we were all seated, Carlisle clasped his hands together, the one movement capturing everyone's attention.

"Bella, I'm so sorry our first introduction to you as a family has to fall under such dire circumstances. We've all been eager to meet you for some time."

Bella thanked him quietly, nestling deeper against my side.

"Regardless, I think it's time we all learned everything Alice has seen." Carlisle turned to face her where she sat, perched on a windowseat with Jasper on the floor at her feet.

"Every vision is the same." Alice's voice was pained, her eyes trained out the window to the dark night surrounding us. "Sometimes there's blood, sometimes it's just her neck..." She swallowed, eyes closing. "...being snapped by someone's hands."

"Those hands," Carlisle interjected. "Can we be fairly certain they belong to a vampire?" At Alice's hesitant nod, he continued. "I suppose the only logical explanation is unfortunately that it must be the Volturi."

"Who?" Bella piped up. Her voice shook and I could tell she was struggling to stay calm. Frowning, I held her closer, stroking my knuckles gently against her arm, hoping it provided her a modicum of comfort.

Why isn't Jasper's gift able to calm her?

As my father explained to Bella how Aro, Caius and Marcus, our cruel vampire "royalty", operated, I shared a glance with Jasper, asking with my eyes why his mood altering abilities weren't affecting Bella. In a movement imperceptible to the human eye, he simply shrugged.

How strange.

I'd noticed his gift take effect when they sat down, feeling my own anxiety lesson. He was obviously rolling waves of tranquility over the rest of us, so why not Bella?

"But why would any of them be after *me*? What have I ever done to them?"

Carlisle leaned forward, balancing his elbows on his knees. "The Volturi's main objective is keeping our existence a secret. Humans are not supposed to be aware of our existence."

"It's a little late for that, huh?" Emmett grinned, breaking the tension by winking at Bella. "What I don't get, is how they found out so fast."

"My guess is someone has been watching us while we've been here," Carlisle offered, rubbing his hands together in uncharacteristic discomfort.

"Like a spy?" Rosalie grumbled. "Why?"

My father let out a heavy sigh. "I've known Aro for a long time, and he's always had a fascination regarding our abstinence from human blood. I could see him keeping someone here to watch us, in a place that was so intensely populated with humans."

"You mean, to make sure one of us didn't snap," Jasper suggested, his jaw tight in remorse. He had never had an easy time during our sojourns to Disney, and clearly felt that he was the reason we'd been observed. Alice reached down, squeezing his shoulder.

"That's certainly a possibility," Carlisle agreed slowly, studiously avoiding my stare. "But I think it's more likely he'd want to make sure our presence here didn't breach any of the rules."

Anger suddenly coursed through me, my vision going red. "So this is my fault?" I snapped. I'd tried to stay away from Bella, even before I'd seen her beautiful face. My family brought me here, convinced me that I needed to find my mate, human or not. And now it was for that very reason that she was in mortal danger?

My hands curled into fists and I stood quickly, startling Bella. I had to put some space between us - I couldn't risk the possibility of accidentally hurting her.

"No one is saying that, sweetheart." Esme's voice was soothing as she rose, taking

tentative steps toward me. "It's no one's fault. There was no way to know this was going to happen." She patted my arm before moving to sit next to Bella, pulling her into a mothering embrace.

"Wasn't there, though?" My eyes shot daggers at Alice. "Did you see *this* in all your visions over the years?"

"No, I didn't!" she shouted as fury raged in her eyes. "I would never have knowingly put any of us in danger!"

"Let's not turn against one another now, Edward," Carlisle reasoned. I forced myself to try to calm down. "We need to use this time to figure out what to do next. Alice, did you see how much time we had?"

"A few days, I think." She looked out the window again.

My rib cage felt as if it were caving in, demolishing the black space where my heart should have been. What use would that organ have been to me now anyway, with my only love being taken away from me?

I glanced back toward Bella, pale and terrified in my mother's arms. She reached an open palm toward me, clearly needing me near. Drawn to her, I was by her side without consciously thinking about it, relaxing as soon as I felt her stretch one thin arm around my side.

"It's going to be all right," I whispered, kissing her forehead, convincing her as much as myself.

"Can't they just be reasoned with?" Emmett asked, leaning back against the couch, his broad arms like tree trunks along the top. "Couldn't we explain that Bella isn't a threat to our big vampire secret?"

"How do you know she isn't?" Rosalie spat bitterly, her golden eyes narrowing on Bella. Esme tried to quiet her, but Rosalie ignored it. "Maybe she's the spy, ever think of that? Maybe we should let them kill her. She already knows too much."

I growled a warning at her, to which Rosalie narrowed her eyes at me. But then Bella sat up, pulling away from me and looking around earnestly at all my family members.

"I would never tell anyone," she promised as Rosalie rolled her eyes, slamming her back against the couch like a petulant child. "I wouldn't - I swear."

"We know that, Bella." Carlisle stood, eager to end the discussion, the tension among all of us too high for Jasper to combat. "Clearly, we will have to try to explain to Aro the unusual circumstances here. At least we have a few days to figure it out."

After a beat, Alice spoke quietly. "There is another way."

"Alice," I hissed. "*No!*"

"Why do *you* get to decide for her, Edward? Bella has to know there is another option."

"Wait, what other option?" Bella lifted her eyes to mine in confusion. "I thought there was no way to stop them."

I buried my head in my hands, refusing to speak. *This is **not** an option!*

After a beat of silence, Alice threatened, "If you won't tell her, I will." I was ready to lurch across the room and rip her throat out, but then, Bella's warm hand ran across my knee, her touch commanding me wholly and melting my resolve.

I gave in.

"Alice's final vision didn't end with you being murdered," I admitted, my voice cracking with emotion. "The last image was you...becoming one of us. Becoming a vampire."

I waited for Bella's rage - for her to tell me she hated me and wished I'd never come into her world. But instead, she softly uttered one word.

"Okay."

My head jerked up at the sound of Bella's voice. My jaw worked, but it took a few moments for me to get sound out. "What did you say?"

She moved closer to me on the couch. "I said, okay. I mean...do it. Make me one of you."

Was she insane? Too bewildered to speak, I heard my family's responses in their thoughts.

"*You've got to be kidding me,*" Rosalie thought angrily.

"Rock on!" That was Emmett, while Alice happily thought, "*I told you so, Edward.*"

Jasper's thoughts were relieved. "*At least I won't want to eat her anymore.*"

My parents both shared the same notion - that this way, our family would be complete.

"No!" I shouted, bounding to my feet, gazing at all of them with incredulity. "I will *not* condemn Bella to this life!" I faced Bella angrily. "I told you, I didn't want this for you!"

She stood as well, looking into my eyes without fear. "It's not as if we have much of a choice, do we, Edward?"

"Bella, don't you *get* it? Your life as you know it will be over! You won't be able to go back to Disney, or even college, for Christ's sake."

Carlisle moved to stand behind me, raising a hand to place on my shoulder. I knew he had good intentions, but I shrugged him off. Bella's gaze didn't falter as I continued to shout.

"You'll be completely unstable as a newborn, consumed by the need for blood. And you won't be able to see your family or your friends *ever* again. It will be as if you were *dead*, Bella!"

"Well, it looks like that's what's going to happen either way, isn't it?" she yelled back at me. Her jaw was determined, her gaze fierce.

"No!" I fumed, turning away from her and clenching my fists. "There has *got* to be another alternative to this hell!"

Carlisle's head dropped and I felt guilt stabbing at me from all sides. "What would you suggest, Edward?" he asked.

"We'll disappear. Pack everything up and take her somewhere, anywhere-"

"There's no use in running, Edward!" Alice interrupted, marching across the living room floor, her eyes wild. "You've seen it, too. No matter where we go, somehow they are going to find us."

My entire body shook with rage and fear. How could fate be so cruel as to dangle a happy future with Bella in front of me, just to rip it from my grasp.

"I know you feel like I'd be giving something up Edward," she murmured softly. I could feel the heat of her body, warm and soft, coming closer behind me. "But I'd be gaining so much more than I'd lose."

Alice's face softened, then her eyes glazed over as she had another vision. I strained to hear what she was thinking, but she snapped out of it too quickly. Her expression became as determined as Bella's. "If you won't change her, then I will."

NO!

The idea of anyone else's teeth at Bella's neck, anyone else tasting her delectable blood, enraged me to the point that I let out a desperate roar. Furious, I wheeled away from her, ignoring the sound of her calling out my name, and stormed up the stairs to my room, needing to get away from everyone, even Bella.

"Uh...thanks, for the offer, Alice," I heard her say as my door slammed shut. "But if anyone is going to do it - to...change me - I want it to be him."

A small measure of relief flooded through me, chipping at my anger.

"Edward isn't wrong, Bella," Carlisle admitted. "You do know what a sacrifice this is to make."

"I know." There was a trace of sadness in her sweet voice, and it made my chest ache. But it was her strength that truly floored me. "But being with Edward forever doesn't strike me as a fate worse than death."

Those words and the soft timbre of her voice as she uttered them sent a rush through me that had me immediately hardening for her. Suddenly, my mind was awash with images of Bella's head arching back as she offered me the sweet fragrant skin of her neck, blood pounding through her pulse points. My cock swelled and thickened, desperate need coursing through my body. I couldn't help but fantasize burying my teeth into her carotid artery, greedily sucking down pull after pull as I thrust deeply inside her tight, wet heat.

My father chuckled. "You're very brave, you know, Bella."

She thanked him, and I heard her heartbeat slow to a calmer cadence. My entire family's thoughts radiated warmth toward her - even Rosalie softened a little. In that moment, I knew they were all standing around her supportively, just as Alice had envisioned earlier.

White hot anger enveloped me once again as I saw the possibility of that vision becoming a reality, but, at the same time, hope flared. I couldn't help but picture the image Alice had seen of Bella as a vampire. She had been magnificent in her beauty and strength, and my knees weakened at the idea of having her forever.

I leaned back against the wall with a groan, banging my head against it in frustration. Bits of plaster rained down from the ceiling.

"Go to him," I heard Alice say.

I listened to the sounds of my family heading out the door. Whether it was to hunt or give Bella and me privacy, I wasn't sure, because they all suddenly hid their thoughts from me. Emmett made sure throw some comic relief my way by thinking the theme song from *It's a Small World*.

Bastard.

Once it was silent, I registered Bella's scent becoming stronger as she tiptoed up the stairs, knocking softly. "Edward? Can I come in?"

I reached forward and turned the knob, pulling the door open. She gazed up at me, her face angelic while her body, still sheathed in that devilish costume, radiated sin. My body burned with desire. I wanted to drink from her - to slice through the flesh of her thigh and lick a trail of blood up between her legs, letting that sweet ambrosia mix with her arousal as I brought her to orgasm with my tongue.

I was such a deplorable creature.

"Are you still mad at me?" she whispered, stepping inside.

I closed the door behind her, shaking my head as all my rage seeped out of me. Her presence calmed me just as much as it made my body burn in need. "I'm not mad at you, Bella. I just don't understand how you could want to do this."

She crossed the room, crawling onto the king sized bed I'd never slept in. My family and I had no need for sleep, but beds were useful to my family for...other *reasons*. I gulped, thinking of all the times in the last two weeks I'd hungered for Bella to be there, in my bed.

"*You* all did it," she pouted.

"Yes, Bella, but..."

"But what?" she snapped. "Don't you *want* to be with me?"

Her lower lip trembled and it suddenly dawned on me that she felt I was rejecting her. As if that were even possible. "I've known I wanted to be with you forever from the very first second I saw you."

Bella's eyes widened. "Then, why?"

I moved to sit down next to her, the bed shifting under our combined weight. "Because I hate the idea of you losing everything, and...I can't stand the thought of watching you suffer through the change."

"But that doesn't take long...does it?" Even as she tried to hide it by lowering her face, I could see her gulping with fear. I raised a hand to tenderly trace a fingertip along her cheek, running it down to her chin until she looked up at me again.

"About three days, give or take. And it's complete agony - worse than anything you could ever imagine," I replied softly.

"Did you know that was going to happen before you...changed?"

"I didn't know anything. I was about to die, Bella."

She blinked, her long eyelashes fluttering, a tear pooling at the corner of her eye at the thought. "Tell me what happened to you? To all of you?"

I frowned, realizing just how little she knew about who I was. I reached for her, pulling her down onto the bed beside me. Bella curled on her side, her hands tucked under her cheek like a child. But, this was no bedtime tale - no, it was more like a ghost story.

She listened intently as I spoke of how Carlisle had been changed centuries earlier, but found ways to feed with mercy, discovering how to survive on animal blood. I told her about my short life as a human, how I'd been intent to be a soldier in the Great War, but fell ill from the Spanish Influenza in 1918. Next, she listened to the tale of Carlisle finding Esme, turning her when there was no chance she would heal from her fall. Rosalie and Emmett's stories followed, as well as abbreviated versions of Alice and Jaspers' tales.

Bella absorbed everything as I talked for what felt like hours. "So it sounds to me that most of you were turned to save you from death," she prompted. "How is my situation any different?"

"Because-" I began, looking for a reason to argue with her, but she was correct. Defeated, I answered, "Because I need it to be."

She sighed and inched closer to me. "Edward, you keep acting like I have a choice here. If Alice's visions are right, I'm going to be dead in a few days. Changing me is the only choice we have." Bella reached forward and wrapped her warm fingers around mine, the sensation electric, tingling up my spine. "I know I want to be with you, so change me."

"But how can you be so certain of that?" I croaked. What if she changed her mind later? What if she ended up resenting me for all time? "You hardly even know anything about me."

"Fine," she huffed, sitting up abruptly. I followed suit, facing her as she crossed her legs. "I'll *get* to know you. What's your favorite color?"

I couldn't help but roll my eyes. "Blue," I answered, although, lately it had become the soft pink of her blush. "You?"

"Gold." She grinned, that very flush appearing on her cheeks. "The color of your eyes when you're happy." My grin unexpectedly mirrored hers, and then she continued with her questions. "Favorite place to go in the world?"

"The Caribbean. It has the bluest waters you'll ever see."

She raised an eyebrow. "Are there real pirates there?"

Her teasing forced a smile out of me. "Don't even start with that." Damn, she was so adorable. "Where is your favorite place?"

"New York City. My parents took me there when I was really little, before they got divorced. They still live in the same town back home. They're friends and all, but it's really awkward." She looked away sadly and my stomach plummeted. I'd had no idea she came from a broken home.

"When that happened I didn't believe people could fall in love and be together forever. I guess, for a while, I lost my faith in happy endings."

"That must be why Alice's visions went in and out for a time." She glanced up at me, confused, and I realized what I'd said really made very little sense. "Her premonitions of you were hazy for a time - about whether you were going to come here or not. I guess during that time you didn't believe in fairy tales."

She let out a clipped laugh. "Yeah, happily every after and Disney kind of go hand in hand, huh?"

A tear slipped down her cheek, but she wiped it away quickly. "Anyway, I just remember that trip as the last really good time we had as a family. They took me ice skating at Rockefeller Center and we saw the big Christmas tree."

Another tear streaked wetly down to her chin and I gently brushed my thumb along the path it left behind. "We'll go there together someday," I promised her.

A smile appeared from her tears, like the sun peeking from the clouds after a rainstorm. She cleared her throat, staying the course of her questions. "Favorite Disney movie?"

I shook my head, thinking these inquiries were just wasting time when, but as her eyes flickered to my lips, I discovered I was grinning back at her. Blinking, I realized just how much I enjoyed simply talking with her.

She was more to me than just her body and her blood - she was *everything*.

"All right, it's *Peter Pan*. I saw it in the theater when it came out in '53. It was so bright and colorful, and Peter was exactly how I remembered being when I was human - headstrong and always ready for an adventure." I paused, laughing softly, before my thoughts turned somber. "But the truth was I felt like I was one of The Lost Boys, because I will never grow up."

I glanced up at her from under my lashes. "If you do this, if I change you, then you'll never grow up either, Bella."

She pressed her hand to my cheek, warming me inside and out just from that one touch. "I don't need to get old if it means I will have eternity with you."

I winced, choking on emotion, lowering my head as she rose up on her knees, both hands cupping my face. "Bella...what if...what if I can't stop? What if *I* end up killing you?"

"You won't." She bent her head closer to mine, noses touching. Her scent began wrecking all my senses, waking up the lust I'd tried to control all night. "I know you won't."

"How do you know?" My lips almost brushed against hers as I asked the question, her breath washing over my face. She was so close, her body hovering, and my

fingers ached to touch her. I was trembling, intense need battling with restraint.

"I know because you love me," she whispered. "And I love you."

With that she fell against me, hands snaking up into my hair, her lips against mine in a hot, desperate kiss, swallowing my moan. "God, Bella," I panted, pressing kisses to her jaw, her neck and up to her ear, when she pulled apart for air. "Love you."

A loud groan rumbled out of me, breaking off my words as she climbed onto my lap. I could feel her heat searing me through her panties, and my cock so hard for her, it hurt. The thought that had consumed me every time I touched her began beating through my brain. *Mine. Mine. MINE!*

Her tongue slipped past my lips, a wet tease, stroking at my own, and my hands wrapped around her waist of their own volition, tearing the costume from her voluptuous curves. I had to see every inch of her, had to feel her, taste her.

"Make me yours, Edward," she gasped, her hips circling as she ground herself against me. "Make me yours for all time."

"Bella, *fuck.*" I pulled the costume the rest of the way off, throwing it to the side. The sight of her writhing on my lap in only her bra, panties and those fishnet thigh-highs was enough to nearly make me come just looking at her. "Need you, naked."

She rolled forward, nipping at my ear, sending a spike of desire through me. "Need *you* naked, too."

Her fingers found the hem of my shirt and tugged. I raised my arms, letting her pull it over my head. Bella licked her lower lip and sank her teeth into it as her hands brushed along the muscles of my chest, trailing down lower. "More," she begged, undoing my belt, her breathing hot and fast as she pulled the zipper down.

I was out of my mind already from the feeling of her grinding down on me. One stroke of her fingers along my cock and I was sure I would come in seconds. Needing to see her fall apart first, I flipped us over, and she let out a tiny yelp in surprise at how quickly she found herself on her back.

"Not yet," I rasped.

She mewled in protest, but stopped when I stood and quickly rid myself of my pants, kicking them off my legs. Bella's eyes slid hotly down my chest to where my

cock was straining, pushing at the fabric of my boxers. Laving my tongue up the side of her neck, I let my hips fall into the cradle of her thighs, rubbing against the wet satin of her panties, head against her clit.

"Have to taste you, first." Forcing myself away from the tempting beat of her neck, I kissed a path down to her breasts. Her nipples were taut, begging to be pinched and tweaked. Biting down on her bra, I snapped the fabric in two, letting the cups fall from her full, round breasts and down to her sides. Latching onto one pert nipple, I licked and sucked, feeling her body arch and buck beneath mine.

"Edward, please." Ignoring her pleading, I did the same to her other breast, careful not to nick her delicious skin with my teeth. One taste of her blood and I'd be lost.

I let my hands replace my lips on her breasts, cupping them and then rolling her sensitive nipples between my fingers as I pressed open-mouthed kisses to her belly. When I reached the hem of her panties, her legs started to tremble in anticipation.

Sliding my hands down her sides, I dipped my fingertips under the hem, glancing up at her wickedly as I began to drag her panties over her hips. She raised her legs, aiding me in pulling the fabric from her body, and then she was completely bare, her rosy lips parted, heated blush on every inch of her perfect skin.

"So beautiful," I murmured, drawing circles on her inner thighs, my touch feather light, and her eyes clamped shut as she let out a tiny whimper. "I love seeing how much you want me."

She began to open her mouth to answer, but any words disappeared in a moan as I finally brushed my thumb along her folds. Bella gasped - I could feel her throbbing, knew she had to be aching to be stroked. "Tell me you want me," I demanded, repeating those light touches just barely along her clit.

"Want you!" she cried, body twisting, legs spreading wider, desperate for more. I grit my teeth, so desperate to be inside her but needing to make her come at least once first.

"Tell me you're mine." I lowered my other hand, pressing a finger just against her opening, loving the way it made her thrash.

"I'm yours, Edward! Yours!" she whined, her entire body shaking. "God, please, *please*, touch me!"

Unable to deny her any longer, I sank a finger deep inside her tight heat, circling her clit with the other hand. Bella wailed, her fingers gripping the comforter, back arching. In and out I pumped, rubbing, stroking, feeling her blood pump under the slick surface of her skin. Biting back a surge of bloodlust, I swallowed down venom, focusing on her pants and moans even as my teeth tingled, wanting to bite. She was so wet, so hot, her body rocking with every movement of my fingers.

"So good, oh *God*." Her eyes opened, her pleasure-drenched gaze making my cock throb for her. "Want...you."

"No. I want to watch you come first." Adding a second finger, I watched her mouth drop open, circling her clit faster. "You're so fucking beautiful like this. Let me see it, Bella. Give it to me."

She cried out, and suddenly I needed to have my mouth on her, to drink down her release. Bringing my face between the sweet skin of her thighs, I replaced my fingers with my tongue, sucking her clit into my mouth. Bella screamed with pleasure, and I felt her walls begin to contract as I continued to thrust two fingers inside her. I wanted to bite, wanted to taste every sweet liquid she had to offer, but I wanted her to fall apart more.

Reaching up just above where my mouth was ravishing her, I pressed a palm to her lower belly, easing down with gentle pressure, and growled against her flesh. Bella's fingers shot into my hair, holding on tight as she shuddered and moaned, calling out my name as her orgasm rocked through her.

"Have to have you," I mumbled, sitting up and kneeling between her legs. I was shaking, I wanted her so damn much. "Can't wait any longer."

Still breathing heavy, she reached for me, clutching my hip and pulling me close until the tip of my cock met where my hands and mouth had just been. "Take me. I'm yours."

Straining, tremors taking over every limb, I forced myself to pause even as her sweet heat beckoned me forward. I knew this was it - that I would bite her as I came, and the next time she opened her eyes, she'd be a vampire.

"Love you," I whispered reverently, and then my eyes slammed shut as I pushed inside. "Oh! Oh, *fuck*, Bella!"

Unable to hold back, to be gentle or slow, I started pounding into her, more animal than man. It was pure bliss, her body a paradise I never thought I'd deserve,

the sensations mounting with every thrust. My hands ripped through the comforter as she writhed beneath me, hips lifting to meet me, stroke for stroke.

Mine!

I didn't feel my mouth opening, wasn't aware of how I bared my teeth, because all I could feel was my body inside hers and a need for more. But she caught my attention as she suddenly shivered through another release. Then she angled her head to the side and there it was - her throat, my bite mark from earlier that night.

"Take me now," she moaned. Her body was covered in sweat, our bodies slipping wetly against one another, my orgasm dangerously close. My release bearing down, I managed to hold back for a moment longer, pressing a kiss to her bite mark.

"I love you, Edward." Bella's voice was at my ear. "Do it. Bite me."

On the razor's edge, I snarled, my teeth raking along her bite mark, and then, unable to withstand it any longer, I gave in. My teeth sank into her flesh at the same instant my orgasm slammed into me, her taste rushing down my throat, the sensations more intense than I ever could have dreamed.

Letting my venom flow, I sucked down hard, one delicious pull after the next. The taste of her blood seemed to fuel my pleasure, making it go on endlessly. I was lost to sensation, pounding, sucking, taking all of her until the last of my spasms deliciously played out.

It was only then that I realized she'd stopped moving, her body frozen in agony. Instantly, I licked her wound closed and pulled out from inside her, wrapping her in the blanket and holding her to me.

"Bella?" I croaked against her hair, feeling her spasm in pain. "Bella, I'm so sorry!"

"Hurts." Her eyes were slammed shut, lines creasing all around them, with the last tears she'd ever cry rolling down her face. "Don't leave me?"

The question broke me, a sob tearing from my throat. "Never! I'm here, I love you so much, Bella!"

Pain took over, and she went in and out of consciousness. I knew the agony she was going through, the fire that felt like it was burning her alive.

"Please bring her back to me," I prayed in the darkness. "Please let her get the

happily ever after she never thought she could have."

Pressing my forehead to hers, I rocked her in my arms, knowing all I could do now was wait.

- WFM -

The three days that followed were the worst of my existence. Watching Bella endure the pain of the change was worse than experiencing it myself. Every time Bella let out an agonized moan, it was like a knife straight through me. I never let go of her hand, talking to her softly the entire time, telling her stories of my life and all the hopes and dreams I had for us.

I couldn't help but wonder if I'd be able to hear her thoughts when she awoke. Part of me hoped I could, but the rest of me enjoyed the silence I had when she was near.

My family had tried to get me to hunt, but I had refused to leave Bella's side. I knew I was getting weak, Alice finally insisted on prying me away from her while she dressed Bella in some comfortable clothes, and Carlisle had used that opportunity to force a blood bag in my hand. He always kept them around for emergencies.

And while we waited for Bella to come back to us, Alice's visions about the Volturi became clearer: Aro would be arriving soon, along with some of the most viscous members of his elite guard - Jane, Alec and Felix.

"I can't understand why they're still coming." I heard Alice wonder from the living room. "Bella's changed. There is no threat anymore."

"Whoever is informing them must not know where Bella is right now," Carlisle surmised.

He was right - no one knew where Bella was. Her cell phone had been going off constantly with text messages from her friends, all wondering what was happening. Finally, Alice had sent back answers from Bella, saying her mother had come into town and she was staying at her hotel for a few days. She'd also called in sick to work for her, and Esme had offered to cover Bella's evening shifts. We all hated to lie, but the truth wasn't exactly an option.

When the sun set on that third dreary November day, rain clouds almost completely obscuring the sun as it sank down toward the horizon, Bella's eyes began

to flutter. The scent of her blood had dwindled to nothing over the time of her change, and her body, now cold and sturdy, started shifting slightly on my bed.

"Bella, love? Can you hear me?"

I bent down, pressing my mouth to hers. I felt her respond to my kiss, lips brushing slightly, and when I pulled back, her eyes were open. The deep pools of brown absent, her irises were now blood-red, but the emotion shining in them was still the same.

"This must be a fairy tale," she murmured, smiling. Her teeth, now razor sharp, gleamed. "Because you just woke me with a kiss."

My eyes were shining as I brushed a silky hair back off her face, tucking it behind her ear. "You are my princess," I whispered. "With skin as pale as snow." I pressed gentle kisses to each cheek. "And lips as red as blood."

As my lips met hers again, I heard chuckling from the hallway.

"If Bella's Snow White, does that mean the rest of us are dwarves?" Emmett asked. Bella and I turned to see my family, all crowded outside my door.

"If we are, that makes you Dopey," Jasper joked. Bella laughed softly, the sound music to my ears. She started to sit up, not realizing how quickly she could move now. The rapidity of her movements shocked her, and she gripped the blanket, only to discover she could now shred the fabric.

"I'm sorry!" she yelped, immediately releasing the comforter in horror, but everyone just chuckled.

"It's all right, Bella. We all remember the feeling," Carlisle assured her. "You'll get used to everything, it will just take time."

At that moment, Alice's eyes went blank. "Time is one thing we don't have," she said, her eyes abruptly coming back into focus. "They're here."

The doorbell rang a moment later. "Since when do the bad guys use doorbells?" Emmett mused. "Shouldn't they be banging down the door, guns blazing?"

Carlisle shook his head, clasping Esme's hand. "Aro is too civilized for that."

As they all made their way out of my room, I turned to Bella, listening for her

thoughts. They were still hidden from me, but I could tell from her expression that she was worried.

Helping Bella to slowly stand, keeping her movements controlled, we followed my family down the stairs to the front hall. "It will be okay," I promised her, sliding an arm over her shoulder and clasping her to me. I missed her warmth, but loved the strength that now resonated from her.

"Ready?" Carlisle asked, looking back over his shoulder. Every family member was holding tightly on to their mate, and for the first time in my life, I felt connected, fulfilled. I steeled myself for whatever came next, swearing that I would defend her, even to my death.

He pulled open the door and I sucked in a breath, my lips curling off my teeth, ready to fight. Three vampires stood on the front step, the palest, oldest of the bunch stepping forward

"Carlisle, my old friend!" Aro, Alice thought. "It's so wonderful to see you again."

"Aro, what a lovely surprise," Carlisle said without humor. "What brings you to Central Florida?"

"Well, I didn't think you'd mind a visit. And we had it on...good authority that you would be in the area." He peeked inside the hallway. "May we come in?"

"Of course." Carlisle held the door open, looking gracious, but his eyes were cautious. *Be careful*, he thought to me. *Keep Bella close. It's standard for them to try to be peaceful before taking down their enemies.*

I didn't nod in agreement, only kept Bella tightly against my side as we followed Aro, a tiny pale blond, a male vampire with a similar build, who must have been her brother. They were all wearing casual clothing, and looked as out of place as they must have felt.

"I see your guard has increased since we last met," Carlisle began as we all gathered together in the living room. "I assume I'm meeting Jane, Alec and Felix?"

Aro smiled, a slow sinuous motion that was anything but genuine. "You assume correctly. And I see your family has increased as well?" His eyes flickered to Bella, and my fingers tightened on her shoulder.

"Yes," Carlisle began. "This is-"

"Bella," she answered for him. "I'm Bella, Edward's...mate."

Jane, Alec and Felix tensed, and Aro tilted his head to the side. "Odd...we were under the impression that Edward had become involved with a human."

"How'd you come across that piece of information?" Jasper questioned.

Aro didn't take his eyes off Bella, advancing slowly toward her. Quietly, he simply said, "Felix."

We all crouched as the door reopened, ready to fight, when we saw a tall, hulking brunette, who rivaled Emmett in size, dragging in Mike Newton. Bella gasped as he was brought into the room by the scruff of his neck, squeaking out words of protest. Each one of my family members let out a hiss.

So, Newton is the Volturi spy, Rosalie thought. I am so going to kick his ass.

Settled onto his feet, Mike looked around at all of us without any guilt in his expression. His gaze settled last on Bella, and lust followed on the tails of relief reflecting from his eyes. I growled at him, pulling Bella possessively against my side. *Mine!*

"Now, now, no need to get territorial, Edward." Aro stepped to Mike's side, his arms crossed casually behind his back. "Mike was simply doing what we entrusted him to do."

"And what's that?" I snapped, swallowing back venom as I beat out of my mind images of ripping Mike's head off. Bella slid a reassuring palm along my spine and I calmed instantly from her gentle touch.

Looking as guilty as the ruler of our kind could appear, Aro glanced back at Carlisle. "We needed to have someone here to ensure you all remained, how do you put it? Vegetarians. We could only imagine the feeding frenzy that would happen if one of you...snapped."

I heard Jasper grind his teeth together and Carlisle stepped forward. "I would have hoped you'd have more faith in me and my family. We have never done anything to betray your trust."

"True," Aro continued, swinging his gaze back toward Bella. "But when Mike discovered the connection between Edward and this one-

"Bella," she repeated, this time anger flashing hot across her features. "My *name* is Bella."

Jane hissed, taking a step forward, but Aro held out a palm to stop her. "My apologies, *Bella*. But, when Mike discovered how...close...you two had become on Halloween, he had no choice but to contact us."

"Well, as you can see, there is no threat. Bella is one of us, now," Carlisle said diplomatically.

"She is indeed, and quite the beauty. It is, my dear, as if you were made for this life." Aro held a hand out to her. "May I?"

Bella looked up at me apprehensively. "Aro can read minds," I told her, never taking my eyes off him. "With one touch, he will know every thought you've ever had."

"Well, then he'll know we have nothing to hide then." She lifted her chin in that determined gaze I'd seen in Alice's vision, and without another word, Bella reached out and clasped her hand with Aro's.

His lids sank shut in concentration, ready to absorb everything Bella had to offer, but his brow furrowed, eyes opening in confusion.

"Her thoughts are beyond my reach," he said, still holding her hand. I watched Bella's expression from the corner of my eye, waiting for any flickering of pain. "How can this be?"

"Edward has not been able to read her thoughts, either," Carlisle offered. "It would seem that she is some kind of shield."

Tension filled the air, Bella's eyes widening. "I'm a...what?"

Aro suddenly dropped her hand, clapping his together as he erupted into laughter. "How marvelous!"

"I don't understand," Bella whispered to me, not realizing that every vampire in the room could hear her as well. "What does this mean?"

"It means you're more bad ass than we ever thought you were!" Emmett said, grinning from ear to ear. Jane, Alec and Felix continued to glower as Aro stepped back toward them.

"I think you may have some kind of gift, Bella," Carlisle informed us. "Your thoughts were blocked from Edward's ability, even as a human. It's something I was hoping to continue to research."

"I look forward to hearing about it," Aro told him. "But perhaps from now on, you would all find less populated areas to vacation to? We must be sure to keep the peace."

"Of course," Carlisle agreed. As he did, Alice had another series of visions:

Bella running through the marshlands with me, her eyes glittering as we hunt together.

Bella bundled in winter clothes, beaming as she glided on ice skates. Towering above her head is the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center.

My family by our sides as we stood hand in hand, exchanging vows, a couple looking vaguely like Bella standing proudly behind her.

"Well!" Aro clapped his hands together loudly. "As long as we're here for a bit, we might as well make the best of it."

"We're staying?" Jane asked.

"Isn't there something you would like to see, my dear?" he asked, looking pensive. "I, for one, have always wanted to see what you call Space Mountain."

Eyes flickering back to Felix again, Aro motioned a finger at him. Mike suddenly fell forward, released from Felix's grasp. "Oh! Yes, of course! I can get you all complimentary park tickets, fast passes to all the rides, anything you want!"

Aro waved a hand dismissively at Mike, effectively shutting him up, and nodded at the others. As Jane, Alec and Felix headed toward the door, he beamed at us. "I look forward to seeing you both again." He bid Carlisle goodbye, and Bella sagged against me in relief.

"Well I'm glad that's over," Carlisle said, pulling Esme close and kissing her forehead.

"When do I get to give Newton a beat down?" Rosalie's eyes were still trained on the door, and Jasper's expression mirrored hers. Emmett nodded at her comment, a sadistic grin on his face.

My father chuckled. "I think being Aro's personal tour guide sounds like punishment enough for him, don't you? Besides, it looks like he's a Volturi puppet until they decide to get rid of him themselves. We, it seems, are free to go."

Free. The knowledge seeped over me, sinking into my bones. Bella and I were free to be together, forever.

Alice raced over to embrace Bella. Even though the danger was gone, I still held on to her, fingers touching as Alice hugged her. "We're going to have so much fun in New York City!" she squealed. "I can't wait to go shopping with you!"

"New York?" Bella asked, raising an eyebrow, but then nodded. "Visions. I get it. So, can you tell me anything about my super power?"

"I haven't finished researching it yet, but you'll be the first to hear of it when I do," Carlisle said.

She wrapped her arms around my stomach, perching her chin on my chest as she looked up at me. "Guess I'm not a damsel in distress after all."

I bent down to kiss her. "No, but I will still try to give you your happily ever after."

"Bella, we do have to think about what we're going to do next," Esme added sadly. "How we're going to handle things when we leave here, and what you're going to tell your friends, your school and your family. After a time, you know..."

She trailed off, not wanting to say what came next. We all knew there were difficult times ahead, but what's a fairy tale without a little drama?

"Bella knows the drill! She's one of us now," Emmett hollered. He grinned widely, his dimples appearing on his face as he put on a campy, Dracula-esque voice. "And there's no turning back now!"

"Well, I'm sure you guys will help me figure it out," Bella insisted, smiling back at him. "But for now, can someone please tell me why my throat is on fire? Do vampires get strep?"

I chuckled. "You're thirsty, love."

"You've gotta go wrestle some alligators, Bells," Emmett announced as he and Rose turned to head up the stairs. "Trust me, it's worth the fight."

The rest of the family followed, and I led Bella to the door. My breath quickened at the thought of hunting with her, of watching her, feral and beautiful as she made her first kill.

"You'll show me what to do?"

Walking her out into the evening, I replied, "Of course."

Sweeping her into my arms, I kissed her passionately, letting myself crush her to me like I'd always wanted. Pulling her into a tight embrace, I closed my eyes, simply holding her against me, reveling in the feeling. "I don't feel lost anymore," I whispered.

"That's because you found me." Bella tilted her head up for another kiss. "So, which way to Neverland?"

Grinning broadly, I looked up into the star-filled sky and pointed. "Second star to the right..."

She jumped up, brushing her lips against mine once more before finishing the line. "And straight on 'till morning."