

breaking dawn



STEPHENIE MEYER

AUTHOR OF THE #1 BESTSELLING *TWILIGHT*, *NEW MOON*, AND *ECLIPSE*

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This book is dedicated to my ninja/agent, Jodi Reamer.

Thank you for keeping me off the ledge.

*And thanks also to my favorite band,
the very aptly named Muse,
for providing a saga's worth of inspiration.*

←← →→

BOOK ONE

↔ ↔

bella

*C*hildhood 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

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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 Cullen, 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 flamethrower 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 home, I still couldn't make the rain-faded 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