



Da Capo

a *Twilight* novella

by giselle-lx

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Happy Reading.

giselle-lx, March 2010

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Dedicated to AnjieNet,
with all my gratitude for both your generosity and the wonderful prompt.

~||x||~

“But 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. And I went back to Carlisle and Esme. They welcomed me back like the prodigal. It was more than I deserved.”

Twilight, p. 343.

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First Movement: Allegro ma non tanto

Barre, VT

1931

The spring rain pounded the earth, churning dirt into mud and releasing the scent of freshly mown grass into the air. Mud, water, leaves, and grass splattered onto Edward's body as he ran, and he smiled. Dirtied from the bottom up as he was cleansed from the top down. Given the reason he was running in the first place, it made perfect sense.

He had been running now for two days—cutting a wide swath through the cornfields of first Illinois, then Indiana, then Ohio, winding his way around the hulking steel mills of West Virginia and Pennsylvania. He wasn't entirely sure returning had been a conscious decision—had it been, he might have taken the train. But instead he was running. His body had simply pointed him toward Vermont, and his feet had moved to carry him there.

He didn't even know if they would still be there. They might have needed to move on already—the three of them had passed six years together in the claustrophobic house before that awful evening. It had been raining then, too. Unconsciously, Edward's hand lifted to his nose, and he touched it carefully with his fingertips as he ran. It was still there on his face, unbroken as ever. The pain and the injury both had subsided after a mere hour, and that had been three years ago. But the sensation of the heel of Carlisle's hand smashing upward into his face, the keening sound of both of them crying out in pain—these things swam in his memory and refused to heal.

Childish and stupid. All of it. The arguments, the fight, his departure. The ensuing three years. Time after time he had written letters, only to find that words could not convey his shame. Wad after wad of paper found their way into garbage cans—in Toronto, in New York, in Dallas, in San Francisco. Letters which amounted to little more than trite monologues of self-loathing, and whose disposals were invariably followed by the next kill. But the blood had been less and less satisfying each time.

Edward's legs carried him ever so less surely than they had a few months ago. His speed was not what it had been. This would be part of his penance—to remember forever the incredible

strength and speed given to him by the blood of the humans whose lives he had cut short. He would know always—with each stride he took for the rest of existence—that he was forever weaker for his choice to return.

He wondered absently what he looked like, aside from being wet. He hadn't fed. He didn't want them to see him first with eyes that had not yet regained their gold hue. It was better to be hungry; better to keep the onyx color that they all shared then, regardless of diet. How long would it take for them to change back? He wanted his countenance to shift quickly back to what it had been back when he had been happy. When immortality had seemed to be a gift rather than a burden. He had never seen the change happen to someone who was returning to the diet—he had no idea when his irises would reclaim their once-golden hue.

His thighs pumped beneath him as though of their own accord, the pelting rain caressing his face where it would have stung a human's. The questions of where they would be, how they would respond to him, those would answer themselves later—for now, it was enough simply to run.



Ashland, WI

1921

Edward was three-quarters of the way through a Chopin Nocturne when the door crashed open and his father entered. For a moment he didn't understand the strange silhouette—it was so incredibly unexpected that even his vampire senses took a good second to register the broken body in Carlisle's arms.

He loved Carlisle, if he let himself admit it. The man had, at first, seemed so godlike, so assured, so wise and even. Nothing like Edward Masen, Sr. the man from whom Edward had inherited his volatile temper. Edward knew the purity of the blond doctor's mind; how desperate he had been for something as seemingly inconsequential as friendship. So he had played the roles that Carlisle had needed him to play—friend, brother, and finally, son.

Edward had seen the woman in Carlisle's memories—the caramel-haired tomboy who had bravely kept herself from crying even when Carlisle had yanked her grossly disfigured leg

back into position. He, too, remembered the way she had smiled up at him, and the warm, but confused feelings he'd experienced. She had clearly struck a chord in the still heart of an immortal man, but Edward never bothered to give her memory much thought. That was, until the day she was brought to the small house in Ashland, writhing in the arms of the man Edward had slowly grown to adore.

He supposed he had been naïve to think that he was enough. They shared a wonderful friendship, but it was a friendship. It only made sense that once Carlisle learned that it was possible to bring others to the lifestyle he'd created for himself, he would seek out someone who could comfort him as a mate.

But it still took Edward by surprise.

"You had no right!" he screamed when Carlisle offered a contrite explanation for his actions, realizing only as he saw Carlisle's desperate expression that he was speaking not only for the woman who lay in squirming in such obvious pain, but for himself, as well.

Carlisle, being the man he was, did not fight the accusation. For three days they circled each other warily, Carlisle tending to *her*, Edward nursing his wounded ego. Up to this point, he had been Carlisle's entire world. They had left Chicago in the height of the flu epidemic when Carlisle relocated them both into the deep woods of northern Illinois. They hunted together and laughed together. Edward adjusted to his new body and its immeasurable endurance and skill.

He pretended that he had adjusted to the loss of his parents.

He pretended that he had adjusted to the loss of his life.

They never returned to Chicago, instead travelling northward, to the town of Ashland. And while outside their home he lived as Carlisle's brother, inside their home they gradually grew as father and son. It was comfortable. Carlisle was unbelievably happy, and that was enough for Edward. He thought it was enough for Carlisle, too, until the day the door creaked open and Carlisle entered carrying the jerking body.

"I knew her, Edward," he pleaded. "I knew her...she was happy once." He stroked her face as he spoke, his eyes half-closed with a tenderness Edward had never seen. And three days later, when the woman awoke and fixed her own half-closed eyes on Carlisle's face, Edward lost his father for the second time in three years.



Rochester, NY

1931

Edward threw his entire body into the opening chords of the Prelude in C Sharp Minor. Rachmaninoff was nothing like the Mozart, Bach, and Chopin he'd been brought up on. The music had a dark power that struck him somewhere deep. He would say it was within his soul, but if even Carlisle was right and he'd somehow retained his soul in the Change, he doubted it still existed now.

Three hundred and seventy-seven. That was the number he would bear the rest of his existence, burned into his mind as were so many other memories. He could still taste the blood of each and every one of them. Number twenty-nine, the one whose daughter's thoughts Edward had heard as he beat her with his belt. His blood had been acidic, hard on the palate, and Edward might have gagged had he not been so thirsty. Number one hundred forty-four, broken by the market crash, who had stolen all the money his wife needed to raise their three young children and blown most of it on craps before stumbling drunkenly down the street to the brothel. His blood had carried with it the sharp sour of the bootlegged whiskey. Number two hundred twelve, the mother who'd smothered the baby she felt she couldn't afford to raise. Her blood had been sweet—ready to nourish the baby that she instead condemned to death.

All of them were there, their twisted souls screaming at him from the minor seventh chords, the sensation of their blood in his throat trickling down through the glissandos. Each time he began a new piece, he held hope that when he finished, they would stop screaming, their terrified faces would disappear, and his memory of his own crimson-eyed visage would fade. It didn't happen, instead each concerto and sonata left him emptier than the last.

And so he kept playing.

He rocked forward over the keys, trying to think of *anything* else as he looked down at his fingers. His mother had always commented on his long fingers. Elizabeth Masen, with her dark red hair and soft green eyes—she had loved to hold his hands and to watch as his fingers flew over the keyboard of the aging instrument that sat in their family's parlor. It had been why she had taken him to piano lessons beginning when he was eight—his long fingers would make him nimble on the keys. He remembered her gentle smile when he had wagged his fingers inches from her nose, the sound of her laughter as she pushed his hand playfully away. That

sharp memory, one of a few he had left, was only a slice. Where the two of them had been, he didn't know, and what had happened after that moment had long since faded into the abyss that had been Edward's human brain. The memories slipped away more quickly with each passing year. He was thirty now, trapped for all eternity in the gangly body he'd occupied at seventeen, still the too-tall boy with the girlish face—and the long fingers.

He played for hours at a stretch now, his hands hammering out pounding songs. Always minor keys, never the gentle Schumann and Chopin that he knew Carlisle and Esme longed to hear. One or the other would sometimes come into the front parlor and listen attentively, as though Edward might break from his playing to acknowledge them or talk about the time he'd been gone, but he never did. Instead he let Esme and Carlisle drift around him, their worries humming in his mind like a disjointed counterpoint to the pulsing chords.

But he did nothing about their thoughts, instead staying seated at the Bösendorfer they had bought him, playing loudly, quietly, quickly, slowly, as though the music would exorcise him of the demon he now knew for sure resided within him. Expansive concertos and short minuets rang in the stale air, and the long fingers his mother had loved so much flew frantically over the keys again and again.



Barre, VT

1927

Barre, Vermont was a small town, and the doctor and his wife and “brother-in-law” slid inconspicuously among the locals. The land was pastoral and bountiful, covered mostly with dairy farms. It was a far cry from Chicago, and perhaps the difference was an appropriate metaphor. The city of his birth and the life he had lived there were slipping from his memory with each passing year.

And yet, the less he remembered, the more he missed.

Most afternoons, Edward found himself at the train station. Carlisle, ever the intellectual, had other ideas about how Edward should spend his time—after nine years, he felt strongly that Edward's self-control was more than adequate to handle university. Edward had long since

devoured every book that the doctor had amassed over his two centuries of life, and although Carlisle would have had more volumes shipped in by the truckload if asked, Edward never did. Nor was he willing to head off to any of the wonderful institutes of higher education that New England had to offer. Instead, he made his way each afternoon to the familiar worn wood of the train platforms, seeking out a shadowed spot on the rare sunny days, and just sitting with his back against the small ticketing building on the others.

Hours disappeared as he watched both freight and passenger trains chugging to a halt and restarting again, belching steam into the sky in billows of white smoke that, when inhaled, made Edward feel like he was underwater. He sat there, breathing in the wet, warm air and wondering what would happen if he simply swung himself up into one of the boxcars as it stopped. Would chug away with him? And if it did, would he somehow find himself taken, not only out of Barre, but out of his life entirely? Every time a train pulled to a stop, for a brief, almost undetectable moment, he would feel his muscles seize as though preparing to launch him toward it. He didn't know where the trains that left Barre were going, and he found he didn't care. Further north into New Hampshire and Maine? Across the Midwest and into Chicago? The possibilities seemed endless.

Edward pressed his back to the cold stone wall, wrapping his arms around his legs and pressing his chin to his knees. He and Carlisle had bickered again over nothing. His eyes had been dark in the morning, and Carlisle had suggested that they hunt together when he returned from work. The snide remark had slid through his lips before he had managed to reign it in:

“Why don't you just hunt with *her*?”

He wished he could take it back. The hurt that had poured off Carlisle hit Edward at his core. It was infantile, really, and although a part of Edward knew this, he continued to make remarks as though he were a petulant child even six years after Esme had joined them. It wasn't fair to her, either. Esme loved Edward as much as she loved Carlisle, and she couldn't bear to see them arguing. And so Edward had begun making it a point simply to leave.

Footsteps behind him drew Edward's eyes upward, and he watched with disinterest as a man and a woman approached. The man was tall, his face obscured by the shadow of the brim of his hat. The woman was petite and attractive, with dark red hair, like his mother's. Or at least, as much like his mother's as Edward could remember.

I wish he didn't have to leave, thought the woman wistfully. For a moment Edward saw a flash of her memory—they had not been married long. He was headed for New York City for several weeks, and she was not looking forward to her mother coming to stay. She was even less excited about spending the next two nights alone before her mother would arrive. The woman stared up at her husband, her eyes filled with adoration and love.

Edward averted his gaze as the couple shared a kiss—a polite kiss, appropriate for being in public, but still full of passion. He looked away. Perhaps it was the woman's hair, or perhaps it was simply the sadness that had overtaken him of late, but he found that watching the couple was like watching Carlisle and Esme, both with his eyes and with his mind. He knew these two who called themselves his parents as well as they knew each other; there were no secrets which could be held from him. In Esme's mind, he had seen the angular slope of Carlisle's bare hip; in Carlisle's he had seen the dark pink of Esme's nipples. Unable to block their thoughts, Edward had been a part of their lovemaking time and time again.

It made him feel ill.

So he escaped, every day, to the place where Barre met the rest of the world, a world where lovers weren't perfectly matched for all eternity. To a world without the overly gentle man who had been Edward's guide but whose attention was now too scattered to even wonder where Edward disappeared to every afternoon. And he looked away from these strangers who shared a love he didn't know, trying to give them privacy that he really wasn't able to offer.

The man's hat tipped forward as he pressed his lips to his wife's once more, and the train's whistle blasted. The woman wished him goodbye with a smile on her face, and her palm delicately stroked his temple as she pushed the brim of his hat back into place. Edward could hear her heart pounding as their hands slipped from each other's.

Wheels creaked, the train chugged slowly forward, and the woman's hand began waving frantically as her husband's figure moved away. Edward continued to watch her husband after he was out of her sight—he was still waving, even after he knew his wife could no longer see him.

As the train gathered speed, the woman finally dropped her hand and turned, her gaze landing on Edward in his hunched position against the ticketing building. For a moment, the soft eyes that had been fixed on her husband were fixed on Edward instead. They brimmed with tears, but she did her best to stem the flow as her eyes fell on him.

He is alone, she thought to herself. You are not alone. Tom will be back before you know it.

Resolutely, she drew herself upward, wiped her eyes with the back of one pale wrist and smiled at Edward—a tiny smile, one still shaking with the probable onset of a fresh round of tears. Then she turned to walk away from the station, back to the taxicab driver who her husband had instructed firmly to wait for his wife’s departure. She gave Edward one last, long look before she disappeared, and her red hair fanned out from her face as she gave him the same sad smile that had once been given to him by Elizabeth Masen. Then, in a flurry of linen and cotton, the beautiful woman who reminded Edward of his mother turned and was gone.

It took him only a fraction of a second to follow.

Second Movement: Adagio

Ashland, WI

1921

“Humans are evil, Carlisle.”

A long silence followed this statement, and Edward could feel Carlisle’s eyes boring into him. Even though he didn’t turn around, he could nevertheless see the sad and confused expression that he knew had appeared on his creator’s face.

She had insisted they hunt together, just the two of them. Her control was getting better with every passing day, and she’d been pressing Carlisle to go alone with Edward for some time. Even Carlisle knew she felt as though she was coming between them, but he was reluctant to leave her alone even if only for a few hours’ hunt.

And that, Edward knew, had very little to do with the fact that she was a newborn.

He’d said “humans,” as though the statement were meant to exclude his present company, but the truth was Edward was privy to the way Carlisle’s mind was darkening with lust more by the day. There was a base, animalistic side to even this most gentle man. He and Esme had held a chaste relationship thus far, but in Edward’s estimation, it wouldn’t last much longer. In their minds Edward had seen the vulgar ways they considered each other—he knew the physical responses they each had and were careful to hide from the other. He knew them better than they knew themselves, and it made him feel dirtied and ashamed.

He was coming to hate himself.

“Why do you say that?” the other voice asked.

A single, strong hand came to lie on the back of Edward’s neck. He wrenched away at once and came to face Carlisle, whose expression registered the same pained shock as his mind. Edward flinched away more slowly, opening a gap between them.

Sunlight filtered through the canopy of the forest overhead, making Carlisle’s skin shine in odd patches. The older vampire was starting to panic. It upset him when Edward didn’t return

his affection, or at least, didn't yield to it, and at first Edward had been only too happy to have changed Carlisle's lonely existence so thoroughly. But after three years, it was becoming uncomfortable.

That, and Edward knew that Carlisle's hands longed to be somewhere else entirely.

"I hear them," he continued, not turning to face his sire. "I hear everything. The ones you would think are upstanding—they have the darkest minds. And I'm the only one who knows."

Without conscious thought, his hand shot forward and suddenly a deep gouge appeared in the stalwart oak tree at his side. Carlisle's eyes shot upward at once, and he forcefully nudged Edward sideways with his hip as the tree crashed down just inches to their right. Several smaller trees fell with it, their branches snapping with loud cracks and the ground shuddering under their weight.

"I would have been fine," Edward growled when the forest had stilled once again.

It isn't your physical pain I am worried about.

Edward frowned, but thankfully, Carlisle changed the subject, gesturing to the black bear they had taken down minutes before. *She grows cold.* Dropping to the bear, they drank side-by-side in a tense silence.

But as he drank with Carlisle, suddenly the world seemed to spin, and Edward remembered for a brief moment the taste of steak, the comforting texture of milk, the astringency of black tea. The blood gagged him at once. It was too thick, too salty, too much like *blood* and not the refreshing drink he'd known. Carlisle's thoughts at once became a terrified worry as Edward staggered away from the corpse of the bear, one hand over his mouth. It was a futile action. He doubled over and vomited, a mess of blood and venom splashing the ground and staining the patch of grass at his feet a dark, sticky crimson. At once there came strong hands on his back, supporting him as his body heaved and at last coaxing him upright.

Carlisle's concern washed over him in waves, and a snarl that was really more embarrassment than anger tore from his lips. The hands abruptly pulled away and for a moment the two men stood facing each other. One of the bear's hind legs twitched as the last vestiges of life left its body.

Frowning, Carlisle stepped back to regard Edward. *This isn't just about the humans, is it?* Edward stared down at the dark mess at his feet, and did not return Carlisle's gaze.

"I hear your mind, too."



Barre, VT

1927

Her name was Eleanor. It had taken Edward over a week to discover this; he'd had to wait for her mother to arrive to keep her company in her husband's absence. The woman—Eleanor—had no telephone, and no acquaintances who came to call, and so as Edward skulked his way around her home, he had heard nothing to tell him this critical detail of the woman's life.

Esme and Carlisle didn't know where precisely he was spending his time, just as they had never questioned him about his days on the train platform. He told them nothing. Their questioning was suffocating enough without adding the issue that he was spending his days circling the house of a young married woman. Although on second thought, given the number of times concern for Edward's lack of interest in women had crossed Esme's mind, perhaps news of his exploits would not be entirely unwelcome.

Nevertheless, he kept them to himself. At times he disappeared in the night, leaving Esme alone in the secluded farmhouse while Carlisle worked another midnight shift. Other times he left in the mornings as Carlisle arrived home. Every day he started out in the direction of some other place, but his feet unfailingly found their way to the small home on the edge of town.

The woman had a grace about her as she moved through the silent house, and as Edward watched her through the slightly dusty window, he marveled at this. He had followed her from the platform that day because she was sad, and because something about the way her reddish hair trickled its way down her cheek to her neck reminded him of his mother. But he returned each day for a reason he couldn't quite understand.

It seemed to Edward that she cleaned more than necessary; in fact, he found it difficult to imagine her without the wide feather duster that was always in her hands. He didn't need to wonder why, for Esme was the same way. Not that a woman who took such pride in the spaces she created would ever allow them to fall into disarray, but it never failed that their small home reached new heights of cleanliness whenever Carlisle was away.

Her husband's name was Thomas. She thought of him often, especially when she cleaned the spare bedroom. Edward recognized the hollow ache she exuded when in that room—it was the same ache that Esme felt whenever she looked at Edward. The longing for a child seemed to permeate both women equally, except that in Esme's case, Edward was all she could long for.

Carlisle had urged him, in the beginning, to be gentle about Esme's loss. The baby's death was what had driven her to the edge of the cliff to begin with; a longer story which included a monster of a husband left in Columbus had unfolded itself over the years. She hadn't wanted to tell Carlisle at first, and for a long time, Edward had been forced to bear the terrible secret with her. But Carlisle had eventually wheedled the truth out of them both, and things had become even more uncomfortable. Because when everything was out in the open, Esme had declared them her family—Carlisle her loving husband, and Edward the son she'd yearned for.

It was irritating.

But the woman, Eleanor, longed for a son who didn't yet live, and this was more acceptable somehow. Edward sat now in the bushes outside her window, watching as she lovingly ran hands over the chair rail, gently straightened the bed covers, and dreamed of the day this spare room would be the nursery for her child. When a small body would lie against her in the rocking chair and tiny fingers would caress her breast as their owner suckled there. Edward saw the scene in her mind—an infant's hand dwarfed by the swell of her pale breast, her pink nipple exposed and waiting.

The image caused a familiar heat to build in his groin, and, disgusted, he threw himself back with such force that there was an audible crash as he landed in the Boxwood. He sprang away at once, too quickly for her eye, and watched as her shadow appeared behind the curtains, seeking the source of the sound.

She gazed out over the lawn but of course saw nothing, and it took only twenty seconds for her to return to her task. Edward heard her footfall and her distracted thoughts as she moved to the bedroom she shared with her husband. In what seemed a single step, he was at that windowsill, too—then stopped short.

A slickness met his fingers, one that would be imperceptible to the skin of a human, but which felt to his hands as though the windowsill had been greased. It carried with it the fresh scent of another.

A second set of fingertips, leaving their oils on his windowsill. Watching this woman.

Watching his woman.

Enraged, Edward flung himself from the window and tore off in the direction of town.



Rochester, NY

1931

“I can’t practice medicine.”

His father’s blond head cocked to the side. *You could. Your self-control is just fine.*

Edward snorted, kicking the ground with such force that a large divot formed and his toe sent a small patch of grass airborne. They both watched it fly a good twenty feet before it tumbled to rest among the bracken.

Carlisle said nothing.

“Have you forgotten already that I killed three hundred seventy men?”

Surprise registered on Carlisle’s face, and Edward realized at once that he had not yet told this number. He had been careful, especially around Esme, to underplay the horror of the time he’d spent away. He cringed as Carlisle considered this new information.

One every three days, came the amazed thought.

“It wasn’t quite that patterned.”

But it could have been. His father circled him a moment, peering at him curiously as though he were examining a specimen in a zoo. “You managed, even while tasting human blood that often, to control your thirst to the point that you made rational decisions about each of your victims.”

The words sounded odd coming from Carlisle, who’d only twice spilled human blood and who had then felt it necessary to chaperone both the people he’d bitten. Unconsciously, Edward’s hand drifted toward his neck to the set of perfect teeth marks there, and he watched in Carlisle’s mind as his father’s eyes followed the gesture.

Carlisle wanted to believe the best of him, he knew. The man would insist, even in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that Edward had somehow retained a semblance of the purity for which Carlisle had chosen him in the first place, that Edward was capable of being as noble

as his sire even after three years of feeding off humans. Only he could possibly take Edward's disciplined methods of murder as a sign that Edward had *control*.

It felt strange to hunt with another after the years alone, and most of the time, Edward refused company when he left to feed. He knew his standoffishness hurt both Esme and Carlisle, yet his discomfort in their presence was so acute that he ignored them anyway. Finally, a few days ago, Carlisle had cornered him. The man was older, larger, and stronger, so when he'd made it clear that he was accompanying Edward on a long hunt, Edward had chosen not to refuse.

His immortal parents had thrown themselves into the task of distracting him. They offered him outings, books, music. A new phonograph was acquired, a first for their family, but the records which accompanied it sat untouched. Esme kept offering to take him into town—for new clothes, to see a moving picture, or whatever else she dreamed at the moment—and it hurt them both each time he declined and slunk back to his piano.

Now Carlisle's latest tactic was to convince him to mingle further with the humans who until so recently had been his meals rather than his companions. He wanted to see Edward go off to university, and to follow with attendance at a medical college. Edward refused of course, insisting that Carlisle's faith in him was misplaced. And so the older vampire had brought him hunting to corner him.

What if I went with you? The field is changing so quickly these days, it wouldn't hurt...

"No."

His reply was sharper than he intended, and Carlisle's face clouded with hurt once again. Edward drew a deep breath and made eye contact. It was just after sundown, and Carlisle's eyes shone in the waning daylight. They had been blue, Carlisle had told him once, and for a moment Edward busied himself trying to imagine them that way, instead of the saffron or obsidian that he was used to. He tried to imagine his father's gaze on him with eyes looking like heaven itself—because that made sense for Carlisle—and he instantly felt ashamed.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, looking downward again. "It's not you. I just—I'm not ready."

Carlisle stared at him again, his expression softening. *You will heal, Edward. I know you will. Give it time.* His hand floated unconsciously to his own left shoulder, and Edward winced. Carlisle didn't miss his expression.

This healed, too. He patted his shoulder. *Quickly, in fact. But the heart takes longer. As does the soul.*

The soul. Edward let out a frustrated growl. They weren't supposed to have them. Vampires were damned creatures, or so the legends said. Not that very much was true about the legends, but Edward clung to this. And even if he hadn't been damned when he'd set out running from the little house in Barre, wasn't he undoubtedly damned now? How could one take nearly four hundred lives and still expect eternal forgiveness?

He had no soul.

Still, he dared not say this to his father, whose faith in such things had brought him through almost three centuries now. Even if Edward thought him foolish, Carlisle had welcomed him back as though he were the lost sheep, and he owed the man his allegiance. So he simply repeated, "I'm not ready."

Carlisle's expression became pensive, and Edward could tell he was contemplating probing the issue further. But he changed his mind, and a moment later, simply shook his head as though to clear his thoughts.

Come, then. I won't push you. But we should feed.

And in a flash of gold, Carlisle was gone.



Barre, VT

1927

Whiskey was among the foulest human inventions for internal consumption, Edward thought. His own father had been a bourbon man, and as a human, Edward had always preferred the sweeter alcohol to the hardness of whiskey. Of course, now he found it all repulsive, but his mind clung to the handful of moments he could remember when he had finally been old enough to remain in the sitting room with the men after dinner, pretending to like the burn of his Pall Malls and downing juleps, malt whiskey, and Scotch.

The memory whirled back to him as he lay on his belly and stared through the sweaty basement window. It came the way his human memories often did—after nine years they were slipping away like crumbling chalk. He could no longer summon them. When they came, they

came unbidden, and while he tried to cling to them with his new, infallible memory, more often than not they shrugged his mind's feeble grasp and hurried away back into the ether.

Strictly speaking, he wasn't supposed to know about this place, but a vampire could smell the liquor running for miles. Through the window fogged from cold, Edward's sharp eyes made out the individual silhouettes of the men in the basement inside. There were a smattering of women, too—flappers, to be sure, and he couldn't manage to avert his eyes as he saw one raise her skirt up to her thigh to retrieve the flask hidden in her garter. This sickened him.

The foul scents of booze and sweat assaulted Edward's nostrils, making it nearly impossible to separate the individual scents of the men in the speakeasy. In truth, he didn't even know for certain that the owner of the oily fingers was here; as evening had fallen the previous day, Edward had been obligated to return home to the stifling confines of his "parents." By the time he was able to make it back to the small house where the woman lived, a thick rain had fallen and the unknown man's trail had been erased.

However, the man's scent was burned in his memory by way of anger and indignation, and the reek of bad whiskey that had permeated the stranger's pores had suggested this place as a starting point. So Edward had traced his way to this small building, in hopes that one form of debauchery might be predicated upon another, but so far, he had little evidence. He squeezed his eyes closed for a moment, helping him to filter the steady hum of thoughts flying from the throngs of men at the tables.

Hazy images assaulted his mind, blurred by the drunken eyes through which their owners looked at the world. Through the eyes of one patron, Edward watched as the floor spun lazily, rocking from side to side as the man tried to balance on unsteady feet. In the mind of another, he traveled further up the stocking of the young woman he had seen earlier, until he found himself looking at an imagined version of the female anatomy which was so grossly distorted that it made him wonder if the man had ever actually seen the organ on a live woman.

Edward looked away and spat venom into the grass, ignoring the uncomfortable tightness at the front of his pants. He had almost given up when from the thoughts of the drunken imbeciles he finally snatched the image of a pale arm. He recognized it at once, the way it moved from elbow to wrist delicately, the skin so translucent that thin blue veins were visible just beneath the surface. He saw a hand running lovingly over a quilt in a spare bedroom, humming the quiet lullaby Edward had heard again and again.

It was the woman. *His* woman.

The growl that ripped from his throat caused the window to rattle ever so slightly, and at least one head whipped toward it as Edward ducked out of sight. He found he was breathing heavily, a leftover habit from having lived nearly twice as long a human as an immortal. Forcing his breath to slow, he peered back into the smoky drinking parlor towards the source of the image.

The man was tall, but not imposingly so—perhaps only an inch or so taller than Edward himself. His tweed coat and Balmorals showed him to be reasonably well-off. But then even gentlemen were up to nefarious things now, Edward thought, wincing as he recalled the awful imagined visage of the flapper's pudendum. He focused in again on the seemingly innocuous man who stood at the bar, snifter in hand, swaying unsteadily as he laughed with the man next to him. The amber liquid in his snifter sloshed precariously; a few droplets splashed onto the already-stained tablecloth.

Edward's breath, which was the same temperature as the air in which he stood, did not fog the window, and so he sat, frozen, as the man downed two more snifters. People began to trickle out of the front door, but still the man remained. His thoughts drifted hazily, drunkenly, but every now and then came back to rest on the beauty of the ivory arm that held Edward's own attentions so firmly.

At last only a few were left. The position of the moon told Edward it was already the wee hours of the morning, and he wondered briefly if he ought to leave. But Carlisle and Esme would not ask where he had been. Finally, the tweed-coated man put down his snifter, slapped a large quantity of bills down on the table—too large, in Edward's estimation, but probably a direct result of the man's inebriation—and began to stagger toward the door.

Pushing himself from his stomach, Edward made it to the door faster than a human eye could see him. It was only a second later that the man tripped his way through the door frame, falling face-first into the churned mud at the entrance. For a heartbeat, Edward considered the possibility of breaking the man's fall but he did not, and instead stepped aside as he listened to the soft thud of a heavy body landing in the dirt.

It would be better that he remained unseen.

And so as the man pulled himself to unsteady feet and then ambled his way down the dusty road, Edward slunk back into the shadows to hide.

Third Movement: Alla breve

Rochester, NY

1931

Anything cheerful would be welcome.

Edward's fingers hitched for a fraction of a beat when he heard Esme's uncharacteristic sarcasm. It was long on four o'clock in the morning, and she was doing an excellent job of pretending that she didn't mind the dark arpeggios of Bach's "Little Prelude." Nevertheless, the thought slipped from her as she passed the piano on her way to the kitchen. She had paused, contemplating whether to put down Carlisle's newspaper and sit with Edward near the piano, but instead listened to the discordant minor key, sighed, and made her mental remark before continuing on.

He pounded the keys more furiously in answer

She was waiting, he thought, for a life that wasn't coming back. The three of them circled one another uncomfortably now. It didn't help that Carlisle and Esme had grown closer in his absence. Before he'd left, they had both gone out of their way to block their romantic thoughts, or to steal time together where Edward couldn't hear them. Carlisle in particular had been cautious, even after six years, to make certain that Edward felt at ease around the both of them.

Three years was but a blink of an eye for someone as old as Carlisle, and yet it had been enough time for his whole relationship with his wife to change. They touched openly now, standing beside each other in the kitchen with their hips brushing in a comfortable familiarity, and often Edward walked into a room to find them in each other's arms, laughing. They were bonded to each other now, having not had to worry about Edward for almost thirty-six months, and it showed in their every movement. What had once been a perfect triangle had become a perfect pair. He didn't belong here anymore, but he had nowhere else to go.

The low D sounded a little too loudly from his left hand, and Edward let out a frustrated growl before stopping abruptly and standing up from the piano. Esme noticed at once, and reentered the living room, a concerned expression on her face.

I apologize, Edward. Please keep playing, whatever you'd like.

“I’m finished,” he growled, and Esme took a step backwards. He knew he had hurt her with his sharp reply, and a part of his mind hammered him to fix it. Esme was the most gentle woman he had ever known. Even the women whose lives he had saved over the last three years, going back all the way to beautiful Eleanor in Vermont--none of them could match his father’s mate for purity of heart. He felt sick—sick for leaving, sick for coming back, sick for disturbing Esme by playing the melancholy music that seemed to be his only comfort. His hands found their way to his head, and soon clumps of his hair were gripped in his fists. He yanked on it, but it was as unyielding as the rest of his body.

Esme approached him cautiously, speaking aloud, as she and Carlisle often did when they wanted to make sure they had his attention. “What’s wrong?” The calmness in her voice was betrayed by her anxious thought, *When is Carlisle coming home?*

He took a breath to steady himself and placed one hand on the edge of the piano to steady himself as for a moment Esme’s mind flicked over that awful evening three years ago. Her heart swelled with concern for her husband, even now.

“I won’t fight him again,” he said evenly when the scene stopped playing in her mind, and she nodded her understanding.

Is there anything we can do?

He was unable to stop the growl. “They’re all still dead, aren’t they?”

Esme’s face fell, and he was at once crushed by her hurt, which rolled off her in waves. “Edward,” she whispered. “It’s all right. You’re forgiven.” She moved to close the gap between them, one hand outstretched.

The snarl ripped from his throat before he could stop it, and he saw Esme flinch backwards. She hovered there a moment, her eyes nervously searching Edward’s face.

I’ve killed, too, you know.

His eyes narrowed as he remembered that day. Carlisle had asked him to keep an eye on Esme, but he’d become distracted by something in his bedroom, thinking they were safe alone in the house. The saleslady who’d arrived at their door met her end so swiftly she’d probably never noticed that it was a woman who attacked. Esme had been inconsolable afterward, causing Carlisle to stay home from work for days.

“One,” Edward spat. “One is nothing.”

“Edward—”

“One is *NOTHING!*”

He didn't actually see himself do it. He didn't feel his hands making contact with the polished wood. It was through her eyes that he saw the deep break in the middle of the instrument and through her ears that he heard the dissonant sounds of the strings as they reached the limits of their tensile strength and snapped. It took mere seconds for the entire instrument to be reduced to a pile of rubble in the middle of the floor.

The front door crashed open, and for a fraction of a second, the whole room was perfectly still as the blond vampire surveyed the scene. His breath was coming quickly, like a human's, and Edward could feel the fear rolling off him in waves as the man assured himself that first Esme, then Edward, were both safe. The snarl formed on his lips as he listened to Carlisle's heaving breaths and his disjointed, worried thoughts. He hated the way Carlisle could pass for human even at his most stressed. He hated way the strings of the piano sagged freakishly toward the floor. He hated the hurt looks on their faces. He hated Esme with her single accident, and Carlisle with his centuries of temperance. He hated their concern, and their furtive, nervous looks.

And above all, he hated himself.

It took Carlisle but a moment to step into the room. His thoughts were confused but nevertheless he began trying to soothe Edward at once. “Son, what—” he began, but Edward cut him off with a strangled yowl.

“*Why* didn't you just let me *die?*”

He fled before Carlisle had a chance to answer.



Barre, VT

1927

His name was Phillip MacIntyre, and he worked for the Vermont National Bank Corporation in Barre's tiny downtown strip. He dressed finely, albeit simply, in a suit and tie, a simple hat, a long coat. At times, he reminded Edward of Carlisle with his simple, pleasant demeanor when he greeted clients in his workplace. He married, with a young son of maybe four or so, and he owned a home and a new Chevrolet. The little family went to church every Sunday

at the Methodist chapel, and the little boy went to a nursery school that the church provided three days a week. His wife kept a little garden and made her own pasta sauce from the tomatoes she grew and canned. They were a simple family—wholesome, in a way.

Except that he spent his time skulking around another woman's home.

Edward had been following the man for over a week, sitting unseen in the shadows near the bank, and scrambling away to the library anytime the thoughts in his vicinity told him people were getting too suspicious. In the evenings he alternated between the hedge around the charming farmhouse with its female occupant and her mother, and the craftsman bungalow where the banker's family lived. He preferred the woman's house; there was something pleasant and soothing about her demeanor that he couldn't quite place his finger on. Her hair and her smile reminded him of his mother. Yet his reactions to her were not son-like, and this made him uncomfortable.

He was no better than MacInyre, really. If anything he was worse. He was a predator by design, not by choice, and if the right moment presented itself he was powerless to the demon within.

Today the sun blazed high in the western sky, and all three vampires were trapped in the small house waiting for dusk to fall. Carlisle had already called the hospital to inform them of a dire situation at home that needed his hand; he would be an hour or so late to his shift by the time it became dark enough for him to venture out. So when he came across Edward's frantic pacing before the picture window in the front room, he had plenty of time to talk.

Carlisle's worry betrayed his presence before he said anything. Edward's gift made him next to impossible to sneak up on, a side effect he valued greatly. The other vampire was still several feet away when Edward answered him without turning.

"Yes, I'm planning on going out this evening."

The concern flowed from his father in waves. For all that Edward could read minds, it was Carlisle who was truly the perceptive one. He had noticed the increasing amounts of time Edward spent out of the house, and each day his need for explanation was growing.

I don't know what he's up to. Edward listened as Carlisle's thoughts waged war with themselves for a moment, debating whether it would display too little confidence in Edward to demand that he account for himself, or if his position as guide necessitated that he keep close

tabs on the other two at all costs. Carlisle didn't want to meddle, and yet—Edward frowned as he recognized the emotion which laced Carlisle's worry.

Fear.

His lip curled involuntarily. "I'm not out killing people, if that's what you're wondering."

Carlisle sighed, which frustrated Edward even further. Carlisle had perfected so many human mannerisms over his nearly three centuries of life. To Edward, each sigh and fidget raised the bar for his own behavior. He had become quite good at not standing unnaturally still, changing the pace of his breathing, occasionally allowing an item to smash to the floor (Esme hadn't appreciated when he'd practiced this particular skill with her heirloom china). But Carlisle—Carlisle was practically human. The only thing that ever betrayed him were the unusual color of his eyes, and his sincerity meant that those around him were more than willing to accept his explanation of having been afflicted with a rare ocular disease as a child.

I would know if you were killing people, came the exasperated thought.

"Then why do you worry?"

Carlisle caught his lower lip between his teeth, and for a moment Edward stared as the blood rushed away from the pressure and turned that tiny portion of skin from pink to pale, and back to pink. His father hunted often to keep his thirst fully at bay, and this resulted in his veins flowing with borrowed blood such that his skin responded almost as a human's might. As Edward looked away, he heard the thought, *Distant...*

"I'm sorry?"

"You've been distant, Edward." *And I'm unsure what it is that bothers you so.*

Edward grunted, but did not answer. Besides, what did he say? "I'm sorry, but I've grown tired of being here with you and Esme, and oh by the way, I've been tracking a woman and the man who is tracking her"? There was no way to explain this to Carlisle.

"I'm fine."

Carlisle frowned, but he didn't press. It was one of the good things about Carlisle—it was rare for him to force a conversation. Instead his mind filled with images from years past, when he and Edward had hunted together, laughing, or had shared time together playing chess, driving, or even simply sitting by a warm fire and reading. Edward felt his father's ache at remembering those times, and he looked away in shame.

The image of Edward lying casually on the couch, nose buried in an original Dostoyevsky, gave way to a simple thought: *Whatever happened?*

And as though the mere thought had summoned her, the French doors swung open and Esme entered.

Edward turned back to the window and resumed his wait for dusk.



Ashland, WI

1921

“You’re what?”

It was a leftover idiom from years as a human, Edward supposed. There was no physically possible way that he could not hear someone speaking in a normal human voice, even if he were across the house and upstairs. He had absolutely no need to clarify what Carlisle had just said, and yet he’d stupidly asked anyway.

“We’re going to marry,” Carlisle repeated, more slowly, and unnecessarily aloud. His hand ran its way down Esme’s pale forearm until their palms met and their fingers intertwined. A smile spread across Esme’s face, and Edward looked away quickly.

Carlisle’s other hand reached for Edward’s shoulder. Before he could make contact, Edward spun out from beneath it. His father’s breathing hitched a moment, and Edward felt the hurt pouring off him in waves. This part, too, had changed as the years progressed. When he’d first awoken, Edward had felt a strange sort of privilege in helping the older vampire shoulder his burden. Carlisle had been childlike in his wonder at finally having a companion and sometimes his excitement at finally breaking free of his solitude had made Edward feel like the older one. He had been the linchpin; the one who held Carlisle’s happiness in his hands. It had taken him a long time to realize this gave him power over the other man; that Carlisle would do anything to ensure that he was happy and that he could manipulate that if he wanted.

But he’d never had need to, before.

The rage was building in him now, even as he tried to suppress it, and he didn’t really know why. This moment had obviously been coming. Every month the three of them lived in

these same small quarters he saw how their feelings toward each other were rapidly evolving. Carlisle thought of Esme first, then Edward, always.

The thought caused a low growl to rumble in Edward's chest.

Edward could hear Carlisle's thoughts churning, tumbling over themselves as he worried about Edward's reaction. *I know this isn't what you want*, he thought fervently. *But I love her, son.*

"Don't call me that," he spat, and Esme frowned as she wondered what Carlisle had said. His father's face fell. "Edward—"

Edward sucked a deep breath through his teeth, making a dull hissing noise that cut Carlisle off midsentence. They stared at each other a moment before his father continued.

She is my mate.

"Don't you think I know?" he shot back at once. "You certainly haven't made any effort to hide *that*." And this was the truth—he could hear their sounds as well as their thoughts. Most days he tried to run away during the day, but sometimes he would come back to the staccato breathing and muffled groans of their ardor. He would run out again at once, but lately had taken to slamming the door behind himself so as to make sure they knew he'd heard.

It was Esme who looked away this time, and it was likely her embarrassment that caused Carlisle's expression to harden. If there was one thing that could be said of the woman, it was that her presence made it abundantly clear that Carlisle was part beast. Edward had thought him eternally patient and compassionate, but Esme had changed all of that, making it exactly clear where Carlisle's edges were. He wondered if Carlisle would have been this protective of him.

He doubted it.

Drawing a deep breath, he turned his back on them both, putting his hand on the doorknob. "Marry if you want. I won't be there."

Through Carlisle's eyes, he saw Esme's pained expression. A low growl rumbled through his father's chest. *This behavior is unacceptable, son.*

He knew that, of course. A part of him, a part that refused to own up to its sadness, missed the day when everything he did caused Carlisle immeasurable joy. Edward remembered just as well as Carlisle the days of the two of them simply being men together, forming what had first been a tenuous friendship, then a brotherhood, then the relationship that had become a father and his gift of a son. There had been a time when Edward would have let Carlisle comfort him,

when the man's hand would have found its way from Edward's shoulder to the nape of his neck. The phantom weight of the fingers was there as soon as he thought about it, the ghost of a hand at the bottom of his hair. Edward lifted his own hand to touch the spot, to wipe away even the memory of his mentor's touch, and for a moment his hand lingered there and Carlisle stared at it.

Edward, please. The image of Edward, standing next to the two of them at the front of a church before a priest swirled in Carlisle's mind. But it was accompanied not with the fluttered-heart joy of a wedding day, but instead by a deep pain.

Once, he had held the power to heal that pain. There had been a time when making Carlisle happy had been his goal. He hadn't felt the need to throw daggers.

But now he drove them and twisted them as well.

"You know what, Carlisle? You can go to hell."

The door rattled off its hinges when he slammed it behind him.



Barre, VT

1927

The scent permeated the entire grounds by the time Edward made it to the tiny farmhouse. The husband, Thomas, was due back tomorrow; he had heard this discussion the previous day. It gave him some relief—surely MacIntyre would keep his distance with the woman's husband at home. He would continue to watch, of course, but it would be less necessary.

The sun had taken eons to sink tonight. After the confrontation with Carlisle earlier in the day, the house had become uncomfortable, and he had shot out the door as soon as it was safe to do so. Under the cover of dusk, he closed the distance between the Cullen family home and Eleanor's in mere minutes.

Edward loved to run. It had been one of the few things that had pleased him about his new existence those strange first few months in the northern woods of Illinois. Carlisle had explained to him that his strength and his speed, although both remaining inhuman, would wane over time. But his speed, the thing he loved most, had not fallen away from him at all. He loved its effortlessness, the way a few strides would set him off faster than any automobile. He loved

the way he could see the grain of the bark of every branch he passed, even when at speeds that should have rendered the world around him an amorphous blur. He loved the wind battering his face and whipping through his hair.

And he loved how quickly his running got him away from thoughts he didn't care to hear.

So what if Carlisle was worried? Edward was watching; that was all. And yes, Carlisle might tell him that they weren't to interfere in the lives of the mortals, but who was he to judge this, anymore? The man had made rash decisions of his own; he had little authority to tell Edward what to do.

Edward wondered sometimes if Esme felt as he did. She never seemed to harbor ill-will toward her husband, and counted the past six years as the best of her life. He wondered if perhaps it was because they'd met before, because Carlisle had been in her thoughts and dreams for ten years before he interfered with her death. Perhaps, he thought on occasion, if he'd had ten years to admire the man, he might feel differently as well.

His thoughts of Carlisle vanished at once, however, when his feet made purchase on the soft soil of Eleanor's expansive lawn. She and her husband were moderately wealthy, although it surprised Edward that they had no household help. A second woman in the house might be of comfort and help to Eleanor while Thomas was away. But instead there was no one, save the man whose scent seemed to surround Edward as he slunk his way around the house.

The indignant anger was instantaneous, a fire licking at his insides as he sprang into position at the windows. He cast his own mind wide, trying to pick up on anything. The man's scent was *everywhere*—had he been haunting this woman all afternoon?

Edward moved swiftly, looking in first the kitchen, then the living room, then the back window. Nothing, nothing, and nothing—nothing, that was, except the greasy fingers, the strong scent of eau de cologne and bootlegged whiskey. He gagged, but kept going, following the trail the greasy pervert had left behind. It circled the entire first floor of the house—the voyeur had peered in every window, it seemed. But when he reached the front door, he stopped cold.

The noisome odor was stronger on the *other* side.

He didn't think. The door handle was in his hand in a moment, and although he was ready to give the door a single tap with his forefinger that would bring it crashing down, it turned out that the door was unlocked and opened easily.

Air choked its way into his lungs as he drew frantic breaths through his nose. Usually there was the faintest sense of the burn when he was this close to humans; he had learned to ignore it, to treat it as a mere inconvenience, but it was always there to taunt him, reminding him that, no matter what Carlisle told him, he was created to be a monster. Tonight, however, he could barely feel the burn for his concentration.

Thoughts came to him at once from both directions. MacIntyre's thoughts were absolutely choked with lust. He focused only on the image of Eleanor—naked—and Edward quickly averted his own mind from the imagined porcelain skin, the taut stomach, the nest of hair at the join of her legs. His body, however, betrayed his modesty, and the reaction made him sick.

And even more determined.

Thomas will be so delighted, came the thought, and its sudden interruption nearly knocked Edward off his feet. He saw a hand run its way down the opposite bicep, elbow, and finally to the wrist, a cake of soap in its palm. As the image slipped from him, he heard the quiet slosh of bathwater.

MacIntyre heard it, too. The body reappeared in Edward's mind as it resurfaced in MacIntyre's. *The bath*, came the thought.

Swiftly, the image shifted. Instead of a naked body standing before a dressing table—a memory, Edward realized with a sickening horror, not the man's imagination—the body was now in the bathwater, glistening sensually. And then he saw flashes—insistent lips against jawbone, a hand grasping a pale breast, the strong thighs parted by an even stronger hand, and a hot tightness around his...

The roar of anger was barely choked off as Edward charged up the stairs. If the man could hear the slight movement of the water, he was near the bathroom. Edward cursed that his quick ingress of breath caused noise and tried to breathe as quietly as he could. The man's foul scent was *everywhere*.

Where was he?

Eleanor let out a happy hum, and for a moment, Edward paused, remembering the earlier statement. *Thomas will be so delighted*, she'd thought, and he took his mind off MacIntyre long enough to focus on her thoughts. He saw only disjointed images; the spare room, a quilt, the tiny hand against the breast. Her calendar.

Her calendar?

A manicured hand swept its way across the wet stomach to rest underwater just above her navel. Edward recognized the gesture at once—it brought back Esme, not long after Carlisle had turned her, standing before the mirror in her bedroom. She, too, had run her hand over her stomach, resting it in the same place as she mourned not her life, but the life of the child who had once kicked there. *Thomas will be so delighted.*

A door creaking open behind him caused him to spin, and he flew instinctually in the direction of the noise. It wouldn't happen. He wouldn't let it. Not to this woman, not to *his* Eleanor, whose smile reminded him so much of his mortal mother, whose yearning for the child now in her womb reminded him so much of his immortal one.

It *wouldn't* happen.

MacIntyre nearly shouted out when he came face-to-face with Edward in the darkened hallway. As it was, his feet froze in the doorway to the spare room, the room that would become the nursery, where Eleanor had spent so much time under Edward's watchful gaze. And it was this that finally took him over. To see this monster, innocently slack-jawed and surprised, standing in the doorway to the room that belonged to the woman's *child*...

When Carlisle had turned Edward, he had replicated the bites he himself had received, which had been the result of a fast scuffle and an immortal so weak his aim had suffered. By the time Esme had come into their lives, Carlisle had thought more about how to merge the medical and the mythical. The jugular vein and the carotid artery shared the same space beneath a delicately thin layer of dermis—when pierced together, the venom spread incredibly fast.

Transformation—or death—was expedient.

A decade of practice had perfected Edward's movements so that they matched the frustrating sluggishness of the humans around him. But he now closed the gap faster than MacIntyre could see, moving behind him in an instant and placing a hand on either shoulder as he cocked his head to the left.

Before the man had fully registered the presence of the strong being at his back, Edward parted his lips and gave a simple whisper of warning:

“Don't scream.”

Da Capo al Fine

Barre, VT

1921

Edward watched from the corner as Carlisle scooped Esme into his arms and carried her across the threshold. She giggled, kissing him on the nose and patting his cheek gently, and he bent over her as he held her, brushing his lips first to her forehead and then to her neck. He held her far longer than was necessary—well of course, it really wasn't necessary at all—and then finally set her on her feet.

My wife, came Carlisle's still-incredulous thought as he nuzzled the spot between Esme's jawbone and her ear. She let out a squeal of a giggle, and Edward averted his eyes.

"I'll find my bedroom," he said quietly. Gathering a few boxes, he began to trudge up the stairs.

The two of them had come up several weeks earlier to find the small farmhouse. Esme had been absolutely enchanted by the house's features, and Carlisle had drawn a large cheque on his new bank account at once. Edward could feel the joy rushing off her as she looked around the home, and saw the imaginings of the new furnishings she would buy. These new things would replace the old, the vestiges of a life that belonged to Carlisle and Edward alone, that had been carefully placed into a moving truck and which Edward had met here earlier that morning.

It had been past time for them to leave, he knew this. Carlisle had drilled into him the importance of keeping cover, complete with the gruesome images of the vampires that his former Italian colleagues had torn to pieces. Yet they had lingered in Ashland, and Edward knew why. Carlisle had replaced the tiny wooden cross that marked the infant-sized grave at St. Alban's church cemetery, changing it to a fine, but simple marble slab which bore the name JOHN DAVID PLATT in carefully-tooled lettering. Esme had visited first with Carlisle and then later by herself as she gained control. She told Carlisle that the visits helped her, but Edward felt the increased heaviness of her spirit each time she came home.

But she let Carlisle think otherwise, and truthfully, whatever pain they caused her, Edward knew she didn't want to leave. So they had remained in Ashland longer than had been safe. Now they moved across seven states and a time zone, to a new life that was the same as the old, except now Edward carried secrets for two instead of only for one.

The hinges on the door to his bedroom groaned in protest as he pushed the door open with his hips and dropped the boxes in his arms, which were mostly books and sheet music. His room was furnished sparsely—three bookshelves, a desk, and a simple chair. He had no need for a bed or and no desire for the comfortable reading chairs that Carlisle preferred.

Edward unpacked the boxes at vampire speed, and a few minutes later found himself standing amidst full bookshelves, a few pieces of sheet music scattered across the immense desk. For a moment he thumbed them, his oil-less fingers leaving no smudge on the pages. It was an apt metaphor. His body left no more marks than did his existence. He was easily—and perfectly—erased.

Quietly, he slunk back down the stairs. Carlisle and Esme were sitting on the back porch in dining chairs they'd carried outside. Their hands were clasped together; their fingers intertwined, and the tiny diamond on Esme's left hand threw broken rainbows across Carlisle's cheek. Instinctively, Edward turned the other way.

The day was overcast; it was a good day to explore. But he didn't head toward the tiny downtown strip. He found himself instead moving toward the edges of the tiny town, drawing himself away from the invasive thoughts of the people around him. He walked nearly at a human's pace, perhaps a little faster, as he was tall and could get away with strides that were a little longer and a little quicker than an average human could keep up with.

The Barre train station was small, just a single stone building where the ticketer sat, and one platform of worn, rickety wood, and at first it surprised Edward when he came across it a few miles outside of town. A single locomotive chugged quietly at the platform, and the handful of minds he could hear all seemed intent on listening for its whistle. It was leaving soon, he realized.

Cuing in more closely to the minds around him, Edward ferreted out some of their destinations. Rochester. Pittsburgh. Cleveland. Chicago.

Chicago?

His feet carried him across the grass and the path of packed dirt to the tiny ticketing building, and before he knew it, he was holding out a five-dollar bill.

“May I purchase a ticket to Chicago, please?”

The ticketer, a man in his forties with a stout mustache, stared at him a moment. “Aren’t you a little young to be traveling that far on a whim, son?” He looked behind Edward and made note of his utter lack of luggage.

“I’m going to visit my brother-in-law,” Edward answered, the lie sliding coolly. “He is studying at the medical college there.” It was easiest, he found, to always build any additional lies off the main one; in this case that he was Carlisle’s wife’s brother. This had been their cover all along. But now there really was a wife, and Carlisle was now a devoted young husband instead of masquerading as a bereft widower.

The man still looked at him skeptically, and so Edward plunked down an additional twenty dollars. “I’d like to go to Chicago,” he repeated, pushing the twenty toward the man.

As the ticket seller’s eyes grew wide, he wondered silently if Edward were a bootlegger, or even perhaps one of Capone’s men. At that moment, however, the whistle blasted, and a sharp look from Edward was all it took for the man to pull the bill toward himself. He folded it neatly and pushed it into his breast pocket, then began to make change with the other bill Edward had given. “You’ll want a Pullman car, I assume?”

Minutes later found Edward standing before the now-chugging locomotive as the conductor leaned out of a doorway down the platform and called, “All aboard!” Family members who had walked or driven to the train station stood on the platform, waving at those whom they’d dropped off. He watched them a moment, and imagined Carlisle and Esme, back at the new house, sitting quietly on the back porch, completely oblivious to his whereabouts. The train whistle sounded once more, and Edward swung one foot into the doorway near the front of the train.

The train lurched suddenly, and his foot slipped.

It was only a fraction of a second, and he of course recovered at once. He suspected no human watching had even seen it. Yet it was enough. He had just long enough to think of how happy Carlisle and Esme had looked as Carlisle carried her across the threshold earlier that morning. He imagined the looks on their faces when he didn’t return. He saw clearly the frantic

looks passing between them, the way Carlisle would run after his scent until it disappeared at this very spot. He could see Carlisle standing here in the dark, staring at the empty tracks.

“You coming, son?”

It was a gentleman perhaps in his thirties. He came to the door and offered Edward his hand, his too-large suit crinkling a bit at the elbow as he stretched out his arm. Unthinkingly, Edward put his own hand forward, but then pulled it back.

“No,” he said quietly. “I think I’m going to stay.”

He hopped off the stair and back onto the platform as the train whistle blew once more. The engine poured steam into the air, and he took a step backwards. He knew the ticket man was staring at him, wondering why he was retreating, but he turned away. The train’s wheels screeched into motion. People on the platform began waving more frantically.

Edward turned away.

He would stay, he thought, beginning to walk slowly down the platform as the train gathered speed at his back. He would become Edward Platt, or Edward Masen—he didn’t know, and he didn’t care. He would go back to his sparse room with its books, and play at the new piano when it was delivered, and try to be happy for Carlisle and Esme in their newfound love. He would forget about having once been the important one.

But, he thought, as his feet left the train platform and landed on the packed dirt of the road, perhaps he would come back to the train station tomorrow.



Barre, VT

1927

The burn was *gone*.

Not slaked, not merely postponed, not held at the edges of his consciousness only to gradually creep more and more to the forefront of his mind, but absolutely gone. Edward had lived this falsification of a life for nine years, and not once in that time had he felt the peace and strength that he had known as a human. Vampirism to him had always reminded him that he was weaker; the call of the human blood, even when resisted, served as a constant reminder that he

was inadequate, beastly—a demon among men. But now the call was gone, and there was an uncomfortable spring in his step as he raced back toward the farmhouse.

Frankly, it felt a little odd.

Esme was preoccupied with plans for turning their dilapidated barn into an adequate garage for Carlisle's car, and this allowed Edward to slip into the house unnoticed. He went immediately up to his room, seating himself on the hard, wooden desk chair and putting his head into his hands. The man's blood seemed to thrum in his veins. It had been beyond delicious, and the thought of how good it had tasted simultaneously made his throat ache and his head hurt.

Eleanor knew nothing. His bite had been straight through the man's Adam's apple, silencing him forever. Edward had been forced to live her happy thoughts in the bath as the images of terror flashed in the mind of the dying man. The body had been carried on his back into the wood behind Eleanor's home and dumped into the creek—he'd gone to the trouble to shove a large branch through the wound his teeth had created and to break the man's neck. The creek was high from the spring rains; if the body was even found, they would assume he'd had a horrific, drunken fall.

And so he'd left the woman splashing languidly in the bath, returning to his home under the cover of night, like the beast he now knew himself unequivocally to be. He didn't want to come home, and yet he knew no other place. He sat huddled over his desk, his hands shaking as they cradled his forehead.

He sat silently for a long time before his breath shook as he gave a sudden, involuntary gasp. The sensation was foreign, and were it not for Esme having already made the sound so familiar to his ears, he wouldn't have recognized his own crying.

For a moment he sat upright in shock, feeling the deep shame and sadness begin to rock him. But then, leaning forward, he laid his head on the desk and pressed his cheek to the cool wood as his shoulders heaved uncontrollably. The entire desk shook with his body, and its legs rattled against the wooden floor.

The sound drew Carlisle upstairs when he arrived home a short while later, and Edward burrowed his head more deeply into his arms as the scent grew nearer and nearer. Finally the scent enveloped him, but he didn't look up and instead sat in silence before he could look at his arms.

What's wrong with him? came the panicked thought. Memories of the terse words exchanged earlier in the day raced through Carlisle's mind.

"Please, just go away, Carlisle," Edward managed.

The heavy hand came to lie on the back of his neck, the thumb moving its way up the vertebrae at the top of his spine. Edward flinched, but he was unable to move. If he pulled himself away, Carlisle would see his face. So he contented himself merely to listen as the older vampire stood behind him, breathing steadily, perfunctorily, and unnecessarily.

Strange thoughts began to pour forth. Edward saw himself, flinching from Carlisle's hand repeatedly. He saw his face, a smile plastered across it as he stood at the altar in the tiny side chapel beside his mentor and guide, and he realized now as he saw into Carlisle's mind that Carlisle had recognized his acquiescence to the marriage for the charade that it was. He saw Carlisle lying next to Esme in their luxurious bed, and heard Carlisle's smooth voice breaking as he spoke.

"I'm terrified," the memory-Carlisle said. *"He's so changed, Esme. I wish you had known him before. This is not my Edward."* Then more memories, each assaulting Edward's mind as it assaulted Carlisle's—Ashland, Barre, on hunts, in their home, in private moments and in public. The same thought pulled forth again and again, sometimes spoken aloud, sometimes thought silently but always in Edward's absence: *I don't know what to do.*

And it was only then, only when the realization of the grave misunderstanding that had lasted almost six years reared its head, that Edward finally allowed himself to look up and meet his father's eyes in shame.

The hand was gone from his neck at once as Carlisle staggered backwards, the horror registering simultaneously on his face and in his mind.

"Edward..." he breathed. "Oh please, no." *Tell me it was an accident,* Carlisle's mind began to beg. *Please, tell me it was a mistake. You slipped, Edward. He slipped. He only slipped. Tell me you slipped.*

He could, he realized. He could say the words, and he would be welcomed into Carlisle's embrace as surely as Esme had been when Carlisle had discovered her mistake six years before. A tiny lie, easily forgivable by his kind. And especially forgivable by Carlisle, whose compassion knew no bounds.

Please say it was only a mistake.

Except that was the problem. There had been no mistake. The mistake would have been those greasy fingers where they didn't belong. The mistake would have been the damage to the woman, to her unborn child. The mistake would have been not to interfere, to stand idly by as Carlisle did, merely doing his best but not doing what he *could* do to save those around him from their suffering.

His father's eyes followed him warily as he rose to his full height. He and Carlisle were just a fraction of an inch different, although Carlisle's body was that of a man's and Edward's was still the gangly, half-finished form of a teenager. He stared into Carlisle's eyes, red upon gold, and told the truth.

"I made no mistake."

A pain shot through Carlisle at his words, so deep it nearly knocked Edward to his knees. But the man recovered himself at once, turning a sorrowful expression on Edward.

You are forgiven.

"I don't want your forgiveness, Carlisle."

The expression softened. "You don't get to choose that, son," he began, but Edward brought him up short.

"I don't *want* forgiveness!"

The older vampire moved to embrace him, and at once, Edward knew he'd had enough. There was no way to make Carlisle see. He would forgive, endlessly, and the thought made Edward tired. The last thing he wanted was this piteous gaze, these open arms. He needed the anger—he needed Carlisle, for once, to fight. Fight for him, fight against him; he didn't care, but anything was better than *pity*.

Edward swiftly closed the gap as Carlisle advanced with his arms ready to embrace, diving for the same place on Carlisle's body where his own scars were. A sickening metallic scrape rang out as Edward's teeth clamped down on Carlisle's neck, and the sound of bone breaking echoed in the sparsely-furnished room. Blood spurted from the wound—not the fragrant human blood, but the stomach-turning blood of some animal that had been the blond vampire's most recent kill.

Floorboards groaned and cracked beneath them as the two crashed to the floor, and a terrible roar of pain ripped from Carlisle's lips. His left arm went limp against his side, the tendons severed and the collarbone that had once supported it shattered. But his right arm

recovered instinctively, and Edward saw only the split-second of thought in Carlisle's mind before the hand swung around to make contact with his face. A second sickening crack rang out, and blood began to gush from Edward's now-broken nose.

He, too, howled in pain, shooting to his feet at once and dragging the back of his wrist across his upper lip. It came away crimson.

Before he thought, his tongue darted out and licked the blood from his hand. Carlisle's mind registered his horror at Edward's action, but he remained writhing in pain on the floor, unable to put pressure on the one arm to stand himself back up.

In seconds, Edward's hand was clean. He gulped down the last mouthful of blood and venom, and shamefully met his sire's eyes once more.

"Son—"

"Don't call me 'son!'" His feet took him backwards so quickly he might have fallen, had he been human.

In that moment, Carlisle managed to get his right palm beneath him and sprang to his feet, his left arm still dangling limp at his side. Edward looked away, sickened by what he'd done.

"Edward, please," he said quietly, but it was no use. Edward met his father's shining golden eyes for what would prove to be the last time, and he looked away at once.

"I'm not who you thought I was," he mumbled. "I don't belong here."

Carlisle had always told him his speed would slow as his body finally churned the last of his human blood into venom. But it had never happened, and as Edward ducked Carlisle's second attempt to embrace him, he was grateful. Perhaps it was the injury, or perhaps it was just the shock of being turned down twice, but Carlisle stayed still as Edward shot through his arms once more—this time not in the direction of his body, but in the direction of the stairs.

She was on the stairwell, trembling, her hands thrown over her face. Fear for her husband's safety was written in every plane of her face. When she saw his eyes, her own squeezed shut, but this didn't stop her thought: *Like a demon.*

A demon, indeed. Reaching the front door, he yanked it open, only to be greeted with the torrential downpour he had registered only faintly in the furthest reaches of his mind. For a brief second, this gave him pause, but then he was over the threshold and hurtling into the darkness and the pelting water. He pumped his legs hard, surprised at how fast they would move fueled by the blood of the monster he had disposed, and he was away from the tiny house in seconds, far

enough that the thoughts faded, the concern waned, the terrible image of his own visage replayed in the other minds left behind. But as a loud clap of thunder sounded, his super-human ears still picked up in the distance the sound of his father's desperate scream.



Rochester, NY

1931

Esme was at the back of the house, gardening by moonlight. It was a favorite hobby of hers. Faded bits of her human memories had revealed to Edward a perpetual love of playing in the dirt, which she had learned to channel to more domestic pursuits as she grew into womanhood. She had begun gardening once more not long after their move to Vermont, and now in Rochester their house was surrounded by beds. Most were filled with flowers, but there was also a healthy vegetable garden whose bounty Esme took to the aid society. She found her peace in the gardens, and both the men had learned over the years not to disturb her there.

But as Edward's lanky form cast a long shadow from the doorway of the house, she beckoned him.

Spring had given way to a hot and sticky summer, and the air was thick tonight as Edward moved silently to Esme's side. She was on her knees in the dirt, her hands repeatedly moving forward as she spied something, yanked it, and tossed it aside.

When he was close enough that his body towered over hers, Esme looked up and tossed her hair out of her face. For a moment she only gazed at him, then gestured to the patch of earth beside her.

"You were just standing there," she told him quietly when he dropped to his knees beside her. "I thought you might want something to do." She gestured to the growing pile of discarded green plants at her left side and then back to the garden. "You can help weed."

Edward looked from her dirt-streaked hands to the plants at her side, and recalled the plodding way she had mechanically uprooted them—pull, twist, toss. Her speed, or lack thereof, confused him.

"Couldn't you already have this finished? Why are you working so slowly?"

She laughed, and the sound gave him pause as he tried to remember the last time he'd heard it. None of them laughed much anymore, it seemed.

Still young, she thought, and Edward winced a little. Esme was older than him in all ways but one, and her general good humor about her new life seemed to give her an edge even in the arena where Edward technically had three years on her.

“What do you mean, ‘Still young’?” he asked, and she gave him a sympathetic smile in answer.

“Sometimes it’s not about being fast. I know that’s probably a tough concept for you.”

He began to protest at once, but then realized that her intention was to tease him. She reached forward, grabbed another shoot, and gave it the methodical twist-pull. “It gives me time to think.”

He frowned. “But we think quickly, too.”

Another laugh. “It can just be good to slow down sometimes, Edward.” She gestured to the garden. In the dark and in the moonlight, the plants looked an odd shade of purple. He reached forward, grabbed one, and yanked.

The feeling of the release and the tiny zipping sound as the roots gave way their hold on the earth was strangely satisfying. He reached forward and pulled another. Esme watched him work for a moment, admonishing him once when he reached for a carrot plant by mistake, then quietly went back to her own patch.

He had pulled forty-seven weeds and had a small pile growing when it happened. He didn’t know the plant by sight, although Esme told him later it was a dandelion. But its root was stronger than the others, and pulling it required just enough of an increase in force that it brought back to his fingers the memory of human tendons snapping, the crush of a windpipe between his thumb and forefinger. The plant came free, spraying bits of dirt onto his slacks, but he didn’t throw it into the pile, and instead stared at it, his hand shaking.

Esme cocked her head toward him as her own hands came to a stop. Her puzzled concern hit him at once. Carlisle and she had talked, he knew. He’d told her everything he knew about Edward’s absence. But she didn’t probe, just simply pushed herself up so that she was sitting on her heels. In the moonlight, her hair looked almost the same shade as his. They passed well as brother and sister, if they were a bit too close in age to pass for mother and son.

“She reminded me of my mother,” he said quietly, looking back down at the churned dirt. “The woman in Barre. That was why I followed her at first. And then there was someone else. Following her, I mean. And he”—he gulped—“he was going to force himself on her that night. So...I did something about it.”

He looked over to find that Esme’s eyes were trained on him. Her lips were slightly parted, as though she were about to answer, but she instead nodded for him to go on.

“I never meant to leave. I thought I was just going to go for a day or two—actually, I was going to stay until Carlisle and I fought. But then I thought I should get away, and then by the time I made it to Montpelier, I found another. His mind was so dark, and it was so...*easy*.”

The memory caused him to shudder. He’d fled from Barre that afternoon feeling rejected and hurt, but not with intention to stay away for long. But he’d barely reached Montpelier before he’d allowed the thoughts of another to infiltrate his mind once more—a man planning to off his cousin over a bad bootlegging deal.

The man had never made it to the speakeasy.

And so Edward Masen Cullen, the once-beloved son of the doctor had become the dark avenging angel. Each victim took him further, made it harder to turn back. If he couldn’t accept Carlisle’s forgiveness for one, how could he accept it for ten? Fifty? Two hundred? And so his shame and guilt had kept him going until they nearly crushed him.

There was a swishing sound as Esme moved across the grass, closing the space between them so that she could lay a hand on his shoulder. She said nothing. It wasn’t the backrub or the overt comforting that was more typical of Carlisle’s style, but just a simple reminder that she was present. They sat that way, silent and in the darkness, for several minutes before Edward continued.

“It got fun,” he said at last. “One day, I was...hunting. And I chased a man. Chased him, at human speed. He was just as vile as the rest, but when I caught him, I realized that I’d gone after him for fun. I wasn’t thirsty, and there were hundreds I could’ve chosen, but I didn’t. And I could’ve just gone at full speed and he never would have even seen me. I chased him because he was a good runner, and it was *fun*.”

He scooped up a handful of topsoil and then tipped his hand sideways, letting it trickle off his palm into a little pile as he remembered that day. He had crossed a line, but he hadn’t realized that he’d crossed it until that moment. The feel of the ground beneath his knees

reminded him of how he had fallen there in the dank alley, the blood still dribbling down his chin and his howl of shame echoing off the brick walls.

This ground was softer, though, and that fact did not escape him.

Her voice startled him. “And that was when you stopped?”

He hadn’t been able to stop, not right away. But it had gotten better then. He started to pay more attention to who he was killing again, going longer between kills, until he was going weeks at a stretch.

“I just...I started being smarter about it again. I didn’t feed as often. And then one day I was out, and it had been weeks since I’d fed, and I just...started running.”

His image flashed in her mind—dark-eyed, sopping wet, and standing on their lawn. For a fraction of a second, the hand on his shoulder squeezed, and then the memory shifted. He dissolved, to be replaced with the woman whose flowing hair reminded him so much of Elizabeth Masen’s. Except now she sat outside, in the town’s small park, holding a bundle. As he watched in Esme’s memory, the bundle reached out a tiny hand and pulled down its blanket.

“Did you know she was pregnant?” Esme whispered.

He nodded, looking away.

“Carlisle delivered the baby. He insisted on it. There was a scandal when they found the body of...that man.” She didn’t say “that man you killed” and for this, Edward was grateful.

“They found a photograph of her in his home,” she went on. “Carlisle thought that maybe she’d had something to do with what you did, and so we watched her. We hoped maybe you would come back to see her and we could talk to you. But you never did.” Eleanor reappeared in Esme’s mind, the baby clutched to her chest. The child kicked and giggled in her arms. He was a fat baby, and cheerful. Above him, his mother smiled widely, looking every bit as beautiful as she had when Edward had last seen her.

“She named him Thomas,” Esme said quietly.

Edward swallowed, looking back at the garden. Of course Esme had fixated on the baby; the loss of her own child was still that which most pained her about this life. She would see the existence of that child as a reason to justify everything that Edward had done. He couldn’t have it that way.

“I’m still a murderer.”

She caught him off-guard when she nodded.

“Of course you are,” she said thoughtfully. “And those people you killed are a part of you now. But so is that baby, and so is every bit of good that came from what you did. You carry them both, Edward. That’s how it works. I didn’t leave Charles soon enough, but that gave me John. I took my own life, but that brought me to Carlisle.” She gestured to the garden. “We don’t get to live without our weeds.”

Edward looked askance at the tiny pile of shriveling greenery that lay beside his knee. He could almost see them wilting. It happened so quickly once their roots were severed from the ground. They were like the bodies of the men he’d killed, one after another, lying in the dirt, slowly withering away to nothing. He ran his hand over the pile absently.

“There were so *many*,” he whispered.

Oh, Edward. She moved at full speed now, and her arms came around him protectively. He stilled himself, letting her hold him. Her arms were more slender than Carlisle’s, her wrists more delicate where they crossed over his shoulder. In the moonlight, her bare arms shone faintly. She laid her head on his shoulder a moment, and her hair tickled his ear. They sat for several minutes. Edward could hear the thrum of the summer locusts around them, and the gentle whooshing of the stream in the distance.

Esme’s chest expanded and contracted against his own ribcage as she heaved a sigh, and Edward felt a strange emotion from her.

Pride?

His lip curled in disgust. “How can you be *proud* of me?”

She shifted her body again, so that they were looking at each other directly, although one arm stayed draped over his shoulder, her wrist bending a little at his clavicle. “Edward,” she said, “that you feel remorse at all is what makes you human.”

Carlisle surfaced in her mind then, kneeling over the parts of the smashed piano. Edward had never seen the thing; so quick his father had been to remove the evidence. The living room had been empty by the time he wandered back down from his bedroom an hour later. But in Esme’s memory he saw his father, the pain evident on the man’s face as he began to gather the pieces of the instrument. He recalled his own terrible words, “*Why didn’t you just let me die?*” and winced. The apology to his father for these words still had not been made. He had gone for the jugular—figuratively, this time, which on the one hand was an improvement, but on the other,

the words would hurt Carlisle more permanently than any bite he could inflict. He had lashed out at the doctor, but Edward knew himself to be the one who deserved the harsh rebuke.

He hung his head. "I've failed him." To his surprise, Esme laughed.

"He's said the same thing, you know," she answered when Edward raised his eyebrows. "He's afraid he's let you down. Afraid he did something to cause you to leave. I've told him he's wrong, but he doesn't listen."

"He didn't do anything."

"I know that. But he wants to be perfect for you. And while Carlisle is many, many wonderful things, perfect is just not one of them." She gave Edward a conspiratorial smile as she removed her hand from his shoulder. "He loves you more than anyone, Edward. And I say that as his wife. That you came back will always mean more to him than any number of deaths ever could."

She stood then, brushing away some of the dirt that clung to her skirt. Bending over to pick up the shriveling weeds, she threw them into the woods with such speed they made little zinging noises as they hit passing trees. She brushed her palms clean against each other, then turned back to Edward.

"Thank you for helping me weed."

He nodded and got to his feet behind her. They both jerked upright when they recognized the rumble of an engine in the distance. Carlisle insisted on driving as the humans drove—it took almost twenty minutes from the time they heard him until he arrived on the doorstep.

"That will be your Carlisle," Esme said, as though Edward hadn't heard the engine himself. She started for the back door, but paused when she saw Edward hadn't followed. Her eyebrows raised, and for a moment she worried for his hesitation.

"It will take time," she said when he didn't move forward. "But time, Edward, is certainly something you have." She beckoned him. "Come. Help me greet your father."

She turned, her hair swirling over her shoulders as she did. And as the quiet purr of the slow engine wound its way ever closer, he followed her inside, this woman whose hair was the same shade as his, the same shade as Eleanor's—the shade of his mother's.



Barre, VT

1931

He smelled them long before he saw the house. After three years of solitude, the cloy of vampire perfume was almost foreign to him now. He recognized them both—Esme’s sweeter scent, Carlisle’s earthier one. At once, he was flooded with both relief and trepidation.

Their thoughts broke through to him before their voices did. They were confused, worried. Angry, even. Carlisle’s mind was filled with the idea of a hospital, somewhere else, and this caused him to pause.

They were thinking of leaving.

He came to a halt on the lawn, two hundred yards from the house, unwilling to get close enough to hear their conversation. It had turned from a gentle spring shower to an outright storm, and every now and again the whole sky lit up in purples and blues as he watched an upstroke shoot from the ground toward the dark clouds. Weighed down by the soaking rain, his clothing, hung off his body, pulling his own weight toward the ground as he stood, dripping, watching as the shadows moved inside the house.

Edward felt the upstroke begin in the ground beneath his feet—the electricity, the anticipation, the magnetic pull toward the sky destined to destroy anything in its path. Unconsciously, his feet spread themselves a little wider. He had chosen this path, and he would stand his ground.

The electricity shot from the ground to the sky a few yards behind him, and the pressure of the hot air expanding outward behind him seemed to singe his skin. The sky lit up in purple, blue, and fiery white over his head, throwing the whole house and yard into stark relief.

At the window, Esme turned.

For a fraction of a second, he almost ran. He could beat them, if he needed to. His whole being filled with shame—for running from this simple house and the people who occupied it, for the lives he had taken in his absence, for the baleful nature of his return. His shoulders sagged as he looked downward, away from the gaze of the woman at the window, and yet, his feet did not move.

The hesitation was just long enough. There was a resounding crack as the front door of the tiny house was wrenched from its hinges, and a second slam as it landed on the wood floor behind.

He had forgotten what it looked like to watch one of his kind move. The speed so fast it was almost stillness, the graceful way their bodies moved even as they both made a beeline for him at a flat-out run. He was still standing there, feeling the remaining heat from the lightning, listening to the rumbling thunder echoing from the trees and the house, when they both slammed into him.

Had they not come at him from different sides, he might have been knocked over, but as it was, they mashed him between them as their arms came around him. One of Carlisle's hands twined itself in Edward's hair, and he found himself nearly crushed against the strong chest even as Esme's more delicate arms grabbed him from behind.

"I'm sorry," a voice said, and it was shaking. Crying. "I'm sorry; I'm sorry; I'm so sorry..."

It wasn't until the third or fourth iteration that he recognized the quavering voice was his own. Around him, Esme and Carlisle were laughing and crying at once, the rain dripping down their faces as they all became drenched together and water whipped in through the front door of the house beyond. The wind howled, driving the rain against their backs, and more lightning struck in the distance. Yet Edward stayed trapped securely between his parents, mumbling his litany of apology as they responded with a silent one of their own:

We missed you.

We love you.

Welcome home.

~Fine~