

Project Death Sparkle

“Project Death Sparkle” is a LGBT
rewrite/conflation of Stephanie Meyer’s 2005 novel
Twilight and her 10th
anniversary edition, *Life and Death:
Twilight Reimagined*.

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Phenomenon

That was the first night I dreamed of Edward Cullen

WHEN I OPENED MY EYES IN
THE MORNING,

SOMETHING WAS
DIFFERENT.



It was the light. It was still the gloomy light of a cloudy day in the forest, but it was clearer somehow. I realized there was no fog veiling my window.

I jumped up to look outside, and then groaned in horror.

A fine layer of snow covered the yard, dusted the top of my truck, and whitened the road. But that wasn't the worst part. All the rain from yesterday had frozen solid—coating the needles on the trees in fantastic patterns, and making the driveway a deadly ice slick. I had enough trouble not falling down when the ground was dry; it might be safer for me to go back to bed now.

Charlie had left for work before I got downstairs. In a lot of ways, living with Charlie was like having my own place, and I found myself enjoying the space rather than feeling lonely.

I threw down a quick bowl of cereal and some orange juice from the carton. I felt excited to go to school, and that scared me. I knew it wasn't the stimulating learning environment I was anticipating, or seeing my new set of friends. If I was being honest with myself, I knew I was eager to get to school because I would see Edward Cullen.

And that was very, very stupid.

Maybe a few of the other kids were intrigued by the novelty of the new kid, but Edward wasn't a Mike or an Eric. I should be avoiding him entirely after my brainless and embarrassing babbling yesterday. And I was suspicious of him; why should he lie about his eyes? And, of course, there was the whole thing where he might have at one point wanted me dead.

I was well aware that my league and his league were spheres that did not touch. I was still tongue-tied whenever I pictured his perfect face—I worried that just looking at his face was giving me unrealistic expectations that would haunt me for the rest of my life. Spending more time looking at him—watching his lips move, marveling at his skin, listening to his voice—was certainly not going to help with that. So I shouldn't be at all anxious to see him today.

It took every ounce of my concentration to make it down the icy brick driveway alive. I almost lost my balance when I finally got to the truck, but I managed to cling to the side mirror and save myself. Clearly, today was going to be nightmarish—the sidewalks at school would be complex today...so much potential for humiliation.

Driving to school, I distracted myself from my fear of falling and my unwanted speculations about Edward Cullen by thinking about Mike and Eric, and the obvious difference in how people responded to

me here. Maybe it was just that the kids back home had watched me pass slowly through all the awkward phases of adolescence and still thought of me that way. Perhaps it was because I was a novelty here, where novelties were few and far between. Possibly my crippling clumsiness was seen as funny rather than pathetic. Whatever the reason, Mike's puppy dog behavior and Eric's apparent rivalry with him were disconcerting. I wasn't sure if I didn't prefer being ignored.

My truck seemed to have no problem with the black ice that covered the roads. I drove very slowly, though, not wanting to carve a path of destruction through Main Street.

When I got out of my truck at school, I saw why I'd had so little trouble. Something silver caught my eye, and I walked to the back of the truck—carefully holding the side for support—to examine my tires. There were thin chains crisscrossed in diamond shapes around them. Charlie had gotten up who knows how early to put snow chains on my truck.

My throat suddenly felt tight. That wasn't the way it was supposed to work. I probably should have been the one to think about putting chains on my tires, if I could figure out how to do that. Or at least I should have helped him with the chore. It wasn't his job...

Except that, actually, it kind of was. He was the parent. He was taking care of me, his son. That was how it worked in books and on TV shows, but it made me feel upside down in a strange way. I wasn't used to being taken care of, and Charlie's unspoken concern caught me by surprise.

I was standing by the back corner of the truck, struggling to contain the sudden wave of emotion the snow chains had brought on, when I heard an odd sound.

It was a high-pitched screech, and it was fast becoming painfully loud. I looked up, startled.



I saw several things simultaneously. Nothing was moving in slow motion, the way it does in the movies. Instead, the adrenaline rush seemed to make my brain work much faster, and I was able to absorb in clear detail several things at once.

Edward Cullen was standing four cars down from me, staring at me, mouth open, in horror. His face stood out from a sea of faces, all frozen in the same mask of shock. But of more immediate importance was the dark blue van that was skidding,

tires locked and squealing against the brakes, spinning wildly across the ice of the parking lot. It was going to hit the back corner of my truck, and I was standing between them. I didn't even have time to close my eyes.

Just before I heard the shattering crunch of the van folding around the truck bed, something hit me, hard, but not from the direction I was expecting. My head cracked against the icy blacktop, and I felt something solid and cold pinning me to the ground. I realized I was lying on the pavement behind the tan car I'd parked next to. But I didn't have a chance to notice anything else, because the van was still coming. It had curled gratingly around the end of the truck and, still spinning and sliding, was about to collide with me *again*.

"Come on!" He said the words so quickly I almost missed them, but the voice was impossible not to recognize.

Two long, white hands shot out protectively in front of me, and the van shuddered to a stop a foot from my face, his large, pale hands fitting exactly into a deep dent in the side of the van's body.

Then his hands moved so fast they blurred. One was suddenly gripping under the body of the van, and something was dragging me, swinging my legs around like a rag doll's, til they hit the tire of the tan car. There was a groaning metallic thud so loud it hurt my ears, and the van settled, glass popping, onto the asphalt—exactly where, a second ago, my legs had been.

It was absolutely silent for one long second before the screaming started. In the abrupt bedlam, I could hear more than one person shouting my name. But more clearly than all the yelling, I could hear Edward Cullen's low, frantic voice in my ear.

"Beau? Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." My voice sounded strange. I tried to sit up, and realized he was holding me against the side of his body in an iron grasp. I must have been more traumatized than I realized, because I couldn't budge his arm at all. Was I weak with shock?

"Be careful," he warned as I struggled. "I think you hit your head pretty hard."

I became aware of a throbbing ache centered above my left ear.

"Ow," I said, surprised.

"That's what I thought." His voice, amazingly, sounded like he was suppressing laughter.

"How in the..." I trailed off, trying to clear my head, get my bearings. "How did you get over here so fast?"

"I was standing right next to you, Beau," he said, his voice suddenly serious again.

I turned to sit up, and this time he let me, releasing his hold around my waist and sliding as far from me as he could in the limited space. I looked at his concerned, innocent expression and was disoriented again by the force of his gold-colored eyes. What was I asking him?

And then they found us, a crowd of people with tears streaming down their faces, shouting at each other, shouting at us.

"Don't move," someone instructed.

"Get Tayler out of the van!" someone else shouted. There was a flurry of activity around us. I tried to get up, but Edward's cold hand pushed my shoulder down.

"Just stay put for now."

"But it's cold," I complained. It surprised me when he chuckled under his breath. There was an edge to the sound.

"You were over there," I suddenly remembered, and his chuckle stopped short. "You were by your car."

His expression hardened abruptly. "No, I wasn't."

"I saw you." Everything around us was chaos. I could hear the lower voices of adults arriving on the scene. But I obstinately held on to the argument; I was right, and he was going to admit it.

"Beau, I was standing with you, and I pulled you out of the way."

He stared at me, unleashed the full, devastating power of his eyes on me. It was like the gold of his eyes turned up, like his eyes were drugging me, hypnotizing me. But his expression was anxious. I thought he was trying to communicate something crucial.

"No," I said weakly. I set my jaw.

The gold in his eyes blazed again. "Please, Beau."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Trust me," he pleaded, his soft voice overwhelming.

I could hear the sirens now. "Will you promise to explain everything to me later?"

"Fine," he snapped, abruptly exasperated.

"Fine," I repeated angrily, unable to process his mood swings with everything else I was trying to come to terms with. What was I supposed to think, when what I remembered was impossible?

It took six EMTs and two teachers—Ms. Varner and Coach Clapp—to shift the van far enough away from us to bring the stretchers in. Edward vehemently refused his, insisting he hadn't been touched, and I tried to do the same, but he was quick to contradict me. The traitor told them I'd hit my

head, and then made it sound worse than it was, throwing around words like *concussion* and *hemorrhage*. I almost died when they put on the neck brace. It looked like the entire school was there, watching soberly as they loaded me in the back of the ambulance. Edward got to ride in the front. It was maddening, a thousand times more humiliating than I'd imagined today would be, and I hadn't even made it to the sidewalk.

To make matters worse, Chief Swan arrived before they could get me safely away.

"Beau!" he yelled in panic when he recognized me on the stretcher.

"I'm completely fine, Char—Dad," I sighed. "There's nothing wrong with me."

He rounded on the closest EMT for a second opinion. While the EMT tried to talk him down, I tuned him out to consider the jumble of inexplicable images churning chaotically in my head. Images that were not possible. When they'd lifted me away from the car, I had seen the deep dent in the tan car's bumper—a very distinct dent that fit the contours of Edward's shoulders...as if he had braced himself against the car with enough force to damage the metal frame...

And then there was his family, looking on from the distance, with expressions that ranged from disapproval (Eleanor) to fury (Royal), but held no hint of concern for their little brother's safety.

I remembered the sensation of almost flying through the air...that hard mass that had pinned me to the ground...Edward's hand under the frame of the van, like it was holding the van off the ground...

I tried to think of a logical solution that could explain what I had just seen—a solution that excluded the assumption that I was insane. However, all I could come up with was that I was having a psychotic episode. I didn't *feel* crazy, but maybe crazy people always felt sane.

Naturally, the ambulance got a police escort to the county hospital. I felt ridiculous the whole time they were unloading me. What made it worse was that Edward simply glided through the hospital doors on his own. I ground my teeth together.

They put me in the emergency room, a long room with a line of beds separated by pastel-patterned curtains. A nurse put a pressure cuff on my arm and a thermometer under my tongue. Since no one bothered pulling the curtain around to give me some privacy, I decided I wasn't obligated to wear the stupid-looking neck brace anymore. As soon as the nurse walked away, I quickly unfastened the Velcro and threw it under the bed.

There was another flurry of hospital

personnel, another stretcher brought to the bed next to me. I recognized Tayler Crowley from my Government class beneath the bloodstained bandages wrapped tightly around her head. Tayler looked a hundred times worse than I felt. But she was staring anxiously at me.

"Beau, I'm so sorry!"

"I'm fine, Tayler—you look awful, are you all right?" As we spoke, nurses began unwinding her bloody bandages, exposing a myriad of shallow slices all over her forehead and left cheek.

She ignored me. "I thought I was going to kill you! I was going too fast, and I hit the ice wrong..." She winced as one nurse started dabbing at her face.

"Don't worry about it; you missed me."

"How did you get out of the way so fast? You were there, and then you were gone..."

"Umm...Edward pulled me out of the way."

She looked confused. "Who?"

"Edward Cullen—he was standing next to me." I'd always been a terrible liar; I didn't sound convincing at all.

"Edward? I didn't see him...wow, it was all so fast, I guess. Is he OK?"

"I think so. He's here somewhere, but they didn't make him use a stretcher."

I knew I wasn't crazy. What had happened? There was no way to explain away what I'd seen.

They wheeled me away then, to X-ray my head. I told them there was nothing wrong, and I was right. Not even a concussion. I asked if I could leave, but the nurse said I had to talk to a doctor first. So I was trapped in the ER, waiting, harassed by Tayler's constant apologies and promises to make it up to me. No matter how many times I tried to convince her I was fine, she continued to torment herself. Finally, I closed my eyes and ignored her. She kept up a remorseful mumbling.

"Is he sleeping?" a musical voice asked. My eyes flew open.

Edward was standing at the foot of my bed, smirking. I glared at him (it would have been more natural to ogle), trying to put the pieces together in my head. It wasn't easy. He didn't look like someone who could stop attacking vehicles with his bare hands. But then, he also didn't look like anyone I'd ever seen before.

"Hey, Edward, I'm really sorry—" Tayler began.

Edward lifted a hand to stop her.

"No blood, no foul," he said, flashing his brilliant teeth. He moved to sit on the edge of Tayler's bed, facing me. He smirked again.

"So, what's the verdict?" he asked me.

“There’s nothing wrong with me, but they won’t let me go,” I complained. “How come you aren’t strapped to a gurney like the rest of us?”

“It’s all about who you know,” he answered. “But don’t worry, I came to spring you.”

Then a doctor walked around the corner, and my mouth fell open. She was young, she was blonde...and she was more beautiful than any movie star I’d ever seen. Like someone sliced up Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly, and Marilyn Monroe, took the best parts, and glued them together to form one goddess. She was pale, though, and tired-looking, with circles under her dark eyes. From Charlie’s description, this had to be Edward’s mother.

“So, Mr. Swan,” Dr. Cullen said in a remarkably appealing voice, “how are you feeling?”

“I’m fine,” I said, for the last time, I hoped.

She walked to the lightboard on the wall over my head, and turned it on.

“Your X-rays look good,” she said. “Does your head hurt? Edward said you hit it pretty hard.”

“It’s fine,” I repeated with a sigh, throwing a quick scowl at Edward. He avoided my eyes.

The doctor’s cool fingers probed lightly around my skull. She noticed when I winced.

“Tender?” she asked.

“Not really.” I’d had worse.

I heard a low laugh, and looked over to see Edward’s patronizing smile. My eyes narrowed.

“Well, your father is in the waiting room—you can go home with him now. But come back if you feel dizzy or have trouble with your eyesight at all.”

“Can’t I go back to school?” I asked, imagining Charlie trying to be attentive.

“Maybe you should take it easy today.”

I glanced at Edward. “Does *he* get to go to school?”

“Someone has to spread the good news that we survived,” Edward said blithely.

“Actually,” Dr. Cullen corrected, “most of the school seems to be in the waiting room.”

“Ugh,” I moaned, covering me face with my hands.

Dr. Cullen raised her eyebrows. “Do you want to stay?”

“No, no!” I insisted, throwing my legs over the side of the bed and hopping down quickly. Too quickly—I staggered, and Dr. Cullen caught me—she was sturdier than she looked. She looked at me, concerned.

“I’m fine,” I assured her again. No need to tell her my balance problems had nothing to do with hitting my head.

“Take some Tylenol for the pain,” she suggested as she steadied me.

“It doesn’t hurt that bad,” I insisted.

“It sounds like you were extremely lucky,” Dr. Cullen said, smiling as she signed my chart with a flourish.

“Lucky Edward just happened to be standing next to me,” I amended with another hard glance at the subject of my statement.

“Oh, well, yes,” Dr. Cullen agreed, suddenly occupied with the papers in front of her. Then she looked away, at Tayler, and walked to the next bed. My intuition flickered; the doctor was in on it.

“I’m afraid that *you’ll* have to stay with us just a little bit longer,” she said to Tyler, and began checking her cuts.

As soon as the doctor’s back was turned, I moved to Edward’s side.

“Can I talk to you for a minute?” I hissed under my breath. He took a step back from me, his jaw suddenly clenched.

“Your father is waiting for you,” he said through his teeth.

I glanced at Dr. Cullen and Tayler.

“I need to speak with you alone,” I pressed.

He glared—but it wasn’t the same as that first day, not nearly as homicidal, so I just waited. After a second, he turned his back and strode down the long room. Long as my legs are, I nearly had to run to keep up. As soon as we turned the corner into a short hallway, he spun around to face me.

“What do you want?” he asked, sounding annoyed. His eyes were cold.

His unfriendliness intimidated me. My words came out with less severity than I’d intended. “You owe me an explanation,” I reminded him.

“I saved your life—I don’t owe you anything.”

I flinched back from the resentment in his voice. “Why are you acting like this?”

“Beau, you hit your head, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” His tone was cutting.

My temper flared now, and I glared defiantly at him. “There’s nothing wrong with my head.”

He glared back. “What do you want from me, Beau?”

“I want to know the truth,” I said. “I want to know why I’m lying for you.”

“What do you *think* happened?” he snapped.

It came out in a rush. It was almost harder to say the words out loud, where I could hear the crazy—it shook my conviction.

“I know is that you weren’t anywhere near me—Tayler didn’t see you, either, so don’t tell me it’s concussion damage. That van was going to crush us

both—but it didn't, and it looked like your hands left dents in the side of it—and your shoulder left a dent in the other car, but you're not hurt at all—and the van should have smashed my legs, but you were holding it up..." It just kept sounding worse and worse; I could hear how crazy it sounded, and I couldn't continue. I was so mad I could feel the tears coming; I tried to force them back by grinding my teeth together.

He was staring at me incredulously. But he couldn't entirely hide the tension, the defensiveness.

"You think I lifted a van off you?" His tone questioned my sanity, but it only made me more suspicious. It was like a perfectly delivered line by a skilled actor—so hard to doubt, but at the same time, the frame of the movie screen reminded you nothing was actually real.

I just nodded once, jaw tight.

He smiled, hard and mocking. "Nobody will believe that, you know."

"I'm not going to tell anybody." I said each word slowly, carefully controlling my anger.

Surprise flitted across his face, and the smile faded. "Then why does it matter?"

"It matters to me," I insisted. "I don't like to lie—so there'd better be a good reason why I'm doing it."

"Can't you just thank me and get over it?"

"Thank you." I waited, fuming and expectant.

"You're not going to let it go, are you?"

"No."

"In that case...I hope you enjoy disappointment."

We scowled at each other in silence, but my thoughts were scattered by how beautiful his anger was. I was the first to speak, trying to keep myself focused. I was in danger of being totally distracted by his livid, glorious face. It was like trying to stare down a destroying angel.

"If you were going to be like this about it," I said frigidly, "why did you even bother?"

He paused, and for a brief moment his stunning face was unexpectedly vulnerable.

"I don't know," he whispered.

And then he turned his back on me and walked away.

I was so angry, it took me a few minutes until I could move. When I could walk, I made my way slowly to the exit at the end of the hallway.

The waiting room was more unpleasant than I'd expected. It seemed like every face I knew in Forks was there, staring at me. Charlie rushed to my side; I put up my hands.

"There's nothing wrong with me," I assured

him sullenly. I was still aggravated by the whole crazy situation.

"What did the doctor say?"

"Dr. Cullen saw me, and she said I was fine and I could go home." I sighed. Mike and Jessica and Eric were all there, beginning to converge on us. "Let's go," I urged.

Charlie put one arm behind me, like he thought I needed support, and led me to the glass doors of the exit. I waved halfheartedly at my friends, hoping they would forget about this by tomorrow.

Unlikely.

It was a huge relief—the first time I'd ever felt that way—to get into the cruiser.

We drove in silence. I was so wrapped up in my thoughts that I barely knew Charlie was there. I was positive that Edward's defensive behavior in the hall was a confirmation of the bizarre things I still could hardly believe I'd witnessed.

When we got to the house, Charlie finally spoke.

"Um...you'll need to call Renée." He hung his head, guilty.

I was appalled. "You told *Mom*?"

"Sorry."

I slammed the cruiser's door a little harder than necessary on my way out.

My mom was in hysterics, of course. I had to tell her I felt fine at least thirty times before she would calm down. She begged me to come home—forgetting the fact that home was empty at the moment—but her pleas were easier to resist than I would have thought. I was consumed by the mystery Edward presented. And more than a little obsessed by Edward himself. Stupid, stupid, stupid. I wasn't as eager to escape Forks as I should be, as any normal, sane person would be.

I decided I might as well go to bed early that night. Charlie continued to watch me anxiously, and it was getting on my nerves. I stopped on my way to grab three Tylenol from the bathroom. They did help, and, as the pain eased, I drifted to sleep.

That was the first night I dreamed of Edward Cullen.

Chapter Three: End