

The Day We Died

The day we died, January 10th, 2015, was much like any other day. Bella and I still lived hidden away in our cottage, running distance from Jacob and Renesmee's home on the Quileute reservation. Our family was still there too, off and on, though the area had become more a place to hide than a place to live. By Forks accounting, Carlisle would have been an impossible forty-two years old, but we all looked too young to be seen except by Charlie and the Quileute.

The lead-up to that auspicious day began way back in the fall of 2006 after Renesmee was born, not long before the Volturi came to threaten our family and the idyllic life Carlisle had built for us in Forks. Bella and I had settled into a comfortable routine centered around our new daughter. By day, our family and Jacob shared and cared for her and on evenings and weekends we were often joined by Charlie and Sue Clearwater (now Clearwater-Swan). We had some frightening issues still hanging over our heads—the need to prove to the Volturi that Bella was changed and the need to chase down any facts we could find about the lifespan of human/vampire children.

There was one other problem whose solution eluded us and indeed, whose very existence fell from the forefront of our minds until it was forcefully brought to our attention by a phone call.

“She’s coming to Forks,” Charlie told Bella on a Wednesday morning in early November, 2006.

“Who, Dad?”

“Your mother.”

“Mom’s coming here?” Bella’s high-pitched squeal drew every Cullen within half a mile to the living room in short order.

“Yes,” Charlie replied. “Phil called and said that when he was out of town she went a little crazy. She drove to Atlanta and parked herself in the front office of the CDC, claiming she wouldn’t leave until they let her see her daughter.”

“Oh no!”

“The police came and hauled her to the station. By the time Phil got there, they’d interrogated her and decided she was cracked, though harmless. They released her to his custody and said that if she trespassed on CDC property again, she would be charged. That was yesterday.”

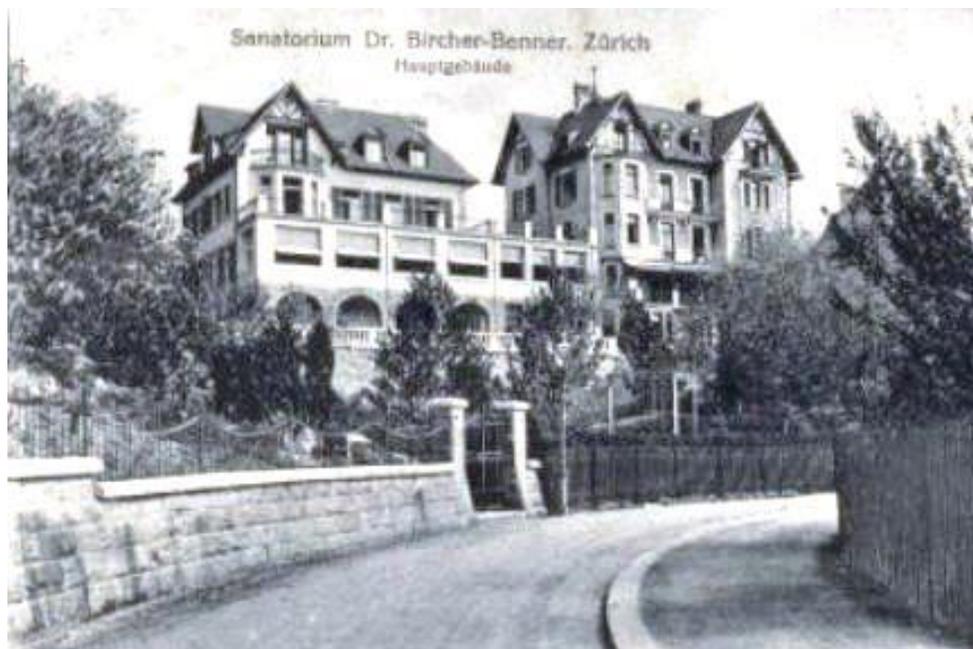
“So now she’s flying to Forks?” Bella squeaked.

“She’s decided I know something about you and Edward that I’m not telling her.”

“But she hates to fly!”

“That should give you some idea of how serious she is about this.”

And that’s how the Switzerland fiction began. Before Renee could act on her plan, Esme phoned and told her that Bella had been transferred to the historic Lebendige Kraft Sanatorium in Switzerland, famous for treating patients with rare diseases.



“We’re very sorry, Renee, for not calling you immediately. What with the arrangements to move her and everything happening so fast, we’ve only just now come up for air,” Esmé soothed as my entire family stood nearby on alert. If Renee were coming to Forks, we’d have to act quickly.

Fortunately, Esmé pulled off the impossible—halting a locomotive in motion—and convinced Renee that Bella was being well looked after at the healing center in Zurich, that I was with her, and that she and Carlisle had just returned from Europe. Shortly after that scare, I set up a video connection to allow Renee to see and talk to Bella and be regularly reassured that her daughter was alive and more or less well.

The drama didn’t end, though. It was a strain on Bella to respond to Renee’s probing emails and to chat with her while pretending to live in a country my wife has never seen. Both Carlisle and I periodically broached the subject of Bella’s ending her connection to her mother, but neither of us had the heart to demand she do so. It was becoming increasingly clear that Renee wouldn’t simply allow her daughter to fade from her life quietly. My

parents wouldn't have in similar circumstances. Why had I ever thought Renee would?

At least we could end the fiction that Bella was ill, though all of us Cullens, who were experienced in these matters, believed just letting Bella "die of her disease" would be the easiest way out of this familial dilemma. Instead, though, we let things ride when Bella came up with a fictional scholarship for me to attend the Institute of Technology in Zurich. She would begin studying to teach English as a second language. Or so the story went.

As adventurous as Renee was in some ways, she was terribly afraid of heights. Flying was something she did only rarely and the thought of doing so over 4,500 miles of ocean gave her palpitations, according to Bella, so we were "safe" in Europe.

That's how things remained for the next four years. We knew it couldn't last forever, but when Renee finally screwed up the courage to fly to Zurich for a visit, Bella was still unable to end the relationship.

"What if we move somewhere really remote where Renee couldn't fly? Somewhere with no internet?" she asked me.

"Where on God's green earth is there no internet?"

"I don't know. A third-world country, maybe. What if we joined the Peace Corps and got assigned somewhere off the map?" Bella's hand slid beneath my shirt. It was a well-worn tactic to sway me when she felt the need to do so.

It worked, of course, and that's what we did. Of the countries with active Peace Corps programs, we focused on those in South America since it was known that both Bella and I had studied Spanish in high school. Uruguay isn't a third-world country, by any means, but it lies far enough south to make any flight there daunting.

The new fiction worked. We were able to end Bella's difficult video chats with excuses about our lack of access to modern technology, though we sent the occasional email through a proxy server. Bella was back to writing and receiving letters forwarded through a hired box in Washington D.C., the domestic headquarters of the Peace Corps. Two years passed and with this convenient cover story, Bella saw no reason why we shouldn't hang on a while longer.

"But Peace Corps assignments are only two years," I pointed out.

"Can't we reenlist or whatever? There's no way my mom will fly 4700 miles south over mostly ocean so it's perfect. I can keep writing letters, which gives me time to think about what to say and she can't see we're not changing. Please, Edward, it will hurt her so much if I die!"

"But we always knew this time would come."

"I know. I just don't see why we should artificially bring it on when everything is fine as it is." She kissed my sternum, then dragged her lips right, then left.

She had a point. Why should Bella have to hurt her mother, and thereby herself, when there was no impending difficulty with the current arrangement? Besides, one never knew when a human might contract a fatal disease or fall victim to a traffic accident. Our dear Nessie was proof of that. Though we would never wish it, something might happen to Renee that made breaking with her unnecessary.

My son-in-law's chastising words from long ago buzzed in my head. "You just give her everything she wants." Perhaps so, but Bella had suffered so much in her life because of me.

After eight and a half years of playing international cat and mouse, Renee proclaimed that if her daughter wouldn't come to her, she would go to her daughter. She planned to travel to Uruguay

over the school holiday and celebrate Christmas with us. She wasn't bluffing. Eight years is a long time for a mother to be separated from a child she loves, adult or not.

With Renee's announcement, even Bella could no longer doubt that the time had come to exit her mother's life permanently. I took it upon myself to write Renee a letter informing her that our service in Uruguay was ending and we would return to the US within a matter of months. Therefore, she need not travel to South America. Of course, we would plan a lengthy stopover in Jacksonville on our way north.

As best I could, I helped my wife prepare for her final, veiled goodbyes to the mother she had loved for nearly three decades. The time and distance we'd placed between them would not diminish the loss. Renee's letters turned to making ecstatic itineraries for our visit, which tore Bella apart, knowing how painfully we would dash her plans.

"I'm not sorry about my choices, Edward, or any of our decisions. I just never knew how hard it would be to let her go."

I simply held her and offered reassurance in the time-honored way of lovers.

I agreed that we might postpone our departure from Uruguay until March or April to give Bella a little more time, but as the new year came and went, she grew increasingly distressed in anticipation of her bereavement. Dragging out the inevitable seemed pointless to me, even cruel. It was time for Bella and I to die. With no further notice to my despairing wife, I set the wheels in motion.

My father and I ironed out the necessary details and then I met Charlie to explain what needed to be done. After an initial angry outburst over the pain I was inflicting on his daughter, he accepted

our assessment of the situation, for he knew Bella's mother as well as anyone. Then he bravely phoned Renee to pass along the bitter news.

We had left our remote Uruguayan post on January 10th, 2015, two months earlier than anticipated. En route to the capital, our small plane went down off the coast of Argentina. There were no survivors.



An extensive search launched in the deep, turbulent waters of La Plata Gulf yielded no bodies. It took authorities a week to locate a passenger list for the unregistered turboprop and another week for the American consulate to confirm the victims' identities. A consular official phoned Carlisle after luggage washed ashore bearing his son's name.

My mother packed Bella's battered and water-stained passport in a nondescript box along with one of the many friendship bracelets Renee had made for her daughter during the course of her childhood. Esme shipped the items to Renee—one mother to another—and included a letter expressing the sincere condolences of the Secretary of Transportation, Montevideo, Uruguay. "We regret to inform you that..."

There could be no doubt that Isabella Swan Cullen and her husband, Edward Anthony Cullen, were deceased.



In my best judgment, shielding my wife from the details of making our deaths real would help minimize her pain. She wondered why Charlie hadn't visited Renesmee for a week. He'd stayed away because no one believed he could hide our doings from his daughter during a face-to-face meeting. Only after the drama played out fully and Renee had entered a state of mourning did I break the news to Bella that the deed was done, the tragedy finished.

She reacted with spluttering disbelief, then rushed at me and pounded my chest with her fists. When the rage had passed, she paced our cottage living room, grasping at ways to turn back the clock.

"We swam to shore! We missed the flight! We sold our tickets at the last minute!" It was a hoax, a dream, a mistake, a cruel, cruel joke....

I smoothed my face and held my tongue and at last...at long last...the gush of words turned to a trickle and she collapsed against me in a heap. I carried her to our bed and held her while she cried vampire tears through that long, dark night so reminiscent of another a decade before.

Much as then, by sunrise she had turned the corner and reconciled herself to the new reality that her life with Renee was over. Throughout her terrible distress, I clung to my belief that she would later be grateful I'd taken things out of her hands. I think it's true, but I will never know for sure. She's forgiven me, at any rate.

Jasper arranged for Mr. J. Jenks to hold a videoconference with Charlie and Renee to read our wills, presumably created prior to our foreign service. In them, we stated our wish that no funeral services be held in the event of our deaths. Bella would not choose to be the center of attention at any gathering, even if she couldn't attend. Renee accepted that because she knew her daughter.

Alice penned carefully unrevealing obituaries for Bella and myself, citing the bare circumstances of our deaths, and submitted them to the local newspaper. As far as Forks, Washington, was concerned, Bella and I were no more.

Charlie received cards and flowers at both the police station and at home, despite his published request that memorial gifts be donated to the Forks library in Bella's name. He'd have handled verbal condolences awkwardly enough to discourage acquaintances from asking many questions. No doubt the ordeal was made easier by the fact that Bella remained in his life. But in truth, and though Bella didn't know it, her father did grieve. He still grieves for the loss of the daughter he once knew.

As it happened, and unwittingly on my wife's part, she and I had celebrated the day of our deaths with everything life-affirming—a long visit with our daughter followed by a hunt in the Olympic Forest and an extended session of lovemaking in the snow atop Cullen Peak.

Edward

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