Breaking Dawn

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Extract

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Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

PREFACE

I'D HAD MORE THAN MY FAIR SHARE OF NEAR-DEATH experiences; it wasn't something you ever really got used to.

It seemed oddly inevitable, though, facing death again. Like I really *was* marked for disaster. I'd escaped time and time again, but it kept coming back for me.

Still, this time was so different from the others.

You could run from someone you feared, you could try to fight someone you hated. All my reactions were geared toward those kinds of killers—the monsters, the enemies.

When you loved the one who was killing you, it left you no options. How could you run, how could you fight,

when doing so would hurt that beloved one? If your life was all you had to give your beloved, how could you not give it?

If it was someone you truly loved?

1. ENGAGED

No one is staring at you, I promised myself. *No one is staring at you. No one is staring at you.*

But, because I couldn't lie convincingly even to myself, I had to check.

As I sat waiting for one of the three traffic lights in town to turn green, I peeked to the right—in her minivan, Mrs. Weber had turned her whole torso in my direction. Her eyes bored into mine, and I flinched back, wondering why she didn't drop her gaze or look ashamed. It was still considered rude to stare at people, wasn't it? Didn't that apply to me anymore?

Then I remembered that these windows were so darkly tinted that she probably had no idea if it was even me in here, let alone that I'd caught her looking. I tried to take some comfort in the fact that she wasn't really staring at me, just the car.

My car. Sigh.

I glanced to the left and groaned. Two pedestrians were frozen on the sidewalk, missing their chance to cross as they stared. Behind them, Mr. Marshall was gawking through the plate glass window of his little souvenir shop. At least he didn't have his nose pressed up against the glass. Yet.

The light turned green and, in my hurry to escape, I stomped on the gas pedal without thinking—the normal way I would have punched it to get my ancient Chevy truck moving.

Engine snarling like a hunting panther, the car jolted forward so fast that my body slammed into the black leather seat and my stomach flattened against my spine.

"Arg!" I gasped as I fumbled for the brake. Keeping my head, I merely tapped the pedal. The car lurched to an absolute standstill anyway.

I couldn't bear to look around at the reaction. If there had been any doubt as to who was driving this car before, it was gone now. With the toe of my shoe, I gently nudged the gas pedal down one half millimeter, and the car shot forward again.

I managed to reach my goal, the gas station. If I hadn't been running on vapors, I wouldn't have come into town

at all. I was going without a lot of things these days, like Pop-Tarts and shoelaces, to avoid spending time in public.

Moving as if I were in a race, I got the hatch open, the cap off, the card scanned, and the nozzle in the tank within seconds. Of course, there was nothing I could do to make the numbers on the gauge pick up the pace. They ticked by sluggishly, almost as if they were doing it just to annoy me.

It wasn't bright out—a typical drizzly day in Forks, Washington—but I still felt like a spotlight was trained on me, drawing attention to the delicate ring on my left hand. At times like this, sensing the eyes on my back, it felt as if the ring were pulsing like a neon sign: *Look at me, look at me*.

It was stupid to be so self-conscious, and I knew that. Besides my dad and mom, did it really matter what people were saying about my engagement? About my new car? About my mysterious acceptance into an Ivy League college? About the shiny black credit card that felt red-hot in my back pocket right now?

"Yeah, who cares what they think," I muttered under my breath.

"Um, miss?" a man's voice called.

I turned, and then wished I hadn't.

Two men stood beside a fancy SUV with brand-new kayaks tied to the top. Neither of them was looking at me; they both were staring at the car.

Personally, I didn't get it. But then, I was just proud I could distinguish between the symbols for Toyota, Ford,

and Chevy. This car was glossy black, sleek, and pretty, but it was still just a car to me.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but could you tell me what kind of car you're driving?" the tall one asked.

"Um, a Mercedes, right?"

"Yes," the man said politely while his shorter friend rolled his eyes at my answer. "I know. But I was wondering, is that . . . are you driving a Mercedes *Guardian*?" The man said the name with reverence. I had a feeling this guy would get along well with Edward, my . . . my fiancé (there really was no getting around that truth with the wedding just days away). "They aren't supposed to be available in Europe yet," the man went on, "let alone here."

While his eyes traced the contours of my car—it didn't look much different from any other Mercedes sedan to me, but what did I know?—I briefly contemplated my issues with words like *fiancé*, *wedding*, *husband*, etc.

I just couldn't put it together in my head.

On the one hand, I had been raised to cringe at the very thought of poofy white dresses and bouquets. But more than that, I just couldn't reconcile a staid, respectable, dull concept like *husband* with my concept of *Edward*. It was like casting an archangel as an accountant; I couldn't visualize him in any commonplace role.

Like always, as soon as I started thinking about Edward I was caught up in a dizzy spin of fantasies. The stranger had to clear his throat to get my attention; he was still waiting for an answer about the car's make and model.

"I don't know," I told him honestly.

"Do you mind if I take a picture with it?"

It took me a second to process that. "Really? You want to take a picture with the car?"

"Sure—nobody is going to believe me if I don't get proof."

"Um. Okay. Fine."

I swiftly put away the nozzle and crept into the front seat to hide while the enthusiast dug a huge professional-looking camera out of his backpack. He and his friend took turns posing by the hood, and then they went to take pictures at the back end.

"I miss my truck," I whimpered to myself.

Very, very convenient—too convenient—that my truck would wheeze its last wheeze just weeks after Edward and I had agreed to our lopsided compromise, one detail of which was that he be allowed to replace my truck when it passed on. Edward swore it was only to be expected; my truck had lived a long, full life and then expired of natural causes. According to him. And, of course, I had no way to verify his story or to try to raise my truck from the dead on my own. My favorite mechanic—

I stopped that thought cold, refusing to let it come to a conclusion. Instead, I listened to the men's voices outside, muted by the car walls.

". . . went at it with a flame thrower in the online video. Didn't even pucker the paint."

"Of course not. You could roll a tank over this baby. Not much of a market for one over here. Designed for

Middle East diplomats, arms dealers, and drug lords mostly."

"Think *she's* something?" the short one asked in a softer voice. I ducked my head, cheeks flaming.

"Huh," the tall one said. "Maybe. Can't imagine what you'd need missile-proof glass and four thousand pounds of body armor for around here. Must be headed somewhere more hazardous."

Body armor. *Four thousand pounds* of body armor. And *missile*-proof glass? Nice. What had happened to good old-fashioned bulletproof?

Well, at least this made some sense—if you had a twisted sense of humor.

It wasn't like I hadn't expected Edward to take advantage of our deal, to weight it on his side so that he could give so much more than he would receive. I'd agreed that he could replace my truck when it needed replacing, not expecting that moment to come quite so soon, of course. When I'd been forced to admit that the truck had become no more than a still-life tribute to classic Chevys on my curb, I knew his idea of a replacement was probably going to embarrass me. Make me the focus of stares and whispers. I'd been right about that part. But even in my darkest imaginings I had not foreseen that he would get me *two* cars.

The "before" car and the "after" car, he'd explained when I'd flipped out.

This was just the "before" car. He'd told me it was a loaner and promised that he was returning it after the

wedding. It all had made absolutely no sense to me. Until now.

Ha ha. Because I was so fragilely human, so accident-prone, so much a victim to my own dangerous bad luck, apparently I needed a tank-resistant car to keep me safe. Hilarious. I was sure he and his brothers had enjoyed the joke quite a bit behind my back.

Or maybe, just maybe, a small voice whispered in my head, *it's not a joke, silly. Maybe he's really that worried about you. This wouldn't be the first time he's gone a little overboard trying to protect you.*

I sighed.

I hadn't seen the "after" car yet. It was hidden under a sheet in the deepest corner of the Cullens' garage. I knew most people would have peeked by now, but I really didn't want to know.

Probably no body armor on that car—because I wouldn't need it after the honeymoon. Virtual indestructibility was just one of the many perks I was looking forward to. The best parts about being a Cullen were not expensive cars and impressive credit cards.

"Hey," the tall man called, cupping his hands to the glass in an effort to peer in. "We're done now. Thanks a lot!"

"You're welcome," I called back, and then tensed as I started the engine and eased the pedal—ever so gently—down . . .

No matter how many times I drove down the familiar road toward home, I still couldn't make the rain-washed flyers fade into the background. Each one of them, stapled to telephone poles and taped to street signs, was like a

fresh slap in the face. A well-deserved slap in the face. My mind was sucked back into the thought I'd interrupted so immediately before. I couldn't avoid it on this road. Not with pictures of *my favorite mechanic* flashing past me at regular intervals.

My best friend. My Jacob.

The HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BOY? posters were not Jacob's father's idea. It had been *my* father, Charlie, who'd printed up the flyers and spread them all over town. And not just Forks, but Port Angeles and Sequim and Hoquiam and Aberdeen and every other town in the Olympic Peninsula . . . He'd made sure that all the police stations in the state of Washington had the same flyer hanging on the wall, too. His own station had a whole corkboard dedicated to finding Jacob. A corkboard that was mostly empty, much to his disappointment and frustration.

My dad was disappointed with more than the lack of response. He was most disappointed with Billy, Jacob's father—and Charlie's closest friend.

For Billy's not being more involved with the search for his sixteen-year-old "runaway." For Billy's refusing to put up the flyers in La Push, the reservation on the coast that was Jacob's home. For his seeming resigned to Jacob's disappearance, as if there was nothing he could do. For his saying, "Jacob's grown up now. He'll come home if he wants to."

And he was frustrated with me for taking Billy's side.

I wouldn't put up posters, either. Because both Billy and I knew where Jacob was, roughly speaking, and we also knew that no one had seen this *boy*.

The flyers put the usual big, fat lump in my throat, the usual stinging tears in my eyes, and I was glad Edward was out hunting this Saturday. If Edward saw my reaction, it would only make him feel terrible, too.

Of course, there were drawbacks to it being Saturday. As I turned slowly and carefully onto my street, I could see my dad's police cruiser in the driveway of our home. He'd skipped fishing again today. Still sulking about the wedding.

So I wouldn't be able to use the phone inside. But I *had* to call . . .

I parked on the curb behind the Chevy sculpture and pulled the cell phone Edward had given me for emergencies out of the glove compartment. I dialed, keeping my finger on the "end" button as the phone rang. Just in case.

"Hello?" Seth Clearwater answered, and I sighed in relief. I was way too chicken to speak to his older sister, Leah. The phrase "bite my head off" was not entirely a figure of speech when it came to Leah.

"Hey, Seth, it's Bella."

"Oh, hiya, Bella! How are you?"

Choked up. Desperate for reassurance. "Fine."

"Calling for an update?"

"You're psychic."

"Not hardly. I'm no Alice—you're just predictable," he joked. Among the Quileute pack down at La Push, only Seth was comfortable even mentioning the Cullens by name, let alone joking about things like my nearly omniscient sister-in-law-to-be.

"I know I am." I hesitated for a minute. "How is he?"

Seth sighed. "Same as ever. He won't talk, though we know he hears us. He's trying not to think *human*, you know. Just going with his instincts."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Somewhere in northern Canada. I can't tell you which province. He doesn't pay much attention to state lines."

"Any hint that he might . . ."

"He's not coming home, Bella. Sorry."

I swallowed. "S'okay, Seth. I knew before I asked. I just can't help wishing."

"Yeah. We all feel the same way."

"Thanks for putting up with me, Seth. I know the others must give you a hard time."

"They're not your hugest fans," he agreed cheerfully. "Kind of lame, I think. Jacob made his choices, you made yours. Jake doesn't like their attitude about it. 'Course, he isn't super thrilled that you're checking up on him, either."

I gasped. "I thought he wasn't talking to you?"

"He can't hide everything from us, hard as he's trying."

So Jacob knew I was worried. I wasn't sure how I felt about that. Well, at least he knew I hadn't skipped off into the sunset and forgotten him completely. He might have imagined me capable of that.

"I guess I'll see you at the . . . wedding," I said, forcing the word out through my teeth.

"Yeah, me and my mom will be there. It was cool of you to ask us."

I smiled at the enthusiasm in his voice. Though inviting the Clearwaters had been Edward's idea, I was glad he'd thought of it. Having Seth there would be nice—a link, however tenuous, to my missing best man. "It wouldn't be the same without you."

"Tell Edward I said hi, 'kay?"

"Sure thing."

I shook my head. The friendship that had sprung up between Edward and Seth was something that still boggled my mind. It was proof, though, that things didn't have to be this way. That werewolves and vampires could get along just fine, thank you very much, if they were of a mind to.

Not everybody liked this idea.

"Ah," Seth said, his voice cracking up an octave. "Er, Leah's home."

"Oh! Bye!"

The phone went dead. I left it on the seat and prepared myself mentally to go inside the house, where Charlie would be waiting.

My poor dad had so much to deal with right now. Jacob-the-runaway was just *one* of the straws on his overburdened back. He was almost as worried about me, his barely-a-legal-adult daughter who was about to become a Mrs. in just a few days' time.

I walked slowly through the light rain, remembering the night we'd told him . . .

As the sound of Charlie's cruiser announced his return, the ring suddenly weighed a hundred pounds on my finger. I wanted to shove my left hand in a pocket, or maybe sit on it, but Edward's cool, firm grasp kept it front and center.

"Stop fidgeting, Bella. Please try to remember that you're not confessing to a murder here."

"Easy for you to say."

I listened to the ominous sound of my father's boots clomping up the sidewalk. The key rattled in the already open door. The sound reminded me of that part of the horror movie when the victim realizes she's forgotten to lock her deadbolt . . .

"Calm down, Bella," Edward whispered, listening to the acceleration of my heart. The door slammed against the wall, and I flinched like I'd been Tasered.

"Hey, Charlie," Edward called, entirely relaxed.

"No!" I hissed under my breath.

"What?" Edward whispered back.

"Wait till he hangs his gun up!"

Edward chuckled and ran his free hand through his tousled bronze hair.

Charlie came around the corner, still in his uniform, still armed, and tried not to make a face when he spied us sitting together on the loveseat. Lately, he'd been putting forth a lot of effort to like Edward more. Of course, this revelation was sure to end that effort immediately.

"Hey, kids. What's up?"

"We'd like to talk to you," Edward said, so serene. "We have some good news."

Charlie's expression went from strained friendliness to black suspicion in a second.

"Good news?" Charlie growled, looking straight at me.

"Have a seat, Dad."

He raised one eyebrow, stared at me for five seconds, then stomped to the recliner and sat down on the very edge, his back ramrod straight.

"Don't get worked up, Dad," I said after a moment of loaded silence. "Everything's okay."

Edward grimaced, and I knew it was in objection to the word "okay." He probably would have used something more like "wonderful" or "perfect" or "glorious."

"Sure it is, Bella, sure it is. If everything is so great then why are you sweating bullets?"

"I'm not sweating," I lied.

I leaned away from his fierce scowl, cringing into Edward, and instinctively wiped the back of my right hand across my forehead to remove the evidence.

"You're pregnant!" Charlie exploded. "You're pregnant, aren't you?"

Though the question was probably meant for me, he was glaring at Edward now, and I could have sworn I saw his hand twitch toward the gun.

"No! Of course I'm not!" I wanted to elbow Edward in the ribs, but I knew that move would only give me a bruise. I'd *told* Edward that people would immediately jump to this conclusion! What other possible reason would sane people have for getting married at eighteen? (His answer then had made me roll my eyes. *Love.* Right.)

Charlie's glower lightened a shade. It was usually pretty clear on my face when I was telling the truth, and he believed me now. "Oh. Sorry."

"Apology accepted."

There was a long pause. After a moment, I realized everyone was waiting for *me* to say something. I looked up at Edward, panic-stricken. There was no way I was going to get the words out.

He smiled at me and then squared his shoulders and turned to my father.

"Charlie, I realize that I've gone about this out of order. Traditionally, I should have asked you first. I mean no disrespect, but since Bella has already said yes and I don't want to diminish her choice in the matter, instead of asking you for her hand, I'm asking you for your blessing. We're getting married, Charlie. I love her more than anything in the world, more than my own life, and—by some miracle—she loves me that way, too. Will you give us your blessing?"

He sounded so sure, so calm. For just an instant, listening to the absolute confidence in his voice, I experienced a rare moment of insight. I could see, fleetingly, the way the world looked to him. For the length of one heartbeat, this news made perfect sense.

And then I caught sight of the expression on Charlie's face, his eyes now locked on the ring.

I held my breath while his skin changed colors—fair to red, red to purple, purple to blue. I started to get up—I'm not sure what I planned to do; maybe use the Heimlich maneuver to make sure he wasn't choking—but Edward

squeezed my hand and murmured "Give him a minute" so low that only I could hear.

The silence was much longer this time. Then, gradually, shade by shade, Charlie's color returned to normal. His lips pursed, and his eyebrows furrowed; I recognized his "deep in thought" expression. He studied the two of us for a long moment, and I felt Edward relax at my side.

"Guess I'm not that surprised," Charlie grumbled. "Knew I'd have to deal with something like this soon enough."

I exhaled.

"You sure about this?" Charlie demanded, glaring at me.

"I'm one hundred percent sure about Edward," I told him without missing a beat.

"Getting married, though? What's the rush?" He eyed me suspiciously again.

The rush was due to the fact that I was getting closer to nineteen every stinking day, while Edward stayed frozen in all his seventeen-year-old perfection. Not that this fact necessitated *marriage* in my book, but the wedding was required due to the delicate and tangled compromise Edward and I had made to get to this point, the brink of my transformation from mortal to immortal.

These weren't things I could explain to Charlie.

"We're going away to Dartmouth together in the fall, Charlie," Edward reminded him. "I'd like to do that, well, the right way. It's how I was raised." He shrugged.

He wasn't exaggerating; they'd been big on old-fashioned morals during World War I.

Charlie's mouth twisted to the side. Looking for an angle to argue from. But what could he say? *I'd prefer you live in sin first?* He was a dad; his hands were tied.

"Knew this was coming," he muttered to himself, frowning. Then, suddenly, his face went perfectly smooth and blank.

"Dad?" I asked anxiously. I glanced at Edward, but I couldn't read his face, either, as he watched Charlie.

"Ha!" Charlie exploded. I jumped in my seat. "Ha, ha, ha!"

I stared incredulously as Charlie doubled over in laughter; his whole body shook with it.

I looked at Edward for a translation, but Edward had his lips pressed tightly together, like he was trying to hold back laughter himself.

"Okay, fine," Charlie choked out. "Get married." Another roll of laughter shook through him. "But . . ."

"But what?" I demanded.

"But *you* have to tell your mom! I'm not saying one word to Renée! That's all yours!" He busted into loud guffaws.

I paused with my hand on the doorknob, smiling. Sure, at the time, his words had terrified me. The ultimate doom: telling Renée. Early marriage was higher up on her black list than boiling live puppies.

Who could have foreseen her response? Not me. Certainly not Charlie. Maybe Alice, but I hadn't thought to ask her.

"Well, Bella," Renée had said after I'd choked and stuttered out the impossible words: *Mom, I'm marrying Edward.* "I'm a little miffed that you waited so long to tell me. Plane tickets only get more expensive. Oooh," she'd fretted. "Do you think Phil's cast will be off by then? It will spoil the pictures if he's not in a tux—"

"Back up a second, Mom." I'd gasped. "What do you mean, waited so long? I just got en-en . . ."—I'd been unable to force out the word *engaged*—"things settled, you know, today."

"Today? Really? That *is* a surprise. I assumed . . ."

"What did you assume? *When* did you assume?"

"Well, when you came to visit me in April, it looked like things were pretty much sewn up, if you know what I mean. You're not very hard to read, sweetie. But I didn't say anything because I knew it wouldn't do any good. You're exactly like Charlie." She'd sighed, resigned. "Once you make up your mind, there is no reasoning with you. Of course, exactly like Charlie, you stick by your decisions, too."

And then she'd said the last thing that I'd ever expected to hear from my mother.

"You're not making my mistakes, Bella. You sound like you're scared silly, and I'm guessing it's because you're afraid of *me*." She'd giggled. "Of what I'm going to think. And I know I've said a lot of things about marriage and stupidity—and I'm not taking them back—but you need to realize that those things specifically applied to *me*. You're a completely different person than I am. You make

your own kinds of mistakes, and I'm sure you'll have your share of regrets in life. But commitment was never your problem, sweetie. You have a better chance of making this work than most forty-year-olds I know." Renée had laughed again. "My little middle-aged child. Luckily, you seem to have found another old soul."

"You're not . . . mad? You don't think I'm making a humongous mistake?"

"Well, sure I wish you'd wait a few more years. I mean, do I look old enough to be a mother-in-law to you? Don't answer that. But this isn't about me. This is about you. Are you happy?"

"I don't know. I'm having an out-of-body experience right now."

Renée had chuckled. "Does he make you happy, Bella?"

"Yes, but—"

"Are you ever going to want anyone else?"

"No, but—"

"But what?"

"But aren't you going to say that I sound exactly like every other infatuated teenager since the dawn of time?"

"You've never been a teenager, sweetie. You know what's best for *you*."

For the last few weeks, Renée had unexpectedly immersed herself in wedding plans. She'd spent hours every day on the phone with Edward's mother, Esme—no worries about the in-laws getting along. Renée *adored* Esme, but then, I doubted anyone could help responding that way to my lovable almost-mother-in-law.

It let me right off the hook. Edward's family and my family were taking care of the nuptials together without me having to do or know or think too hard about any of it.

Charlie was furious, of course, but the sweet part was that he wasn't furious at *me.* Renée was the traitor. He'd counted on her to play the heavy. What could he do now, when his ultimate threat—telling Mom—had turned out to be utterly empty? He had nothing, and he knew it. So he moped around the house, muttering things about not being able to trust anyone in this world . . .

"Dad?" I called as I pushed open the front door. "I'm home."

"Hold on, Bells, stay right there."

"Huh?" I asked, pausing automatically.

"Gimme a second. Ouch, you got me, Alice."

Alice?

"Sorry, Charlie," Alice's trilling voice responded. "How's that?"

"I'm bleeding on it."

"You're fine. Didn't break the skin—trust me."

"What's going on?" I demanded, hesitating in the doorway.

"Thirty seconds, please, Bella," Alice told me. "Your patience will be rewarded."

"Humph," Charlie added.

I tapped my foot, counting each beat. Before I got to thirty, Alice said, "Okay, Bella, come in!"

Moving with caution, I rounded the little corner into our living room.

"Oh," I huffed. "Aw. Dad. Don't you look—"

"Silly?" Charlie interrupted.

"I was thinking more like 'debonair.'"

Charlie blushed. Alice took his elbow and tugged him around into a slow spin to showcase the pale gray tux.

"Now cut that out, Alice. I look like an idiot."

"No one dressed by me *ever* looks like an idiot."

"She's right, Dad. You look fabulous! What's the occasion?"

Alice rolled her eyes. "It's the final check on the fit. For both of you."

I peeled my gaze off the unusually elegant Charlie for the first time and saw the dreaded white garment bag laid carefully across the sofa.

"Aaah."

"Go to your happy place, Bella. It won't take long."

I sucked in a deep breath and closed my eyes. Keeping them shut, I stumbled my way up the stairs to my room. I stripped down to my underwear and held my arms straight out.

"You'd think I was shoving bamboo splinters under your nails," Alice muttered to herself as she followed me in.

I paid no attention to her. I was in my happy place.

In my happy place, the whole wedding mess was over and done. Behind me. Already repressed and forgotten.

We were alone, just Edward and me. The setting was fuzzy and constantly in flux—it morphed from misty forest to cloud-covered city to arctic night—because

Edward was keeping the location of our honeymoon a secret to surprise me. But I wasn't especially concerned about the *where* part.

Edward and I were together, and I'd fulfilled my side of our compromise perfectly. I'd married him. That was the big one. But I'd also accepted all his outrageous gifts and was registered, however futilely, to attend Dartmouth College in the fall. Now it was his turn.

Before he turned me into a vampire—his big compromise—he had one other stipulation to make good on.

Edward had an obsessive sort of concern over the human things that I would be giving up, the experiences he didn't want me to miss. But there was only one experience I was insisting on. Of course it would be the one he wished I would forget all about.

Here was the thing, though. I knew what I was going to be like when it was all over. I'd seen newborn vampires firsthand, and I'd heard all my family-to-be's stories about those wild early days. For several years, my biggest personality trait was going to be "thirsty." It would take some time before I could be *me* again. And even when I was in control of myself, I would never feel exactly the way I felt now.

Human . . . and passionately in love.

I wanted the complete experience before I traded in my warm, breakable, pheromone-riddled body for something beautiful, strong . . . and unknown. I wanted a *real* honeymoon with Edward. And, despite the danger he feared this would put me in, he'd agreed to try.

I was only vaguely aware of Alice and the slip and slide of satin over my skin. I didn't care, for the moment, that the whole town was talking about me. I didn't think about the spectacle I would have to star in much too soon. I didn't worry about tripping on my train or giggling at the wrong moment or being too young or the staring audience or even the empty seat where my best friend should be.

I was with Edward in my happy place.