

THE LOST CULLEN

No doubt you've heard that as a human Esme bore a child. Bella has described my vampire mother as "a little rounder" than the rest of us (though she's still quite slender). She has that voluptuous appearance because she delivered her baby only three days before she became a vampire. The baby's name was Charles George, for Charlie Chaplin and George Gershwin, both of whom Esme loved, though if asked, she would say that "Charles" was for her husband, and "George" was for her father. I knew better.

Another little-known fact about Esme: her baby was born only six months after she was married. Charles Evenson was a cad, forced to the altar by the proverbial shotgun (yes, ol' George was known for his twitchy trigger finger). So, three months into her marriage, six months pregnant, her husband found himself a little something on the side and poor Esme was left alone every day, and many a night too. She knew she could endure, though, because she already had someone else to love.

Esme was a real beauty; still is, as a matter of fact, and by all accounts, so was little Charlie...green eyes, soft blonde hair. A cutie if ever there was one. For three days. **For. Three. Days.** Can you imagine? Now that Bella and I are parents, I can begin to understand how horrendous it would be to lose a child.

Like Esme, most of us remember whatever caused our human death as the most significant event of our human life. For Carlisle, it was the horror of being bitten by the London sewer wraith and crawling off to die. (You might have noticed that he always wears his collars high on his neck, or covers his neck with a scarf, or protects it with a coat or hat, because that's where his transformative bite was made.)

My most troubling human memory is of the Spanish Influenza pandemic and Rosalie's is of being assaulted and left for dead by her fiance and his friends. Jasper's worst human memory is being tricked by the evil Maria into stopping to assist her and her vampire friends. Emmett is troubled by the bear attack that almost killed him. (He still likes to wrestle bears because he's forever trying to win that last battle.)

Of all of us, only Alice has no disquieting human experiences in her memory, none at all. The "treatment" for asylum residents in the 1920s was electroshock, which steals the victim's humanity by wiping out her memory. Therefore, I surmise that electroshock was the worst experience of Alice's human life, though she doesn't remember it.

Bella's worst memory is of Renesmee's near-death from suffocation before she was born. (In truth, I'm only guessing since I can't read her mind. I will never ask, though, because the other possibility is my having abandoned her in the woods a number of years ago. I simply couldn't bear it if that was her answer.)

For Esme, the worst thing that happened to her as a human was losing little Charlie. His lungs hadn't fully developed, apparently, or perhaps his heart was not strong enough, or maybe his immune system wasn't yet activated. For whatever reason, he developed "lung fever" right after his birth. We call it pneumonia now and it's caused by fluid building up in the lungs. It's similar to what killed most of the Spanish Flu victims (including me).

Esme wouldn't have jumped off of a cliff if her baby had survived his illness, but sometimes I fantasize about what our family would be like if he had, if Carlisle had changed Esme, but her baby

somehow, miraculously, had lived. Would she have made off with the baby and brought him along with her to live as a Cullen?

The answer, my friend, is yes, yes she would have. Esme would have been incapable of abandoning her baby; our family would have begun differently and would live differently to this day. For one thing, the child would have grown up always wondering if he was adopted. And the family's answer to that would have to be "yes, yes you are." There's no other way we could have explained to little Charlie why his skin was a different color than ours; why everyone looks exactly the same year after year in the family photographs except for him; and perhaps worst of all, why we'd never let poor Charlie join in any of our "reindeer games."

We'd all feel badly, of course, that he could never legitimately win at any competition with his family members...not cards, not chess, not trivia, not arm wrestling, not bird-watching, not rock-paper-scissors. No, I take that back. Probably, he could beat us all at pie-eating, though with Emmett's competitive spirit, you never know.

It is interesting to think about how Charlie would have grown to adulthood, married, and had children of his own. The Cullen family would have heirs, descendants, a family tree! That would be something. It makes me wonder whether Renesmee will be able to bear children someday. If so, might they be half-puppy? I shudder at the thought. (Though I must admit that Seth was always a good kid.)

Edward

