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S T E P H E N I E M E Y E R



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ATOM

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*To my husband, Pancho,
for your patience, love, friendship, humor,
and willingness to eat out.*

*And also to my children, Gabe, Seth, and Eli,
for letting me experience the kind of love
that people freely die for.*

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Fire and Ice



Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.

Robert Frost

PREFACE

ALL OUR ATTEMPTS AT SUBTERFUGE HAD BEEN IN VAIN.

With ice in my heart, I watched him prepare to defend me. His intense concentration betrayed no hint of doubt, though he was outnumbered. I knew that we could expect no help — at this moment, his family was fighting for their lives just as surely as he was for ours.

Would I ever learn the outcome of that other fight? Find out who the winners and the losers were? Would I live long enough for that?

The odds of that didn't look so great.

Black eyes, wild with their fierce craving for my death, watched for the moment when my protector's

attention would be diverted. The moment when I would surely die.

Somewhere, far, far away in the cold forest, a wolf howled.

1. ULTIMATUM

Bella,

~~I don't know why you're making
charlie carry notes to Billy like
we're in second grade if I wanted
to talk to you I would answer the~~

~~You made the choice here, okay?
You can't have it both ways when~~

~~what part of 'mortal enemies' is too
complicated for you to~~



~~Look, I know I'm being a jerk, but
there's just no way around.~~

~~We can't be friends when you're
spending all your time with a bunch of~~

~~It just makes it worse when I
think about you too much, so don't
write anymore~~

Yeah, I miss you, too. A lot.
Doesn't change anything. Sorry.

Jacob

I ran my fingers across the page, feeling the dents where he had pressed the pen to the paper so hard that it had nearly broken through. I could picture him writing this — scrawling the angry letters in his rough handwriting, slashing through line after line when the words came out wrong, maybe even snapping the pen in his too-big hand; that would explain the ink splatters. I could imagine the frustration pulling his black eyebrows together and crumpling his forehead. If I'd been there, I might have laughed. *Don't give yourself a brain hemorrhage, Jacob*, I would have told him. *Just spit it out.*

Laughing was the last thing I felt like doing now as I reread the words I'd already memorized. His answer to my pleading note — passed from Charlie to Billy to him, just like second grade, as he'd pointed out — was no surprise.

I'd known the essence of what it would say before I'd opened it.

What was surprising was how much each crossed-out line wounded me — as if the points of the letters had cutting edges. More than that, behind each angry beginning lurked a vast pool of hurt; Jacob's pain cut me deeper than my own.

While I was pondering this, I caught the unmistakable scent of a smoking burner rising from the kitchen. In another house, the fact that someone besides myself was cooking might not be a cause for panicking.

I shoved the wrinkled paper into my back pocket and ran, making it downstairs in the nick of time.

The jar of spaghetti sauce Charlie'd stuck in the microwave was only on its first revolution when I yanked the door open and pulled it out.

"What did I do wrong?" Charlie demanded.

"You're supposed to take the lid off first, Dad. Metal's bad for microwaves." I swiftly removed the lid as I spoke, poured half the sauce into a bowl, and then put the bowl inside the microwave and the jar back in the fridge; I fixed the time and pressed start.

Charlie watched my adjustments with pursed lips. "Did I get the noodles right?"

I looked in the pan on the stove — the source of the smell that had alerted me. "Stirring helps," I said mildly. I found a spoon and tried to de-clump the mushy hunk that was scalded to the bottom.

Charlie sighed.

"So what's all this about?" I asked him.

He folded his arms across his chest and glared out the back windows into the sheeting rain. “Don’t know what you’re talking about,” he grumbled.

I was mystified. Charlie cooking? And what was with the surly attitude? Edward wasn’t here yet; usually my dad reserved this kind of behavior for my boyfriend’s benefit, doing his best to illustrate the theme of “unwelcome” with every word and posture. Charlie’s efforts were unnecessary — Edward knew exactly what my dad was thinking without the show.

The word *boyfriend* had me chewing on the inside of my cheek with a familiar tension while I stirred. It wasn’t the right word, not at all. I needed something more expressive of eternal commitment . . . But words like *destiny* and *fate* sounded hokey when you used them in casual conversation.

Edward had another word in mind, and that word was the source of the tension I felt. It put my teeth on edge just to think it to myself.

Fiancée. Ugh. I shuddered away from the thought.

“Did I miss something? Since when do you make dinner?” I asked Charlie. The pasta lump bobbed in the boiling water as I poked it. “Or *try* to make dinner, I should say.”

Charlie shrugged. “There’s no law that says I can’t cook in my own house.”

“You would know,” I replied, grinning as I eyed the badge pinned to his leather jacket.

“Ha. Good one.” He shrugged out of the jacket as if my glance had reminded him he still had it on, and hung it on the peg reserved for his gear. His gun belt was already

slung in place — he hadn't felt the need to wear that to the station for a few weeks. There had been no more disturbing disappearances to trouble the small town of Forks, Washington, no more sightings of the giant, mysterious wolves in the ever-rainy woods . . .

I prodded the noodles in silence, guessing that Charlie would get around to talking about whatever was bothering him in his own time. My dad was not a man of many words, and the effort he had put into trying to orchestrate a sit-down dinner with me made it clear there were an uncharacteristic number of words on his mind.

I glanced at the clock routinely — something I did every few minutes around this time. Less than a half hour to go now.

Afternoons were the hardest part of my day. Ever since my former best friend (and werewolf), Jacob Black, had informed on me about the motorcycle I'd been riding on the sly — a betrayal he had devised in order to get me grounded so that I couldn't spend time with my boyfriend (and vampire), Edward Cullen — Edward had been allowed to see me only from seven till nine-thirty p.m., always inside the confines of my home and under the supervision of my dad's unfailingly crabby glare.

This was an escalation from the previous, slightly less stringent grounding that I'd earned for an unexplained three-day disappearance and one episode of cliff diving.

Of course, I still saw Edward at school, because there wasn't anything Charlie could do about that. And then, Edward spent almost every night in my room, too, but

Charlie wasn't precisely aware of that. Edward's ability to climb easily and silently through my second-story window was almost as useful as his ability to read Charlie's mind.

Though the afternoon was the only time I spent away from Edward, it was enough to make me restless, and the hours always dragged. Still, I endured my punishment without complaining because — for one thing — I knew I'd earned it, and — for another — because I couldn't bear to hurt my dad by moving out now, when a much more permanent separation hovered, invisible to Charlie, so close on my horizon.

My dad sat down at the table with a grunt and unfolded the damp newspaper there; within seconds he was clucking his tongue in disapproval.

"I don't know why you read the news, Dad. It only ticks you off."

He ignored me, grumbling at the paper in his hands. "This is why everyone wants to live in a small town! Ridiculous."

"What have big cities done wrong now?"

"Seattle's making a run for murder capital of the country. Five unsolved homicides in the last two weeks. Can you imagine living like that?"

"I think Phoenix is actually higher up the homicide list, Dad. I *have* lived like that." And I'd never come close to being a murder victim until after I moved to his safe little town. In fact, I was still on several hit lists . . . The spoon shook in my hands, making the water tremble.

"Well, you couldn't pay me enough," Charlie said.

I gave up on saving dinner and settled for serving it; I had to use a steak knife to cut a portion of spaghetti for Charlie and then myself, while he watched with a sheepish expression. Charlie coated his helping with sauce and dug in. I disguised my own clump as well as I could and followed his example without much enthusiasm. We ate in silence for a moment. Charlie was still scanning the news, so I picked up my much-abused copy of *Wuthering Heights* from where I'd left it this morning at breakfast, and tried to lose myself in turn-of-the-century England while I waited for him to start talking.

I was just to the part where Heathcliff returns when Charlie cleared his throat and threw the paper to the floor.

"You're right," Charlie said. "I did have a reason for doing this." He waved his fork at the gluey spread. "I wanted to talk to you."

I laid the book aside; the binding was so destroyed that it slumped flat to the table. "You could have just asked."

He nodded, his eyebrows pulling together. "Yeah. I'll remember that next time. I thought taking dinner off your hands would soften you up."

I laughed. "It worked — your cooking skills have me soft as a marshmallow. What do you need, Dad?"

"Well, it's about Jacob."

I felt my face harden. "What about him?" I asked through stiff lips.

"Easy, Bells. I know you're still upset that he told on you, but it was the right thing. He was being responsible."

"Responsible," I repeated scathingly, rolling my eyes. "Right. So, what about Jacob?"

The careless question repeated inside my head, anything but trivial. *What about Jacob?* What *was* I going to do about him? My former best friend who was now . . . what? My enemy? I cringed.

Charlie's face was suddenly wary. "Don't get mad at me, okay?"

"Mad?"

"Well, it's about Edward, too."

My eyes narrowed.

Charlie's voice got gruffer. "I let him in the house, don't I?"

"You do," I admitted. "For brief periods of time. Of course, you might let me *out* of the house for brief periods now and then, too," I continued — only jokingly; I knew I was on lockdown for the duration of the school year. "I've been pretty good lately."

"Well, that's kind of where I was heading with this . . ." And then Charlie's face stretched into an unexpected eye-crinkling grin; for a second he looked twenty years younger.

I saw a dim glimmer of possibility in that smile, but I proceeded slowly. "I'm confused, Dad. Are we talking about Jacob, or Edward, or me being grounded?"

The grin flashed again. "Sort of all three."

"And how do they relate?" I asked, cautious.

"Okay." He sighed, raising his hands as if in surrender. "So I'm thinking maybe you deserve a parole for good behavior. For a teenager, you're amazingly non-whiney."

My voice and eyebrows shot up. "Seriously? I'm free?"

Where was this coming from? I'd been positive I would be under house arrest until I actually moved out,

and Edward hadn't picked up any wavering in Charlie's thoughts . . .

Charlie held up one finger. "Conditionally."

The enthusiasm vanished. "Fantastic," I groaned.

"Bella, this is more of a request than a demand, okay? You're free. But I'm hoping you'll use that freedom . . . judiciously."

"What does that mean?"

He sighed again. "I know you're satisfied to spend all of your time with Edward —"

"I spend time with Alice, too," I interjected. Edward's sister had no hours of visitation; she came and went as she pleased. Charlie was putty in her capable hands.

"That's true," he said. "But you have other friends besides the Cullens, Bella. Or you *used* to."

We stared at each other for a long moment.

"When was the last time you spoke to Angela Weber?" he threw at me.

"Friday at lunch," I answered immediately.

Before Edward's return, my school friends had polarized into two groups. I liked to think of those groups as *good* vs. *evil*. *Us* and *them* worked, too. The good guys were Angela, her steady boyfriend Ben Cheney, and Mike Newton; these three had all very generously forgiven me for going crazy when Edward left. Lauren Mallory was the evil core of the *them* side, and almost everyone else, including my first friend in Forks, Jessica Stanley, seemed content to go along with her anti-Bella agenda.

With Edward back at school, the dividing line had become even more distinct.