

## TEACHING FRED

Our new friend, Fred, came to visit the day after Renesmee's birthday as we'd agreed. I heard him outside thinking about how to announce his presence. He was still using his shield, though I wasn't sure why. Perhaps it was just a habit.

"Fred's here!" I announced to Carlisle, who quickly came down the stairs and joined Bella and me in the living room. "Back yard," I added, when Carlisle looked at me questioningly.

Carlisle opened the kitchen door and called out, "Fred?" Through the window I saw Fred suddenly appear about ten feet away from the door. Amazing. "Welcome! Please come in. You must have come through the forest?"

"Yes. I jumped over the Sol Duc." Fred stepped into the kitchen and followed Carlisle to the living room, where Esme, Alice and Jasper had joined us.

"You've already met Edward and Jasper. Esme is my wife, Alice is Jasper's mate, and Bella is Edward's.

"Nice to meet you," Esme answered. "Welcome to our home." Fred nodded and looked at the floor shyly.

"Are you from this area?" Carlisle asked. "Strangers rarely know the name of the river, or if they do, they don't know how to pronounce it."

"I grew up on Camano Island and was going to the UW before Riley found me on University Avenue."

"Is that the business district near the Seattle campus?" Carlisle inquired. He knew Seattle well, having visited many times, most recently to acquire donated blood for his grandchild.

"Yeah. I used to hang out over there when I wasn't studying or in the computer lab. There are some good movie houses and a couple of video arcades. That was before this happened." Fred gestured toward himself.

"It must have been quite a shock," Esme said gently.

Fred nodded. "It hasn't been so bad since I escaped from Riley's coven. It's been pretty great, actually. I've been sneaking into the Paul Allen Center for Computer Engineering at the university. It has awesome computer labs. I can use unlimited computer resources and nobody bothers me. I can program so much better now," Fred said in a rush of excitement.

I inferred that Fred was a stereotypical computer nerd, judging by his enthusiasm for this particular topic. Until that point, he had given me the impression of being rather laconic and sluggish. Jasper—a gifted scholar himself—chuckled.

"Won't you come in and have a seat?" Esme offered, gesturing toward the living room. Fred ambled over and plopped in one of the lounge chairs facing the TV.

"Hey! Company!" Emmett exclaimed, coming in the front door towing Rosalie behind him. "You're Fred, right?" he said, striding to the other lounge chair and pulling Rosalie onto his lap, and then kissing her boisterously. Since the Volturi had threatened our lives, their ardency had returned to that of newlyweds, much to everyone's chagrin.

"Meet Emmett and Rosalie," Carlisle said indulgently.

"Oh, sorry," Emmett said, coming up for air and offering the front side of his fist. Fred, who was obviously not a social creature, didn't know how to respond to that.

"How many of you are there?" he asked, looking ill-at-ease.

"This is all of us, except for Renesmee and Jacob," Alice sang out, a secret smile on her face. "If you don't count the pack. Speaking of which..." The kitchen door opened and in glided Renesmee on all fours wearing her wolf costume. Jacob followed in her wake. "Now we're all here!" Alice declared.

Fred looked at Renesmee, then at Jacob, and then took another look around the room. He could tell by their heartbeats and the scent of their blood that the newcomers were neither fully human nor vampire, but he didn't know what to make of them.

When she saw Fred, Nessie hurried to climb into Bella's lap. At one, Renesmee resembled a five-year-old human, more or less, with an intellectual capacity far

beyond that. We treated her like a five-year-old, though she could speak three languages, was almost as good as Jasper at probabilities and statistics, and was reading at an adult level. Bella was adamant that we not push her to be an adult before her time, though she was on an accelerated schedule of development. Bella wanted her to feel secure and protected for as long as possible. Renesmee still preferred to communicate with her hand for the most part, but she spoke more than she had six months previously.

Who? she asked Bella with her palm. Though she'd seen Fred the day before, she'd been so busy with her party that she hadn't bothered to ask about him.

"Fred, this is our daughter, Renesmee, and our friend, Jacob. Renesmee, this is Fred," said Bella.

"Hi Fred," Renesmee said shyly. Then she hopped off Bella's lap and went down on all fours. "I'm a wolf, see?" Fred smiled and then looked at Jacob, but didn't ask the question that was written on his face.

"You have questions for us," Carlisle commented. "Let's go to my office and talk." Edward, please join us, he added silently.

Fred was more than willing to escape the presence of so many. He seemed to become more anxious, the more of us who surrounded him. I assumed it was from his experience with the newborn army. He was remembering a night when he had cleared a crowded basement room of vampires by generating a nausea-inducing odor or haze of some kind. He seemed tempted to repeat the trick now. I hurriedly accompanied him and Carlisle up the stairs.

"How do you all live together so peacefully?" Fred asked on our way to the office. "This is nothing like it was with Riley."

Carlisle explained. "Newborn vampires, those who are less than one or two years old are strong, highly volatile, and obsessed by blood. Putting a number of newborns together in a small space often leads to violence. Like other predators, we can be quite territorial, at least until we learn to control our impulses. It takes time. It is much easier when you give up drinking human blood. We are better able to establish loving bonds with others."

I added, "Our family structure is rare. We know of only one other coven like ours and we consider them our extended family. They live in the Denali region of Alaska."

*"So you never drink blood?"*

*"Carlisle and Rosalie never have. The rest of us are converts to the 'vegetarian' way of life," I said with a grin.*

*"I think I'd like to try your way. I wasn't all that crazy about humans when I was one and I like them even less now. It grosses me out to be so intimate with them."*

*"We actually live among humans as if we were human too. The 'kids' usually go to school and I work at a hospital."*

*"How can you stand it?"*

*"Practice," Carlisle said, smiling.*

*"Well, I don't know that I'd be interested in doing that, but the game hunting, that part is fascinating."*

*"Even our Denali cousins have less contact with human communities than we do," Carlisle explained, "But it allows me to do the work I love and lets everyone else pursue education and other interests. We can also stay in one place for a number of years before moving on."*

*"You had human friends here yesterday. Do you do that often?" Fred seemed truly perplexed.*

*"I suppose that's mostly my fault," I explained. "I was the crazy vampire who fell in love with a human. One thing led to another and we got married and had a child. She has relatives and friends who have gradually become part of our extended family."*

*"That's the other thing. You had a child with a human? A biological child?"*

*"Yes. We didn't know it was possible until it happened. It's not advisable, though. It's deadly for the human mother."*

*"Wow...I had no idea. I haven't even seen vampires since I left Riley's coven. I thought I might find some of the other escapees, but I haven't."*

*"You are not atypical, not at all," Carlisle told Fred. "We invited all of our vampire friends here about six months ago. There were five covens and six*

nomads. That's what we call vampires who roam like you do. Of the nomads, four are individuals and two are mates."

"Are the other covens as big as yours?"

"There are five in the Denali coven; we have nine; the others have three or four. So we are the largest by far among our friends. The Volturi coven has fifteen or twenty if you count the members of their guard and the hangers-on."

"Who are these Volturi? You said that I might be a target for them?"

Carlisle explained. "The Volturi are a group of very old vampires, the closest thing we have to a ruling family. They hold court in Volterra, Italy, and act as the police force for our kind."

"What do they police?"

"Any kind of action that risks revealing our existence to humans. Like what your coven was doing in Seattle, killing indiscriminately, and not hiding the bodies, revealing our special abilities, that sort of thing."

"They destroy whole covens?"

"They have done so a number of times over the centuries."

"Centuries??"

"They are very old."

"How old is old exactly?"

"The leaders have existed for more than 3000 years."

"Wow, that's unbelievable! How old are you?"

"I am three hundred sixty-five years or thereabouts. Edward is... what?"  
Carlisle looked at me.

"One hundred ten."

"Are the others in your family as old as you?"

"Jasper was born in the 1840s. The rest of us are twentieth-century vampires. Bella is the youngest at one year old." I answered that question, knowing that

*Carlisle would have to do quick calculations to get the numbers right. When you're centuries old, a difference of decades doesn't have much significance.*

*"So am I in danger from the Volturi?"*

*This question was trickier than any of the others so far. I tried to compress the answer into a version that wouldn't keep us talking all night.*

*"Not in danger, exactly. The Volturi guard is a collection of some of the most talented vampires among us. Their skills are valuable in helping the Volturi maintain power...or order, if you prefer. If they discover that you exist, Aro, their leader, undoubtedly will want you for the guard. He has a shield named Renata, but I'd venture to say that your talent is more potent. Aro wanted Bella to join the guard because her shield is also powerful.*

*"Joining the Volturi is not necessarily a bad thing. Many members of the guard enjoy the prestige of their positions. The problem is that they have not always acquired their members in the most forthright manner. Sometimes talented vampires are coerced. I would suggest that you visit our cousins, the Denalis, to educate yourself more thoroughly. Eleazar was a member of the guard for several centuries and has tremendous insight that might prove useful to you. Carlisle lived with them for a time, but decided to move to North America and live a different kind of lifestyle."*

*"So I'm a shield and you're a mind reader. Are there others in your family with talents?"*

*"Alice sees the future and Jasper can alter moods, calming or exciting a group, for example. You've already seen how Bella can block other talents. Our daughter often communicates by creating pictures in the minds of others."*

*"Wow! I'd love to experience all of that. Riley's coven didn't have anybody else who was like me, as far as I know."*

*"Our cousin, Kate, can electrify her skin. That's one talent that is no fun to experience," I told him, laughing. "She can pack a punch." Carlisle gave me a knowing smile, remembering my experience as the guinea pig for Bella's shield practice.*

*Fred changed the subject again. His mind was full of questions, which spilled out almost uncontrollably. I could appreciate his eagerness for information*

after living alone and in ignorance for so long. Not teaching your newborns the rules of our existence was a crime punishable by death. Victoria and her coven had already been punished. We wanted to help Fred avoid the same fate.

“Would you show me how to hunt animals?”

“Certainly,” Carlisle replied. “Are you and Bella due, Edward?”

“It’s about time for Bella, and Renesmee can always use the encouragement. We can go now if you like,” I said to Fred.

“That would be great.”

“I’ll talk to Bella. We’ll take our daughter and Jacob probably will want to come with us.”

“Is your daughter human?”

“Half-human, half-vampire.”

“Wow! That’s amazing. I noticed that she has a heartbeat, but she doesn’t smell exactly human, either.”

“She’s unique. There have always been legends about the incubus impregnating human women, but it turns out that the incubi are us! You can imagine how rarely it occurs. We’ve found only a handful of other hybrids in the world.”

“That’s cool. It’ll be interesting to hang out with her.”

“Let’s go then.”

Counting the previous day, this conversation comprised Fred’s second session of vampire training. There would be more. Like me, he was an inquisitive fellow.

## Edward

