

CHAPTER TWENTY

Dirty High

It was the first time Jake didn't leave after fucking me.

When I opened my eyes at 6 a.m. his arms were tight around me, keeping me warm. Too warm. The heat from his body and the pounding in my head made me feel like feverish and ill. My ankle was throbbing like it had a heart of its own. I pulled myself out of Jake's arms, out of the bed and shook him.

"Jake—get up. You've got work and no clothes here."

He rolled over and opened his eyes and looked at me. "Good morning." He looked me up and down. "Got any coffee?"

"You're going to be late," I said. "And of course I have coffee."

"I'm off today," he said.

I hopped over to the bathroom and turned on the shower and downed two Percocets with a gulp of water. Then I heard Jacob get up and go into the kitchen and run the coffee grinder. A minute later he stepped into the bathroom. "I'll take you to work today, okay?"

I stuck my head out from the shower curtain. "Why?"

"I'm here," he said.

"I don't want to make a scene with Derek," I said.

"No scene. Promise."

I put my head back in the shower and started shaving my armpits when Jake stepped in behind me. "What are you doing?" I asked, annoyed.

"Washing your back." He began soaping me up.

"What's up with you today?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Bullshit," I said. He took the shower head and sprayed me down and soaped himself up and rinsed off. "Why are you acting like a boyfriend?"

"Does that bother you?" he asked, stepping out of the shower.

"I just broke off an engagement. The last thing I need is to fuck up my friendship with you."

"You won't," he said, handing me a towel. Then he walked into the kitchen and poured two cups of coffee.

#

On the ride to school I felt sick. I should have stayed home. But today was the last Thoreau club meeting and I wanted to be there for Angela, Erik, Jessica and Paige. I thought of Mike Newton, waiting for discharge to the adolescent psychiatric unit in Port Angeles. And then I thought of Edward, who was on his way in for a disciplinary hearing that might destroy his chances for Dartmouth. I pulled my phone out.

"Tell them the f. was for drugs," I typed then sent to Edward.

"What are you doing?" Jake asked.

"Checking my email," I said.

We pulled into the school parking lot and the kids milling around looked to see who was in the '67 Mustang. Paige and Angela and Erik all waved and then I saw them huddle, no doubt in quiet conference about how I'd finally hooked up with Jake. We parked and he got out to open my door, and I saw Derek climbing out of his Subaru, carrying his messenger bag, in a hurry. He looked over and then just looked away as he walked into the building. It made my stomach hurt to see him.

I climbed out of the car and grabbed my crutches. "See you later," I said, trying to get rid of Jake quickly. "Thanks for the ride."

"Well, look who's here," he said as the Cullens pulled into the parking lot.

Emmett, Jasper, Alice and Rosalie hopped out of their SUV and looked curiously to where we stood. It was clear they recognized Jake, but they made no greeting. Then they all walked to the tree line of the woods and peered into the forest. Were they afraid the bears would come back? When they were satisfied nothing lurked there, they joined Carlisle, Esme and Edward, who were getting out of Edward's Volvo. Edward stepped

out of the car staring openly at Jacob, dagger faced. Then he shifted his eyes to me, and I had to look away. Esme whispered something in Edward's ear and patted his arm and he turned away to discuss something with her and Carlisle.

"You have to tell me what's going on," Jake whispered in my ear, gripping my arm. "Why was Edward Cullen staring at you like that?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said.

"I'll walk you to your office," he said.

"No, you won't. I don't need any more shit from Derek."

"Fine. I'll pick you up at 3, then."

"Make it 4. I've got a meeting after school."

He kissed me then, quickly on the lips, right there in front of the Cullens, in front of all the students in the parking lot, and my face broiled with embarrassment. I pulled away and gave him the most evil glare I could muster. Then he got back into the car and drove off.

I felt awful. Screamingly awful. My head throbbed and my stomach flipped. I wanted to hide somewhere as the Cullens approached me, but I stood there and did my best to act normal and not get sick on the sidewalk.

"Good morning," I said, my heart pounding.

"Good morning, Miss Swan," Carlisle said. "How's your ankle?"

"Fine," I said. "Thank you for asking."

"Can I speak to you for a minute?" Edward asked through gritted teeth. This is a bad idea, I tried to telecast to him. Meeting with me alone in my office when everyone is so suspicious is a dumb, dumb idea. Oh please, oh please read my mind. Just this once. But he continued to look at me in earnest.

"Of course," I said, as professionally as I could. "Now?"

"Yes, now."

We all walked together into the main office, where Derek stood sorting through his mail. I put my head down and walked straight into my office, Edward following me as Carlisle and Esme were shown into the small conference room.

#

Inside, Edward leaned against the door and let out a heavy sigh. He shook his head like a disappointed parent, slow, deliberate, admonishing.

"Tell me you are not fucking Jacob Black," he said in a low, but exasperated voice. "Lie to me."

I turned my head away, unable to meet his disapproving eyes.

"What do you want me to say?" I said.

"Are you in love with him?"

"What difference does it make?"

"I need to know."

"Of course I'm not in love with him," I said. "You know that."

"Okay then," he said. "You're not to let him touch you again."

I was too stunned to speak. No, you did not just order me not to let Jake touch me. Who the hell do you think you are? These are the words that I meant to say, but I found I could not say them. How on earth could he make such a demand of me? Was he out of his mind?

"Say something," he said.

"You left."

"I know. We're in a difficult situation here, Bella. You know that."

"Then what the hell do you expect?"

"I don't want anyone touching you."

"You told me to get married and have babies," I said. "You said you wouldn't interfere."

"I changed my mind."

"When?"

"When you fucked Jacob Black." He looked up at the clock. "I've got to go. They're waiting."

Then he slipped out the door without another word.

#

By the clock I knew it was a full ten minutes that I sat staring at the door, imagining him standing where he'd stood, still trying to formulate some better response. What an incredible display of balls. How in the world did he think he had any place to tell me who I could or could not fuck?

And worse yet—why was I so turned on? Edward unlocked something in me that I was afraid to face, some dark desire that shamed and confused me. Because however offended I was by his presumption, I wanted to obey him. I felt like my body had betrayed my mind, had betrayed my better judgment since the day I met him. But I would not hand control my sexuality over to a man. Ever.

I'd show him, I thought. He didn't own me. How dare he toy with my heart this way, issuing inappropriate edicts, moratoriums on my sexual behavior? He'd be sorry.

He's seventeen, I said to myself. Remember that, Bella.

No. Something was really not right here. I'd never give some kid that kind of power over me, not even Edward Cullen. It just wasn't possible. Had I regressed in some way? Did I see myself as seventeen-year-old Bella here?

No. Seventeen-year-old Bella never had it in her to feel like this.

Quite the head fuck for 8:45 a.m. and I had nearly the entire school day, and then the last Thoreau club meeting to endure. With Derek.

I sat with my head on the desk, my hands over the top of my head, trying to blot out the light. I took another Percocet and stayed like that for quite awhile, until well into first period, until after Edward and his parents had finished their meeting and left the building.

There was a knock at my door. I picked my head up and tried to look coherent. It was Red. "We reached an agreement with the Cullens regarding Edward's disposition."

"Oh?"

"Dr. Cullen spoke with the juvenile court judge last week to discuss Edward's case. The judge felt that since this was a first offense, treatment would be the recommendation."

"That's good," I said.

"Dr. Cullen said you shared your concerns about Edward having some mental symptoms and how that might have caused his behavior last week."

"Yes," I said. "He appeared to be having a manic episode."

"He was very grateful to you for that," Red said. "He's going to send Edward for treatment up in Alaska."

"That's good."

"We'll confer his diploma by mail."

"Okay," I said, trying to appear as disinterested as possible. I really didn't know what to think, but I did know one thing. Carlisle Cullen was full of shit.

"That's not all," Red said. "Dr. Cullen is starting a scholarship fund for the Thoreau Club. He said that he found Edward's participation in the club this year to be very good for his attitude, despite his problem here at the end."

"You're kidding me," I said.

"I was surprised too," he said. "He said you and Derek were a very positive influence this year."

I laughed cynically, shaking my head.

"Anyway, that takes care of that," Red said. "Three more days, then graduation, then I'm going on a long fishing trip. I hope you're planning some kind of vacation too."

"I'm going to Vancouver after graduation," I said, feeling my heart speed up. Was I still going to go?

"Enjoy it," Red said. "You could use the change of scenery."

#

The rest of the day was fogged by confusion, but I managed to tackle the last of my piles of paperwork and check in with a few students. The rest of the week was finals, and things would be more relaxed.

And then finally came the moment I'd been sort of dreading—the last Thoreau club meeting. I hated last things, and even in some small way hated that this was the last time I'd run this group with Derek, even though I was starting to hate Derek himself. Just because I hated goodbyes.

I came in the room and plunked my bag down on the floor next to my chair and lay my crutches on top of it. Derek said nothing when I came in, even though none of the students had arrived yet.

"We can do this, right Derek?" I said. "We can be professionals here."

"I know I can," he said. "Whether you can or not is up to you."

"Come on," I said. "The kids are going to be tense enough as it is."

Angela and Erik and Paige came into the room, a little tentative.

"Hey there young Thoreauvians," I said. "Welcome to the grand finale of bear watch."

Angela laughed and took out her notes. Jessica came in then, taking a seat next to me. She wouldn't even look at Paige, who appeared as if she really wanted to say something but just didn't know how.

"Glad you made it," I said to Jessica.

"Let's get started," said Derek. "First of all, I need to issue an apology to all of you for discussing my religious beliefs at Lake Crescent. I understand it wasn't the right venue to bring it up."

I watched the surprised look on the kids faces, especially Jessica, who just looked at the floor and blushed a little. So, it had been her, I thought. Good for her.

"It's okay, Mr. Banner," Angela said. "We know your heart was in the right place."

I didn't agree, but I kept it to myself. "I know this has been a really difficult couple of weeks," I said. "So much has changed so fast. I was wondering if you guys wanted to talk about any of it."

"I'm sorry, Jessica," Paige blurted out at the first opportunity. "I know Mike's overdose wasn't your fault. I was just, I don't know, freaked out. I feel awful for how I treated you. Can you forgive me?"

Jessica burst into tears and I put my arm across her shoulders. Paige came over and gave her a hug, and then Jessica hugged her back and then I had to dab the tears out of my own eyes, because I knew how frightened the kids had been by Mike's suicide attempt, by the thought that the dark things in this world had such power over us. And I thought about how much I loved these kids, and how sad I was that they ever had to grow up and leave the safety of those childhood years, when all was possible and dark things lived under beds and in closets, and a kiss on top of the head could make them stay there.

"I'm so glad you guys made up," Angela said, wiping her eyes.

"Me too," Erik said. "I'd like a drama vacation. A long one."

"Me too," I said. "You guys are leaving and going off to college and I hope that when you think back on your time here, especially with us in Thoreau Club, you can remember the good, long talks and the bonds of friendship we made here. I want you to take those and keep them close to your heart. I know I will."

"Now you're really going to make me cry," Paige said.

"Yeah, goodbyes suck," I said. "Sorry."

"Miss Swan," Derek said, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm a little choked up here."

"I really wish we'd been able to write our statement about the bears," Angela said. "With the problems last week we never had the chance to finish that."

"Well, we can still discuss it, right? After all these months of following it, I want to know what you think this bear behavior means. Does it contain a message for us after all?"

"It seems like ever since Lake Crescent, there's been a lot more aggressive behavior," Angela said. "Like something around that time caused the bears to become upset."

"Not just the bears," Paige said. "Think about it. The bears got aggressive. Edward committed a crime. Miss Swan broke her ankle. Mike OD'd on pills, and then Mr. Banner and Miss Swan..." she stopped talking and gave us an "oops" kind of look.

"We broke up," I said. "It's okay, you can say it."

"I think we should consult the stars," Erik said, joking. "Maybe there's some bad planet alignment."

"If I believed in that sort of thing, I'd agree," I said. "It does feel like there's something in the air."

"Maybe the bears reacting to us," Derek said. "Or maybe we're reacting to the bears. What do you think?"

"You know, I think you can read the bears' behavior however you want," Angela said. "Like, whatever you want to see, you'll notice it more. So if you feel bad? Then you'll see more bad behavior in the bears. Does that make any sense?"

"Perfect sense," I said. "Really, perfect. Whatever you're looking to see, you'll see everywhere. I think that's what the bears have taught me, anyway."

"And what about what you don't want to see?" Paige asked.

"I guess you don't see it," Erik said. "Denial."

"Wow, I hope you guys are all going into psychology," I said. "There's still time. You don't have to declare a major until junior year, right?"

"I'm doing biology," Erik said.

"Great field," Derek said.

"I'm going to major in psych," Paige said. "I think it's really cool to know why people do what they do."

"Yes, well even with all that theory there's still a lot of mystery involved," I said, and gave her a smile.

"Okay folks, I think that wraps it for Thoreau Club. I want to thank you all for your hard work. I really enjoyed leading this club with Miss Swan," Derek said, and gave me an apologetic smile. "Truly, Bella."

"Me too," I said. "And oh—before I forget, I have an announcement. A really, really great announcement. Dr. Cullen has created a scholarship fund in honor of the Thoreau Club. I think this year each one of you are getting money to put towards college. Mr. Colter will contact you with the details later this week."

The kids all lit up with the unexpected good news, but their excitement was quickly tempered by the alarm that crossed Derek's face.

"No," Derek said, shaking his head. "That's not appropriate."

"What are you talking about?" I said. "Red approved it this morning."

"Listen, I am telling you all, do not accept any money from the Cullens," he said, to the confusing stares of the students.

"But... I could really use it," Paige said. "My parents are struggling enough as it is."

"Derek, don't do this," I said. "Please."

"It's not like the Cullens don't have a ton of money," Jessica said. "If they couldn't spare it, I'm sure Dr. Cullen wouldn't offer."

"I am telling you all right now, do not take that money."

"Mr. Banner," I said. "Now would be a good time for you to stop talking."

"This is my classroom, and I'll say what I want here, Miss Swan. And I'm telling you all, do not take any money from the Cullens. Don't go near them."

"So Edward really is a terrorist?" Paige asked.

"No, of course not," I said. "Mr. Banner is having a moment of temporary insanity."

"Who do you think you are, insulting me in front of students? I'll report you for this."

"We should go," Angela said, and she and Erik, Paige and Jessica all gathered their belongings as we continued to argue.

"You'll report me? Go right ahead. I've got a report of my own to make." I grabbed my crutches and stood up from the desk, but in my haste I kicked my bag and dumped

all the contents on the floor. Lipstick, wallet, keys, phone, iPod, little notebooks, three pens, a pack of gum scattered. Paige and Angela picked everything up for me.

"Let's go down and see Mr. Colter then," he said, handing me my bag.

"Fine."

#

It was just before 4pm and Red's office was locked, the lights out. He was gone already. There was nobody in the main office other than the Bob the custodian, and he was vacuuming the conference room.

"The Cullens are deceiving you," Derek said, getting in my face. "Bella, please, you've got to believe me. They are not what you think they are, and they will damage your chances for heaven."

"Derek, I will not—do you understand me? Will not hear any more of this bullshit. If you bring it up again, I swear to you I'll make a formal HR complaint."

"I know Edward got to you," he said. "And all I can say is, I'm sorry. I'll be praying for you."

#

I stormed out of the building with my big heavy bag, on my crutches, down the sidewalk. Jake was already waiting for me in the parking lot, luckily. I hopped over to his car and got in.

"Hiya," he said, smiling.

I was so enraged I tried to slap him, but he caught my wrist before I made contact with his face.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he said, his nostrils flaring, his eyes widening in anger.

"How dare you kiss me this morning in front of the entire student body? I'm not some whore you can make out with whenever or wherever you feel like it."

"I didn't make out with you," he said. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I just got into an argument with Derek. Can you get me out of here?"

"So he starts shit and you decide to hit me?" He shook his head and started the car. I closed my eyes, dropped my head back and let out a long, frustrated sigh. "What happened?"

"He was being a dick," I said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because he's a dick, that's why," I said.

"And imagine you almost married him," he said. We were silent the rest of the ride to my house.

"Jake?" I asked as he was pulling into my driveway. "Do you consider us a couple now?"

"Jesus, Bella," he said. "Do we really have to make this a formal kind of arrangement already?"

"No," I said. "That's not why I'm asking."

"Let's just keep things casual, okay? I promise I'll be around a lot more now that Derek is gone."

"I'm not asking for that," I said.

"What are you asking then?"

"I just want to know what you're thinking." Jake got out of the car and came around to my side. He pulled my crutches out of the back seat and carried my bag as I hopped up the porch stairs. I walked over to the kitchen counter and he came up behind me and put his arms around my waist and kissed my neck. "Don't," I said, shrugging him off. Adrenaline surged through me.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said. "I just got home from work. My ankle hurts."

"Go lay down and I'll bring you your medicine, okay?"

Why did he have to be nice Jake? Couldn't he be arrogant Jake? I went into the living room and lay down on the couch and he brought me a tall glass of water and a Percocet.

"That's not enough," I said. "I need at least two."

"Are you kidding me?" he asked.

"It's a broken ankle. It hurts."

"The bottle says one every six hours," he said. "How could a little thing like you need double that?"

"Just get me another pill."

He shrugged his shoulders and went and got me the bottle. Then he sat down in the chair and turned on the television.

"You're staying?" I asked, puzzled.

"Is that a problem?"

"I don't get it," I said. "You don't want to call yourself a boyfriend, but you're acting just like one."

"I'm acting like a friend," he said. "You could act more like one yourself."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Why are you being such a bitch?"

"I don't know," I said, and then felt terrible. I did know. I was acting like a bitch because I was afraid if I didn't, he'd try to touch me. What the fuck was wrong with me? "I'm sorry," I said. "I just feel like shit. I hurt, my head is all fucked up. I'm a mess. I'm really sorry."

Jake came over and hugged me. "I know I haven't been there enough for you, Bella," he said, gently brushing the hair from my face, holding my hand. "I wish I could explain more but this has just been a really weird year."

"You're not kidding," I said.

"I know," he said. "Let's figure out what we want to do in Vancouver. Maybe we can catch a good show or something."

"Um," I said, feeling weird again. "Not right now. I think I need a nap."

"I knew I shouldn't have given you two Percocets. Are you okay?"

"Yeah," I said. "I'm just tired. Whatever we do in Vancouver will be fine. You can plan the whole itinerary. Surprise me."

"Okay," he said. "Go ahead and take a nap. I'll hang out."

I pulled myself off the couch and went to my bed. Was Jake going to stay all fucking night?

"Hey, can you bring me my bag?" I called from bed.

"Yeah, hold up," I heard him say over the ringing of his cell. "What's up?" he said to whoever called. Then I heard him say, "No. What? Shit. How many? Another 15? Damn it. Okay. Okay. Half an hour."

He walked into my room carrying my bag and dropped it on the floor next to my bed.

"Sorry Bella, I have to run," he said, looking annoyed. "Another group of bears showed up today and I have to go see what the hell is going on."

"No problem," I said.

"Call me if anyone comes here uninvited, okay? If anything seems at all out of place or even if you get a weird vibe, just call me. I'll be right back."

"What are you so worried about?"

"I don't like the way Edward was looking at you this morning," he said.

"You're being ridiculous," I said. "I've known him all year and he's been nothing but polite."

"Right," he said. "Of course he has."

"You're in no position to be possessive," I said.

"Possessive?" he looked at me strangely. "Bella, I'm being protective."

"Well, I don't need protecting from Edward Cullen."

"Just call me," he said and kissed me on the forehead.

Right. I didn't think so.

#

I slept into the evening. At eight o'clock, I went into the bathroom and splashed my face. Brushed my hair, my teeth. Considered my outfit. What was I doing?

I needed answers. But I didn't even know what questions to ask.

Back in the bedroom I grabbed my bag and dug into it looking for my phone. Keys. ID. Wallet. Mascara. iPod. Huh. I dumped it out onto my bed, spreading the contents out. No phone. I unzipped the outside pocket. It wasn't there. I checked the inside pocket. Nothing but tampons and an old lip balm.

I grabbed my house phone and dialed my cell. It rang three times and was about to go into voicemail when someone picked up.

"Hello Bella," Derek said.

"What are you doing with my phone?" I asked.

"I found it under my desk," he said. "I guess the kids didn't see it when they were picking up your bag for you."

"Well, can you just turn it off and give it to me tomorrow? Save the battery for me."

There was a long pause.

"Derek?" I asked.

"I'm thinking that I need to give this to Red."

"Come on," I said, feeling the beginnings of panic. Had he gone through my phone? "Are things so bad now that you can't even see me to give me back my phone? Can't we just be grown ups?"

"It's not that, Bella," he said. "Look, this is really difficult, but, I just think Red needs to know about your relationship with Edward Cullen," he said.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I saw the text messages. I saw the call log."

"That's a violation of my privacy. And you can't prove anything."

"Red can decide what he wants to do with the information," he said. "I know you'll hate me for this, but deep down you know I'm right. Bella, you need help. You're going to ruin your life."

I hung up, shaking so bad I thought I might go into convulsions. .

#

I sat on the couch shaking, unable to calm myself. I had no idea what to think. I had no idea what to do. Should I quit my job? Should I confess, turn myself in? Should I call Edward's parents? Should I check myself into a psychiatric hospital?

My mind raced and I could not get my body to stop shaking. I was in some state of emotional shock. I needed to calm the fuck down.

I went back into the bathroom and pulled the Klonopin out. I had two left. I took them and went back into the living room and tried to breathe.

In the morning, I'll turn myself in. I'll talk to Red myself and then check myself into a psychiatric hospital, I thought. I will not allow Derek to drive my fate. He was right—I needed help, but I wanted it on my terms, not the terms of a judge. And not from prison, if I could avoid prison.

I pulled my wedding album from the shelf. You were a good person, Bella. You can be a good person again, I told myself.

I flipped to the first page. I wanted to remember who I was when I was worthy of love. I wanted to remember Zack. I silently begged him not to hate the person I had become.

I pulled the Grey Goose out of the liquor cabinet. A toast, I thought. Just one. I'll drink it slow.

I turned to the shots of our rehearsal dinner. His father making speeches in front of slides of us as children. My father choked up as he danced with me the evening before he'd walk me down the aisle. See? I had been a good person.

When I started drinking, I told myself I was just going to drink enough to take the edge off. Just enough to stop trembling and to fall asleep. But when the edge came off, I no longer cared how much I drank.

I flipped the page over to my wedding. There I was, in my white princess dress. I had been so young. A baby, really. Couldn't even legally drink. Yet in these photos where I was so young and innocent, I was still older than Edward was now. My heart sank with the realization.

I turned the page. Zack was standing with his groomsmen, so handsome in his uniform. I took out our first photo as husband and wife and held it between my fingers. We'd had our whole lives ahead of us.

Down came the tears. So, so many tears. I remembered then what it felt like to be good. But it didn't matter because even as I tried to immerse myself in that memory, I thought of Edward and how much I still wished he would return.

I needed some water. The edges of my vision went fuzzy and there was a red haze creeping in. I stood up and took a step, and then everything went black.

I don't know how much later it was, but I realized I was not actually in my body—I was standing next to myself, watching as vomit began to dribble out of the side of my mouth.

Oh no, I thought. Oh shit. What have you done, Bella? You're choking. Wake up wake up you're going to choke. No, no, no, fuck. Please wake up. I hovered near myself, but I couldn't find the way back in.

Someone was yelling my name. It sounded distant, like maybe it was from the road. Then I saw Edward streak across the living room to the floor where my body lay. Don't let me die, Edward. Please don't let me die.

"No... Bella... No... " He called, but he sounded so far away. He picked my limp body off the floor and stuck his hand in my mouth and leaned me over. I watched the vomit spill onto the rug. He pulled out his phone and dialed.

"Carlisle, you've got to get over here. Now. She OD'd." He dropped the phone and dragged my body into the bathroom, blasted the shower and threw me in. Then he slapped my face, but I couldn't feel anything because I was still outside. I marveled as a huge red mark spread across my jaw, covering the place where he'd struck me.

"Please Bella, don't die. You can't die." He put his ear to my chest and I desperately wanted to respond to him. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was. This was not supposed to happen. I was supposed to turn myself in. To try to be a good person again. Please don't feel bad. He had to know it wasn't his fault. It was my fault. But I couldn't speak because I didn't know how to get back into my body.

Then he buried his head in my neck and as the water was streaming over us, he let out the most mournful sound I'd ever heard in my life. I watched in agony as he put his mouth on my neck and then I felt something terrible.

Piercing, liquid fire entered my veins right at the base of my throat. Shards of glass lit with acid started to course through me. Hell. I'd died and gone to hell. I began to scream and kept screaming with agonizing pain and terror and then I opened my eyes. Edward pulled away from me, horrified, blood dripping from the corners of his open mouth.

"Make it stop!" I screamed at him. The acid began to spread throughout my body, into my organs which began to ache as a rapid rigidity set in. I willed myself to leave my body again, but I couldn't go, couldn't escape the fire that burned me alive from inside.

"Kill me kill me kill me make it stop! Please!" I implored him.

He dragged me from the shower and laid me soaking wet across the bathroom floor. In seconds I had become paralyzed, unable to move on my own volition, yet I lay grotesquely twitching.

He leaned over me and said, "I love you, Bella. I'm so sorry." And then he wrapped his lips around the fiery wound and began to suck.

How can I describe the relief I felt as his ice cold mouth pulled the infected blood from my body? I felt lighter than light, like an essence. An idea, pure in form. I experienced a realm of delight so intense it couldn't exist anywhere on earth, it couldn't possibly be felt by mere mortals, yet I felt it more keenly than I'd ever felt anything. I began to hallucinate wild images from the forest. The white bear was standing over us, and then she faded slowly like a projected image in a lightening room.

The pain I had been experiencing was obliterated from my memory and then there was no discomfort of any kind anywhere, in any part of my body, in any part of my mind. Nirvana. I began to moan softly, disintegrating with the elation I felt as he continued to draw my blood. Then I climaxed under him, finally, as he was draining me of the last remnants of my life. He continued to suck and suck and suck and I felt my spirit lifting again, ready to leave for good when a loud and violent sound crushed my euphoria.

Carlisle and Emmett broke into the room where we were.

"Edward! Stop!" Carlisle commanded as he and Emmett pulled Edward with all of their force off of me.

Edward snarled like a ravenous lion pulled off a doe and struck Emmett in his attempt to get back to me. Emmett threw him to the floor with such force he cracked the bathroom tile. He held him down as Edward continued to fight. Edward looked over at me, again horrified, his eyes glowing red like a demon's.

Alice and Jasper came bursting in then.

"Are we too late?" Alice cried. "Is she dead?"

"Not yet," Carlisle said. "Alice, go down to the hospital and steal twelve units of blood and bring it back to the house."

"What type?" she asked, panicky.

"O negative," he said. "And hurry. Jasper, Emmett, take your brother out to the woods. If Jasper can't calm him down, beat him senseless." Then he lifted me off the floor. "I'm so sorry Miss Swan. Please, please forgive us."