

FADING AWAY RENEE

It's been a tough thing for Bella, trying to maintain some kind of connection to her mother since our wedding and her transformation. She'd never expected to and when we left on our honeymoon, Bella said her final goodbyes to her mother—or so she thought.

But after Bella became “ill” on our honeymoon, Renee reestablished contact with Charlie by calling him frequently, trying to find out what was happening with Bella. One thing led to another and we established a video link to Bella's mother, but we used it as infrequently as possible. We'd been trying to disappear quietly out of Renee's life. Bella's feeling was that she had Phil to look after her now and didn't need Bella the way she used to. But the fact remained that, though Renee might not have been the most maternal of mothers, she still loved her daughter and her daughter still loved her.

After a year with the sanatorium in Switzerland story, we couldn't believably string it out any longer without tempting Renee to get on a plane to Europe. If her daughter was still that sick after a year, then Renee would feel duty-bound to personally check out the situation. We needed to let Bella be healed and come up with a new story.

“Since we're here anyway, Edward is going to study at the Institute of Technology in Zurich,” Bella told her mother. “It's one of the top ten engineering universities in the world. I want to pursue my education too. I've decided to study teaching English as a second language. ESL teachers are needed everywhere and you know I always wanted to follow in your footsteps. By staying here for school, I can check in with the doctors every six months too. Yes Mom,

I'm perfectly fine, but I'm still an interesting research subject, I guess."

If we had been in Zurich, I would have loved to study at the Institute of Technology, so it wasn't too far of a reach as stories go. With this new excuse in place, we managed to stretch out our stay in Switzerland for four more years. But the time came to revisit things with Renee.

"Is it worse letting her go from your life altogether or trying to create and maintain some new fiction?" I asked Bella.

"I don't know, Edward," she sighed. "Both are so hard."

"We can figure out a new story. Cullens are expert at it."

"But this is my mother. I hate lying to her."

"We always knew that was part of the deal."

"You're right, I know. This is what I wanted. And she's doing fine without me, but...oh, I don't know. I guess I like having the option of letting her know I'm okay. And I feel like I have to in a way. Before the wedding, Renee hadn't called Charlie five times in ten years. I arranged my own pickup and deliveries between my parents. But now, it's almost like they're friends. If we disappear, then I'll be leaving Charlie to deal with all her questions and he'll have the same problem we have now."

*"Bella, I think we can postpone this decision if you want to. We can say we're moving somewhere else in Europe or that we're going to South America because we loved it so much on our honeymoon. We could avoid being on the same continent as your mother for three or four more years maybe. We'll have to give up the video-phoning soon, though. She's bound to meet some five-year-old who will show her that **Skype** works fine overseas."*

“That’s true,” Bella agreed with a chuckle.

“Do you think she’s heard your rough voice enough over the internet that she could handle your phone voice now?”

“Yes, I think I can make that work.”

“We could pretend to live somewhere in the wilderness in South America or Africa. You’ll teach English and I’ll help build wells or bridges or something.”

“Right. And then we never come back to the U.S. Will I have to die of another tropical disease, do you think?”

“Only if it becomes necessary. We wouldn’t have to stage a funeral.”

So that’s what we did a few months ago. We told Renee that we had joined the Peace Corps and been assigned to Uruguay. I would work on engineering projects and Bella would teach English as a Second Language.

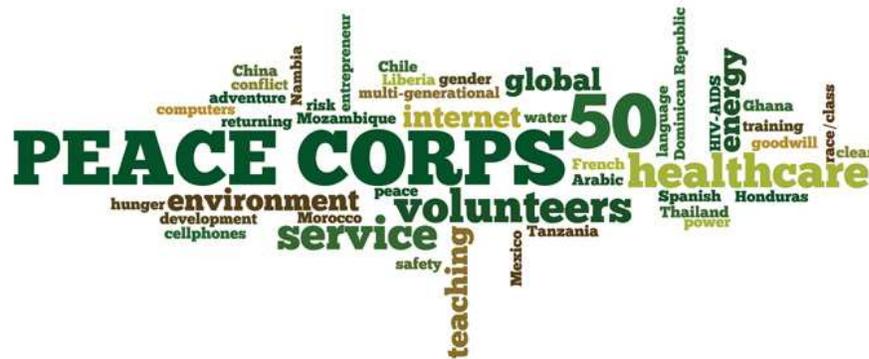
“We were lucky to be accepted, actually,” Bella told her mother. “The Peace Corps only takes married couples if they have a need for both of them in the same location. It will be a great experience.”

Renee was sad but proud that her daughter and son-in-law would do something so “noble.” She teared up on the video screen, which tugged at Bella’s heart. But it got a little easier for her when her mother’s next comment was “That’s South America, right? Maybe you’ll get a little more sun down there. You sure could use it.”

Peace Corps appointments are for two years and we’ll tell Renee that we’ve re-upped for two more years after that. So we have four years before we’ll have to think of another excuse for not seeing her. I’m guessing that Renee will know so little about Uruguay that she will easily accept that phone calls—with bad reception and a

tendency to cut off in the middle of conversations—will be few and far between.

In order not to put responsibility for Renee on either Charlie or my parents, we've given Renee a phone number that she can call in case of emergency. If she does, she will get a message to leave a message for the volunteers she's trying to reach and they will call if they are able. From a country as remote as Uruguay, she won't expect more.



Because Bella and I can't actually do the service—sparkling creatures that we are—our family has made a large monetary contribution instead. Carlisle gets the credit for that last part—it was his suggestion.

Edward

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