

## THE SPANISH INFLUENZA

Contrary to what I said in my first diary entry, I do not write this bit of history (“his story”) to purge another’s secret from the forefront of my mind, but because it was a horrifying experience that haunts me still. Though many details are lost to time and to my transformation, my feelings about it remain, despite what I told Bella.

The Spanish Influenza pandemic was the most significant event of my human life. It was the worst scourge of infectious disease that the world has ever seen. Remember the Bubonic Plague, transmitted by rats in Europe in the 1300s? (Okay, me neither.) The Spanish Flu killed more people in one year than the plague killed in four.

It was called “Spanish” because France, where the disease was raging, and the U.S., where the disease was first identified, were fighting World War I and were enforcing strict news censorship. Nobody wanted Germany to know that the flu was killing half of the Allied soldiers in the trenches. (Psssst...guess what? The Germans already knew, since their soldiers were hunkered down in trenches visible from the French side and the flu was killing them too!) Spain was a neutral country, so when it spread there, newspapers reported it, giving the impression that it started in Spain.

Among the U.S. population as a whole, ten times more people died from the Spanish Flu than died in “The Great War.” Twenty-five percent of the population was infected. You get the idea—it was a killer. In fact, it was the war that made it so deadly. Soldiers in Europe lived in trenches in the worst mud, and rain, and cold you’ve ever seen. The sickest ones were shipped home or to hospitals, making contact with lots of people along the way. If I had lived long enough to enlist in the army, I probably would have died of the flu anyway!

The epidemic first appeared in March, 1918, in a Kansas military

*camp out in the “the boondocks,” as we former mid-Westerners would say. Though it spread rapidly and killed soldiers all over the country, civilians were not forewarned. In the late fall, it moved into the general population like a time bomb.*



Army Hospital Ward for Spanish Flu Victims, Ft. Riley, Kansas, 1918

*Two hundred thousand U.S. citizens died in the month of October. My father, Edward Masen, Sr., was one of them. In November, the war officially ended, and sick soldiers from around the world returned home to spread the disease anew. My mother, Elizabeth Masen, and I succumbed in that second wave of 1919. I got sick in February and entered Chicago's Lakeside hospital; my mother joined me shortly thereafter. That was where we met Dr. Carlisle Cullen.*

*The Spanish Influenza was a horrendous disease, nothing like the colds that humans call “the flu” today. It turned an ordinary cold into the neutron bomb. People would seem fine at dinner and be dead in the morning. People literally dropped dead in the streets. When you caught the bug, it quickly turned into pneumonia that filled your lungs with bloody, bubbly phlegm as thick as Elmer's glue. You couldn't spit it out;*

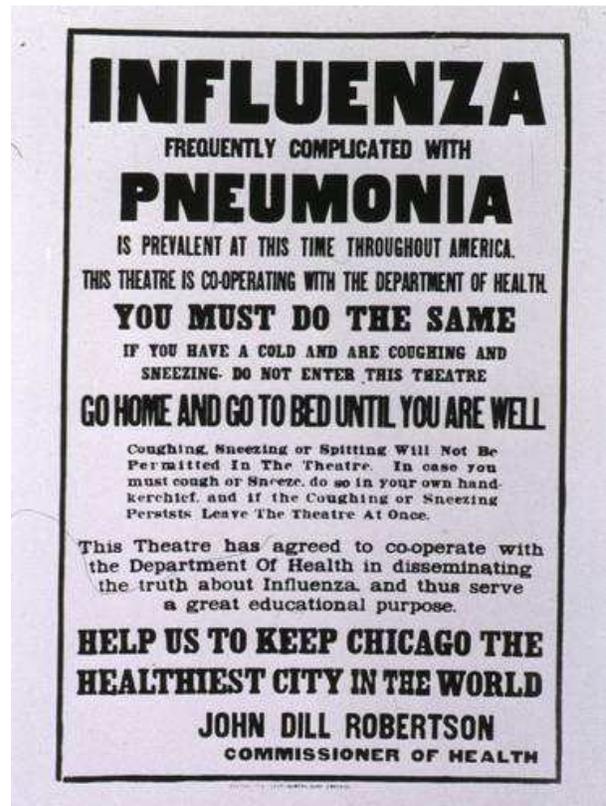
*you couldn't choke it out. You just coughed until you drowned. Patients turned blue within a few hours as they suffocated to death.*

*The most gory symptom was a freakish type of nose bleed. The flu caused great damage to the mucous membranes of the nose and throat. Without warning, a patient might cough or sneeze and blood would squirt out of his nose, shooting several feet. Now there's a nice way to spread disease!*

*Medical staff was decimated first by the war and then by the flu so that few professionals remained to care for stricken civilians. The hospitals were jammed with patients and empty of staff. Medical students were instantly given doctors' certificates and sent to help.*

*There wasn't anything to be done for most of us, though. You either got well or you didn't. Hot whisky toddies were the only available "medicine." The whiskey probably killed some germs and it did help one relax, which made breathing a tiny bit easier for a while. Besides bringing whisky, hospital workers endlessly fetched and carried—water, bedpans, linens, and, yes...bodies. Hundreds of bodies a day.*

*Carlisle said that the hospital morgue was nightmarish. There was a shortage of coffins and crematoria space, and not enough people to bury the bodies, so they stacked up from floor to ceiling like firewood. And this was at Lakeside—a nice, for-profit hospital. If it was bad there, it's hard to imagine what it was like at the indigent hospitals! I never*



*saw the morgue, because by the time Carlisle took my mother and me there, she was already dead and I was nearly so.*

*Despite what Bella said about it after jumping off the cliff, drowning has to be one of the worst ways for a human to die. You don't just pass out and float off into dreamland. Terror is a huge part of it, especially if you can breathe just a little. The body's attempt to save itself is very hard work, the choking, the coughing, concentrating to relax your throat so that what little air can get through does get through. All the while, you're panicking at every breath. And coughing takes air—a lot of air.*

*I'm sure you can appreciate my level of panic, then, when Bella began choking up blood on the day she died. It filled her lungs just like the pneumonia had filled mine. Despite my best efforts to clear her airways, she began turning blue, just as I and my parents had when we died. In truth, I'm not certain that I was even fully present at that moment. I was so traumatized that if Jacob hadn't been there to take over, Bella could have died for real.*

*Now there's a secret for you—despite the kudos Carlisle gives me, I carry that shame with me always. It is noteworthy that, though Bella was dying from complications of childbirth and I was dying from the Spanish Influenza, we would have expired in exactly the same way: from lack of oxygen. In the end, we were both saved by a Cullen vampire.*

*Edward*



*One can stand it to see one, two or twenty men die, but to see these poor devils dropping like flies sort of gets on your nerves.*

*—From a letter written by a doctor at Kansas army hospital, Sept 1918*

*I had a little bird,  
Its name was Enza.  
I opened the window,  
And in-flu-enza.*  
-Children's jump-rope rhyme, 1918



*Emergency Tent Hospital for Spanish Flu Victims*

This is a "funny" song and video about the pandemic, complete with relevant pictures:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV938U4Y96w>