Commonality

by Von_Yel

Summary

Charlie Swan is visited by Carlisle and Edward Cullen after they receive a package requesting they gather him and the Quileute Elders before opening. What's inside will show them they aren't so different after all...

Notes

This is my first fanfiction, and I don't have a beta, so there may be mistakes. Please let me know if you find any inconsistencies. I got the idea for this concept from a story on ff.net by Obsesive Reader

Any recognizable characters or situations belong to Stephenie Meyer; Little, Brown; and Summit Entertainment.
Forks' Police Chief Charlie Swan was enjoying his day off by sitting in his favorite chair with the game on, hoping that when his daughter Bella moved in with him in a few months that he wouldn't have to change his routine too much. Though he knew that she was similar to him in personality, she was still a seventeen year old girl, and dealing with teenage girls was definitely above his pay-grade.

Just as Charlie was getting up to get himself another beer, there was a knock at the door. He was instantly on alert. Any of the usual people who visited him called to let him know they were coming. He suspected his friend Billy did it so he would know he would have to soon maneuver him up the stairs in his wheelchair. As he opened the door he thought about the merits of installing a peep hole for Bella to use when she came to stay with him. Standing there, silhouetted by the foggy, grey morning light were Dr. Carlisle Cullen and one of his five adopted children. Charlie was not as well acquainted with them, and was unaware which was which. He noticed that the doctor was also carrying a large cardboard box.

"Dr. Cullen, what brings you here this morning? Should I be putting my badge on?" he joked, confused as to why the doctor would be at his house in anything other than official capacity.

"No, Chief Swan, my son Edward and I received a package this morning, and there was a letter attached instructing us to not view the contents without you, Billy Black, Quil Ateara Sr., and Harry Clearwater. We were hoping you would be able to contact them for us as we do not have their addresses or phone numbers." Dr. Cullen seemed sincere enough that he was inclined to believe him without question.

"Well, nice to meet you, Edward," Charlie shook the young man's hand, "Why don't you two come in while I call Billy and have him rally the guys together."

"Pleasure to meet you as well, Chief Swan," Edward was surprisingly polite for a boy of his age, and Charlie was impressed with his manners. The doctor and his son proceeded to the living room while he went to the landline in his kitchen. Calling Billy was such a standard occurrence for Charlie that his fingers hit the buttons almost instinctively. Listening to the dial tone, Charlie couldn't help but wonder why someone would want to gather such a strange group of people to open a silly package. What could possibly be inside the box that tied them all together.

The phone picked up after only a few rings, and Charlie prepared to ask his friend for a large favor. He knew that Billy, Harry, and Old Quil were elders for the tribe of Quileutes on the local native reservation of La Push, and that they still believed ancient legends that told them the Cullens were dangerous and not to be trusted. He only hoped that Billy would be willing to hear him out before disagreeing outright.

"Charlie, what can I do for you? It's a bit late in the day for you to want to go fishing," Billy chuckled at his own joke.

"Billy, Doctor Cullen and his son are here, and have asked me to gather you, Harry, and Old Quil. Seems they got some package that they are only supposed to open with all of us here. Sounds a bit odd if you ask me, but it must be important if whomever it is wanted the Chief of Police and the tribal elders present.

"Carlisle Cullen and one of his 'children'? They're there with you now, in your house? We'll be there right away, don't worry." Billy hung up before Charlie could say another word, and the worry
had been evident in his voice. He meandered his way back into the living room, not looking forward to the awkward silence awaiting him in the other room.

"Billy says they'll be here soon. Now, do you fellas know who sent you this package, or why they want everyone here?" Charlie was in full investigative mode. A mystery package meant for the best doctor in town, the police chief, and the elders of the local First Nations tribe had to be something major. He knew that Dr. Cullen was too good of a man to waste his time if this weren't important.

"There is no address or name on the box to indicate who sent it, and the only name on the note was Ness," Carlisle explained. "It asked that we share the note with everyone, so if you don't mind I'd like to wait and read it aloud when the others get here."

"That's no problem, Doc, they should be here any minute. With the way Billy sounded before he hung up I'd say that I may just have to give them a speeding ticket when they get here." Charlie just hoped it would be soon, as small talk was never something he quite mastered. Just as the thought of asking Edward what grade he was in, he was saved by hearing a truck pull into his gravel driveway.

"That'll be them now, I better go help Harry with Billy's chair." Charlie hopped up from his recliner and hurried to the door just as the three men barged in without knocking, looking more formidable than they had a right to at their age. He knew that his friends had allowed their superstitions to influence their decision to come, and were prepared to protect him from the kind man and his teenage son.

"Where's the fire, guys? Harry, I know that it should have taken you a good fifteen minutes to get here. Next time I'll have to write you a ticket. Come in the living room, there's plenty of room on the couch." The men all looked apprehensive at the thought of sitting next to either of the Cullen men. Billy rolled himself next to Charlie's recliner, while Old Quil and Harry stood against the wall behind him. Sighing, Charlie resigned himself to the tense atmosphere and allowed Carlisle to take over.

"Gentlemen, thank you for coming. I'm sorry if we have inconvenienced any of you. We are just as befuddled as to why we are all here. My son Edward and I received a package addressed to the both of us with no return address with a note attached claiming that it was of utmost importance that we have all of you present before going through it's contents." The sincerity coming off him was clear, and not so easily ignored by the tribesmen. "I will now read the note aloud so that we are all on the same page."

**Carlisle and Edward,**

I ask that you please don't open this package until you are with Charlie Swan, Billy Black, Harry Clearwater, and Quil Ateara, Sr. It is important that the six of you review the contents of this box together. You have more in common than you think. There are more instructions inside.

Love, Ness
"Who is this 'Ness' person anyway, and how the hell do they know who we are?" Harry asked belligerently.

"Unfortunately we know as much as you do at this point." Carlisle was showing far more patience in the face of Harry's attitude than Charlie would have. If he had been speaking to him that way he'd have gotten a lot more than a kind smile.

"Why don't we open the package now that we're all here? I'm sure you gentlemen would like to get back to whatever you were doing before we intruded on your day." It was the first time Edward had spoken since the elders had arrived, and though his tone was polite, Charlie noticed that he too seemed to be through with whatever was going on.

Carlisle swiftly and efficiently slid a nail through the tape and opened the box. He proceeded to pull out another note and what seemed to be four ordinary books with black binding. Opening the note Carlisle read it aloud for everyone's benefit.

"Dear Gentlemen,

The content of these books depicts the future of your lives following the arrival of Bella Swan to Forks. It is important that all of you are present for the reading of them. There are things in them can be prevented or changed for the better.

Secrets will be revealed over the course of all four books that are necessary for everyone present to know.

I understand that for some of you these secrets are bigger than others, however, they are, in fact, important for everyone involved to be prepared for what is to come.

Please do not do anything rash until all four books have been read. Running away will not solve your problems.

I'm looking at you, Edward. Do. Not. Leave. These books will be most important for you to hear, as you are an important person in all of them.

Billy, Harry, and Quil, please do not allow your prejudices prevent you from listening with an open heart and mind.

Charlie, there will be instances in these books where your daughter's life will be in danger, but remember that she is okay.

Most of them can be prevented from the knowledge you learn from reading. Know that it is important for her to come here, and telling her to stay with her mother won't work. Bella is your daughter through and through and sticks to her decisions.

You are both stubborn that way.

You are all here because you have things in common that you may not believe until you are finished, so please read on.

Love, Ness."

"This has to be some sort of joke. Books from the future? My daughter can't possibly cause all this trouble, she's just a teenage girl!" Charlie couldn't believe someone would play a prank like this. What would they gain? Especially pranking the police chief.

Carlisle looked reluctant as he picked up the first book. Harry, Billy, and Quil were looking at it as
though the books themselves were going to inflict the danger referred to in the letter. Edward looked like he was, indeed thinking of running.

"I guess I'll start reading them. The first is called, Twilight, and I believe it is in your daughter's perspective, Chief Swan."

**But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil,**

thou shalt not eat of it:
for in the day that thou eatest thereof
thou shalt surely die.
Genesis 2:17

**Preface**

I'd never given much thought to how I would die - though I'd had reason enough in the last few months -
but even if I had, I would not have imagined it like this. I stared without breathing across the long room, into the dark eyes of the hunter, and he looked pleasantly back at me.
Surely it was a good way to die, in the place of someone else, someone I loved. Noble, even. That ought to count for something.
I knew that if I had never gone to Forks, I wouldn't be facing death now. But, terrified as I was, I couldn't bring myself to regret the decision. When life offers you a dream so far beyond any of your expectations, it's not reasonable to grieve when it comes to an end.
The hunter smiled in a friendly way as he sauntered forward to kill me.

"Hunter? Someone is going to try to kill her?" Charlie was irate. No one would dare try to hurt his daughter.

"I wonder who this hunter could be?" Billy asked while looking pointedly at the Cullens. Though they were looking worriedly at each other having a silent conversation.

"I'll read the first chapter," Charlie said as he took the book from Carlisle. "I need to know who's going to try and hurt my girl."
"This chapter is called 'First Sight'."

My mother drove me to the airport with the windows rolled down. It was seventy-five degrees in Phoenix,

the sky a perfect, cloudless blue. I was wearing my favorite shirt-sleeveless, white eyelet lace. I was wearing it

as a farewell gesture. My carry-on item was a parka.

In the Olympic Peninsula of northwest Washington State, a small town named Forks exists under a near-constant

cover of clouds. It rains on this inconsequential town more than any other place in the United States of America.

It was from this town and its gloomy, omnipresent shade that my mother escaped with me when I was only a

few months old. It was in this town that I'd been compelled to spend a month every summer until I was fourteen.

That was the year I finally put my foot down; these past three summers, my dad, Charlie, vacationed with me in

California for two weeks instead.

It was to Forks that I now exiled myself-an action that I took with great horror. I detested Forks.

Old Quil scoffed, "Teenagers. You'd think she's moving to the Seventh Circle of Hell with the way she's acting. It's not that bad here. She hasn't given it a chance."

I loved Phoenix. I loved the sun and the blistering heat. I loved the vigorous, sprawling city.

"Bella," my mom said to me-the last of a thousand times-before I got on the plane. "You don't have

to do this."

My mom looks like me, except with short hair and laugh lines. I felt a spasm of panic as I stared

at her wide, childlike eyes. How could I leave my loving, erratic, hare-brained mother to fend for herself?
Of course she has Phil now, so the bills would probably get paid, there would be food in the refrigerator,
gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost, but still...

"I want to go," I lied. I'd always been a bad liar, but I'd been saying this lie so frequently lately
that it sounded almost convincing now.

"Tell Charlie I said hi."

"I will."

"I'll see you soon," she insisted. "You can come home whenever you want-I'll come right back as
soon as you need me."

But I could see the sacrifice in her eyes behind the promise.

"Don't worry about me," I urged. "It'll be great. I love you, Mom."

She hugged me tightly for a minute, and then I got on the plane, and she was gone.

It's a four-hour flight from Phoenix to Seattle, another hour in a small plane up to Port Angeles,

and then an hour drive back down to Forks. Flying doesn't bother me; the hour in the car
with Charlie,

though, I was a little worried about.

Charlie had really been fairly nice about the whole thing. He seemed genuinely pleased that I
was coming to live with him for the first time with any degree of permanence. He'd already gotten me
registered for high school and was going to help me get a car.

"Of course you were pleased. She's your daughter and you love her, why would you not be happy she's living with you?" Charlie blushed at Carlisle's words. He'd always known the Cullens were good people, and that they were wonderful with their adopted children. Their good behavior and manners were a testament to their good parenting. The Elders seemed shocked at his words, though Charlie couldn't understand why they would find his good-hearted nature surprising. If they wouldn't avoid the hospital due to silly legends and prejudice they would already know that Dr. Cullen was a good man. He put his anger aside, for now, not noticing the appraising look Edward was giving him, and continued reading.

But it was sure to be awkward with Charlie. Neither of us was what anyone would call verbose, and I
didn't know what there was to say regardless. I knew he was more than a little confused by
my decision-like

my mother before me, I hadn't made a secret of my distaste for Forks.

When I landed in Port Angeles, it was raining. I didn't see it as an omen—just unavoidable. I'd already

said my goodbyes to the sun.

Charlie was waiting for me with the cruiser. This I was expecting, too. Charlie is Police Chief Swan to the

good people of Forks. My primary motivation behind buying a car, despite the scarcity of my funds, was that

I refused to be driven around in a car with red and blue lights on top. Nothing slows down traffic like a cop.

Charlie gave me an awkward, one-armed hug when I stumbled my way off the plane.

"It's good to see you, Bells," he said, smiling as he automatically caught and steadied me.

"You haven't

changed much. How's Renee?"

"Mom's fine. It's good to see you, too, Dad." I wasn't allowed to call him Charlie to his face.

I only had a few bags. Most of my Arizona clothes were too permeable for Washington. My mom and I

had pooled our resources to supplement my winter wardrobe, but it was still scanty. It all fit easily into

the trunk of the cruiser.

"Don't let my sister, Alice, hear that. She's a shopaholic and would drag her around shopping for hours. The little pixie is almost impossible to say no to," Edward chuckled. Charlie made a mental note to stay away from this, Alice, too.

"I found a good car for you, really cheap," he announced when we were strapped in.

"What kind of car?" I was suspicious of the way he said "good car for you" as opposed to just

"good car."

"Well, it's a truck actually, a Chevy."

"Where did you find it?"

"Do you remember Billy Black down at La Push?" La Push is the tiny Indian reservation on the coast.
"No"

"He used to go fishing with us during the summer," Charlie prompted.

That would explain why I didn't remember him. I do a good job of blocking painful, unnecessary things from my memory.

"He's in a wheelchair now," Charlie continued when I didn't respond, "so he can't drive anymore, and he offered to sell me his truck cheap."

"What year is it?" I could see from his change of expression that this was the question he was hoping I wouldn't ask.

"Well, Billy's done a lot of work on the engine—it's only a few years old, really."

I hoped he didn't think so little of me as to believe I would give up that easily. "When did he buy it?"

"He bought it in 1984, I think."

"Did he buy it new?"

"Well, no. I think it was new in the early sixties—or late fifties at the earliest," he admitted sheepishly.

"Ch-Dad, I don't really know anything about cars. I wouldn't be able to fix it if anything went wrong, and I couldn't afford a mechanic..."

"Really, Bella, the thing runs great. They don't build them like that anymore."

_The thing_, I thought to myself...it had possibilities—as a nickname, at the very least.

"How cheap is cheap?" After all, that was the part I couldn't compromise on.

"Well, honey, I kind of already bought it for you. As a homecoming gift." Charlie peeked sideways with a hopeful expression.

Wow. Free.

"You didn't need to do that, Dad. I was going to buy myself a car."

"I don't mind. I want you to be happy here." He was looking ahead at the road when he said this.
Charlie wasn't comfortable with sharing his emotions out loud. I inherited that from him. So I was looking straight ahead as I responded.

"That's really nice, Dad. Thanks. I really appreciate it." No need to add that my being happy in Forks is an impossibility. He didn't need to suffer with me. And I never looked a free truck in the mouth-
or engine.

"Well, now, you're welcome," he mumbled, embarrassed by my thanks.

We exchanged a few more comments on the weather, which was wet, and that was pretty much it for conversation. We stared out the windows in silence.

"Thank God, you're buying that truck off me. Jake has been begging me to let him finish building his car, and I'm afraid if I waited much longer he'd start scrapping the old thing for parts." Billy joked, relieving some of the awkward tension that had settled in the room from Charlie's discomfort at reading about his own feelings. He looked at his long time friend as a brother at heart and appreciated his understanding and help.

"Let's hope she likes it when she sees it," Charlie laughed.

"I'm sure she will Charlie, simply because it's a gift from you." Carlisle offered. Charlie sent him a small smile in thanks.

It was beautiful, of course; I couldn't deny that. Everything was green: the trees, their trunks covered with moss, their branches hanging with a canopy if it, the ground covered with ferns. Even the air filtered down greenly through the leaves.

It was too green-an alien planet.

Eventually we made it to Charlie's. He still lived in the small, two-bedroom house that he'd bought with my mother in the early days of their marriage. Those were the only kind of days their marriage had-the early ones. There, parked on the street in front of the house that never changed,

was my new-well, new to me-truck. It was a faded red color, with big, rounded fenders and a bulbous cab. To my intense surprise, I loved it. I didn't know if it would run, but I could see myself in it. Plus,
it was one of those solid iron affairs that never gets damaged—the kind you see at the scene of an accident,

paint unscratched, surrounded by the pieces of the foreign car it had destroyed.

"Wow, Dad, I love it! Thanks!" Now my horrific day tomorrow would be that much less dreadful.

I wouldn't be faced with the choice of either walking two miles in the rain to school or accepting a ride

in the Chief's cruiser.

"I'm glad you like it," Charlie said gruffly, embarrassed again.

It took one trip to get all my stuff upstairs. I got the west bedroom that faced out over the front

yard. The room was familiar; it had belonged to me since I was born. The wooden floor, the light blue

walls, the peaked ceiling, the yellowed lace curtains around the window—these were all a part of my

childhood. The only changes Charlie had ever made were switching my crib for a bed and adding a desk

as I grew. The desk now held a second-hand computer, with the phone line for the modem stapled along

the floor to the nearest phone jack. This was a stipulation from my mother, so that we could stay in

touch easily. The rocking chair from my baby days was still in the corner.

There was only one small bathroom at the top of the stairs, which I would have to share with Charlie. I was trying not to dwell too much on that fact.

One of the best things about Charlie is he doesn't hover. He left me alone to unpack and get settled, a feat that would have been altogether impossible for my mother. It was nice to be alone, not

to have to smile and look pleased; a relief to stare dejectedly out the window at the sheeting rain and

just let a few tears escape. I wasn't in the mood to go on a real crying jag. I would save that for bedtime,

when I would have to think about the coming morning.

Forks High School had a frightening total of only three hundred and fifty-seven—now fifty-
eight-students; there were more than seven hundred people in my junior class alone back home. All of the

kids here had grown up together-their grandparents had been toddlers together. I would be the new
girl from the big city, a curiosity, a freak.

Maybe, if I looked how a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I had never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond—a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps—all the things that go with living in the valley of the sun.

Instead, I was ivory-skinned, without even the excuse of blue eyes or red hair, despite the constant sunshine. I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself—and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close.

"Well, she's definitely your kid, Charlie. I couldn't tell you how many bruises I got trying to play ball with you down on the rez when we were her age," Harry interjected before Charlie could continue reading, causing him to blush to his hairline.

"Yeah I'm surprised that they let you handle a gun, Chief," Billy continued teasing his friend. Charlie heard Edward snicker and shot him a look that caused him to pretend to cough to cover his laughter.

"I'd like to finish this chapter today, guys," his voice was rough with suppressed embarrassment.

When I finished putting my clothes in the old pine dresser, I took my bag of bathroom necessities and went to the communal bathroom to clean myself up after the day of travel.

I looked at my face in the mirror as I brushed through my tangled, damp hair. Maybe it was the light, but already I looked sallower, unhealthy. My skin could be pretty—it was very clear, almost translucent-looking—but it all depended on color. I had no color here.

Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that I was lying to myself. It wasn't just physically that I'd never fit in. And if I couldn't find a niche in a school with three thousand people, what were my chances here?

I didn't relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I didn't relate well to people,
period. Even my mother, who I was closer to than anyone else on the planet, was never in harmony

with me, never exactly on the same page. Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things

through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch

in my brain.

But the cause didn't matter. All that mattered was the effect. And tomorrow would be just the beginning.

I didn't sleep well that night, even after I was done crying. The constant *whoosh*ing of the rain and wind across the roof wouldn't fade into the background. I pulled the faded quilt over my head, and later added the pillow, too. But I couldn't fall asleep until after midnight, when the rain finally settled into a quieter drizzle.

Thick fog was all I could see out my window in the morning, and I could feel the claustrophobia creeping up on me. You could never see the sky here; it was like a cage.

Breakfast with Charlie was a quiet event. He wished me good luck in school. I thanked him, knowing his hope was wasted. Good luck tended to avoid me. Charlie left first, off to the police station that was his wife and family. After he left, I sat at the old square oak table in one of the three unmatching chairs and examined his small kitchen, with its dark paneled walls, bright yellow cabinets, and white linoleum floor. Nothing was changed. My mother had painted the cabinets eighteen years ago in an attempt to bring some sunshine into the house. Over the small fireplace in the adjoining handkerchief-sized family room was a row of pictures. First a wedding picture of Charlie and my mom in Las Vegas, then one of the three of us in the hospital after I was born, taken by a helpful nurse, followed by the procession of my school pictures up to last year's. Those were embarrassing to look at—I would have to see if what I could do to get Charlie to
put them somewhere else, at least while I was living here.

It was impossible, being in this house, not to realize that Charlie had never gotten over my mom. It made me uncomfortable.

I didn't want to be too early for school, but I couldn't stay in the house anymore. I donned my jacket—which had the feel of a biohazard suit—and headed out into the rain.

It was just drizzling still, not enough to soak me through immediately as I reached for the house key that was under the eaves by the door, and locked up. The sloshing of my new waterproof boots was unnerving. I missed the normal crunch of gravel as I walked. I couldn't pause and admire my truck again as I wanted; I was in a hurry to get out of the misty wet that swirled around my head and clung to my hair under my hood.

Inside the truck, it was nice and dry. Either Billy or Charlie had obviously cleaned it up, but the tan upholstered seats still smelled faintly of tobacco, gasoline, and peppermint. The engine started quickly, to my relief, but loudly, roaring to life and then idling at top volume. Well, a truck this old was bound to have a flaw. The antique radio worked, a plus I hadn't expected.

"That's going to annoy Rose," Edward mumbled.

"My daughter, Rosalie. She's a bit of a grease monkey." Carlisle explained to everyone. They had all been wearing varying expressions disbelief. Charlie couldn't picture the beautiful girl in anything other than her usual designer outfits.

Finding the school wasn't difficult, though I'd never been there before. The school was, like most other things, just off the highway. It was not obvious that it was a school; only the sign, which declared it to be Forks High School, made me stop. It looked like a collection of matching houses, built with maroon-colored bricks. There were so many trees and shrubs I couldn't see its size at first. Where was the feel of the institution? I wondered nostalgically. Where were the
I parked in front of the first building, which had a small sign over the door reading FRONT OFFICE. No one else was parked there, so I was sure it was off limits, but I decided I would get directions inside instead of circling around in the rain like an idiot. I stepped unwillingly out of the toasty truck cab and walked down a little stone path lined with dark hedges. I took a deep breath before opening the door.

Inside, it was brightly lit, and warmer than I'd hoped. The office was small; a little waiting area with padded folding chairs, orange-flecked commercial carpet, notices and awards cluttering the walls, a big clock ticking loudly. Plants grew everywhere in large plastic pots, as if there wasn't enough greenery outside. The room was cut in half by a long counter, cluttered with wire baskets full of papers and brightly colored flyers taped to its front. There were tree desks behind the counter, one of which was manned by a large, red-haired woman wearing glasses. She was wearing a purple t-shirt, which immediately made me feel overdressed.

The red-haired woman looked up. "Can I help you?"

"I'm Isabella Swan," I informed her, and saw the immediate awareness light her eyes. I was expected, a topic of gossip no doubt. Daughter of the Chief's flighty ex-wife, come home at last.

"Of course," she said. She dug through a precariously stacked pile of documents on her desk till she found the ones she was looking for. "I have your schedule right here, and a map of the school."

She brought several sheets to the counter to show me.

She went through my classes for me, highlighting the best route to each on the map, and gave me a slip to have each teacher sign, which I was to bring back at the end of the day. She smiled at me and hoped, like Charlie, that I would like it here in Forks. I smiled back as
convincingly
as I could.

When I went back to my truck, other students were starting to arrive. I drove around the school, following the line of traffic. I was glad to see that most of the cars were older like mine, nothing flashy. At home I’d lived in one of the few lower-income neighborhoods that were included in the Paradise Valley District. It was a common thing to see a new Mercedes or Porsche in the student lot. The nicest car here was a shiny new Volvo, and it stood out. Still, I cut the engine as soon as I was in the spot, so that the thunderous volume wouldn't draw attention to me.

I looked at the map in the truck, trying to memorize it now; hopefully I wouldn't have to walk around with it stuck in front of my nose all day. I stuffed everything in my bag, slung the strap over my shoulder, and sucked in a huge breath. I can do this, I lied to myself feebly. No one was going to bite me.

"They'd better not," Billy said, glaring at the Cullens. Charlie wondered just what the hell that was about. He decided against confronting him though, as they had just had a fight over the Cullens and he hoped this would be a way for them to mend fences.

I finally exhaled and stepped out of the truck.

I kept my face pulled back into my hood as I walked to the sidewalk, crowded with teenagers.

My plain black jacket didn't stand out, I noticed with relief.

Once I got around the cafeteria, building three was easy to spot. A large black "3" was painted on a white square on the east corner. I felt my breathing gradually creeping toward hyperventilation as I approached the door. I tried holding my breath as I followed two unisex raincoats through the door.

The classroom was small. The people in front of me stopped just inside the door to hang up their
coats on a long row of hooks. I copied them. They were two girls, one a porcelain-colored blonde,

the other also pale, with light brown hair. At least my skin wouldn't be a standout here.

I took the slip up to the teacher, a tall, balding man whose desk had a nameplate identifying him as Mr. Mason. He gawked at me when he saw my name—not an encouraging response—and of course

I flushed tomato red. But at least he sent me to an empty desk at the back without introducing me
to the class. It was harder for my new classmates to stare at me in the back, but somehow, they

managed. I kept my eyes down on the reading list the teacher had given me. It was fairly basic:

Bronte, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Faulkner. I'd already read everything. That was comforting...and boring.

I wondered if my mom would send me my folder of old essays, or if she would think that was cheating.

I went through different arguments with her in my head as the teacher droned on.

When the bell rang, a nasal buzzing sound, a gangly boy with skin problems and hair black as an

oil slick leaned across the isle to talk to me.

"You're Isabella Swan, aren't you?" He looked like the overly helpful, chess club type.

"Bella," I corrected. Everyone within a three-seat radius turned to look at me.

"Where's your next class?" he asked.

I had to check my bag. "Um, Government, with Jefferson, in building six."

There was nowhere to look without meeting curious eyes.

"I'm headed toward building four, I could show you the way..." Definitely over-helpful. "I'm Eric,"

he added.

I smiled tentatively. "Thanks."

We got our jackets and headed out into the rain, which had picked up. I could have sworn people

behind us were walking close enough to eavesdrop. I hoped I wasn't getting paranoid.
"So, this is a lot different than Phoenix, huh?" he asked.

"Very."

"It doesn't rain much there, does it?"

"Three or four times a year."

"Wow, what must that be like?" he wondered.

"Sunny," I told him.

"You don't look very tan."

"My mother is part albino."

He studied my face apprehensively, and I sighed. It looked like clouds and a sense of humor didn't mix. A few months of this and I'd forget how to use sarcasm.

We walked back around the cafeteria, to the south buildings by the gym. Eric walked me right to the door, though it was clearly marked.

"Well, good luck," he said as I touched the handle. "Maybe we'll have some other classes together."

He sounded hopeful.

I smiled at him vaguely as I went inside.

The rest of the morning passed in about the same fashion. My Trigonometry teacher, Mr. Varner, who I would have hated anyway just because of the subject he taught, was the only one who made me stand in front of the class and introduce myself. I stammered, blushed, and tripped over my own boots on the way to my seat.

After two classes, I started to recognize several of the faces in each class. There was always someone braver than the others who would introduce themselves and ask me questions about how I was liking Forks. I tried to be diplomatic, but mostly I just lied a lot. At least I never needed the map.

One girl sat next to me in both Trig and Spanish, and she walked with me to the cafeteria for
lunch. She was tiny, several inches shorter than my five feet four inches, but her wildly curly dark hair
made up a lot of the difference between our heights. I couldn't remember her name, so I smiled and
nodded as she prattled about teachers and classes. I didn't try to keep up.

We sat at the end of a full table with several of her friends, who she introduced to me. I forgot all their names as soon as she spoke them. They seemed impressed by her bravery in speaking to me.

The boy from English, Eric, waved at me from across the room.

It was there, sitting in the lunchroom, trying to make conversation with seven curious strangers,

that I first saw them.

They were sitting in the corner of the cafeteria, as far away from where I sat as possible in the long room. There were five of them. They weren't talking, and they weren't eating, though they each had a tray of untouched food in front of them. They weren't gawking at me, unlike most of the other students, so it was safe to stare at them without fear of meeting an excessively interested pair of eyes.

But it was none of these things that caught, and held, my attention.

They didn't look anything alike. Of the three boys, one was big-muscled like a serious weightlifter,

with dark, curly hair. Another was taller, leaner, but still muscular, and honey blond. The last was lanky, less bulky, with untidy, bronze-colored hair. He was more boyish than the others, who looked like they could be in college, or even teachers here rather than students.

The girls were opposites. The tall one was statuesque. She had a beautiful figure, the kind you saw on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, the kind that made every girl around her take a hit on her self-esteem just by being in the same room. Her hair was golden, gently waving to

the middle of her back. The short girl was pixielfike, thin in the extreme, with small features.
Her hair was a deep black, cropped short and pointing in every direction.

And yet, they were all exactly alike. Every one of them was chalky pale, the palest of all the students living in this sunless town. Paler than me, the albino. They all had very dark eyes despite the range in hair tones. They also had dark shadows under those eyes—purplish, bruise-like shadows. As if they were all suffering from a sleepless night, or almost done recovering from a broken nose. Though their noses, all their features, were straight, perfect, angular.

But all this is not why I couldn't look away.

I stared because their faces, so different, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful.

They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine.

Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel. It was hard to decide who was the most beautiful—maybe the perfect blonde girl, or the bronze-haired boy.

They were all looking away—away from each other, away from the other students, away from anything in particular as far as I could tell. As I watched, the small girl rose with her tray-unopened soda, unbiten apple—and walked away with a quick, graceful lope that belonged on a runway. I watched, amazed at her lithe dancer's step, till she dumped her tray and glided through the back door, faster than I would have thought possible. My eyes darted back to the others, who sat unchanging.

"Who are they?" I asked the girl from my Spanish class, whose name I'd forgotten.

As she looked up to see who I meant—though already knowing, probably, from my tone—suddenly he looked at her, the thinner one, the boyish one, the youngest, perhaps. He looked at my neighbor for just a fraction of a second, then his dark eyes flickered to mine.
He looked away, more quickly than I could, though in a flush of embarrassment I dropped my eyes at once. In that brief flash of a glance, his face held nothing of interest—it was as if she had called his name, and he'd looked up in an involuntary response, already having decided not to answer.

My neighbor giggled in embarrassment, looking at the table like I did.

"That's Edward and Emmett Cullen, and Rosalie and Jasper Hale. The one who left was Alice Cullen; they all live together with Dr. Cullen and his wife." She said this under her breath.

I glanced sideways at the beautiful boy, who was looking at his tray now, picking a bagel to pieces with long, pale fingers. His mouth was moving very quickly, his perfect lips barely opening. The other three still looked away, and yet I felt he was speaking quietly to them.

Strange, unpopular names, I thought. The kind of names grandparents had. But maybe that was in vogue here—small town names? I finally remembered that my neighbor was called Jessica, a perfectly common name. There were two girls named Jessica in my History class back home.

"They are...very nice-looking," I struggled with the conspicuous understatement.

"Yes!" Jessica agreed with another giggle. "They're all together though—Emmet and Rosalie, and Jasper and Alice, I mean—and they live together," her voice held all the shock and condemnation of a small town, I thought critically. But, if I was being honest, I had to admit that even in Phoenix, it would cause gossip.

"Which ones are the Cullens?" I asked. "They don't look related..."

"Oh they're not. Dr. Cullen is really young, in his twenties or early thirties. They're all adopted.

The Hales are brother and sister, twins—the blondes—and they're foster children."

"They look a little old for foster children."

"They are now, Jasper and Rosalie are both eighteen, but they've been with Mrs. Cullen
since they were eight. She's their aunt or something like that."

"That's really kind of nice-for them to take care of all those kids like that, when they're so young and everything."

"I guess so," Jessica admitted reluctantly, and I got the impression that she didn't like the doctor and his wife for some reason. With the glances she was throwing at their adopted children, I would presume the reason was jealousy. "I think that Mrs. Cullen can't have any kids, though," she added, as if that lessened their kindness.

"Terrible gossip, that girl, her mother is the same way. Dealing with her every time I deposit a check is an exercise in patience," Charlie grumbled, irritated that no one seemed to have the courtesy to mind their own business.

Throughout all this conversation, my eyes flickered again and again to the table where the strange family sat. They continued to look at the walls and not eat.

"Have they always lived in Forks?" I asked. Surely I would have noticed them on one of my summers here.

"No," she said in a voice that implied it should be obvious, even to a new arrival like me.

"They just moved down two years ago from somewhere in Alaska."

I felt a surge of pity, and relief. Pity because, as beautiful as they were, they were outsiders, clearly not accepted. Relief that I wasn't the only newcomer here, and certainly not the most interesting by any standard.

As I examined them, the youngest, one of the Cullens, looked up and met my gaze, this time with evident curiosity in his expression. As I looked swiftly away, it seemed to me his glance held some kind of unmet expectation.

"Which one is the boy with the reddish brown hair?" I asked. I peeked at him from the
of my eye, and he was still staring at me, but not gawking like the other students had today-he had a

slightly frustrated expression. I looked down again.

"That's Edward. He's gorgeous, of course, but don't waste your time. He doesn't date.

Apparently none of the girls here are good-looking enough for him." She sniffed, a clear case of sour

grapes. I wondered when he'd turned her down.

I bit my lip to hide my smile. Then I glanced at him again. His face was turned away, but I thought his cheek appeared lifted, as if he were smiling, too.

After a few more minutes, the four of them left the table together. They were all noticeably graceful—even the big, brawny one. It was unsettling to watch. The one named Edward didn't look at me again.

I sat at the table with Jessica and her friends longer than I would have if I'd been sitting alone.

I was anxious not to be late for class on my first day. One of my new acquaintances, who considerately reminded me that her name was Angela, had Biology II with me the next hour. We walked to class together in silence. She was shy, too.

When we entered the classroom, Angela went to sit at a black-topped lab table exactly like the ones I was used to. She already had a neighbor. In fact, all the tables were filled but one. Next to the center aisle, I recognized Edward Cullen by his unusual hair, sitting next to that single open seat.

As I walked down the aisle to introduce myself to the teacher and get my slip signed, I was watching him surreptitiously. Just as I passed, he suddenly went rigid in his seat. He stared at me again,

meeting my eyes with the strangest expression on his face—it was hostile, furious. I looked away quickly,
shocked, going red again. I stumbled over a book in the walkway and had to catch myself on the edge of a table. The girl sitting there giggled.

I'd noticed that his eyes were black-coal black.

Mr. Banner signed my slip and handed me a book with no nonsense about introductions. I could tell we were going to get along. Of course, he had no choice but to send me to the one open seat in the middle of the room. I kept my eyes down as I went to sit by him, bewildered by the antagonistic stare he'd given me.

I didn't look up as I sat my book on the table and took my seat, but I saw his posture change from the corner of my eye. He was leaning away from me, sitting on the extreme edge of his chair and averting his face like he smelled something bad. Inconspicuously, I sniffed my hair. It smelled like strawberries, the scent of my favorite shampoo. It seemed an innocent enough odor. I let my hair fall over my right shoulder, making a dark curtain between us, and tried to pay attention to the teacher.

Unfortunately the lecture was on cellular anatomy, something I'd already studied. I took notes carefully anyway, always looking down.

I couldn't stop myself from peeking occasionally through the screen of my hair at the strange boy next to me. During the whole class, he never relaxed his stiff position on the edge of his chair, sitting as far from me as possible. I could see his hand on his left leg was clenched into a fist, tendons standing out under his pale skin. This, too, he never relaxed. He had the long sleeves of his white shirt pushed up to his elbows, and his forearm was surprisingly hard and muscular beneath his skin. He wasn't nearly as slight as he'd looked next to his burly brother.

The class seemed to drag on longer than the others. Was it because the day was finally
coming to a close, or because I was waiting for his tight fist to loosen? It never did; he continued to sit so still.

it looked like he wasn't breathing. What was wrong with him? Was this his normal behavior? I questioned my judgment on Jessica's bitterness at lunch today. Maybe she was not as resentful as I'd thought.

It couldn't have anything to do with me. He didn't know me from Eve.

I peeked up at him one more time, and regretted it. He was glaring down at me again, his black eyes full of revulsion. As I flinched away from him, shrinking against my chair, the phrase 

*if looks could kill* suddenly ran through my mind.

At that moment, the bell rang loudly, making me jump, and Edward Cullen was out of his seat. Fluidly he rose-he was much taller than I'd thought-his back to me, and he was out the door 

before anyone else was out of their seat.

Everyone turned to look at Edward as though he knew where this animosity stemmed from. He looked pained, and Carlisle was speaking lowly to him, though Charlie could not hear what he said. Whatever it was, it must have helped as the boy seemed to calm marginally. Charlie continued to read, hoping to understand why the usually polite young man would behave this way.

I sat frozen in my seat, staring blankly after him. He was so mean. It wasn't fair. I began packing up my things slowly, trying to block the anger that filled me, for fear my eyes would tear up.

For some reason, my temper was hardwired to my tear ducts. I usually cried when I was angry, a

humiliating tendency.

"Aren't you Isabella Swan?" a male voice asked.

I looked up to see a cute, baby-faced boy, his pale blond hair carefully gelled into orderly spikes, smiling at me in a friendly way. He obviously didn't think I smelled bad.

"Bella," I corrected him, with a smile.

"I'm Mike."

"Hi, Mike."
"Do you need help finding your next class?"

"I'm headed to the gym, actually. I think I can find it."

"That's my next class, too." He seemed thrilled, though it wasn't that big of a coincidence in a school this small.

We walked to class together; he was a chatterer—he supplied most of the conversation, which made it easy for me. He'd lived in California till he was ten, so he knew how I felt about the sun. It turned out he was in my English class also. He was the nicest person I'd met today.

But as we were entering the gym, he asked, "So, did you stab Edward Cullen with a pencil or what? I've never seen him act like that."

I cringed. So I wasn't the only one who had noticed. And, apparently, that wasn't Edward Cullen's usual behavior. I decided to play dumb.

"Was that the boy I sat next to in Biology?" I asked artlessly.

"Yes," he said. "He looked like he was in pain or something."

"I don't know," I responded. "I never spoke to him."

"He's a weird guy." Mike lingered by me instead of heading to the dressing room. "If I were lucky enough to sit by you, I would have talked to you."

I smiled at him before walking through the girls' locker room door. He was friendly and clearly admiring. But it wasn't enough to ease my irritation.

The Gym teacher, Coach Clapp, found me a uniform but didn't make me dress down for today's class. At home, only two years of P.E. were required. Here, P.E. was mandatory all for years. Forks was literally my personal hell on Earth.

I watched four volleyball games running simultaneously. Remembering how many injuries I had sustained—and inflicted—playing volleyball, I felt faintly nauseated.

The final bell rang at last. I walked slowly to my office to return my paperwork. The rain had drifted away, but the wind was strong, and colder. I wrapped my arms around myself.
When I walked into the office, I almost turned around and walked back out.

Edward Cullen stood at the desk in front of me. I recognized again that tousled bronze hair. He didn't appear to notice the sound of my entrance. I stood pressed against the back wall,

waiting for the receptionist to be free.

He was arguing with her in a low, attractive voice. I quickly picked up the gist of the argument. He was trying to trade from sixth-hour Biology to another time-any other time.

I just couldn't believe that this was about me. It had to be something else, something that happened before I entered the Biology room. The look on his face must have been another aggravation entirely. It was impossible that this stranger could take such a sudden, intense dislike to me.

The door opened again, and the cold wind suddenly gusted through the room, rustling the papers on the desk, swirling my hair around my face. The girl who came in merely stepped to the desk,

placed a note in the wire basket, and walked out again. But Edward Cullen's back stiffened, and he slowly turned to glare at me-his face was absurdly handsome-with piercing, hate-filled eyes. For an instant, I felt a thrill of genuine fear, raising the hair on my arms. The look only lasted a second, but it chilled me more than the freezing wind. He turned back to the receptionist.

"Never mind, then," he said hastily in a voice like velvet. "I can see that it's impossible.

Thank you so much for your help." And he turned on his heel without another look at me, and disappeared out the door.

I went meekly to the desk, my face white for once instead of red, and handed her the signed slip.

"How did your first day go, dear?" the receptionist asked maternally.

"Fine," I lied, my voice weak. She didn't look convinced.
When I got to the truck, it was almost the last car in the lot. It seemed like a haven, already the closest thing to home I had in this damp green hole. I sat inside for a while, just staring out the windshield blankly. But soon I was cold enough to need the heater, so I turned the key and the engine roared to life.

I headed back to Charlie's house, fighting tears the whole way there.

"What the hell was that?" Charlie demanded, glaring angrily at Edward.

"I'm sure it will explain further in the book, Charlie. Why don't we continue on and try to calm down? These events have yet to occur, and my son cannot possibly know why he may have acted in such an uncouth manner." Carlisle clearly wanted to know just as much as everyone else what had happened, but it was plain to see that his primary concern was his son's well being.

"I apologize, sir. May I read next? I would like to know why I would treat a lady that way as well," Edward spoke directly to Charlie and surprised him with his sincerity. As he passed the book to him he waringly kept eye contact.

Most of the teenage boys he had encountered were not as respectful and genuine. This uncharacteristic hostility was a shock, and Charlie wondered what could possibly cause anyone to treat his daughter this way.

Chapter End Notes

I'm contemplating making the next chapter be in Edward's POV so we know what he's thinking about Bella at this point.
I've attempted to give Edward's perspective in this chapter, and I hope I have done him justice. I'm sorry about the long hiatus. I had a lot of personal setbacks and a few technical difficulties get in the way of writing in the last year. I also got married so that also took time away from writing, though it was worth it, I think.

As Edward took the book from Charlie he couldn't manage to keep his thoughts from reeling at the implications of his behavior in the book. He knew that he would only behave as such in instances of sheer thirst. However, he could not fathom what about this girl could make him react so strongly that he could potentially reveal their secret.

The note had told them that their secret would be revealed in these books, and though the Quileutes knew already, he was most worried about Chief Swan. The stalwart man held an important role in their town and could potentially ruin the lives they had built for themselves here. Although it had warned him against running, he worried that it would be the only option to avoid the consequences of what may be brought to light today.

Turning the page to the second chapter, a note fell into Edward's lap.

Edward,

As much as I know it won't help, I'm going to tell you to relax.

You don't need to worry. I know, a shocking concept for you, but I mean it.

Charlie is a good man and will understand in due time.

The changes you will see in yourself in these books are good. Don't fight them.

Love, Ness

Edward had chosen to read the note aloud despite it being only addressed to him and was now regretting it as his father was hiding his amusement behind his usually calm demeanor.

“They must know you very well to treat you with such cheek” Carlisle mentally chuckled. He decided not to show that he'd heard.

"This chapter is titled Open Book." Edward tried to ignore the thoughts bombarding him from the rest of the men in the room. The Quileutes were now convinced that he was the hunter referred to in the prologue.

He chose to read on for answers.

The next day was better...and worse.

It was better because it wasn't raining yet, though the clouds were dense and opaque. It was easier because I knew what to expect of my day. Mike came to sit next to me in English, and
walked me to my next class, with Chess Club Eric glaring at him all the while; that was flattering. People didn't look at me quite as much as they had yesterday. I sat with a big group at lunch that included Mike, Eric, Jessica and several other people whose names and faces I now remembered. I began to feel like I was treading water, instead of drowning in it.

It was worse because I was tired; I still couldn't sleep with the wind echoing around the house. It was worse because Mr. Varner called on me in Trig when my hand wasn't raised and I had the wrong answer. It was miserable because I had to play volleyball, and the one time I didn't cringe out of the way of the ball, I hit my teammate in the head with it. And it was worse because Edward Cullen wasn't in school at all.

All morning I was dreading lunch, fearing his bizarre glares. Part of me wanted to confront him and demand to know what his problem was. While I was lying sleepless in my bed, I even imagined what I would say. But I knew myself too well to think I would really have the guts to do it. I made the Cowardly Lion look like the Terminator.

But when I walked into the cafeteria with Jessica—trying to keep my eyes from sweeping the place for him, and failing entirely—I saw that his four siblings of sorts were sitting together at the same table, and he was not with them.

Mike intercepted us and steered us to his table. Jessica seemed elated by the attention, and her friends quickly joined us. But as I tried to listen to their easy chatter, I was terribly uncomfortable, waiting nervously for the moment he would arrive. I hoped that he would simply ignore me when he came, and prove my suspicions false.

He didn't come, and as time passed I grew more and more tense.

"Where are you, Edward?" His father questioned him aloud, adding mentally that he hoped he hadn't left, as it would make his mother very sad.

"I'm unsure, hopefully, these books will tell us in due time." Edward attempted to reassure his father, though he believed that he may, in fact, have left if his behavior was an indication of what he suspected was the problem. It reminded him of previous incidents involving Emmett and a few unsuspecting innocents.

I walked to Biology with more confidence when, by the end of lunch, he still hadn't showed. Mike, who was taking on the qualities of a golden retriever, walked faithfully by my side to class.

Edward suppressed a growl, feeling oddly protective of this strange girl. He knew the sorts of vile thoughts that ran through Mike Newton's head, and this girl, no girl, deserved to be debased in such a manor. He avoided his father's eyes, hearing his confusion at this reaction. He, himself, couldn't understand his reaction.

I held my breath at the door, but Edward Cullen wasn't there, either. I exhaled and went to my seat. Mike followed, talking about an upcoming trip to the beach. He lingered by my desk till the bell rang. Then he smiled at me wistfully and went to sit by a girl with braces and a bad perm. It looked like I was going to have to do something about Mike, and it wouldn't be easy. In a town like this, where everyone lived on top of everyone else, diplomacy was essential. I had never been enormously tactful; I had no practice dealing with overly friendly boys.

Wish it would stay that way Edward caught the thought drifting from a disgruntled Charlie. It seemed they'd all noticed the male attention Bella would be receiving when she arrived here in Forks. He couldn't understand why that thought appeared to upset him so. Ignoring his confusion for the moment, he continued to read.

I was relieved that I had the desk to myself, that Edward was absent. I told myself that
repeatedly. But I couldn't get rid of the nagging suspicion that I was the reason he wasn't there. It was ridiculous, and egotistical, to think that I could affect anyone that strongly. It was impossible. And yet I couldn't stop worrying that it was true.

When the school day was finally done, and the blush was fading out of my cheeks from the volleyball incident, I changed quickly back into my jeans and navy blue sweater. I hurried from the girls' locker room, pleased to find that I had successfully evaded my retriever friend for the moment. I walked swiftly out to the parking lot. It was crowded now with fleeing students. I got in my truck and dug through my bag to make sure I had what I needed.

Last night I'd discovered that Charlie couldn't cook much besides fried eggs and bacon. So I requested that I be assigned kitchen detail for the duration of my stay. He was willing enough to hand over the keys to the banquet hall. I also found out that he had no food in the house. So I had my shopping list and the cash from the jar labeled FOOD MONEY, and I was on my way to the Thriftway.

I gunned my deafening engine to life, ignoring the heads that turned in my direction, and backed carefully into a place in the line of cars that were waiting to exit the parking lot. As I waited, trying to pretend that the earsplitting rumble was coming from someone else's car, I saw the two Cullens and the Hale twins getting into their car. It was the shiny new Volvo. Of course. I hadn't noticed their clothes before—I'd been too mesmerized by their faces. Now that I looked, it was obvious that they were all dressed exceptionally well; simply, but in clothes that subtly hinted at designer origins. With their remarkable good looks, the style with which they carried themselves, they could have worn dishrags and pulled it off. It seemed excessive for them to have both looks and money. But as far as I could tell, life worked that way most of the time. It didn't look as if it bought them any acceptance here.

No, I didn't fully believe that. The isolation must be their desire; I couldn't imagine any door that wouldn’t be opened by that degree of beauty.

She’s a very observant girl, Edward. It may be that she discovers what we are. Carlisle’s thoughts were slightly tinged with worry. Edward nodded his head almost imperceptibly. He agreed with his father, as did the Quileute men. They were surmising that Edward was attacking her in the prologue in order to keep their secrets, and the treaty would then be over. If it weren’t for the fact that they knew this girl, they would have been rejoicing at the thought of being rid of them once and for all. It sickened him, and he had to struggle to restrain himself from attacking them.

Edward composed himself, questioning his strong protective instincts toward this particular girl. He didn’t even know her yet.

They looked at my noisy truck as I passed them, just like everyone else. I kept my eyes straight forward and was relieved when I finally was free of the school grounds.

The Thriftway was not far from the school, just a few streets south, off the highway. It was nice to be inside the supermarket; it felt normal. I did the shopping at home, and I fell into the pattern of the familiar task gladly. The store was big enough inside that I couldn’t hear the tapping of the rain on the roof to remind me where I was.

When I got home, I unloaded all the groceries, stuffing them in wherever I could find an open space. I hoped Charlie wouldn’t mind. I wrapped potatoes in foil and stuck them in the oven to bake, covered a steak in marinade and balanced it on top of a carton of eggs in the fridge.

When I was finished with that, I took my book bag upstairs. Before starting my homework, I changed into a pair of dry sweats, piled my damp hair up into a ponytail, and checked my e-mail for the first time. I had three messages.
“Bella,” my mom wrote…
Write me as soon as you get in, Tell me how your flight was. Is it raining?
I miss you already. I’m almost finished packing for Florida, but I can’t find
my pink blouse. Do you know where I put it? Phil says hi. Mom.

I sighed and went to the next. It was sent eight hours after the first.
“Bella,” she wrote…
Why haven’t you e-mailed me yet? What are you waiting for? Mom.

The last was from this morning.
Isabella,
If I haven’t heard from you by 5:30 p.m. today I’m calling Charlie.

I checked the clock. I still had an hour, but my mom was well known for jumping the gun.
Mom,
Calm down. I’m writing right now. Don’t do anything rash.
Bella.

I sent that, and began again.
Mom,
Everything is great. Of course it’s raining. I was waiting for something to write
about. School isn’t bad, just a little repetitive. I met some nice kids who sit by me
at lunch.
Your blouse is at the dry cleaners-you were supposed to pick it up Friday.
Charlie bought me a truck, can you believe it? I love it. It’s old, but really sturdy,
which is good, you know, for me.
I miss you, too. I’ll write again soon, but I’m not going to check my e-mail every
five minutes. Relax, breathe. I love.
Bella.

Sounds like Renee hasn’t changed much Billy Black’s thoughts were mildly derisive.
Edward had heard the story of Chief Swan’s divorce from the minds of several children at Forks
High who were consumed with thoughts of what Isabella Swan would be like when she arrived.
Would she be like her father, the no-nonsense, reserved man, or would she be like her impetuous
mother? He guessed that, based on her mindset so far, she sounded much like her father.
Isabella’s interactions with her mother concerned Carlisle; he could hear his father worrying over
the girl’s wellbeing. She seems to have been forced to be the responsible one, Edward. Hopefully
staying with Charlie will give her the opportunity to be a child while she still has time. He could
only nod imperceptibly in agreement as he continued with the chapter.

I had decided to read Wuthering Heights -the novel we were currently studying in English-yet
again for the fun of it, and that’s what I was doing when Charlie came home. I’d lost track of
the time, and I hurried downstairs to take the potatoes out and put the steak in to broil.
“Bella?” my father called out when he heard me on the stairs.
Who else? I thought to myself.
“Hey, Dad, welcome home.”
“Thanks.” He hung up his gun belt and stepped out of his boots as I bustled about the kitchen.
As far as I was aware, he’d never shot the gun on the job. But he kept it ready. When I came
here as a child, he would always remove the bullets as soon as he walked in the door. I guess he considered me old enough now not to shoot myself by accident, and not depressed enough to shoot myself on purpose.

“What’s for dinner?” he asked warily. My mother was an imaginative cook, and her experiments weren’t always edible. I was surprised, and sad, that he seemed to remember that far back.

“Steak and potatoes,” I answered, and he looked relieved.

He seemed to feel awkward standing in the kitchen doing nothing; he lumbered into the living room to watch TV while I worked. We were both more comfortable that way. I made a salad while the steaks cooked, and set the table.

I called him in when dinner was ready, and he sniffed appreciatively as he walked into the room.

“Smells good, Bell.”

“Thanks.”

We ate in silence for a few minutes. It wasn’t uncomfortable. Neither of us was bothered by the quiet. In some ways, we were well suited for living together.

“So, how did you like school? Have you made any friends?” he asked as he was taking seconds.

“Well, I have a few classes with a girl named Jessica. I sit with her friends at lunch. And, there’s this boy, Mike, who’s very friendly. Everybody seems pretty nice.” With one outstanding exception.

“That must be Mike Newton. Nice kid—nice family. His dad owns the sporting goods store just outside of town. He makes a good living off all the backpackers who come through here.”

“Do you know the Cullen family?” I asked hesitantly.

“Dr. Cullen’s family? Sure. Dr. Cullen’s a great man.”

“They...the kids...are a little different. They don’t seem to fit in very well at school.”

Charlie surprised me by looking angry.

“People in this town,” he muttered. “Dr. Cullen is a brilliant surgeon who could probably work in any hospital in the world, make ten times the salary he gets here,” he continued, getting louder. “We’re lucky to have him—lucky that his wife wanted to live in a small town. He’s an asset to the community, and all of those kids are well behaved and polite. I had my doubts, when they first moved in, with all those adopted teenagers. I thought we might have some problems with them. But they’re all very mature—I haven’t had one speck of trouble from any of them. That’s more than I can say for the children of some folks who have lived in this town for generations. And they stick together the way a family should—camping trips every other weekend...Just because they’re newcomers, people have to talk.”

Charlie’s face was turning a mottled red, and Edward knew that, were it possible, Carlisle would also be blushing. With the embarrassment flooding his mind, Edward was finding it difficult to clearly hear what the Chief was thinking, picking up only every other word or image. He had never come across anyone whose mind was impossible to read, and Chief Swan, whilst difficult, was not entirely closed off to him. He found it an interesting distraction from the thoughts of the other men. Billy had already heard a form of this rant of Charlie’s and was unsurprised, but Harry and Quil had had no idea how strongly Charlie felt, and were convinced that their family had done something to influence his mind.

“Thank you, Charlie. That’s very kind of you to say. I appreciate your sticking up for my family.”

Carlisle had finally managed a response, and Edward could hear the emotion in his voice.

“Don’t mention it,” Charlie stuttered out, still blushing a vibrant red. “Why don’t you keep on reading there, Edward.”
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