

45. RENESMEE'S STORY

Bella was scheming. On our unhurried walk to the house—Reneseemee still asleep in Bella's arms—she asked me to teach her to fight, but I simply could not think about Bella that way. When she argued that I couldn't leave her undefended and helpless in a battle, I saw her point. Still, it hurt even to *think* of Bella as a target for the purposes of training.

My wife was planning her personal strategy for battling the Volturi. She thought that since Jane couldn't hurt her, she could help our side by attacking Jane and preventing her from torturing the rest of us into submission. That was well and good, but despite her brutal gift, Jane wasn't the real threat. Her brother Alec was the one who would guarantee the Volturi an unmitigated victory. He would ensure that we didn't fight at all.

While Jane could disable only one fighter at a time, Alec could disable all opponents at once by emitting a kind of anesthetic fog. Once it touched you, you became trapped in your body like a coffin, unable to see or hear anything around you. It ensured the Volturi's power to eliminate all adversaries, because by the time they realized they were in danger, it was already too late to run or fight.

Bella surmised—probably correctly—that she would be unaffected by Alec's "anesthesia" and, therefore, was the logical person to attack him. She reasoned that neither Alec nor Jane was likely to be a good fighter because they never would have needed to fight. I tried to discourage her even from thinking about such a move, which was unlikely to succeed and would guarantee that she was destroyed immediately. The horrifying image made me cringe. So Bella changed the subject and asked about Demetri instead.

"Demetri is mine," I snarled. In those words, I heard a cruelty in my voice that I hadn't felt often in the last seventy years since I stopped feeding on humans. The last time I felt it was the night that thugs in Port Angeles set out to rape and murder Bella. If she hadn't been sitting right there in the car and then in the restaurant with me, I would have killed them all in the blink of an eye.

"Why?" Bella whispered, bringing me back.

"For Alice," I replied after taking a moment to get my emotions under control. "It's the only thanks I can give her now for the last fifty years." If I could destroy Demetri—assuming I got the chance—at least she could run without being tracked. Even if we all died, Alice and Jasper would be safe...maybe. Bella nodded in silent understanding.

We reached the house and prepared ourselves to introduce Tanya, Kate, Eleazar, and Carmen to Reneseemee. They would be the first subjects in our attempt to garner support for our standoff with the Volturi.

As we waited for their arrival, Reneseemee awakened and Bella straightened her clothes and brushed her hair. Jacob had explained the situation to Nessie the evening

before, perhaps in more detail than was warranted, so she knew what was happening. She knew that we needed the help of our friends to prevent us from “getting in trouble” with the Volturi. Wisely, Jacob had not told her our odds of survival.

Renesmee pressed her hands to Bella’s face anxiously, but she had no pictures for her feelings. What I saw in her mind was painful to know, though. Renesmee believed it was her fault that we were “in trouble” because she was different, and she felt it was on her shoulders to convince everyone that she was no danger. Poor child. Except for being at fault—that was on me—she was close enough to the truth that I couldn’t tell her otherwise. When she spoke aloud, her words nearly broke my heart.

“What if they don’t like me?” she whispered bleakly to her mother.

I clenched my fists. My child was being victimized by ignorance and an ancient prejudice that had nothing to do with her! But I had to remain calm and composed.

When the Denalis came, I faced Tanya and pressed for her word that they would not react to what they saw until they had heard our full explanation. I asked them to listen for the sound of Renesmee’s heart (“some kind of a bird?”) and to smell her scent (“is there a human here?”).

With that introduction, Bella brought Renesmee into the room. Nessie steeled herself for rejection and then bravely peeked out from behind Bella’s hair. *She is her mother’s daughter*, I thought proudly. Though the four cousins didn’t speak, their reactions were what we had feared.

Tanya involuntarily scuffled backwards. *No, no, no...!*

AAAAACK!!! Kate leaped away and flattened herself against the wall, hissing.

Eleazar threw himself in front of Carmen protectively. *What the bloody...?*

Oh, isn’t she cute! Carmen alone was not pained or frightened by seeing a vampire-like child in Bella’s arms. She was the only one who had no history with immortal children, though she knew what they were, of course. Even young vampires knew that part of our history. Judging by her reaction, she could be my way in to convincing the others.

“Oh *please*,” Jacob scoffed quietly from where he waited, ready to phase at the first sign of trouble.

I put my arm around my wife and child. “You promised to listen,” I said, looking straight into each set of panicked eyes.

“Some things cannot be heard!” Tanya exclaimed. “How could you, Edward? Do you not know what this means?”

I did. When her mother created an immortal child, Tanya and her sisters had been saved from destruction only because Aro found them to be ignorant of its existence. Now that we had shown them Renesmee, she was thinking that her coven, along with ours, was as good as dead. Anger blazed in her eyes.

“We have to get out of here,” Kate cried, ready to make her escape through the front door. She wanted to report us immediately to the authorities.

Eleazar was shaken and deeply saddened for Carlisle, his old friend. “Edward...”

“Wait,” I cut in. They were all reacting emotionally rather than thinking things through. I needed them to calm down enough to consider the facts. “Remember what you hear, what you smell. Renesmee is not what you think she is.”

“There are no exceptions to this rule, Edward,” Tanya retorted in her fury. For the briefest moment I thought I read something else too—jealousy. I disregarded it.

“Tanya,” I returned, “you can hear her heartbeat! Stop and think about what that means.” The runaway trains of emotion both Tanya and Kate were riding began to slow. The two vampire women went silent.

“Her heartbeat?” Carmen murmured, leaning out from behind Eleazar. Curiosity was much preferable to fear or anger.

“She’s not a full vampire child,” I explained while I had their attention. “She is half human.” The words were so foreign to them that I got no reaction at all.

“Hear me,” I tried again. “Renesmee is one of a kind. I am her father. Not her creator—her biological father.” They didn’t believe it. Vampires do not father children. It was absurd.

“Edward, you can’t expect us to—,” Eleazar began.

“Tell me another explanation that fits, Eleazar. You can feel the warmth of her body in the air. Blood runs in her veins. You can smell it.”

“How?” Kate whispered, incredulous.

“Bella is her biological mother,” I explained. “She conceived, carried, and gave birth to Renesmee while she was still human. It nearly killed her. I was hard-pressed to get enough venom into her heart to save her.”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing,” Eleazar stated as if that were the final word on the subject. I had to convince him. We needed to get the information Alice said he had.

“Physical relationships between vampires and humans are not common. Human survivors of such trysts are even less common. Wouldn’t you agree, cousins?”

Three thousand, two hundred, and three, mused Tanya, before realizing I could hear her thought. Kate recalled a particularly memorable liaison that had ended in the usual way. Both women frowned at me, annoyed. Better annoyance than fear and disbelief, I thought.

Eleazar was still giving me a chilly look. “Come now, Eleazar. Surely you can see the resemblance,” I coaxed.

Only Carmen dared to investigate further. She came close and leaned down to peer at Renesmee. “You seem to have your mother’s eyes, but your father’s face.” One look into that face was all it took for the magic to begin and Carmen smiled. Renesmee responded with her brilliant, toothy smile, the one that made everyone fall at her feet.

Momma, can I show? Renesmee thought while showing a picture of her hand on Carmen’s face. Already Renesmee was drawn to this woman with her exotic accent and warm, olive-toned skin.

“Do you mind if Renesmee tells you about it herself?” Bella asked quietly, her

voice filled with tension. “She has a gift for explaining things.”

“Do you speak, little one?” Carmen asked, encouraging Nessie to vocalize her reply, something she still did sparingly.

“Yes, but I can show you more than tell.” The child’s thin, vampire soprano chimed through the room and Tanya, Kate, and Eleazar flinched at the forbidden sound.

When Renesmee’s tiny hand met Carmen’s cheek, the woman went rigid with shock, though her eyes never left Nessie’s face. Eleazar saw his mate’s reaction and leaped to Carmen’s side.

“Wait,” Carmen said, holding up a palm as Renesmee began to share her short autobiography.

RENESMEE’S STORY

I am Renesmee Carlie Cullen. *(Image: Renesmee clad as a sunflower with a big golden headdress. In later “showings,” she often switches to a picture of herself in a pink ruffled swimming suit holding a huge beach ball. These are her favorite self-portraits.)*

Don’t be scared. I show you my days. *(Image: A slit of light appearing in a field of darkness. Everyone reacts with fright when Renesmee first shows a picture. She thinks “don’t be scared,” though nobody hears that but me. She continues her story after the person calms down.)*

Something is wrong. I have to get out! I reach for the light and feel a hard and cold thing. I grab my Daddy’s nose. He pulls me out and says “Renesmee.” I know his sound. I am okay. *(Image: My face, shocking in its tight intensity, smeared in blood, but with a tiny glimmer of...what? Wonder. Hope?)*

I see Momma. She says, “Give her to me.” I know her sound. She smells good so I bite. She tastes good. *(Image: Bella’s bloody face wearing an impossible expression of joy, followed by shock.)*

Daddy says, “No Renesmee.” I must not bite Momma. Aunt Rose washes me and makes me warm. I am thirsty. She gives me my cup. I drink and show her Momma, but she is scared. Jacob comes. He is for me. I show him Momma and he is scared, but then he’s not. *(Images: My face speaking; Rosalie holding the cup, her dress stained with water; Renesmee’s hand on Rosalie’s neck and then on Jacob’s cheek and their respective startled expressions; Jacob laughing.)*

Momma sleeps for a long time. *(Image: Bella laid out on the surgical table, clean and beautiful, white and still.)*

Popop measures and Aunt Rose brushes my hair. Daddy sings to me.

Momma wakes up, but I can't see her. I wait and wait and then she comes!
(Images: Carlisle with his tape measure; Rosalie with the sterling silver baby brush; my face, singing; Bella and I entering the clearing as seen through the glass wall with Jacob blocking our path.)

Reaching and reaching, but Momma doesn't come. Then reaching and reaching and *saying* and then...MOMMA! I show Momma my days and she is scared, but then she's not. *(Image: Bella in the living room as glimpsed between six bodies; concerned faces crowding in when Renesmee cries out in impatience; Bella stepping forward, her arms outstretched; Nessie's hand on Bella's face and Bella's startled reaction.)*

Everyone holds me and feeds me my cup, but Momma doesn't. My cup makes Momma thirsty. *(Images: Family members' faces from beneath; metal cup in Nessie's hand.)*

Momma gets mad at Jacob and tries to bite. Seth blocks and gets hurt. My Jacob is okay. *(Image: Bella attacking Jacob; Seth as a wolf crumpled on the ground, Carlisle kneeling over him.)*

Everyone is gone and I am in my room and I am scared. Daddy hears when I say in my head. He comes and Momma comes and I am okay. *(Images: The doorway of Nessie's room as seen through iron bars; me running in with my pillow—Oh, great!—Bella in her sheet.)*

Grandpa Charlie and Sue come and they smell good. Daddy says I must not bite them, so I don't. *(Images: Charlie's face from below; Sue sitting in a chair nearby.)*

I see Billy and he is Jacob's daddy. He has a wheelie chair and lets me ride. Jacob takes me in the woods and shows me animals. Animals like me and I like animals. *(Images: Billy in his chair; Billy's face from below, spinning circles on his porch; feeding squirrels in the Olympic Forest.)*

Momma and Daddy and Popop and Nana and Grandpa Charlie read me books and I read books too, but I don't say. I can say, but I like better to show. *(Image: Nessie holding a book in Bella's lap; Bella's face with Nessie's hand on her cheek.)*

Aunt Alice plays dress-up and takes my pictures. Every day I get new clothes because my yesterday's are too small. Everyone is scared because I grow fast. They don't say, but I know. I like new clothes so it is okay. *(Images: Alice's bedroom with clothes everywhere.)*

Nana and Popop give me human food. It is yucky and I have to use the potty. Momma and Daddy take me hunting. I have to drink animals because it is bad to drink humans. Grandpa Charlie is human and Sue and Billy and I am one-half human, but they like food and I don't except for cookies. *(Images: Esme presenting half a chicken breast, green beans, and fig*

cookies; me drinking a deer; Billy and Jacob eating spaghetti at Billy's house; cookies hidden in Nessie's pocket.)

I catch Roosevelt deer and elk and sometimes Daddy helps me catch a cougar. Animals get scared, but I show pictures and they aren't scared anymore. *(Image: Chasing and catching an elk; me holding down a cougar with Renesmee's hand on its throat.)*

I choose my Jacob and Aunt Rose and Nana and Popop for my godparents. Jacob says they are the "second strings." Aunt Alice is planning a party and Uncle Emmett is going to minister. Uncle Jasper is running the pool. *(Images: The godparents' faces as they accept Renesmee's requests; two shoestrings; Alice holding up an invitation; Emmett wearing a harlequin outfit with tights and blowing a wooden flute; Jasper filling the baby pool.)*

Now everyone is gone. I don't know where. Aunt Alice and Uncle Jasper are lost and we are sad. I love my family and my wolf people and my human people and I want us all together and I don't want it to be my fault. *(Images: Everyone leaving home; Renesmee with Bella and me and the wolves standing alone outside.)*

Please like me and be my friend. *(Image: a closeup of Carmen's face with Nessie's hand on it; Carmen's big smile. In retellings, Nessie always shows an image of the "listener's" face with a huge smile, which makes almost everyone smile. Smart child.)*

When Renesmee pulled her hand away, Carmen stood frozen in enchantment for a moment before speaking. "She really is your daughter, isn't she? Such a vivid gift! It could only have come from a very gifted father."

"Do you believe what she showed you?" I asked. That was the crucial question and might foreshadow the reactions of every other vampire Nessie touched.

"Without a doubt."

Thank God! Please let it catch on.

"Carmen!" Eleazar was dumbfounded and disapproving, a true non-believer.

"Impossible as it seems, Edward has told you nothing but truth. Let the child show you," Carmen urged her mate, grasping his hands in hers and directing him closer to Renesmee. "Show him, *mi querida*." Nessie smiled in delight, both at Carmen's enthusiasm and at her exotic-sounding words.

When Renesmee touched Eleazar's forehead, he jerked away with eyes as wide as a lemur's. "*Ay caray!*" he hissed.

Tanya and Kate's curiosity got the better of them and they moved in closer to watch. "What did she do to you?" Tanya asked suspiciously.

“She’s just trying to show you her side of the story,” Carmen explained.

Renesmee grew impatient and frowned. This reaction had already gotten tiresome for her. I wanted to cheer at what she did next.

“Watch, please,” she ordered Eleazar, the former Volturi soldier, someone who probably would frighten most young children. She held out her hand, waiting for the big vampire to comply. I could imagine her tapping her foot. Carmen prodded him until he reluctantly leaned into Renesmee’s hand and shut his eyes. He winced at the first image, but then gradually relaxed.

“Ahh, I see,” he said when Renesmee finished. His face had softened completely. He even allowed himself a little smile at the grinning child.

Two down, I thought.

“Eleazar?” Tanya queried.

“It’s all true, Tanya. This is no immortal child. She’s half-human. Come. See for yourself.”

Both Tanya and Kate took their turns “listening” to Renesmee’s story and though each was initially wary, Nessie had swayed them both by the time she finished.

“Thank you for listening,” I murmured to Tanya’s coven, grateful beyond belief.