

MIDNIGHT SUN

by Stephenie Meyer (partial draft)

This was the time of day when I wished I were able to sleep.

High school.

Or was purgatory the right word? If there *was* any way to atone for my sins, this ought to count toward the tally in some measure. The tedium was not something I grew used to; every day seemed more impossibly monotonous than the last.

I suppose this *was* my form of sleep--if sleep was defined as the inert state between active periods.

I stared at the cracks running through the plaster in the far corner of the cafeteria, imagining patterns into them that were not there. It was one way to tune out the voices that babbled like the gush of a river inside my head.

Several hundred of these voices I ignored out of boredom.

When it came to the human mind, I'd heard it all before and then some. Today, all thoughts were consumed with the trivial drama of a new addition to the small student body here. It took so little to work them all up. I'd seen the new face repeated in thought after thought from every angle. Just an ordinary human girl. The excitement over her arrival was tiresomely predictable--like flashing a shiny object at a child. Half the sheep-like males were already imagining themselves in love with her, just because she was something new to look at. I tried harder to tune them out.

Only four voices did I block out of courtesy rather than distaste: my family, my two

brothers and two sisters, who were so used to the lack of privacy in my presence that they rarely gave it a thought. I gave them what privacy I could. I tried not to listen if I could help it.

Try as I may, still...I knew.

Rosalie was thinking, as usual, about herself. She'd caught sight of her profile in the reflection off someone's glasses, and she was mulling over her own perfection. Rosalie's mind was a shallow pool with few surprises.

Emmett was fuming over a wrestling match he'd lost to Jasper during the night. It would take all his limited patience to make it to the end of the school day to orchestrate a rematch. I never really felt intrusive hearing Emmett's thoughts; because he never thought one thing that he would not say aloud or put into action. Perhaps I only felt guilty reading the others' minds because I knew there were things there that they wouldn't want me to know. If Rosalie's mind was a shallow pool, then Emmett's was a lake with no shadows, glass clear.

And Jasper was...suffering. I suppressed a sigh.

Edward. Alice called my name in her head, and had my attention at once.

It was just the same as having my name called aloud. I was glad my given name had fallen out of style lately--it had been annoying; anytime anyone thought of any Edward, my head would turn automatically...

My head didn't turn now. Alice and I were good at these private conversations. It was

rare that anyone caught us. I kept my eyes on the lines in the plaster.

How is he holding up? she asked me.

I frowned, just a small change in the set of my mouth. Nothing would tip the others off. I could easily be frowning out of boredom.

Alice's mental tone was alarmed now, and I saw in her mind that she was watching Jasper in her peripheral vision. *Is there any danger?* She searched ahead, into the immediate future, skimming through visions of monotony for the source behind my frown.

I turned my head slowly to the left, as if looking at the bricks of the wall, sighed, and then to the right, back to the cracks in the ceiling. Only Alice knew I was shaking my head.

She relaxed. *Let me know if it gets too bad.*

I moved only my eyes, up to the ceiling above, and back down.

Thanks for doing this.

I was glad I couldn't answer her aloud. What would I say? 'My pleasure'? It was hardly that. I didn't enjoy listening to Jasper's struggles. Was it really necessary to experiment like this? Wouldn't the safer path be to just admit that he might never be able to handle the thirst the way the rest of us could, and not push his limits? Why flirt with disaster?

It had been two weeks since our last hunting trip. That was not an immensely difficult time span for the rest of us. A little uncomfortable occasionally--if a human walked to close, if the wind blew the wrong way. But humans rarely walked too close. Their instincts told them what their conscious minds

would never understand: we were dangerous.

Jasper was very dangerous right now.

At that moment, a small girl paused at the end of the closest table to ours, stopping to talk to a friend. She tossed her short, sandy hair, running her fingers through it. The heaters blew her scent in our direction. I was used to the way that scent made me feel--the dry ache in my throat, the hollow yearn in my stomach, the automatic tightening of my muscles, the excel flow of venom in my mouth.

This was all quite normal, usually easy to ignore. It was harder just now, with the feelings stronger, doubled, as I monitored Jasper's reaction. Twin thirsts, rather than just mine.

Jasper was letting his imagination get away from him. He was picturing it--picturing himself getting up from his seat next to Alice and going to stand beside the little girl. Thinking of leaning down and in, as if he were going to whisper in her ear, and letting his lips touch the arch of her throat. Imagining how the hot flow of her pulse beneath the fine skin would feel under his mouth...

I kicked his chair.

He met my gaze for a minute, and then looked down. I could hear shame and rebellion war in his head.

"Sorry," Jasper muttered.

I shrugged.

"You weren't going to do anything," Alice murmured to him, soothing his chagrin. "I could see that."

I fought back the grimace that would give her lie away. We had to stick together, Alice and I. It wasn't easy, hearing voices or seeing visions of the future. Both freaks among those where were already freaks. We protected each other's secrets.

"It helps a little if you think of them as people." Alice suggested, her high, musical voice too fast for human ears to understand, if any had been close enough to hear. "Her name is Whitney. She has a baby sister she adores. Her mother invited Esme to that garden party, do you remember?"

"I know who she is," Jasper said curtly. He turned away to stare out one of the small windows that were spaced just under the eaves around the long room. His tone ended the conversation.

He would have to hunt tonight. It was ridiculous to take risks like this, trying to test his strength, to build his endurance. Jasper should just accept his limitations and work within them. His former habits were not conducive to our chosen lifestyle; he shouldn't push himself in this way.

Alice sighed silently and stood, taking her tray of food--her prop, as it were--with her and leaving him alone. She knew when he'd had enough of her encouragement. Though Rosalie and Emmett were more flagrant about their relationship, it was Alice and Jasper who knew each other's mood as well as their own. As if they could read minds, too--only each other's.

Edward Cullen.

Reflex reaction. I turned to the sound of my name being called, though it wasn't being called, just thought.

My eyes locked for a small portion of a second with a pair of wide, chocolate-brown human eyes set in a pale, heart-shaped face. I knew the face, though I'd never seen it myself before this moment. It had been foremost in every human head today. The new student, Isabella Swan. Daughter of the town's chief of police, brought here by some new custody situation. Bella. She'd corrected everyone who'd used her full name...

I looked away, bored. It took me a second to realize that she had not been the one to think my name.

Of course she's already crushing on the Cullens; I heard the first thought continue.

Now I recognized the 'voice.' Jessica Stanley--it had been a while since she'd bothered me with her internal chatter. What a relief it had been when she'd gotten over her misplaced infatuation. It used to be nearly impossible to escape her constant, ridiculous daydreams. I'd wished, at the time, that I could explain to her *exactly* what would have happened if my lips, and the teeth behind them, had gotten anywhere near her. That would have silenced those annoying fantasies. The thought of her reaction almost made me smile.

Fat lot of good it will do her, Jessica went on. She's really not even pretty. I don't know why Eric is staring so much...or Mike.

She winced mentally on the last name. Her new infatuation, the generically popular Mike Newton, was completely oblivious to her.

Apparently, he was not as oblivious to the new girl. Like the child with the shiny object again. This put a mead edge to Jessica's thoughts, though she was outwardly cordial to the new comer as she explained to her the commonly held knowledge about my family. The new student must have asked about us.

Everyone's looking at me today, too, Jessica thought smugly in an aside. Isn't it lucky that Bella had two classes with me...I'll bet Mike will want to ask me what she's--

I tried to block the inane chatter out of my head before the petty and trivial could drive me mad.

"Jessica Stanley is giving the new Swan girl all the dirty laundry on the Cullen clan," I murmured to Emmett as a distraction.

He chuckled under his breath. *I hope she's making it good*, he thought.

"Rather unimaginative, actually. Just the barest hint of scandal. Not an ounce of horror. I'm a little disappointed."

And the new girl? Is she disappointed in the gossip as well?

I listened to hear what this new girl, Bella, thought of Jessica's story. What did she see when she looked at the strange, chalky-skinned family that was universally avoided?

It was sort of my responsibility to know her reaction. I acted as a lookout, for lack of a better word, for my family. To protect us. If anyone ever grew suspicious, I could give us early warning and an easy retreat. It happened occasionally--some human with an

active imagination would see in us the characters of a book or a movie. Usually they got it wrong, but it was better to move on somewhere new than to risk scrutiny. Very, very rarely, someone would guess right. We didn't give them a chance to test their hypothesis. We simply disappeared, to become no more than a frightening memory...

I heard nothing, though I listened close beside where Jessica's frivolous internal monologue continued to gush. It was as if there was no one sitting beside her. How peculiar, had the girl moved? That didn't seem likely, as Jessica was still babbling to her. I looked up to check, feeling off-balance. Checking on what my extra 'hearing' could tell me--it wasn't something I ever had to do.

Again, my gaze locked on those same wide brown eyes. She was sitting right where she had been before, and looking at us, a natural thing to be doing, I supposed, as Jessica was still regaling her with the local gossip about the Cullens.

Thinking about us, too, would be natural.

But I couldn't hear a whisper.

Inviting warm red stained her cheeks as she looked down, away from the embarrassing gaffe of getting caught staring at the stranger. It was good that Jasper was still gazing out the window. I didn't like to imagine what that easing pooling of blood would do to his control.¹

¹ Stephenie Meyer, "Midnight Sun (partial draft)", The Official Website of Stephenie Meyer, August 28, 2008, <http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/pdf/midnightsun_partialdraft3.pdf>