

18. BIRTH AND DEATH

When Jacob granted his permission, through his birthright, for me to change Bella, I was moved beyond words. It was the *last* thing he ever would have wanted for her...except, as it turned out, that she die altogether. He knew that I would never let her die if I had any power to prevent it, so Jacob's choice was to not declare war on the tribe's hereditary enemies. We would be aligned with the Quileute even more closely than before, with Bella as our point of connection. Rosalie and Alice, who'd joined us when Jacob came in, stared at me, sensing the depth of my emotion. They didn't know what it meant and at that moment, I couldn't tell them.

Bella and Jacob were shooting the breeze, engaging in small talk to smooth things over between them after Leah's outburst...a drive...the park...good, good. All pleasant and ordinary things.

And then...and then...I can't say exactly what happened. No, that's not true. I could say, but I never want to relive the horror that I witnessed in those next seconds...blood spilling...the scream, the horrifying scream...the ripping, cleaving, rending inside her...blood gushing, flowing, spewing into the air.

That's when the terror tore through me...I couldn't breathe...I was going to die! I must get out...claw, kick, bite...!

Then I shook myself as I saw my wife's body jumping, jerking, and flopping around in Rosalie's arms. But there was no Bella...she was unconscious. It was the baby! The baby couldn't breathe! He was suffocating...and Bella would die! Her bones snapped like twigs, I could hear them one after another as the baby struggled to fight its way out.

Rosalie raced up the stairs with the two of them in her arms, blood flowing behind her on the staircase, dripping down, red on white, crimson on beige, the furniture, our clothing, nothing mattered now...nothing, but getting him out and keeping her heart beating.

Rosalie was yelling instructions. "She's convulsing! The baby's going to die! We have to get him out!"

"Anesthesia first!" I shouted, horrified by the idea of cutting into Bella's sensible flesh, not to mention all the bones that continued to snap.

"No! She's unconscious. There's no time!"

"Morphine!" I hollered at Rosalie.

"Alice—get Carlisle on the phone!" she screamed in reply.

Rosalie laid Bella on the table and tore her clothes out of the way to reveal the black and blue mountain. The bulge was jumping and jerking, tossing Bella's body around as

Rose tried to hold her down. I grabbed the smaller syringe filled with morphine that I had set up earlier. Thank God in Heaven, I had prepared!

I stabbed the syringe into Bella's arm. It would take at least thirty seconds for the morphine to spread enough to make even the tiniest bit of difference. It wouldn't keep Bella from suffering. She'd feel the scalpel.

"What's *happening*, Edward?"

Rosalie wanted me to focus on the baby while my wife was dying in her arms.
"He's suffocating!"

"The placenta must have detached!" she screamed.

Bella snapped awake at these words, like their meaning had retrieved her from another world. Her strength of will was impossible...impossible.

"Get him OUT!" Bella screamed. "He can't BREATHE! Do it NOW!" Blood vessels in her eyes popped one after another under the force of her straining.

"The morphine—," I growled at Rosalie. She must wait with the scalpel...wait a little longer.

"NO! NOW—!" Bella screamed again before a river of blood spewed out through her mouth and silenced her.

The baby was battering her insides, causing massive hemorrhaging. It was a vampire's dream, this scent...*heavenly scent...to drink...drink...flowing...drink ...*

Bella's choking snapped me back. The blood in her throat was blocking her airway, suffocating her. I turned her head to the side and drained the blood onto the floor.

Alice darted into the room and attached the telephone headset to Rosalie's ear before darting back out away from the gore. Rose started explaining the situation to Carlisle in short, frantic hisses. Then she picked up a scalpel and held it aloft near the bottom of Bella's bulge.

"Let the morphine spread!" I yelled at her.

"There's no time," she hissed. "He's dying!"

She jammed the scalpel into Bella's abdomen and opened the floodgates. The blood poured out like Niagara Falls. The blood supply between mother and baby had torn away and all that vital life force was running into the cavity of her body. It was bright, glowing red, full of oxygen. It was a red, flooding, Mississippi River, spreading wide across the table, and pouring onto the floor in a dozen separate rivulets. I fought to keep my concentration on helping Bella to breathe. I held her head up to prevent gravity from draining the flood through her throat. It wouldn't clear...it *wouldn't* clear!

Then I saw Rosalie's eyes change from clear black to glassy. Her lips pulled away from her teeth. She was losing control!

"No, Rose!" I cried in desperation, still trying to clear the blood. Until that moment, I'd been unaware of Jacob's presence in the room. He had followed us in and was watching the horror from behind the table on the far side of the room.

Before I could kick Rose away from Bella, Jacob soared across the table like a

seven-foot Superman, aiming directly for Rosalie. She stabbed him in the arm as he gripped her face with his gigantic right hand and swung her off the ground. As her feet flew out from under her, he planted his foot in her stomach like he was kicking a field goal. She flew across the room and smashed into the doorway. Alice's hands appeared from around the corner and latched onto Rosalie's throat.

"Alice, get her out of here!" I yelled. "Take her to Jasper and *keep* her there!"

Bella needed air! Her throat hadn't cleared fully, and as her body continued to flop around on the table, her face was turning blue, her eyes wide and staring. She must be terrified—and in agony! The baby had to come out before it pulverized her insides.

"Jacob, I need you!" I yelled. I saw him pull the scalpel from his arm. "CPR?"
Please let him know CPR!

He nodded.

Please, God, keep her alive. Please keep her alive long enough... The silent prayers ran through my head in a continuous loop, begging God yet again for one more miracle on our behalf. No, two more. I wanted them *both* to live!

"Get her breathing! I've got to get him out before—" A loud CRACK shocked both of us into paralysis. Bella's legs flopped unnaturally to the side, but she made no sound. She had passed out from lack of oxygen.

"Her spine!" I choked on the word, horrified. *Oh, why isn't Carlisle here? How can I do this? Please God, give me the strength!*

Jacob gave me the strength.

"Get it *out* of her!" he growled, jerking me from my stupor. The scalpel that he'd pulled from his arm was flying through the air toward me. I snatched it reflexively.

"She won't feel anything now!"

He was right. She would be dead soon. It didn't matter if I cut major nerves or major arteries. I had to get the child out and my venom in her before her heart gave out. It was now a certainty that Bella would not survive this day as a human.

I sliced into my beloved's midsection, lengthening the incision that Rosalie had started until it was about six inches long. The first cut went through skin and muscle; another cut was needed to widen the gash Rose had made in the uterus. Wiping the blood away so I could see, I carefully sliced into my wife's womb. I saw the pale membrane inside and touched its surface with my finger. Yes, hard as stone, just like us. Despite that, I could see the baby's feet and elbows smashing into it, distorting the shape like a gigantic soap bubble, its surface moving and rolling.

I lost no time in thinking, but merely sank my teeth into it and tore. It felt just like tearing a vampire's head from its neck and the familiar, metallic, ripping sound pierced the air. I made a point of not looking at Bella's face. I knew if I did that I would be compelled to do something more for her, but this had to happen first. I had to trust my wife's heart and lungs to Jacob's hands.

To my shock and wonder, through the gap I had created in the membrane, a tiny,

pearl-colored hand reached out and grabbed my nose. It was hot, almost burning hot against my skin. The fingers clung tenaciously, as if trying to pull the rest of the infant's body behind them. The baby was strong!

I swiftly tore at the hole again, doubling and then tripling its size. An arm followed the hand and then a shoulder poked through. Gently, I grasped the baby's arm and pushed it back inside, my fingers following to find its head and free its face. It was a narrow opening. I would have had to tear Bella to bits to pull the baby out sideways. He needed to be birthed in the standard fashion...head first, then shoulders, arms, torso, and legs.

I found the wet sphere and to my amazement, it was covered in thick, plastered-down hair. I eased my fingers around it, holding the neck for support, and out popped his head! Bronze hair, just like mine. Wide, blinking eyes looked directly into mine—wasn't that unusual?—and then squinted under the bright lights. Melted chocolate, like his mother's. I felt his sense of relief when he took his first gasp of air and his stunned surprise at the rush of sensory input in this strange new world. I gently pulled again, one hand holding his neck and the fingers from my other hand curling underneath his armpit. Much to my surprise, the baby's head didn't bob around at all—he was holding it up on his own. I knew then that we could have delivered him two or three days ago if we'd known, if only I had heard him sooner.

Then a wet, drawn-out slurping sound sang through the air as his torso, legs, and feet slid out of Bella's womb with a single pull. A little metallic *ping* sounded as the edges of the torn membrane snapped back together.

Oh my, oh my, oh...oh...

There were simply no words for the awe-inspiring miracle of this experience. I looked at her chubby little thighs hanging in the air and realized that I *was* looking at a "her," very clearly a "her."

"Renesmee," I murmured, moved beyond thinking as I gazed down upon my daughter. *Our daughter*. The surge of love that flowed through me was vast, encompassing my wife, my family, Jacob, and the rest of humanity...or whatever. I marveled and exulted that I was here to see this day. A second had passed since Renesmee had come into the world. I checked the clock and noted the time, then quickly tied off the umbilical cord and bit through it. The whole procedure had taken fifty seconds.

I looked to my wife's face and saw the glimmer of life still in her. *Thank you, God!*

"Let me..." she whispered, her voice nothing but a scratching sound. "Give her to me."

Renesmee yearned to meet her mother. I could feel her desire and joy well up at Bella's voice. I carried the wet, bloody baby to Bella and laid her against her mother's chest, not releasing her, just letting she and her mother officially meet. Bella's eyes struggled to focus on the hot, wiggling creature.

"Renes...mee. So... beautiful," Bella rasped softly, her voice weak, unrecognizable. Then much to my chagrin, Bella gasped in renewed pain as the baby sank her fully functional, little teeth into her mother's breast. I snatched her away immediately.

"No, Renesmee," I murmured softly, looking directly into her wide, brown eyes, eyes that were fully aware, alert, and cognizant. She had recognized her mother's gasp of pain and with my "No," she understood the relationship. She wouldn't do it again.

Renesmee's heartbeat was strong, but rapid like a bird's. Against its rhythmic fluttering, I heard the hollow *thump-THUMP* and knew instinctively it was Bella's final heartbeat. Jacob was on her instantly, forcing blood through the organ and out into her body.

"What are you waiting for?" he barked, coming up for air after blowing into Bella's mouth.

I stood there, frozen, the newborn child hanging limply from my two hands. There was nowhere to set her down. I couldn't just put her on the floor. I'd never thought about what we would do with a newborn baby. It never seemed entirely real that a little creature with an actual body would be present in the birthing room. All I'd really thought about was how to minister to Bella's needs. *Could Alice handle this? Emmett? Damn! Emmett wasn't back yet.*

"Take the baby," I finally commanded Jacob. If I could get the venom into her heart quickly enough, she could miss a few compressions before I restarted them. We had no defibrillator. It was another piece of equipment Carlisle had been hoping to find, but had not.

"Throw it out the window," he retorted. Of course he didn't care about Renesmee, of course not.

"Give her to me," Rosalie's voice rang low and calm from the doorway. Jacob and I both snarled viciously at her.

"I've got it under control," Rosalie promised. "Give me the baby, Edward. I'll take care of her until Bella..." I passed Renesmee into her hands. There was no choice, but I could see that Rose's heart was filled with a mother's love for this newborn baby. Renesmee *would* be safe with Rosalie.

I opened the little refrigerator and grabbed for the large, steel syringe with the five-inch needle. The last time I had collected venom, I had filled the syringe in readiness for Bella's possible transformation. Thank goodness I had! There was no time to waste.

"Move your hands, Jacob," I ordered him.

"What's that?" he asked, reluctant to stop the CPR. Without waiting for him to comply with my order, I knocked his hands away from Bella and heard a tiny snapping sound. I'd broken one of Jacob's fingers, but he didn't flinch. I aimed the needle straight toward Bella's heart and plunged it in.

"My venom," I answered, pushing the magical, deadly fluid into her. I felt her heart react convulsively to the assault almost as if it had been shocked.

"Keep it moving," I commanded Jacob. I was utterly focused now on saving Bella's life. Nothing else mattered. I followed the procedure I had planned in preparation for this day. I had expected Carlisle would create a safety net beneath me as we delivered the baby and changed Bella, but that plan was dead now. I was all alone with this burden—it was *do or Bella dies*. I refused to let my terror break through and paralyze me again. I imagined myself as a robot, working step-by-step, determination driving me forward.

I moved from artery to artery, biting through Bella's skin and then sealing each wound with my tongue...from neck to armpit to wrist...repeated on the other side...to groin...repeated on the other side. How I'd imagined biting my true love here in a different way in a time that seemed long ago. Bella's lovely body was unrecognizable...purple, blue, covered in blood, distended and distorted. Her heart no longer beat and the only air moving into her body was directly from Jacob's lungs. He remembered bringing Bella back to life with CPR once before on a beach beneath a cliff. Surely, he could do it again!

I heard his thoughts as he continued to pump my beloved's heart. In his mind, she was already dead. The compulsive pull she held for him had simply disappeared, like a light switch shutting off. The love of his life was no longer in this room. He ached to escape the gore, the death, and the helplessness he felt.

But he was wrong. I knew he was wrong. He *had* to be wrong! *Please, God, let him be wrong...!*

"Go, then," I barked, smacking his hands out of my way. I started compressing Bella's heart muscle, swiftly, fiercely, like it was my own life I was trying to save, because it was. Her life *was* my life.

"She's not dead," I insisted. "She's going to be fine." *She'll be fine!! She'll be fine!! She'll be fine!!* I screamed the words over and over in my head, negating Jacob's thoughts, willing it to be so.