

Project Death Sparkle

A “Fan”-made LGBT rewrite/conflation of Stephanie Meyer’s two *Twilight* novels: the original 2005 edition and first book in *The Twilight Saga*, and the 10th anniversary gender-flipped edition, the one-shot entitled *Life and Death: Twilight reimaged*.

No profits are being made by the production or distribution of this fan rewrite.

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HE LED ME BACK TO THE ROOM THAT HE'D POINTED OUT AS CARINE'S OFFICE.

He paused outside the door for an instant. Carine's voice called out from behind the door. "Come in."

Edward opened the door to, revealing a room with a high ceiling and tall windows that stretched the entire height of the walls. Towering bookshelves, reaching to the ceiling, lined the room, holding more books than I'd ever seen outside of a library.

Carine sat in a leather chair behind a huge desk; she was just placing a bookmark in the pages of the thick volume she held as we entered. Though Carine looked too young to fit the part of a college dean, her office was reminiscent of what I'd always imagined one would look like.

She rose to her feet, smiling pleasantly.

"What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to show Beau some of our history," Edward said. "Well, your history, actually."

"We didn't mean to disturb you," I apologized.

"Not at all," she said to me, and then turned to Edward. "Where are you going to start?"

"The Wagoner," Edward replied. He placed one hand lightly on my shoulder, spinning me around to look back toward the door we'd come through. My heart reacted—audibly—as it did every time Edward touched me, even casually. It was more embarrassing

than usual with Carine there.

The wall he'd turned me to face was different than the others. Instead of bookshelves, this wall was crowded with dozens and dozens of framed paintings of all sizes, some in vibrant colors, others dull monochromes.

I searched for some logic, some overarching theme that tied the collection into a cohesive whole, but I found nothing in my quick examination.

Edward pulled me toward the far left side of the wall, grasping my arms and positioning me directly in front of a small square oil painting in a plain wooden frame.

Painted in tones of sepia, it was nearly invisible nestled among bigger and brighter pieces. As I looked closer, I noticed all the details of the miniature city the painting depicted—a wide river, filling the foreground, with a bridge spanning the length, houses with steeply slanted roofs, and a few scattered towers with thin spires.

"London in the sixteen-fifties," Edward said.

"The London of my youth," Carine added from a few feet behind us. I flinched; I hadn't heard her approach. Edward squeezed my hand.



“Will *you* tell the story?” Edward asked.

I twisted a little to see Carine’s reaction. She met my glance and smiled. “I would, but I’m actually running a bit late. The hospital called this morning—Dr. Snow is taking a sick day.”

She grinned at Edward now, “Beau won’t miss anything if you tell it; you know the stories as well as I do.”

It was a strange combination to absorb—the everyday concerns of the town doctor mixed up with a discussion of her early days in seventeenth-century London. It was also unsettling to realize the she’d only spoken aloud for my benefit. After gifting me with another warm smile, Carine left the room.

I stared at the little picture of Carine’s hometown for a long moment.

“What happened next?” I asked, glancing across at Edward, who was watching me. “When she realized what had happened to her?”

He nudged me over a half-step and glanced back to the paintings, and I looked to see which painting caught his interest now. It was a larger landscape in dull fall colors—an empty, shadowed meadow in a forest, with a craggy peak in the distance.

“When she knew what she had become,” Edward said quietly, “she rebelled against it, tried to destroy herself, but that’s not so easily done.”

“How?” I didn’t mean to say it aloud, but I was shocked enough that it slipped out.

“She jumped from great heights,” Edward told me, voice impassive. “She also tried to drown herself in the ocean...but she was young to the new life, and very strong. It is amazing that she was able to resist...feeding...while she was still so new. The instinct is more powerful, then; it takes over everything. Still, she was so repelled by herself that she had the strength to try to kill herself with starvation.”

“Is that even possible?” My voice was faint.

“No. There are very few ways we can be killed.”

I opened my mouth to ask, but he spoke before I could.

“She grew very hungry, then eventually began to weaken. As she weakened, so too did her willpower. Recognizing this, she strayed as far as she could from the human populace—wandering by night, seeking the loneliest places, loathing herself.

“One night, a herd of deer passed her hiding place and she attacked without a thought, wild with thirst by this point. Her strength returned, and she realized that there was an alternative to being the monster she feared—had she not eaten venison in her former life? Over the following months, Her new

philosophy evolved. She found herself again as she realized that she could exist without being a demon.

“She began to make better use of her time. She’d always been intelligent, eager to learn, and now she had unlimited time before her. She studied by night, planned by day, and eventually swam to France—”

“She *swam* to France?”

“People swim the Channel all the time, Beau,” he reminded me patiently.

“That’s true, I guess. It just sounded funny in that context. Go on.”

“Swimming is easy for us—”

“Everything is easy for *you*,” I griped.

He waited with eyebrows raised, his expression amused.

“I won’t interrupt again, promise.”

He chuckled darkly, and finished his sentence. “—because, technically, we don’t need to breathe.”

“You—”

“No, you promised.” He laughed, putting his cold finger lightly to my lips. “Do you want to hear the story or not?”

“You can’t spring something like that on me, then expect me not to say anything.” My words were mumbled against the finger pressed to my mouth.

He lifted his hand, moving it to rest against my neck. My pulse reacted to the touch, but I ignored it. “You don’t have to *breathe*?”

He shrugged. “No, it’s not necessary. Just habit.”

“How long can you go without *breathing*?”

“Indefinitely, I suppose; I don’t know. It gets a bit uncomfortable, being without a sense of smell.”

“*A bit uncomfortable*,” I echoed weakly.

I wasn’t paying attention to my own expression, but something in it made him grow somber. His hand dropped to his side and he stilled, his eyes intent on my face. The silence stretched. His features were immobile as stone.

“What’s wrong?” I whispered, carefully touching his frozen face.

His face softened under my hand, and he sighed. “I keep waiting for it to happen.”

“For *what* to happen?”

“I know that at some point, something I tell you, or something you see, is going to be too much; you’ll run away from me, screaming as you go.” He



gave a half-smile, but his eyes were serious. “I won’t stop you, because I want it to happen...I want you to be safe, and yet...I want to be with you. The two desires are impossible to reconcile...” He trailed off, staring at my face, waiting.

“I’m not running off anywhere,” I promised.

“We’ll see.”

I frowned at him. “Back to the story—Carine was swimming to France, and?”

He paused, his eyes reflexively flickering to another picture—the most ornately framed and colorful of them all. It was also the largest of them all, twice as wide as the door it hung next to.

The canvas overflowed with bright figures in swirling robes, writhing around tall pillars and off marbled balconies. I couldn’t tell if it represented Greek mythology, or if the characters floating amongst the clouds were meant to be biblical.

“Carine swam to France, and continued on through Europe and to the universities there. By night she studied music, science, medicine—and found her calling, her penance, in the profession of saving human lives.”

His expression was awed, reverent. “I can’t adequately describe the struggle; it took Carine two centuries of tortuous effort to perfect her self-control. Now she is all but immune to the scent of human blood, and is able to do the work she loves without agony. She finds a great deal of peace there, at the hospital...”

Edward stared off into space for a long moment, before suddenly seeming to recall his purpose. He tapped his finger against the huge painting in front of us. “She was studying in Italy when she discovered the others there. They were much more educated, much more *civilized*, than the wraiths of the London sewers.”

He touched a comparatively sedate group of figures painted on the highest balcony, looking down calmly on the mayhem below them. I examined the grouping carefully and realized, with a startled laugh, that I recognized the golden-haired woman.

“Solimena was greatly inspired by Carine’s friends. He often painted them as gods.” Edward chuckled. “Sulpicia, Marcus, and Athenodora,” he said, indicating the other three. “Nighttime patrons of the arts.”

The first woman and man were black-haired, the second woman flaxen haired. All three wore richly colored gowns, while Carine was painted clothed in white.

“What about that one?” I pointed to a small, nondescript girl with light brown hair and clothes. She was on her knees, clinging to the skirts of the

woman with the elaborate black curls.

“Mele,” he said. “A...servant, I suppose you could call her. Sulpicia’s little thief.”

“What happened to them?” I wondered aloud, my fingertip hovering a centimeter from the figures on the canvas.

“They’re still there,” he shrugged, “as they have been for who knows how many millennia. Carine stayed with them only for a short time, just a few decades. She greatly admired their civility, their refinement, but they persisted in trying to cure her aversion to ‘her natural food source,’ as they called it.

“They tried to persuade her, and she tried to persuade them, to no avail. Eventually, Carine decided to try the New World. She dreamed of finding others like herself; she was very lonely, you see.

“She didn’t find anyone for a long time, but as monsters became the stuff of fairy tales, she found she could interact with unsuspecting humans as if she were one of them. Even then, the companionship she craved evaded her; she couldn’t risk familiarity. Then she began practicing medicine. Though her learning and skill exceeded that of the surgeons of the day, as a woman, she wasn’t readily accepted as Doctor, so worked as a nurse.

“When the influenza epidemic hit, she was working nights in a hospital in Chicago. She’d been turning over an idea in her mind for several years—if she couldn’t find a companion, she would create one. She was almost decided on acting on her idea, but was still hesitant.

“She wasn’t absolutely sure how much of the violence of her ordeal was a necessary part of the transformation, or if what had occurred had simply been for the enjoyment of her sadistic creator. In addition to all that, she was loath to steal another’s life the way hers had been stolen.

“It was in during this time that she found me—without hope of a cure, left to die in the terminal ward. She had nursed my parents, and knew I was alone, so she decided to try...”

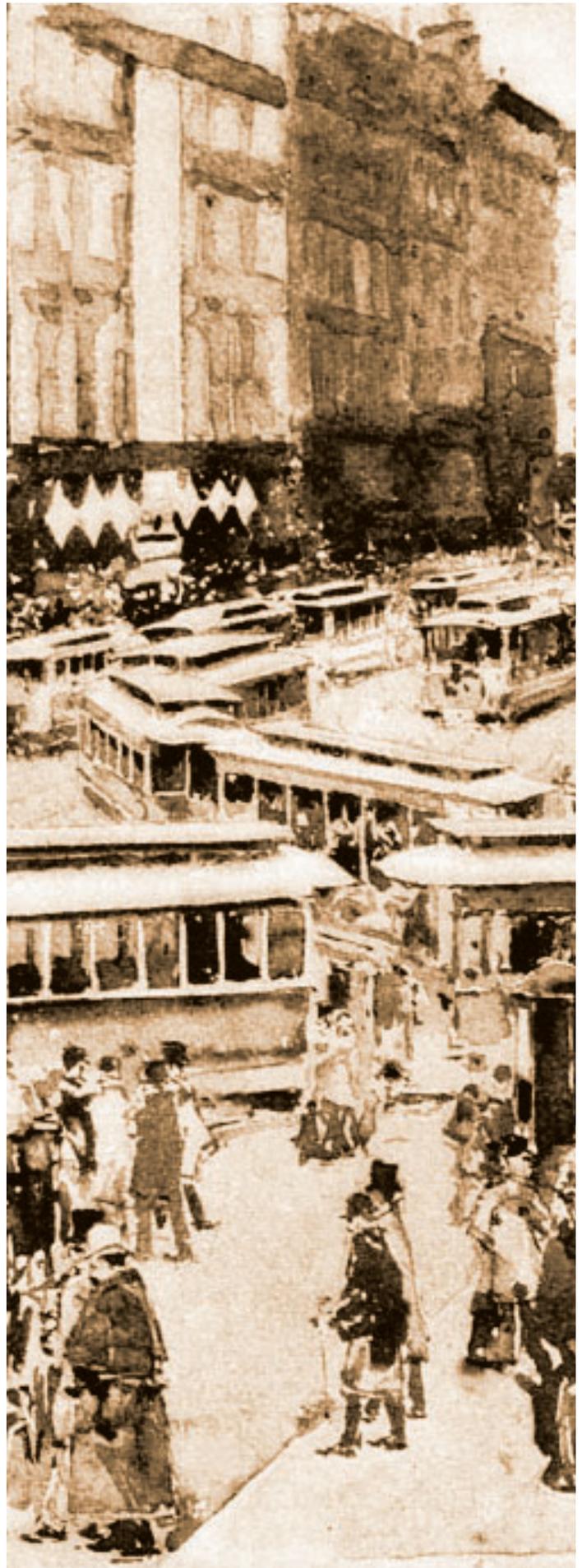
His voice, nearly a whisper now, trailed off. He stared unseeingly through the tall windows. I wondered which memories filled his mind now—Carine’s or his own. I waited.

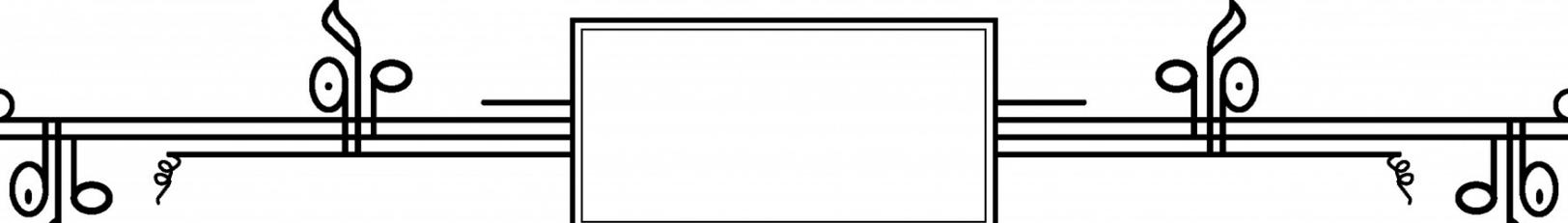
He turned back to me, smiling softly. “...and so we’ve come full circle.”

“You’ve always stayed with Carine, then?” I wondered.

“Almost always.”

He set his hand lightly on my hip, guiding me back out into the hallway. I peered back at the wall of pictures, wondering if I would ever get to hear other





stories.

Edward didn't say any more as we walked down the hall, so I asked. "Almost?"

He sighed, seeming reluctant to answer.

"You don't want to answer that, do you?"

"It wasn't my finest hour."

We started up a flight of stairs.

"You can tell me anything."

He paused when we reached the top of the stairs and stared into my eyes for a few seconds. "I suppose I owe you that, at least."

I got the feeling that what he was saying now was directly connected to what he'd said before, about me running away screaming. I kept my face carefully blank and I braced myself.

He sighed. "I had a typical bout of rebelliousness, about ten years after I was...born, created...whatever you want to call it. I wasn't sold on Carine's life of abstinence, and I resented her for curbing my appetite, so I went off on my own for a time."

"Really?" I was more curious than shocked or frightened, as I perhaps should have been.

"That doesn't repulse you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It's an understandable reaction."

He barked a laugh, more loudly than before, pulling me forward again, through a hall similar to the one downstairs.

"From the time of my new birth," he murmured, "I had the advantage of knowing what everyone around me was thinking, both human and non-human alike. That's why it took me ten years to defy Carine—I could read her perfect sincerity, understand exactly why she lived the way that she did. It took only a few years after my rebellion to return to Carine and recommit to her vision. I thought I would be exempt from the depression that accompanies a conscience.

"I knew the thoughts of my prey, so could pass over the innocent and pursue only the evil. If I followed a murderer down a dark alley where he stalked his victim, if I saved them, then surely I wasn't so terrible."

I shivered, imagining only too clearly what he described—the alley at night, the frightened victim, the dark man behind them...and Edward as he hunted, terrible and glorious as a young god, unstoppable.

What would he have looked like to the murderer, coming silent and pale out of the shadows? Would he even have known to be afraid? And that victim, would they have been grateful, or more frightened than before?

"As time went on, I began to see the monster in my eyes. I couldn't escape the debt of so much human life taken, no matter how justified, so I went back to Carine and Esme. They welcomed me back like the prodigal. It was more than I deserved."

We'd come to a stop in front of the last door in the hall.

"My room," he said, pulling me inside.

His room faced south, with a window the size of a wall, just like the one in the great room below; the whole back side of the house had to be glass. His view looked down on the winding Sol Duc River, across the untouched forest to the Olympic Mountain range.

The western wall was completely covered by shelf after shelf of CDs; it was better stocked than a music store. In the corner was a sophisticated-looking sound system, the kind I was afraid to touch because I'd be sure to break something. There was no bed, only a wide, inviting sofa—black leather, of course—and thick, golden carpet that matched the floor to ceiling drapes covered the floor.

"Good acoustics?" I guessed.

He chuckled, nodding. Edward picked up a remote and turned the stereo on. It was quiet, but the soft jazz number sounded like the band was in the room with us. I went to look at his mind-boggling music collection.

"How do you have these organized?" There didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to the arrangement of the titles.

"Ummm, by year, and then by personal preference within that frame," he said absently.

I turned. He was looking at me with a peculiar expression on his face.

"What?"

"I was prepared to feel relieved...having you know everything, not needing to keep secrets from you, but I didn't expect to feel more than that. I like it. It makes me happy." He shrugged, smiling slightly.

"I'm glad," I said, smiling back. I'd worried that he might regret telling me these things. It was good to know that wasn't the case. Then, as his eyes dissected my expression, his smile faded.

“You’re still waiting for the running and the screaming, aren’t you?”

A faint smile touched his lips, and he nodded.

“I hate to burst your bubble, but you’re really not as scary as you think you are. I don’t find you scary at all, actually,” I lied casually.

He stopped, raising his eyebrows in blatant disbelief. He flashed me a wide, wicked smile and chuckled. “You *really* shouldn’t have said that.”

He growled, a low sound that rippled up the back of his throat; It sounded inhuman.

His wicked smile stretched wider until it wasn’t a smile at all, but a feral display of teeth. He shifted his body, half-crouching, tensed like a lion about to pounce. I backed away from him, glaring.

“You wouldn’t. *Edward*—”

I didn’t see his attack; it was much too fast. I couldn’t really understand what was happening. For half a second, I was airborne, the room rolling around me, upside down and then right side up, again. I

didn’t feel the landing...until we crashed onto the sofa, knocking it into the wall.

Edward was on top of me, his knees tight against my hips, his hands planted on either side of my head so that I couldn’t move, and his bared teeth just inches from my face. He made another soft noise that was halfway between a growl and a purr.

I tried to right myself, disoriented.

He wasn’t having that. Pulling my body against his torso, he twisted with a boneless grace til he was slouched against the couch cushions, holding me on his lap. His arms tightened around me, more secure than if they were actually iron chains. I glanced at him, vaguely alarmed, but he seemed well in control—jaw relaxed, grinning, with eyes lit up with humor.

“You were saying?” The growl, like his grin, was playful.

“That you are a very, very terrifying monster,” I drawled. My sarcasm was marred a bit by how breathless I was.

“Much better.”

I struggled. “Can I get up now?”

He just laughed.

“Can we come in?” a low voice sounded from the hall.

I struggled to free myself, but Edward merely readjusted me so that I was somewhat more



conventionally draped across his lap.

Alice stood in the doorway, Jasper behind her in the hall. My cheeks burned, but Edward seemed at ease.

“Go ahead.” Edward was still chuckling quietly.

Alice didn’t seem to have noticed that we were doing anything unusual. She walked—nearly danced, her movements were that graceful—to the center of the room, where she folded herself sinuously onto the floor. Jasper, however, paused at the door, his expression a little shocked. He stared at Edward’s face, and I wondered what he was feeling in the room to cause that expression to cross his face.

“It sounded like you were having Beau for lunch,” Alice said, “and we came to see if you would share.”

I stiffened until I saw Edward grin—whether because of her comment or my response, I couldn’t tell.

“Sorry,” he replied, holding me dangerously close, “I’m not in a mood to share.”

Alice shrugged. “Fair enough.”

“Actually,” Jasper said, smiling despite himself as he stepped further into the room, “Alice says there’s going to be a real storm tonight, and Eleanor wants to play ball. Are you game?”

I blinked, confused. The words were all common enough, but I was missing the context. What little I did understand made it sound like Alice might make a reliable weatherman.

Edward’s eyes lit up, but he hesitated.

“Of course you should bring Beau,” Alice said. I thought I saw Jasper throw a quick glance at her.

“Do you want to go?” Edward asked, excited.

“Sure.” I couldn’t disappoint such a face.

“Um, where are we going?”

“We have to wait for thunder to play ball—you’ll see why,” he promised.

“Should I bring an umbrella?”

All three of them laughed aloud.

“Should he?” Jasper asked Alice.

“No.” Alice seemed positive. “The storm will hit over town. It’ll be dry enough in the clearing.”

“Good.” The enthusiasm in Jasper’s voice was unsurprisingly catching. I found myself eager about the idea, instead of scared stiff, though I wasn’t even sure what it was.

“Let’s call Carine and see if she’s in.” Alice was on his feet in another sinuous movement that made me stare.

“Like you don’t already know,” Jasper teased, and then they were gone, but not before the empath managed to inconspicuously close the door behind

them.

“So...what are we playing?”

“You will be watching,” Edward clarified. “We will be playing baseball.”

I rolled my eyes. “Vampires like *baseball*?”

“It’s the American pastime,” he said with mock solemnity.

CHAPTER END