

THE BLACK STORY

Billy Black's wife, Sarah, died in a car accident when Jacob was small. His memories of her are few and indistinct, which is why he never talks about her. Like me, I suppose. Sarah Black ran the family car off the road and into an ancient Douglas fir tree after confronting Billy about his affair with Lily Call—and about her suspicion that he was the father of Lily's toddler. Two decades later, Billy still wonders whether the car crash was an accident, and if not, whether Sarah was trying to kill him or herself. She accomplished the former, but only crippled her husband, leaving him forever to wonder.

Billy's mind is relatively quiet compared to most people's. He's not as hard to read as Charlie Swan, but nearly so. However, when Jacob was severely injured in our battle with the newborns, Billy's mind kept wandering back to Sarah's death and to the tremendous pain it caused him to lose her. He didn't know whether he could survive such a loss again. Fortunately, Jacob had inherited his father's werewolf gene and had reached the age when the gene had kicked in. Therefore, Billy knew Jacob would heal, but watching his son suffer was painful in the extreme.

Billy had never known for sure whether Embry was his son. Lily claimed he was, but Billy knew that Lily also saw her ex-husband from time to time. It wasn't until Embry turned sixteen and phased for the first time that Billy had to face the truth. The only other men who could have fathered a werewolf son were Quil Ateara, Sr., and Levi Uley.

Billy had ruled out old Quil as Embry's father, because Quil was known to be completely devoted to his wife. Levi Uley was another story. He'd always been restless and wild, a drinker and man about town before he left the area altogether. In spite of that, Billy knew Lily was not promiscuous, so the likelihood was high that Embry was his son.

Billy never owned up to being Embry's biological father, but in the most important ways, Billy was more of a father to Embry than Lily's ex-

husband had been. Jacob and Embry were best friends growing up, and because Lily worked long hours to support her son, the boys spent most of their out-of-school hours at Jacob's house. Stuck in his wheelchair, Billy had been available to spend time with the boys, teaching them how to throw a ball, to operate a boat and fish, and how to repair their decrepit vehicles...all those things that loving fathers do with their sons.

Neither Jacob nor Embry knew the truth, because if they had, the whole pack would know and I would have heard it through the pack mind. Billy had kept the information to himself, but he was about 95% sure that Embry was his.

I could see a certain similarity in appearance between Jacob and Embry, though everyone says Jacob resembles Sarah more than he does Billy. If you look at the three musketeers together (Jacob, Embry, and Quil, Jr.), you can pick out the half-brothers immediately. Quil looks nothing like the other two. Jacob and Embry also have some similarities in their personalities, though I'd venture to say that Jacob is both more outgoing and more hot-headed. Jacob used to be rather shy like Embry until he developed a crush on Bella. After that, he became surprisingly pushy in his pursuit of her.

Embry's mother has lived on the Quileute reservation since before Embry was born, though she is Makah. Her father is Albert Ulmer, the old fisherman whose son, Robert, ferried Carlisle and I across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Canada some years ago. We were attempting to lead the sadistic vampire, James, far away from Bella so we could do away with him.

Albert, with what appeared to be a latent case of Alzheimer's, tried to tell Carlisle and me about Billy Black's intrusion into his family tree. He certainly believed that Billy had fathered his grandson. Talking about it excessively and inappropriately seemed to be one of the symptoms of his disease.

I'd gotten the impression that Lily's brother, Robert, thought his sister still held a torch for Billy. As Robert motored us across the strait that day in his fishing boat, he'd thought about Lily's long-standing love for Billy. She was heartbroken when Billy lost the use of his legs in the car accident with Sarah. I'm not sure, but my guess is that Billy's spinal break put an end to his baby-making days.

Billy still has an eye for the ladies, though. He spent a lot of time with Sue Clearwater after her husband, Harry, was killed. Billy had a good excuse to do so, since Sue became a tribal elder upon Harry's death. As the tribe's de facto chief (Sam Uley's alpha-wolf status notwithstanding), Billy would be the one to introduce Sue to the secrets of the tribe, and in particular, the existence of the tribe's wolf gene. Sue must have had quite a shock discovering that the tribal legends are real and that her two children, Leah and Seth, are both pups in disguise.

I sincerely hope that Bella and I don't get a similar shock when Renesmee comes of age. She does indeed have 24 pairs of chromosomes, the same number as the wolves. Carlisle has been thrilled to learn about the heretofore unknown breeding compatibility between humans and vampires, which could explain how the wolf shape-shifters originally came into existence. (Carlisle is only excited about the genetic science of it, not the reality. Carlisle would never promote the impregnating of humans by vampires after witnessing what happened to Bella.)

Perhaps Carlisle will solve some of the mysteries of the wolf pack, such as why Leah became a wolf and Jacob's sisters did not, or why a wolf imprints on a particular mate. Leah could be right in hypothesizing that imprinting occurs to enhance the fertility and long-term survival of the tribe. In particular, a wolf may

be attracted to a mate based on the likelihood of passing on the wolf gene.

Ugh! I just realized that if fertility plays a role in imprinting, then Renesmee is likely to be fertile with Jacob! Ugh, ugh, ugh!

I'm starting to have a little more sympathy for Charlie than I ever expected to. It was hard for him to accept my courting of Bella. Still, he had seventeen years to prepare himself and I shall have only seven or eight.

Perhaps I should prohibit Renesmee from going out with Jacob until she has lived sixteen human years. On second thought, that is unlikely to be effective. If Charlie had forbidden Bella to date me, then I would have found some way around his strictures. If he had insisted that Bella not marry until she was in her twenties, I would have used every asset at my disposal to convince her to elope with me. Oh, how the worm turns! It serves me right, I suppose.

You'd think that having courted Bella by lying with her every night in her bed might have softened my attitude toward Renesmee's suitor (or possibly, suitors, given Nahuel's interest), but it hasn't. If I discovered that Jacob was sleeping with my teenage daughter, chastely or not, I'd blow a gasket. God certainly has a sense of humor.

Lord, I wish I could sleep! It would be such a welcome escape from these troubled thoughts of a compulsive father. I wonder if Bella feels like making love right about now...

Edward

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