

THE OTHER WOMAN (or Esme's Lament)

The most painful event of my mother's human life was losing her newborn baby boy. She will tell you that herself. What she won't tell you is that, as a vampire, she carries with her a pain of another sort.

I was seventeen when my human life drained away in an influenza ward, just one of the 675,000 U.S. victims of the 1918–1919 pandemic. My parents, Elizabeth Masen and Edward Masen, Sr., were two others.

Once admitted to the hospital, my father never regained consciousness and died swiftly under the watchful eyes of Dr. Carlisle Cullen, who was working the night shift at Lakeside Hospital throughout the crisis. When my mother and I were admitted four months later, the good doctor was already acquainted with us and our plight.

Carlisle was unique among the staff of the hospital. No other doctor, nurse, or aide would have remembered us. There were simply too many patients who passed through there on their way to the morgue. But unlike his peers, Carlisle's memory was infallible. To this day, he remembers the name, age, and severity of disease of every patient he saw, and a lot more besides.

For some reason, he carried a particular affection for my mother and me, though we were not his patients for long. No matter how busy he was, he made time to visit us at least once every day to check on our conditions and to chat with my mother, Elizabeth.

Carlisle has said that he thought I would die first, because I was so much sicker than my mother. In all likelihood, she would have survived her less severe infection had she taken Carlisle's advice and kept to herbed, but she could not. There was so little staff to care for patients, their numbers having been decimated by the war, and then by the flu, that my mother got out of her sick bed to nurse me. It weakened her so severely and so precipitously, that when Carlisle came to work on our third night in the hospital, she was at death's door. With her last few breaths, she begged for my life.

"Save him!" she cried. "You must do everything in your power. What others cannot do, that is what you must do for my Edward." Carlisle said that her eyes bored right through him as he held her hand and watched her tortured face become insensible.

Somehow, my mother knew that Carlisle was more than what he appeared to be. Perhaps she thought he had a special connection to the Almighty—it wouldn't be the first time Carlisle has been mistaken for an angel. I think it likely that she had a gift for discerning another's thoughts or intentions and it is that gift which I have inherited from her. However she perceived it, she knew that Carlisle had special abilities and in her final hours, implored him to use them—not for herself, but for me.

That moment was the first time in his vampire existence that Carlisle had felt recognized for who and what he was. It changed him. Elizabeth had pierced the shell of loneliness that had isolated him for 235 years.

And that is when Carlisle decided to save my life, to grant Elizabeth's dying wish. He had longed for a companion so often, but could never bring himself to damn another creature to his unchanging existence. He did it then, and afterwards, it became easier for him to change the others in our family. He came to believe that transforming a human into a vampire was not wrong when there was no other hope for saving their life. Obviously, he did not regard it as a panacea, or he would have changed many more dying humans since then. He chose each of us in particular for reasons of his own.

I know one thing for sure. If I had died first, as Carlisle expected, he would have changed Elizabeth. For you see, Carlisle loved my mother. It was not something he could declare to her, her husband having recently passed, and she and her son sick and under his care, but he thought she would survive her illness. He thought he would have time. Unfortunately, her sickness grew worse much faster than mine in the end, and time ran out.

So Carlisle changed me—not only for Elizabeth, but also because of Elizabeth. In his hesitation to perform the act he considered unholy, he missed his chance with her. He mourned the loss deeply as he wheeled her body to the morgue. In his despair, he came back to spirit me away and

make me his own. That is not to say that Carlisle doesn't love me...indeed, I believe he loves me all the more because I am my mother's son. I am a powerful reminder of her that he shall keep forever. If you've ever thought that Carlisle favors me, you would not be wrong, and now you know why.

Carlisle told Esme about Elizabeth before asking for her hand. Esme, who is such a loving and generous soul, took it in stride, offering Carlisle her understanding and reassurance. She has never let him see that she harbors inchoate, vague feelings of being his "second choice." She wasn't—of course she wasn't. After all, Carlisle changed Esme.

Clearly, Carlisle and Esme are perfect mates and ecstatically in love—neither would be complete without the other. It doesn't change the fact that Esme retains that small measure of sadness and doubt.

One might think that Esme would resent me, but generous as she is, I believe she loves me especially because I am the son of one whom Carlisle loved. Despite that, I have seen the sadness in my vampire mother's mind from time to time, when the past pays a visit.

If my father knew, he would do everything in his power to make it right. He would explain that what he felt in the past in no way lessens the joy of his love for Esme in the present. That he feels honored and happy that she chose him. Perhaps he could ease her mind.

But he doesn't know, has never realized. And much as I love them both, it is nothing I can ever reveal outside these pages.

Edward

