

YOUNG TALENT

When Bella's nemesis, Victoria, brought her newborn army to wipe out our coven, we very nearly added another member to our family. Her name was Bree Tanner, a runaway child who had been recruited to the vampire army for the price of a cheeseburger. She seemed a good sort, just a hungry kid living on the streets due to a bad home situation—Seattle streets are full of them. Bree didn't tell me these details, but they were in her mind shortly before her sad demise.

From what I saw of the vampire army through the wolf pack's eyes, Bree seemed to be Riley's favored type of recruit— young and hopeless with nowhere to go. Most of them were wild, aggressive, not too smart, and undisciplined—at least as vampires, they were far from disciplined.

But Bree was a gentle, intelligent child. She wouldn't have come to the battle except Riley had told her that her love was already there ahead of her. In fact, Riley had lied outright to get her to come to the battlefield. He and Victoria had murdered Diego several days earlier.

Bree and Diego weren't officially betrothed, but from what I read in Bree's mind, the bond had already been established. That kind of attachment rarely changes with vampires.

Realizing that Diego was dead was terribly sad for Bree, but already she was thinking of ways that she might go on living if she survived the Volturi's visit. At first, she thought she'd make a life out of tracking Riley and killing him in revenge for Diego's death. Later, she thought she would go looking for her friend, Fred. She trusted him, and he trusted her, not something that is easy to come by in the vampire

world. That's why every vampire who's ever met Carlisle is shocked even more by his integrity than by his diet. Bree was so impressed by him and Esme that she even considered joining our family.

When Bree found out that I had already destroyed both Riley and Victoria, she was deeply grateful. In exchange, she told me secrets she knew about Jane and the Volturi guard—in particular, that they had conspired with Victoria to allow the newborn's attack on my family. We learned the full extent of the conspiracy later that year, when the entire Volturi coven arrived in Forks for a visit. But that's another story.

As far as my family knew, Bree was the lone survivor of Victoria's army. As it turns out, though, she was not. In her last moment before the Volturi tore her apart, her thoughts centered on Fred's escape from the coven just before it reached the battleground. Bree believed Fred had survived and was waiting for her in Vancouver. When she knew that her death was imminent, she hoped that he would meet our family someday.

Fred sounds like an interesting character. When Bree thought about him, she considered his special talent, something that Riley had mentioned to the newborn army. I'd read this thought in her mind: "How could the 'dark-cloaks' find him if they couldn't see him?" I inferred that Fred can make himself invisible. I wonder how he does it... Does he issue a vapor of some kind to hide behind, for example, or does he just make others believe they can't see him?

That's how special talents work, in one of two ways: either they act directly on the physical world, or they simply create an illusion. For example, Jasper's talent to alter others' emotions is grounded in an actual force. He sends out vibrations or waves of some kind that operate on the subject's

brain, actually changing its chemistry. Similarly, Alice has the physical or spiritual ability to see events in the future.

In contrast, Jane's skill of torturing someone by staring is merely an illusion—she triggers the subject's memory of their burning time. You don't really burn, as you did when you were changed, you just remember being burned...remember it in excruciating detail...in your very cells. It feels exactly like the real thing. It is a horrible torture for a vampire. No doubt it is equally torturous to a human, though it must be felt somewhat differently.

Bella has always been immune to Jane's kind of talent, the mind-based illusion. Jane cannot torture Bella because she cannot gain access to Bella's mind, something that infuriates Jane, but delights the de facto leader of the Volturi, Aro. When Bella became a vampire, her protective skill intensified, as often happens. Not only can she protect her own mind from being acted upon from the outside, but she can spread that protection into space and shield those around her. She saved us when the Volturi arrived to destroy our coven for creating a vampire child, an act that is illegal and punishable by death.

We'd had to convince the Volturi that Renesmee is not a vampire child, but rather a hybrid vampire/human child. Though she is as beautiful and as naturally endearing as a vampire child, she is of an entirely different species, which has none of the negative qualities that the Volturi object to in vampire children. In fact, Renesmee has a special talent for communication, something Aro, at least, values highly.

I call hybrids like Renesmee "vampans" in my **Vampire's Guide to the Care and Maintenance of a Human Being**. I have since learned from Vladimir, an ancient Romanian vampire—and rival to the Volturi—that the Albanians call

them dhampirs and have done so for centuries. That implies, of course, that vampans or dhampirs have been around for that long. Perhaps Bella and I weren't the only vampire couple in existence to birth a natural-born child.

Despite all the research that Carlisle, Jasper, and Emmett did during Bella's pregnancy, though, we never found any records of such. Alice and Jasper did find Nahuel, a vampan from Brazil who also has several vampan half-sisters. However, Nahuel's father merely impregnates human women and abandons them to their deaths during pregnancy or childbirth. He's never treated a human woman as a true mate.

I wish we'd known Fred when the Volturi came to destroy the Cullen coven on very little excuse. If Fred had made us invisible to the Volturi, then "What could they have done?" as Bree put it.

I wonder if Fred has settled in Vancouver. Perhaps one day I will look for him, if for no other reason than to tell him of Bree's death and to warn him about Aro's penchant for collecting unique specimens like himself...and me.

Edward

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