

The biggest difference (and it's a HUGE difference) between the first draft of New Moon and the final copy is this: originally, Bella never did find out what was wrong with Jacob. It was a shorter book back then, missing the crucial seventy pages wherein Jacob and Bella share all their secrets and cement their relationship into something that transcends friendship.

(Before you read on, don't let this version confuse you. This isn't how it "really happened." As my knowledge of Jacob's character grew, this original version seemed more and more unlikely. (Of course Jacob was going to break the rules—he's Jacob!) This is like a skeleton—just bones, no flesh.)

Try to imagine it: Bella goes to Jacob's house to demand the truth about the "cult." Jacob shows up with Sam and the others, and then agrees to talk to Bella privately. He dumps her (for lack of a better descriptive word) and she is broken-hearted for the second time in the book. Okay, that all sounds familiar. But then that night...nothing happens. Jacob doesn't break the rules and climb through her window to talk to her. Jacob gives her no hints, trying to help her discover what she already knows. Bella is still isolated, alone. She has no idea that Victoria is out there, hunting her, or that the werewolves are out there, protecting her.

Bella is too persistent to take no for an answer from Jacob, though. She doesn't have the same self-worth issues that interfered with her relationship with Edward at the beginning of New Moon to stop her here. No, Jacob OWES her better than this, dammit, and she's going to get her due.

*She can't find him, however, and eventually her searching takes her along the cliff tops. She remembers watching "the gang" dive into oblivion—and you know what a junkie she is for her hallucinations. Cliff diving is **her** inspiration in this version. When Jacob saves her life this time, the interaction between them is 180 degrees from the final version...*

"How are we going to get out of here?" I coughed and spit the words. I was so cold now that I couldn't feel much besides the heat of his body as he held me carefully above the waves, and the soreness in my back. It seemed like the current was dragging against my legs, not willing to quit, but they were numb and I might have been imagining it.

"I'm going to tow you to the beach. You are going to stay limp like you're unconscious and not fight. That will make it easier."

"Jake," I said anxiously. "The water's too strong. You probably can't make it by yourself, let alone pulling me."

"I fished you out, didn't I?" He held me too tight for me to see his face, but his voice sounded slightly smug.

"You did," I agreed dubiously. "How did you? The current..."

"I'm stronger than you are."

I would have argued, but the water decided to come out of my stomach just then.

“Okay,” he said when I was done vomiting. “I need to get you out of here. Remember, stay still.”

I was too weak to argue, but I was terrified to leave the safety of the rock and let the waves have me again. As reconciled as I had been two minutes ago with the idea of drowning, I was afraid now. I didn’t want to go back into the dark. I didn’t want the water to cover my face again.

I could feel it when Jacob kicked off from the rock. I was on my back and he was still holding me under the arms as he pulled for the shore. The churning water reached for us, and I panicked and started kicking.

“Stop that,” he snapped.

I fought to stay limp, and it was harder than I would have thought, even though my exhausted, cramping limbs wanted nothing more than to float motionless.

It was amazing—we darted through the water like a line was towing us to the shore. Jacob was the strongest swimmer I’d ever seen. The shoving and grasping of the current seemed helpless to even disrupt the straight route he cut through the waves. And he was fast. World record pace.

Then I felt the sand scraping my heels.

“Okay, you can stand up, Bella.”

As soon as he let go of me, I fell face first into the knee-high waves.

He snagged me out before I could choke down any more water, throwing me easily over his shoulder and striding onto the sand. He didn’t say anything, but his breathing sounded irritated.

“Over there,” he muttered to himself, and he changed directions. I could only see, as I dangled from his shoulder, his bare feet leaving huge prints in the wet sand.

He set me down on a patch of sand that actually felt dry. It was dark here—I realized we were in a shallow cave that the tide had eaten away from under the rock. The rain couldn’t reach me directly, but little splatters of mist bounced off the sand outside and hit me.

I was shaking so hard that my teeth were clicking together—the sound was like hyper castanets.

“Come here,” Jacob said, but I didn’t have to move. He wrapped his warm arms around me and held me tightly to his bare chest. I shuddered, but he was still. His skin was too warm—like the fever was back.

“Aren’t you freezing?” I stuttered.

“No.”

I felt ashamed. Not only had he bested me exponentially in the water, but now he had to make me look even weaker.

“I’m such a wuss,” I mumbled.

“No, you’re normal.” The bitterness was there in his voice. He moved on quickly, not giving me the chance to ask what he meant. “Do you mind telling me what the hell you think you were doing?” He demanded.

“Cliff diving. Recreation.” Unbelievable, but there was still some water left in my stomach. It chose this moment to make its reappearance.

He waited till I could breathe again. “Looks like you had fun.”

“I did, till I hit the water. Shouldn’t we go get some help or something?” My teeth were still chattering, but he understood what I said.

“They’re coming.”

“Who’s coming?” I asked, suspicious and surprised.

“Sam and the others.”

I grimaced. “How will they know we need help?” My tone was skeptical.

He snorted. “Because they watched me run and throw myself over the cliff after you.”

“You were watching me?” I accused with weak outrage.

“No, I heard you scream. If I’d seen you, I would have stopped you. That was really stupid, you know.”

“Your friends do it.”

“They’re stronger than you.”

“I’m a good swimmer,” I protested, despite the evidence to the contrary.

“In a lap pool,” he argued. “Bella, it’s turning into a hurricane out there. Didn’t you consider that at all?”

“No,” I admitted.

“Stupid,” he repeated.

“Yeah,” I agreed with a sigh. It was so cold and I was so tired.

“Stay awake,” Jacob shook me roughly.

“Cut it out,” I griped. “I’m not going to sleep.”

“Then open your eyes.”

Truthfully, I hadn’t realized they were closed. I didn’t tell him that. I just opened them and said, “Fine.”

“Jacob?” The call carried clearly despite the noisy wind and surf. The voice was very deep.

Jacob leaned away so that he wouldn’t shout in my ear. “In the cave, Sam!”

I didn’t hear them approach. Abruptly, the little cave was crowded with dark brown legs. I looked up, knowing my eyes were full of distrust and anger, conscious of Jacob’s closeness. His arms sheltered me, but I suddenly I felt like the protective one.

Sam’s calm face was the first thing I saw. A confusing sense of déjà vu overwhelmed me. The dark cave was not so different from the forest at night, and, again, I lay weak and helpless at his feet. He was saving me again. I glared at him, annoyed.

“Is she all right?” he asked Jacob with the assured voice of the only adult among children.

“I’m fine,” I grumbled.

No one listened to me.

“We need to warm her up—she’s getting sleepy,” Jacob answered him.

“Embry?” Sam asked, and one of the boys stepped forward to hand Jacob a bundle of blankets. The tone of command in Sam’s voice irritated me to no end. It was like none of them could do anything until he allowed it. I glowered at him fiercely as Jacob draped the rough blankets around me.

“Let’s get her out of here,” Sam instructed coolly. He bent toward me with his hands out, but stopped when I flinched away from him.

“I’ve got her Sam,” Jacob said, putting his arms under me and lifting me fluidly as he rose to his feet.

“I can walk,” I protested.

“Okay.” Jacob set me on my feet and waited.

My knees buckled. Sam caught me as I fell; instinctively, I struggled against his hands.

Jacob grabbed me again, pulling me away from Sam and swinging me into his arms. He was ridiculously strong for his age. I frowned furiously while Sam tucked the blankets back around me.

“Paul, do you have that poncho?”

Another boy stepped forward without speaking and added a layer of plastic to cover the blankets.

It was at this point, swathed in layers of protection, that I noticed Sam and the others were no more dressed than Jacob. I’d assumed that Jacob had stripped off most of his clothes before jumping after me, but they were all barefoot and bare-chested, each wearing only a pair of shorts or cut off jeans, dripping wet from the rain. Rain trickled out of their hair and ran in rivulets down the smooth brown skin of their chests; they didn’t seem to notice. Under my pile of blankets, I shivered uncontrollably and felt like a ridiculous baby.

“Let’s go,” Sam ordered, and they filed out of the cave.

There was a trail leading up from the beach. They scrambled agilely up the steep path, Jacob just as quickly as the rest. No one offered to help him, and he never asked. It didn’t seem to bother Jacob that his hands weren’t free. He never stumbled.

Sam and the other three went ahead of us, and, as I watched them climb with the ease of mountain goats, I was struck by how well they fit the landscape. They blended harmoniously with the colors of the rocks and trees, the movement of the wind; they belonged here.

I peeked up at Jacob, and he fit, too. The clouds and the storm and the forest framed his new face perfectly. He looked even more natural, more at home, than my happy Jacob had ever looked as he puttered around his homemade garage, his own little kingdom. It was disturbing.

We reached the top farther down the road than I’d ventured. I could see a vague, rust-colored lump to the South, and I guessed that it was my truck.

I wanted to try walking again, but Jacob ignored my muttered pleas. They stuck to the edge of the forest, as if they were could move more quickly in the trees than along the road. And they *were* moving quickly; my truck was approaching faster than it should.

“Where’re your keys?” Jacob asked as we drew near. His breathing was still even and regular.

“In my pocket,” I answered automatically before I realized what he was suggesting.

“Give them to me.”

I glared at him, but his face was smooth and determined. Sullenly, I forced my hand into my wet jeans and dug out my key. I shuffled through the blankets till my hand was free. I held it up.

“For you or for Sam?” I asked sourly.

He rolled his eyes. “I’ll drive.”

In a sudden, swift movement, he inclined his head toward me and snatched the key out of my hand with his teeth.

“Hey!” I objected, startled, as I jumped in his arms.

He smiled wryly around the key.

We were at the truck now; Sam opened the passenger door and Jacob shoved me in. Jacob went around to the driver's side while the rest of them piled in the back. Jacob revved the engine, and turned the heater on high, turning his vents to blow on me. I glanced guiltily out the back window, at his friends sitting stoically, half-naked in the pounding rain.

"What were you doing out here, anyway?" I asked Jacob. "Were you going to swim in the hurricane, too?"

"We were running," he said shortly.

"In the rain?"

"Yes...lucky for you."

I shut up and looked out the window.

We didn't turn off onto the 110 like I expected, instead we headed for the Black's place.

"Why are you taking me to your house?"

"I'm going to get my bike and put it in the back for the return trip—unless you wanted me to keep your truck."

"Oh."

"Besides, I wanted Billy to take a look at you. I don't want Charlie to hear about this until I'm sure you're okay. He'll probably arrest me for attempted murder or something," he added bitterly.

"Don't be stupid," I retorted.

"Okay," he agreed. "There's more than enough stupid in here already...cliff diving!"

I blushed and stared straight ahead.

Jacob carried me into the house. The rest of them followed silently. Billy's face was expressionless.

"What happened?" he asked, directing his question toward Sam rather than his son or myself. I glared at him.

"I was cliff diving," I said quickly, before Sam could reply.

Billy just raised one eyebrow and kept his eyes on Sam.

"She's cold, but I think she'll be fine in some dry clothes," Sam said.

Jacob set me on the one small sofa, and quickly shoved it closer to the radiator. The couch legs scraped loudly against the wooden floor. Then he disappeared into his little closet of a room.

Billy didn't say anything about his son's dripping condition, or anyone else's. No one seemed concerned about hypothermia except in my case.

I felt bad about the wet soaking from me into the sofa, but I couldn't keep my head up to at least save the worn fabric from my hair. I was too exhausted. Even the tall, ominous figures crowding the tiny room, lining the walls motionlessly, couldn't hold my eyes open. I was finally warm next to the humming radiator, and my lungs ached in a way that pushed me toward unconsciousness rather than keeping me awake.

"Should I wake her up to change?" I heard Jacob whisper. Addressing Sam no doubt.

"How does her skin feel?" Sam's deep voice answered. I wanted to send him another dirty look, but my eyes wouldn't open.

Jacob's fingers brushed lightly across my cheek.

“Warm.”

“Let her sleep, then, I guess.”

I was glad they were going to leave me alone.

“Charlie?” Jacob asked.

Billy answered this time. “He’d rush down here first thing. Let’s wait till the storm passes to call him.”

Good answer, I thought. Here I was, surrounded by the strange men I’d come to fear, but I felt unusually safe and warm.

Someone spoke, a voice I didn’t recognize. “Do you want the three of us to head back out?”

There was a pause. “I think yes,” Sam finally said. “The storm is a perfect cover, we shouldn’t be caught unawares.”

“Is three safe?” Billy asked, sounding strained.

Someone laughed a guttural laugh. “No trouble at all.”

“If there’s only one,” Sam amended sternly. No one answered, but I heard the door opening.

“Control, my brothers,” Sam spoke again, in the tone of someone giving a familiar farewell. “Speed and safety to you.”

I was slightly roused by this exchange, but I kept my breathing even.

“Brothers,” the others repeated in unison. I heard Jacob’s voice join in.

The door shut quietly. There was no sound for a long time, and the warmth pulled me down toward unconsciousness again. I was about to succumb when Sam spoke quietly.

“You didn’t want to leave her.”

“If she woke, I think she would be afraid of you.” Jacob sounded defensive.

“You can’t do this, Jacob. It was right to save her life today, of course. But you can’t keep her near you.”

I had to bite my tongue to halt the acidic answer I wanted to give him. It was more important to listen now.

“Sam...I...I think I can do it. I think it would be safe.”

“One moment of anger, that’s all it would take. How close did you come yesterday afternoon?”

Jacob didn’t answer.

“I know how hard it is.”

“I know you do,” Jacob said acquiescently. *No*, I wanted to yell at him. *Don’t knuckle under like that!*

“Be patient,” Sam counseled. “In a year or so...”

“She’ll be gone,” Jacob concluded bitterly.

“She’s not for you,” Sam said gently.

Jacob didn’t answer, and I was torn. I hated to be in agreement with Sam over anything. And I didn’t see why this fact should outlaw our friendship.

It was too warm for me to concentrate, and in the silence that followed this exchange I lost the fight against my tired mind. Nearby, I heard an exquisite voice humming a familiar lullaby, and I knew that I was asleep.

The previous section seemed like a good introduction to New Moon's original epilogue. As we continue with this alternate universe, remember that, while Bella knows there's something wrong with Jacob, she still has no clue that he's a werewolf. In the epilogue, she and Edward are together in Forks again, and things are back to normal...

Epilogue - Human

It was one of those rare sunny days, my least favorite kind of day. But Edward couldn't keep his promise every minute. He had needs.

"Alice could stay again," he offered late Friday night. I could see the anxiety behind his eyes—the fear that I would go berserk when he left me alone and do something crazy. Like retrieving my motorcycle from La Push, or playing Russian roulette with Charlie's pistol.

"I'll be fine," I said with bogus confidence. So many months of pretend had honed my skills of deceit. "You all have to eat, too. We may as well get back into the routine."

Mostly everything *was* back to normal, in less time than I would have believed possible. The hospital had welcomed Carlisle back with eager arms, not even bothering to conceal their glee that Esme had found life in L.A. so little to her liking. Thanks to the Calculus test I'd missed while abroad, Alice and Edward were in better shape to graduate than I was at the moment. Charlie was not happy with me—or speaking to Edward—but at least Edward was allowed in the house again. I just wasn't allowed *out* of it.

"I have all these essays to write, anyway," I sighed, waving toward the stack of college applications—Edward had scavenged up one from every suitable school whose deadline was still open—on my desk. "I don't need any distractions."

"That's true," he said with mock severity. "You'll have plenty to keep you busy. And I'll be back when it's dark again."

"Take your time," I told him lightly, and I closed my eyes as if I were tired.

I was trying to convince him that I trusted him, which was true. He didn't need to know about the zombie nightmares. They were not about lacking trust in him—it was myself I still couldn't rely on.

Charlie stayed home, which was not normal for a Saturday. I worked on the applications at the kitchen table so he could keep an eye on me more easily. But I was boring to watch, and he rarely left the TV to check that I was still there.

I tried to concentrate on the forms and questions, but it was hard. Now and then I would feel lonely; my breathing would spike and I'd have to struggle to calm myself. I

felt like the little engine who could—over and over again I had to tell myself, *you can do this, you can do this, you can do this.*

So, when the doorbell rang, the distraction was more than welcome. I had no idea who it could be, but I really didn't care.

"I got it!" I hollered, up from the table in a flash.

"Okay," Charlie said absently. As I ran by the living room, it was clear that he hadn't shifted an inch.

I already had a smile of relief and welcome on my face, ready to dazzle the door-to-door salesman or Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Hey, Bella," Jacob Black smiled back sardonically when the door swung open.

"Oh, Jacob, hey," I mumbled, surprised. I'd heard nothing from him since I'd managed to return from Italy alive. I'd accepted his last goodbye as final. It hurt when I thought about it, but to be perfectly honest, my mind had been too occupied with other things for me to miss him as often as I should.

"Are you free?" He asked. The bitter edge had not disappeared from his voice, and he said these particular words with extra resentment.

"That depends." My voice turned acid, matching his. "I'm not that busy, but I *am* on house arrest. So not precisely free, no."

"You're alone, though, right?" he clarified sarcastically.

"Charlie's here."

He pursed his wide lips. "I'd like to talk to you alone...if you're allowed."

I held my hands up helplessly. "You can ask Charlie," I said with hidden triumph. Charlie was never letting me out of the house.

"That's not what I meant." His dark eyes were suddenly more serious. "It wasn't Charlie's permission I was asking about."

I glared at him blackly. "My father is the only one who tells me what I can and can't do."

"If you say so," he shrugged. "Hey Charlie!" He shouted over my shoulder.

"That you, Jake?"

"Yeah. Can Bella go for a walk with me?"

"Sure," Charlie called casually, and my expectant smile, waiting for the denial, twisted downward into a frown.

Jacob raised his eyebrows in challenge.

The taunting look in his eyes made me move faster than I might have otherwise. I was out the door in a second, pulling it shut behind me.

"Where do you want to go?" I asked, insincerely cheerful.

For the first time, he looked unsure of himself. "Really?" he asked. "You'll really be alone with me?"

"Of course," I frowned. "Why not?"

He didn't answer. He stared at me for a long minute with puzzled, suspicious eyes.

"What?" I demanded.

"Nothing," he mumbled. He started toward the forest.

"Let's go this way," I suggested, gesturing down the street to the west. I'd had enough of that particular patch of forest to last me forever.

He glanced at me swiftly, suspicious again. Then he shrugged to himself and ambled slowly down the sidewalk to the road.

This was his party, so I kept my mouth shut, though I was getting more curious by the second.

“I have to say, I’m surprised,” he finally spoke again when we were halfway to the corner. “Didn’t the little bloodsucker tell you everything?”

I wheeled and started back to the house.

“What?” he asked, confused, matching my angry stride easily.

I stopped and glared up at him. “I’m not talking to you if you’re going to be insulting.”

“Insulting?” he blinked in surprise.

“You can refer to my friends by their proper names.”

“Oh.” He still seemed a little surprised that I found his word offensive. “Alice then, right? I can’t believe she kept her mouth shut.” He started back down the street and I followed reluctantly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t you ever get tired of playing dumb?”

“I’m not playing,” I said sourly. “Apparently, I’m just dumb.”

He eyed me carefully. “Humph,” he muttered.

“What?” I demanded.

“She really didn’t tell you about me?”

“About *you*? What about you?”

His eyes narrowed as he scrutinized my face again. Then he shook his head in resignation and changed the subject.

“Did they make you choose yet?”

I knew what he meant immediately.

“I told you they wouldn’t do that. You’re the only one obsessed with picking sides.”

He smiled a tight smile, and his eyes narrowed. “We’ll see about that.”

Abruptly, he leaned down and caught me in an enthusiastic bear hug that yanked my feet right off the ground.

“Let me go!” I struggled futilely. He was too strong.

“Why?” he laughed.

“Because I can’t *breathe*!”

He dropped me, stepping back with a sly smile on his face.

“You *are* on drugs,” I accused, looking down in embarrassment, pretending to smooth my shirt.

“Just remember that I warned you,” he smirked, leaning down again—not quite as far—to take my face in his big hands.

“Um, Jacob…” I protested, my voice shooting up an octave, one hand flying up childishly to cover my mouth.

He ignored me, inclining his head to press his lips firmly to my forehead for a prolonged second. The kiss seemed to begin as a joke, but his face was angry when he straightened up.

“You *should* let me kiss you, Bella,” He said as he stepped away, dropping his hands. “You might like it. Something warm for a change.”

“I told you from the beginning, Jacob.”

“I know, I know,” he sighed. “My fault. I’m the one who lost my grip on the grenade.”

I looked down, biting my lip.

“I still miss you, Bella,” He said. “A lot. And then, just at the point when we might have at least been able to be friends again, *he* comes back.”

I glared at him. “If it weren’t for Sam, we would be friends anyway.”

“You think so?” Jacob suddenly smiled, and the smile was arrogant. “Okay, I’ll leave it in *his* hands then.” It was obvious the pronoun he sneered did not refer to Sam.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll be your friend—if *he* doesn’t have a problem with that,” Jacob offered, and then he began to laugh with something resembling real amusement.

I frowned, but I wasn’t going pass up the unexpected opportunity. “Fine.” I held my hand out in front of me. “Friends.”

He shook my hand with a smirk. “The ironic part is that—if he’d let you be my friend,” he snorted in derision, “it would probably work out. I’m better at this than the rest of them. Sam says I’m a natural.” He made a revolted face.

“A natural what?” I asked in confusion.

“I’ll let the bloodsucker tell you that—when he explains why you’re not allowed to be friends with me.” Jacob laughed again.

I turned automatically, but he grabbed my shoulder.

“Sorry. It slipped out. I meant...*Edward*, of course.”

“Of course. Just remember that you made a deal,” I reminded him darkly.

“I’ll keep my side of the bargain, don’t worry about that.” He chuckled.

“I don’t get the joke,” I complained.

“You will.” He continued to laugh. “Though I can’t guarantee that you’ll think it’s funny.”

He started to saunter back toward the house, so I guessed that he had said all he’d planned to say.

“How’s Sam?” I asked in a bland tone.

“Not pleased, as you could probably guess,” he said, matter of fact. “You can’t expect us to be thrilled that the vampires moved back to town.”

I stared at him, my face frozen in shock.

“Oh, *c’mon*, Bella,” he groaned, rolling his eyes.

I frowned and looked away, while he chuckled again. My temper flared.

“How’s Quil?” I taunted him.

His expression immediately turned into a glower. “I don’t see him much,” he growled.

“Good.”

“It’s only a matter of time,” he said in a sick, angry voice. “Now.”

“Now what?”

“Now that your friends are back.”

We glared at each other for a moment.

“I can’t talk to you when you’re being like this,” I eventually decided.

I didn’t expect him to back down, but he did.

“You’re right. I’m not being very friendly, am I? I shouldn’t waste the moment—this is probably the last conversation we’ll have.”

“I’m really going to enjoy proving you wrong,” I muttered.

“That’s funny. I don’t think I’m going to enjoy proving you wrong at all.”

We were back at the house. Jacob walked me to the porch, but stopped there.

“Do you expect him back soon?” Jacob asked casually.

“Edward, you mean?”

“Yes...Edward.” It seemed hard for him to say the name. He’d had less trouble with ‘Alice.’

“Later,” I said in a vague tone.

Jacob squinted up at the sun, beaming from between the uncharacteristically thin clouds.

“Ah,” he said, clearly understanding only too well. “Tell him I said ‘hi.’”

He let loose with another long peal of laughter.

“Sure,” I grumbled.

“I can’t tell you how much I wish that you could win this one,” he said when he was done, his smile fading. “La Push is no fun without you.”

So fast that my breath caught in shock, Jacob threw his arms around me again.

“Bye, Bella,” he muttered, exhaling warmly into my hair.

Before I could recover and respond, Jacob swung around and headed off down the street, his hands shoved in the pockets of his jeans. It was only then that I wondered how he’d gotten here. There was no vehicle in sight. But his long legs took him away so quickly, I would have had to shout to ask. And I was sure he was meeting Sam somewhere close by.

It seemed like all I did with Jacob anymore was say goodbye. I sighed.

Charlie didn’t look up when I walked past him.

“That was short,” he noted.

“Jacob’s being a brat,” I told him.

He laughed briefly, eyes on the TV.

I took my work with me up to my room then, determined to concentrate better. I knew that if I stayed in the kitchen, I’d never keep my eyes off the clock over the stove for any length of time. In my room, I was able to simply pull the plug on the alarm clock to solve that problem. I had five applications ready for the mail when the sound of the rain broke my attention. I glanced out the window. Apparently, the nice weather had spent itself. I smiled fleetingly, and started on the next question. I still had hours ahead of me.

Something hard caught me roughly around the waist and jerked me off the bed. Before I could suck in a breath to scream, my back was against the far wall. I was pinned there by something hard and cold—and familiar. A low, warning growl slid from between his teeth.

“Edward, what’s wrong? Who’s here?” I whispered in terror. There were so many bad answers to that question. We were too late. I never should have listened to them, I should have made Alice change me at once. I started to hyperventilate in fear.

And then Edward said, “Hmm,” in a voice that did not sound even vaguely concerned. “False alarm.”

I took a deep, steady breath. “Okay.”

He turned around, backing slightly away to give me room. He put his hands on my shoulders, but did not pull me closer. His eyes scrutinized my face, and his perfect nose wrinkled slightly.

“Sorry about that,” he grinned ruefully. “Overreaction.”

“To what?” I wondered.

“In a minute,” he promised me. He took a step back and looked at me with a strange expression that I couldn’t make out. “First, why don’t you tell me what you’ve been up to today?”

“I was good,” I said breathlessly. “I’m halfway done.”

“Only halfway?” he teased, his eyes running over me with the strange look again.

“You’re back early. Not that I’m complaining.” Now that I was beginning to recover from the moment of panic, I could feel the surge of happiness welling up inside me. He’d come back.

“Did you do anything else?” he continued, expectant.

I shrugged. “Jacob Black stopped by.”

He nodded, unsurprised. “He chose his moment well. I suppose he’s been waiting for me to leave.”

“Probably,” I admitted, and I was suddenly anxious. “Because, Edward, he...well, he seems to know *everything*. I don’t know why he started believing Billy now—”

“I do,” he muttered.

“What?” I asked, taken off guard again.

But Edward had paced away, his face distant and thoughtful.

I started to get irritated. “This is so annoying. Are you going to tell me what’s going on?”

“Maybe,” but he hesitated. “Can I ask a favor first?”

I groaned. “Fine.” I went to sit on the bed, trying to reassemble the scattered papers. “What do you want?” He must know there wasn’t much I wouldn’t do for him. Asking was almost superfluous.

“I’d appreciate if *very* much if you would promise to stay away from Jacob Black. Just for the sake of my peace of mind.”

My jaw fell open. I stared at him in horrified disbelief. “You’re joking,” I said incredulously.

“No, I’m not.” He stared back at me with somber eyes. “You nearly gave me a heart attack just now—and that’s not the easiest thing to do.”

I didn’t understand what he meant by that, only that he was doing exactly what I’d been so sure he wouldn’t do. “You can’t be serious. You can’t honestly be telling me to pick sides.”

“Pick sides?” he asked, frowning.

“Jacob said I would have to choose, that you wouldn’t let me be friends with him—and I told him that was *ridiculous*.” I looked at him with pleading eyes—pleading for him validate my trust.

His eyes narrowed slightly. “As much as I truly hate to make Jacob Black right...” he began.

“No!” I wailed. “I can’t believe this!” I kicked my foot out petulantly and my tidied stack of applications fluttered to the floor.

His eyes grew cool. “You could pick the other side,” he reminded me.

“Don’t be an idiot!” I growled.

“I didn’t realize he was so important to you,” Edward said in a grim voice. His eyes tightened again.

“You can’t be *jealous*,” I moaned in disbelief.

He sniffed once, and wrinkled his nose again. “Well, it does smell like he was fairly close this afternoon.”

“That wasn’t my idea.” But I blushed.

He noted that. He raised one eyebrow.

“There’s absolutely no reason for you to ever be jealous of anyone or anything. How can you not know that? But Jacob *is* important to me. He’s the best human friend I have. He’s family. If it weren’t for Jacob...” I trailed off, shaking my head. Dead was not the worst thing I could be without Jacob.

“Best human friend,” Edward repeated in a low voice, staring absently out the window for a second before turning back to me. He came to sit next to me on the bed, though leaving a little space between us, which surprised me. “I have to admit, I owe him one—at least one—for saving you from the watery grave. Regardless of that, I’d...*prefer* that you kept your distance. Because whether I’m jealous or not isn’t the issue. You ought to realize by now that the only thing that I really get bent out of shape over is your safety.”

I blinked in surprise. “Safety? What on earth do you mean?”

He sighed, frowning. “It’s not really my secret to tell. Why haven’t you asked Jacob what’s going on?”

“I *have*.”

He put his finger to his lips, reminding me to keep it down.

“I just did, *again*,” I continued angrily, but more quietly. “And Jacob said, ‘I’ll let the bloodsucker tell you that, when he explains why you’re not allowed to be friends with me.’”

He just rolled his eyes, so I kept going.

“He also said to tell you ‘hi,’” I added, using the same jeering tone Jacob had.

He shook his head, and then smiled ruefully. He put his hands on my shoulders, holding me a little ways away, as if to get a better view of my expression. “Fine, then,” he said. “I’ll tell you everything. In fact, I’ll explain every tiny detail and answer every single question you have. Only, could you do something for me first?” He raised his eyebrows, almost apologetically, and wrinkled his nose again. “Do you mind washing your hair? You absolutely *reek* of werewolf.”

I have to admit, I still have a soft spot for that last line.